RUSSIA—AN INCREASINGLY UNRELIABLE NONPROLIFERATION PARTNER

• Russia is inevitably a player in most nonproliferation issues by virtue of its many roles: as one of three NPT depositary governments, a leading member of the IAEA board, a permanent member of the UN Security Council, and a participant in both the Iranian-P5+1 talks and Six-Party Talks with North Korea; as a potential source of sensitive equipment, materials, and technology; and as a traditional friend of countries of proliferation concern.

• Few nonproliferation problems can be resolved without Russia’s active support or at least acquiescence, and Moscow is often well-positioned to play a spoiler role.

• Despite their many differences, the United States and the USSR often saw eye to eye on nonproliferation, starting with the negotiation of the NPT (which for the Soviet Union was a means of preventing a nuclear-armed Germany). But post-USSR, post–Cold War cooperation has been uneven and has deteriorated sharply since Russia’s annexation of Crimea in 2014.

RUSSIA’S RECORD IN KEY AREAS

Civil Nuclear Cooperation With Third Countries
Nuclear technology is one of Russia’s few industrial strengths. Especially given Moscow’s bleak economic outlook, it is aggressively marketing its nuclear reactors and related services in several regions of the world.

• Russia is the only reactor supplier willing to take back plutonium-bearing spent fuel to its territory, something that is good both for nonproliferation and for Rosatom’s sales pitch (because returning the spent fuel to Russia eliminates the burden of storing it for prospective customers).

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• However, Russia is believed to be less demanding than the United States in terms of nonproliferation conditions and assurances required of cooperation partners. A significant difference is that the United States strongly discourages the acquisition of enrichment and reprocessing capabilities, while Russia is more tolerant of countries acquiring such capabilities and counts on legal restrictions and IAEA safeguards to prevent countries from using fuel-cycle facilities to produce fissile material for nuclear weapons.

Cooperative Threat Reduction and Nuclear Materials Security

U.S.-Russian cooperation since the early 1990s greatly reduced the proliferation risks stemming from the collapse of the USSR. Among the highlights were security upgrades at Russian military and civilian nuclear facilities, the blend-down of 500 tons of highly enriched uranium from Soviet-era nuclear weapons that was then sold to the United States for use as nuclear reactor fuel, and the repatriation of Russian-origin HEU-bearing reactor fuels from Central and Eastern Europe.

• But Russia, chafing at the donor-recipient optic and suspicious of the presence of American monitors at sensitive Russian facilities, terminated practically all bilateral nuclear security cooperation in 2013-2014, and, in the wake of the Crimea annexation, the U.S. Congress prohibited the use of U.S. funds in Russia, effectively precluding even the few remaining areas of cooperation.

• Russian authorities argue that they can effectively secure their nuclear materials and facilities without U.S. help. But U.S. observers assert that there is much unfinished nuclear security business in Russia, and they strongly doubt that Moscow has either the resolve or the financial resources to do the job itself, especially given pressures on the Russian budget from sanctions and low oil prices.

• A symptom of the U.S.-Russian divorce on nuclear security was the Russian decision not to participate in the Nuclear Security Summit on March 31–April 1, 2016. The decision, which the Russians say was based on the heavy-handed, dominating preparatory role played by the United States, was widely seen as President Vladimir Putin’s post-sanctions snub of President Barack Obama, the host.

Regional Proliferation Challenges

Russia’s role in dealing with countries of proliferation concern has been uneven.

• Iran. Although Moscow was willing to accept a larger Iranian civil nuclear program than the United States or the Europeans, opposed economic sanctions in principle, and sought throughout the nuclear talks to maintain good bilateral relations with Tehran, Russia played a key positive role in the negotiations, including by gaining Iran’s agreement to ship virtually its entire stock of enriched uranium to Russia. Its nonproliferation and commercial interests coincided. By supporting low limits on Tehran’s enrichment capacity, Moscow could ensure that Iran would remain dependent on Russia to provide fuel for its Russian-supplied power reactors.

• North Korea. Russia has taken a back seat to China on North Korea (just as China has taken a back seat to Russia on Iran). In the past few years, as DPRK-Chinese relations were souring, it appeared that Moscow was making a play for a greater role on North Korea. But Russia soon found that, with little to offer Pyongyang economically (unlike China), it was unlikely to have much clout with Kim Jong-un’s regime. Russia has issued tough statements against North Korean nuclear and missile testing but will be in China’s corner in resisting strong sanctions and in calling for a resumption of negotiations.
• **Syria.** Russia has sought to shield Syria from condemnation and IAEA scrutiny in the wake of Israel’s 2007 destruction of the planned plutonium-production reactor that North Korea was clandestinely building for Syria. It has defended Damascus’s rejection of IAEA requests for access to facilities related to the bombed reactor, and it has even lent support to Syria’s far-fetched claim that the destroyed facility was not a nuclear reactor.

