
Russia's Nuclear Policy in the 21st Century Environment

In collaboration with the Atomic Energy Commission (CEA)

Dmitri Trenin

Autumn 2005



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Proliferation papers

Though it has long been a concern for security experts, proliferation has truly become an important political issue over the last decade, marked simultaneously by the nuclearization of South Asia, the strengthening of international regimes (TNP, CW, MTCR) and the discovery of fraud and trafficking, the number and gravity of which have surprised observers and analysts alike (Iraq in 1991, North Korea, Libyan and Iranian programs or the A. Q. Khan networks today).

To further the debate on complex issues that involve technical, regional, and strategic aspects, Ifri's Security Studies Department organizes each year, in collaboration with the Atomic Energy Commission (Commissariat à l'énergie atomique, CEA), a series of closed seminars dealing with WMD proliferation, disarmament, and non-proliferation. Generally held in English these seminars take the form of a presentation by an international expert. The Proliferation Papers is a collection, in the original version, of selected texts from these presentations.

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Introduction

While little noticed by the public, the nuclear standoff that had long been associated with the Soviet-U.S. confrontation continues to exist even a decade and a half after the official end of the Cold War. Nuclear weapons, developed and perfected in the environment of the U.S.-Soviet politico-military confrontation, which they soon came to epitomize, continue to play a prominent role in Washington's and Moscow's defense and security policies. Nuclear deterrence has not been abolished by official zero targeting of missiles and warheads. Even as arsenals are being reduced, modernization and research go ahead. Moreover, in the 21st century's strategic environment, whose principal features include the spread of weapons of mass destruction and catastrophic terrorism; the rise of China as America's future competitor, and the nuclearization of India; and, finally, a general politico-strategic uncertainty, the usability of nuclear weapons, both political and military, is being subtly reconsidered. In the opinion of some experts¹, a second nuclear age has come.

This paper discusses the official nuclear policy of the Russian Federation and the evolution of Russian thinking on the role of nuclear weapons in the 21st century. It seeks to explain the importance of nuclear weapons for post-Soviet Russia; the post-Cold War deterrence strategy; the development of the nuclear forces structure and their missions; as well as Russia's approaches to nuclear arms control and nuclear proliferation. Finally, the paper examines the place and role of Russia in the multipolar nuclear constellation of this new century.

¹ Including Andrei Kokoshin, a former secretary of the Security Council of the Russian Federation.

The Political and Military Importance of Nuclear Weapons

For the post-Soviet Russian elite, nuclear weapons play a major politico-psychological role as one of only two remaining attributes of their country's great power and global status (the other being a permanent seat on the UN Security Council). Over the past 15 years, Russian leaders have been repeatedly "reminding" others, in particular the United States, that Russia is still a nuclear power on par with the U.S. In reality, by doing so they have been reassuring themselves that *not everything is lost* and that Russia will make a comeback as a major world player. Nuclear weapons are a symbol of Russia's strategic independence from the United States and NATO, and their still-formidable capabilities alone assure for Russia a special relationship with America.

The Russian leadership is firmly wedded to the fact that Russia has to remain a great power. This means that Moscow will seek equitable relationships with the U.S. and the EU, rather than accession to Euro-Atlantic institutions or bandwaggoning on the United States as the world leader. They believe that nuclear weapons considerably strengthen Moscow's otherwise weak hand and provide a guarantee against Western pressure and interference.

In domestic politics, control over nuclear weapons has become the ultimate symbol of presidential authority, an equivalent of the old-time scepter and the orb. As Mikhail Gorbachev was transferring power to Boris Yeltsin, and Yeltsin to Vladimir Putin, it was the transfer of the "black suitcase" that acted as the passing of the baton to the new head of state. Yeltsin famously once ceded temporary control over the country's nuclear forces to Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin, as he himself was preparing to undergo a heart bypass operation, but he claimed his command authority back immediately after. Even more often than Yeltsin, Putin is referred to as the Commander-in-Chief. He also makes more frequent visits to the Strategic Nuclear Forces, which he uses to make political statements that are directed towards both the domestic and international audience.

