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## Russian-US Relations: Beyond the Reset Policy

Relations between Russia and the United States have always had their ups and downs. In my view, the interaction of the Soviet Union and the USA – the leading powers in the political blocs that confronted each other in the Cold War – shaped the entire structure of world political processes in the second half of the twentieth century. Their standoff was not only an embodiment of competition between two ideologies, ways of life, and forms of government, but also a struggle between geopolitical giants for global influence.

Back in the 18th century, Russia actively aided the American colonists in their fight against the British empire, as exemplified by Catherine the Great's "Declaration of Armed Neutrality" of 1780. After Russia gave up its Californian settlements in 1841 and sold Alaska to the US in 1867, the two nations maintained sound diplomatic ties. Among other things, Washington was interested in investing in Russian railroad construction, especially in the Far East and Siberia, and in entering the booming Russian banking sector at the end of 19th century. The USA helped to negotiate the Treaty of Portsmouth, bringing to an end the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905, which Russia lost. After the advent of the Bolsheviks in 1917 and the short American interventions in Arkhangelsk and Vladivostok, the USA became the major provider of technology, know-how, and industrial hardware to the Soviet Union's industrialization endeavour. This not only turned the devastated and impoverished Stalinist state into the leading world power that was later able to defeat the Nazi juggernaut, but also helped to save the US economy during the Great Depression, leading to the rise of the US as the world's leading economy in the aftermath of the Second World War.

From the Soviet/Russian point of view, although the threat of sliding into a "hot" war was constant – from the Korean War, to the 1961 Berlin Crisis, to the 1973 Middle East conflict – the USA always served as a kind of yardstick by which all Moscow's successes and failures could be measured.

After the demise of the Soviet Union, Russian elites were considerably frustrated that the American government basically ignored Moscow's claims for strategic-partner status while abandoning Russia to the woes of its democratic transition – just as Donald Rumsfeld did with Iraq once it had been liberated from Saddam Hussein's dictatorship. Presiding over their greatly weakened state in the early 1990s, Russian elites were irritated by American pretensions to be the sole global superpower – according to the notorious "unipolar world" concept. This foreshadowed future friction, even during the Clinton administration, which basically wrote Moscow off as a serious international actor.

Though relations were relatively friendly in the nineties, the US limited its support to sending a number of dubious economic advisors and trying to siphon off some remaining cutting-edge Russian technologies, namely in outer space, software, and nuclear technology, while also restricting Russian defence potential by means of the remarkably successful Nunn-Lugar Co-operative Threat Reduction (CTR) programme. Even today, the US presence in Russia is not very substantial, with Boeing and a few major energy and IT companies being the only major representatives in the country. The Clinton administration also formulated some basic policy vectors that were inherited by subsequent US administrations. These include the strategy for NATO expansion and support for the Newly Independent States (NIS) in the post-Soviet territory; the active development of modern defence technologies, including Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) technology, which was particularly worrisome to Moscow; and the use of democratization and human-rights issues to extract concessions from the Kremlin, especially when it was necessary to assuage the conservatives in the US Congress.

Barack Obama was chosen by the US Democratic Party to restore US authority in the world after it had been considerably undermined by the obstinate policies of President George W. Bush, to revive the image of the USA as the leader of the free world, and to boost the support and confidence of the US's NATO allies and friendly states in the developing world. One of the minor components of this long-term "comeback" strategy was the idea of improving relations with Russia, which, though not as central as China, was still very important in practical terms, for example, in supporting US interests in the Islamic world and Eurasia.

Obama's victory in the US presidential elections created muted expectations in Moscow that American foreign policy would change for the better. The two terms of George W. Bush, though he initially tried to use his "personal chemistry", brought bilateral relations to a rather chilly pass, despite the fact that Moscow expressed its solidarity with the American people after the 9/11 tragedy, and reacted with visible restraint to the US invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan and its withdrawal from the ABM treaty, as well as to the generally hostile attitude of the Bush administration to arms-control issues, which almost buried that topic for many years.

The "reset" policy introduced by Vice President Joseph Biden helped to overcome the bitter inheritance of the Bush years and seemingly brought bilateral relations back on track, demonstrating US interest in deeper cooperation with Moscow on issues such as China, Iran, Afghanistan, and the fight against the international Islamist terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). Russia was tacitly sympathetic towards the new US president from the beginning, though a little concerned at his inexperience in international affairs – though this was also considered a plus, as it offered Moscow an opportunity to impose its approaches on the American neophyte. From the American perspective, Obama's key tasks, for

which he was chosen over many other contenders, were to restore American leadership in the world, to look for ways out of the global economic crisis that would buttress the US's position as the world's leading economy, and to improve damaged relations with allies, the developing world, and Russia.

