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Real and Imaginary Threats

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MILITARY POWER IN WORLD POLITICS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

This article is based on a speech given by Alexei Arbatov at the international conference "Russia in the 21st-Century World of Power" held to mark the twentieth anniversary of the Council on Foreign and Defense Policy and the tenth anniversary of Russia in Global Affairs.

The "power of arms," in other words, the role of military force in politics and war is mostly determined by the nature of potential and real arms conflicts; by military-technical progress and available economic resources needed for defense; and by ambitions and phobias of state leaders, military-industrial complexes and their contractors at research centers and in the media.

PREMONITION OF WAR

Contrary to the widespread belief among the Russian military-political elite, all objective parameters indicate that the threat of a major war is now (and in the future) less than ever in modern history. And the reason is not the stockpiles of nuclear weapons possessed by the leading powers: during the Cold War these stockpiles were much larger, but the likelihood of a global armed conflict was immeasurably higher.

Over the last two decades, the number of international conflicts and their devastating scale has not increased but decreased significantly, as compared with any 20-year period during the Cold War (from the late 1940s to the late 1980s).

Suffice it to recall what happened in those years: the Korean War, two wars in Indochina, four wars in the Middle East, the war in Afghanistan, and the Indo-Pakistani and Iran-Iraq wars, not to mention numerous border and civil conflicts in Asia, Africa

and Latin America which often involved outside interference. The number of people killed in Cold War conflicts is estimated at 20 million, in the least. The United States, a country most sensitive about its military casualties, alone lost about 120,000 people in those years, as many as during the First World War of 1914-1918.

Great powers have gone through a series of crises which in the bipolar system of relations could escalate into a global war. Fortunately, the world escaped the disaster. Many regard it as a demonstration of the effectiveness of nuclear deterrence, others (including the author of this article) take the crises as an indicator of inefficiency of nuclear deterrence and believe that the happy outcome of worst-case scenarios, especially during the Cuban missile crisis of 1962, was pure luck.

Of all armed conflicts that have taken place in the world since the early 1990s, only two wars waged by the United States and its allies against Iraq and civil wars with outside interference in Yugoslavia, Tajikistan, Afghanistan and Libya can be compared to Cold War conflicts in terms of casualties and destruction.

In the last two decades, unlike the Cold War years, great powers have never been involved, directly or indirectly, in armed conflicts with each other (as it happened previously in Korea, Indochina and the Middle East). Moreover, they have not provided assistance to states or non-state armed groups, against which other great powers fought.

After 1991, there has been not a single crisis that would place great powers on the brink of an armed conflict. Now, even if countries disagree with each other's actions, no one would think of putting the world on the brink of a global war or threatening to use nuclear weapons because of military actions of the United States in Iraq, of NATO countries in Libya, or Russia in Georgia, and even in case of an Israeli or U.S. strike against Iran.

Great powers and their allies continue modernizing their armed forces and conducting military reforms, but these efforts cannot even compare to the quantitative and qualitative nuclear and conventional arms race during the Cold War.

The now widespread feeling of insecurity is due, above all, to the contrast between the past hopes and the current realities. After the end of the Cold War and the removal of the threat of global nuclear catastrophe, in many countries that had for decades been on the frontline of confrontation there appeared naive expectations of universal harmony. The international community simply forgot how dangerous the world, torn by bloody wars, had been before the Cold War – even if we leave aside the two world wars of the 20th century.

Few people thought about how difficult and dangerous a transition from bipolarity to a polycentric world would be – in the absence of new governance mechanisms; given large stockpiles of nuclear weapons, materials, technologies and knowledge; in the changed financial, economic, social and political conditions; and amidst an information revolution, rapid technological progress, and the development of mass communications.

During the Cold War, the world was under a constant threat of global nuclear catastrophe as a result of an armed East-West clash, which it barely avoided on several occasions, especially in the days of the Cuban missile crisis in October 1962. Against this background, regional and local conflicts were seen as inevitable and peripheral manifestations of the global rivalry between the superpowers. They were viewed as the “lesser evil” as they made it possible to avoid a full-scale armed clash between the Soviet Union and the United States, for which both camps were preparing hard.

After the end of the Cold War, the main overarching threat receded into the background in the global public consciousness, yet universal harmony and peace did not come. Contrary to the euphoria of the late 1980s-early 1990s, new and diverse threats and challenges of the late 20th-early 21st century came to the fore in international security instead of harmony: ethnic and religious conflicts, the spread of weapons of mass destruction and their delivery systems, international terrorism, etc. The ideological confrontation between capitalism and communism, in all their varieties, gave way to nationalist and religious clashes.

