

# Washington Wrecks Cyber Security Talks

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*Cybersecurity (CS) is the latest frontier in warfare. Much has been said about the need to work out certain rules to prevent an “unfettered arms race” and “combat operations” in this domain. Last year, Russia and the US [agreed to discuss](#) these issues and form a working group. The need for a joint approach to the problem during a telephone exchange between the two presidents. US pundits have [discussed](#) it in depth.*

Many hopes were pinned on these Russia-US cyber talks. If they could get off the ground, they would be viewed as a light at the end of the tunnel. Negotiations over strategies in regard to this “fifth domain” might expand to also include land, air, sea, and space. It took a lot of effort to reach an agreement to hold a dialog on February 27-28 in Geneva. Experts had been impatiently waiting for the two powers to address this burning issue.

The whole world heard National Security Advisor H. R. McMaster [claiming](#) at the Munich Security Conference in February that the US was ready for such talks. Russia had initiated the efforts to reach an agreement aimed at restricting military operations in cyberspace. The 17-member Russian delegation arrived in Switzerland ready to roll up their sleeves, buckle down, and work hard to tackle the issue and get something accomplished, but Washington torpedoed the consultations. It informed Moscow that its delegation [was not coming](#). It was a last-minute pull out.

That’s pretty tacky! You talk to someone and reach an accord, but then when the time comes to do what had been agreed upon, your counterpart simply doesn’t show up at the scheduled meeting with no advance notice! This isn’t something we’re used to seeing in diplomacy. Or is this a new trend in the evolution of international diplomatic protocol?

As a result, Moscow [cut off](#) the Russian-US consultations on strategic stability and bilateral relations that were slated to begin March 6-7 in Vienna. Russia has [called for a broad international effort](#) to prevent the militarization of cyberspace. The lessons learned from implementing the [1972 INCSEA Agreement](#) and the [1989 DMA Agreement](#) could help guide this work. Several European NATO members have shown their interest in joining the cybersecurity negotiations. But the US stymied the process, at least in a Russia-NATO format. It’s a pity, because the issue could have become part of a broader Russia-NATO and OSCE agenda.

CS is an area in which agreements can be reached. For instance, Russia and China signed an agreement on CS in 2015. Their [deal on cyber security](#) could serve as an example for other states that are willing to join in those efforts. The only [initiative](#) aimed at tackling CS on a global level was launched by the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in 2015. It did not go far because of the West’s reluctance to discuss it.

In 2013, [Russia and the US came up with a package of agreements](#) that included the exchange of information and emergency response teams. They agreed to use the operational nuclear hotline to also address cyber emergencies. It never got off the ground. The dialog was suspended in 2014 after Crimea joined the Russian Federation.

On Feb. 27 in Geneva the process could have been given a new lease on life. The first-ever non-aggression pact in the cybersphere could have been signed and it could have had room to grow. Once Moscow had agreements in place with both parties, Russia could have acted as a link between Washington and Beijing. America and Russia could have come together to draft an international agreement, outlining universal rules to regulate cyber operations on a global level. After all, the protection of critical infrastructure, such as power and water supplies, against cyberattacks is an issue of common interest, which requires joint efforts, regardless of any political divisions or affiliations.

Without curbs on cyberwarfare, cyber operations might spiral out of control. Without established rules, we could see dangerous consequences. Hostilities could spill over into other areas. In 2001, the US left the [1972 ABM Treaty](#). Seventeen years later it was surprised to discover that all those years of missile-defense efforts had gone down the drain and that Russia [is now leading](#) the superweapons race. On March 1, President Putin elaborated on this issue in his [address to the Federal Assembly](#). A few days ago, the US missed its chance to address the problem of cyberwarfare. It's quite possible that eventually it will find itself lagging behind in this area as well. And maybe one day it will appreciate the wisdom that can be gained by learning one's lessons and seizing opportunities.

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