

American and Russian Publics Strongly Support Steps to Reduce and Eliminate Nuclear Weapons

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A new poll, conducted in the United States and Russia, finds robust support for a series of cooperative steps to reduce nuclear dangers and move toward the global elimination of nuclear weapons.

A Minuteman II ICBM in silo at the Minuteman Missile National Historical Site, South Dakota (Photo: National Park Service)

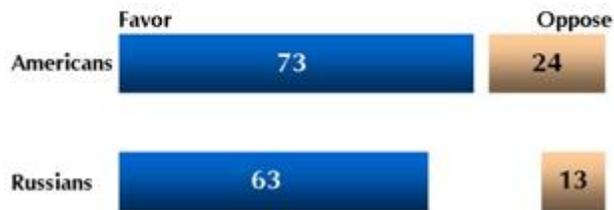
Large majorities of Americans and Russians favor taking nuclear weapons off high alert, sharply cutting the numbers of nuclear weapons, banning the production of weapons-grade nuclear material, and once advanced methods of international verification are established undertaking the complete elimination of nuclear weapons.

These steps correspond to key elements of a plan for "A World Free of Nuclear Weapons," developed by a bipartisan group that includes two former secretaries of state (George Schultz and Henry Kissinger), a former defense secretary (William Perry) and the former chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee (Sam Nunn) sometimes called the "Reykjavik Revisited" plan. Some have been included in recent legislation, such as a bill introduced by Senators Chuck Hagel and Barack Obama (S.1977). A systematic, global endeavor to eliminate nuclear weapons has also been endorsed by former Russian President Mikhail Gorbachev, former British Foreign Secretary Margaret Beckett, and US Presidential candidates.

The WorldPublicOpinion.org poll was developed in conjunction with the Center for International and Security Studies at the University of Maryland (CISSM) and fielded by Knowledge Networks in the United States and the Levada Center in Russia.

Elimination of Nuclear Weapons

Assuming that there is a well-established international system for verifying that countries are complying, would you favor or oppose all countries agreeing to eliminate all of their nuclear weapons?



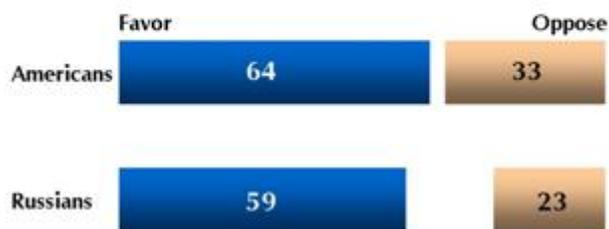
WPO 9/07 The goal of eliminating all nuclear weapons, established in the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, is endorsed by 73 percent of Americans and 63 percent of Russians. Seventy-nine percent of Americans and 66 percent of Russians want their governments to do more to pursue this objective. Majorities of both Democrats and Republicans agree on these points, although the Democratic majorities are larger.

Steven Kull, director of WorldPublicOpinion.org, comments, "In contrast to the growing tension between their governments, publics in the US and Russia show enthusiasm for dramatic cooperative steps to reduce the nuclear threat."

John Steinbruner, director of CISSM notes, "Current US security policies do not reflect underlying public opinion."

De-alerting All Nuclear Weapons

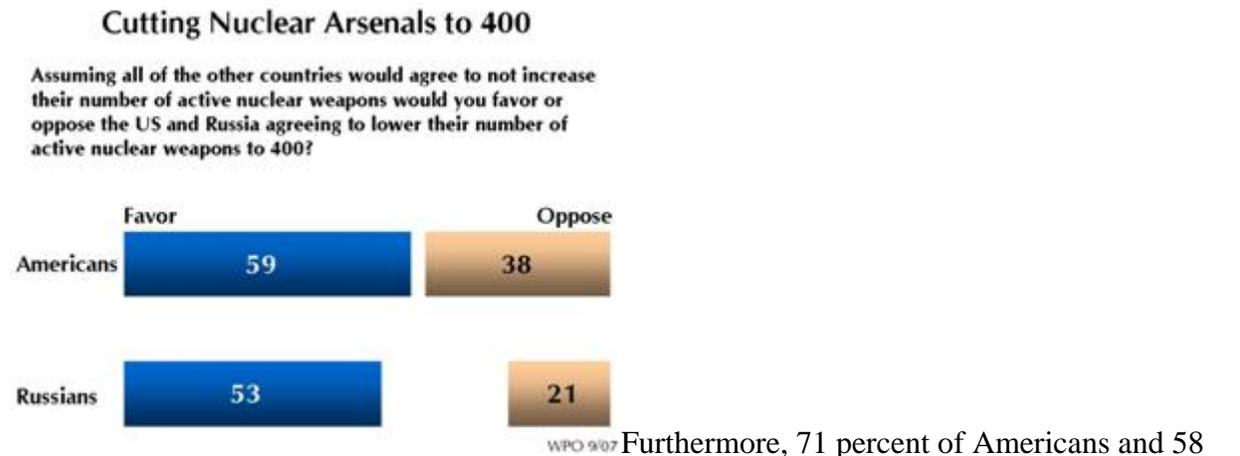
If [US/Russia] and [Russia/US] established a system for verifying that nuclear weapons have been taken off high alert, would you favor or oppose [Country] agreeing to take all of their nuclear weapons off of high alert?



