



# Americans and Russians on Nuclear Weapons and the Future of Disarmament

**A Joint Study of WorldPublicOpinion.org and the  
Advanced Methods of Cooperative Security Program, CISSM**

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**The Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA)** is a joint program of the Center for International and Security Studies at Maryland and the Center on Policy Attitudes. PIPA undertakes research on American attitudes in both the public and in the policymaking community toward a variety of international and foreign policy issues. It seeks to disseminate its findings to members of government, the press, and the public as well as academia.

**The Center for International and Security Studies at Maryland (CISSM)**, at the University of Maryland's School for Public Policy, pursues policy-oriented scholarship on major issues facing the United States in the global arena. Using its research, forums, and publications, CISSM links the University and the policy community to improve communication between scholars and practitioners. CISSM's Advanced Methods of Cooperative Security Program is exploring the security implications of globalization.

Mary Speck, Melinda Brouwer, Abe Medoff, Melanie Ciolek and Blake Congdon managed the editing and production of the report. Knowledge Networks' Stefan Subias adapted the questionnaire and managed the fielding of the US poll.

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## INTRODUCTION

During the Cold War, concerns about the destructive potential of nuclear weapons were high. The United States and the Soviet Union had enormous nuclear arsenals that were kept continuously on high alert. Since the end of the Cold War, the size of these arsenals has been reduced, but the two countries still have thousands of nuclear weapons, many still on high alert. When US-Russian relations became relatively warmer after the fall of the Soviet Union, the status of their nuclear arsenals received little public attention. But the issue has become more urgent in recent years. The growing tensions between the United States and Russia have renewed interest in arms control and heightened concern about the nuclear ambitions of Iran has drawn attention to the importance of non-proliferation policies.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has warned that because of the US proposal to put ballistic missile defense (BMD) installations in Eastern Europe, Russia may withdraw from the 1987 Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) and the 1990 Conventional Forces in Europe treaty (CFE). These agreements do not directly address the ballistic missile defense question—legal limits on missile defense were lifted when the United States withdrew from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty in 2002—but they are core elements of the legal and political framework used to end the Cold War. Putin’s basic argument is that legacy arrangements for international security regulation are at risk for reasons much broader than the BMD issue and that these arrangements will not survive without formal elaboration.

A growing number of security experts, including bipartisan groups of past and present U.S. government officials, have started calling for action. In a *Wall Street Journal* op-ed titled, “A World Free of Nuclear Weapons,” George Shultz, William Perry, Henry Kissinger and Sam Nunn urged the United States to reinvigorate efforts to reduce its reliance on nuclear weapons and to take steps toward their global elimination, warning of the danger of “a new nuclear era that will be more precarious, psychologically disorienting, and economically even more costly than was Cold War deterrence.”<sup>1</sup> The four statesmen identified the 1986 Reykjavik Summit, at which Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev agreed to work toward nuclear elimination, as a critical turning point leading to agreements such as the INF and CFE Treaties, and they proposed a series of concrete cooperative steps to address current nuclear dangers.

Subsequently, some of these measures have been included in legislation proposed by Senators Chuck Hagel and Barack Obama.<sup>2</sup> Similar ideas have also been endorsed by former Russian President Mikhail Gorbachev, former British Foreign Secretary Margaret Beckett, and US Presidential candidates.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> George P. Shultz, William J. Perry, Henry A. Kissinger and Sam Nunn, “A World Free of Nuclear Weapons,” *Wall Street Journal* (January 4, 2007), p. A15. The ideas are elaborated by George Bunn and John B. Rhinelanders in “Reykjavik Revisited” at [www.cisac.stanford.edu/publications/reykjavik](http://www.cisac.stanford.edu/publications/reykjavik).

<sup>2</sup> Senators Hagel and Obama introduced the Nuclear Weapons Threat Reduction Act of 2007 (S. 1977) in August. The two senators also authored an amendment to secure global stockpiles of nuclear material that was attached to the Fiscal Year 2008 State-Foreign Operations appropriations bill. The Senate passed this amendment in September.

<sup>3</sup> Mikhail Gorbachev, “The Nuclear Threat,” *Wall Street Journal* (January 31, 2007) and Margaret Beckett, “A World Free of Nuclear Weapons?” Carnegie International Nonproliferation Conference, June 25, 2007.

In this context, the University of Maryland’s Center for International and Security Studies (CISSM) and WorldPublicOpinion.org have undertaken a study of American and Russian public attitudes that covers both the near-term steps proposed in the Reykjavik Revisited plan, as well as its broader goal of a nuclear-weapons-free world.

In the United States, the poll was fielded by Knowledge Networks with a nationwide sample of 1,247 respondents from September 14-23. All questions were administered to a half sample, thus the margin of error is plus or minus 4.0 percent. The poll was fielded through Knowledge Networks’ 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](http://www.knowledgenetworks.com/ganp).

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

The key findings of the study are:

***1. De-alerting Nuclear Weapons***

Large majorities of Americans and Russians favor reducing the number of nuclear weapons on high alert. Robust majorities on both sides would even favor a mutual agreement to take *all* of their weapons off high alert, if the two countries established a verification system. Few Russians or Americans think their country should have a policy of launching nuclear weapons on warning of a potential attack. ....4

***2. Deep Cuts in Nuclear Arsenals***

Very large majorities endorse the US-Russian agreement to reduce the number of active nuclear weapons in each arsenal to about 2,000 weapons by the end of 2012. Most think such cuts should be made even sooner. Majorities in both countries also favor cutting the arsenals below the 2,000 levels. Americans and Russians would favor lowering U.S. and Russian arsenals to the level of 400 nuclear weapons if all other nuclear powers also promised not to increase the number of weapons in their arsenals.

Both Russians and Americans believe nuclear weapons are of very limited military utility: A majority of both Americans and Russians say that nuclear weapons should be used only in response to a nuclear attack and a large majority of Americans say that the United States should have a policy of never using nuclear weapons first. When Americans are asked how many nuclear weapons are necessary for deterrence, the median response is just 500. ....5

***3. Eliminating Short-Range Weapons***

A large majority of Americans believe the US should agree to eliminate its short-range weapons based in Europe if Russia agrees to eliminate its short-range nuclear weapons based in western Russia. (Russians were not asked this question.) .....9

***4. Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty***

Overwhelming majorities of Americans as well as Russians think their country should participate in the treaty banning all nuclear weapons testing. Indeed, a clear majority of Americans assume that the United States already does. ....9

**5. Controlling Nuclear Weapons-grade Material**

Very large majorities of Russians and Americans say that their countries should put a top priority on cooperating with each other to prevent terrorists from acquiring nuclear weapons. Majorities, especially in the United States, 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 have. Americans, however, lean against highly intrusive bilateral monitoring systems, while Russians lean in favor of them. Americans also lean slightly against providing money and technical assistance to aid Russia in securing its nuclear weapons and materials, while Russians are lukewarm about the idea. .... 10

**6. Getting Control of the Production of Nuclear Fuel**

Americans support various proposals for gaining greater international control over the production of nuclear fuel. A majority favors the idea of discouraging countries from building their own facilities through an agreement that would provide them with fuel in return for a promise not to produce it themselves. A modest majority also favors having a UN affiliate control all facilities that process nuclear material, while guaranteeing countries a supply of fuel for nuclear power plants. (Russians were not asked these questions). Both Russians and Americans who are aware of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) tend to view it positively. .... 12

**7. Ban on Producing Fissile Material**

A majority of Americans and Russians favor having a ban on any further production of fissile material suitable for nuclear weapons. .... 13

**8. Intrusive and Multilateral Verification**

Americans and Russians believe that achieving deep cuts in nuclear arsenals would require verification by an international body. A majority of Americans believe that international inspectors charged with verifying compliance with arms control agreements have too many limits on what they can do. Russians lean toward this belief but are largely unsure.

