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**THE US-RUSSIA RELATIONS  
AND THE RUSSIAN STRATEGIC  
DEFENSE POLICY:  
GETTING BEYOND  
THE COLD WAR LOGIC**

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***SERIES: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS***

*Dmitry V. Suslov*<sup>1</sup>

**THE US-RUSSIA RELATIONS AND THE RUSSIAN STRATEGIC DEFENSE POLICY:  
GETTING BEYOND THE COLD WAR LOGIC**

The contemporary Russian military-industrial complex to a great extent still remains a shortened and shrinking copy of the old Soviet military machine, which is less and less capable of defending Russia from the real threats and challenges and stimulates ineffective spending of financial resources. The reason is that the logic of the Russian defense policy, which determines structure of the military-industrial complex, did not change since the Cold War. This logic is strategic deterrence of the US. Today more factors objectively unite Russia and the US in the world rather than separates them. However, Moscow is still committed to maintaining a parity (or at least an illusion of parity) with the US in the strategic nuclear sphere and regards it as a criteria for its military security and maintenance of a great power status.

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## A Stalemate of Nuclear Disarmament

The New START Treaty between Russia and the US, signed in April 2010 in Prague and ratified in the beginning of 2011<sup>2</sup>, was presented by the sides and widely commented as a manifestation of overcoming of the crisis of nuclear disarmament, which emerged in the 2000 decade as a result of the Bush Administration policies. Indeed, the previous US Administration was openly hostile to the arms control and openly sought unilateral US military preponderance, including in the nuclear field. Although Russia and the US signed the so-called Moscow Treaty of 2002 (Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty or SORT)<sup>3</sup>, which went beyond START-1 in terms of the ceilings of both nuclear weapons and deliveries, it lacked the detalization and verification procedures of the conventional US-Russian and US-Soviet agreements in the field of arms control. In this aspect it simply relied on START-1. Even the very fact that the SORT Treaty appeared as a legally binding treaty, not as a political declaration or statement, was a concession on the part of the Bush Administration. The latter declared that “friends don’t need long treaties” and that in the post-Cold War environment, when the US and Russian nuclear arsenals do not threaten each other, each side can manage reduction of its nuclear arsenal itself and unilaterally.

At the same time, it was clear that such a “free sailing” and elimination of traditional control and verification mechanisms and procedures will quite quickly result in the US nuclear arsenal getting superiority over the Russian both in numbers and quality. In the end of 1990-s – beginning of 2000-s the US was at the apex of its financial might and economic prosperity, while Russia was still on the brink of economic and financial collapse. Thus, it was a common sense that if international rules and constrains on nuclear policies were to be abolished, Russia would not be able to compete with the US in terms of the nuclear potential. Because of financial limitations it would not be able even to sustain its arsenal on the then level, whereas the US would have had an opportunity to easily modernize its nuclear triad and perhaps even expand those parts of its nuclear arsenal it considered useful.

So, not necessarily opposing the very idea of reduction of the old Cold War type strategic nuclear arsenals, the Bush Administration did oppose the international limitations and control<sup>4</sup>. It

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<sup>2</sup> *Treaty between the United States of America and the Russian Federation on Measures for the further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms*. New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START). (Signed in Prague, April 8, 2010). <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/140035.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> *Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty (SORT)*. Signed in Moscow, May 24, 2002. <http://www.armscontrol.org/documents/sort>

<sup>4</sup> See: Ivo H. Daalder, James M. Lindsay. 2003. *America Unbound: The Bush Revolution in Foreign Policy*. Brookings Institution Press. 246 pp.

opposed the enshrined in the classic arms control process right of the other side (Russia) to control and monitor development of the American strategic nuclear arsenal. At the same time, the Bush Administration clearly tried to make its nuclear arsenal usable. This was reflected both in the relevant strategic documents the Administration produced (Nuclear Posture Review above all<sup>5</sup>) and in the priorities of the research and development projects of that time. So, while the US was ready to reduce the amount of elderly unusable strategic weapons of the Cold War era, it was clearly inclined to develop the kind of strategic potential, including a nuclear one, that could be used, and not just for the purposes of deterrence but also in combat, as well as the other dimensions of strategic potential. Such as strategic space systems, strategic missile defense and Prompt Global Strike program.

This risked creating a legal and normative vacuum in strategic sphere, thus undermining strategic stability and all the other security regimes, that are historically linked to the rules of nuclear arms control. Nuclear non-proliferation regime first and foremost. Indeed, the foundation of this regime – the NPT Treaty – is based on the nuclear signatories to disarm, which is an indispensable part of the compromise with the non-nuclear countries which take an obligation not to pursue nuclear weapons. Although it is clear that in reality this disarmament obligation will not be fulfilled in the observable future (if ever), rhetorical recognition of the nuclear states' obligation to pursue the so-called "zero option" (fully eliminate nuclear weapons) makes it easier for the non-nuclear states to subscribe to the indigenously unjust regime with legal haves and have-nots.

In the years 2002-2003 the Bush Administration developed and officially adopted the Preemptive Strike Doctrine (which in fact was about preventive strikes, not preemptive ones), which allowed the US to use force against a state on the basis of mere suspicion, in a situation where a threat even did not materialize<sup>6</sup>. Besides, as it was clear from the statements by the leaders of the Administration and the Defense ministry in particular, criteria of the threat that could trigger preventive use of force were very unclear and deliberately blurred<sup>7</sup>. Thus, almost everyone who was viewed by the US as a problem could feel threatened. At that time (and up to

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<sup>5</sup> See: Donald H. Rumsfeld. 2002. *Nuclear Posture Review Report. Foreword*. <http://www.fas.org/sgp/news/2002/01/npr-foreword.html>; Stephen Young, Lisbeth Gronlund. 2002. *A Review of the 2002 US Nuclear Posture Review*. Union of Concerned Scientists Working Paper. [http://www.ucsusa.org/assets/documents/nwgs/npr\\_review.pdf](http://www.ucsusa.org/assets/documents/nwgs/npr_review.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> G. John Ikenberry. 2002. *America's Imperial Ambition*. *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 81, No. 5. P. 44-60.

