

No Nukes for Old Enemies

A 2007 poll, conducted in the US and Russia, finds robust support for a series of cooperative steps to reduce nuclear dangers and move toward the global elimination of nuclear weapons.

Large majorities of Americans and Russians favor taking nuclear weapons off high alert, sharply cutting the numbers of nuclear weapons, banning the production of weapons-grade nuclear material, and — once advanced methods of international verification are established — undertaking the complete elimination of nuclear weapons.

These steps correspond to key elements of a plan for *A World Free of Nuclear Weapons*, developed by a bipartisan group that includes two former US secretaries of state (George Schultz and Henry Kissinger), a former US defense secretary (William Perry) and the former chairman of the US Senate Armed Services Committee (Sam Nunn) — sometimes called the *Reykjavik Revisited* plan. Some have been included in recent legislation, such as a bill introduced in the US Congress by Senators Chuck Hagel and Barack Obama (S.1977).

A systematic, global endeavor to eliminate nuclear weapons has also been endorsed by former Russian President Mikhail Gorbachev, then-British Foreign Secretary Margaret Beckett, and US Presidential candidates.

The *WorldPublicOpinion.org* poll was developed in conjunction with the Center for International and Security Studies at the USA's University of Maryland (CISSM) and fielded by Knowledge Networks in the US and the Levada Center in Russia.

The goal of eliminating all nuclear weapons, established in the world's Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), is endorsed by 73% of Americans and 63 % of Russians. Around 79% of Americans and 66 % of Russians want their governments to do more to pursue this objective. In the USA, majorities of both Democrats and Republicans agree on these points, although the Democratic majorities are larger.

Steven Kull, Director of *WorldPublicOpinion.org*, commented: "In contrast to the growing tension between their governments, publics in the US and Russia show enthusiasm for dramatic cooperative steps to reduce the nuclear threat."

John Steinbruner, director of CISSM noted: "Current US security policies do not reflect underlying public opinion."

One of the first steps called for in the *Reykjavik Revisited* plan is to take nuclear weapons off high alert so as to increase warning time and reduce the danger of their accidental or unauthorized use. Eight in ten Americans and two in three Russians favor this

American and Russian Publics Strongly Support Steps to Reduce and Eliminate Nuclear Weapons

idea. Provided there is a system for verifying international compliance, 64 % of Americans and 59 % of Russians would favor taking *all* nuclear weapons off high alert.

The UN Disarmament Committee recently voted 124-3 in favor of total de-alerting with the US, France and Britain opposed.

Deep cuts in nuclear arsenals also receive robust support. Nearly nine out of ten Americans and 65% of Russians endorse the US-Russian Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty (SORT) to reduce the number of active nuclear weapons in each arsenal to about 2,000 weapons by the end of 2012. In fact, most Americans (71%) and Russians (55%) favor reaching this level even sooner.

Furthermore, 71 % of Americans and 58 % Russians favor reducing their arsenals to significantly less than 2,000 weapons. Majorities of both Americans (59%) and Russians (53%) would even support cutbacks to 400 nuclear weapons each (38% of Americans and 21% of Russians are opposed). This would make the US and Russian arsenals comparable to those of other nuclear powers.

Most Americans (92%) and Russians (65%) believe that an international body, such as the UN, would need to monitor and verify compliance with such deep reductions.

Americans and Russians also favor concrete steps to increase the transparency between the nuclear powers. Majorities in both the US (75%, with 22% opposed) and Russia (52%, with 24% opposed) favor an agreement among all nuclear powers to share information about the number of nuclear weapons and the amount of weapons-grade nuclear material they each have.

Support is strong for the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), which prohibits nuclear explosive testing and thus makes it more difficult for countries to develop or improve nuclear weapons. Eight in ten Americans and Russians approve of their country's participation in this treaty. Indeed, 56% of Americans believe, incorrectly, that the US is already a member of the treaty. Russia ratified the treaty in 2000 but the US Senate voted against ratification in 1999.

Ideas for exerting international control over nuclear-weapons grade material — a means to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons or terrorist acquisition of a dirty bomb — get wide endorsement. Two-thirds of Americans and 55% of Russians favor an international ban on any further production of fissile material suitable for nuclear weapons.

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