Russia's youthful leader, Dmitry Medvedev, and America's black president seemed to share a certain personal chemistry, especially at the time when Moscow was promoting a policy of comprehensive modernization to meet the challenges of the new century and was stating that the "freedom was better than the lack of freedom". All this was ruined after the so-called "peace-enforcement" operation against Georgia, following its assault on South Ossetia in 2008, when, reportedly under pressure from Russian state security agencies and Putin himself, Medvedev was to lead his country into retaliation against Saakashvili's regime. Subsequent harsh statements on ABM with Cold-War-style threats of "adequate asymmetrical response" did not improve bilateral relations.

At the same time, Moscow was also irritated that NATO, led by the US, dismissed Medvedev's plan for a new Euro-Atlantic common security paradigm more or less out of hand. Medvedev believed that new thinking was urgently required to prevent a new conventional and nuclear confrontation.

Since the peaceful "revolution" of 1991 and the demise of the Soviet Union, Russian experts have been debating the issue of Russian identity in search of a "national idea" – is Russia a European or a Eurasian state, or is it an entity *sui generis*? At the same time, in Putin's February 2012 article "Russia and the changing world"<sup>1</sup> the country is presented as an integral part of Europe, occupying a niche in the multipolar world with an extended sphere of influence in the so-called post-Soviet "near abroad", and interested in the creation of "a common economic and human space from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean". While the EU has become Russia's major economic partner, NATO is still viewed as the major military challenge, if no longer the enemy. However, in its constant political tug-of-war with Washington, Moscow habitually tries to strengthen its position by playing the European "common home" card.

The speech Putin gave at the Munich Security Conference in 2007 revealed all the frustrations and grievances of the Russian political class, which perceives that it is merely tolerated for its assets, but not admitted as an equal in the Western community.<sup>2</sup>

As if to compensate for the West's lack of interest, Putin introduced the novel concept of an "integration project" in his pre-election manifesto en-

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1 Cf. Vladimir Putin, *Russia and the changing world*, 27 February 2012, rt.com, at: <http://rt.com/politics/official-word/putin-russia-changing-world-263>.

2 Cf. Putin's Prepared Remarks at 43rd Munich Conference on Security Policy (transcript), in: *The Washington Post*, 12 February 2007, at: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/02/12/AR2007021200555.html>.

titled “A new integration project for Eurasia: The future in the making”,<sup>3</sup> published in October 2011. According to Putin, the Eurasian Union is far from being “any kind of revival of the Soviet Union”. Rather, it would represent a “powerful supranational association capable of becoming one of the poles in the modern world”. Such a union would stand on equal footing and enjoy partnerships with major regional organizations such as the EU. These partnerships would “prompt changes in the geopolitical and geo-economic setup of the continent as a whole”. No doubt this initiative has caused considerable concern in Europe and the US, where it has been seen as an apparent attempt to revive the Soviet Union by other means.<sup>4</sup> In the past ten years, Russia has strengthened its military presence in the post-Soviet area – especially via the framework of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), as well as by reinforcing its military presence in Central Asia and permanently stationing military contingents in the breakaway republics of South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

Moscow is very much concerned, however, that while NATO and the European Union have engaged with the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, they view Russia as a kind of wayward outsider, excluding it from the main discourse and institutions of the Euro-Atlantic community. Russia is also concerned that the United States and its NATO allies have developed a post-Cold War arrangement that, in effect, bypasses Russia, ignoring its vital interests. Nonetheless, in 1997, NATO and Russia signed the NATO-Russia Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security, which provided the formal basis for NATO-Russia relations and led to the development of a bilateral programme of consultation and co-operation under the Permanent Joint Council (PJC). In 2002, Russian relations with NATO and the US grew yet closer thanks to the signing of the Rome Declaration on “NATO-Russia Relations: A New Quality”, which established the NATO-Russia Council (NRC, replacing the PJC). Despite the difference in approaches, many co-operation projects have since been promoted – though relations have never reached the status of a real partnership.