<sup>7</sup> The most famous example is the statement by the US Defense Secretary of that time Donald Rumsfeld of the "unknown unknowns" as a type of threat, which the US must be ready to counter, including preventively.

now) there was and is a common sense that the most credible deterrence potential, that could deter the US from attacking, is a nuclear capability.

Elaboration and adoption of the New START Treaty, as well as bringing it into force prevented these dangerous tendencies from happening. The US and Russian commitment to Article VI of the NPT was confirmed<sup>8</sup>. The sides increased their soft power and moral standing, especially on the eve of the Washington Nuclear Security summit in April 2010 and the another NPT Review Conference in May 2010.

However, the New START did not open a new substantial stage in the process of nuclear disarmament. First of all, there was a huge gap between how the Treaty was officially presented and what it really meant in terms of the real cuts of the US and Russian nuclear arsenals. According to the document, each side was allowed to possess up to 700 deployed strategic deliveries (ICBMs, ICBMSs, strategic bombers), up to 800 deployed and non-deployed (that it – total number in general) strategic deliveries, and up to 1550 deployed strategic nuclear warheads<sup>9</sup>.

Officially, this was presented as if Russia and the US were cutting their nuclear arsenals by one third. This ratio, though, appeared in comparison to the START-1 levels, whereas in reality neither of the sides possessed such arsenals by spring 2010. Thus, using the real sizes of the US and Russian strategic nuclear arsenals by the time the New START was signed as a point of departure, it became clear that it not only doesn't force the sides to take tough steps toward reduction of their arsenals of warheads and deliveries, but even allows some more freedom of maneuver in terms of the nuclear force structure in comparison to the expired START-I and START-II, which never came into effect. For instance, the heavy liquid fuel missiles with multiple independently targetable reentry vehicle (MIRV) warheads, outlawed under the START-I, became allowed again, the number of monitoring and verification inspections decreased and their regime softened, etc.

Already during the negotiations on the New START Treaty, Washington insisted on minimal reductions of strategic delivery vehicles, compared with the current arsenals. As a result, Russia can even build up the number of its strategic delivery vehicles to reach the ceiling established by the new treaty. The new U.S. nuclear doctrine (Nuclear Posture Review), presented in April

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<sup>8</sup> *The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT)*. 1968.  
<http://www.un.org/en/conf/npt/2005/npttreaty.html>

<sup>9</sup> New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START). (Signed in Prague, April 8, 2010).  
<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/140035.pdf>

2010 immediately after signing of the New START Treaty clearly states that “conservative assumptions” were used to determine reductions in nuclear weapons.<sup>10</sup> This approach, according to the US, might be revised in a new treaty, to be concluded after New START. The problem, though, is that this new treaty is highly unlikely in the observable future. The U.S. nuclear doctrine also provides for maintaining balance between the strategic nuclear arsenals of the United States and Russia. Interestingly, this very traditionalist view is considered in the U.S. to be almost revolutionary.

The Treaty also did not produce any substantial continuation of the nuclear arms reduction and especially disarmament. Officially the US tried to continue it and rhetorically insisted on going further in implementation of the Barack Obama’s vision of a nuclear-free world.<sup>11</sup> But in reality it was not ready to go to deeper cuts of the strategic nuclear weapons – both due to opposition from the Pentagon and the defense establishment in general, opposition from the Republicans, who generally dislike the idea of the US cutting its nuclear arsenal, and, finally, due to the fact that the Obama Administration was not really eager to go to go to deeper cuts in conditions of nuclear proliferation and when the other nuclear states are not going to decrease their arsenals as well. Instead, Washington proposed to focus on the tactical and non-deployed nuclear weapons as the new priorities for cutting.<sup>12</sup>

Focus on tactical NW was the major proof of the US unwillingness to continue with the nuclear disarmament: it is the sphere where Russia enjoys a vast advantage over the US. According to estimates, it possess about 10 times as more tactical NW than the US (2000 to 200 warheads). Thus, making it a priority of the next round of nuclear arms cut would essentially mean a unilateral cutting of the Russian arsenal. Indeed, both the Obama Administration and the Republicans were talking about “overcoming asymmetry” in their arsenals of non-strategic (tactical) NW. In December 2010 this approach was fully reflected in the ratification documents adopted by the US Senate concerning the New START and thus became a legal obligation for the Administration.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> *Nuclear Posture Review Report*. 2010. US Department of State.  
<http://www.defense.gov/npr/docs/2010%20Nuclear%20Posture%20Review%20Report.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> *Obama Prague Speech On Nuclear Weapons: FULL TEXT*. 2009.  
[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/04/05/obama-prague-speech-on-nu\\_n\\_183219.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/04/05/obama-prague-speech-on-nu_n_183219.html)

<sup>12</sup> See: Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, *Excerpt from Remarks at NATO Working Dinner on Nuclear Issues and Missile Defense*, Tallinn, Estonia. April 22, 2010; Ellen Tauscher, “*New START Treaty and the Obama Administration’s Nonproliferation Agenda*,” Department of State Press Briefing, Washington, D.C., March 29, 2010. <http://www.state.gov/t/us/139205.htm>

<sup>13</sup> *New Start Treaty Resolution of Advice And Consent To Ratification*. 2010. US Senate Foreign Relations Committee New START Treaty Resolution. [http:// www.foreign.senate.gov](http://www.foreign.senate.gov)

It is also important that the value of tactical NW is vastly different for Russia and the US. In a situation where a big war in Europe is unthinkable, a serious geopolitical confrontation with Russia in Europe resembling the Cold war unlikely, while the US enjoys preponderance in conventional force and has an ally and a friend as neighbors, the US simply does not need tactical nuclear weapons. At the same time, for Russia, which feels constant discomfort with the weakness of its conventional forces in comparison to the US and NATO, especially in the context of NATO enlargement, and which has troublesome neighbors on the South and the East and, finally, which feels geopolitical and demographic pressure from China, tactical NW continue to play a very important role in defense policy. Not necessarily a defense from the West.