As explained above, majorities, especially in the United States, 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. Both publics prefer this to a bilateral information exchange and monitoring arrangement.

Americans overwhelmingly believe that when the US and Russia agree to a nuclear arms reduction it should be done through a legally binding and verifiable agreement rather than a general understanding that both sides decide how to implement. .... 14

**9. Elimination of Nuclear Weapons**

Large majorities of Russians and Americans favor an agreement among all countries to eliminate all nuclear weapons, assuming that there is a well-established system for verifying compliance. Most approve of this objective, even though they are unaware that their country has already agreed to pursue it under the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Indeed, large majorities on both sides feel that the nuclear powers have not been doing a good job of fulfilling this obligation and very large majorities would like their country to do more. Support for eliminating nuclear weapons softens, however, without an international system for verification and an orderly sequence of reductions. Also, trend line data suggest that support for elimination may have declined in light of the current suspicions about Iran’s nuclear program. .... 16

## FINDINGS

### *1. De-alerting Nuclear Weapons*

Large majorities of Americans and Russians favor reducing the number of nuclear weapons on high alert. Robust majorities on both sides would even favor a mutual agreement to take *all* of their weapons off high alert, if the two countries established a verification system. Few Russians or Americans think their country should have a policy of launching nuclear weapons on warning of a potential attack.

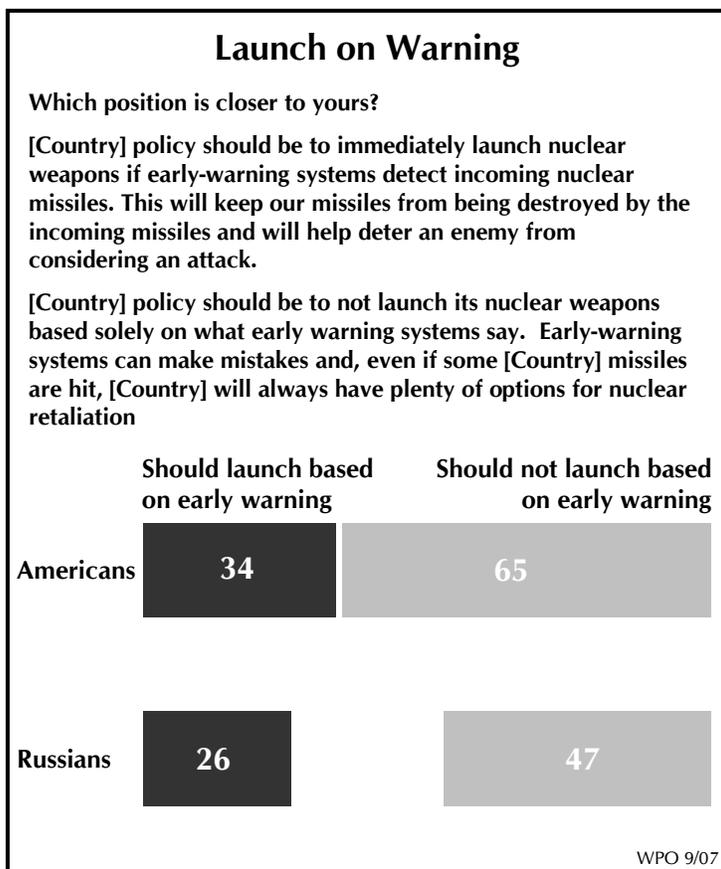
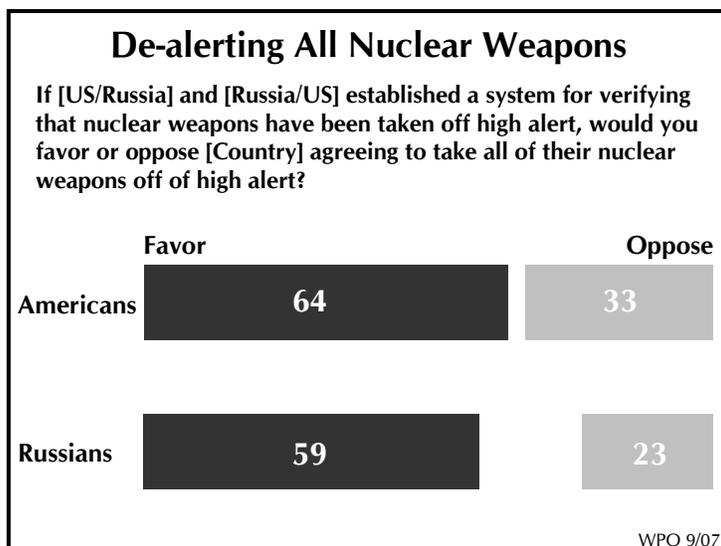
By large margins, Americans (79% to 20%) and Russians (66% to 16%) believe that their governments should work with other nuclear powers to “lower the number of nuclear weapons each country has on high alert—that is, ready to fire on very short notice.” Respondents were told that some people believe such efforts “could lower the risk of accidental nuclear war” while others “oppose this idea, saying it is too difficult to make sure that the other countries would not cheat.”

The American response is statistically unchanged from 2004, showing that in the United States this policy preference is very stable.

More strikingly, 64 percent of Americans and 59 percent of Russians would favor taking *all* weapons off high alert if their countries established a verification system. Only 33 percent of Americans and 23 percent of Russians said they would not want to go this far.

Closely linked to the de-alerting debate is the question of whether Russia or the United States should have a policy of launching their nuclear weapons in response to a warning of incoming missiles, i.e. before they actually strike. This is known as a “launch-on-warning policy.”

Respondents were given arguments in favor of a launch on warning policy



(“this will keep our missiles from being destroyed by the incoming missiles and will help deter an enemy from considering an attack”) and against such a policy (“early warning systems can make mistakes, and, even if some American/Russian missiles are hit, America/Russia will always have plenty of options for nuclear retaliation”).

The argument against a launch-on-warning policy was favored by a majority of Americans (65%) and a plurality of Russians (47%). Roughly a third of Americans (34%) and a quarter of Russians (26%) preferred a policy of immediately launching nuclear weapons based on the information detected by the early warning system. A large proportion of Russian respondents refused to answer or said they did not know (27%); however, Russians are generally more likely to decline to answer survey questions than Americans are.

The majority positions on all of these questions were bipartisan, though the Democratic majorities were significantly larger. Both Republicans (68%) and Democrats (92%) supported working with other nuclear powers to reduce the number of nuclear weapons on high alert. Republicans (52%) and Democrats (74%) also said that all nuclear weapons should be taken off high alert once a verification system had been established. There was bipartisan opposition to a launch-on-warning policy (Republicans 58%, Democrats 72%).

