

Russian Military Thinking and Threat Perception: A Finnish View

Dr. Stefan FORSS

The author is a Finnish physicist working as Senior Researcher at the Unit of Policy Planning and Research at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and as Adjunct Professor at the Department of Strategic and Defence Studies at the National Defence University in Helsinki.

The views expressed are his own.

Introduction

“The three main security challenges for Finland today are Russia, Russia and Russia. And not only for Finland, but for all of us.”¹ This quote is from a speech by Finnish Minister of Defence Jyri Häkämies in Washington in September 2007. His remarks were immediately strongly criticised as inappropriate and it was pointed out that his view didn’t represent the official position of the Finnish Government. Mr. Häkämies seemed, however, to gain in credibility a month later, when a senior Russian diplomat gave a strongly worded presentation about the security threats in the Baltic Sea area in a seminar organised by the Finnish National Defence University and later appeared several times on Finnish television.² The message sent was that Finnish membership in NATO would be perceived as a military threat to Russia. This peculiar episode caused cold shivers, as it reminded us of unpleasant experiences during the post-war period. The Russian military force build-up and the war in Georgia in August 2008 was the ultimate confirmation for all of Russia’s neighbours, that the Soviet-style mindset is not a thing of the past.

A brief historical note

The agreement, known as the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, between the Soviet Union and Germany, was signed in Moscow on 23 August 1939 by their respective Foreign Ministers. A secret additional protocol to the treaty defined their territorial spheres of interest in Europe.

The first part of the plan of these two great powers, at that time *de jure* allies, was completed a month later. Poland was militarily defeated and its territory was divided between Germany and the Soviet Union. The Soviet *Red Army*, which advanced into Poland “adhering to strict neutrality in

¹ Jyri Häkämies, *FINLAND: SIMILAR YET DIFFERENT - Finland’s Perspectives on European Security Issues*, CSIS Statesmen’s Forum Speech, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, D.C., 6 September 2007 (http://csis.org/files/media/csis/events/070906_statesmens_forum.pdf)

² Counsellor, Dr. Vladimir Kozin at a seminar organized by the Finnish National Defence University in Helsinki on 10-11 October, 2007. He praised Finnish-Russian relations during the Cold War and suggested a strategic partnership between Finland and Russia, and military cooperation, including joint military exercises. The Russian Embassy to Helsinki immediately distanced itself from Dr. Kozin’s views and announced that he would return promptly to Moscow. Dr. Kozin, however, seems to have acted on direct instructions from high-level conservative superiors in Moscow, and eventually left Finland, not immediately, but in normal order when his tenure came to an end. See also Keir Giles and Susanna Eskola, *Waking up the Neighbour – Finland, NATO and Russia*, Special Series 09/14, Research & Assessment Branch, Defence Academy of the United Kingdom, November 2009, p. 36. (<http://www.da.mod.uk/colleges/arag/document-listings/special/09%2814%29%20KGSE%20Web.pdf>).

the present conflict” and the German *Wehrmacht* celebrated the achievement together with a victory parade held in Brest-Litovsk.

For the countries in the Baltic Sea region these events were certain signs of a gathering storm, in fact an existential threat to several young nations that got their independence after the Great War. Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania chose not to resist the Soviet Union militarily with known consequences.

Finland behaved differently and decided not to yield to Soviet demands, including those for Finnish territory. At the same time, several leading Finnish politicians didn't grasp the seriousness of the situation and defied the mere thought of war as unthinkable, thus challenging the sober and realistic view held by Finland's towering military and political figure, Field Marshal Gustaf Mannerheim.

The Soviet military force build-up near the Finnish border went on all autumn, and finally, on 30 November the Red Army launched a concerted attack all along the Finnish-Soviet border, not only on the Karelian Isthmus, where the proximity of the Finnish border to Leningrad was projected as a threat to Soviet Union itself.

This war became known as the Winter War³ and for a few months Finland caught the world's attention. The Soviet Union was condemned almost universally for its blatant aggression and was speedily expelled from the League of Nations. Finland desperately needed help and assistance and France proved to be one of the most important contributors, providing political support, armaments and even made contingency planning for a potential military intervention.⁴

The easy military victory that Stalin envisioned was not there for him to take. The Finnish Army inflicted huge losses upon the Red Army, but three months later the Finnish Army was exhausted, worn out, without reserves and practically without ammunition. The Red Army, massively reinforced to about 1000 000 man strength was ready to deliver the final blow.

