Russian Federation
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Current status

Russia is estimated to have a total stockpile of 8000 nuclear warheads, of which about 4300 are believed to be in active stockpile. In the New START data exchange Russia reported that in September 2013 it had 473 operationally deployed launchers and 1400 accountable warheads. According to best estimates based on data exchange under New START and other expert assessments, Russia has, as of January 2014, 489 operational strategic launchers—311 ICBMs, 112 SLBMs, and 66 bombers. It has about 1700 strategic warheads associated with these launchers—1078 on ICBMs, 416 SLBM warheads, and about 200 nuclear weapons that could be delivered by bombers. Russia is estimated to have about 695±120 tons of HEU and 128±8 tons of weapon-grade plutonium (plus 50 tons of reactor-grade plutonium).

Modernization

President Putin announced in November 2013 that Russia should replace its Soviet-built arsenals with modern weapons to counter new evolving threats. Under this process, Russia will allocate about $700 billion to a broader military rearmament, which will include 400 new ICBMs and eight SSBNs. Russia’s modernization plans indicate that it is determined to maintain parity with the United States in terms of number of warheads and delivery systems. Most of the currently operational ICBMs are being retired but new multiple-warheads missiles are being deployed to replace them. One new solid-propellant ICBM is undergoing flight tests. The government also made a commitment to development of a new multiple-warhead liquid-fuel ICBM, which is supposed to be ready for deployment in 2018. Russia is also upgrading its SSBN fleet with a planned construction of eight new submarines of Project 955 Borey class, carrying 16 Bulava missiles.

Economics

Modernization of the nuclear arsenal is part of a broader rearmament programme that is expected to spend about US$700 billion on various military systems in 2011–2020. About 10% of these funds will be spent on strategic force modernization. Financial constraints could affect the scale of these plans, though the rearmament effort appears to have strong support of the political leadership and public, so significant cuts to the modernization programme are unlikely. This situation may change if political environment in Russia would allow an open discussion of government spending priorities and the role of nuclear weapons in the national security policy, but so far this discussion has been very limited.

International law and doctrine

Official documents of the Russian government do not question Russia’s right to possess nuclear weapons, though they also recognize its responsibilities as an NPT nuclear weapon state including to pursue a world free of nuclear weapons as a means of achieving security for all. Official policy assumes the right of first use of nuclear weapons, though the policy has a limited range of scenarios under which this would be considered. Both Russia and the United States consider their bilateral arms reduction agreements to have nuclear weapons related issues on the agenda. Russia has not attended either of the conferences on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons in Norway or Mexico, nor did it participate in the open-ended working group on nuclear disarmament in 2013. It has issued statements disparaging such initiatives as naïve and unrealistic.

Public discourse and multilateral engagement

Public opinion in Russia tends to support the nuclear status of the country—according to a poll conducted in 2006, 76 percent of all the respondents believed that Russia “needs nuclear weapons.” More than half of the population consider nuclear weapons to be the main guarantee of the security of the country and about 30 percent of respondents believe that nuclear weapons play an important, although not a decisive, role. To a large extent, the lack of critical assessment of the role of nuclear weapons is a result of the lack of an open and informed discussion of national security priorities and policies that would involve independent voices. While there are non-governmental research organizations that are involved in the discussion of defence policies, there are no independent public organizations that would have nuclear weapons related issues on the agenda. Russia has not attended either of the conferences on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons in Norway or Mexico, nor did it participate in the open-ended working group on nuclear disarmament in 2013. It has issued statements disparaging such initiatives as naïve and unrealistic.