**2. Deep Cuts in Nuclear Arsenals**

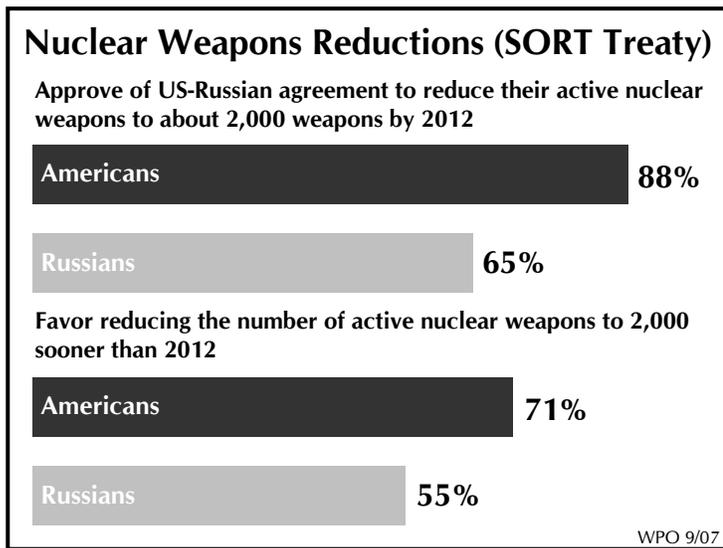
**Very large majorities endorse the US-Russian agreement to reduce the number of active nuclear weapons in each arsenal to about 2,000 weapons by the end of 2012. Most think such cuts should be made even sooner. Majorities in both countries also favor cutting the arsenals below the 2,000 levels. Americans and Russians would favor lowering U.S. and Russian arsenals to the level of 400 nuclear weapons if all other nuclear powers also promised not to increase the number of weapons in their arsenals.**

**Both Russians and Americans believe nuclear weapons are of very limited military utility: A majority of both Americans and Russians say that nuclear weapons should be used only in response to a nuclear attack and a large majority of Americans say that the United States should have a policy of never using nuclear weapons first. When Americans are asked how many nuclear weapons are necessary for deterrence, the median response is just 500.**

**The SORT Agreement**

The United States and Russia have signed an agreement called the Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty (SORT) which requires both sides to reduce the number of their operationally deployed strategic nuclear weapons (i.e. warheads that are mounted on delivery vehicles and ready for launch) to about 2,000 each. This would require the United States to eliminate 4,000 weapons and Russia to get rid of 2,000 by the end of 2012.

Very large majorities endorse this



agreement. Respondents were told that the two countries “have signed an agreement to reduce the number of active nuclear weapons on each side to about 2,000 by the end of the year 2012.” Eighty-eight percent of Americans and 65 percent of Russians said they approved of SORT, while only 11 percent of Americans and 15 percent of Russians disapproved.

In the United States, approval of the treaty reached very high levels among both Republicans (83%) and Democrats (92%).

Some have criticized SORT because it does not require any action until 2012. To assess the public’s position on this issue, respondents were asked, “Would you favor or oppose reducing the number of active nuclear weapons to this level sooner than the year 2012?” Seventy-one percent of Americans and 55 percent of Russians favored moving faster. Only 26 percent of Americans and 19 percent of Russians were opposed.

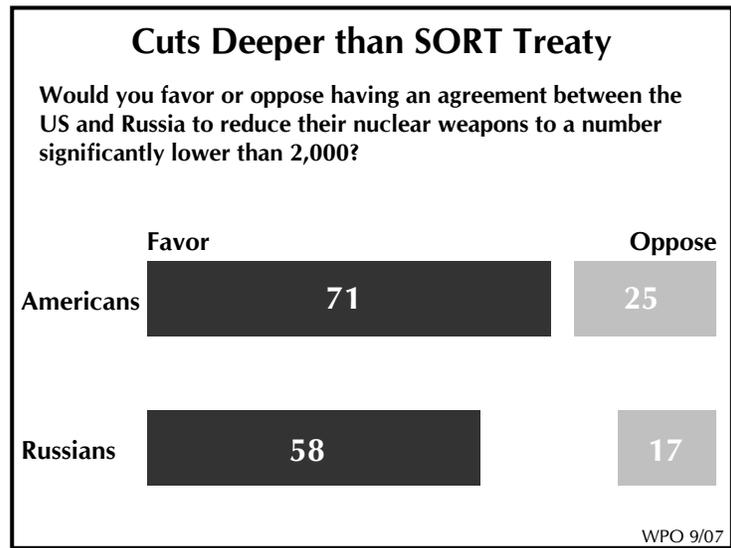
Among Americans, faster reductions were favored by 59 percent of Republicans and opposed by only 39 percent. Democrats overwhelmingly favored faster reductions (83% to 14%).

### Deeper Cuts

Not only is there majority support for making cuts faster, there is also majority support for making them deeper. Majorities on both sides favor reductions to less than 2,000 weapons. Assuming that all other nuclear powers would agree to not increase their number of active nuclear weapons, most would favor decreasing the U.S. and Russian arsenals to 400 nuclear weapons.

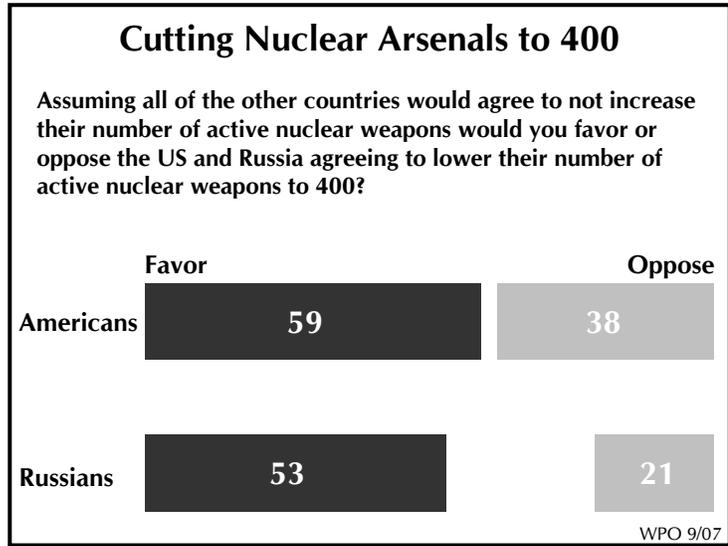
Seventy-one percent of Americans and 58 percent of Russians said they would favor an “agreement between the US and Russia to reduce their nuclear weapons to a number significantly lower than 2,000.” Only 25 percent of Americans and 17 percent of Russians opposed such an agreement.

In the United States, Republicans said they favored these reductions by a margin of 58 percent to 38 percent. Democrats supported them by an overwhelming margin of 82 percent to 16 percent.



Respondents were then asked about even greater reductions that would bring the size of the US and Russian arsenals down to that of the smaller nuclear powers. “In addition to the US and Russia, several other countries have nuclear weapons. None of them have more than 400 active nuclear weapons,” they were told. “Assuming all of the other countries would agree to not increase their number of active nuclear weapons, would you favor or oppose the US and Russia agreeing to lower their number of active nuclear weapons to 400?” Support for these reductions was not as robust as more modest cuts, but a clear majority on both sides favored them with relatively small numbers opposed. Fifty-nine percent of Americans and 53 percent of Russians said they would favor such deep cuts if all other nuclear powers complied, while 38 percent of Americans and 21 percent of Russians did not.

When asked about reductions to the 400 level, however, Americans display sharper partisan differences. Three-quarters of Democrats (74%) said they would favor such cuts (25% opposed) as did 60 percent of independents (36% opposed). However, a majority of Republicans (54%) said they would oppose these reductions while 43 percent favored them. At the same time—as discussed below in the section on eliminating nuclear weapons—a majority of Republicans support elimination in the context of advanced verification.



