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Just like old times  
By Paul Webster

**Russia's old Cold Warriors couldn't be happier with their country's new nuclear weapons plans.**

Moscow, May 24, 2002: It was the kind of event news editors love: The presidents of the two greatest nuclear powers—mortal enemies for decades, but now sworn to peace—were meeting to lay down their weapons. Amidst the gilt-splashed splendor of the Kremlin Palace, peace was breaking out, all on a fine spring day. Then, as the ink dried on the Strategic Offensive Reduction Treaty (also known as “SORT,” but usually referred to as the Moscow Treaty), President George W. Bush gave reporters the headline: “This treaty liquidates the Cold War legacy of nuclear hostility between our countries,” delivering on a promise he had made two weeks earlier to “put behind us the Cold War once and for all.” Moments later, Bush’s statement was being typed into teleprompters and printers around the world.

Quotable though Bush’s words were, not everyone was convinced by them. For one thing, the end of the Cold War had been announced several times before. And for another, it was difficult to know what to make of the treaty.

Many analysts pointed out that although the Moscow Treaty would eventually reduce the number of “operationally deployed” strategic nuclear weapons from about 6,000 in each country to between 1,700 and 2,200, the warheads would not actually be destroyed, just put in storage. Nor did the treaty say anything about the two countries’ vast numbers of tactical weapons. Analysts were also concerned that its disarmament provisions would not come into full effect until the day it expired, December 31, 2012.

But most reporters accepted Bush’s history-in-the-making script. After all, as with most pronouncements on history, only time would tell.

Rebuilding forces

A year later, it’s still too soon to say with any certainty what history’s verdict will be. But a mass of discouraging news coming out of Russia suggests that the end of the Cold War has been postponed. Over the past 14 months, the Russian news media have been reporting on what looks like a major renewal of the Russian nuclear weapons enterprise. By all accounts, after a decade of post-Soviet confusion, retrenchment, and rumors of disarmament, 2002 was the year Russia’s Cold Warriors got back to business as usual.

The Kremlin started signaling renewal even before the treaty was signed. Speaking to Russian reporters two months before the presidents met in Moscow, Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov warned that Russia would follow the U.S. lead, storing rather than destroying decommissioned weapons.

Days later, Russia announced plans to modernize all 15 of its Tupolev-160 bombers, which are capable of carrying a dozen 200-kiloton nuclear-tipped cruise missiles on intercontinental missions. It also emerged that three new Tu-160s were being built. Then, on April 11, only six weeks before the summit, Vladimir Simonov, the general director of the Russian military's Agency for Control Systems, told *Izvestia* that Russian President Vladimir Putin wanted work to resume on the Soviet missile defense systems that were abandoned after the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty was signed in 1972. "The main task today," Simonov said, "is to get the stagnating enterprises and scientific research institutes involved in anti-missile defense back on their feet."

Barely three weeks after Bush signed the Moscow Treaty, the United States allowed the ABM Treaty to expire. The Kremlin immediately announced that it was pulling out of START II, a nuclear arms reduction treaty signed in 1993. According to Ivanov, abandoning START II would give Russia "much more flexibility in building and planning its strategic nuclear forces."

A week later, on a visit to the Novaya Zemlya nuclear test site in the Arctic, Ivanov affirmed that Russia, like the United States, would continue to perform non-nuclear, but nuclear stockpile-related experiments, 132 of which Russia had already conducted since it ratified the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty in April 2000. Then, in August, on a visit to an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) facility deep in the Ural Mountains, Ivanov pushed the message of continuity a little further: Russia's "nuclear triad" of land-, sea-, and air-based nuclear weapons would remain central to Russian defense, he said, with "priority attention" focused on land-based weapons. Reforms to these forces had assured their future to 2016, he said, and "We are currently thinking of what we will have in 2015–2020."

At the same time, Strategic Missile Forces commander Col. Gen. Nikolai Solovtsov predicted that substantial numbers of heavy ballistic missiles that had been slated for destruction would remain in the arsenal. "Prolonging the operation of heavy missiles will be achieved by rearranging the missiles themselves and their combat infrastructure," Solovtsov told Dmitry Litovkin, military correspondent for the government-owned RIA-Novosti news agency. "Funding for this has been included in state arms procurement for 2003."

Three months later, Solovtsov appeared on Russian television to confirm Putin's reversal of a key disarmament decision. The rail-based nuclear arsenal, the centerpiece of Russia's Cold War nuclear legacy, would be retained, not retired.

Days later, Moscow's Cold Warriors conducted war games, with Russian air, sea, and ground forces simultaneously launching mock ICBM and cruise missile attacks on targets across Russia. The games came hard on the heels of Russian missile interceptor tests conducted in September.

How much money?