In military terms, with the serious decline of Russia's conventional forces, capabilities and readiness, nuclear weapons alone provide deterrence. Even in the absence of credible external threats of appropriate caliber, this works to reassure the high command and the political leadership that the country is adequately protected against any hypothetical large-scale attack. In

October of 2003, President Putin called nuclear deterrence forces “the main foundation of Russia’s national security”, both for the present and the future². This form of reassurance, undoubtedly, is a positive contributing factor in the overall Russian decision-making process.

² Of particular importance among them are *The National Security Strategy* (2000; its earlier version was adopted in 1997); *The Military Doctrine* endorsed in April 2000, replacing the earlier document of 1993 (www.mil.ru); the Defense Ministry’s White Paper published in October 2003 (its official name is *The Relevant Tasks of the Development of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation*). Important statements on nuclear policy are contained in public addresses by the President of the Russian Federation as well as the Minister of Defense and the Chief of the General Staff.

Nuclear Deterrence

Russia's declaratory nuclear policy is set out in several published documents³. The documents themselves, due to their public nature, are a rather curious combination of political expediency, foreign policy propaganda and military theory. Largely useless as a guide to action, they are exceedingly interesting as an object of study and are capable of providing insights into the current evolution of the Russian strategic mind.

It follows from these public statements that the likelihood of a large-scale war, usually seen as a nuclear conflict, has receded considerably⁴. The Defense Ministry White Paper claims that Russian armed forces no longer even train for that eventuality⁵. Both Defense minister Ivanov and President Putin are highlighting new security threats, in particular the spread of weapons of mass destruction and the rise of international terrorism⁶.

However, a close reading of the available public statements and an analysis of military exercises and procurement policies leads one to conclude that, in reality, Russian defense policy is a "layered cake". The new threats only represent the icing. The layers beneath the icing address two sets of more traditional threats. One deals with such classic issues as territorial disputes, neighbors entering alliances with other major powers or hosting their troops, raging armed conflicts or growing instability on Russia's borders, etc⁷. The other focuses on the traditional Cold War agenda of managing American power.

Moscow's attitude toward the U.S., which is central to its entire defense policy, remains highly complex, at times inconsistent and often ambiguous. The White Paper demonstrates this best when, at the beginning, it calls its partnership with the U.S. "part of the solution" of the world's security problems. In the same breath, however, it adds that Russian armed forces are a factor preventing a final destruction (presumably, at the hands of the U.S.) of the system of international relations based on international law. *Only* the Russian armed forces, the White Paper then concludes, can ensure global stability⁸. Later, the document's authors revisit this issue once again, adding that

³ *The Military Doctrine*, paragraph 1.2.

⁴ *The Relevant Tasks*, p. 8.

⁵ Sergei Ivanov's remarks at the meeting with President Putin and the military high command, in Moscow, on October 2, 2003. Cf. www.mil.ru.

⁶ *The Military Doctrine*, paragraphs 1.4 and 1.5.

⁷ *The Relevant Tasks*, Introduction, p. 3.

⁸ *The Relevant Tasks*, p. 8.

Russia's military ties to the U.S. and NATO create additional instruments for strengthening global security⁹.

The situation here is more complex than a clash between old and new approaches, neither of which has yet been able to prevail. True, Putin is not looking for a confrontation with the United States, but the partnership which he and George W. Bush proclaimed in the wake of 9/11¹⁰ has not delivered the results the Kremlin had hoped for. Equally true, the military leaders who have identified preparation for defense against an aerospace attack as the main task of the Russian armed forces, an attack which can *only* come from the U.S., are doing so primarily to protect the remnants of the Soviet military establishment, and their own position within it, from what they see as a wrong-headed and destructive reform effort of the last 15 years.

In today's world, America and Russia are no longer adversaries, but they have not become allies, or even full partners. Moreover, asymmetries between them have never been more striking (e.g., Russia's defense budget, in exchange-rate terms, is only 5% of America's). Very tellingly, as Russia continues to retrench and increasingly focuses on itself, the U.S. is in its global expansion phase. The U.S.-Russian security cooperation agenda, as the Russian MOD sees it, includes maintaining strategic stability; dismantling the Cold War legacy; stopping WMD proliferation; and addressing regional instabilities¹¹. Moscow, however, has had to factor in U.S. military interventionism; its unrestrained missile defense program; U.S. troop deployments to former Soviet republics; and above all the reality of overwhelming U.S. military superiority.

