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# Ambassador of the Russian Federation to the United States Anatoly Antonov's Interview with Nikkei Asian Review, September 18, 2020

10-13 minutes

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**Question:** Is Russia ready to consider US proposals (to constrain all nuclear warheads, including non-strategic nuclear weapons, as well as stronger verification measures) in exchange for Washington's readiness to extend the New START Treaty? Is Russia going to tell the US to constrain their missile defense systems?

**Answer:** First of all, I would like to note that three meetings held this summer as part of a strategic dialogue between Russia and the United States were certainly useful. The parties aimed at better understanding each other's approaches and 'red lines.' They showed their interest in identifying a list of issues on which further progress is possible.

However, Russian and American priorities at this stage differ significantly.

One of the most serious stumbling blocks is the issue of New START extension. This Treaty is the last existing agreement

limiting the world's two largest nuclear arsenals. In fact, it is the only thing that prevents the escalation of the multilateral nuclear and missile arms race. If the Treaty fails to be extended in 2021, we will face a period of uncertainty. The mutual understanding regarding the other side's strategic nuclear arsenal will diminish. The reduced transparency and fewer communication channels will increase the possibility of unintended use of nuclear weapons as well as of a conflict to escalate to a nuclear level.

Our position is very clear. As early as in December 2019 the Russian Federation announced its readiness for immediate extension of New START Treaty without any preconditions. At the same time, I would like to emphasize that our country needs this agreement as much as the United States does. It is a fundamentally wrong policy to set a 'price' for its extension. Our national security will be guaranteed even without the Treaty. At the same time, we are not going to start an arms race.

Washington is not considering the possibility of an unconditional extension of New START. In exchange for its consent the United States puts forward – in the form of an ultimatum – a set of demands on which it expects concessions from Russia. In fact, the US wants to rewrite the verification mechanism of the Treaty.

In addition, Washington insists on the conclusion of a political agreement regarding a future legally binding arms control treaty. It implies freezing the levels of all nuclear warheads (including non-strategic ones) and introduction of an extremely tough verification regime. It is not clear which American weapons will be subject to such restrictions. In the long term, the United States does not give up pressure on China in order to involve it in negotiations in this area.

We are ready for further interaction with the US on arms control, but only on a basis of parity and the principle of mutual respect for each other's interests and concerns. In this regard, we are in favor of an integrated approach to arms control agreements which takes into account key factors influencing strategic stability. Among them are missile defense, ground-based intermediate-range and shorter-range missiles, Global Strike weapons, hypersonic delivery systems, future space weapons, etc.

**Question:** Is Russia ready to work with the United States to involve China in an arms control agreement?

**Answer:** Russia is open to multilateral discussions on possible measures to ensure predictability and restraint in the nuclear missile realm given the common understanding that forcing anyone to participate in such discussions is a counterproductive approach. Therefore, we cannot support the policy of the US who is trying to put pressure on China in order to make it join the arms control process. This kind of consultations and negotiations should be conducted on the basis of consensus and should take into account the legitimate interests of all parties. The PRC is a responsible nuclear power which itself will determine its steps in the field of arms control.

Our priority is for Great Britain and France to join the arms control dialogue. These countries not only possess nuclear arsenals comparable to that of China, but are also US NATO allies closely coordinating their nuclear policies. Without the participation of London and Paris, it is extremely difficult and hardly possible to talk about further restrictive measures for nuclear missiles. By the way, we have been reiterating our call to take into account the capabilities of the European nuclear powers in the arms control

discussions since the Soviet Union days.

**Question:** Is Russia proposing to limit the deployment of ground-based intermediate-range and shorter-range missiles in Asia? Do you think that the deployment of US missiles will provoke an arms race in Asia?

**Answer:** The withdrawal of the United States from the INF Treaty in August 2019 led to the collapse of this important for global stability and security Treaty. As a result, this erroneous US step has complicated efforts to avert the escalation of the missile arms race.