In mid-October, liberal politicians in Russia's parliament, the Duma, achieved a crucial breakthrough: For the first time in Russian history, they forced the government to disclose the defense budget. A flood of news reports followed, each delivering deeper insight into Russia's Cold War revival. Alexei Kudrin, Russia's deputy prime minister, delivered the first big news: The defense budget had increased by 33 percent from 2002 to 2003, with weapons budgets jumping to \$1.67 billion, he said in October, and weapons development budgets to \$1.37 billion. (By the time the Cabinet approved the budget on January 15, the combined figure had risen to \$3.45 billion, an additional 8 percent.)

Gen. Andrei Nikolayev, the head of the Duma's defense committee (and someone with rare knowledge of previous years' secret budgets), added further details: Since 1999, Russia's defense budget has quadrupled in ruble terms and for 2003 reached the equivalent of \$10.9 billion, he said. Then, after noting that 35 percent of the 2003 defense budget is allocated to weapons development and purchases, Nikolayev revealed that, in future defense budgets, weapons development and procurement would rise to 60 percent.

Next to discuss the weapons budget was Vladislav Putilin, deputy minister for trade and economic development. He confirmed that the rearmament budget for 2003 had increased 33.4 percent, and said breakdowns of this number are secret. He told reporters that the increases were all part of Putin's "National Security Concept," introduced in 2000, which emphasized Russia's need to have "nuclear forces that are capable of guaranteeing the infliction of the desired extent of damage against any aggressor state or coalition of states in any conditions and circumstances"—a policy in keeping with Russia's 1993 renunciation of the Soviet policy against the first use of nuclear weapons.

Trying to get more detailed information on Russian weapons development budgets is forbidden. As Pavel Felgenhauer, a former military officer turned Moscow defense analyst says, "The actual number, specification, and price per unit of weapons to be procured is a state secret. The nature of military R&D programs, the number of such programs financed by the government, and any specifics regarding how much money is allocated to each project, are also closely guarded state secrets."

And asking questions about military R&D isn't just forbidden, it's dangerous. The head of Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB), Nikolay Patrushev, said that when the CIA attempted to obtain classified information about Russia's advanced weapons programs last year, the effort was thwarted, with a U.S. embassy employee thrown out of the country. "We have prevented a heavy blow from being delivered to Russia's defense capabilities and security," Patrushev said. He then added that a Russian involved in the affair was sentenced to 14 years in a maximum security prison.

Igor Sutyagin, another Russian accused of helping Western intelligence find information about Russian forces, is awaiting trial, imprisoned for more than three years under conditions described by human rights observers as gruesome.

On February 19, Moscow City Court gave Russian arms researcher Anatoly Babkin, accused of passing information to American businessman Edmond Pope, an eight-year suspended sentence. Babkin, 72, says his confession was obtained under duress. His trial had been repeatedly delayed due to his health problems.

Despite the secrecy surrounding Russian nuclear weapons development, in December dozens of senior researchers from Russia's top weapons labs arrived at the Moscow Hyatt for a three-day conference organized by the Washington-based Center for Defense Information and the Russian Ministry of Atomic Energy's Institute of Strategic Stability, titled "Confidence Building in the Nuclear Sphere and Problems of Strategic Stability." Without providing more detail, several top researchers confirmed that significant funds had recently been allocated to Russian nuclear weapons research.

Speaking to a mixed audience—Russian weapons researchers, delegates from U.S. non-governmental organizations, and U.S. State and Energy Department officials—Russia's top nuclear weapons bureaucrat, Alexander Getmanets, the deputy minister of atomic energy responsible for nuclear weapons development, summarized the events that led up to renewed nuclear weapons research:

"Last January the United States proclaimed a new doctrine on weapons development with focus on new weapons, at the same time NATO is expanding to the borders of Russia, while the United States leaves itself the option of quick restitution of weapons from storage, all the while developing the ABM system and new offensive nuclear potential. This all raises questions."

Just like the old days

Russia's reinvigorated nuclear weapons development may be mostly driven by concerns about U.S. nuclear plans, but economic motives probably figure in as well. A study from Moscow's Institute for the Economy in Transition released in late October 2001 notes that Putin believes that military R&D should be the centerpiece of federal science policy. "A realization of this policy can be seen in the growing expenditures by the government on defense-related R&D," adding that "a noticeable redistribution of resources from the civilian sector of the economy to the defense sector is occurring."

That's the best news Russia's Cold Warriors have heard in a long time. Officials from the Nizhny Novgorod region, home to Sarov, Russia's main nuclear weapons development center, boasted in late January that funding for military producers in their region had jumped 60 percent in 2002.

On December 13, 2002, in an article marking the first anniversary of President Bush's announcement of the U.S. decision to pull out of the ABM Treaty, RIA-Novosti's Dmitry Litovkin described the "asymmetrical measures" Russia had decided to take in response to the U.S. development of missile defenses and new nuclear weapons:

“Until the United States withdrew from the ABM Treaty,” Litovkin wrote, “Moscow had been intending to completely eliminate by 2007 the grouping of 154 ‘heavy’ R-36 Voyevoda missiles [SS-18s] with 10 independently targetable warheads, capable of penetrating any missile defense system. Now it has been decided to keep them in combat service until 2012–2015.”

