

Arms Control & Security in the Middle East & the CIS Republics

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RUSSIA'S NUCLEAR CONCEPT

I. New domestic challenges and Russia's nuclear doctrine

The Russian Federation as an independent state-successor of the U.S.S.R. has a history of less than three years. During that period, the Russian political leadership could not create a detailed and well-planned strategy, or concept, in the nuclear field. Almost all the actions on military nuclear policy, as it is well-seen now, came as a political impromptu.

The decision making process has become highly dependent upon the role and the influence of different lobbyist groups in the Kremlin. It has become the object of content between old and new elites, old and new nomenklatura, including military nomenklatura, and, much less the struggle between different concepts of strategy of a nuclear-weapon state. Finally, there was neither scientific openness nor media glasnost during the discussion of such issues.

By now, the only official and not classified document on Russian nuclear weapons concept is "Guidelines of Russian Military Doctrine", adopted by the National Security Council and signed by the President in November 1993.

The Guidelines of Russian Military Doctrine include the definition of the Russian concept of nuclear deterrence, that

copies (word by word) the American concept but is far from the previous Russian position of first non-use of nuclear weapons. The new text says: "The Russian Federation will not use nuclear weapons against any non-nuclear weapon state party to NPT except in the case of an attack on it, its territory or armed forces, or its allies, by such a state allied to a nuclear weapon state by an alliance agreement or acting jointly with a nuclear weapon state in carrying out or sustaining the attack".

This paragraph follows almost literally the US formula of 1978, with one exception: security assurances are offered only to the NPT parties while the US has been willing to give assurances also to NNWS party to "any comparable internationally binding commitment not to acquire nuclear explosive devices".

The reason for this omission is obvious: Russia wanted Ukrainian accession to NPT, as quickly as possible.

Russia doesn't insist any longer on its previous requirement that the states that want assurances should not have nuclear weapons possessed by other states on their territory. The previous formula was provoked by U.S. missiles in Germany—a question that was solved in the 80's.

U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher said that the nuclear policy outlined in the new Russian doctrine differed little from that of the U.S. government. He added that the U.S. government thinks the Russian doctrine does not undermine the crucial principle of respect for the sovereignty and the territorial integrity of other former Soviet republics.

There was a vote in the National Security Council, when every permanent member reflected its own position on this point. There followed the longest discussion about the "nuclear" paragraph in all the history of the National Security

Council. Finally, it was adopted by consensus and signed by President Yeltsin: both the Guidelines that were published later, plus two pages which are classified and will be published within a two years term.

Mr. Valery Manilov, Deputy Secretary of the Security Council, explained that the purpose of such a formula is "hundred per cent political and psychological, not military". Russia wants to show all the world that not conventional deterrence but nuclear deterrence is the Russian official concept now, he said, and that Russia is worried about non-NPT states near the Russian borders, unstable regimes, and the creation of alliances that would not include Russia and can be anti-Russian.

"New nuclear policy in fact is aimed at hastening the accession to the NPT by CIS states and keeping them out of the orbit of NATO and the Western European Union", Mr. Manilov stressed.

There was a long internal discussion before adopting the doctrine. The terms of this debate over such a highly formalized document might seem strange in the West where specific security policies often emerge from a mix of competing ideas and strategies. In Russia, however, the discussion in fact reflected the far broader battle that was taking place not only over specific security policies but also over the definition of Russian national interests as a whole and, of equal importance, over the manner in which institutions, interest groups, and individuals would be allocated influence in the security policy-making process.

There are several controversies in the text of the doctrine.

First, there is a thesis in the doctrine about the "deterrence" from aggression against the Russian federation and its allies. But there is no definition of "aggression". What

aggression: with conventional arms, or with arms of mass destruction?

Secondly, according to the doctrine it is still unclear whether Russia will use its nuclear weapons against other NPT parties. According to Dr.Sergei Rogov, "the formula of the new Russian doctrine permits using its nuclear weapons first against other declared nuclear weapon states as well as against such rogue countries as Israel, India, Pakistan, North Korea, and some others".