Thus, one can hardly call the US proposal to cut tactical NW arsenals as witness of its real inclination to continue reduction of nuclear weapons after the New START. It is no surprise that the Russian reaction was negative. Therefore, in order to prevent even the possibility of such negotiations, Moscow insists, as a precondition, that the U.S. unilaterally withdraw its nuclear warheads from Europe and that negotiations should focus on matters of missile defense, strategic conventional weapons and the militarization of outer space.<sup>14</sup>

However, even before the US Senate demanded the Obama Administration to pursue reduction of the Russian tactical NW arsenal, Washington started to exert pressure on Moscow to start the new negotiations. More and more publications started to appear in the US and European press about some mythical threat to NATO countries from Russia's tactical nuclear weapons, which by far outnumber the U.S. ones (the United States keeps an estimated 200 tactical nuclear bombs in Europe). NATO's new Strategic Concept, adopted in November 2010, also reflects these fears and puts the issue of tactical NW on the agenda.<sup>15</sup> Finally, the US started discuss this issue with the European NATO allies, effectively utilizing Germany's push for withdrawing US tactical NW from the European soil, as well as the Baltic states' arguments that the Russian tactical NW, located on the European part of Russia, as they claim, threaten their security.

So far Russia did not change its strict position on tactical NW, and there is almost no chance that it will change it in the observable future. Moscow makes it very clear that this is simply not an issue, but it is ready to discuss the US withdrawal of its tactical NW arsenal from Europe and

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<sup>14</sup> *U.S.-Russian talks on tactical nuclear arms cuts will take time - U.S. official*. RIA Novosti, 22/03/2011. <http://en.rian.ru/world/20110322/163136512.html>

<sup>15</sup> “*Strategic Concept For the Defence and Security of The Members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation*”. Adopted by Heads of State and Government in Lisbon. Lisbon, 19 November 2010. <http://www.nato.int/strategic-concept/index.html>

further hypothetical reductions of these arsenals if Washington fulfils a list of conditions, which obviously will not be fulfilled and which are unacceptable to any American Administration. By beginning of 2012 Obama Administration officially recognized that there are no conditions to launch negotiations on tactical NW with Russia in the observable future.<sup>16</sup> Partly it was made deliberately in order to avoid an additional irritant in the US-Russia relations at a time when they already were overwhelmed with serious contradictions and frictions over missile defense and election period in both countries.

However, in the long run the US will be compelled to come back to this problem, indispensable of who will win the US presidential elections in November 2012. If a Republican candidate wins, Washington will press on this issue even more vigorously. Therefore, the next few years will see growing pressure on Moscow for further reductions in nuclear weapons, above all tactical forces. Unwillingness to move in this direction will be interpreted as a breach of the obligations under Article VI of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and as an effort to impede the idea of a nuclear-free world, while Moscow will take the pressure as proof of Washington's desire for absolute military superiority. Russia, on its turn, will continue to block these efforts and reject negotiation. As a result, the paradigm of the perception by Russia and the U.S. of each other as potential enemies will only strengthen.

It is not clear yet whether Washington will insist later on the discussion of further cuts in strategic nuclear weapons within the framework of negotiations on the next treaty, and what scale of the cuts it means. Objective factors (the growing U.S. superiority in conventional weapons, the development of precision weapons, the growing potential of strategic non-nuclear deterrence, the gradual upgrading of missile defense systems, etc.) will prompt America to seek nuclear disarmament. This logic is typical of the Obama administration, which has seriously stepped up the Prompt Global Strike and missile defense programs but which, at the same time, is seeking Senate ratification of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). The ratification will make it physically impossible for the U.S. to build up its strategic nuclear arsenal to the level of the 1980s-1990s. In this case, however, it would be natural to expect Washington to exert pressure on other nuclear countries, above all Russia and China, in order to force them into further reductions.

On the other hand, this approach is not shared by all in the U.S. establishment. The military community and the Republicans oppose reductions in nuclear weapons and the ratification of the

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<sup>16</sup> *Peregovori SSHA i RF po sikrasdheniu vooruzhenij otkladivajutsya*. RIA Novosti, 13/01/2012. [http://ria.ru/defense\\_safety/20120113/538196017.html](http://ria.ru/defense_safety/20120113/538196017.html)

CTBT if these are not coupled with the simultaneous buildup or modernization of the U.S. strategic nuclear arsenal. To gain Republican support on New START and the CTBT (it has not gained either yet), the Obama administration has given the green light to a substantial increase in the funding of the nuclear complex within the next 10 years.

The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have shown that the U.S. non-nuclear military might is becoming increasingly less usable. Its use involves huge spending and does not produce the desired political results. Considering the increasing budget deficit, which will inevitably cause a reduction in the defense budget and, at the same time, growth in defense spending in “new centers of power,” the U.S. superiority in conventional weapons may start decreasing. In this case, not only the Republicans and “hawks” in the defense community but also other representatives of the political elites may turn their eyes to the strategic nuclear forces again as the main instrument of strategic deterrence and as a way to ensure the country’s military security. That would stand as an insurmountable obstacle to substantial cuts.

