

The Current Arms Control: Better Late than Never

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In the whole history of arms control it is difficult to remember such a period “of doing nothing” as the first decade of the 21st century. And the specific feature of the arms control process is that any prolonged pause in fact means a roll-back due to the going on qualitative and quantitative changes in the systems of weapons and their modernization.

In the nuclear sphere – in the limitations and reductions of the strategic nuclear weapons there was only one rather modest achievement – the Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty (SORT) concluded in 2002 in Moscow which declared the aim of modest reductions to the level of 1700-2200 warheads. Signing of this agreement in no way created the breakthrough and meant anything new for national potentials. By putting its signature each president, in fact, certified its own “national plan” for strategic nuclear modernization.

Being, in principle, a positive development, the Treaty, still, gave an additional pretext for the criticism on the Russian side. It caused a splash of allegations in “one-sidedness” of its provisions in favor of Washington. Most often the Russian experts and politicians emphasized the fact that the US got an opportunity to preserve the so-called “reversible potential” – keeping the reduced warheads in the stockpiles and not annihilating them. The verification procedures in the text of the SORT itself were inexistent – it relied on the verification system of the START-1 which expires in December 2009. The Bush and Putin’s administrations failed to start at least consultations (not speaking about the negotiations) on the prolongation of the Treaty.

The limited positive effect of the SORT for Moscow was overlapped by the negative impact of the US one-sided withdrawal from the ABM Treaty. This withdrawal meant, besides all, that the “saint linkage” between the nuclear reductions and the restraints in BMD developments, which was mutually agreed from the first steps of nuclear arms control was ruined. The US activity in the creation of the limited territorial BMD were the constant irritating factor for the Russian side till the end of the Bush-Putin political cycle ¹. The arguments that it is presupposed against accidental or single strikes was not taken for granted in Moscow.

Much more disturbance for our relations was caused by the declaration of plans to deploy elements of the US BMD in Europe. The mere announcement of these plans initiated a very kin, sometimes even hysteric reaction of Russian politicians and experts. The possible deployment of 10 anti-missiles was considered by Moscow as potentially diminishing the deterrence capability of the Russian strategic nuclear potential.

The high ranking experts and officials on our side were assuring the public that the system “is aimed” to threat our security. The former Chief of the General Staff, general of the army, Yuri Baluevsky at the end of 2007 declared that American anti-missiles may provoke the retaliatory strike of Russian ICBMs. "The provoking of the retaliatory strike is considered as the

¹ For the arms control, being highly dependent on the Russian- American relations, the first political cycle of the 21st century is framed by the period of Putin-Bush presidency – the two leaders whose personal outlooks and specific interrelations played a key role and made a decisive impact upon the arms control process.

result of the false assessment of the ballistic missile launch", – emphasized he². The urgent signing of the US-Polish agreement about the future deployments undertaken at the peak of the aggravation of relations between Russia and USA at the time of the Georgian crisis served as an additional argument supporting the thesis that "this all" is undertaken against Russia. This whole situation made crystal clear the fact that despite all declarations about partnership coming from the two presidents of Russia and USA, the sides act, just as in the time of the Cold War, within the model of nuclear deterrence.

During the whole Bush-Putin's political cycle the nuclear deterrence was "supported" by the modernization of the nuclear arsenals of both sides which was done primarily "vis-à-vis" each other. The tests of ballistic missiles in Russia started to look as religious rite being often executed with the presence of the high officials. Some time ago then the Supreme Commander of the Russian Armed Forces Vladimir Putin, after attending one of the tests, declared that "our newest technical complexes" – systems of armaments, "which at present are not at the disposal of any other country of the world ... are capable of solving any task, including the overcoming of the ballistic missile defense systems, if such systems will be developed" ³. As far as the USA is the only country which is going to "develop" the BMD system it is impossible not to understand the assignment of these "technical complexes".

Just the same is true about the aim of modernization of the US strategic nuclear potential. And the periodic leakages to the press about the number of aims on the Russian territory for American ICBMs only support the thesis that the declaratory partnership failed to principally change the military technical confrontation of the Cold War period.