### Utility of Nuclear Weapons

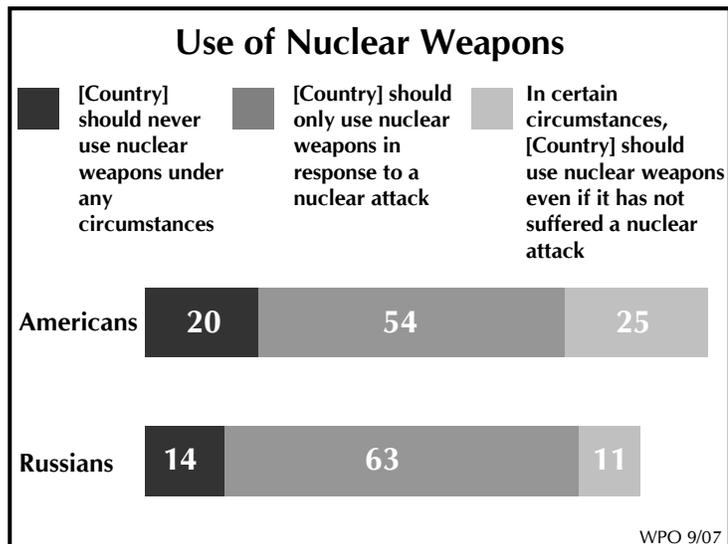
This support for deep cuts in nuclear weapons appears to reflect the belief that nuclear weapons have very limited military utility. A majority of both Americans and Russians said that nuclear weapons should only be used in response to a nuclear attack. A large majority of Americans said that the United States should have a policy of never using nuclear weapons first. Americans also believe that the number of nuclear weapons the United States needs for purposes of deterrence is quite low.

Respondents were asked “about the possible use of nuclear weapons by [our country]” and offered three choices:

- 1) “[Our country] should never use nuclear weapons under any circumstances.”
- 2) “[Our country] should only use nuclear weapons in response to a nuclear attack.”
- 3) “In certain circumstances, [our country] should use nuclear weapons even if it has not suffered a nuclear attack.”

In both the United States and Russia, majorities said their nuclear weapons should only be used in response to a nuclear attack.

In the United States, 54 percent chose this option. Another 20 percent thought the United States “should never use nuclear weapons under any circumstances.” Only 25 percent said, “In certain circumstances, the United States should use nuclear weapons even if it has not suffered a nuclear attack.”



In Russia, a larger 63 percent said that Russia “should only use nuclear weapons in response to a nuclear attack.” Another 14 percent said Russia should never use nuclear weapons at all. Only 11 percent said there were circumstances in which Russia should use nuclear weapons, even in the absence of a nuclear attack. Thus, both American and Russian majorities believe nuclear weapons have only limited military utility.

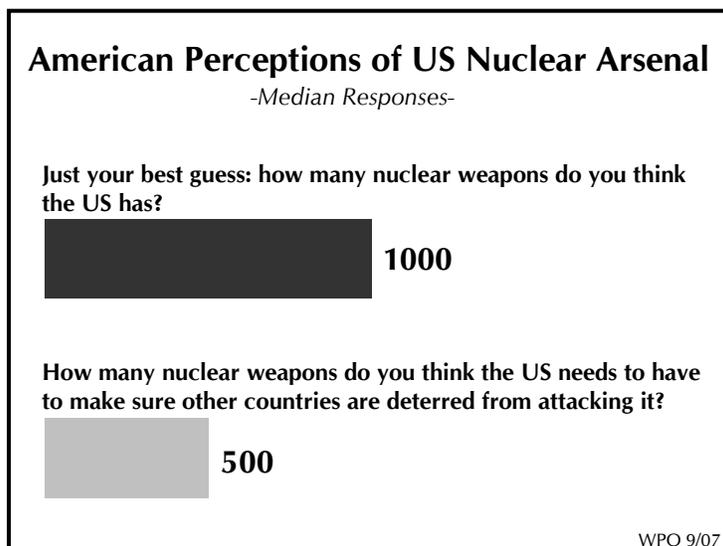
Among Americans, a larger minority of Republicans (41%) than Democrats (12%) said that there were circumstances in which the United States should use nuclear weapons even if it had not suffered a nuclear attack. However, a majority from both parties either believed that the US should only use nuclear weapons in response to a nuclear attack (Republicans 50%, Democrats 57%) or that the United States should never use nuclear weapons under any circumstances (Republicans 7%, Democrats 29%).

PIPA asked the same question to Americans in 2004, as did The Chicago Council in 2002. Over the years, the proportion saying that in some circumstances the US should consider using nuclear weapons “even if it has not suffered a nuclear attack,” has never risen above one in four.

A key part of the recurrent controversy over the appropriate use of nuclear weapons is whether the United States should formally adopt a no-first-use policy. The United States has promised not to use nuclear weapons against members of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty who neither have nuclear weapons themselves nor are aligned with a nuclear weapon state. But the United States has not codified this pledge in a legally binding treaty, nor has it ruled out nuclear first use in response to a chemical, biological or other type of attack by a state that also possesses nuclear weapons.

To gauge US opinion on this issue, the survey asked respondents, “Do you think it is a good idea or a bad idea for the US to have a stated policy of not using nuclear weapons first?” Seventy-one percent said that a stated no-first-use policy was a good idea, while only 26 percent said it was not. Republicans favored it by about two to one (64% to 34%) and Democrats by about three to one (78% to 19%).

If a majority of Americans believe that the US should not use nuclear weapons except in response to a nuclear attack, this implies that respondents believe that the only legitimate reason to have nuclear weapons is for deterrence. This raises the question of how big an arsenal is needed for deterrence. Americans were asked, first, to give their “best guess” of how many nuclear weapons the United States had. The question was open-ended, so respondents could offer any number. The median response was 1,000—much lower than the actual size of the US arsenal (approximately 10,000 total warheads).



US respondents were then asked: “How many nuclear weapons do you think the US needs to have to make sure other countries are deterred from attacking it?” The median answer was 500—half of

respondents’ estimate for the US arsenal and only five percent of the actual US arsenal. Thus, it appears that Americans would feel quite comfortable with deep cuts.

Interestingly, a different form of this question was asked by PIPA in 2004. At that time, Americans were asked how many nuclear weapons they thought the United States had on high alert. The question was again open-ended, and the median answer was 200—a good deal lower (logically) than their estimate of the size of the entire US nuclear arsenal in the current study. US respondents were then asked how many weapons the United States needed to keep on high alert. The median answer was 100. This was half (on average) of the number they thought were on high alert in the entire arsenal.

Taken together, the results from the two polls suggest that Americans significantly and consistently underestimate the number of nuclear weapons that the United States actually has and believe that the United States has twice as many nuclear weapons (total and on high alert) as it needs for national security.

**3. Eliminating Short-Range Weapons**

**A large majority of Americans believe the US should agree to eliminate its short-range weapons based in Europe if Russia agrees to eliminate its short-range nuclear weapons based in western Russia. (Russians were not asked this question.)**

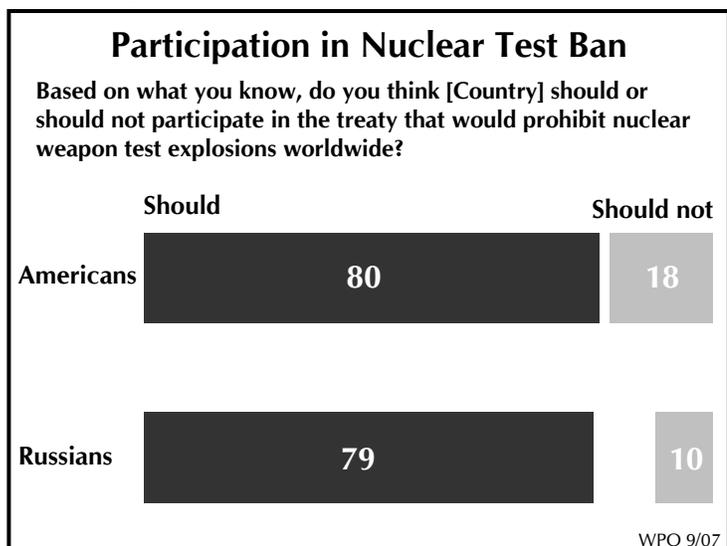
After being told that “current arms control treaties in place between the United States and Russia do not address short-range nuclear weapons designed for battlefield use,” Americans were asked the following: Do you favor an agreement whereby “the US eliminates its short-range nuclear weapons based in Europe and Russia eliminates its short-range nuclear weapons in the western part of Russia?”