Under these circumstances, the central mission of Russian nuclear forces remains essentially unchanged from the days of the Cold War. Deterrence, albeit at a numerically reduced level, is key to this mission. No longer placed in a context of global political and ideological rivalry, deterrence is now officially seen as a factor guaranteeing Russia's national security, the security of its allies and a global stabilizing factor. Yet, despite the previously mentioned assurances that the Russian military is not training for a large-scale war, official documents such as the White Paper admit that such a scenario is possible and expect the Russian armed forces to repel the enemy's airspace attack, carry out strategic mobilization and fight two regional wars simultaneously¹². The nature of the specific tasks to be accomplished in the European and Far Eastern theaters leaves little doubt that the adversaries the Russian planners have in mind are the U.S., its NATO allies and Japan¹³.

The Russian military has also modified the Cold War notion of "unacceptable damage," which was originally based on the high-end assumption of what it would take to annihilate the enemy's military forces, wreck its economy and demoralize its society. Now they refer to it as "required

⁹ In particular, in the joint Russian-American declaration signed in Moscow in May 2002.

¹⁰ *The Relevant Tasks*, p. 16.

¹¹ *The Relevant Tasks*, p. 39.

¹² *The Relevant Tasks*, p. 29.

¹³ *The Relevant Tasks*, p. 29.

damage”, which is defined as what would be subjectively unacceptable to the would-be attacker, so as to outweigh any potential gains from attacking Russia, and thus would be enough to dissuade the enemy from considering an attack¹⁴.

It would be fair to say that *both* Russian and American nuclear arms remain focused on each other. Official de-targeting has enhanced the time needed to launch a nuclear attack by a few dozen seconds¹⁵. Similar agreements have been signed among all major nuclear powers, but there is a difference. From Moscow’s perspective, deterring NATO’s two other nuclear powers, France and Britain, is practically no longer relevant¹⁶. Russia’s relations with the nations of the European Union are de facto demilitarized, and a war between Russia and Germany is as unthinkable as a war between Germany and France¹⁷. Even the occasionally tense relations with Central European and especially Baltic members of the EU (which are also members of NATO) do nothing to change that central fact.

Gorbachev’s 1989 trip to Beijing put an end to a “parallel Cold War” between the USSR and China. Ever since, Sino-Russian relations have been improving. In 1992, Russia started arms and later military technology exports to China. By 1996, the bilateral relationship was officially elevated to a strategic partnership. A new major political treaty was signed in 2001 and, between 1991 and 2004, the border issue was completely resolved. In 2005, the Russian military held the first-ever war-games with the PLA. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization, to which China and Russia belong along with four other Central Asian countries, is credited with creating “a zone of peace and security” not only in Central Asia, but also in the Far East¹⁸.

Prudence dictates, however, that despite its peaceful, friendly and progressively closer relationship with China, Russia should quietly apply the

¹⁴ *The Relevant Tasks*, p. 42

¹⁵ According to Sergei Rogov, director of the Institute for U.S. and Canadian Studies at the Russian Academy of Sciences.

¹⁶ Any public discussion of UK or French nuclear forces, so lively throughout the 1980s, has completely stopped.

¹⁷ Cf. Putin’s statements in connection with the 60th anniversary of victory over Nazism.

¹⁸ *The Relevant Tasks*, p. 16.

Cf. a rare and candid 2004 statement by General Yuri Baluevsky, Chief of the General Staff, at www.mil.ru

policy of nuclear deterrence to the rising power in the east¹⁹. An armed conflict with China would be a true nightmare for the Russian General Staff. Moscow's strategic planners have long concluded that nuclear deterrence is the only hard security guarantee available to them in a situation where the overall power balance has clearly tilted toward their Asian neighbor. Thus, while Russo-Chinese cooperation expands in many areas, the maturing of the new relationship between a strong China and a relatively weaker Russia will contain an element of nuclear deterrence, even if well-camouflaged and discreet. The Chinese do not seem to mind that this gives their Russian partners a bit more self-confidence.

¹⁹ Cf. a rare and candid 2004 statement by General Yuri Baluevsky, Chief of the General Staff, at www.mil.ru.