Moreover, according to the new nuclear concept, Russia can use the nuclear weapons against all the NATO members (including Iceland), ANZUS bloc, and other blocs and states which have treaties of mutual security cooperation with the US, for instance, Japan, South Korea, and others. The number of such countries is about sixty.

Russia can now use nuclear weapons also against such states as Saudi Arabia, Morocco Kuwait, and a few of the former Soviet republics.

In this context, it can be said that Russia officially has recognized its right of first use of nuclear weapons against the vast majority of countries of the world. It is still unclear, however, what would be Russia's nuclear behavior in the conflicts of low intensity, or in local wars near Russian borders. According to the text of the doctrine, Russia can use its nuclear weapons even against, say, Latvia or Azerbaijan if the radar military stations based on their territories and owned (or rented) by Russia are in danger.

The text of the doctrine, as well as some other written and unwritten comments, made later by the National Security Council, give permission to Russian diplomats and the military not to sign the CTBT and even to break the moratorium on nuclear tests.

It should be mentioned here, in brief, the obvious fear of Russian military strategists-makers of a fast chemical weapons' proliferation. The information is based mostly on the intelligence service's reports.

"We are very vulnerable in this context", Gennadi Evstafiev, a high-ranking officer from SVR said in his interview to *Moskovskiye Novosti*. He explained that, although the majority of states have signed the CWC, the ratification process goes very slowly. The reaction of the Arab countries is still negative because of Israel not joining the NPT. The research and preparations in a number of developing countries geographically close to Russia are very intensive, he insisted.

At the same time, there is some information about Russia's continuing activities in this field, as for instance in the *New York Times* (April 8, 1994, page A28) which describes recent U.S. and British inspections of major biological research centers in Russia. "The inspections, one official said, demonstrated that a substantial biological infrastructure with no commercial purpose and with links to the Russian military remains largely intact". This information, in general, was confirmed by *Moscow News* confidential sources, although no particular program was named.

Other documents on Russia's nuclear weapons policy are international agreements and other international obligations of Russia or the U.S.S.R. Among them, are START I & II Treaties with the United States (START II Treaty has not been ratified yet by the State Duma, and current calculations show that it will not gain sufficient support in the parliament), NPT, Lisbon Protocol, Trilateral Statement, and some others.

While now trying to make some changes to the policy of nuclear weapons' reduction, Russia faces controversial tendencies.

From one side, the economic crisis and a deep crisis of all state industry shows the economic incapacity of Russia to re-establish military nuclear programs. The attempts to re-start the nuclear tests in Novaya Zemlya, strongly advocated by a number of hawks in the Russian MoD, will be unsuccessful simply because of lack of resources.

On the other hand, the new Russian nationalism demands to protect Russian traditional nuclear-weapon power. 1994 was the year when the "honeymoon" of Russia and the United States was over. Russia has started thinking about its national interests which often do not coincide with U.S. ones.

The results of the parliamentary elections in Russia, in December 1993, have shown a new tendency in society and in public opinion. The idea of re-establishing the Empire (with Russia as center, or metropolis) has become remarkably popular.

It does not mean, however, that Vladimir Zhirinovski, with his 'pocket' LDPR, is a real and considerable threat. The scenario of Zhirinovski coming to power is interesting more as a theory than as a practical analysis. The emotional support of marginals is not enough, of course, to take power. Speculations on "phenomenon Z" and his threat are used and abused both by international media which are looking for sensations and front-page stories, and by politicians in some neighboring countries, who used "phenomenon Z" to strengthen their own nationalism and anti-Russian campaign. Zhirinovski's party is number three, not number one, in parliament, and it is unable to control the decision-making process in the legislature, without saying a word about other structures.

At the same time, it is true that right-wing forces in Russia also use Zhirinovski's ultra-radicalism to initiate a proc-

ess of so called "soft" nationalism, with protectionist barriers in the economy, more financial support and respect for the Armed Forces ("The times of criticism of the Russian military are over now", Yeltsin's spokesman said in December 1993), more distance from U.S. initiatives in foreign policy.