Obama’s second term, which coincided with the return of Putin as the Russian president, marked a new phase in US-Russian relations. The backdrop hardly appeared to be more auspicious. Yet a window of opportunity remains open that could permit the promotion of bilateral relations even beyond the limits of the “reset” policy. Second-term presidents are usually more inclined to make controversial decisions and undertake risky initiatives. However, Obama’s administration is currently plagued by so many foreign

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3 Cf. Vladimir Putin, A new integration project for Eurasia: The future in the making, in: *Izvestia*, 3 October 2011, at: <http://www.russianmission.eu/en/news/article-prime-minister-vladimir-putin-new-integration-project-eurasia-future-making-izvestia-3->.

4 See the comments by then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton reported by: Charles Clover, Clinton vows to thwart new Soviet Union, in: *Financial Times*, at: <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/a5b15b14-3fcf-11e2-9f71-00144feabdc0.html>.

and domestic policy quandaries that it is unlikely he will attempt to make any dramatic new breakthroughs in relations with Russian.

At the same time, the Russians have noticed that Obama is more concerned with other issues, such as the global economic and financial crisis and the Middle East conflict, and has a tendency to deliver well-written speeches that usually do not lead to any concrete steps as he moves on to other issues. So no “pivot to Russia” is expected in Moscow from Obama’s foreign policy.

Meanwhile, recent months have only proved what intractable divergences exist in the two countries’ attitudes to major issues. As is true of the West as a whole, the US has been greatly concerned with recent domestic developments in Russia – from the Khodorkovsky case, via the jailing of Pussy Riot, to the onslaught on the fledging opposition, and the adoption of bizarre and draconian laws by the Russian parliament. The Magnitsky Act<sup>5</sup> and the Snowden case have only aggravated the already embittered bilateral relations. Though Moscow’s domestic policies are not the primary concern of the Obama administration, which tends to gloss over differences with Russia, it is unable to avoid the topics of human rights and democratization, which gravely annoys the Russian government. Conservatives in the US Congress claim that Russia should be brought to account for its lack of compliance with universal democratic and human-rights norms. This has all contributed to ending the reset policy. According to the Russian foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov, the “reset” could not last forever, because, extending the computing metaphor, eternal “reset” would amount to system failure or a complete “system freeze”. He therefore proposed seeking a new quality of relationship.<sup>6</sup>

A number of key issues in bilateral US-Russian relations can be identified:

- The Jackson-Vanik amendment, denying “most favoured nation” status to non-market economies that restrict freedom of emigration, has finally been repealed, and Russia has acceded to the WTO.
- Simultaneously, the Russian parliament responded to the Magnitsky Act by passing the “Dima Yakovlev Act”.<sup>7</sup> The restrictions on entry to the US imposed on Russian citizens by the former are especially painful for Russian officials, many of whom have property or regularly spend time there.
- Bilateral efforts to fight narcotics trafficking have been greatly reduced.

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5 A US law passed in 2012 that imposed sanctions on Russian officials held to be responsible for the death in prison of Sergei Magnitsky, an auditor who was investigating high-level fraud.

6 Cf. *Russia-US reset cannot last forever – Lavrov*, 3 October 2012, at: <http://rt.com/politics/russia-us-reset-lavrov-software-557/>.

7 A law that imposes various measures on US organizations and citizens active in Russia, including banning the adoption of Russian children by US citizens. The act is named after a Russian child who died after being adopted by an American family.

- Only limited progress has been made in neutralizing the Iranian and North Korean nuclear programmes.
- There has been no tangible co-operation in the fight against international jihadist terrorism, as the case of the Tsarnaev brothers has shown.
- No consensus has been reached on the issue of ABMs.
- Russia remains a major factor in any future US dealings with China.
- Even though the USA is leaving Afghanistan, it understands that Russia remains a major geopolitical actor in Eurasia – a factor that can hardly be neglected.
- Washington is still very much worried about the outlines of the declared Russian strategy to promote the so-called “Eurasia vector”, which it fears will revive a kind of Soviet empire.
- Moscow is actively using the United States’ current domestic problems to criticize Washington for its lack of real democracy, neglect of human rights, and the creation of a police state under the pretext of the fight against terrorism.

During 2012, tensions between the two countries intensified, with differences over issues such as Syria and the meaning and practice of democracy.

Consequently, the only possible areas of co-operation are arms control and non-proliferation issues. So far, despite demonstrative declarations of co-operation and partnership, strategic nuclear issues are the only area in which the US-Russian partnership has produced any meaningful progress – as they are linked to core issues of Russia’s statehood and its concerns in the realm of “hard” security.