Nuclear First Use and Limited Nuclear War

In the 1993 version of the military doctrine, Russia declared for the first time its right to use nuclear weapons either in response to a WMD attack against herself and her allies, or while defending against a major conventional attack in a critical situation for Russia and her allies. The document then proceeded to give negative security guarantees to non-nuclear weapons states. At the time that this declaration was made, it was aimed at bolstering deterrence in a period of weakness for Russia's conventional military. The 2003 White Paper goes a step or two further. It calls on the Strategic Deterrence Forces to prevent political pressure against Russia and her allies; to be able to de-escalate aggression; to be in a position to use certain components of the forces incrementally; and to demonstrate resolve by raising alert status, holding exercises and redeployments²⁰. Thus, for the first time ever, the Russian politico-military leadership is officially contemplating a limited nuclear war²¹. This is also borne out by the reluctance of the Russians to reduce tactical nuclear weapons, or even discuss them with outsiders.

In the post-9/11 environment, Russian defense ministry officials and armed forces chiefs have also embraced the American idea of preemptive and preventative strikes against terrorists and those who harbor them. However, they have consistently denied that such a posture carries a nuclear option with it. Moreover, Russian officials see the emergence of mini-nukes as highly destabilizing, virtually on par with WMD proliferation. The lowering of the nuclear threshold would require, it is said, a change in Russia's deterrence policies and a revision of the command and control procedures²².

At the same time, some Russian experts propose to address the factor of "uncertainty" (mainly future U.S. technological advances and breakthroughs in nuclear and non-nuclear fields, offense as well as defense) by going ahead with nuclear weapons miniaturization and their deployment on both strategic

²⁰ The Relevant Tasks, p. 41.

²¹ Alexei Arbatov, Vladimir Dvorkin (Eds). Nuclear Deterrence and Non-Proliferation. Moscow: Carnegie Moscow Center, 2005, p. 26.

²² The Relevant Tassa, p. 23.

and tactical systems. They claim that such development would not only ensure a more stable relationship with the United States, but would buy security for Russia in case of the possible resumption of conflict among the major powers by the middle of the 21st century.

Extended Deterrence: The Question of Allies

The Russian military doctrine refers to deterrence being exercised also on behalf of Russia's allies, to "ensure their security"²³. Yet, throughout the 1990s, it was not clear precisely who Russia's allies were. At present, there is more clarity. Russia's formal allies are members of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (Armenia, Belarus, Kazakstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan). Russia considers it a priority to guarantee their security and the inviolability of their borders²⁴.

However, in the early 21st century environment, the notion of a nuclear umbrella is different from that of the Cold War period. With one exception (Armenia), Russia's allies are not facing a traditional external threat that would require nuclear protection. Most security threats that exist for these countries are of domestic or sub-state origin, and cannot be addressed by counter-threats. So far, the Russian Federation has only once referred to the potential use of nuclear forces to protect an ally – in 1992 when Marshal Shaposhnikov, then commander-in-chief of the CIS joint armed forces, which included nuclear forces, warned Turkey not to become involved in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

²³ The Military Doctrine, para 1.8

²⁴ The Relevant Tasks, p. 14

The Structure of Nuclear Forces and Force Developments

The structure of the Russian Strategic Armed Forces was streamlined in the early 2000s to take into account Russia's reduced scope of deterrence and its limited resources, compared with those of the Soviet Union. This, however, came only as a result of a bitter public dispute over defense priorities between then minister of defense Igor Sergeev, a missileman, and then chief of General Staff, Anatoly Kvashnin, a Chechen war veteran. Marshal Sergeev, who sought to preserve the Strategic Deterrence Forces mainly as a political asset in relations with the U.S., lost. General Kvashnin's arguments in support of conventional forces won Putin's support. Still, a drastic downsizing of the land-based Strategic Rocket Force (SRF)²⁵ was finally avoided, and the plans for shifting emphasis from ICBMs to SLBMs were dropped. By 2007-2008 the SRF will be comprised of ten missile divisions²⁶.

As of January 2004, Russian nuclear forces had, according to a SIPRI count, a total of 4,422 strategic weapons, including 2,478 in the SRF (on 613 ICBMs). The naval arm of the Strategic Deterrence Forces had 1,072 weapons on 232 SLBMs launchers. Finally, the air component had 872 ALCMs and other weapons on 78 heavy bombers (Tu-160 and Tu-95)²⁷.