Thus, a year after ratification of the New START and almost two years after its signing, the prospects of further reductions in nuclear weapons between Russia and the US appear to be unlikely. Indeed, Russia immediately after signing of the New START made it clear that it does not share the Obama administration’s desire to further reduce nuclear weapons in the foreseeable future and that it considers the reduction levels envisaged by New START sufficient for the next 10 years (for which the Treaty will remain in force).

Even the US rhetoric about moving towards a world without nuclear weapons, the goal President Obama proclaimed in 2009 as a way of increasing the US soft power, also waned soon. It almost disappeared from the official rhetoric of the White House by the end of 2011. Besides, the Obama Administration started to diminish the public profile of its other priorities in the nuclear sphere that accompany the proclaimed goal of moving towards the nuclear-zero world. Such as pursuing ratification by the Senate of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty and conclusion of the Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty.

## **Russian Priorities in the Field of Nuclear Arms**

Instead of launching a long-term round of substantial reduction of nuclear weapons, which did not happen, the new START created a basis for profound step up of the Russia nuclear program and, in particular, in a nuclear build up. Definitely, within the limits of the New START. Quite soon after the new Treaty was signed, the Russian government adopted a new State Armaments

Program till 2020, which gives the highest priority to modernizing the Russian strategic nuclear arsenal and keeping not just balance, but parity with the US.

Interestingly, that the nature of the military threats and challenges Russia faces today and will face in the near and middle-term future demand focusing on modernizing Russian conventional and power projection capability, speeding up the military reform with the aim of building a concise but capable and effective armed service, able to fight large-scale war, counterinsurgency operations and limited conflicts beyond the Russian borders. Weak points of the Russian conventional and power projection potential was vividly revealed during the Russia-Georgia conflict of August 2008: the overall technical equipment of the Georgian forces exceeded the Russian one.

Moreover, Russia faces growing threats of instability from the Central Asia and Afghanistan, especially after the year 2014, when the US and NATO plan to pass responsibility for security in the country to the Afghani government and withdraw the majority (or all) of its contingent there. Most probably, this would result in intensification of the civil war and Taliban eventually capturing power in the majority of the country, apart from the northern part, populated by tajik and uzbek minorities. Hence, a situation might resemble the middle of 1990-s, with a war continuing on the borders of Tajikistan. This might spread instability throughout weak countries of Central Asia and demand Russian involvement. Nuclear arsenal won't help here. Instead, counterinsurgency and effective conventional capability will be mostly precious.

Despite these objective factors, the majority of funds from the new Russian Armaments program are supposed to be supplied to upgrading and strengthening the Russian strategic nuclear arsenal. That is, strengthening strategic deterrence of the United States. Some major parameters of these program were highlighted by the Russian Prime minister Vladimir Putin in march 2011, when he visited one of the military plants in Votkinsk, where strategic missiles are produced.<sup>17</sup> He confirmed that production of strategic missiles is the major priority of the Armaments Program and declared that in accordance with it Russia is doing to double their production since 2013. In general, Putin said, it is planned to allocate 77 billion roubles for production of strategic missiles till 2020. What is peculiar is not just that these news were declared at a key site of the Soviet military industrial complex. But that they were put in an explicit anti-American context.

In the same comments the Russian Prime minister severely criticized the US and some European countries' decision to start a military operation against the then Libyan leader Muammar

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<sup>17</sup> *Russia to double production of ballistic missile systems – Putin*. RIA Novosti, 21/03/2011. [http://en.rian.ru/military\\_news/20110321/163130424.html](http://en.rian.ru/military_news/20110321/163130424.html)

Quaddafi (using the UN Security Council resolution 1973 as a pretext) and, in particular, said that the US action “lack either logic or conscience”. He also said that the ease of the US decisions to use military force is a stable tendency, thus performing the Libyan operation as a sort of continuation of the US wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Finally, Vladimir Putin claimed that all these activities of the US “proof that what is done in terms of increasing of the Russian defense is right”.<sup>18</sup> The meaning was, obviously, that Russia should continue to invest in protecting itself against the US, which is unambiguously unfriendly and even hostile and is continued to be viewed as a “probable adversary”.

The Russian desire to invest 77 billion roubles in strategic missiles production as well as its explicit anti-American context triggered criticism from NATO, thus complicating the Russia-US and Russia-NATO relations. Talking at an international conference in London in June devoted to the problems of missile defense, NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen to double production of strategic missiles a “senseless waste of money”.<sup>19</sup> He also emphasized that while NATO was trying to create a defensive system (missile defense), Russia was investing huge sums of money into production of offensive weapons, especially the weapons that due to their qualities can not be directed against anyone but the US and NATO. A month later Rasmussen repeated his criticism during his speech at the Naval Academy in Saint-Petersburg.<sup>20</sup> He urged Russia to rethink its decision and leave the Cold War mentality, which forces Russia to invest that much in production of wittingly anti-US and anti-NATO systems, in the past.

