



SECURITY INDEX

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Pursuing Enhanced Strategic Stability in US-Russian Relations: an Agenda for 2018-2020

Russia-U.S. Working Group

The report "Pursuing Enhanced Strategic Stability in US-Russian Relations: an Agenda for 2018-2020" summarizes recommendations by members of the Russia-U.S. working group, as well as by other experts who participated in discussions held by PIR Center (Moscow, Russia) in partnership with the James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies (Monterey, the United States) in 2017 – 2019. The **working group** of leading experts from Russia and the United States was established to promote a constructive dialogue between the two countries on arms control, a reduction of risks stemming from nuclear modernization, crisis management, and a future framework of strategic stability.

The report was prepared by PIR Center's Russia and Nuclear Nonproliferation Program Director **Adlan Margoev**.

Members of the Working Group believe the publication of this report is especially important in the context of the unravelling of the INF Treaty. Urgent steps to salvage the treaty-based arms control regime are deemed overdue.

Policy memos written by Working Group members, as well as other materials produced as part of the project, are available at www.russia-us.pircenter.org.

Read the report on PIR Center website

PURSuing ENHANCED STRATEGIC STABILITY THROUGH RUSSIA-U.S. DIALOGUE

May 2019

RECOMMENDATIONS BY
RUSSIA-U.S. WORKING GROUP
REPORTED BY ADLAN MARGDEV



Key findings

- **Strategic stability is being hit with a double blow.** Rapid technological progress indulges those who believe that nuclear war can be won, with deteriorating political relations increasing the probability of a conflict between Russia and the United States. The Russians and the Americans no longer fear nuclear war the way their predecessors did, so there is little acknowledgement in Washington and Moscow of the need to join efforts to avoid a nuclear war.
- **Russia and the United States are reverting to strategic competition.** While Washington's attention has been primarily focused on nuclear-arming regional challengers, Moscow has been suspecting it of trying to gain strategic superiority. In order to address this perceived challenge, it launched a large

modernization program and developed new strategic weapons. Moscow's response is troubling to the United States in its ambition, and the United States now accepts the more adversarial nature of its relations with Russia.



- **Russian and the U.S. approaches to strategic stability need to be harmonized with each other.** Full agreement in this field is beyond the two capitals. They are expected to emphasize the respective national approaches to preserve strategic stability rather

than develop shared ones. An updated conceptual framework for strategic stability should rest on four principles: deterrence stability, crisis stability, a shared assessment of nuclear dangers, and a renewal of habits of cooperation in the field of nonproliferation.

- **Perceived threats may set off a new arms race.** Threat perception plays a greater role in the U.S. and Russian strategic policies than their actual offensive and defensive capabilities. The two countries should try to convey and explain the purpose of their modernization plans to each other, as well as focus their attention on adopting restrictions on the development of weapon systems threatening the survivability of each other's strategic forces and command, control, communications and intelligence assets.
- **Russia and the United States need to preserve arms control.** The New START extension talks should begin without delay. The United States and the Russian Federation have the most to lose in this scenario of an unbridled quantitative and qualitative nuclear arms race. Fresh approaches to expanding the geographic reach of nuclear arms control should also be explored.

- **Nuclear risk reduction remains the saving grace for the world.** The existing mechanisms are barely adequate for the current state of bilateral relationship and technological advancements. The U.S. and Russian leaders have to reassure each other that a limited war is not part of their military doctrines or plans.
- **Protection of critical infrastructure from cyber threats may prevent a military conflict.** The risk of a cyber attack leading to a military escalation that could further trigger a nuclear attack has become real. The escalation ladder from cyber to nuclear attacks remains ambiguous as each side defines the thresholds for proportionate reciprocal measures based on its own criteria. Russia and the United States must find a way to work together on protecting their critical infrastructure and developing norms of responsible behavior in cyberspace.
- **Enhancing strategic stability requires urgent steps.** These include the resumption of strategic stability talks and establishing a panel consisting of civilian and military officials and the next generation of specialists representing political and technical fields of expertise to conduct a joint assessment of nuclear dangers. The panel would also serve as an informal platform for the exchange of opinions between Russian and U.S. parliamentarians. It would help to raise public awareness on nuclear dangers by engaging the media, and facilitate joint analytical work involving U.S. and Russian specialists working in the field of strategic stability.

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[About](#)

[To contents](#)

"Security Index" newsletter presents reports, analytical articles, comments and interviews that reflect the positions of Russian and foreign experts on the current challenges of global security and Russian policy in this sphere. The newsletter aims at providing clear analysis of global security problems and suggesting practical solutions.

"Security Index" occasional papers continues the "Security Index" journal published by PIR Center in 1994 – 2016. Authors and editors will be glad to receive comments, questions and suggestions on our e-mail address inform@pircenter.org.

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