With the status of both the SRF (since 2001) and the General Staff (since 2004) much reduced, Russia has been steadily modernizing its nuclear forces and is committed to keeping the nuclear triad. The withdrawal of the United States from the ABM treaty and the nearly simultaneous signing in 2002 of a new U.S.-Russian Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty (SORT) to replace the START-2 document, which the Russian military regarded as too stringent and too costly to implement, created a new situation. Russia was no longer constrained with regards to two key aspects of its force development program: heavy missiles and MIRVing. The Russian military attained what they had long desired: to be able to independently determine the structure of their nuclear forces.

²⁵ One proposal set the number of ICBM warheads by 2003 at a puny 150. Cf. "Sudba RVSN", in: *Yadernaya bezopasnost*, 2000, Issue 38-39. Quoted in: Arbatov and Dvorkin. *Op. cit.*, p. 27

²⁶ *The Relevant Tasks*, p. 42

²⁷ SIPRI Yearbook 2004. *Armaments, Disarmament and International Security*. Oxford University Press, 2004, p. 634

With the ban on heavy missiles lifted, Russia was able to extend the lifespan of its missiles beyond 2007, their previously-agreed date of elimination. With MIRVing missiles again permitted, Russia could easily live up to the 2,200 warheads ceiling set by SORT by means of placing several warheads on its Topol-M ICBM, which is currently replacing older types of missiles²⁸. This, of course, depends on whether Russia will keep up the pace of missile replacement, which has slowed in comparison to the period of Sergeyev's stewardship at the MOD.

Taking account of the U.S. withdrawal from the ABM Treaty, Russia has concentrated on making sure that any ballistic missile system that the U.S. would be able to build would not reduce Russian deterrence capability. It has continued to modernize an existing SLBM ("Sineva") and built a new-generation system ("Bulava-30") for a new Borey-Class submarine. These projects, however, have been plagued by a series of failures. Russia has assembled on its territory, through purchases from Ukraine, the bulk of the Soviet-built fleet of Tu-160 heavy bombers, which Russia has been modernizing. Still, the aging of the weapons systems and their slow replacement continue to be a problem.

The structure of the Russian nuclear forces and, in particular, concerns about their survivability suggest that Russia will probably continue to rely on the concept of launch on warning rather than embrace the concept of a second strike.

28 Arbatov and Dvorkin. *Op. cit.*, p. 27

Nuclear Arms Control

Since the ill-fated START-II treaty that was signed in 1993, but never got implemented, Russia has been using arms control to keep parity with the United States as both countries' strategic arsenals were going down and Moscow was no longer able to compete with Washington. In 2000-2001, part of the military establishment was considering dropping the parity requirement in favor of drastic cuts in the Russian nuclear arsenal so as to release funds for the conventional armed forces. The 2002 Strategic Offensive Reductions treaty (SORT), which replaced START-II, allowed Russia to keep its heavy missiles as well as some freedom to mix its forces within the overall limit of 2,200 weapons, thus using scarce resources more efficiently. Unlike START-II, SORT has greatly assuaged the Russian military's concerns. They also value the opportunity to keep a close watch on U.S. nuclear forces, provided by the 1991 START-I treaty inspection mechanism, which was adopted for SORT. In reality, SORT, with the minimum restrictions and maximum margin of manoeuvre it provides, has become an epitaph to the classical nuclear arms control.

For years, in order to be able to fulfill its treaty obligations, Russia has been accepting U.S. assistance, first under the Nuclear Threat Reduction (Nunn-Lugar) program, and later under the Global Partnership initiative, formalized at the 2002 G-8 summit at Kananaskis²⁹. However, the Russian military categorically rejects the notion that Russian nuclear weapons present a special security risk, that the system "leaks" and thus should be placed under more stringent international safeguards. They resist some of the more intrusive inspections proposals ostensibly aimed at enhancing the safety and security of weapons and facilities. This usually quiet resistance was revealed in the wake of the U.S.-Russian agreement on the matter at the February 2005 U.S.-Russian summit in Bratislava.