At the same time, I would like to stress that Russia has taken concrete steps to prevent the situation from sliding into a crisis. In February 2019, our country made unilateral commitments not to field ground-based intermediate-range and shorter-range missiles in any region of the world – including Asia – until American systems of this kind are deployed there.

We regret that the Russian initiative to introduce similar moratoriums was categorically rejected by the United States and its NATO allies. Moreover, the Pentagon is rapidly developing and has already tested twice systems previously prohibited under the INF Treaty. US officials periodically declare their intention to deploy such missiles in the Asia-Pacific region as soon as possible.

The American partners, perhaps, should carefully weigh all the destabilizing consequences of such a step fraught with further escalation of tension and an arms race. The possible deployment of US intermediate-range ground-based missiles in Asia will not only upset the military-political balance in the region and global strategic stability, but will also directly affect Russia's national

security interests. The fact is that this region is located near the Russian borders, naval facilities and the bases of the Pacific Fleet where submarine strategic forces are based. The deployment of new US systems there will put our nuclear deterrent at risk.

We are interested neither in escalating tension either in the Asia-Pacific region or anywhere else in the world, nor in the beginning of an economically destructive arms race. I hope the United States and its regional allies share this approach. We are ready to work together – our proposals remain on the table.

**Question:** The economic, military and diplomatic relations between the US and China have deteriorated. What is Russia's position on the US-China competition? Are you going to reconcile them or side with China?

**Answer:** The differences between the US and China have been deepening. Though, the hope remains that the two countries will be able to solve their problems by diplomatic means. We expect that common sense will prevail.

Russia has established contacts with both states. We have experience in resolving inter-state disputes in various regions of the world. If somewhere there is a need for our balancing efforts, we provide them. But we do not impose ourselves.

The aggravation of relations between the US and China does not meet the interests of Russia and the entire international community. A possible continuation of the trade war between Washington and Beijing is a threat to the global economy.

We believe that the US attempts to create anti-Chinese alliances around the world are counterproductive. They present a threat to international security and stability. Russia, for its part, will never

participate in coalitions against third countries, including China.

**Question:** The US has advanced the initiative of “the free and open Indo-Pacific” with Japan, Australia and India. Do you think it has worked for the US to maintain and expand its influence in Asia?

**Answer:** Many countries wish to gain more influence in Asia. And that is natural. The region has a great social and economic potential. The pandemic has shown that Asian economies are the first to overcome or start to overcome the COVID-19 crisis. As for the US policy in Asia-Pacific, the region does need some steps to solve multiple problems of economic development and to resolve various issues on unifying basis. Unfortunately, Washington promotes anti-Chinese sentiments and its relations with regional countries are based on their support to such an approach.

It is difficult to call the Indo-Pacific initiative ‘free and open.’ More likely it is quite the opposite: this project is non-transparent and non-inclusive. It is closed to a lot of countries and even whole regions if we talk about the Indian Ocean countries. Instead of well-established norms of the international law Washington promotes there an obscure ‘rules based order.’ What are those rules, who created them and who agreed to them – all this remains unclear.

The US actions in Asia should not substitute effective multilateral efforts of the functioning regional bodies. Among them are ASEAN, Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, East Asia Summit, etc. Participants of these mechanisms and their partners, including Russia, work with each other on the basis of mutually accepted approaches. They strive for consensus decisions through negotiations.

**Question:** While India has had strong military relations with Russia, the US has opposed India's purchase of Russian sophisticated military equipment. Do you think the US efforts along with Indo-Pacific initiative have undermined the relations between Russia and India?

**Answer:** Currently we have privileged strategic partnership with India. Our cooperation with New Delhi is gaining momentum, including in such important domains as energy sector and military-technical cooperation. Russia is strengthening its ties with India in the areas which the US and other Western countries have closed for cooperation with New Delhi.

We are certain that the government of Narendra Modi will continue to pursue a harmonious multidimensional policy, develop predictable and mutually beneficial relations with all countries, including Russia (it is also our goal) as well as the US. We are convinced that the last thing India needs when building up its armed forces and defense capabilities is prompting from the outside. Especially of the kind that is aimed at destroying good relations with Russia and other countries.