• **South Asia.** Russia has not made an effort to promote strategic restraint by India or Pakistan. Building on close, Cold War–era ties between India and the Soviet Union, Russia has returned as a major supplier of defense items to New Delhi, including the leasing of nuclear powered submarines and the co-development of the nuclear-capable Sagarika sea-launched ballistic missile.

**Controlling Exports of Sensitive Equipment and Technology**  
In the wake of the USSR’s collapse, Russia’s weak export control system made it a prime target for countries seeking equipment and technology for WMD and missile programs. Since then, Russia’s export controls have significantly improved, but enforcement remains uneven. Russian authorities are sometimes responsive to U.S. démarches to stop troublesome Russian-origin transactions, but sometimes not. Moscow plays a fairly constructive role in the Nuclear Suppliers Group but can be a problem in the Missile Technology Control Regime, protecting Russian commercial interests, insisting that the MTCR play a narrow technical role, and not supporting U.S. efforts to involve the MTCR in promoting missile restraint in unstable regions.

**IAEA Safeguards**  
Russia has been the leading critic of the so-called state-level concept—a recent IAEA approach to make verification more effective by relying on additional sources of information, including intelligence from member states, and not just on information from traditional safeguards techniques. The Russians argue that overreliance on intelligence information has allowed the United States and its allies to dominate the IAEA and manipulate it to serve their own political agendas.

**NPT Issues**  
Although the USSR/Russia has traditionally been one of the staunchest supporters of the NPT, it has lately showed little interest in efforts to shore it up. Russia had worked with the United States on ways to prevent the abuse of the NPT’s withdrawal provision, but it ceased engagement on this issue after Crimea. At the 2015 NPT Review Conference, instead of maintaining traditional nuclear-weapon-state solidarity, Russia sided with Arab delegations on the contentious Middle East nuclear-free-zone issue in the hope of isolating the United States and putting the onus on Washington for blocking consensus. In meetings of the five NPT nuclear weapon states, which were intended to work on practical, incremental steps by which the five could demonstrate their continuing commitment to meeting their NPT disarmament obligations, Russia has played a passive and unimaginative role.

**Chemical Weapons**  
The U.S.-Russian initiative to press Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to join the Chemical Weapons Convention and eliminate 1,300 tons of chemical weapon agents is a positive example of bilateral nonproliferation cooperation. At the same time, Russia had its own motives for pursuing the initiative: averting U.S. military strikes, legitimizing Assad’s regime, showcasing Russia’s regional role, and diverting attention from Syria’s brutal conventional military tactics. Having achieved most of these goals with the elimination of the 1,300 tons, Russia’s follow-on role has been mixed. Russian officials have dragged their feet and only grudgingly supported investigations regarding Syria’s failure to disclose
all chemical weapon stocks and its use of chlorine gas while strongly supporting an investigation of the self-proclaimed Islamic State’s suspected use of mustard agent. The Russians still refuse to attribute any chemical weapon use to Assad’s regime. Regarding Russia’s own compliance with the Chemical Weapons Convention, the U.S. government has long maintained that Moscow has pursued an offensive chemical weapon program in violation of the convention.

**Biological Weapons**

Confronted by the United States, Boris Yeltsin publicly admitted in 1992 that Russia had an offensive biological weapon program in violation of the Biological Weapons Convention and agreed to a U.S.-UK-Russian transparency initiative designed to provide confidence that Russia would eliminate the program. But after providing access to civilian biological facilities, the Russians stonewalled on military sites and backed away from Yeltsin’s admission. The U.S. government maintains that Russia continues to possess an offensive biological weapon program. The U.S.-Russian dialogue on biological weapon issues was discontinued long ago.

**Nonproliferation Institutions**

To prevent proliferation, it is critical that international institutions have the authority and tools to deal with countries that defy international norms and obligations. However, reflecting a frequent Putin theme that the United States and its allies are manipulating international institutions to serve their own interests, Russia has been highly critical of the role played by organizations with responsibility for nonproliferation.

- Asserting that the West went way beyond the Security Council mandate in pursuing its military campaign in Libya, Russia has opposed strong Security Council actions in recent years on nonproliferation matters.
- Accusing the IAEA and its director general of being tools of the United States, Russia has denigrated IAEA findings critical of Russia’s friends such as Iran and Syria.
- Raising questions about the professionalism of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, Russia has cast doubt on the organization’s investigations that could incriminate the Syrian regime.

**AREAS FOR POSSIBLE U.S.-RUSSIAN COOPERATION**

As long as overall bilateral relations remain in their current adversarial condition, the opportunities for productive cooperation on nonproliferation issues will be limited. But given the stake that both governments share in preventing proliferation and the responsibility they have as leaders of the global nonproliferation regime, it is important that they look for areas where they could work together to promote common goals.