The feeling of danger is especially strong in Russia, because the breakup of the Soviet Union and all its consequences coincided with a transition from a bipolar to a polycentric world. In this world, Russia no longer occupies a leading position in most aspects of national power (except for the number of nuclear weapons, area, and natural resources).

THE GLOBAL BALANCE OF POWER

After the two coalitions stopped struggling for world domination, the desire and capabilities of the great powers to allocate large resources for controlling developments at regional level dwindled. In the 1990s-early 2000s, the United States and NATO tried to take over this role, but the campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan cost them too much, compared to the results achieved. The economic crisis of 2008 made them abandon this utopian idea.

The 1990s saw an unprecedented surge in UN peacekeeping activities. During the decade, the UN launched 36 peacekeeping operations (out of 49 carried out by the UN in 1995-2000s.). Now the UN is conducting 17 such operations, which involve more than 100,000 soldiers, police and civilians. These operations have proved to be much more efficient and cheaper than unilateral U.S. and NATO actions, even despite the overwhelming military-technological level of the United States and the Alliance.

This experience could have been used to create a new mechanism for interaction between the great powers and regional countries in preventing and settling conflicts in the post-bipolar era – to replace the world’s division into two spheres of influence during the Cold War. However, such a mechanism has never been built.

The experience in conducting UN-mandated operations in Yugoslavia in 1999 and Libya in 2011 proved disappointing because of the arbitrary use of force by the West. In 2012, the UN Security Council was again divided and paralyzed on Syria and Iran. In the latter case, this happened after several years of cooperation, which resulted in six

unanimous resolutions and sanctions against Iran's nuclear program. The new multilateral system of peacekeeping and preventing nuclear proliferation was frozen because of growing conflicts between the great powers' national priorities.

After the elections of 2011 and 2012 in Russia and the U.S., the great powers have again entered into a period of alienation and growing mutual mistrust, which will adversely affect prospects of their cooperation on a whole range of international security issues. With Barack Obama in power, the U.S. and its allies are no longer willing to take the burden of maintaining international security. Washington is seeking to act via the UN Security Council, but it is not ready to place NATO's peacekeeping forces under the aegis of the UN, its rules and institutions. Russia's military resources are limited and focused on fulfilling other tasks. The development of Russia's domestic political processes has come into conflict with the ideas of cooperation with the West. China has been very restrained in the international arena, pursuing primarily its own pragmatic, above all economic, interests.

Unlike the 19th-century Concert of Nations, the present centers of power are not equidistant and are divided over the division of "spheres of influence." Moreover, the former "spheres of influence" themselves are actively stirring up regional and global politics, with economic and domestic political factors playing a huge role.

The new polycentric world is again showing clear signs of division. One dividing line is between Russia and NATO over the Alliance's enlargement to the East, rivalry for the post-Soviet space, the use of force without UN Security Council sanctions, the European missile defense program, and harsh sanctions against Syria and Iran.

Another line has emerged between China and the U.S. with its Asian allies. This factor causes Russia and China to seek closer mutual ties and stimulates the CSTO/SCO/BRICS to pose as an economic and political counterweight to the West (the U.S./NATO/Israel/Japan).

Theoretically, the rise of Islamic radicalism should have united the West, Russia and China. However, in contrast to the 1990s and the beginning of the new century, marked by the terrorist attacks in the U.S. and Europe and by the coalition's counter-terrorism operation in Afghanistan, the increased antagonism between Sunnis and Shiites in the Muslim world has added tensions to Russia's and China's relations with the West. For political and economic reasons, the former support Shiites, while the West supports Sunnis.

However, these tendencies are unlikely to bring about a new bipolarity. The scale of economic ties of major members of the SCO/BRICS (Russia, China and India) with the West and their dependence on it in receiving investments and the latest Western technologies is much greater than between themselves. Inside the CSTO/SCO/BRICS there are much deeper conflicts than between their members and the West (for example, between India and China, India and Pakistan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan).

RUSSIA: THE RETREAT SYNDROME

Russia occupies a unique position in this system of relations. Unlike the other countries, Russia is still undecided on its foreign-policy priorities. This issue largely hinges on its domestic struggle over political and economic modernization.