Obviously, these plans were not abolished. Moreover, a crisis and stagnation of the Russia-US negotiations on missile defense, a failure to find a mutually acceptable compromise, not to mention a cooperative agreement, gave Russia additional motivation to go further with its intentions and to publicize them in greater detail. Indeed, the US rejection of Russian demands and proposals on missile defense were presented by Moscow as a proof of the anti-Russian nature of this would-be system, which, in its turn, provided an additional justification or even obligation for Russia to expand and modernize its nuclear strategic potential. Hedging against hypothetical threats of the US missile defense plans are claimed to be one the major rationale behind the Russian plans to expand its ballistic missile production. The logic is that Moscow

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<sup>18</sup> *Putin likens UN Libya resolution to crusade call*. RIA Novosti, 21/03/2011. <http://en.rian.ru/russia/20110321/163126957.html>

<sup>19</sup> *"NATO: Defending against Ballistic Missile Attack"*. Speech by NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen at the Royal United Services Institute in London. 15/06/2011. [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/opinions\\_75473.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/opinions_75473.htm)

<sup>20</sup> *"Russia and NATO: so much to gain"*. Speech by NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen at the Kuznetsov Naval Academy in St. Petersburg. 05/07/2011. [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/opinions\\_76061.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/opinions_76061.htm)

need to guarantee it has an enough strategic missiles to surely overcome any hypothetical missile defense, thus sustaining strategic stability, which, according to Russia, is still based on strategic deterrence, which, in its turn, is founded on mutually assured destruction.

In December 2011, when the talks with the US on missile defense finally collapsed and it became absolutely clear that no compromise would be found in the near future (it was symbolized by the special address of President Medvedev on November 23, 2011, who presented a list of measures that Moscow took as a reaction to the US efforts on missile defense and which it might take if these American plans would be further be implemented), Russia presented its plans on modernization of its nuclear arsenal in greater detail. Talking on December 15, 2011, the commander of the Russian Strategic Missile Forces Sergei Karakaev declared that in the coming years Russia intended to produce two types of new intercontinental ballistic strategic missiles, one of which would be a solid-propellant middle class missile, while the second one – a heavy liquid fuel missile.<sup>21</sup> According to Sergei Karakaev, Russia is currently creating a newest middle-class ICBM with a new type of combat equipment (nuclear warhead), and it will be supplied to the Armed forces by 2015 and supplement the current representatives of the new generation of ICBMs – the “Yars”, “Topol-M” and “Bulava” missiles. A necessity to produce another new type of ICBMs, commander said, is determined by these major considerations: to sustain the strategic deterrence and the strategic balance with the US, and to overcome a prospective hypothetical US missile defense.

Sergei Karakaev described the following plans to modernize the Russian ICBMs. Russia intends to increase the share of the new missile complexes in its strategic arsenal up to 60 % by the year 2016 and up to 98 % up to year 2021. Pursuing this purpose, Russia plans to double the quantity of missile launches (tests) in 2012. In general, 11 missile launches are planned for 2012, four of which would be aimed at prolonging the service periods of the old ICBMs and seven – at testing of the new missile complexes.

In general the Russian intention to modernize its strategic deterrent and in particular ICBMs seem quite prudent and even necessary. There is no question that a nuclear superpower, which holds responsibility for strategic stability in the world by the very existence of its strategic arsenal, has to supply it with the newest ICBMs and substitute with them outdated missiles. Especially in conditions, when during the last 20 years since collapse of the USSR this aspect of the Russian Armed Forces (as everything else) was heavily underinvested, and the majority of

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<sup>21</sup> *Rossiya dostala dva raketnih kozirya v otvet na ugrozu EvroPRO*. RIA Novosti, 16/12/2011. [http://ria.ru/defense\\_safety/20111216/518424606.html](http://ria.ru/defense_safety/20111216/518424606.html)

the current Russian ICBMs are indeed outdated and need to be dismantled and recycled. Indeed, according to the commander of the Russian Strategic Missile Forces, more than 70 % of the missile systems that are currently utilized by Russia are already beyond their guarantee periods (although they still maintain the necessary safety indicators). Thus, within the next 10 years, Karakaev said, the old complexes such as “Stilet” and “Topol” will be gradually removed from the active duty.

However, serious questions arise about the Russian intention to create and produce a new 100-tonn heavy silo-based ICBM.<sup>22</sup> This missile, Karakaev said, is supposed to supplement a famous heavy liquid-fuel ICBM “Satan”, which played a central role in the Soviet deterrence plans in the later stages of the Cold war, was prohibited by START-1, but allowed again by the New START. Thus, Russia did not hesitate to use this opportunity and reproduce these ICBMs again. According to the commander, this heavy missile would specifically be oriented to overcoming of the prospective US missile defense system.

Even from the viewpoint of maintaining of the strategic balance and of a Russian ability to inflict an unacceptable damage to the US in a retaliatory nuclear strike, developing new silo-based heavy weapons does not seem the most effective option. According to the classical strategic deterrence and mutually assured destruction logic one should invest into those missile systems that are the most survivable. Those are mobile missile systems (such as “Topol” and “Yars”), not silo-based ones. The latter are widely recognized to be the easiest target for the first strike.

Another aspect of the Russian armaments plans, declared by Sergei Karakaev, that trigger questions, is development of a Russian strategic non-nuclear deterrence potential (which is ICBMs with non-nuclear warheads) similar to the one that it planned by the US.<sup>23</sup> What is meant is the so-called US Prompt Global Strike program, which is claimed to be one of priority dimensions of the US defense policy and which is supposed to provide the US with an ability to commit high-accurate strikes overseas globally without using nuclear weapons. This policy is severely criticized by Moscow, which sees it as a threat to strategic stability and something that might undermine it and create a temptation in Washington to use force in a wider list of circumstances. Thus, according to the Russian Strategic Missile Forces commander, Russia might create a relevant potential if Washington does not drop its plans and make a certain

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<sup>22</sup> *Rossiia sozdast 100-tonnuju zhidkostnuju MBR dlya preodolenija PRO SSHA*. RIA Novosti, 16/12/2011. [http://ria.ru/defense\\_safety/20111216/518204781.html](http://ria.ru/defense_safety/20111216/518204781.html)

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

progress here. Moreover, Russia, said Karakaev, might use heavy ICBMs to build up such a potential.