Another area where the Russian government and the military refuse to negotiate is in the field of tactical nuclear weapons. Moscow would not go beyond the 1991 Gorbachev-George Bush Senior unilateral statements and even disclose the number of its tactical nuclear arsenal, not to speak of placing it under agreed limitations. According to SIPRI, in January 2004 the Russian non-strategic nuclear arsenal counted a total of 3,380 weapons, including

²⁹ For an excellent update on the state of the Global partnership program, see Michele Flournoy. The G-8 Global Partnership: Successes and Shortcomings. Testimony before the Subcommittee on International terrorism and Nonproliferation, U.S. House of representatives. June 30, 2005

1,540 ALCMs on 385 land-based aircraft (Tu-22, Su-24); 190 weapons on 95 naval aviation platforms; 240 SLCMs, and 210 ASW weapons³⁰.

At present, Russia does not feel threatened by U.S. tactical nuclear weapons (TNW), even those deployed in Europe, and has no stimulus to seek their reductions or redeployments. On the other hand, the Russian military feels the need to keep tactical nuclear weapons as a credible deterrent for conventional attacks against Russia outside of Europe. Also, tactical nuclear weapons are no longer tied primarily to the strategic relationship with the West. Some experts talk about a tri-polar (NATO-Russia-China) nuclear relationship having succeeded the former bipolar one³¹.

Although Russia has ratified the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) and has been observing the moratorium on nuclear testing, it keeps the option of resuming tests if and when the situation demands it. Moreover, Moscow has been watching the evolution of Washington's stance toward testing. Should the U.S. proceed with tests, Russia would be likely to follow.

The Russian defense minister Sergei Ivanov was reported as suggesting, in a 2004 meeting with his U.S. counterpart Donald Rumsfeld, the termination of the 1987 INF treaty which banned intermediate-range (500-5,500 km in range) nuclear forces. The Russian interest in reviving the Iskander missile with an approximate range (depending on its payload) of 500 km, and which is currently banned, is obvious in view of the new threats to the south of the Russian border. Yet, as it has been pointed out, this calls for amending, rather than discarding a treaty which is regarded by Russia's neighbors in the west (the Europeans) and in the east (the Chinese and Japanese) as very important to their own security³².

At the expert level there has been a recent debate (2004-2005) on the radical reform of the U.S.-Russian mutual deterrence posture. Sergei Rogov and his colleagues, retired generals Viktor Yesin and Pavel Zolotaryov, put forward an idea of reducing the number of deployed nuclear weapons to no more than 500 each, with the rest (1,500 or so) not to be deployable for a considerable period of time. Thus, the authors argue, the stability based on capabilities for massive immediate strikes would be replaced by a stability rooted in the structural inability for pre-emption accompanied by a guaranteed second-strike capability³³. Although this proposal has received some support in the professional community, critics argue that strategic arms balance alone is no longer enough and that, due to the overwhelming U.S. superiority in

³⁰ SIPRI Yearbook 2004, p. 634

³¹ General Varfolomey Korobushkin. *Metamorfozy strategicheskogo sderzhivaniya. Nezavisimoe Voennoe Obozrenie (NVO)*, April 15, 2005

³² Vladimir Dvorkin. *Budushee yadernykh sil v tiskakh topornoy diplomatii. NVO*, April 8, 2005

³³ The text of the proposal was published in *NVO*, Issue 6, 2005

precision-guided munitions, adopting the proposed posture would not be in Russia's best interest³⁴.

³⁴ Cf., e.g., Sergei Topalov. Shatkaya kontsepsiya echelonirovaniya strategicheskikh sil. NVO, April 22, 2005

Attitudes Toward Nuclear Proliferation

Russia is no longer alongside the United States as a guardian of the world's strategic order. Instead, it is guided by the national interest, and is primarily focused on its immediate neighborhood, the Commonwealth of Independent States. Its principal military security concerns are also located on the country's own periphery. While nuclear proliferation is not the most immediate concern, the fact is that most of the new and aspiring members of the nuclear club are Russia's neighbors. This fact is being taken increasingly seriously. All recent documents and statements on national security, from President Putin on down³⁵, mention WMD proliferation and international terrorism at the top of the list of Russia's security concerns.