At that crucial point in March 1940, Stalin surprisingly decided to settle for peace, even if only for the time being. Why? The simple answer is that he was well aware of the plans for a French and British intervention on the Finnish side. Apparently he was not willing to take the risk of being dragged into a war on the German side against two major European powers. The solidarity with the Finnish cause expressed by France, and to some extent Britain, was sufficient. Actual execution of military contingency plans was not needed.⁵

This case relating to 1939 is interesting even today, in the context of the security policy debate in Europe, when claims of legitimate spheres of interest have been made and the essence of the EU declaration of solidarity is contemplated.

Russia's self-image and perception of security

In order to understand Russian perceptions of security one needs to take a closer look at the background and mindset of Russia's ruling elite. Prime Minister Vladimir Putin is the key person to consider. His relation to the last Soviet KGB chief, General Vladimir A. Kryuchkov is especially interesting. Kryuchkov, a pupil and successor to former KGB chief Yuri Andropov, was the mastermind behind the unsuccessful coup attempt in August 1991 which aimed at saving the Soviet

³ In Soviet military history the Russo-Finnish War of 1939-40 was for long regarded merely as a minor border clash.

⁴ It should be noted that the Swedish Volunteer Corps, consisting of more than 8000 men was the only significant foreign military force actually deployed on Finnish territory.

⁵ It is not a coincidence that two old French field artillery cannons from the time of the Winter War now occupy an honorary place at the entrance to the Finnish War Museum in Helsinki.

Union, but instead contributed significantly to its rapid and unexpected demise. He was subsequently convicted of treason and put in jail, but was released in 1994. Reuters reported the following after the death of Kryuchkov in November 2007:

“Russian media said the former general sometimes gave advice to President Vladimir Putin, who served as a Soviet spy in East Germany while Kryuchkov was head of the KGB. Kryuchkov praised Putin for restoring Russian influence and was a frequent guest at Kremlin spy galas under Putin, who brought back former security service officers to key positions in the Kremlin.”⁶

The coup plotters did not succeed in 1991, but they got their man to the top less than a decade later. Consequently, Russia’s self-image of today builds upon its Soviet past. “Never forget that our country, the Soviet Union, made the decisive contribution to the outcome of World War II – that it was precisely our people who destroyed Nazism and determined the fate of the world”, President Medvedev said in Moscow at the Victory Day celebrations in May 2009. The parade itself, with impressively rehearsed troops, Soviet flags, tanks and now also mobile strategic nuclear missiles, continues the tradition of the Soviet Union.

The western perception of security is largely focussed on cooperation, shared values, responsibilities and mutual respect among nations. Respect, in the positive sense of the word, is not imposed but something that must be earned and is granted on a voluntary basis. The European integration process, the existence of institutions like the European Union and NATO, is a result of the free will of peoples. War between member states has become all but impossible and many new members see these institutions as providing solidarity and a guarantee that they will never be abandoned again.

The ruling conservative elite in Russia, however, sees things rather differently. As a former military superpower, still with the capability to destroy the rest of the world several times over, respect is what makes a country great. For them, respect means ability to invoke fear. The American Russia-expert Strobe Talbott, presently President of the Brookings Institution in Washington, outlined Russian security thinking as follows in August 2008, just after open hostilities in Georgia had ended:

“The more authoritarian – not to mention totalitarian – Russia is, the more it tends to assert itself in an intimidating or aggressive fashion outside of its borders. Another point has always been, ... , that Russia has tended to define its security – and the Russian word [безопасность], ... literally means “absence of danger” – in a zero-sum way. It has tended to feel absolutely secure only when everybody else, particularly those around its borders, feel absolutely insecure.”⁷

This mindset has produced some paradoxical results. NATO forces in Europe have been reduced to only a fraction of the manpower and equipment levels at the break-up of the Soviet Union, reflecting a dramatically diminished threat after the end of the Cold War. This has not been very much appreciated in Russia but has instead created uneasiness among the Russian military. The Western behaviour has been interpreted as evidence of disrespect and indifference with regard to the capability of the Russian armed forces, i.e. as outright lack of fear. The fear-factor needed to be addressed. Several means were chosen. Ballistic missile tests were given high profile visibility in media and Russian strategic bombers were sent on long-distance patrols to the vicinity of U.S. and

⁶ Reuters, *USSR’s hawkish KGB chief Kryuchkov dies at 83*, November 25, 2007.