Moreover, in the beginning of the XXIst century, quite contrary to the declared partnership, the reliance on nuclear weapons started to grow. This may be followed both through the provisions of US and Russian official documents. In the acting Russian Concept of National Security (CNS) it is declared that all forces and means "including nuclear weapons" being at the disposal of the Russian Federation may be applied in case of the necessity to rebuff the military aggression if "all other means to solve the crisis situation are exhausted and appeared to be ineffective" ⁴. This means in fact the acknowledgement of the feasibility to be the first to use the nuclear weapons in a non-nuclear conflict. Another symptomatic acknowledgement is the declaration of the task "of providing deterrence in the interests of prevention of aggression of any scale". The similar vision is for long typical for the US official "nuclear documents".

The same Russian document confirms the necessity for Russia to have at its disposal "nuclear forces capable to inflict in a guaranteed way the predetermined damage to any aggressor state or to the coalition of states under any conditions"⁵. This in its turn means the acknowledgement of the feasibility of the limited war the mere impossibility of which for long time was being proved by Soviet scientists. Again, similar provisions are characteristic for American documents.

The military-technical possibility of the limited strike is supported by the fact that Russia and USA have at its disposal a still officially unknown number of tactical nuclear missiles. The proposals of George Bush senior and afterwards – "responsive steps and the counterproposals" of Gorbachev and then – Yeltsin in 1991-1992 were made in the form of oral declarations being

² RIA "Novosti" (unofficial translation), December 15, 2007. (<http://www.rian.ru/politics/foreign/20071215/92598395.html>)

³ President of Russia. Official website. Declaration for the press and responses to the questions. Plesetsk, February 18, 2004 (unofficial translation). http://www.kremlin.ru/appears/2004/02/18/1656_type63380_60811.shtml

⁴ Concept of the National Security of the Russian Federation (approved by the Decree of the President of the Russian Federation of December 17 1997 r. # 1300, in the edition of the Decree of the President of the Russian Federation of January 10, 2000 # 24), (http://www.scrf.gov.ru/documents/decree/2000_24_1.shtml).

⁵ Ibid.

never put on paper or formulated as an agreement. As the result the sides now possess in fact the additional "unknown nuclear potential" of tactical missiles and nuclear artillery shells.

The presence of tactical nukes in the arsenals of the powers makes the usage of nuclear weapons to be a more realistic perspective. This perspective will become even more realistic if the Russian threats to abrogate the INF Treaty will come true.

The proclaimed partnership also did not change the scheme of application of nuclear weapons which may only answer the "demands" of the highly nervous relations of the Cold War time. According to the analyses of the prominent specialists to whom the practical state of the "nuclear realities" is well-known, "although nuclear deterrence does not require the concept of launch-on-warning attacks it has been adopted by both the United States and Russia" ⁶. A very peculiar proof that the "launch-on-warning thinking" exists appeared in connection with Moscow perception of threat coming from the US plans to deploy the European-based ballistic missile defense and the confirmation of general Baluevsky cited above is an additional unquestionable evidence of this.

At a period of time when partnership was declared to be in existence there, in principle, existed possibilities to go in for deepened discussion and to come at least to preliminary agreement on the principle matters concerning the foundations of "strategic nuclear relations". But the sides did not initiate the serious expert discussion on the fundamental nuclear issues such as deterrence, nuclear stability and its parameters, the nature and the content of nuclear policies and, what is more important – on the present mission of the nuclear weapons in connection with the existing and future threats and challenges. Inability to do so multiplies the problems adding the new ones to the logical inadequacy of existing nuclear doctrines to the content of the present level of the intergovernmental relations. And it is not a coincidence that in their present forms the documents in national security and military doctrines do not contain stimulus for arms control.

There is an additional peculiarity which is very seldom addressed. The presidents of the nuclear states – USA and Russia in the first turn, when being elected very rarely have the understanding of their own for what purpose do their countries need nuclear weapons. This "understanding" is usually brought to the leaders of the states by the most conservative representatives of the ruling bureaucracy – by the high-ranking military. And the presidents very often prefer to rely on the assessments of these professionals who usually are not in favor of arms control which may only make their sphere of responsibility (which means – their importance) smaller. These are the military who say that we know "how much is enough" and the essence of this knowledge is always one of the biggest states secrets the details of which almost never interest the presidents (and if they are interested – the details are very technical to be understood properly). This definitely only narrows the stimulus for arms control.

The situation with the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) which was signed in 1968, in the beginning of the XXIst century has become even more critical than before. The indefinite prolongation of the NPT that was announced in 1995 as a diplomatic victory was deceiving – the three states (India, Pakistan and Israel) were left beyond the NPT limitations. Simultaneously this stimulated the other states to start considering the "military nuclear option" as the way for strengthening their national security.