However, it is highly doubtful that coping an American behavior in this field would be an optimal policy choice for Moscow. First, there is low probability that the US would really create its Prompt Global Strike potential, especially taking their shrinking defense budget into account. Second, Russian efforts to create such a potential might open a Pandora box, when similar steps would be taken by the third countries, not least China, which will seriously undermine international security and stability. Many countries, not just the US, would be tempted to use force in a wider list of conditions and get the kind of strategic potential, that is usable and operational, unlike nuclear weapons. Third, such Russian efforts would be of explicit anti-American nature, for it will be an obvious response to the US efforts to create the Prompt Global Strike potential (which is, by the way, not inherently anti-Russian, for an option of its use against Russia does not exist due to strategic deterrence existing between the sides), which will add another irritant to the US-Russia relations, undermine trust even more and might become another driver behind a new arms race.

Finally, it is very surprising that the head of the Russian Strategic Missile Forces recognized a possibility to use the possible new heavy liquid-fuel ICBM as the basis for the hypothetical Russian version of the Prompt Global Strike. The problem is that it is just impossible to do so from the current strategic stability perspective: in this case it would be simply impossible to distinguish the launches of the non-nuclear strategic ICBMs from the launches of missiles that carry nuclear warheads. This might result in very dangerous consequences. It is notable in this regard that the US – at least theoretically – talk about developing new types of ICBMs for their hypothetical Prompt Global Strike potential, which would have a different trajectory than the current ICBMs armed with nuclear weapons. The reason is exactly to avoid such a misperception.

All these plans fully coincide with the vision described in the newest Russian Military Doctrine, adopted by President Medvedev in 2010, that is – already one year after the launch of the US-Russian “reset” and in the most dynamic year from the perspective of improving of the US-Russian relations.<sup>24</sup> First, the Russia official threat perception reflected by the document is profoundly anti-Western and anti-US. The first four among the list of threats enlisted in the Doctrine are of the US and NATO origin, the major being US global interventionism, US

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<sup>24</sup> *Text of Newly-Approved Russian Military Doctrine*. February 5, 2010.  
[http://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/2010russia\\_militaryDoctrine.pdf](http://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/2010russia_militaryDoctrine.pdf)

demands for security provision throughout Eurasia and moving of the US military infrastructure close to the Russian borders. Whereas such common challenge as “proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, missiles and missile technologies” occupies just 6<sup>th</sup> position, while international terrorism is on the 10<sup>th</sup>.

Second, the Doctrine officially raises the importance of nuclear weapons in the Russian defense strategy. The logic is that with the Russian conventional forces becoming smaller and with the gap between Russia and the US and NATO in conventional military power widens, Moscow needs to compensate this with the nuclear deterrent. In fact, Russia repeats the logic of NATO in the later stages of the Cold War, when it raised the role of nuclear weapons in its defense strategy as a way to compensate for the Warsaw Pact superiority in conventional arms. Thus, 30-40 years later and more than 20 years since the end of the Cold War Russia still plays according to those rules.

Third, the Doctrine claims that one of the major purposes of the Russian military reform is to preserve a capability to conduct a powerful and destructing nuclear strike on the US and NATO and, at the same time, to protect against their air and space attack. Thus, they are obviously still presented and tackled by the defense strategists and planners as “potential adversaries”.

## **Deterrence and Containment Philosophy**

The reason behind these huge investments into ICBMs, inadequate comprehension of the other side's intentions and traditionalist strategies is domination of deterrence and containment philosophy in the US-Russian relations and particularly in the minds of decision-makers in both countries. (It might be mentioned though that in Russia this domination of deterrence philosophy is much more visible, both in terms of rhetoric and policy). Russian policy is driven not by a necessity to preserve a capability to inflict the US an unacceptable damage in a second, retaliatory strike, but by attempts to preserve an illusion of parity with the US in strategic area, when in reality this parity does not exist. According to a US State Department document published in June 2011, Russia is already by about one third behind the US in the number of strategic deliveries of nuclear weapons: 521 Russian deliveries against 882 US ones.

Already this fact, especially in conditions, when the majority of the Russian strategic deliveries are already beyond the original timeline, makes the Russian defense planners nervous. Whereas development of the US missile defense potential increases this unease many times. Traditionalistic Russian military experts starts to raise doubts about the Russia ability to inflict

the US unacceptable damage in the 2<sup>nd</sup> strike over time if Washington continues with the missile defense, while the Russian ICBM arsenal is not fundamentally modernized and upgraded. Mutually assured destruction, which Russia still officially sees as the foundation of strategic stability, becomes under question. Thus, Moscow finds it necessary to limit the US missile defense activities as much as possible and to increase and modernize its strategic offensive potential in order to preserve a capability to surely destroy the US in the retaliatory strike.

Thus, it is obvious that the paradigm that shaped the mindset of politicians in the two countries during the Cold War persists (more in Russia than in America). Moscow still views the U.S. as a “potential enemy” and seeks to maintain nuclear parity with it by any means. It is also committed to the concept of the mutually assured destruction in its classic Cold War understanding, when each considered necessary not just to inflict unacceptable damage to the opposing side in a second strike, but to physically destroy it.

This dominance of strategic deterrence philosophy constantly undermines trust between Russia and the US and forces each sides to view the other one as potential adversary. This commitment prevents Russia and the US from building sustainable partnership on the basis of common action against common threats and challenges and creates a sort of the vicious circle in the relations, when every new attempt to build positive relations fails in a couple of years. Indeed, it is impossible to build sustainable partnership with your “potential adversary” and if your defense policy is aimed at containing and counterbalancing it in almost every aspects of strategic military field.

