

Study Calls for End to 'Cold War Autopilot'

By [The Moscow Times](#)

April 03, 2013

The  **Moscow Times**

WASHINGTON — Dwindling military budgets and the diminished threat of a nuclear war in Europe dictate that the United States and Russia abandon their Cold War mentality and gradually remove some nuclear weapons from ready-to-launch status, according to a new report.

The study by an international group of political, military and security experts questions the billions of dollars spent by the U.S., Russia and European nations on new nuclear-armed submarines and weapons when those countries are facing deep budget cuts and austerity measures.

Citing the current political cooperation among the countries, the report recommends that they work together on missile defense, reduce tactical nuclear weapons in Europe and develop a new strategy.

"Outdated Cold War-era security concepts and their associated weapons and military postures (in particular, mutual assured destruction and nuclear forces on prompt-launch status), continue as if the Berlin Wall had never fallen, producing a dangerous asymmetry between military capabilities and true political partnership," the report said.

The document, developed over the past year, makes 19 recommendations.

Among the leaders of the group are former U.S. Senator Sam Nunn, best known for his work with then-Senator Richard Lugar in 1991 in creating the program to help former Soviet states destroy and secure their weapons of mass destruction; former British Defense Minister Des Browne; former German Deputy Foreign Minister Wolfgang Ischinger; and former Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov.

In contrast to the saber-rattling from North Korea, the report highlights improved relations among the U.S., European nations and Russia, which are unlikely to be propelled into a conventional or nuclear war.

Against that backdrop, the group argues for the U.S. and Russia to take the lead in systematically moving nuclear weapons off high-alert status, a template for France and Britain to follow.

In an interview, Nunn said the U.S.-Russian relationship is one of both growing distrust and increasing mutual interest. He said issues such as missile defense and nuclear weapons need to be addressed as the world faces new challenges such as cybersecurity.

"We have to have a break out in thinking about how we're going to deal with these issues in the future," Nunn said, underscoring the report's call for a new dialogue on mutual security.

The report suggests that the U.S. and NATO back a 50 percent reduction in U.S. tactical nuclear weapons based in Europe, with Russia adopting reciprocal steps. The move would be phased in over time.

Currently, the U.S. and Russia have about 5,000 nuclear weapons each, either deployed or in reserve. Both countries are on track to reduce the deployed strategic warheads to 1,550 by 2018, the number set in the New START treaty that the Senate ratified in December 2010.

The Federation of American Scientists estimates that Russia has about 2,000 tactical nuclear warheads and the United States has 500.

"A five-year target for completing consolidation of U.S. tactical nuclear weapons to the United States, combined with a process of mutual reductions with Russia, could give a greater sense of direction and pace to nuclear risk reduction in Europe," the report said.

The report also calls for greater cooperation between the countries on missile defense, including sharing data and joint exercises.

The experts, including several former retired U.S., Russian and European generals, say that high-level talks involving leaders of the nations are imperative to establish a new strategy far from one that largely is on "Cold War autopilot."

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