The term “retreat” has become universal in today’s Russia in defining the *raison d’être* of its state policy and economy. Recently, the notion has begun to be applied to foreign policy, as well. Russia is now retreating from the idea of its European identity towards “Eurasianism,” with a strong nationalist and authoritarian/Orthodox spirit as an ideological doctrine.

The concept of “Partnership (with the West) for Modernization” has been replaced with a slogan of self-reliance – “re-industrialization” driven by the defense industry, and the use of the Soviet Union’s “positive experience” of the 1930s (it has not been specified, though, what exactly is meant: five-year plans, collectivization, or mass repressions). Russia’s foreign policy and economy have made a U-turn from Europe towards the Asia-Pacific region (Moscow must have forgotten that, China aside, the leading Asia-Pacific countries belong to the same West: the United States, Japan and South Korea).

Most likely, this choice is dictated by internal motives: the interests of the post-Soviet nomenklatura in protecting the established economic and political system against pressures from the emerging civil society oriented to the West’s example and assistance in the context of Russia’s “European choice.” However, the present policy is leading the country towards isolation from the advanced democratic community, towards Russia’s becoming a raw materials appendage to newly industrialized countries (China, India and ASEAN countries), and towards its growing economic, technological, social and political backwardness compared to the fast-developing world.

Nevertheless, the present tendency of Russia’s retreating to its former positions may very soon be reversed under the influence of internal and external factors, because this track is absolutely opposed to the country’s interests and the mainstream of modern civilization. The top Russian leadership is well aware of this imperative. President Vladimir Putin in his 2012 address to the Federal Assembly said: “Democracy is the only political choice for Russia. I would like to stress that we share the universal democratic principles adopted worldwide. [...] Democracy is not only an opportunity to elect power, it’s about being able to monitor it and evaluate the results of its work.” Speaking about economic development, he said: “I am confident that economic freedom, private property, competition and a modern market economy, rather than state capitalism, must be the core of a new growth model.”

It only remains to translate these beautiful, although not new, development concepts into life. This will not be easy, given that Russia is now miles away from the principles it proclaimed. And at the same time, it is clear that the policy of retreating is leading the country further away from the declared ideals. Statements about Russia’s “special national path” to democracy are equally indisputable and trivial, because any other democratic country has come to its present position along its own path, be it Spain, Sweden or Japan.

However, declarations by the president are not a fad but a reflection of the only promising option for the great power's development – which means that sooner rather than later the retreat policy will be revised by the incumbent or future Russian leadership.

MILITARY RIVALRY

The likelihood of armed conflicts and wars between the great powers and their military-political alliances is now as small as never before. The increasing economic, social and information interdependence of the leading actors in world politics in the conditions of globalization will make damage in such a conflict incommensurate with any political or other gains they could hope for in using military force (especially nuclear weapons) against each other.

At the same time, there is an ongoing rivalry between them, involving indirect means and local conflicts, for economic, political and military influence in the post-Soviet space and in some regions (especially rich in raw materials) in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

In addition, they are seeking to gain military and technological advantages over rivals to exert political and psychological pressure on them (missile defense, and high-precision conventional weapons, including suborbital and hypersonic ones).

Military force is used to stake one's claim to control over important geographical areas and lines of communication (the Eastern Mediterranean, the Black Sea, the Hormuz and Taiwan Straits, the Strait of Malacca, the South China Sea, shipping lanes in the Indian Ocean, extensions of the continental shelf and communications in the Arctic, etc.).

Intense rivalry is going on in arms markets (especially in countries of the Middle East, Asia, Latin America, and North Africa). This rivalry involves political leverage and has political consequences.

Of all hypothetical conflicts among the great powers, a conflict between China and the U.S. over Taiwan would be of the greatest danger. There is a possibility of an aggravation of the crisis over South China Sea islands, in which Southeast Asian countries will support the U.S. against China. Generally, U.S.-Chinese rivalry for domination in the Asia-Pacific region is becoming the epicenter of global military-political confrontation and competition.

Failure of cooperation among the great powers and alliances against common security threats (terrorism, the proliferation of WMD and their delivery systems) is quite imaginable, which would bring about inability to counter new challenges and threats and an increasing chaos in the world economy and politics.

More likely are conflicts between major regional powers: India and Pakistan, Israel (together with or without the United States) and Iran, and North and South Korea. The danger of these conflicts is exacerbated by their possible escalation to a nuclear war.