(<http://www.reuters.com/article/newsMaps/idUSL2521028720071125>)

⁷ The Brookings Institution, *The War in Georgia – Assessing the Aftermath*, pp. 41-42.

(http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Files/events/2008/0814_georgia/20080814_georgia.pdf)

NATO airspace, beginning in 2007 and still going on, perhaps even showing capability to intrude into “enemy” airspace.⁸

This Russian show of force has mostly been dismissed as nostalgic posturing. Without the massive air support that Russia lacks at present, these bombers could not possibly operate in such a way in wartime conditions. That may be true as far as the United States is concerned, but it is gravely misleading in a European perspective. The operational range of Russia’s long-range strategic cruise missiles like Kh-55/RKV-500 (AS-15 Kent) is sufficient to cover all of Europe even if these weapons were launched safely from within Russia’s own territory.

What Russia demands is well known: respect for the Russian nation, its values and its history, recognition of Russia’s legitimate sphere of interest in the post-Soviet space and of its right to defend its citizens even outside Russia’s borders. “Our neighbours are close to us in many respects, and are a traditional area of interest for the Russian nation,” President Medvedev said in September 2008. “We are so close to each other, it would be impossible to tear us apart, to say Russia has to embark on one path, and our neighbours on another.”⁹

Words like these are for obvious reasons not very well received in the former Soviet space. In an open letter to U.S. President Barack Obama, a large number of prominent former Statesmen and politicians from Central and Eastern Europe stated their opinion about Russia in July 2009 as follows:¹⁰

“Our hopes that relations with Russia would improve and that Moscow would finally fully accept our complete sovereignty and independence after joining NATO and the EU have not been fulfilled. Instead, Russia is back as a revisionist power pursuing a 19th-century agenda with 21st-century tactics and methods. At a global level, Russia has become, on most issues, a status-quo power. But at a regional level and vis-a-vis our nations, it increasingly acts as a revisionist one. It challenges our claims to our own historical experiences. It asserts a privileged position in determining our security choices. It uses overt and covert means of economic warfare, ranging from energy blockades and politically motivated investments to bribery and media manipulation in order to advance its interests and to challenge the transatlantic orientation of Central and Eastern Europe.”

“In Russia, history itself is much too important to be left to historians”, Owen Matthews wrote in Newsweek Magazine in July 2009.¹¹ “The Kremlin is very deliberately staking out an official view of history that is not far from the old Soviet myths. [...] Both Putin and Medvedev seek to create a new, great Russia, and to that end, they believe it needs a great history, unsullied with mass murder and secret alliances with Hitler”, he went on to write. Questioning the official interpretation of

⁸ Aberdeen Press & Journal, *Russian aircraft fly over Aberdeen as diplomatic row carries on*, Aberdeen Press & Journal, 21 July 2007. “Two Russian bombers flew over Aberdeen early yesterday morning The pair of Tupolev Tu-95 planes moved out of British airspace after being intercepted by Tornados scrambled from RAF Leeming in Yorkshire in England. Later, two Tu-160 heavy bombers flew close to the fringes of British airspace. ... A spokesman for the Ministry of Defence ... said: “Tornados from RAF Leeming were launched to intercept two Tu-95 Russian Bear aircraft that entered our airspace about 2am. The Russian aircraft were positively identified by our aircraft. They then turned north and left our airspace and our aircraft returned to base. I don't know where they turned around.”

⁹ Slawomir Debski, *The paradox of an unattractive Russia*, International Herald Tribune, October 30, 2008.