WPO 9/07 One of the first steps called for in the Reykjavik Revisited plan is to take nuclear weapons off high alert so as to increase warning time and reduce the danger of their accidental or unauthorized use. Eight in ten Americans and two in three Russians favor this idea. Provided there is a system for verifying international compliance, 64 percent of Americans and 59 percent of Russians would favor taking all nuclear weapons off high alert.

The UN Disarmament Committee recently voted 124-3 in favor of total de-alerting with the United States, France and Britain opposed.

Deep cuts in nuclear arsenals also receive robust support. Eighty-eight percent of Americans and 65 percent of Russians endorse the US-Russian Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty (SORT) to reduce the number of active nuclear weapons in each arsenal to about 2,000 weapons by the end of 2012. In fact, most Americans (71%) and Russians (55%) favor reaching this level even sooner.



Furthermore, 71 percent of Americans and 58 percent Russians favor reducing their arsenals to significantly less than 2,000 weapons. Majorities of both Americans (59%) and Russians (53%) would even support cutbacks to 400 nuclear weapons each (38% of Americans and 21% of Russians are opposed). This would make the US and Russian arsenals comparable to those of other nuclear powers.

Most Americans (92%) and Russians (65%) believe that an international body, such as the United Nations, would need to monitor and verify compliance with such deep reductions.

Americans and Russians also favor concrete steps to increase the transparency between the nuclear powers. Majorities in both the United States (75%, with 22% opposed) and Russia (52%, with 24% opposed) favor an agreement among all nuclear powers to share information about the number of nuclear weapons and the amount of weapons-grade nuclear material they each have.

Support is strong for the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, which prohibits nuclear explosive testing and thus makes it more difficult for countries to develop or improve nuclear weapons. Eight in ten Americans and Russians approve of their country's participation in this treaty. Indeed, 56 percent of Americans believe--incorrectly--that the United States is already a member of the treaty. Russia ratified the treaty in 2000 but the US Senate voted against ratification in 1999.

Ban on Nuclear Explosive Material Production

It has been proposed that there be a world-wide ban on producing any more nuclear explosive material suitable for nuclear weapons.

Some people say that this would be a good idea because it would limit the amount of nuclear explosive material in the world that could be used to make nuclear weapons.

Others say that this is not a good idea because it might limit [Country] in the future, when it may need more nuclear explosive material to make nuclear weapons.

Do you favor or oppose having a world-wide ban on upgrading nuclear fuel to the level necessary for nuclear weapons?



WPO 9/07 Ideas for exerting international control over

nuclear-weapons grade material--a means to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons or terrorist acquisition of a dirty bomb--get wide endorsement. Sixty-four percent of Americans and 55 percent of Russians favor an international ban on any further production of fissile material suitable for nuclear weapons.

A majority of Republicans and Democrats concurred in their support for all these proposals, though in most cases the Democratic majority was larger.

The poll of Americans was conducted with a nationwide sample of 1,247 respondents from September 14-23. Most questions were administered to a half sample, thus the margin of error is plus or minus 4.0 percent. The poll was fielded by Knowledge Networks using its nationwide panel, which is randomly selected from the entire adult population and subsequently provided Internet access. For more information about this methodology, go to www.knowledgenetworks.com/ganp.

The poll of Russians was conducted with a nationwide sample of 1,601 respondents from September 14-24. Most questions were administered to a half sample, thus the margin of error is plus or minus 3.5 percent. The poll was fielded by the Levada Center using face-to-face interviews.

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