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***Once and Future Partners:***

***The United States, Russia, and Nuclear Nonproliferation***

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Let me make four framework points and recommend a few steps:

1. The U.S., USSR and the world escaped the high probability of a Cold War nuclear disaster through a combination of leadership diligence (military and diplomatic), professionalism in handling nuclear weapons and materials by U.S. and Soviet military and scientists and “divine providence” or good luck (take your choice).
2. We had a window of opportunity during the last 20 years to greatly reduce nuclear risks and existential threats to the U.S., to Russia, to Europe and to the world. Instead, we have been edging toward higher risks, erosion of cooperation and trust and military confrontation that could lead to accidents, mistakes or terrible miscalculation. This could result in the first use of nuclear weapons in more than 70 years.
3. Both the U.S. and Russia accuse each other of violating the INF Treaty. Instead of joint discussion, open inspections, observation of tests or some other joint combined effort to resolve suspicions and accusations of violations, we have reached the point where President Trump announced that the U.S. will withdraw from the INF Treaty. I believe that this will be a serious mistake—militarily, diplomatically, and politically. However, Russia’s violation of the INF Treaty is serious and requires a response. Withdrawal from INF is the most severe response and sets the U.S. up to take the blame. Failure to consult the Congress will make Senate consent to new treaties more difficult. Failure to adequately consult allies will also have adverse consequences.
4. My 4th point is a question: Can a serious mistake become a serious opportunity? Can we turn this arms control crisis into an opening for improved strategic stability? I fully acknowledge that this would be a best case and would require strong leadership by the U.S. and Russia, but I would assert that it is not mission impossible.

My suggestions:

1. If President Trump and John Bolton insist on termination, I suggest that the U.S. at least comply with the Treaty’s Supreme National Interest Provision and give six months’ notice.
2. I further suggest that President Trump and President Putin announce that they will launch strategic stability talks now with an intense six-month effort parallel to the six-month INF notice required under the Treaty. Remember – this was their commitment at the summit. Also remember, six months could probably be extended by mutual agreement.
3. Parallel to these talks, I suggest that the U.S. Congress engage a small leadership task force (House and Senate) to coordinate and develop arms control matters, but also to develop – with the Executive Branch – a sensible Russia policy. This effort should begin by recognizing the danger that the sanctions against Russia – now written into law with no waiver provision – take away Executive branch leverage and flexibility to negotiate successfully with Russia. I believe “good Russian behavior” on Ukraine and Syria or the U.S. elections is not encouraged as long as a law must be passed by House and Senate to remove the penalties, which, of course, could take years.
4. President Trump and President Putin should get these strategic stability talks started by repeating and endorsing the Reagan-Gorbachev statement that a nuclear war cannot be won and must not be fought.
5. The strategic stability talks should begin with a laser focus on existential common interests, should include the participation of our military and defense leaders – particularly those with nuclear command responsibilities – and should cover a range of crucial concern of both Russia, the U.S. and our allies, including:
6. Rules of the road or at least understandings that cyberattacks on warning systems, command and control or critical infrastructure – would be a grave danger to Russia, to the U.S. and to the world.
7. Full implementation of the New START Treaty – and extension of the Treaty through 2026 – with specific attention to renew and strengthening verification where possible.
8. The two presidents should also set in motion serious discussions by their respected arms control experts (divided into separate groups where appropriate) on reciprocal transparency and understanding regarding:
* Missile Defense
* Prompt-strike forces and dual-use systems
* Nuclear cyber risks
* Avoiding collisions and conflicts in space
* Increasing decision-time for leaders – with a mandate from our two presidents to their military leaders to work together to give more time to each leader to react to a warning (which could be false) of a first strike.

Finally, my bottom line: the U.S. and Russia and other nuclear weapon states must find ways to reach understandings to utilize technology for stability rather than increased danger. (This includes artificial intelligence and synthetic biology).

We are acting as if time is on our side. It is not. Is this mission impossible? I would say no. It is not impossible if the U.S., Europe and Russia begin acting in our own national interests to reduce growing risks to our very existence.