(<http://www.iht.com/articles/2008/10/30/opinion/eddebski.php>)

¹⁰ Valdas Adamkus, Martin Butora, Emil Constantinescu, Pavol Demes, Lubos Dobrovsky, Matyas Eorsi, Istvan Gyarmati, Vaclav Havel, Rastislav Kacer, Sandra Kalniete, Karel Schwarzenberg, Michal Kovac, Ivan Krastev, Alexander Kwasniewski, Mart Laar, Kadri Liik, Janos Martonyi. Janusz Onyszkiewicz, Adam Rotfeld, Vaira Vike-Freiberga, Alexandr Vondra, Lech Walesa, *An Open Letter to the Obama Administration from Central and Eastern Europe*, Gazeta Woborzca, 15 July 2009.

(http://wyborcza.pl/1,75477,6825987,An_Open_Letter_to_the_Obama_Administration_from_Central.html)

¹¹ Owen Matthews, *HISTORY WARS - The Kremlin is trying to promote national myths—at the expense of the truth*, Newsweek Web Exclusive, July 6, 2009, (<http://www.newsweek.com/id/205373>) Matthews’ Russian grandfather perished in Stalin’s purges in 1937.

modern history has now been made a criminal offense in Russia, and those who dare do that may not go unpunished. The Professor of history Mikhail Suprun, at Pomor State University in Arkhangelsk, is the latest victim.¹² World War II in the Russian version is essentially the Great Patriotic War which took place in 1941-1945, the years engraved in each war memorial from the Soviet era.

Russian professional historians have, however, been able to publish more unbiased accounts of World War II already in 1989. A new massive two-volume work, "History of Russia – XX Century," written by 45 historians under the leadership of Professor Andrei Zubov was published in 2009 and is hailed as a landmark achievement inside and outside Russia.¹³

Russia's security policy agenda

Russia's misgivings concerning its role as recognised global player, and its perception of security and military threats, has dealt with three issues: NATO enlargement, the U.S. plans to deploy missile defence systems in Europe, and the problems regarding the CFE Treaty.

The broad official Finnish view, spelled out in the security and defence policy White Paper reads: "Russia is seeking to restore its great-power status and considers it very important to alter the decisions of the 1990s, which it deems as unfavourable to Russia."¹⁴

Russia aims for a comprehensive re-evaluation of treaties and organisational structures in Europe. After the war in Georgia, Russia began lobbying for a new security order in Europe. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov wanted Finland to be active in this regard. In an interview for the leading Finnish daily, Helsingin Sanomat, he pointed out that a militarily non-aligned and "neutral" nation could make useful contributions.¹⁵ Finnish Minister for Foreign Affairs Alexander Stubb replied promptly that Finland is not a neutral country.¹⁶ Back in the early 1970's, the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) was, however, a very important issue on the Finnish security policy agenda and the Helsinki Final Act of 1975 eventually came out of this process.

On his official visit to Finland in April 2009, President Medvedev returned to the need for a new security architecture for Europe, a "Helsinki Plus" type treaty. The interest in the West in this idea has been lukewarm at best, but more often it has been regarded as a step back, essentially meaning "Helsinki Minus". One observer notes that "President Dmitry Medvedev's proposal ... is largely

¹² Barents Observer, *Barents professor detained by FSB*, 2 October 2009, (<http://www.barentsobserver.com/barents-professor-detained-by-fsb.4639135.html>)

¹³ Relating to accounts made twenty years ago, Professors Mikhail Semiryaga and Dmitri Volkogonov come to mind. For an account of the new work, see Sophia Kishkovsky, *A History of 20th-Century Russia, Warts and All*, The New York Times, November 25, 2009 (http://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/25/arts/25iht-russia.html?_r=1&ref=world)

¹⁴ Prime Minister's Office, *Finnish Security and Defence Policy 2009 – Government Report*, Prime Minister's Office Publications, 13/2009 (5 February 2009), pp. 40-41 (<http://www.vnk.fi/julkaisukansio/2009/j11-turvallisuus-j12-sakerhets-j13-finnish/pdf/en.pdf>)

¹⁵ Susanna Niinivaara, *Russia: Neutral Finland could promote new security treaty*, Helsingin Sanomat, 9 November 2008 (<http://www.hs.fi/english/article/Russia+Neutral+Finland+could+promote+new+security+treaty/1135241003210>) Lavrov particularly raised the fact that Finland is not militarily aligned. "The answer is obvious: by serving as an expert, making constructive proposals on the implementation of treaties. The help of a country like Finland, a respected European and neutral country, in starting the international discussion could be important for the necessary and creative work."