However, Moscow's attitude toward nuclear proliferation remains complex. There is no doubt that the Russian government sees the spread of nuclear weapons as a serious threat to Russia itself, as well as to the world's strategic stability and to international security. It fully supports the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and cooperates with the U.S., the European Union and the IAEA in joint and parallel efforts to curb and reverse the dangerous trends. All said, Russia's specific attitudes towards concrete cases of proliferation, only partially coincide with those of its Western partners. They reflect a plethora of strategic, political and economic considerations.

When India and Pakistan conducted their series of nuclear tests, Russia reacted calmly. It made no accusations and threatened no sanctions. Yet, from Russia's perspective, India and Pakistan represent two very different cases. India, Asia's rising great power, is considered a trusted friend, a non-problematic strategic partner and a valued client in the arms trade. Its "going nuclear" was considered "natural" and was not expected to upset the Asian and world balance, but rather to strengthen it, providing, e.g., a useful counterweight to China. Some even hoped that a nuclear standoff in South Asia would prevent new wars on the Subcontinent.

Pakistan, on the contrary, with its long history of tense relations with Moscow during the Cold War, and especially during the war in Afghanistan, when it served as a rear base for the mujahedeen, was given very different treatment. Russia's recent concerns included Pakistan's links to the Taliban; the country's political instability and the strength and influence of the radical Islamists; and the potential for further downstream proliferation from Pakistan. When General Musharraf came to power, his government was

³⁵ Cf., e.g., Putin's address to the UN General assembly in September 2003

unceremoniously branded in Moscow as “a military junta with nukes”. Since the fall of the Taliban, the relationship has improved, but Russia remains wary of Pakistan’s nuclear activities. It only saw the A.Q.Khan affair as corroborating its suspicions.

Iran and North Korea, the remaining members of George W. Bush’s 2003 “Axis of Evil”, are also considered separate cases. The only thing uniting them, in Russia’s view, is the desire of both regimes, who are in open opposition to the U.S., to protect themselves from a U.S. military action, which is thoroughly conceivable in the light of the Kosovo crisis (1999) and the invasion of Iraq (2003). Beyond that, Russia essentially sees Iran as a major regional player and a trading partner whose policies continue to evolve away from the revolutionary pattern of the late 1970s and early 1980s. Russia’s experience with Iran, whether in Tajikistan (where the two countries cooperated to end a brutal civil war) and elsewhere in the former Soviet space (where Iran abstained from fomenting Islamist revolutions), or with respect to Chechen separatism (which Iran has de facto condemned), has been largely positive. It needs to be added that Iran follows China and India as a major importer of Russian arms.

Russia, of course, does not wish to see a nuclear- and missile-armed Iran, but it believes that a step-by-step approach would ultimately allow Tehran to “come clean” on its nuclear program, which would subsequently be recognized as non-military³⁶. Russia, which has worked to complete the Bushehr light-water nuclear reactor and views Iran as a lucrative market for its civilian nuclear industry, has a vested interest in Iranian cooperation with the international community. In February 2005, Moscow managed to finally conclude an agreement with Tehran under which spent nuclear fuel would be shipped to Russia. Finally, Russia feels exonerated by the evidence of the Pakistani connection (through A.Q.Khan) in the Iranian nuclear program.

North Korea, on the other hand, is perceived as an isolated and historically doomed regime which will give way, in due course, to Korea’s reunification. Russia takes part in the six-party talks and has been trying to persuade Pyongyang to give up its nuclear weapons ambitions and return to the NPT treaty. At the same time, alongside with China and South Korea, Russia has been calling on the U.S. to be more flexible and less threatening in its dealings with North Korea. Russia’s attitude to the North Korean nuclear problem is also influenced by the experience it had in 1994 when the U.S. cut it out of a civilian nuclear energy project with Pyongyang, although the original North Korean nuclear reactors had been built with Soviet assistance. The Russian government broadly shares its national atomic energy agency’s view that the U.S. aims to take Russia out of nuclear energy cooperation with North Korea and Iran, so as to undercut Russia’s position on the world civilian nuclear technology market.