Professing that the elimination of nuclear weapons is a distant and hard-to-achieve goal, Russia has unequivocally placed its strategic eggs in the nuclear basket. This is not only fixed in doctrinal documents but is deeply embedded in the hearts and minds of experts, government officials, and common citizens. The current National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation, valid until 2020, and the new version of Russia’s Military Doctrine stipulate that Russia must, under the current conditions, possess a nuclear potential that could ensure the infliction of “predetermined” damage on the aggressor (a state or a coalition of states) under any circumstances. Nuclear weapons are thus perceived as the ultimate deterrent, the instrument of prevention of any type of aggression, and the major factor in protecting the security of the state and its allies and maintaining international peace and stability. Russia needs its nuclear arsenal to secure the strategic environment in which it can complete its modernization process, including the refurbishment of ailing conventional armed forces. Nuclear weapons, by the same token, ensure Russia’s special status in the world as a Permanent Member of the UN Security Council and a leading international actor.

So while Western liberal thinkers multiply arguments in support of the “nuclear-zero” concept, Russian experts counteract with proliferating views on the inadmissibility of immediate unconditional nuclear disarmament – perceiving the nuclear potential as the most valuable asset of which the adversaries would like to divest Russia.

Some Russian military experts have stated that the removal of the risk of a major war fought with nuclear weapons paradoxically makes their “limited” use as battlefield force-enhancers in war-fighting (for instance, in striking certain well-protected underground WMD-related facilities or compact terrorist-controlled enclaves) more plausible. They do not trust the US’s recent doctrinal shift toward hi-tech, precision-guided conventional weapons, citing examples of the ongoing modernization and consolidation of the US nuclear weapons arsenal, the refurbishment of its design and production infrastructure, and the US refusal to ratify the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT). In this light, and despite the drastic reduction in the number of US warheads, American plans to achieve a safe, secure, and reliable nuclear stockpile – via its “stockpile stewardship” programme – are viewed as another claim for global domination, given that Russian nuclear capabilities may quickly dwindle, leading to overwhelming US nuclear preponderance in the future. Commenting on President Obama’s denuclearization initiative, Russian experts stress its contradictions and Obama’s admission that nuclear weapons cannot be eliminated as long as a single nuclear state remains in the world. This suspicion about the real plans and intentions of the US strategists is the key factor. Most Russian military experts are unmoved by the well developed line of argumentation articulated by the American specialists such as George Perkovich.<sup>8</sup> At best, this kind of argumentation is regarded as typical liberal rhetoric that ignores the harsh strategic realities. At worst, it is seen as an attempt to unilaterally strip Russia of its sole meaningful defence capability. Many experts in Russia think that the new generation of conventionally armed strategic weapons in the US arsenal could minimize or even nullify Russia’s retaliation capacity.

So how should new strategic reductions be carried out? What are the numerical limits? What are the next steps?

Most in the Russian military now agree that the process of strategic arms control has reached a certain plateau. Both the US and Russian military seem to be reluctant to make further (deeper) cuts. Additional deep cuts are only possible, according to the prevailing views in Moscow, if certain major factors are taken into account or eliminated.

First of all, this applies to the new dimensions of strategic stability. If we continue to reduce the number of warheads, the small number that remain can theoretically be knocked out by a first strike, even if they are kept mobile or concealed. The risk that a reduced number of missiles fails to be an effect-

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8 Cf., for example, George Perkovich, *Do Unto Others: Toward a Defensible Nuclear Doctrine*, Washington, DC, 2013.

ive strategic deterrent is further increased by the deployment of national (or global) ABM systems, which limit the effectiveness of any retaliatory strike.

Moreover, if US and Russian nuclear capabilities are starkly reduced, they become comparable with those of other nuclear states, and particularly of undeclared nuclear powers. This would bring about a totally new situation in terms of strategic stability, downgrading Washington and Moscow to the unenviable status of regional nuclear “barons”. Moscow is particularly deeply, if tacitly, alarmed by the rapid increase in China’s military potential. Hence, reducing Russian nuclear forces to the level of Chinese could make Russian vulnerable to Beijing’s growing superiority in terms of conventional forces in the Far East.

Speaking in purely numerical terms, Russian experts generally agree that the next figure can be somewhere around 1,300-1,400 warheads, subsequently sliding down to 1,200, while 1,000 is the lowest possible limit, taking into account the existing potential targets (and threats) worldwide. This view is shared by many US specialists. Going lower would mean undermining or redefining the entire concept of deterrence, including extended deterrence. This is a major barrier, but it could be removed if certain criteria were fulfilled.