Six out of ten Americans (59%) said they would favor such a proposal, while one in three (34%) were opposed. This includes a robust majority of Democrats (68%) and a bare plurality of Republicans (49% with 45% opposed).

**4. Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty**

**Overwhelming majorities of Americans as well as Russians think their country should participate in the treaty banning all nuclear weapons testing. Indeed, a clear majority of Americans assume that the United States already does.**

Both Americans and Russians overwhelmingly support the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). Eighty percent of Americans and 79 percent of Russians said their country “should participate in the treaty that would prohibit nuclear test explosions worldwide.” Only 18 percent of Americans and 10 percent of Russians opposed the treaty. Among Americans, 73 percent of Republicans supported CTBT participation, as did 86 percent of Democrats (independents: 78%).



Although the United States has signed the CTBT, it has not ratified it (Russia ratified it in 2000). Most Americans, however, not only support US participation in the CTBT, they assume it already does so. Fifty-six percent said they thought the United States did “participate in the treaty,” while just 37 percent said, correctly, that the United States did not. (There was no meaningful variation by party.) In 2004, the same number (56%) thought the United States took part.

Americans’ support for the CTBT is longstanding. When the same question was asked by The Chicago Council in 2004 and 2002, 87 percent and 81 percent respectively said the United States should participate in the treaty. In 1999—the year the US Senate voted against ratification—82 percent said the Senate should approve it, a poll by Mellman/Wirthlin found. In 1994, 80 percent said, “the president should push to get a nuclear test ban approved by 1995,” according to the ICR Survey Research Group.

### ***5. Controlling Nuclear Weapons-grade Material***

**Very large majorities of Russians and Americans say that their countries should put a top priority on cooperating with each other to prevent terrorists from acquiring nuclear weapons. Majorities, especially in the United States, 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 have. Americans, however, lean against highly intrusive bilateral monitoring systems, while Russians lean in favor of them. Americans also lean slightly against providing money and technical assistance to aid Russia in securing its nuclear weapons and materials, while Russians are lukewarm about the idea.**

Very large majorities of Russians and Americans believe their countries should help each other to prevent “terrorists from acquiring nuclear weapons.” Seventy-four percent of Russians and 87 percent of Americans gave such cooperation top priority. Only 20 percent of Russians considered this somewhat less urgent (important but not a top priority, 18%; not important, 2%) as did 12 percent of Americans (important, 11%; not, 1%).

Among Americans, Republicans were almost unanimous (94%) in wanting such US-Russian cooperation to be a top priority. Most Democrats (84%) and independents (82%) shared this opinion.

These attitudes are consistent with the support shown in both countries—especially in the United States—for 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. This idea has been proposed periodically—the German government called for an international “nuclear weapons register” in 1994—without winning much support among nuclear weapons states.<sup>4</sup>

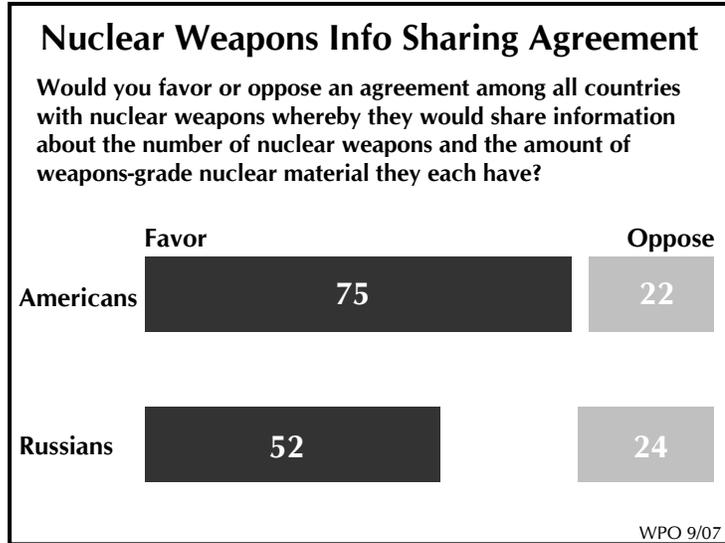
American and Russian respondents were asked: “Would you favor or oppose an agreement among all countries with nuclear weapons whereby they would share information about the number of nuclear weapons and the amount of weapons-grade nuclear material they each have?”

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<sup>4</sup> Nuclear Threat Initiative Research Library, *Securing the Bomb*, [http://www.nti.org/e\\_research/cnwm/monitoring/declarations.asp](http://www.nti.org/e_research/cnwm/monitoring/declarations.asp).

Three in four Americans (75%) and a majority of Russians (52%) favored such an agreement. Less than a quarter were opposed in either country (22% of Americans, 24% of Russians), though a large percentage of Russians (24%) did not answer.

In the United States, two-thirds (66%) of Republicans favored an information-sharing agreement among all nuclear weapons states, as did 85 percent of Democrats. Only 32 percent of Republicans and 12 percent of Democrats opposed the idea.



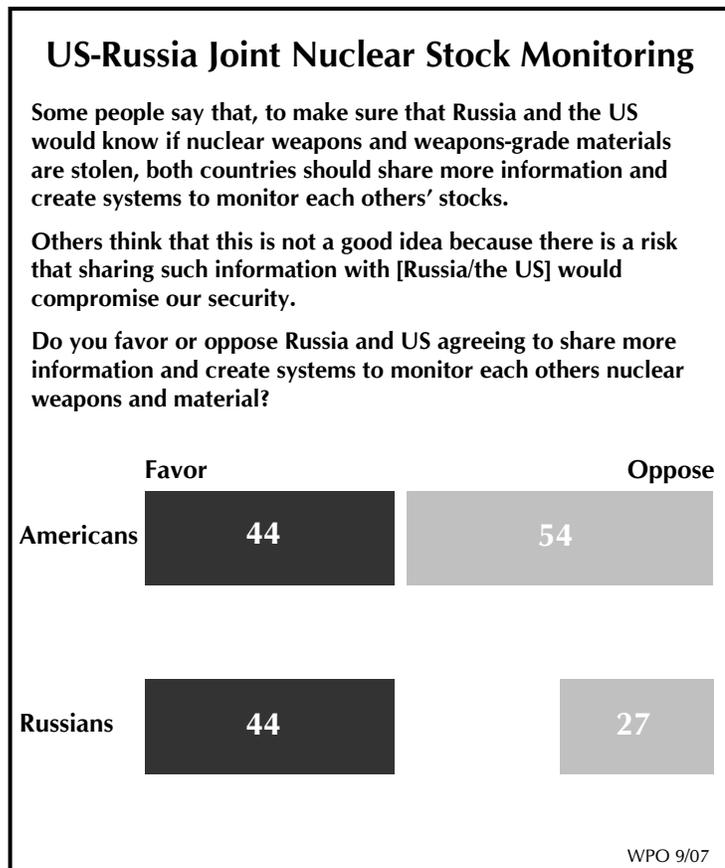
Americans lean against an information-sharing agreement if it includes only the United States and Russia, however, while Russians still tend to favor it. Respondents were offered the following arguments for and against the bilateral proposal:

Some people say that, to make sure that Russia and the US would know if nuclear weapons and weapons-grade materials are stolen, both countries should share more information and create systems to monitor each other's stocks. Others think that this is not a good idea because there is a risk that sharing such information with [Russia/the US] would compromise our security. Do you favor or oppose Russia and the US agreeing to share more information and create systems to monitor each other's nuclear weapons and material?