⁶ Alexei Arbatov, Vladimir Dvorkin. Beyond Nuclear Deterrence (Transforming the U.S. – Russian Equation). Wash., Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2006. p. 108 [Arbatov was Deputy Chairman of the Committee of Defense in the State Duma – Russian Parliament, General Dvorkin – former Director of the 4th Institute of Strategic Forces – auth.]

Another already constant factor stimulating the tendency to acquire nuclear weapons is the non-adherence of the five great nuclear states to the obligation taken more than forty years ago in this NPT. According to the Article VI they had to “pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament, and on a treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control”.

First, definitely, the forty years that passed in no way may be called “an early date”, especially, that the achievements are more than modest. And, second, there are no hints at all that besides, Russia and USA, other three states – France, Great Britain and China are going to join the arms control process.

The US constant refusal to ratify the CTBT reproduces the concerns of a number of countries and stimulate their fears that the nuclear arms race may be prolonged with new force some day undermining the international security which, at present, is not very solid at all. In its turn the hints made on the Russian side that Moscow may consider in some scenarios (deployment of the BMD in Europe, for instance) the withdrawal from the INF Treaty added to the fears of some states that the security, on the regional level especially (which is defined by the technical characteristics of the missiles limited by the INF Treaty) may be endangered. All this provided additional stimulus for states to consider more seriously the perspective of acquiring nuclear weapons or further developing their nuclear arsenals as a guarantor of their national security.

In the contemporary time there started to appear other new stimulus to “go nuclear”. Despite all declarations, decisions and resolutions of the international security institutions the countries of the world are feeling themselves not more, but less secure. One high-ranking Indian diplomat put it quite bluntly in the talk with the author that the principle cause of Indian acquiring nuclear weapons was that very “feeling of insecurity”. This feeling was deepened by the absence of the reliable security systems in most parts of the world – South-East Asia being among them.

The European security system is still based on the US “nuclear umbrella”. An even within the framework of the most elaborated security system, collectively supported by the most “civilized states” the bombing of Belgrade by NATO in 1999 could take place. This event taught many politicians and experts a lesson, and the most “democratic oriented” specialist in Russia had to note that if former Yugoslavia had at its disposal nuclear weapons nobody could dare to bomb her capital.

The negligence to sovereignty and to the rules of international law added a strong stimulus for “thinking nuclear”. Especially powerful negative stimulus for this type of thinking was provided by the US military operation against Iraq (as well as the “behavior” of the Bush administration at the international arena) which started from rude breaking the provisions of the UN Charter and the rules of international law. Such strive for unilateral actions served as a pretext for the appearance afterwards of the well-known passage by Vladimir Putin in his famous speech at the Munich conference that “nobody can feel himself being secure! Because nobody can hide behind the international law as a stone wall” ⁷.

⁷ President of Russia. Official website. Presentation and Discussion at the Munich conference the security policy issues. (Unofficial translation). Munich, February 10, 2007. (http://president.kremlin.ru/appears/2007/02/10/1737_type63376type63377type82634_118109.shtml).

This may be partially attributed to the case of the North Korea. This country already twice provoked the international community by its plans to have nuclear weapons. But both times (in the 90s and during the present crisis) there started to appear some signs of the agreement to curtail these plans only after the US began to show readiness to discuss on the bilateral basis the security guarantees translated in the legal agreement (meaning, first of all, the guarantees not to interfere militarily) to the North Korea. In the previous crisis in 1994 such guarantees were provided to Pyongyang by Washington.

The lack of cooperation, misunderstanding and/or what may be called the still existing “geopolitical competition” between such principal states as Russia and USA give hope and looks for the Iranian authorities as opening opportunities for acquiring the nuclear potential. This potential if even being peaceful at the beginning at some already not very distant point may be easily transferred into the military one. The deficit of will by Teheran to provide the information demanded by the IAEA to assure the international community in the peaceful character of the Iranian nuclear program looks like the attempt to introduce the methods of subtle oriental diplomacy playing on the differences in approaches of Russia and the Western states.

The tendencies to acquire nuclear weapons by some states, to develop the already existing nuclear arsenals by the others that are stimulated by the factors mentioned above go completely in the opposite direction to the arms control and seriously impede this process.