³⁶ Amb. Sergei Kislyak, deputy foreign minister of Russia, in an interview with “Voprosy besopasnosti”, Issue 1 (157), March 2005

While Moscow opposes both Iran and North Korea "going nuclear" for clear strategic reasons, it does not see either one as hostile to itself. Moscow recognizes, in fact, that it is Washington's position which is truly decisive. Actually, Russia mainly fears two things – Iranian and North Korean nuclear weaponization (and the domino effect which they might engender in their regions); and U.S. attempts to disarm Tehran and Pyongyang by force (and their unforeseen consequences). Moscow draws solace from the plausible assumption that in the post-Iraq situation direct U.S. military actions against Iran and North Korea are less likely. As a matter of practical policy, Russia supports international efforts of conflict resolution (the EU trio activity; the six-party talks, the IAEA procedures).

In contrast to the Soviet Union, the Russian Federation is not particularly worried about Israel's nuclear capability, as it is considered a means of last resort and a stabilizing factor in the region. It is concerned, however, that other nations in the Greater Middle East (Saudi Arabia, Egypt) may follow Israel's lead and build their own weapons or acquire components on the black market. Similarly, it is worried about long-term stability in East Asia, should the North Korean example be followed by others (Japan, South Korea, Taiwan).

Russia is a member of the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR), Cooperative Threat Reduction (CTR) and Global Partnership programs, and of the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI). The primary focus of Russian participation in all these programs is Russia itself. Russian national export control agencies, which watch over domestic producers' activities, have been strengthened under President Putin³⁷.

³⁷ Arbatov, Dvorkin. Op. cit., p. 28, 29

Conclusion and Outlook

In the 21st century, Russia will remain a major independent nuclear power. Its scientific, technological and now also financial resources will sustain the country's core nuclear complex for decades to come. At least in the medium term (to 2015), Russia will stay in the exclusive category of the world's premier nuclear powers alongside the United States. Whether, or rather when, China joins is still a moot question.

Nuclear deterrence, the core of Moscow's nuclear policy, will be an important background factor in the U.S.-Russian relationship, giving the Russian leadership an additional measure of self-confidence. It will also be an unstated, underlying element of Sino-Russian relations. By contrast, the progressive demilitarization of EU-Russian relations also leads to their denuclearization. Similar processes can be observed in the Russia-Japan context.

In the future, as the Cold War recedes further into the past, U.S.-Russian relations will become more solidly friendly, and one might expect the Russo-American nuclear relationship to evolve into something much more relaxed. However, even in the very distant future, it is unlikely that this relationship will resemble the one currently existing between the U.S. and France. Even a Russia that is wholly non-adversarial toward the U.S. is likely to keep the *capability* to deter the world's leader virtually indefinitely. Not least, this is due to the asymmetry in the bilateral strategic relationship: the widening technological gap in advanced non-nuclear systems leaves Russia no other option than to cling to the nuclear "equalizer" indefinitely.

Still, the 21st century focus of Russia's nuclear policy is likely to gradually shift away from the United States. The advent of a "second nuclear age" means that other factors, nations and sub-state actors are becoming important considerations shaping Russia's strategic thinking and, ultimately, strategic posture and force structure. China has been mentioned; but it is the prospect of unstable regimes in nuclear weapons states or radical organizations with access to nuclear weapons or, more likely, nuclear materials that will be weighing in on what the Russians think and what they will do. As experience suggests, Moscow can also be expected to follow an American-led nuclear policy. One particular area to watch is nuclear weapons miniaturization and their actual employment under battlefield conditions.

On the whole, the priority of the nuclear proliferation threat to Russia is lower than it is for the United States. The only recent period in which this threat was regarded as acute came at the time of the break-up of the USSR, when

Moscow actively joined forces with Washington (or vice versa) to achieve full de-nuclearization of the three post-Soviet states which had nuclear forces deployed on their territory (Ukraine, Kazakstan and Belarus). Once this was achieved by 1994, the sense of urgency largely dissipated.

Russia will remain firmly committed to nuclear non-proliferation, above all through improvement of its own safety and security procedures and export controls. At the same time Russia will resist what it regards as disingenuous U.S. attempts to make it withdraw from nuclear energy cooperation with countries like Iran. As in the case of North Korea, Russia will support the use of diplomatic means and legal instruments for resolving Iran's nuclear problem. However, Moscow roundly rejects the idea of military intervention and the use of force against the problem states. This position is unlikely to change in the foreseeable future.