Fifty-four percent of Americans did not support having a bilateral system that would allow each country to monitor the other's stockpiles, while 44 percent did. Russians, however, leaned in favor of bilateral monitoring, by 44 percent to 27 percent (29% no response).

Among Americans, a clear majority of Republicans opposed (57%) this bilateral agreement while Democrats were divided (51% against and 48% in favor). A majority of independents (55%) also opposed it.

Americans also lean slightly against providing additional money and technical assistance to help Russia



secure its nuclear weapons and materials. The Russian response to this idea is lukewarm. The United States has provided such assistance since 1992 through the Cooperative Threat Reduction program (CTR), also known as the Nunn-Lugar plan. American and Russian respondents were told that “the US and Russia have many inactive nuclear weapons and a substantial amount of weapons-grade nuclear material,” and that “the US has been providing technical assistance and money to help Russia secure these nuclear weapons and materials.” Respondents were then asked whether they approved or disapproved of this assistance. Americans disapproved by a slim margin (52% to 47%) while Russians approved (36% to 31%), though 33 percent declined to answer.

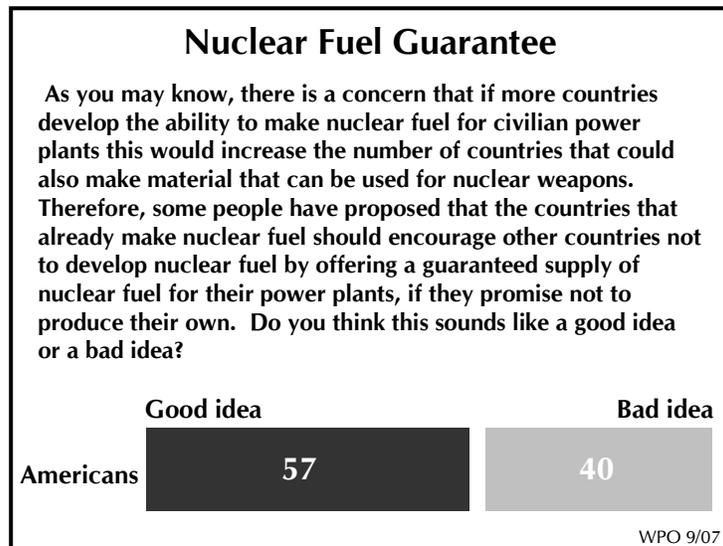
In the United States, Republicans approved of CTR by a clear majority (56% to 43%) while Democrats disapproved by a similarly clear margin (59% to 41%). Independents disapproved by 54 percent to 44 percent. This suggests that some American respondents (both Republican and Democrat) may assume—incorrectly—that CTR is a program initiated by the Bush administration. In past polling, Americans have been generally favorable toward CTR. For example, in a 1997 study for the Stimson Center, Mellman found 81 percent favored “assist[ing] with the dismantling of nuclear weapons in Russia.”

### **6. Getting Control of the Production of Nuclear Fuel**

**Americans support various proposals for gaining greater international control over the production of nuclear fuel. A majority favors the idea of discouraging countries from building their own facilities through an agreement that would provide them with fuel in return for a promise not to produce it themselves. A modest majority also favors having a UN affiliate control all facilities that process nuclear material, while guaranteeing countries a supply of fuel for nuclear power plants. (Russians were not asked these questions). Both Russians and Americans who are aware of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) tend to view it positively.**

One way to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons would be to exert greater control over the processing of uranium and plutonium for nuclear reactors. Currently, most countries that are able to export nuclear fuel are members of an organization called the Nuclear Suppliers Group. The Nuclear Suppliers Group has agreed to export fuel only to countries whose civilian nuclear programs are in good standing with the IAEA. A new idea, presently under discussion, is to try to discourage additional countries from building facilities to enrich uranium or reprocess plutonium by guaranteeing to supply them with the nuclear fuel they need, if they promise not to produce their own.

The survey informed American respondents, “There is a concern that if more countries develop the ability to make nuclear fuel for civilian power plants, this would increase the number of countries that could also make material that can be used for nuclear weapons.” Then they were told about a proposal that would guarantee countries a continued supply of nuclear fuel if they agreed not to produce it [see box]. A clear majority of 57 percent thought this was a good idea, while 40 percent disagreed.



Republicans were distinctly more supportive, with 69 percent calling it a good idea, while Democrats were divided, with 51 percent calling it a good idea and 48 percent a bad idea. Independents approved by 51 to 41 percent.

Mohamed ElBaradei, director general of the IAEA, has an even more far reaching proposal: making the IAEA the central administrator for all nuclear fuel operations and deliveries worldwide. The survey asked Americans about this proposal, after providing pro and con arguments:

Some people have proposed that a UN agency control all facilities that process nuclear material, and guarantee countries a supply of nuclear fuel for nuclear power plants. Advocates say that this would prevent nuclear fuel from being diverted to make nuclear weapons, while still assuring that countries have fuel for their nuclear reactors. Opponents say that this would be too big an intrusion on the freedom of countries.

American respondents were then asked whether they thought it was a good or bad idea “to have a UN agency control all facilities that process nuclear material.” A modest 54 percent majority thought it was a good idea, while 44 percent disagreed.

There were sharp partisan differences on this issue. Curiously, Republicans rejected this approach to supplying non-nuclear countries with fuel, in contrast to their support for providing nuclear fuel through a consortium, while Democrats endorsed it. This may reflect Republican discomfort with allowing a UN agency to produce the fuel instead of using fuel that was commercially produced and guaranteed by a consortium of supplier states. A majority of Republicans opposed the UN agency idea (58% to 39%), though they supported the commercial consortium option. Democrats were strongly in favor (65% to 34%) of the UN agency option. Independents were mildly supportive (54% to 44%).

Both Russians and Americans tend to have a positive view of the IAEA, to the extent that they are aware of it. Respondents were asked whether they thought the International Atomic Energy Agency “is having a mainly positive or mainly negative influence in the world.” Fifty-four percent of Americans thought the IAEA’s influence is mainly positive while only 27 percent did not. Russian views are also far more favorable than unfavorable, though about half did not answer. Forty percent of Russians said the IAEA’s influence was positive, while only 8 percent disagreed.

In the United States, Republican and Democratic views of the IAEA did not differ significantly. Responses to the same question in December 2006 were nearly identical to those in the current study.

### ***7. Ban on Producing Fissile Material***

**A majority of Americans and Russians favor having a ban on any further production of fissile material suitable for nuclear weapons.**

The idea of a treaty to cut off further production of fissile material that could be used in nuclear weapons has been on the international agenda for two decades. The Clinton administration supported the negotiation of a verifiable ban, but the Bush administration has taken the controversial position that an agreement to ban fissile material production should not include verification.

When the basic idea was put to Americans and Russians in the current study, it was endorsed by clear majorities in both countries. The question included the following arguments for and against having “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 [our country] in the future, when it may need more nuclear explosive material to make nuclear weapons.

Nearly two-thirds of Americans (64%) and a majority of Russians (55%) said they favored such a ban. Thirty-four percent of Americans and 14 percent of Russians were opposed.

In the United States, both Republicans and Democrats favored the ban, though the Republican majority was smaller (54% in favor, 42% opposed). Democrats favored it by almost two to one (63% to 36%). Interestingly, independents were overwhelmingly in favor of the idea (76% to 22%).