First of all, the unofficial nuclear states must start the process of gradually eliminating their nuclear weapon capabilities and, most importantly, the US national ABM plans need to be irreversibly mothballed. Other nuclear states should at least show their willingness to create greater transparency and to cap upgrades of their nuclear capabilities. According to Russian experts, these states need to join in the process, perhaps starting with the UK or France. However, it will no doubt be very hard to get them to the negotiating table.

What will the major sticking points be when the discussions on further reductions resume? What are the major problems on the path to further reductions, if not to a non-nuclear world, as delineated in the Russian strategic mindset?

To begin with, there are what we can call philosophical problems. They include – and presuppose – further steps to develop a bilateral strategic-reduction process and strengthen overall strategic stability. The general situation in terms of global stability must be made propitious for nuclear disarmament – this would require a very low level of intensity of international and regional tensions, the mitigation of regional conflicts, and the absence of rivalry, at least between major powers, in sum, something resembling a Golden Age or the “perpetual peace” of Immanuel Kant.

A very delicate and interesting, much touted issue concerns the non-strategic nuclear component of the US and Russian arsenals. While the Obama administration is stressing the need to start discussions on this topic, Moscow is at best ambivalent, arguing that the US must first withdraw its tactical nuclear weapons (TNWs) to its national territory. This condition is



not feasible, even if NATO replaces its 2010 strategic concept before 2020, as it undermines the entire concept of extended deterrence. Russia continues to maintain the importance of TNWs, as it considers itself “dwarfed” in comparison with NATO (and China) in terms of conventional capabilities. However, it might be possible to at least open initial discussions on transparency measures and then, perhaps, data exchange. An ultimate resolution, the “zero option” for those weapons, can only come about in the context of future conventional arms limitations in Europe.

Russia is genuinely concerned at US plans to create a new strategic conventional capability along the lines of the “Prompt Global Strike” concept. Many in the Russian military think that this could be employed to target Russian command and control or early-warning centres, forcing Moscow to unleash an all-out nuclear war. This once again might seem paranoid but only reflects the Russian military’s inferiority complex and anxiety that Washington would act from a position of strength to dictate certain intolerable conditions to Russia. Further restraints must therefore be imposed on these weapons.

The major issue, as all Russians agree, is the “upload potential”, i.e. the problem of non-deployed warheads. The US has historically resisted any limits on its upload capability, understandably trying to retain reserves to hedge against any unpredictable turn of events, such as a hypothetical “nuclear breakout state” or a strategic leap in military technology by China. Russia is still worried that by downloading its missiles and storing the warheads, the US could evade any future START limitations, just as George W. Bush did with the ABM Treaty, and thus retain the capability of immediately acquiring many thousands of new operational warheads. It may be paranoid and totally subject to Cold War logic, but this is how it stands. According to various estimates, America has from 1,500-2,000 to 4,000-5,000 reserve warheads, thus securing itself a considerable edge. Of course, this is meaningless, except in the case of a protracted nuclear war that begins with a methodical exchange of Schlesingerian “limited options”.

To prevent this, a future treaty must cover warheads that are not associated with delivery vehicles. This would require a totally new system of on-site verification using a new generation of advanced radiation and other detection equipment. Both the US (under Clinton) and Russia (experts from nuclear labs) have developed outlines of possible mechanisms. They are technically feasible, and demand only a higher level of trust, transparency, and political co-operation. There are no technical barriers to on-site verification of warhead numbers and their dismantlement status or the amount of fissile material according to the fissile material inventory of the Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty (FMCT). Many of the techniques that would be required are already used by the International Atomic Energy Authority (IAEA). Several were devised to verify limits on submarine-launched cruise missiles (SLCMs) when inspecting nuclear submarines in their bases (for example,

during the 1989 Black Sea Experiment. The only caveat is the barrier of assuring that the secret or sensitive technology is not disclosed.

More far-reaching ideas, such as deactivation and de-alerting, currently seem to be in the realm of fantasy. But they could become interesting for in-depth analysis when the time comes to abandon strategies of mutual assured destruction (MAD) and restore a kind of minimal (existential) deterrence, and can be explored at a later stage.

The ABM conundrum has become the most irritating and highly symbolic issue for the contemporary Russian political class – exceeded in importance perhaps only by the problems of human rights, the rule of law, and democratization. It clearly demonstrates the ongoing exclusion of Russia from the family of democratic Western states – though many Russian experts claim there are no major ideological or substantive differences between them and their NATO colleagues.

