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U.S., Russia to Resume Arms Reduction Talks

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U.S. Vice President Joe Biden is expected to meet with Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov this weekend in Munich to resume arms-reduction talks, as the two-decade Nunn-Lugar program for dismantling weapons of mass destruction in former Soviet states draws to a close.

In October, Russia said it would not extend the program, initiated in 1992 and set to expire in May, because it now possessed enough of its own funds to deal with dismantling nuclear, chemical and biological weapons in those areas.

The U.S. has allocated more than $8 billion to the program since its inception. On Wednesday, Russia's deputy foreign minister said Moscow was nixing a crime-fighting and anti-drug-trafficking deal with the U.S. because Russia was no longer in need of the U.S. funds the deal was established to provide.

In a letter released by Foreign Policy magazine Wednesday, U.S. Strategic Forces

Subcommittee Chairman Mike Rogers broke the news that Biden and Lavrov were expected to resume arms-

reduction talks.

The article accompanying the letter added that U.S. National Security Adviser Tom Donilon and Arms Control Undersecretary Rose Gottemoeller were expected to travel to Moscow later in the month to meet with Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov for similar discussions.

On Thursday, Interfax cited an undisclosed diplomatic source in Moscow as saying specifically that the possible extension of the Nunn-Lugar program would be discussed.

“The program has a much broader meaning than just giving money to Russia,” military analyst Alexander Golts told The Moscow Times on Thursday. “It has demonstrated a certain level of mutual trust between the two largest nuclear powers in the world. By ceasing the program, Russia signals that there is no such trust anymore.”

In October, Kommersant quoted a Foreign Ministry source as saying that “a new treaty must be based on equality and mutual respect.”

The U.S. has insisted that ending the Nunn-Lugar program would escalate the risk of weapons of mass destruction falling into terrorist hands.

In December, U.S. President Barack Obama said he was ready to revise the Nunn-Lugar agreement if Russia considered it obsolete. A milestone of the president’s first term was the 2010 signing of the U.S.-Russian New START agreement to reduce strategic deployed nuclear weapons on both sides.

Meanwhile, on Thursday, NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen said he hoped that U.S.-Russian dialogue about the placement of a U.S. missile defense system in Eastern Europe would progress now that the U.S. presidential election was over.

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