The greatest threat in this regard is posed by military-political confrontation in South Asia.

LOCAL CONFLICTS AND PEACEMAKING

The main threat to international stability will continue to arise from outbreaks of cross-border or mixed violence. I mean internal ethnic, religious or political conflicts in unstable countries, in which other countries and their alliances will interfere. This interference will be aimed at supporting rebels against the central government (like in Libya and Syria) or supporting the central government in suppressing armed opposition (Iraq, Afghanistan and Bahrain). Often there are major powers and corporations behind local conflicting parties, which compete for economic and political influence and earn revenues from supplies of mercenaries, weapons and military equipment.

Over the last decade (2000-2012), only 3 out of 30 major armed conflicts were interstate conflicts (between India and Pakistan, Ethiopia and Eritrea, and the U.S. armed intervention in Iraq in 2003). All the others were mixed, with direct or indirect outside interference.

After the end of the Cold War, throughout the 1990s, Russian troops participated in fifteen UN missions. After 2000, however, Russia's participation in international peacekeeping efforts has dwindled. Today, Russia ranks 48th in the world in terms of personnel involved in international UN peacekeeping operations (in 1990, the Soviet Union ranked 18th; in 1995, Russia ranked 4th, and in 2000, 20th).

To a certain extent, it was a response to manifestations of unconstructive policy by the United States and its allies (military actions against Yugoslavia and Iraq, and support for "velvet" revolutions in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan).

In addition, the reduction of Russia's peacekeeping activity is due to the growing emphasis of its defense policy on confrontation and rivalry with the U.S. and NATO. This factor has not yet caused a massive reaction from them; on the contrary, the West keeps emphasizing that its long-term defense programs (missile defense, and high-precision conventional weapons) are not directed against Russia. However, there are already emerging concepts and technical designs that can be used in confrontation with Moscow.

The mismatch between the status and international role claimed by Russia and the level of its involvement in UN peacekeeping efforts significantly weakens its positions as a world center of power and as an agent of governance of international security processes. The prestige and influence of Russia in the world and in relations with other leading powers and alliances are markedly decreasing, despite the planned build-up of Russia's military might.

MILITARY POWER OF A NEW TYPE

Military force will remain a political tool, but in the conditions of globalization and growing economic, humanitarian and information interdependence of countries its role in the 21st century has relatively decreased, compared with other (“soft”) factors of power and national security. The latter include the financial and economic potential of countries, diversification of foreign-economic ties, the innovation dynamics of industries, progress in information technologies, investment activity abroad, and countries’ weight in international economic, financial and political organizations and institutions.

In recent years, however, “hard” military power has again begun to play a more important role as an instrument of direct or indirect (through political pressure) leverage on other countries. Nevertheless, while remaining a political tool, “hard” military power is unable to make up for the deficiency of soft power as a factor of international prestige and influence. Even nuclear deterrence, which is a guarantee against direct large-scale military aggression, has a decreasing value as an “asset” of prestige, status and ability to influence international security.

In addition, efficient military power is not traditional armies and navies; it is power of a different type, above all, informational/web-centric. It is determined by countries’ financial and economic potential, the innovation dynamics of their industries, progress of information technologies, and the quality of their international alliances and allies.

The role of fast-moving local military operations and surgical conventional strikes at long range (“non-contact warfare”) will continue increasing, as well as the role of actions by mobile special forces. These actions include: political pressure on a country, depriving it of important economic or military assets (including the nuclear industry or nuclear weapons), the application of sanctions, disruption of communications, and blockade.

Operations to coerce conflicting parties to peace and prevent humanitarian disasters will continue. As international terrorism and cross-border crime will predictably grow, special forces to combat them and their operations will grow in number, as well. Another aspect of using force will be efforts to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and deny access to them for terrorists.

REAL THREATS

After more than ten years of peace, which Russia received after the second Chechen War and which was interrupted by the five-day conflict with Georgia in August 2008, Russia’s security may again come under a very real threat.

The withdrawal of UN peacekeeping forces and NATO troops from Afghanistan after 2014 will likely result in the Taliban regaining power and advancing into Central Asia in the north and into Pakistan in the south. The ruling regimes in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and, later, Kazakhstan will come under the pressure of Islamists, and Russia will have to enter into a new protracted struggle against militant Islamic fundamentalism. Such a war, along with destabilization of Pakistan and subsequent involvement of India, will turn the whole of Central and South Asia into a “black hole”

of violence and terrorism. This area will expand still further in case of war in and around Iraq and confrontation between Israel and Iran. There may also emerge a new conflict in the South Caucasus, which may spread to the North Caucasus.

