The Moscow Times
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U.S. Begins Push for New Arms Cuts

By Jonathan Earle

February 13, 2013



Alexei Pushkov, head of the Duma's International Affairs Committee.

President Barack Obama's pledge to pursue new cuts to the U.S. and Russian nuclear arsenals appeared to be under way Wednesday, with the State Department's arms control chief in Moscow amid talk of a visit later this month by another high-level official.

The State Department has been tight-lipped about both trips, by Assistant Secretary Rose Gottemoeller and National Security Advisor Thomas Donilon, but statements in recent days have shed light on the likely purpose of their visits.

Gottemoeller, the arms control chief, told a group of security experts in Tel Aviv, Israel, on Tuesday that the United States was exploring several possibilities for a new agreement, including "reductions in all categories of nuclear weapons: strategic, nonstrategic, deployed and nondeployed," according to a transcript on the State Department's website.

The State Department said earlier that bilateral and international arms control and nonproliferation would be on her agenda. But on Monday, a department spokeswoman

refused to say whether Gottemoeller would propose cuts to Russia's nuclear arsenal.

Adding to the hush surrounding the talks, Gottemoeller is not planning any public or press events, U.S. Embassy spokeswoman Stacy MacTaggert said by telephone Wednesday.

Later this month, Donilon will visit Russia, likely with "some proposals regarding disarmament, including nuclear disarmament," State Duma Deputy Alexei Pushkov, head of the International Affairs Committee, said Wednesday.

"The ball is in the Americans' court," he said at a news conference in Moscow, Interfax reported. "Because we're not responsible for the crisis over the European missile defense system. that was an American idea."

The buzz about new cuts picked up Tuesday when Obama said the White House would "engage Russia to seek further reductions in our nuclear arsenals and continue leading the global effort to secure nuclear materials that could fall into the wrong hands," in his State of the Union Address.

White House officials are looking to cut deployed nuclear weapons to "just above 1,000," down from the current goal of 1,550 by 2018 outlined in the New START, which went into effect in February 2011, The New York Times reported Sunday, citing unnamed administration sources.

Donilon's visit will "lay the groundwork" for future talks on the issue, the newspaper reported.

The United States spends about $31 billion per year to maintain its current arsenal of about 1,700 deployed strategic warheads and delivery systems, according to a June report by the Arms Control Association, a Washington-based think tank.

Pushkov dismissed the vision of a nuclear weapon-free world, supported by Obama and his nominee for secretary of defense, Chuck Hagel, as a "propagandistic-romantic idea," because countries that had made large investments in nuclear weapons would never give them up, he said.

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