### **8. Intrusive and Multilateral Verification**

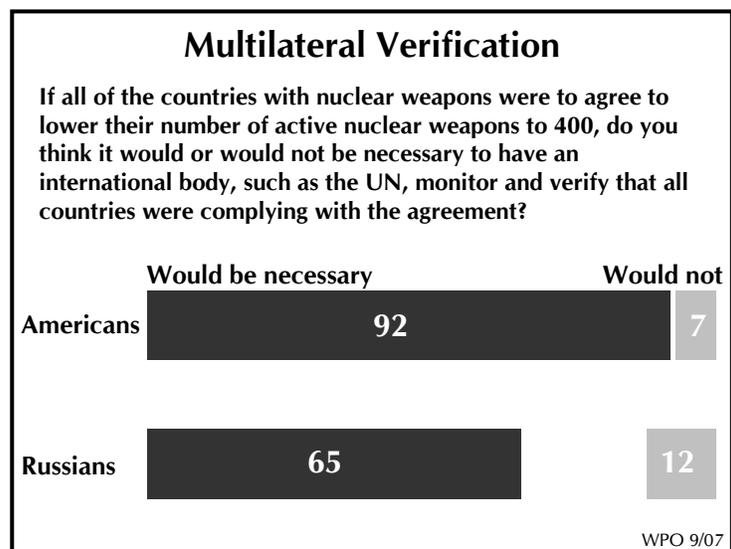
**Americans and Russians believe that achieving deep cuts in nuclear arsenals would require verification by an international body. A majority of Americans believe that international inspectors charged with verifying compliance with arms control agreements have too many limits on what they can do. Russians lean toward this belief but are largely unsure.**

**As explained above, majorities, especially in the United States, 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. Both publics prefer this to a bilateral information exchange and monitoring arrangement.**

**Americans overwhelmingly believe that when the US and Russia agree to a nuclear arms reduction it should be done through a legally binding and verifiable agreement rather than a general understanding that both sides decide how to implement.**

The strategic implications of cheating grow dramatically if countries agree to deep cuts in their nuclear arsenals. Overwhelming numbers of Americans and a large majority of Russians believe that achieving such reductions will require having an international body, such as the International Atomic Energy Agency, or another organization related to the United Nations, monitor and verify compliance.

After posing the questions (as discussed above) about the possibility of lowering Russian and American arsenals to 400 nuclear weapons, the survey then asked respondents, “If all of the countries with nuclear weapons were to agree to lower their number of active nuclear weapons to 400, do you think it would or would not be necessary to have an international body, such as the UN, monitor and verify that all

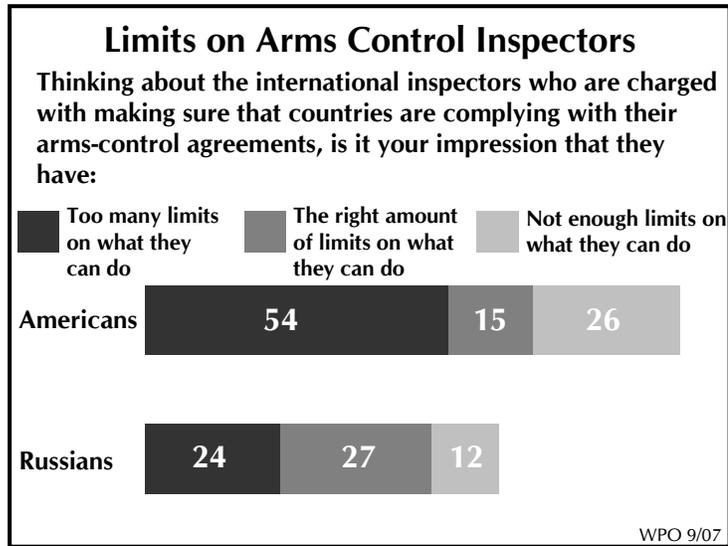


countries were complying with the agreement?”

Large majorities in both countries thought international monitoring and verification would be necessary. Sixty-five percent of Russians and a near-unanimous 92 percent of Americans saw it as a necessity; only 12 percent of Russians and 7 percent of Americans disagreed.

There were only slight party differences in the United States on this question. Overwhelming majorities of Republicans (91%) and Democrats (96%) and independents (88%) agreed that verification by an international body would be necessary.

Americans and Russians also tend to agree that greater latitude should be given to the international inspectors responsible for confirming that countries are in compliance with arms-control agreements. When asked about the authority of international inspectors, a majority of Americans (54%) said inspectors had “too many limits on what they can do,” including two in three Republicans (66%) and half (49%) of Democrats. Only 26 percent of Americans said that inspectors had too few limits, while 15 percent said they were about right.



More Russians said that there were too many limits on inspectors (24%) than too few (12%), while 27 percent said there were “the right amount.” However, 38 percent declined to offer an opinion.

As discussed above, support is also high for a multilateral system to share information about each country’s arsenal and weapons-grade material. Three-quarters (75%) of Americans and a modest majority of Russians (52%) 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, while fewer than one in four in each country oppose such an agreement. A larger majority of Democrats (85%) than Republicans (66%) favored this approach, with less than one-third in each party opposed (32% Republicans, 12% Democrats).

Thus Americans are more skeptical than Russians about more intrusive bilateral monitoring systems and information sharing. However, this skepticism does not carry over to wider multilateral proposals of the same kind.

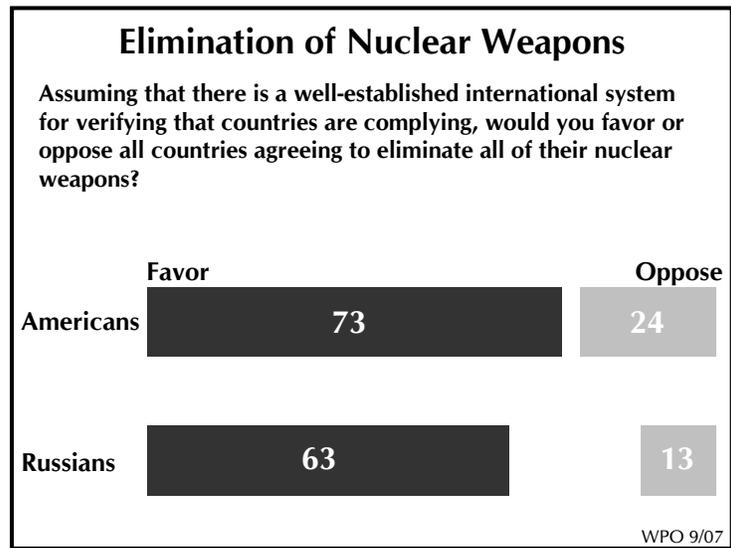
A very large majority of Americans favored the establishment of a “legally binding and verifiable agreement” between the United States and Russia to reduce their nuclear arms. Seventy-nine percent supported such a formal agreement (consistent with the findings from the PIPA/KN March 2004 study), while just 20 percent said there should only be “a general understanding that each country decides on its own how to implement.” Again, Republicans (76%) and Democrats (84%) agreed that a legally binding agreement was preferable.

### 9. Elimination of Nuclear Weapons

Large majorities of Russians and Americans favor an agreement among all countries to eliminate all nuclear weapons, assuming that there is a well-established system for verifying compliance. Most approve of this objective, even though they are unaware that their country has already agreed to pursue it under the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Indeed, large majorities on both sides feel that the nuclear powers have not been doing a good job of fulfilling this obligation and very large majorities would like their country to do more. Support for eliminating nuclear weapons softens, however, without an international system for verification and an orderly sequence of reductions. Also, trend line data suggest that support for elimination may have declined in light of the current suspicions about Iran's nuclear program.

Asked to assume that "there is a well-established international system for verifying that countries are complying," majorities of both Americans (73%) and Russians (63%) would favor "all countries agreeing to eliminate all of their nuclear weapons." Few Americans (24%) and even fewer Russians (13%) would oppose such an agreement.

Majorities of both Republicans and Democrats also favored this policy, though the percentage of Democrats (86%) was considerably higher than that of Republicans (59%).