¹⁶ *Stubb to Lavrov: Finland is not neutral*, Helsingin Sanomat, 10 October 2008 (<http://www.hs.fi/english/article/Stubb+to+Lavrov+%E2%80%9CFinland+is+not+neutral%E2%80%9D/113524096493>) Neutrality was the declared Finnish policy, supported by Western states in the post-war period when Finland was solidly in the Soviet sphere of influence. The Soviet Union, however, did not acknowledge Finnish neutrality but for a brief period when Nikita Khrushchev was Secretary General in the Soviet Union, and once again in 1989 during Mikhail Gorbachev's rule. As a member state in the European Union, Finland of course is not longer neutral.

devoid of substance, and reiterates principles already enshrined in the Helsinki Final Act and the UN Charter. Moscow strongly opposes a Euro-Atlantic security environment dominated by NATO and the US. But it has done little thinking about what might emerge in its place. [...] It is important that Europe resists attempts to minimise NATO and undermine the OSCE.”¹⁷

It is NATO’s political, not military dimension that is the main obstacle for Russia to pursue and achieve her political aspirations in Europe. "That is your half [of Europe] and this is ours. And the problem is that yours is getting bigger", a Russian deputy foreign minister told U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Ronald Asmus already in 1999.¹⁸

Russia would rather see NATO gone altogether, but for Europe that would have grave repercussions. One leading Swedish security policy analyst, Dr. Robert Dalsjö wrote already in 2003: “If NATO was now to wither away, Europe could become a much more dangerous and insecure place than most people could imagine. Safeguards against a re-nationalisation of the security pattern would be removed. Old rivalry of power could return in a new form. This would be nothing less than an earthquake in European security policy.”¹⁹ “We find ways to work around the new member-states and deal with the big countries directly”, boasted one of Medvedev’s advisors in London in late 2008.²⁰ Russia’s big European partners should, however, understand that they bear the responsibility for the security risks involved.

Russia’s military threat assessment

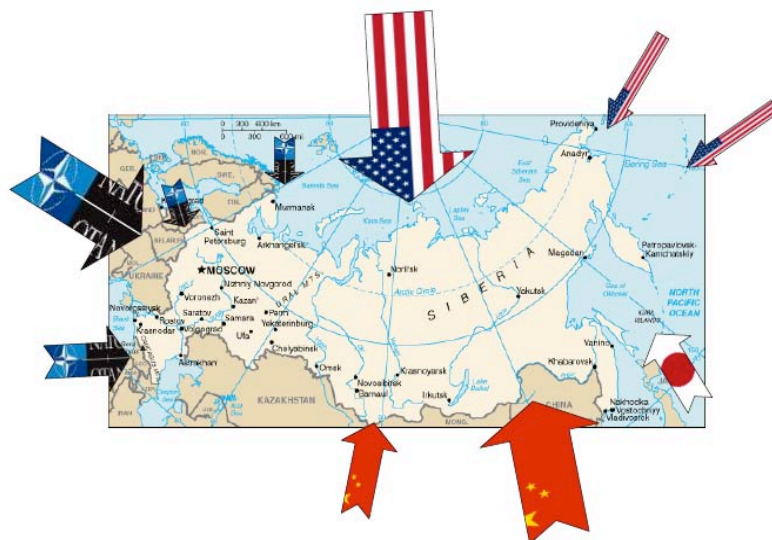


Figure 1. Russia’s military threat perception

The Russian military threat perception, formulated mainly by the military intelligence GRU²¹, is that the Russian homeland is encircled by adversaries. This general strategic threat assessment is

¹⁷ Bobo Lo, *Medvedev and the new European security charter*, Centre for European Reform Policy Brief, July 2009, (http://www.cer.org.uk/pdf/pbrief_medvedev_july09.pdf)

¹⁸ Ronald D. Asmus, *Russia’s ‘sphere’ in Europe*, The Washington Post, December 26, 2009 (<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/12/25/AR2009122501286.html>)

¹⁹ Robert Dalsjö och Stefan Forss, *En säkerhetspolitisk jordbävning*, The Royal Swedish Academy of War Sciences Journal, 6/2003 (http://www.kkrva.se/Artiklar/036/kkrvaht_6_2003_11.pdf). The article was published as op-ed articles in Helsingin Sanomat and Hufvudstadsbladet on 6 December 2003, Finland’s Day of Independence.