The extremely defective situation in the arms control touches all spheres of it and already has the self-propelling inertia. The problems are only aggravated by the bad condition of the non-nuclear sphere of arms limitations and reductions. The situation with the Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty is, perhaps, the most crucial. Moreover it influences the security of the whole continent. The impossibility to ratify the Treaty by the most states-participants symbolizes the inability of the Western countries to come to the agreement with Russia. In its turn Moscow has declared the moratorium on its participation in the Treaty which made the whole situation even worse.

At the same time the way some decisions towards the CFE were taken in the 90s clearly demonstrate that even in the non-nuclear sphere the agreement of only one, but principal participant – United States of America is enough for straightening the evolving problems of this agreement. Of course this is even more true for the nuclear strategic arms control.

The state of **US-Russian relations** still, as in the times of the Cold War, **mainly define the whole atmosphere in arms control**. The poor situation here is the true symbol of the bad state of cooperation between Moscow and Washington. The reason for this and hence the **cause of the crisis in arms control may be found in the crucial importance of the interrelated issues** – a number of bilateral and unilateral factors having a sizable negative effect on Russian-American relations.

To the factors of bilateral character it may be assigned: inertia of the Cold War thinking – preservation of the old stereotypes in the judgments about the activity of each other from the positions of “residual confrontation”; inertia of approaches and archaic strategic concepts, conditioned by the existence of the “military machine” of the Cold War (in the first place, of the strategic nuclear potentials), which ensured the confrontation between USA and USSR, the West and the East for the whole post-War period; the residual and the new elements of “ideologization” of the bilateral relations (which substituted the “ideological rivalry”), when any proposals and activity of one side are firstly invariably put under doubt and considered as challenging or putting under threat the interests of the other side; serious differences in the perceptions of the present and perspective principle threats and challenges.

In Russian understanding such negative factors are: initiatives and steps of the US and other Western countries which are considered by Moscow as aimed against Russian interests or undertaken despite the Russian objections (the NATO enlargement, NATO bombing of Belgrade in 1999); the US actions aimed at promoting and implementing the idea of the unipolar world, especially when ignoring the international law (the war in Iraq, in Russian view – providing of sovereignty to Kosovo in 2007); evaluating by the overwhelming part of the Russian expert political community and decision-makers of the US policy as aimed at the “geopolitical rivalry” with Russia and achieving superiority over it (the activity of Washington in the Central Asia and in the Caucasus); active modernization of the US strategic arsenal; the perspectives of the US BMD deployments in Europe; negative tendencies and the stagnation of the arms control process due to the position of the West (abrogation of the ABM Treaty, “pauses” in the nuclear arms control, opposition of the West to the ratification of the CFE Treaty). The most negative latest impact on our relations, in the understanding of Moscow, happened due to the US support of the Georgian authorities in the armed conflict in August 2008.

In the US perception the negative factors include: uncertainty in the long-term stability and in the non-alternative democratic development in Russia; unpreparedness of the part of the American political elite to look upon Russia as a power reinstating its influence in the international arena; perception of the Moscow activity in its close abroad as a revitalization of the neo-imperialistic policy; Russia’s modernization of its nuclear arsenal; a number of Russia’s steps in the international arena which were causing growing concern in Washington, among them – attempts to establish special relations with Iran and often occupying special stance opposing hardening of measures or new sanctions against Bagdad; resumption of the strategic bombers flights in the world air space, especially along the borders of the Western states; long-term cruises of the Russian Navy and its maneuvers near the American continent; active building of relations with Latin American countries and revitalization of contacts with the former Soviet clients there.

Hence lately we were witnessing as the prevailing tendency – the growth of anti-Americanism on the Russian side which in fact started to govern the foreign and defense policy. On the US side the anti-Russian moods also began to prevail. This whole situation that appeared in the political cycle that was finished in the end of 2008, created very serious obstacles for arms control process.

At present the “ball” is on the American side – the new president with a set of innovatory ideas came to power. Russia with all its anti-American moods within the ruling class will be responding slowly and suspiciously. These responses may start to be more productive if only Obama will succeed to personally convince Medvedev and Putin in the sincerity of his intentions. An even in this case the US side will need special patience and should be prepared to spent time and efforts to overcome the existing states of the minds in Moscow.

Additional “favorable factor” that have the potential to speed up positive developments in arms control is the economic financial crisis which lowers the level of national egoism, limits the national ambitions and have to make the leaders of the states to be more cooperative. In this situation the American and Russian presidents should feel more inclined not to allow the new costly fazes of the arms race to happen and have more incentives to go in for serious arms control.