

Talking Points by Rose Gottemoeller, Director of the Carnegie Moscow Center

U.S. and Russia on the Eve of the G8 Summit

Live Webcast press conference took place on Monday, July 10, 2006.

Since the initiative on nuclear energy has been widely discussed in the media, I am not going to emphasize that in my opening remarks—although I will be happy to discuss the issue during Q&A period. Instead, I would like to touch on a highly unfashionable topic that has come up recently in Moscow, and that will factor in the bilateral summit between Presidents Bush and Putin. President Putin has taken the lead in making a proposal to restart strategic nuclear arms negotiations—most notably in a speech two weeks ago at the Russian Foreign Ministry.

On strategic arms control the Bush administration continues to have a strong allergic reaction, and it is unlikely that the bureaucracy in Washington will do anything to respond to the Putin initiative. Political players in the State and Defense Departments have done everything that they can to avoid negotiated constraints on U.S. nuclear forces over the past six years, in the interest of U.S. “flexibility.” Nevertheless, there is some urgent business that the U.S. and Russia must undertake, first and foremost to extend the START Treaty and its Verification Protocol, which are slated to end on December 31, 2009.

The U.S. bureaucracy does seem willing to take steps to extend the START Treaty beyond 2009. Anything beyond that, however, will likely require President Putin to make a direct proposal to President Bush himself. Since Bush has himself taken serious, if unadvertised, steps to reduce the U.S. nuclear arsenal—most notably, his unilateral decision to eliminate fifty percent of the warheads in that arsenal—he will likely at least consider proposals from Putin for further reductions.

Even if the two sides do not agree to serious negotiations on further nuclear reductions, there could still be a great value in pursuing consultations on the future of our respective nuclear arsenals. Since the Moscow Treaty was concluded in 2002, very few discussions have taken place on a bilateral basis concerning the status and future of the nuclear forces. We are therefore losing the habit of discourse that has so aided military planning on both sides since serious arms reduction negotiations began in the 1980s.

Therefore, a consultative process could be highly valuable. Special focus on new nuclear capabilities would, once again, provide insights beneficial to military planning on both sides. On the U.S. side, there is the reliable replacement warhead program, and on the Russian side, the new nuclear delivery system involving a boost-glide warhead. The discussions might also focus on missile defense technology developments, in the spotlight because of the North Korean missile launches last week.