

China Wants 'Drastic' Russia, U.S. Arms Cuts

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VIENNA — China called on the United States and Russia — which hold the vast majority of the world's nuclear warheads — to make further "drastic" cuts in their atomic arsenals.

A senior Chinese diplomat also told a meeting in Vienna that the development of missile defense systems that "disrupt" the global strategic balance should be abandoned, a possible reference to U.S. plans in Europe that have angered Russia.

The U.S.-Russian New START arms reduction treaty will cut long-range, strategic nuclear weapons deployed by the two Cold War-era foes to no more than 1,550 on each side within seven years after it came into force in February 2011.

But they still have by far the most nuclear arms — a fact stressed by the Chinese representative on Monday, the opening day of a two-week conference to discuss the Non-Proliferation Treaty, a 1970 pact to prevent the spread of atomic bombs.

China, Britain and France are the other three recognized nuclear weapons states. But the size

of their arsenals are in the low hundreds, well below those of the United States and Russia, which have thousands of nuclear warheads.

Ambassador Cheng Jingye, head of the Chinese delegation, said all nuclear weapons states should publicly undertake "not to seek permanent possession" of atomic bombs.

"As countries with [the] largest nuclear arsenals, U.S. and Russia should continue to make drastic reductions in their nuclear arsenals in a verifiable and irreversible manner," he said, according to a copy of his statement.

"Other nuclear weapons states, when conditions are ripe, should also join the multilateral negotiations on nuclear disarmament," Cheng added, apparently referring to the five recognized nuclear-armed countries.

India and Pakistan — which also have nuclear arms — are not part of the NPT. Israel, widely believed to have weapons, is also outside the treaty, as is North Korea, which is believed to be preparing for a third nuclear test.

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