



aspen strategy group

A PIVOTAL YEAR AHEAD

Strobe Talbott

When Paul Doty and his colleagues founded the Aspen Strategy group nearly 40 years ago, they focused on arms control, disarmament, and nonproliferation. Their discussions contributed to the task of keeping the nuclear peace during the Cold War. Since the end of that global ideological and geopolitical competition, the priority tasks of American foreign and defense policy have diversified. So, therefore, has the agenda of the ASG.

With the advent of the Obama administration and with the various treaties that have regulated strategic relations either defunct or showing their age, there is renewed commitment in Washington, Moscow, and other capitals to reviving, updating, and strengthening the nuclear security dimension of the international system.

The months ahead will be decisive in addressing three interrelated issues:

- Will the United States and the Russian Federation put their bilateral relationship back on a solid, constructive footing (the now-famous “reset” that Vice President Biden called for in Munich early in the Obama administration)?
- The answer to that question will depend, in large measure, on whether these two states, which possess 95 percent of the world’s nuclear stockpile, are able to cooperate in reducing their arsenals and adjusting their military strategies in a way that maintains—and, if possible, bolsters—mutual deterrence at reduced levels of nuclear arms.
- And the answer to *that* question will affect the willingness and ability of other states to strengthen the global regime that controls the spread of nuclear technology. Such progress is not only crucial in its own right—it is also necessary if civilian nuclear power is to be a prudent alternative to fossil-fuel energy and thus one of many measures necessary for mitigating climate change—another goal of national and global urgency.

Hence the special Washington workshop of the Aspen Strategy Group on September 25-26 devoted to the topic “2010: A Critical Year for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation.”

The Calendar

When the ASG comes together for a working dinner that Friday night, the following events will be either in the news, underway or in prospect:

- The sixth round of negotiations between the U.S. and Russia over a replacement for the START I treaty will have concluded in Geneva.
- President Obama will have just met President Medvedev, delivered a major address on arms control to the United Nations General Assembly, and chaired a state-level session of the Security Council intended to create new momentum for nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament.
- Just before our meeting, the UN will have held a conference on facilitating the entry into force of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty involving dozens of foreign ministers from the signatory states.
- Also, President Obama will have used the G20 summit in Pittsburgh to build support for his nonproliferation initiatives.
- Our discussion will look ahead to December 5. That is when the START I treaty—which was signed by President George H. W. Bush and Mikhail Gorbachev in July 1991, five months before the collapse of the Soviet Union, and came into force in December 1994—will expire, creating a deadline for the conclusion of negotiations on a post-START treaty.
- That new treaty will be considered by the Senate for ratification in 2010. Proponents and skeptics are already strategizing and prepositioning for what promises to be an intense debate.
- In March 2010, President Obama will host a Global Nuclear Security Summit in Washington, with the purpose of increasing multilateral cooperation to combat international nuclear smuggling and nuclear terrorism.
- Two months later, in May, the third session of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference, which occurs every five years, will take place in Vienna.
- At some point in the coming months, the administration will have to conclude when to push for ratification of the CTBT, which was rejected by the Senate ten years ago.

Taken together, these decision points on the diplomatic and political calendar constitute an overarching challenge for the U.S. and the world. A positive, mutually reinforcing dynamic among the various negotiations, multilateral deliberations, and U.S. ratification processes will give momentum, coherence, and increased effectiveness to the overarching enterprise of global and regional governance. Conversely, a stalemate or

breakdown on one track is likely to slow down, stop, or reverse progress on others, to the detriment of national and international security.

A New Treaty and an Old One: Principles & Objectives

As participants in the ASG workshop prepare for their meeting, they might consider a set of principles and broad objectives that could apply to U.S. government policy and inform the public and congressional debate over post-START and CTBT ratification next year.

1. The post-START treaty should achieve **significant reductions** and set a framework for further cuts, in keeping with the near- to-mid term goal of decreasing reliance on nuclear weaponry and the long-term goal of elimination.
2. That objective should be balanced against the need for preserving and, where possible, enhancing the stability and predictability required for **effective deterrence**.
3. There should be a premium on **verifiability**.
4. Agreements that emerge from U.S.-Russian negotiations should reinforce the U.S.'s defense commitments to its allies.
5. Near-term agreements on strategic systems should be conducive to ancillary and/or subsequent agreements that deal with **shorter-range systems**.
6. The framework for future reductions in offensive nuclear weaponry should be designed in a way that anticipates the **regulation of missile defenses** in order to maintain the stability of mutual deterrence.
7. Agreements should take into account **other declared and demonstrated nuclear powers** (China, Britain, France, India, Pakistan, and North Korea), as well as the undeclared one (Israel) and potential, presumably aspirant ones (notably Iran).
8. The **CTBT**, in order to be ratified, should be **verifiable**.
9. It should serve the purposes of maintaining the **safety** and **reliability** of the U.S. stockpile.
10. It should **strengthen the now-fragile nonproliferation regime**.

These proposed principles are intended to be broad enough to reflect the interconnection among the wide range of issues within the ambit of our discussion, and to maximize the possibility of consensus within a bipartisan group that combines expertise with diversity of perspectives.