Interestingly, this support was strong even though only a small portion of respondents were aware that their country was committed to the goal of eliminating nuclear weapons under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Respondents were introduced to the terms of the NPT as follows:

As you may know, [Country] and most of the world's countries have signed a treaty called the Non-Proliferation Treaty. According to this treaty, the countries of the world that do not have nuclear weapons have agreed not to try to acquire them. In exchange, the countries that have nuclear weapons, including [Country], have agreed to actively work together toward eliminating their nuclear weapons.

They were then asked whether they were aware that their country had agreed to this. A majority of Americans (63%) and Russians (57%) said they were unaware of this commitment, while just 37 percent of Americans and 23 percent of Russians said they were.

When asked whether they favored the goal of eventually eliminating nuclear weapons, more than two-thirds of both Russians (67%) and Americans (69%) said they did. Opposition was low among both Russians (15%) and Americans (28%).

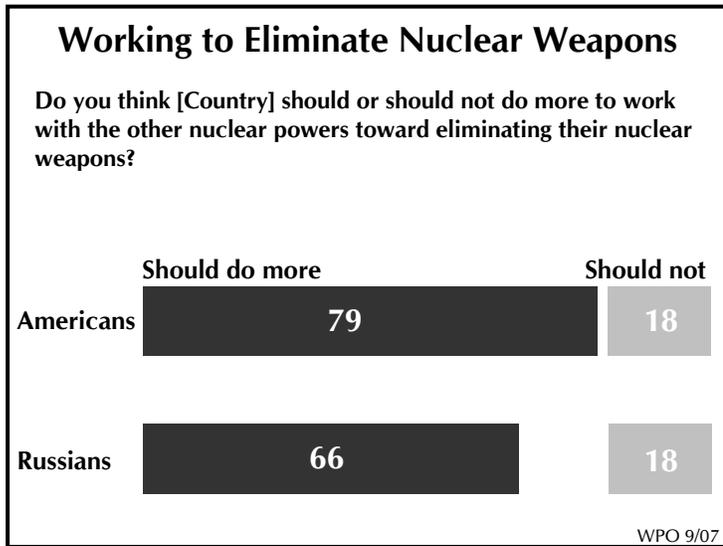
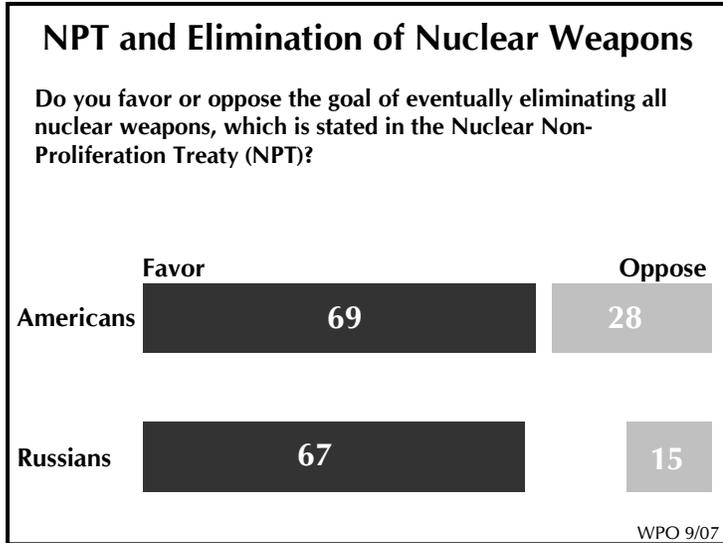
Among Americans, a larger majority of Democrats (81%) favored the goal of eliminating nuclear weapons than did Republicans (61%). Twice as many Republicans (35%) as Democrats (17%) opposed it.

Americans and Russians generally agreed that nuclear powers had not been doing enough to get rid of nuclear weapons. Asked how well they felt that “countries with nuclear weapons have been fulfilling this obligation to work toward eliminating nuclear weapons,” two-thirds of both Americans (67%) and Russians (66%) said “not very well” or “not well at all.” Just 26 percent in the United States and 7 percent in Russia said that these governments were fulfilling this obligation at least somewhat well.

Republicans and Democrats are also in agreement on this issue. Significant majorities in both parties (70% Republicans, 66% Democrats) say that countries are not fulfilling their obligations.

Most significantly, large majorities of both Americans (79%) and Russians (66%) share the belief that their respective countries should “do more to work with the other nuclear powers toward eliminating their nuclear weapons.” Just 18 percent in both countries disagreed. An overwhelming majority of Democrats (90%) viewed this cooperation favorably, as did a large majority of Republicans (73%).

Americans widely agreed that eliminating nuclear weapons should be an important priority for the US government. Eighty-six percent of Americans said that the US government should make the eventual elimination of nuclear weapons a top priority (21%) or an important, though not top, priority (65%). Just 13 percent overall said it should “not be a priority.” Democrats had a slightly larger majority in favor of making it a top priority (30%) than Republicans (11%), while equal numbers in both parties believed it should be an important priority (65% Democrats, 64% Republicans).



Despite broad support for the goal of eliminating nuclear weapons, this support softens either if respondents are *not* told that provisions will be made for verification, or if respondents are *not* told that a series of coordinated reductions will precede the final goal.

A slight majority said that elimination was too risky in response to a question that did not mention verification. The question offered respondents two arguments: 1) “Eliminating nuclear weapons is too risky. Nuclear weapons create stability because countries know that there will be dire consequences if they try to attack another country.” 2) “Since the risk is high that terrorists will someday get hold of nuclear weapons, it is crucial that we pursue the goal of eliminating them.”

A modest majority of Americans (52%) chose the “elimination is too risky” response. Nonetheless, nearly as many (47%) thought that the risk that terrorists might get such weapons outweighed the risk associated with eliminating them.

Responses to this question showed an unusual partisan divide. A majority of Republicans (65%) endorsed the position against elimination, while a majority of Democrats (59%) favored pursuing it.

Support for getting rid of all nuclear weapons also softens without a sequence of coordinated reductions leading up to their elimination. As explained above, 73 percent of Americans and 63 percent of Russians endorsed elimination in a series of questions that asked them to first consider Russian-American reductions to 2,000, and then to 400 along with an agreement under which other nuclear powers would promise not to increase their arsenals.

When a different sub-sample was simply presented a question with four possible responses, representing a spectrum of positions, just under half of Americans and Russians chose elimination over the other options. Forty-five percent of Americans and 39 percent of Russians favored pursuing elimination through an international agreement (Americans 38%, Russians 31%) or as a unilateral act (Americans 7%, Russians 8%). About half of Americans (52%) and Russians (50%) preferred an option other than nuclear elimination, with 33 percent of Americans and 31 percent of Russians favoring reductions short of total elimination and 19 percent of both publics opposing any reductions because nuclear weapons give their country a uniquely powerful position in the world.

This question also elicited responses divided along partisan lines in the United States: 53 percent of Democrats took a position in favor of pursuing elimination compared to 35 percent of Republicans.

There is also trend-line data indicating that Americans may have become a bit more wary of eliminating nuclear weapons in recent years, perhaps because US officials have repeatedly accused Iran of secretly trying to develop a nuclear capability.

In March 2004, when Americans were asked the question offering four options, discussed above, 61 percent took one of the positions in support of pursuing elimination, including 55 percent who supported doing so as part of an international agreement and 6 percent who would do so unilaterally. In response to another question asked in 2004, 82 percent of Americans said they endorsed the NPT goal of eliminating nuclear weapons as compared to 69 percent today.

These responses suggest that should tensions over Iran’s nuclear program subside, American readiness to support the goal of elimination would likely rebound.



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