²⁰ Tomas Valasek, *NATO, Russia and European security*, Centre for European Reform Working Paper, November 2009, pp. 10-11 (http://www.cer.org.uk/pdf/wp_929_nato_nov09.pdf)

²¹ This was distinctly pointed out by researchers of the Swedish Defence Research Establishment FOI during informal discussions in Spring 2004.

rather traditional. The mighty Soviet Union could match the single other superpower, the USA, militarily but in the chaos after the demise of the Soviet Union the correlation of forces tilted heavily to Russia's disadvantage. One assessment made in 2006, which included references to the possibility of a new attack on Russia, similar to the German attack in 1941, was the following:

"Before 2004, when new countries were admitted into NATO, the Alliance had 41 divisions and 86 brigades in permanent combat readiness in the Western direction. Russia had only 4 divisions and 5 brigades there. In the Far East, the United States and Japan have a total of 15 divisions against zero Russian divisions. In the Trans-Baikal Military District, we have one division facing 109 Chinese ones."²² NATO enlargement evidently has made the Russian situation even worse.

Assessments like the one above disregard the fact that the prime task of NATO's European forces is no longer territorial defence, but rather crisis management operations. NATO's standing forces have been reduced by one third to approximately two million men and the trained reserve has withered from seven to one million men.²³

If sheer manpower is no longer a threat to Russia, western military technological developments are perceived to be. Lieutenant General Sergey Skokov, Chief-of-Staff of the Ground Forces recently stated that the USA, including NATO, strive for supremacy "through strategic nuclear forces, the development of high-precision, informational, and other technological means for the conducting of armed conflict, and the development of strategic missiles equipped with non-nuclear warheads, as well as through formation, unilaterally, of a global missile defence system and the militarization of near-earth space".²⁴

The additional two main threats that General Skokov mentions are "the Wahhabites of the North Caucasus, and the People's Liberation Army of China. The most direct threat is that of "guerilla warfare" and the threat from China is the most remote." Officially, relations between Russia and China are better than ever, but in the long-term perspective Russia may have cause for concern.

The People's Liberation Army held a large-scale military exercise, Stride-2009 in August 2009, including altogether four divisions with 50 000 troops from four different commands. This was the "largest ever tactical exercise" and its aim was to test the PLA's long-distance mobility.²⁵

General Skokov's assessment was "that those were not tactical exercises, which are necessary for the maintenance of a state of everyday combat-readiness. They were maneuvers on a strategic scale. [...] Thus, operations that were practiced in the Stride-2009 training exercises were not defensive operations but offensive operations." After ruling out all other possibilities than Russia as the real motive for the exercise, General Skokov formulated the rhetorical question: "But against whom?"²⁶

²² Podvedoved, *Security – if a war comes*, Defense & Security, No. 27, March 15, 2006 (<http://dlib.eastview.com/browse/doc/9167510>) "Before 2004, when new countries were admitted into NATO, the Alliance had 41 division and 86 brigades of permanent combat readiness in the Western direction. Russia had only 4 divisions and 5 brigades there. In the Far East, the United States and Japan have a total of 15 divisions against zero Russian divisions. In the Trans-Baikal Military District, we have one division facing 109 Chinese ones."

²³ The figures can be calculated from the data reported in the 1991/1992 and 2009 editions of IISS - The Military Balance, respectively.

²⁴ Nikolay Khorunziy, Interview with Lieutenant General Sergey Skokov on three main threats to Russia, Stoletiy.ru, November 5, 2009.