Today we can already see the first signs of this "soft", not very aggressive yet, and potentially very strong, nationalist movement, supported by the Prime Minister, the National Security Council, the minister of defence, and half the heads of parliamentary committees.

This factor is of great importance for better understanding the development of events in Russian military nuclear thinking. It seems that the strengthening of the Russian nuclear weapon program, as well as some other similar programs, would be soon one of the key points of the "party" of "soft nationalists", or, better say, of the New Right.

If it is so, it would be supported by the vast majority of the local leaders. The stereotype of the dissolving Russian federative state which can repeat the fate of the U.S.S.R., or, even worse, of Yugoslavia, is completely wrong. No strong and dangerous separatist movements are seen in the domestic political arena. Vice versa, the local leaders express, more and more actively, their interest in a "strong and united" Russian state.

The role of the military-industrial complex is increasing once again, after the collapse of the early 90's, though the confusion within MIC still exists. At the center of the confusion lies the debate over which direction weapons acquisitions should take. In the absence of a clear delineation of administrative authority, the consistent elements of the MIC are turning for signals for the emerging armaments program.

The approval of the Russian military doctrine Guidelines, coming on the heels of a political victory secured by President Yeltsin in October 1993 with the help of the armed forces, is one more sign that the military leadership has begun to collect rewards for the support that it gave to Yeltsin in disbanding the Russian parliament. The political role of the Defence Ministry seems to have been especially enhanced.

II. Russia and NIS

One of the top priorities of Russian foreign policy is the full withdrawal of nuclear weapons from Ukraine, in the shortest possible time. That is why the Russian president signed such a conciliatory document as the Trilateral Statement of January 1994.

A few paragraphs and special phrases were added at the last moment to the Guidelines of the military doctrine with only one purpose: to show Russia's great concern over weapons on Ukrainian soil, for three main reasons:

- first, safety;
- second, unpredictable development of political situation in Ukraine after presidential elections;
- third, strategic and military balance in Europe, in case Ukraine can control the nuclear missiles on its soil, now de facto controlled by Russia.

There are a lot of speculations about a possible military conflict between the two countries. The Crimean crisis provokes more speculations in this field, of course.

However, there is a clear understanding, at least in Russian diplomatic circles, that any kind of Russian-Ukrainian conflict will lead to the breakup of Ukraine, and the appearance of no less than three or four quasi-states. Even

in conditions when the "soft" nationalism in Russia grows, very few attempts are expected for the annexation, in the future, of some part of Ukraine's Russian-populated lands. The instability in neighboring Ukraine and the separatist process are against Russian strategic interest which is: a unified Ukrainian state, with close economic ties (and dependence) with Moscow, a healthy economy, without nuclear weapons, anyway, not a part of the so called "Baltic Sea - Black Sea Alliance", with the Crimean peninsula having much cultural and economic autonomy, but hardly much more than that.

At the same time Russian politicians are concerned about the possible turmoil in Ukraine, and several scenarios are prepared in that case. There is still significant concern about the nuclear attitude of Ukraine. It is more clear now that the Ukrainian parliament is not strongly against the NPT. However, the process of withdrawal of nuclear warheads seven years — is too long to be sure that the result would be a nuclear-free Ukraine.

Russian diplomats, responsible for the dialogue with Kiev, have doubts whether the new Ukrainian president Leonid Kuchma follows the unwritten promises given by Leonid Kravchuk to his Russian and American colleagues during the Moscow summit in January, 1994.

III. External challenges as a source of Russia's nuclear concept

New challenges come to Russia not only from "near abroad". As one of the experts has put it, "the new Russian geopolitical situation provokes both Russian military and diplomats to think of a more efficient defence program. In the South, Russia is surrounded by unstable regimes, with long-lasting, potentially dangerous low intensity conflicts,

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both in Transcaucasus and Central Asia. There are new challenges from the Tajik-Afghan line. The instability in Uzbekistan is expected to increase as well".

Russia's new strategy-makers have to recognize that Russia is surrounded by a group of both declared, non-declared nuclear weapon states, and rogue states.