In the short and medium term, destabilization in South and Central Asia, the Middle East and the Caucasus will be the largest real military threat to Russia, as opposed to myths created by political, institutional or corporate interests.

Of course, it would be better if Russia cooperated with the U.S., other NATO countries, India and China in combating this threat. However, this scenario is unlikely, given recent tensions between the great powers. Russia should prepare to rely only on itself; therefore an optimal allocation of resources is becoming a matter of national survival for it.

It seems, however, that Russia is not ready to face this threat militarily or politically, as has often happened in its history before. Instead, it gives priority to preparations for war with the U.S. and NATO on land, at sea, in the air and outer space.

Russia is increasingly lagging behind the U.S., its allies and, in recent years, even China in the development of military power and new types of weapons. There is no guarantee that real, not declarative, results of the military reform of 2008-2012 and the ambitious State Armament Program 2020 will reverse this trend. Even though SAP-2020 provides for the production of 3,000 armored vehicles, 500 combat aircraft, 1,000 helicopters, 100 ships and submarines, 200 missile defense/air defense systems, 10 regiments of offensive tactical missiles, and more than 200 strategic missiles by the year 2020, these plans, even if fulfilled, will not necessarily bring the Russian Armed Forces to a basically new level.

The now prevailing criticism of this reform and proposals to amend it in some cases may only exacerbate problems, undo positive changes brought about by the reform and revive negative elements of the defense policy (extending the length of compulsory military service, abolishing voluntary military service, introducing conscription for women, weakening the role of the joint strategic commands in favor of the commands of the armed forces' branches, restoring a division-based structure of the armed forces, etc.).

Making a growing emphasis on nuclear deterrence in its relations with the U.S. (including by starting the development of a new heavy ICBM), Russia is increasingly lagging behind in developing information management systems vital for future combat operations, coordinating different services and branches of the armed forces, and using high-precision defensive and offensive conventional weapons. By deploying an ineffective system of air/missile defense against NATO, Russia will not acquire reliable protection against missile and air strikes by irresponsible regimes and terrorists from the South.

Building up the nuclear submarine fleet and planning projects to build nuclear aircraft carriers may undermine the Navy's capabilities to combat poaching, piracy and the smuggling of drugs, weapons, and WMD materials, and maintain control over sea lanes and economic zones. The Russian Air Force will be supplied with numerous

types of new combat aircraft for which there are no high-precision standoff weapons. New armored vehicles built for the Army do not have effective mine protection, while missile and artillery systems do not have sufficient range and accuracy of fire.

By maintaining a large (one-million-strong) army with huge stockpiles of weapons, Russia catastrophically loses strategic mobility, which is vital given the size of its own territory and adjacent areas of responsibility in the CIS/CSTO. While preparing for large regional wars in Europe, Russia demonstrates low efficiency in unexpected fast-moving local conflicts (as in August 2005). Plans to keep the number of conscripts, serving 12-month compulsory military service, at more than 30 percent of the armed forces' personnel are at variance with plans to introduce new sophisticated weapons systems and military equipment and methods of conducting intensive operations.

These factors can undermine Russia's ability to effectively use force in potential conflicts in the country's southern and eastern border areas, in peacekeeping missions outside the former Soviet Union, and in efforts to counter threats of a new type. Russia once again risks spending huge resources in preparing for past wars and finding itself unprepared for real armed conflicts of the future.

The reform and modernization of the Army and the Navy are largely dictated by institutional and corporate interests, considerations of prestige or craving for symbols (vulnerable silo-based heavy ICBMs, a new long-range bomber, a 5th generation fighter, aircraft carriers, etc.). Russia declares clearly unrealistic plans for the armed forces' re-equipment, whose failure will once again damage the country's prestige. But there is a danger that, even if implemented, the armed forces' modernization will result in huge costs and the stockpiling of unnecessary weapons and military equipment and will still not guarantee, contrary to Dr Sergei Karaganov's hopes, the ability to "counter security challenges and bolster Russia's international political status," nor will it give it back its "role as a key guarantor of international security and peace."