²⁵ China.org.cn, *Stride-2009 military exercise*, CCTV, August 14, 2009 (http://www.china.org.cn/video/2009-08/14/content_18337543.htm); B. Raman, *Stride--2009- China's Largest Ever Long-Range Military Exercise*, South Asia Analysis Group, Paper 3354, 13 August 2009. (<http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/%5Cpapers34%5Cpaper3354.html>)

²⁶ Nikolay Khorunziy, Interview with Lieutenant General Sergey Skokov on three main threats to Russia, Stoletiy.ru, November 5, 2009.

How is Russia to cope with China, which has a population ten times as big as Russia's, a booming economy and Armed Forces that are being aggressively modernised while Russia's economy falters? The standard answer offered by Russian military experts is reliance on nuclear weapons, especially tactical nuclear weapons.²⁷ New wordings related to the nuclear doctrine are expected in the Russia's forthcoming military doctrine. "Possession of nuclear weapons allows Russia to restructure its armed forces", Colonel Viktor Baranets, the military commentator of Komsomolskaya Pravda, noted in November 2009.²⁸

NATO enlargement and CFE

The mindset of NATO as a hostile and overwhelmingly powerful military bloc, ready for invasion has been nurtured for long in Russia. "The appearance of a powerful military bloc along our borders would be taken in Russia as a direct threat to the security of my country," Russia's Prime Minister Vladimir Putin told a press conference after the NATO Summit in Bucharest in April 2008, four months before the war in Georgia. "I heard them saying today [4 April 2008] that the expansion is not directed against Russia. But it's the potential, not intentions that matters," Putin said.²⁹

The new Russian security strategy published in May 2009 notes that "the existing global and regional architecture" and "the North Atlantic Treaty Organization are increasingly ... a threat to international security. [...] the determining factor in relations with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization will be unacceptable for Russia, [if] plans [for] moving Alliance military infrastructure to its borders and [if] attempts to make [Alliance] responsibilities global, inconsistent with international law", are being realized.³⁰

Russia does not fear its European neighbours, most of which are small in comparison with Russia herself, but this is not the point. The same mindset as in the Finnish case in 1939 seems still to prevail. The Soviet Union was then especially concerned for the security of Leningrad. The construction work in the 1930's on the Finnish defensive line, later called the *Mannerheim line*, across the Karelian Isthmus was interpreted as offensive. The Russian threat perception was that the small Finnish army would take and hold its positions there in a crisis, until big Western powers deploy *en masse* and use this as an attack route against Leningrad and the Soviet Union.

The Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE)³¹, originally negotiated between the member states of NATO and the Warsaw Treaty Organisation, entered into force in July 1992. By then, the USSR and the Warsaw Pact had been dissolved, which changed the whole context dramatically. Amendments to the treaty made in 1996 relaxed the so-called flank rules, and thus benefited Russia and Ukraine.

An adapted version of the CFE treaty was signed during the Istanbul summit in November 1999 and took into account the different geopolitical situation of the post-Cold War era by setting national instead of bloc-based limits on conventional armed forces.

²⁷ Cf. the RIA Novosti interview with former Deputy Minister of Defence, GRU colonel (retd.) Vitaly Shlykov, head of the Security Policy Commission of the Defense Ministry's Public Council. (http://en.rian.ru/valdai_op/20090914/156124823.html)

²⁸ RIA Novosti, *Col. Baranets: Russia has right to use nuclear weapons as it deems necessary*, RIA Novosti, Opinion & Analysis, November 24, 2009 (<http://en.rian.ru/analysis/20091124/156973187.html>)

²⁹ *Putin says NATO enlargement is "direct threat" to Russia*, China View (Xinhua), 4 April, 2008 (http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-04/04/content_7920815.htm)

³⁰ *Strategia natsyonalnoy bezopasnosti Rossiyskoi federatsii do 2020 goda*, The Security Council of the Russian federation, May 12, 2009. (<http://www.scrf.gov.ru/documents/99.html>)

³¹ Wikipedia, *Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE)* (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/CFE_treaty , last modified 28 October 2009)

NATO members were unwilling to ratify the treaty as long as Russia refused to completely withdraw its troops from Moldovan and Georgian soil. Russia has demanded compensation for NATO's enlargement, such as removal of the flank rule ceilings affecting the North Caucasian and Leningrad Military Districts.