Russia examines carefully the Japanese intentions and plans in the nuclear field.

The key problem consists of the fact that, by now, Russia has NO military-strategic allies in the world, except six states-parties to the Treaty on Collective Assistance (Tashkent Treaty). It is clear, however, that all these countries can not be of assistance to Russia in carrying out military tasks.

The Russian political and military leadership has not found an adequate answer for these new geopolitical and military challenges yet. This is, probably, the question of the following months.

At the same time, Russia's establishment, new and old elites, seem on the way to reach soon (not now) an informal consensus on the point of nuclear disarmament and nuclear program. Three factors were taken into account:

- first, the national economy in crisis and MIC's demands;
- second, the new geopolitical situation and
- third, nationalist ideology.

Speaking on the Russian position, I should stress two problems. One of them is the disappearances of the decision-making apparatus. The other one is the execution of the decisions taken, as well as a lack of laws and law traditions.

Even if a decision is taken and signed it would hardly be carried out. The bureaucratic machine together with the contradictions in the national law make practically impossible carrying out the majority of political, strategic and military decisions.

Let's remember, for instance, the situation when Russia decided to sell four cryogenic rocket engines to India. First, it was forbidden by the Foreign Ministry, then approved by the Government, then forbidden by the Ministry of External Economic Relations, then approved by close Yeltsin aides, then forbidden by Yeltsin, then approved by Chernomyrdin. A lot of lobbyist groups played a game, and what we have now is that the engines are sold, production technology not yet, Russia declared its intention to join the MTCR, but hasn't joined yet. You can see similar or the same controversies in almost any important decisions with installation of a new radar, or with dual-use export controls, or with missile agreements with Ukraine, or with uranium trade with USA, or with nuclear tests ban.

Another example is the "Red Mercury case" (or RM case). I would not like to go into the details of my own investigation in this field because it is quite a different story. I would not even like to discuss once again whether RM exists somehow or not. I would like now only to stress that the secret decision-making does exist, and it exists successfully, with little control by the hard-liner opposition and with practically no control by the media.

RM "export" was legalized by a top secret presidential decree in March 1992. Mr. Burbulis who was responsible for that particular decree, later told Moscow News: "RM was considered as a real substance that can be used in making of nuclear weapons".

That export failed, but there was a decree, and we can expect that there is a number of other secret decrees of

such kind regulating secret exports of strategic, dual use and/or nuclear materials.

IV. Main tendencies of Russia's nuclear policy

One of today's main questions is the ratification by Russia's parliament of START II Treaty concluded with USA.

The strong opposition to the ratification was concentrated in a declaration of the high-ranking experts from the Federal Nuclear Center Arzamas 16. Speaking about the dangers for Russia of the transition to the "nuclear dyad", the experts from Arzamas for some reason proceed from the assumption that START II compels Russia to abolish the Strategic Rocket Forces (SRF) i.e., the land-based component of the Strategic Nuclear Forces (SNF), by virtue of which "we would be forced to spend large sums on building new bombers and nuclear submarines".

In reality, the supporters of START II say, the question is of abolishing not the SRF, but only the intercontinental ballistic missiles with multiple warheads (MIRVs), i.e., the most destabilizing weapons systems—the American "MX" and "Minuteman-3" ICBMs and the Russian SS-18 and SS-24 missiles.

The Start II Treaty and the already adopted program for the development of the SRF assumes Russia's possession in 2003 of 900 stationary and mobile single-warhead ICBMs. In this case the USA would possess the following range of first-strike weapons deployed on ICBMs and SLBMs: up to 1,750 warheads on Trident missiles and up to 500 warheads on "unloaded" Minuteman-3 ICBMs. In this way the number of American warheads which can be committed to action for the first strike, in the event of START II's implementation, is being at least halved, whereas the number of targets — ICBMs in the Russian SRF — even somewhat

increases, from 560-680 under the terms of START I to 900 after START II's implementation.

Besides, under START II Russia possesses a definite share of mobile systems for the assured destruction of which there is a need to use considerably more warheads than what is needed to destroy silo launching mounts whose coordinates are well known.