NUCLEAR WEAPONS

Over the past two decades since the end of the Cold War, stockpiles of nuclear weapons have been reduced by an order of magnitude – both under agreements between Russia and the United States, and through unilateral measures of these countries plus Britain and France. At the same time, the number of countries possessing nuclear weapons has increased from 7 to 9 (the Nuclear Five and Israel have been joined by India, Pakistan and North Korea, while South Africa has given up nuclear weapons.)

Over the forty years of the Cold War, the United States was joined by six more nuclear states (or seven if we count the Indian atomic test in 1974). Over the next 20 years, three more nuclear states have emerged (or two if we exclude India). Nine countries have given up nuclear weapons or nuclear weapon programs voluntarily or by force (Iraq, Libya, Syria, South Africa, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Belarus, Brazil and Argentina). More than 40 countries have joined the Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT), including two

nuclear powers (France and China). In 1995, the NPT was extended indefinitely and became the most universal international document, in addition to the UN Charter – there are only four non-parties to the Treaty in the world.

So, contrary to popular belief, the rate of nuclear proliferation in the world after the end of the Cold War has not increased but decreased. However, it may increase dramatically in the future, if the Iran problem is not solved.

During the Cold War, the main diplomatic way to prevent nuclear catastrophe was nuclear disarmament (the Soviet Union and the U.S.), while non-proliferation played a subordinate role. Now they have switched places – the main emphasis is made on nuclear and missile non-proliferation, while disarmament increasingly plays the role of an auxiliary stimulus for it and a condition for cooperation among the great powers.

Actually all countries recognize that the proliferation of nuclear weapons, critical materials and technologies has become a major new threat to international security in the 21st century. However, countries give different priority to this threat. For example, the U.S. gives it top priority, while Russia gives more priority to dangers of the globalization of operations and the enlargement of NATO's military infrastructure and forces near Russian borders, to the creation of strategic missile defense systems, the militarization of outer space, and the deployment of strategic non-nuclear precision weapon systems. From Moscow's point of view, the spread of nuclear weapons and terrorism rank much lower among military dangers.

This asymmetry in the perception of security largely stems from the historical specificity of the conditions and consequences of the Cold War's end. But it significantly complicates cooperation among the great powers in combating new threats.

In the foreseeable future, a significant growth of nuclear energy, in absolute terms, is expected in the world, which is directly related to the likelihood of nuclear proliferation. According to April 2011 data, 440 nuclear power reactors are in operation in the world, another 61 are under construction, 158 reactors are planned to be built, and 326 reactors have been proposed.

New threats related to nuclear energy include a blurring of distinction between "military" and "peaceful atom," primarily through nuclear fuel cycle technologies. The growth in the number of countries possessing nuclear dual-use technologies and stocks of nuclear materials in the foreseeable future will create a new type of "virtual proliferation" following the Iranian model. Specifically, while formally remaining in the NPT and under IAEA control, countries can reach the nuclear threshold, that is, have both materials and technologies for a fast (within months) transition to the possession of nuclear weapons.

Thus, while nuclear arsenals in the world are reduced, the military and peaceful "nuclear factor" is moving from the central and global level to the regional one – namely, the level of relations among third countries and between them and the great powers.

An even greater threat stems from the acquisition of nuclear materials by terrorist organizations (such as al-Qaeda), which can use them in acts of “catastrophic terrorism.”

The role of nuclear deterrence in the great powers’ efforts to ensure their security will continue to decline, despite Russia’s current attempts to assign a more significant role to it and notwithstanding the present deadlock in nuclear disarmament. First of all, this decline is due to a reduced probability of a large war between the great powers, while the role of nuclear weapons against other threats is highly questionable. Secondly, the effectiveness of deterrence against possible new nuclear states is not obvious because of their political, psychological and military-technical peculiarities. Especially ineffective is nuclear deterrence against nuclear terrorists. Thirdly, nuclear weapons are losing their status value, increasingly becoming a “weapon of the poor” against superior conventional enemy forces.

Of all the major powers, Russia, due to its geopolitical position, new borders and domestic situation, runs the greatest risk of nuclear attack and atomic terrorism in case of nuclear proliferation in Eurasian countries. Therefore, Russia would be expected to lead efforts to tighten the regime of nuclear and missile nonproliferation and give more priority to this issue in its security strategy. In practice, however, this issue is far down the list of its national security priorities.