Thus the issue of missile defence, more than anything, hinders meaningful military and security co-operation and has turned out to be a bone of contention in US-Russia relations. Moscow was frustrated that its 2000 initiative to establish a joint Russian-European Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) system to target non-strategic missiles elicited practically no response from NATO.

The Obama administration's February 2010 European BMD Review Report, as well as numerous statements by NATO officials, insisted that US missile defences are not directed against Russia but are rather intended to counter Iranian missile programs. The US does not believe that the European Phased Adaptive Approach (EPAA)<sup>9</sup> it is pursuing undermines Russian capabilities, while the threat from Iran is limited but real. Although the Obama administration has relocated planned US BMD sites in Europe further away from Russian strategic missile bases, Moscow has continued to demonstrate nervousness over ongoing US BMD deployments in Europe and worldwide.

Nor was Moscow pleased with Obama's updated version of EPAA, which some commentators even consider more wide-ranging and thus threatening than the equivalent proposals of the George W. Bush administration.

Russian commentators have argued that the development of NATO's ABM network – even without the introduction of SM-3 Block IIB interceptors in EPAA Phase IV (which were reported to be capable of targeting strategic warheads) or the placement of Aegis warships in the Arctic – threatens Moscow's retaliation potential. Citing US official documents such as *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense*<sup>10</sup> or statements by certain American officials asserting that EPAA is merely an organic part of the developing global US ABM setup, Russia is deeply con-

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9 For an overview, see: Arms Control Association, *The European Phased Adaptive Approach at a Glance*, at: <http://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/Phasedadaptiveapproach>.

10 United States of America Department of Defense, *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense*, January 2012, at: [http://www.defense.gov/news/defense\\_strategic\\_guidance.pdf](http://www.defense.gov/news/defense_strategic_guidance.pdf).

cerned that “Euro-ABM” looks like just one element in the global US ABM structure – which will also have bases in the US homeland, perhaps on the East Coast, as well in the Far East and the Middle East – and laments that it is not as limited in practice as had previously been pledged by the US.

The Pentagon’s recent decision, as announced by Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel,<sup>11</sup> to deploy 14 additional ground-based interceptors (GBIs) in silos at Fort Greely, Alaska, by 2017 to present a credible deterrence to the growing threat of North Korean missiles and to buttress extended deterrence for South Korea and Japan did nothing to improve the situation. When the US military added that an additional ABM site on the US East Coast might also be needed to deter Iran,<sup>12</sup> it only worsened Russian concerns, as some experts, including leading Russian non-governmental arms-control specialist Alexei Arbatov, think that those systems could be even more dangerous for Russia. This is rather strange, as GBIs, which were first deployed by the Bush administration in the late 2000s, are outdated, have a rather dubious test record, and have never been used against real targets. Additionally, according to recent reports, the SM-3 missile family is also plagued by various technical problems and might be inefficient as a weapon even in the best of cases, as early intercept does not happen early enough to prevent warheads and decoys from being deployed.<sup>13</sup>

However, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov said that partially scrapping the European missile programme did nothing to address Moscow’s national security concerns.<sup>14</sup> Even a curtailed European missile defence system, in his words, still poses a threat to Russia’s nuclear capability. Russia will continue to press for the signing of “legally binding agreements guaranteeing that US missile defense elements are not aimed against Russia’s strategic nuclear forces”.<sup>15</sup> Some more hard-line observers even think that “as soon as the U.S. considers it necessary and feasible to launch the fourth stage of the European ABM system, it will do so immediately”.<sup>16</sup>

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11 Cf. US Department of Defense, *DOD News Briefing on Missile Defense from the Pentagon*, at: <http://www.defense.gov/transcripts/transcript.aspx?transcriptid=5205>.

12 Cf. Thom Shanker/David E. Sanger/Martin Fackler, U.S. Is Bolstering Missile Defense to Deter North Korea, in: *The New York Times*, 15 March 2013, at: [http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/16/world/asia/us-to-bolster-missile-defense-against-north-korea.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/16/world/asia/us-to-bolster-missile-defense-against-north-korea.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0).

13 For detailed information on this, see National Research Council of the National Academies, *Making Sense of Ballistic Missile Defense: An Assessment of Concepts and Systems for U.S. Boost-Phase Missile Defense in comparison to other Alternatives*, Washington, DC, 2012, at: [http://www.nap.edu/catalog.php?record\\_id=13189](http://www.nap.edu/catalog.php?record_id=13189); Defense Science Board, Department of Defense, *Defense Science Board Task Force Report on Science and Technology Issues of Early Intercept Ballistic Missile Defense Feasibility*, Washington, DC, September 2011, at: <http://www.acq.osd.mil/dsb/reports/ADA552472.pdf>.

