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## Nuclear Weapons Diplomacy: Russian Victories and United States Defeats in the Post Cold War Era

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Abstract. This article describes the status and dynamics of the latest nuclear weapons diplomacy between the United States and Russia.

Some analysts and pundits significantly attribute the end of the Cold War to successful United States (US) nuclear weapons diplomacy--specifically, the US decision to go forward with the Strategic Defense Initiative, Soviet financial inability to go forward with a similar initiative, related discourse on military policies, and social and political sequelae. Immediately, after the end of the Cold War, there were assertions that nuclear weapons diplomacy would either be moot or a minor aspect of the discourse and deliberations between the US and Russia (as successor state to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics). However, such assertions were quickly and successfully challenged via concerns for accidental launch; reliability of physical security systems; proliferation (e.g., weapons, components, technology); and possible weapons employment by rogue states, other states, and non-state actors to attain various political objectives or to resolve crises.

Now, in the space of ten years, Russia seems to have created a superior position in nuclear weapons diplomacy when compared with that of the US. Here, superior connotes political leverage to advance security objectives within and outside of the nuclear weapons arena.

First, while the US has not been able to ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), Russia has. This puts the US in a position of seeming not to practice what it preaches to others, while Russia seems to be practicing what the US preaches. This Russian victory of words can serve as a mask for intentional and unintentional acts that contribute to proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Meanwhile, the US can look like an aggressor based on words even without acts to back those words up.

Second, Russia has finally ratified the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty II. However, it has ratified this treaty and, indeed, has stated that it will only adhere to the CTBT only if the US does not violate the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty. Given that the US seems to be moving in the direction of violation--or at least towards significant entreaties to renegotiate the ABM Treaty--Russia again looks like the bearer of pacific banners while the US appears to embrace a militaristic bent.

It is not as if Russia is holding a position that cannot be successfully critiqued--especially if one examines the attributions on which its positions are based. For example, Russia claims that change of the ABM Treaty--outright violation or even negotiated modification--threatens to have some sort of domino effect that will upset all existing arms agreements. Yet, remaining without change in an ever-changing world may pose as significant, if not a more significant threat. Moreover, the ABM Treaty has changed through time--if in nothing more than how it has been interpreted by pertinent parties. As well, the persistent use of "domino effect" is more of a rhetorical device that creates a convenient image and attitudinal and even behavioral predilection than a catchy encapsulation of predictability.

As another example, Russia belittles the US stance that rogue states and non-state actors may pose a significant (if limited) nuclear weapons threat. It is Russia's argument that direct dialogue, a joint US-

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Russian "program" against proliferation, a global "control program" against proliferation, and so-called non-strategic anti-missile defense systems would suffice instead of the development of a limited ballistic missile defense. This rhetorical flourish of multiple alternatives numerically overwhelms the main initiative of the US, even as there are as many problems with these alternatives as the initiative.

US response to the latest Russian victories in diplomacy is seriously impeded by the collapse of any semblance of a bipartisan international security policy and even of a bipartisan need for such a policy. Without bipartisanship, the US will continue to be an inviting target in nuclear weapons diplomacy for friends and foes alike.

As a final note, Russia's diplomatic victories should be viewed in the context of the weak topping the strong. This is because Russian threats to not abide by already ratified treaties are hollow in that there are prohibitive economic costs to its building up nuclear weapons assets. Yet, these threats seem to be viewed by some US policymakers as constituting a bargaining chip against which the US might agree not to develop a limited ballistic missile defense or to increase its limitations--and, as well, to reduce its own nuclear weapons assets beyond what it might ordinarily desire and perceive it needs. Thus, the Russians currently possess victories in bearing the mantle of peace and in increasing the likelihood that a possible adversary will willingly decrease its own assets in time of war. (See Fearon, J.D. (1997). Signaling foreign policy interests: Tying hands versus sinking costs. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 41, 68-90; Ferguson, K. (1998). World information flows and the impact of new technology: Is there a need for international communications policy and regulation? *Social Science Computer Review*, 16, 252-267; Ivanov, I. (April 24, 2000). A challenge from Russia. *The New York Times*, p. A21; Tyler, P.E. (April 22, 2000). Russians approve test ban treaty rejected by U.S. *The New York Times*, p. A1; A5; Watkins, M. (1999). Negotiating in a complex world. *Negotiation Journal*, 15, 245-270.) (Keywords: Diplomacy, Nuclear Weapons, Russia.)