Contrary to the argument, popular in the last few decades, that nuclear disarmament has no effect on nonproliferation, the experience of the 1990s demonstrated their interrelation better than any theory. The greatest breakthroughs in disarmament and efforts to strengthen nonproliferation took place between 1987-1998. The negative experience of 1998-2008 also confirmed, in its own way, this interrelation. And again, some progress in nonproliferation occurred after Russia and the U.S. signed the New START Treaty in April 2010 in Prague – only to give way to stagnation after the parties found themselves in another deadlock shortly after.

New START crowned a year of arms control negotiations between the two nuclear superpowers, resumed after a decade. The Treaty played a role in the relative success of the 2010 NPT Review Conference.

Objectively, Russia and the United States should both be interested in setting still lower ceilings for their strategic offensive armaments. This is imperative for strengthening the nuclear nonproliferation regime and saving Russian and U.S. money required for renovating their strategic arsenals in 2020-2040. Of all third nuclear powers, only China may be an obstacle to this in view of complete uncertainty about its present and future nuclear forces and its huge economic and technological potential for their fast build-up.

However, these ideas have not yet gained wide support in government agencies and political elites of the two countries. After 2010, the issue of Russian-U.S./NATO cooperation in creating a European missile defense system to defend against missile threats from third countries (above all, Iran) has been the main stumbling block to that.

HIGH-PRECISION WEAPONS

The end of the Cold War, the proliferation of missiles and nuclear weapons in the world, and technological progress caused the U.S. to revise the role of missile defense in the defense policy. The U.S. reoriented its programs to conventional hit-to-kill interception (one of successful projects under the SDI program) to defend against missile attacks from third countries and, possibly by default, against nuclear missile forces of China.

Russia took it as a threat to its deterrent capability in the context of bilateral strategic balance. Several years later, it followed in the U.S. footsteps and adopted an Aerospace Defense (ASD) program, which was publicly declared to be aimed at defending not against third countries but against U.S. aerospace attack weapons.

Now, having failed to agree on a joint missile defense program, the two countries have begun to develop and deploy their own defense systems on their national territories and the territories of their allies. In the foreseeable future (10-15 years), the U.S. program, with its global, European and Pacific segments, will provide a capability to intercept single missiles or small numbers of missiles launched by third countries (and, probably, under a certain scenario by China). But this system will not create any serious problems for the Russian nuclear deterrence potential. Similarly, Russia's ASD program, whose officially reported parameters are better than those of the U.S./NATO program, will not call into question nuclear deterrence on the U.S. part.

This conclusion is valid for both the strategic balance between the powers within the framework of New START, and for a hypothetical possibility of lowering its ceilings to about 1,000 warheads, provided both parties maintain sufficient survivability of their strategic forces.

The paradox of the current situation is that Russia is much more vulnerable to missile threats from third countries than the U.S.; at the same time, it is entirely oriented to bilateral strategic balance and possible dangers of its destabilization and the obtaining by the United States of military-political superiority. In addition, one must admit that the excessive exaggeration of a possible impact of the U.S. missile defense system on Russia's deterrent capability has domestic political reasons.

At the same time, it should be emphasized that in its dialogue with Russia in 2006-2008 and 2010-2011 the U.S. did not show enough flexibility and understanding that unity with Russia on nonproliferation issues is much more important than technical and geographical parameters of a missile defense program.

Despite the failure in establishing cooperation between Russia and NATO on missile defense, the foreseeable future will see growing imperatives and objective possibilities for such interaction: Iran, North Korea, Pakistan and other countries with internal instability and involved in external conflicts continue developing missile technologies, sometimes through joint efforts.

Simultaneously, technologies and missile defense systems that only the Soviet Union/Russia and the United States had until recently are spreading fast in the world. National and international missile defense programs are being developed in NATO, Israel, India, Japan, South Korea and China. This tendency is a major and long-term aspect of global military-technological development.

Another major tendency, also led by the U.S., is the development of long-range and precision-guided conventional missiles, based on cutting-edge control and information systems, including those deployed in space. The foreseeable future may see the development of fractional-orbital and precision-guided glide missiles.

In the short term, nuclear deterrence will likely remain an important element of strategic relations between the great powers and a guarantee of their allies' security. But its relative importance will decrease with the development of conventional high-precision defensive and offensive weapon systems. These systems will play an increasingly important role in the relations of mutual deterrence and strategic stability between the leading powers.