14 Cf. *Moscow to Discuss Changes in US Missile Defense Plans*, RiaNovosti, at: <http://en.rian.ru/world/20130320/180138892.html>.

15 Sergei Ryabkov, cited in: *ibid*.

16 Igor Korotchenko, cited in: Inna Soboleva, *NATO, Russia consider joint missile-defense system*, Russia Beyond the Headlines, 8 April 2013, at: [http://rbth.ru/politics/2013/04/08/nato\\_russia\\_consider\\_joint\\_missile-defense\\_system\\_24761.html](http://rbth.ru/politics/2013/04/08/nato_russia_consider_joint_missile-defense_system_24761.html).

As a result, the security conference in Moscow on 24-25 May 2013 was ultimately as fruitless as the May 2012 Moscow conference on ABM issues organized by the Russian Defence Ministry.

New US ideas on further steps in strategic arms reductions and limits on EPAA formulated by the second Obama administration have seemingly promised attractive openings and breakthroughs in the area of strategic nuclear arms control, but have so far found no positive reaction.

There are no signals that Moscow will rescind its planned military build-up in response to the professed US ABM threat. This blocks substantial progress in arms control.

Of the four major blocks of issues related to arms control in general,

- further strategic force reductions,
- ABM co-operation,
- non-strategic nuclear forces in Europe, and
- new conventional arms control measures,

ABM remains the most problematic.

There is a certain obsession in Moscow military and political circles with the ABM issue. At the same time, two groups of opinion can be observed – “hawks”<sup>17</sup> who warn of the disturbing nature of US ABM developments worldwide, while threatening imminent Russian countermeasures and diplomatic responses and “doves” – a small group of “moderate liberal” experts and some retired generals who argue that the USA is in any case unable to undermine Russian nuclear deterrent capabilities if Russia maintains its current pace of strategic modernization.<sup>18</sup>

Despite some – extremely subtle – hints to the contrary, Russia still demands a) legally binding commitments, b) limits on technical capabilities, and c) disclosure of geographical location of planned ABM components by the US. This would amount to a new ABM treaty, not just a set of transparency-building measures and new confidence-building measures. Such an arrangement is understandably unacceptable to the US side, at least there is no chance of Obama getting it through Congress.

ABM remains the major roadblock to further arms-control and disarmament measures, including space non-weaponization, TNW reductions, and closer co-operation on WMD non-proliferation efforts.

All this makes clear the necessity for real qualitative breakthroughs in disarmament, as the major nuclear weapons stockholders – the USA and

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17 These tend to be retired officers associated with the Moscow-based NGOs Academy of Military Sciences and Academy of Geopolitical Problems, or experts at the Russian Institute of Strategic Studies.

18 For good examples of this approach, see the anthology recently published by the Moscow Carnegie Center: Alexey Arbatov/Vladimir Dvorkin/Natalia Bubnova (eds), *Missile Defense: Confrontation and Cooperation?* Moscow 2013, or articles by Sergey Rogov, the Director of the Institute of USA and Canada Studies of the Russian Academy of Science.

Russia – still actually operate within the Cold War standoff framework and pursue strategies based on MAD.

Any further moves in arms control are currently blocked by Moscow's "conditional package", which establishes the complete solution of the following issues as a prerequisite to new arms-control measures:

- gradual involvement of all nuclear weapon states,
- prevention of space weapon deployment,
- guarantees against "breakout nuclear potential",
- no unilateral deployment of ABM systems,
- no qualitative or quantitative imbalances in conventional arms,
- implementation of the CTBT,
- viability of the key multidimensional instruments for disarmament and nonproliferation.

Moscow's logic is unambiguous: Russia can go no further in arms control and disarmament, and is asking for all aspects of strategic stability to be taken into account. Further steps towards the verifiable and irreversible reduction of nuclear weapons in compliance with Article VI of the NPT should be taken on a phased basis with the ultimate objective of this long-term process being complete disarmament, and equal and indivisible security for everyone.

In my view, it is urgent to expediently "unbundle" this package by singling out a sole starter issue, say the problem of outer space non-weaponization.