- **Dialogue.** With the demise of the U.S.-Russia Bilateral Presidential Commission in the wake of Russian actions in Ukraine, bilateral interactions on arms control and nonproliferation issues have been limited and focused on immediate matters of concern, such as Russia’s violation of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty. Under current conditions, resurrecting wide-ranging, senior-level forums such as the Gore-Chernomyrdin Commission in the 1990s is not realistic. However, the two sides should hold periodic meetings—led at the undersecretary or assistant secretary level and supported by interagency teams—to discuss a range of nonproliferation issues, compare notes...
on the prospects for proliferation in various regions of the world, and explore possible areas of common ground.

- **Combating nuclear terrorism.** The United States and Russia are founders and co-chairs of the Global Initiative toCombat Nuclear Terrorism, a voluntary, multilateral partnership of 86 countries dedicated to strengthening the capacity of its members to prevent, detect, and respond to acts of nuclear terrorism. It has sponsored more than 70 multilateral activities in such areas as nuclear detection, forensics, and response and mitigation. Despite the downturn in bilateral relations and the termination of most bilateral nuclear security programs, the Russians have been eager to continue the initiative, in part because of the co-leadership role they play in it. Especially given continuing concerns about terrorist groups seeking nuclear weapons and other WMDs, this remains a promising area of bilateral cooperation.

- **Iran.** Russia will play a crucial role in implementing the Iran nuclear deal, including by accepting regular shipments of Iranian enriched uranium and leading the conversion of the Fordow uranium enrichment facility into a nuclear research center. Russia is Iran’s closest friend among the P5+1; as such, its cooperation with other P5+1 partners in insisting on strict enforcement of the agreement will be essential to convince Tehran to comply. While much U.S.-Russian interaction on Iran will take place in multilateral bodies, such as the agreement’s Joint Commission, the United States and Russia, as leading stakeholders, should also consult bilaterally.

- **North Korea.** In light of recent nuclear and missile tests and Kim Jong-un’s apparent intention to continue strengthening DPRK strategic capabilities, North Korea will occupy a higher place on the international nonproliferation agenda in the period ahead. While Russia does not feel as directly threatened as the United States, it is surely concerned by North Korean actions, not least because the actions could trigger a U.S. response that Moscow doesn’t like (as evidenced by its criticism of a possible deployment of a U.S. antiballistic missile system, THAAD, in South Korea). Although Russia is a less important player on North Korea than China, it is probably less protective of the Kim regime than is Beijing and may be more receptive to increasing pressure on Pyongyang. The United States should explore options with Russia for addressing the North Korean threat.

- **Chemical weapons in Syria.** Although Russian cooperation on Syrian chemical weapon issues has diminished since the elimination of the 1,300 tons of chemical weapon agents, the Russians apparently continue to accept some responsibility for the fate of the U.S.-Russian initiative. They have dragged their feet on calls for investigations, but have eventually come around. Washington should press them to see this process through, especially to ensure that Syria eliminates its entire chemical weapon capability and stops using chlorine or any other chemical agent. And the two governments should cooperate in investigating and stopping the Islamic State’s use of mustard agent.

- **Civil nuclear cooperation with third countries.** While the nonproliferation commitments the United States asks its nuclear cooperation partners to accept are required by law and are a matter of public record, the commitments Russia seeks from its partners—aside from what Russia is required to seek as a member of the Nuclear Suppliers Group—are not publicly known. The United States and Russia should consult on the question of conditions of nuclear supply, addressing such issues as whether supplier consent should be required for
uranium enrichment and plutonium reprocessing and the disposition of spent reactor fuel. While the competitive commercial environment may limit what would be discussed, and there is little prospect of arriving at common conditions of supply, such consultations could usefully explore how to minimize the likelihood that nuclear cooperation with third countries will lead to proliferation.

- **Nuclear materials security.** Although Russia’s termination of nuclear security programs and the U.S. Congress’s funding cutoff have ended most cooperation, some joint work may be salvageable and could at least keep alive the possibility of additional cooperation in the future. For example, cooperation in repatriating HEU-bearing fuels to Russia from Poland and Kazakhstan can continue. Further joint studies of converting Russian HEU-fueled research reactors to operate on low-enriched uranium fuels may also be possible. The two sides also need to discuss the long-delayed implementation of the 2000 Plutonium Management and Disposition Agreement under which each side has agreed to dispose permanently of 34 metric tons of weapons usable plutonium.

In the current environment, bilateral cooperation will not be easy. But given the importance to the global nonproliferation regime of the United States and Russia playing leading roles, it is essential that the two governments do what they can to preserve the cooperation that exists and seek to build on it wherever possible.

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**TASK FORCE ON U.S. POLICY TOWARD RUSSIA, UKRAINE, AND EURASIA**

The task force will assess the strengths and weaknesses of U.S. and Western policy toward Russia, Ukraine, and Eurasia since the end of the Cold War and offer a set of guiding principles for a durable U.S. policy framework. The task force is a joint effort with the Chicago Council on Global Affairs and is supported, in part, by the Carnegie Corporation of New York.