As deterrence presupposes targeting facilities of the other party, conventional systems will be made capable to partially replace nuclear weapons. It is important, however, that this should not create the illusion of a possibility of an "ecologically clean" disarming strike. It is in mutual interests to eliminate such a possibility through air/missile defense and increased survivability of nuclear forces, and by concluding arms limitation agreements (the precedent was set by the New START Treaty whose limits apply to both nuclear missiles and ballistic missiles with conventional warheads).

GENERAL-PURPOSE FORCES

The reduction of nuclear weapons, especially tactical ones, inevitably runs into the problem of the limitation and reduction of conventional armed forces and weapons. Some nuclear and threshold states (Russia, Pakistan, Israel, North Korea and Iran) can view nuclear weapons as a "universal denominator" of their potential enemies' superiority in conventional arms and general-purpose forces.

At present, there are two major treaties regulating general-purpose forces. These are the 1990 Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (plus the Adapted CFE Treaty of 1999) and the 1990 Soviet-Chinese Agreement on Mutual Reduction of Military Forces Along the Sino-Soviet Boundary. (There is also the 1992 Open Skies Treaty, which provides for aerial surveillance flights over the territories of the participating states to promote openness and transparency of military forces and activities, and the Vienna Document 2011 on military information exchanges in the OSCE area.) These agreements embody the idea of strategic stability as applied to general-purpose forces, as they limit the number of offensive heavy weapons and military equipment on a parity basis and reduce their concentration in the zone of contact of allied armed forces. The agreements have made large-scale attacks by the parties on each other impossible, not only politically but also militarily.

Since NATO countries unreasonably delayed the ratification of the Adapted CFE Treaty, Russia in 2007 declared a moratorium on the treaty's implementation. The 2008 conflict in the Caucasus exacerbated the impasse. In 2011, NATO countries formally stopped complying with the treaty. Neither party has gained any political dividends from their decisions, and both have lost. This example (just as the U.S. withdrawal from the ABM Treaty in 2002) should serve as a lesson to those who have an irresponsible attitude to arms control treaties.

There is no sign of a solution to this problem in sight yet that would satisfy all the parties. This is due to political rather than military reasons: the problem of the status of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, whose independence has been recognized only by Russia, Venezuela and Nicaragua. But in the future, a universal ratification of the Adapted CFE Treaty, with some significant amendments, would be a huge breakthrough in strengthening European security.

Recurrent campaigns against "threats" posed by the West or Russia, spurred by large military exercises held by the parties, have shown that large military groups are unable to peacefully coexist if the parties are not allies and if they are not engaged in mutual military cooperation in resolving common tasks. Political processes and events, and military-technological progress often give occasion to heightened tensions.

If Russia is seriously concerned about military implications of NATO's enlargement, the Adapted CFE Treaty can effectively solve this problem, with some amendments. The beginning of a dialogue between the parties on the limitation of non-strategic nuclear weapons, in which NATO countries are interested, on realistic terms that would be acceptable to Russia would be a major additional stimulus for reaching agreement.

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The foregoing analysis suggests a strategy for strengthening Russia's security in the foreseeable future along the following lines:

First, a reasonable and economically feasible military reform and re-equipment of the armed forces to deter and counter real, not imaginary military threats. The reform should not be aimed at "compensating for the relative weakness in other factors of power – economic, technological, ideological and psychological," as Sergei Karaganov said.

For one thing, there will be no such compensation; rather, the aforementioned weakness will be exacerbated. In addition, without building up other factors of power Russia will be unable to create modern and effective defense that would meet military challenges and would thus strengthen the country's prestige and status in the world and its position in efforts to ensure international security and limit and reduce armaments.

Second, cooperation among the great powers and all responsible states in preventing and settling local and regional conflicts, and in combating international terrorism, religious and ethnic extremism, drug trafficking, and other kinds of cross-border

crime. The arbitrary use of force by major powers must be stopped, and legitimate international norms and institutions should be made much more efficient for conducting such operations when they are really needed.

Third, cooperation in stopping the proliferation of nuclear weapons and other types of weapons of mass destruction and their delivery systems, hazardous technologies and materials; the strengthening of NPT norms and institutions and export control regimes, and the toughening of sanctions against rule-breakers.

Fourth, the intensification of negotiations to limit and reduce nuclear weapons and strategic non-nuclear weapons, including fractional-orbital systems; transformation of this process into a multilateral forum; cooperation among the great powers in creating missile defense systems.

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