"An analysis of the development of the political situation, and the economic and technical realities, makes it possible to conclude that irrespective of the ratification of the START II Treaty, Russia's Strategic Nuclear Forces, if not by 2003, then by 2006, will be very close in quantity and structure to what it defined by its terms in virtue of the withdrawal from the combat composition of the systems which have exhausted their service life. The paradox is that the decision to be adopted by the State Duma will be actually affect not the composition and structure of Russia's strategic forces, but what the US strategic forces will be like after 2000. If the Duma ratifies the START II Treaty, they will number approximately 3,500 warheads. If it doesn't, then 7,000 - 9,000 warheads, i.e., 2-2.5 times more", says Alexander Konovalov, Director of the Military Policy and Analytical Center from the Russian Institute of USA and Canada Studies. He is one of the proponents of the ratification.

The opponents, both in Arzamas-16, in the MoD and the Duma, say that "with START II the main accent in Russia's strategic nuclear forces will be shifted to the marine component and this runs counter the Russia's interests, because it fails to take account of the fundamental differences in the two countries' geostrategic position" (Academician Golosov). In the structure of the USSR's strategic forces, indeed, the land-based strategic nuclear forces were the leading component for the number of warheads located on

them (about 65 per cent of the total number).

"In the event of START II Treaty's implementation, approximately 55 per cent of the total number of warheads will be deployed on SLBMs. It is well known that Russia, like the USSR, has only two regions from which it can send missile-carrying submarines on tours of combat duty in the world's oceans (the North of the Russian European part, and the Far East) and even they are to a considerable extent blocked by narrows and straits, the passage through which is rather difficult in combat conditions", a State Duma deputy (Communist faction, Committee on Defence) told me.

Several scientists and military offer a compromise option. As General-Leutenant Lev Volkov put it, "it is highly desirable to correct a few obligations in START II before it is offered for ratification. It should be said, among other amendments, that the Treaty should be automatically stopped if one of the parties violates the anti-missile defence treaty of 1972."

The intensive discussion between the opponents and proponents of the ratification has already been started. [See: *Segodnya*, June 1, 1994; Vladimir Belous in *Segodnya*, February 9, 1994; *Moscow News* NN 11 and 19, 1994; pay special attention to the OP-ED page in governmental *Rossiyskiye Vesti*, May 11, 1994 (page 5), written by Vasili Krivochizha, Assistant Director of RISI — Russian Institute of Strategic Studies].

Conclusions

- 1) According to the current calculations of "pro" and "contra" in the State Duma, START II could hardly be ratified by this parliament. A discussion has already started, and the most probable variant is that it will go on for a long time.

The powers of the State Duma will be over, according to the Constitution, on December 12, 1995.

- 2) Russia would contribute to unlimited extension of the NPT or, at least, to the continuation for a number of 15-years periods, playing here the role of a US ally.

At the same time Russia would agree to reaffirm both negative and positive nuclear assurances to NPT non-nuclear weapon states-parties.

There are unofficial discussions, however, whether Russia can play a specific role in North-South conflict during NPT Extension and Review Conference—but it seems that Russia would not be able to play a key role here, and now the realistic understanding of this fact prevails.

- 3) There would be "black holes" in export controls of sensitive materials and technologies, although all the required documents have been already adopted. MIC will try to strengthen its lobby in both Government and parliament.
- 4) Russia's policy towards Ukraine in nuclear issues would not be aggressive if Ukraine ratifies the NPT and follows both declared and undeclared agreements on nuclear weapons on its soil. Russia would not give special security assurances to Ukraine. Russia would respect the territorial integrity and independence of Ukraine.

At the same time, some kind of confederative (or even closer) liaison would be possible between Russia, Belorussia, and Kazakhstan, in the next few years.

In this context, the question of the possible future nuclear status of both Belorussia and Kazakhstan should be raised.

- 5) In the next one or two years, while Russia is in transition (economically, politically, militarily, and ideologically), the concept of growing nuclear deterrence, as well as of re-starting nuclear programs, would be more emotional than practical.