



## Act now, Mr. President

Matthew Bunn

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## Guest Opinion

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THE CURRENT SCLEROTIC PROCESS OF NUCLEAR arms reductions needs a bypass. What is needed now is another round of fast, informal, reciprocal reduction initiatives like those initiated by President George Bush and Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev in 1991.

Even if the logjam on Senate and Duma approval of START II and its associated agreements can be broken, it will take a decade to fully implement the cuts. Meanwhile, START II doesn't require any reductions or controls on nuclear warheads themselves, once they're off the missiles. START III might require some warhead dismantlement, but senior administration officials expect this agreement to take years to negotiate.

Most of the warheads in the U.S. arsenal—and an even larger fraction of Russian warheads—are not the deployed strategic warheads limited by these treaties, but tactical warheads, strategic reserves, and warheads no longer needed. These weapons are not regulated by negotiated agreements.

Meanwhile, Russian nuclear custodians are not paid for months at a time, Russia's former defense minister warns of funding shortfalls that could lead to a command-and-control collapse, and Russia's former national security adviser makes alarming claims about missing tactical warheads.

Bush faced a similar situation in early 1991. The Soviet Union was about to break up, with the risk that tactical nuclear weapons would be left scattered among a plethora of unstable new states. The Soviets had to be convinced to pull them back, and fast. After working a quick back-room deal with the Soviets, Bush went on television and announced that he would immediately begin pulling back and dismantling much of the U.S. tactical nuclear arsenal, and he would make some important shifts in U.S. strategic deployments as well.

By addressing some of Moscow's key concerns, Bush gave Gorbachev the cover he needed to announce similarly dramatic moves. By early 1992, all of the tactical nuclear weapons had been moved out of every non-Russian republic. A fearsome proliferation threat had been averted.

PRESIDENT CLINTON IS WORKING TO REVITALIZE the START process. All well and good. But that would do nothing about the huge stockpiles of unregulated warheads, leaving unaddressed U.S. concerns about possible warhead theft in Russia and Russian concerns that the massive U.S. stockpile of reserve warheads might be rapidly reloaded onto

U.S. missiles. The president should do more.

After arranging the deal privately in advance, Clinton should announce that if Russia will do the same, he is prepared to take nearly all of the *unregulated* warheads—the warheads being removed from missiles under the START treaties, along with most U.S. tactical nuclear warheads—and put them in secure storage facilities open to Russian monitors, with a commitment that they would be in due time verifiably dismantled.

That would deal directly with Russian concerns over the rapid-reversal capability inherent in the U.S. reserve warhead stockpile. And if the Russians reciprocated, it would greatly reduce U.S. concerns about nuclear weapons theft. Yet it would require no substantial reductions in active, deployed forces beyond those already agreed.

THE KEY TO SUCH AN INITIATIVE WOULD BE SPEED. Just as President Bush did not work out in detail exactly how many warheads of which types would be covered by the Soviet response to his initiative, Clinton should resist the temptation to spend years negotiating how many warheads on each side would be covered and what procedures would eventually be used to verify dismantlement. That could be worked out later, once the immediate task of getting thousands of extra warheads consolidated in monitored storage had been accomplished.

In just a few years, a “consolidate, monitor, and commit to dismantle” initiative could mean 70 or 80 percent of the U.S.-Russian stockpile of intact nuclear warheads was in storage sites with U.S. and Russian monitors. If Clinton simultaneously accelerated current efforts to work with Russia to improve security and accounting for all nuclear weapons and weapons-usable materials, the remaining warheads and warhead materials could be in sites equipped with the most modern safeguards equipment, drastically reducing the urgent risk of nuclear theft.

U.S. security would be demonstrably better than it is today, and Russian security would be substantially improved as well. A consolidate-monitor-dismantle commitment would offer President Clinton a dramatic nuclear security legacy for the history books. The time to act is now. ■

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*Matthew Bunn, a former adviser at the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, is assistant director of the Science, Technology, and Public Policy Program at Harvard University.*