Litovkin added that the plan to eliminate Russia’s rail-mobile missile systems, which carry SS-24s with multiple warheads, has been suspended. He also pointed out that the new silo-based strategic missile, the Topol-M, could be made to carry multiple warheads.

Russia’s interest in renewing Soviet missile defense efforts is another part of “our undeclared, but genuinely asymmetrical response to President George Bush’s decision to withdraw from the 1972 ABM Treaty,” Litovkin said.

Not such great friends?

As many Russian news reports have suggested, Russia’s push back into missile defense development in 2002 triggered a whole new set of U.S.-Russia tensions, revealing far more wariness than might be expected between friends who had just kissed the Cold War goodbye. When the Pentagon invited Russian researchers to watch interceptor rocket tests in November, see the Patriot system in action, and visit the future site of the missile defense installation at Fort Greely, Alaska, the Russians declined.

Russian specialists are highly skeptical about any U.S.-Russian cooperative efforts on missile defense, according to Litovkin. More than anything else, he says, Russian missile defense officials worry that technical cooperation will put the United States ahead without any benefit accruing to Russia. In January, when U.S. Amb. Alexander Vershbow praised Russian missile defense technologies, Col. Gen. Yuri Baluyevsky, the first deputy chief of the General Staff, warned reporters Russia would keep its technology to itself unless the United States was willing to help Russian industry. “The Americans would like to establish direct contacts with our industries to get a ‘product’ they need, and forget about [what those industries might need].” Speaking on television on January 23, Putin said Russia could go it alone on missile defense. “We have our own vision,” he said, adding that missile defense was a “very important and essential field linked directly to the country’s defense.”

Late last year, Solovtsov announced that a new regiment of SS-27 Topol-M missiles, the latest Russian ICBMs equipped with advanced electronic systems designed to penetrate missile defenses, would be installed in the year ahead. Then, to kick off 2003, Fleet Adm. Vladimir Kuroedov, commander of the Russian Navy, announced that a restructured navy will emphasize new nuclear submarines. Kuroedov told *Krasnaya Zvezda* that 10 new submarines were launched between 1992 and 1997, and that one additional Typhoon-class strategic nuclear submarine was recommissioned after repairs were completed in 2002.



Earlier in the year, Adm. Viktor Kravchenko, chief of the navy's General Headquarters, had revealed long-range plans for a fleet of 12 strategic nuclear subs, down from the 26 still in service (although at severely constrained operational capacity)—similar to U.S. plans to keep 14 of its strategic missile subs in service despite Bush's promise that the Cold War was behind us.

Meanwhile, Russia's work on a new, fifth-generation submarine accelerated, with the first ship scheduled to enter service in 2007. Igor Kudrik, a Russian naval analyst with Norway's Bellona Foundation, says the funds for this first ship are fully committed, and that work on others of its class will begin in 2010. Work on a new submarine-launched intercontinental missile, the preeminent Cold War weapon, also got under way in 2002 at Moscow's Institute of Thermo-Equipment (MIT), where the Pioneer, Topol, and Topol-M missiles were designed. In 2001 the navy ordered 40 new sea-launched ballistic missiles, the first new order in a decade.

Last year saw a return to Cold War norms at Rosborexport, Russia's principal weapons exporter. Year-end figures released in February showed Russian arms exports jumped 27 percent, to \$4.7 billion in 2002. Hammering home the message of continuity with a key Cold War client, February also saw Russia reveal that it was having discussions with India about the leasing of Tu-22 bombers (designed for nuclear attack), as well as the leasing of Akula nuclear submarines. China and North Korea bought Russian weapons, and Iran and Syria remained key export markets for Russian nuclear technology. Russian companies pursued \$40 billion worth of contracts in Iraq.

By the beginning of 2003, even Vershbow, the U.S. ambassador to Russia, seemed to disregard the Moscow Treaty. In a speech to the Russian Academy of Sciences on January 17, he listed important recent developments marking a "convergence of interests" in U.S.-Russian relations, but left the treaty off the list. When he did mention it in passing, Vershbow suggested that a "remarkable, if little noticed, political declaration"—a "framework for a long-term U.S.-Russia partnership," also signed last May—may prove "more important and revolutionary than the Moscow Treaty."

While the United States downgrades the treaty's Cold War closure status, the Kremlin seems to see it as a license for Cold War renewal. After Russian politicians ratified the treaty in late May, President Putin bluntly disclosed work on new nuclear weapons. Next, Russian forces staged a series of widely reported simulated nuclear attacks on U.S. and British forces.

As Vershbow knows better than most, for Putin—a phlegmatic, taciturn, and masterfully discreet man, actions speak louder than words. Perhaps that's why he has never suggested that the Moscow Treaty marks an end to the Cold War. His lips pursed noticeably when Bush made that claim last May. And since then, the Kremlin has left it to the Russian press to do the talking.

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