As in the early 1980s, Russia’s approach to determining the required quantitative and qualitative characteristics of strategic nuclear forces is determined by the principle of parity with the U.S. nuclear arsenal and the desire to overcome the future U.S. missile defense system. But now there is also a third factor – namely, the need to compensate for Moscow’s lagging behind the U.S. in conventional armaments. It is believed that Russia’s military security and influence in the world can be ensured only by parity and counterweights to every U.S. action in the strategic sphere. As a result, the disagreement between the two countries in the fields of nuclear weapons and missile defense keeps increasing, threatening to foil the “reset.” Even a new round in Russia’s spending on efforts to build up its nuclear arsenal is possible, which would not be justified.

From time to time, one can even hear talk in Russia that it can be threatened not only by American strategic nuclear forces but also by the arsenals of France and the UK (the latter has been included in the U.S. nuclear planning system). This fear makes Moscow seek ways to maintain both its parity with the U.S. in strategic nuclear forces and its quantitative advantage in

tactical nuclear weapons. Russia is discussing the development of new types of nuclear missiles that could “compensate” for the creation by Washington (now within NATO’s framework) of elements of a missile defense system in Bulgaria, Romania, Poland and the Eastern Mediterranean.

For the time being, New START only reproduces the old logic of balances and counterbalances, because there are no discussions in Russia about criteria for determining a sufficient and optimal level of its nuclear arsenal, or about factors that should now determine the country’s nuclear arms policy. Numerous myths and the enormous Cold War inertia suggest an outdated understanding of what quantitative and qualitative levels of strategic nuclear forces meet the task of ensuring national security, foreign-policy prestige and a place in the international system.

### **Towards a New Nuclear and Missile Policy**

A less ideologized look at the nuclear factor in Russian-U.S. relations from positions shows that Russia’s military security can be effectively and reliably ensured by a much smaller arsenal of strategic nuclear forces than it has now, even considering the possible need to overcome the U.S. missile defense system in the future. To this end, Russia does not necessarily need to maintain parity; it would be enough to maintain the capability of causing irreparable damage to the enemy. For example, China now is capable of causing irreparable damage to the United States, although its nuclear arsenal is several times smaller than Russia’s. In other words, China solves the same strategic deterrence task, but with much less spending. Moreover, effective deterrence no longer is equivalent to the complete destruction of a state or tens of millions of people, as it was believed in the Cold War times. In fact, it is enough to deliver one or two nuclear warheads to enemy territory (if it is a developed democracy). This alone will be irreparable damage to it, and no democratic government will take this risk.

Rethinking by Russia of its nuclear policy should not simply imply renouncing the principle of parity. Such a decision, should it be made spontaneously and without due preparations, would seriously damage Russia.

First, Russia would lose its nuclear superpower status, which largely determines its position in the international system. Second, it would be a dangerous signal for other nuclear countries, especially China, which may try to reduce their gap in the field of nuclear weapons and catch up with Russia. This, in turn, would have a very negative impact on their relations with Moscow. Third, it would deal a blow to Russian-U.S. relations, as the United States would approach

Russia from the position of superiority then. Fourth, the renouncement of parity and large-scale reductions in strategic nuclear forces may prompt Washington to redouble its efforts to build the missile defense system and try to achieve the capability of overcoming Russia's reduced strategic offensive arsenal. Fifth, many members of the Russian political elite would take the renouncement of the principle of parity as a betrayal of national interests; in addition, it would seriously undermine the leadership's authority (the experience of Mikhail Gorbachev).

Rethinking the nuclear arms policy implies making it independent – that is, relieving it of the task of maintaining parity with the United States and subordinating it to the interests of the military security and international political influence of Russia.

“Minimal reasonable sufficiency” seems to be a principle that best defines an independent policy. It should be aimed at creating a nuclear arsenal, whose quantitative and qualitative characteristics would be determined by an optimal balance between the capability of causing irreparable damage to a potential enemy, by economic efficiency (least costly) and the preservation by Russia of its international status as a nuclear superpower.

Russia must maintain a minimum amount of strategic nuclear armaments that would:

- enable it to deliver an assured retaliatory strike against enemy territory and cause irreparable damage to the enemy;
- exceed by many times the size of the nuclear arsenals of all the other nuclear countries, except the U.S. The required amount may be less than the number of strategic nuclear armaments that Russia has today.

This principle will allow Russia, first, to save enormous financial and economic resources and, second, reduce its strategic nuclear weapons still further, without detriment to its military security and international status.

It would be expedient if Russia proposed to the United States launching a new round of reductions in strategic nuclear forces soon after New START enters into force, without waiting for the U.S. to resume pressure regarding the next treaty after New START. If Russia forestalls the United States and proposes a new round of cuts in strategic nuclear weapons, it could put it into the center of discussions and thus reduce the possibility of having to enter into disadvantageous negotiations on reductions in tactical nuclear weapons. Russia's approach to further reductions could be made more flexible if strategic and tactical nuclear forces are united into a single nuclear complex. However, this may bring about difficulties with the counting of delivery vehicles, which are the same for tactical nuclear weapons and conventional armaments.

The issue of what amount of Russian strategic and tactical nuclear weapons will meet the criterion of the “minimal reasonable sufficiency” requires a comprehensive analysis and special discussions among military experts and specialists in international affairs. For now, one can say that Russia’s influence in the international arena is largely ensured by its nuclear superpower status. In addition, strategic stability in the world will be maintained for as long as the two nuclear superpowers – Russia and the United States – have essentially larger arsenals of strategic nuclear weapons than all the other countries in the world taken together. If the Russian and U.S. arsenals are reduced to levels comparable to the arsenals of other countries, including China, the global strategic stability will be disrupted, the possibility of a major conflict or even a new world war will significantly increase, and the prestige and military security of Russia and the United States will suffer irreparable damage. For Russia, it is imperative to maintain its nuclear arsenal at a level that would exceed the arsenal of the world’s third largest nuclear power – in this case, China – several times over.