The Russian military has announced plans to develop a new heavy, liquid-fuel ICBM capable of carrying large numbers of warheads, decoys, and other penetration aids.<sup>19</sup> This will ensure that Russia's strategic nuclear potential does not decline. According to its designers, this new heavy ICBM, together with a new rail-based ICBM system (reviving the famous solid-fuelled SS-24, but also capable of being fitted with the successor to the current Topol system), as well as the potential follow-up systems to the solid-fuelled MIRV-equipped Yars and Topol missiles, will be capable of overcoming any US ABM system. This is due to the quantity of systems, the use of new roving hypersonic warheads that wander with no predictable trajectory while approaching a target, and new types of ABM penetration/saturation decoys.

While all those plans could be scuttled, as many rearmament programmes have been in the past, the repercussions for relations with the West and the state of the Russian economy could already have a pernicious effect.

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19 Cf. *Russian missile chief claims shield-penetrating ICBM ready by 2018*, rt.com, 3 December 2012, at: <http://rt.com/politics/russian-missile-forces-new-250>.

The entire ABM issue is excessively politicized, and the sober assessments of experts are eclipsed by paranoid invocations and a flood of propaganda.

What is even worse, however, is that the ABM issue demonstrates the yawning gap in threat assessments, doctrines, and even basic democratic and societal values between NATO and Russia. The two sides belong to different schools of thought on governance and possess incompatible socio-economic structures. This is exacerbated by Russia's lack of proper integration in Europe, its demands for special rights, and accusations of double standards. However, causes for optimism do exist.

Even the Russian military are quite sure – although they have often stated otherwise – that EPAA is no threat at all – as it is optimized to deal with medium-range targets, and generally does not perform well (according, for example, to the recent report by the US Government Accountability Office).<sup>20</sup> The projected number of SM-3 interceptors in coming years would pose little real threat to the numerous warheads of the Russian strategic deterrent.

The problem lies in the existence of a kind of “grey area” in the capabilities of the planned US BMD force and the Russian strategic offensive potential. Both sides' militaries are inclined to play down the capabilities of their relevant systems and to conceal the entirety of data on them. Thus a considerable knowledge gap exists regarding the real capabilities of interceptors (vis-à-vis the velocity of incoming warheads), which may or may not be within the limits of declared parameters.

More extensive collaboration could range from simply exchanging intelligence data and assessments to launching innovative joint research and development programmes for shared anti-BMD technologies.

Realistically, however, such a high level of collaboration would demand not just a new quality of relationship between the two countries but the total elimination of the current climate of suspicion and inattention to the arguments of the other side. Collaboration between the US (and NATO) and Russia on ABM, including the abandonment of the MAD doctrine, is not possible until Russia undergoes democratization<sup>21</sup> and modernization and actually joins the family of free world nations, renouncing its imperial or “great power” ambitions and its desire to become a kind of Soviet Union in Eurasia without the Communist ideology. As we are still – mentally or operationally – in a Cold War mode, we need to work on the tenets of strategic stability in

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20 Cf. United States Government Accountability Office, *Standard Missile-3 Block IIB Analysis of Alternatives. Briefing Prepared for House Armed Services Subcommittee on Strategic Forces January 29, 2013*, at: <http://www.gao.gov/assets/660/652079.pdf>.

21 For an interesting discussion of democratization in Russia, see Lilia Shevtsova/Andrew Wood, *Change or Decay: Russia's Dilemma and the West's Response*, Washington, DC, 2011, and Lilia Shevtsova, A new way for the West to contain Russia, in: *Financial Times*, 7 February 2013, at: <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/8e0fea1a-7144-11e2-9b5c-00144feab49a.html>.

a multipolar world. Arms races that belonged to the Cold War are anachronistic in the current global crisis situation and must be avoided. Hence, a prompt solution must be found to this ABM conundrum – this entire issue must be depoliticized.

The time is ripe for the US to relinquish its preachy, holier-than-thou attitude, which merely leads, in any case, to US views being junked by Moscow elites. For its part, the Russian political class needs to get rid of its post-Soviet quasi-imperial complexes. If pragmatism is to win, efforts need to be made to avoid becoming bogged down in rhetorical battles.

It is clear that Moscow will under no conditions be subject to any sanctions or coercion from the West: This is the most important point in Putin's foreign policy message. Obama needs to invent a new policy that will engineer a new phase in bilateral relations. This will – of course – only hold true if the Russian administration demonstrates a genuine interest in developing long-term constructive relations with the West and if the West understands the issues and problems that make the Russian democratic transition so troublesome.