In fact, renouncing the Cold War paradigm, making Russia’s nuclear policy independent and subordinating it to the considerations of economic rationality, military security and foreign-policy influence would bring about a seemingly paradoxical result. This policy must be determined, above all, not by tactical moves of the U.S. or the size of its nuclear arsenal, but by the steps made by China and the size of its nuclear arsenal. Naturally, if there is a real possibility that the U.S. arsenal or missile defense system reach a level that would pose a threat to Russia’s deterrent potential (rather than simply have individual advantages that the Russian strategic complex does not have), then Russia should take countermeasures – again, not those that would be aimed at restoring parity but those that would make it possible to cause unacceptable damage to the United States.

Another thing that needs to be rethought is Moscow’s policy with respect to qualitative characteristics of its strategic nuclear arsenal, which is also marked by the Cold War inertia. As is the case with quantitative characteristics, the main criterion here is again U.S. actions and Moscow’s devotion to the goal of destroying large areas, rather than considerations of Russia’s national security. In particular, Russia persists in maintaining the strategic nuclear forces triad (land-based ICBMs, submarine-launched ICBMs and heavy strategic bombers), thus only duplicating the U.S. policy. (On the other hand, the Obama administration also adheres to a conservative approach as a concession to the Republicans and the military establishment.)

From the standpoint of military security, there is no real need to preserve the classical triad. Over time, the United States itself is likely to renounce the triad in favor of strategic submarines.

Progressive military experts in the U.S. more and more actively advocate this issue, and more and more money is allocated for submarine construction. The Obama administration has already admitted that the preservation of strategic bombers is purely symbolic for the U.S.

The main criterion that must determine Russia's approach to the qualitative characteristics of strategic nuclear forces should be a balance between their survivability (that is, the ability to carry out an assured retaliatory strike after a nuclear attack on Russia) and economic efficiency. The survivability principle goes well with the principle of "minimal reasonable sufficiency" and is, actually, its qualitative expression. The greater the survivability of strategic nuclear forces, the smaller number of them is required to cause assured unacceptable damage to a potential enemy. Considering the geography of Russia, the weapons that best meet this criterion are road-mobile missile systems (Topol-class). Therefore, Russia should focus its main resources on their development and improvement. Perhaps, it should also retain several strategic submarines, whereas strategic aviation is geared to the past and its flights, resumed recently, make the West only smile ironically.

Silo-based ICBMs are the least survivable, so it would be highly unreasonable to preserve them for the foreseeable future and, especially, make them the core of Russia's strategic nuclear arsenal. Such an approach would involve huge – and unfounded – spending and would only weaken Russia's defense capability and its ability to deliver an assured retaliatory nuclear strike. As it already happens, an exacerbation of Russian-U.S. disputes on further reductions of nuclear weapons and, particularly, possible attempts by Russia to overcome the future U.S. missile defense system, which actually will not pose a threat to Russia's strategic deterrence potential, prompts Moscow to make emphasis on silo-based heavy ICBMs – again, being guided by the Cold War inertia and mentality. Such developments must be prevented.

## **Conclusion**

There would be much less disagreement between Russia and the United States on further nuclear arms reductions and missile defense if Moscow rethought its approaches to its nuclear arms policy and its relations with Washington in this field. Russia should be guided by the need to ensure its military security and international political positions, rather than by the logic of parity and a desire to respond to all U.S. actions in the nuclear field, which may not be targeted against Russia at all in the present circumstances (when Russian-U.S. relations are not the core of world politics, nor the top priority for the U.S.).

Rethinking the nuclear arms policy implies making it independent – that is, relieving it of the task of maintaining parity with the United States and subordinating it to the interests of the military security and international political influence of Russia. Russia's military security can be effectively and reliably ensured by a much smaller arsenal of strategic nuclear forces than it has now, even considering the possible need to overcome the U.S. missile defense system in the future.

The United States should also display more flexibility and, first, give up the approach where Russia has only one choice: to accept the invitation to participate in a project approved without it, or to reject it. Second, Russia's perception of the missile defense system, being created by the U.S., would be less negative and opportunities for cooperation would be greater, if Washington made its approach in this sphere and the European-based missile defense system itself more transparent – for example, if the U.S. held preliminary consultations with Russia regarding the system's geography and its quantitative and qualitative characteristics, and if it explained to Moscow why missile defense assets should be deployed in European countries; finally, if the U.S. provided Russian military experts with a possibility to inspect these assets and if Russia was provided with the missile defense system's telemetry data.

The political elites of the two countries have yet to realize that in the world of today and especially tomorrow Russia and the U.S. no longer pose the main threat to each other. This threat stems from tendencies and events, both global and regional, which are external to interaction between the two countries. Moscow and Washington no longer need to build balances and respond (symmetrically or asymmetrically) to every action by the other party.

Today, the capability of Russia or the U.S. to destroy each other makes a stabilizing impact upon their relations and excludes, rather than creates, the possibility of the emergence of a real military threat to Russia from the U.S. or vice versa. Mutually assured destruction (MAD) has been and will be part of the reality of U.S.-Russia relations. But the assumption that MAD constitutes a “material-technical basement” for these relations and inevitably implies that Russia and the U.S. must secretly pursue a hostile policy towards each other is today nothing but a groundless old-style thinking.

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