President Putin explained the Russian position on CFE in June 2007: "We have not just stated that we are ready to comply with the treaty, like certain others have done. We really are implementing it: **we have removed all of our heavy weapons from the European part of Russia and put them behind the Urals.**" (emphasis added).³² Moving excess equipment outside the area of treaty implementation may not be a direct violation of the letter of the treaty, but it hardly complies with its spirit.

When NATO didn't yield to the Russian demands, President Putin issued a decree on 14 July 2007 on Russia's intention to suspend the observation of the Treaty obligations, taking effect 150 days later, i.e. on 12 December 2007. In the absence of inspections and notifications of troop movements Russia was able to perform a major force build-up to the North Caucasian Military District in the early summer of 2008, in violation of the flank rules, and eventually go to war against Georgia. The establishment of several military bases in South Ossetia and Abkhazia also is a violation of the EU-Russia accords agreed upon after the war.

The future of the CFE Treaty is therefore in question. Russia may be right that the whole framework of the CFE needs to be reevaluated. NATO member states for their part would have good reason to broaden the agenda also to include non-strategic nuclear weapons.³³ Russia enjoys an overwhelming superiority in this category, which seems to be increasing as the corresponding U.S. weapons may be pulled out of Europe.

Ballistic missile defence

Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) has been a very high-profile political issue in the relations between Russia and the United States for decades. Unfortunately, BMD perceptions have lived an imaginary life of their own and the issue eventually became highly distorted. Too little attention has been attached to scientific-technical, military-operational and economical perspectives of the issue. These are, however, necessary prerequisites for understanding and evaluating the possible merits, shortcomings and implications of BMD.

Missile defence became a natural part of the strategic arms limitation process when the United States and the Soviet Union signed the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABM Treaty) in 1972, which limited the number of strategic defensive missiles to 100 missiles and to one site each, in an amendment of the treaty in 1974. The sites were Moscow for the USSR and Grand Forks Air Force Base in North Dakota.

The main rationale for the ABM treaty was the need to limit the strategic arms race. An unrestrained development of strategic defensive systems was seen as only accelerating the development and introduction of more powerful strategic offensive arms.

³² President of Russia, Interview with Newspaper Journalists from G8 Member Countries, June 4, 2007 (http://www.kremlin.ru/eng/text/speeches/2007/06/04/2149_type82916_132772.shtml)

³³ Miles A. Pomper, William Potter, and Nikolai Sokov, *Reducing and Regulating Tactical (Nonstrategic) Nuclear Weapons in Europe*, The James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies, Monterey Institute of International Studies, December 2009

To understand the real military role and capability of ballistic missile defence one can use an analogy between offensive airpower and air-defence. From the Great War onwards, air-defence has played a second, and in fact, reactive role and has never succeeded to keep up with developments in aircraft technology. There are very few examples in history when air-defence alone has succeeded to thwart massive airstrikes.³⁴

The efficiency of ballistic missile defence systems has, in fact, been very limited and continues to be so if offensive and defensive systems of the same technological sophistication are compared with each other.

The Russian and American ballistic missile defence missiles of the 1970's were using powerful nuclear warheads to compensate for deficient accuracy. It was not known when these systems were developed, that the explosion of even one such powerful nuclear charge in the upper atmosphere ionized the air molecules and created plasma that effectively blinded the fire control radar. The radar waves simply could not penetrate the plasma and give further information on attacking missiles. The capability of this nuclear ballistic missile defence system was effectively reduced to a useless single shot system. Only the first incoming ballistic missile could be engaged. The USA soon abandoned its own system, but the Soviet Union kept its own, which still is operational around Moscow.

The practical value of the ABM Treaty can be questioned from technical and military operational perspectives, but its political value remained strong especially in Soviet and later Russian arms-control policy. The protests heard from Moscow in 1983 were very strong, after the U.S. President launched his famous Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI). The scientific-technical community all over the world, including the Soviet Union, recognised immediately that SDI was a utopian project, not anchored in the real world. SDI soon got the nickname Star Wars, referring to the well-known fantasy movies.

SDI, however, set the stage for ambitious R&D in the field of non-nuclear ballistic missile technology. The general perception was that President Reagan was willing to throw unlimited amounts of money into this project. Soviet leaders understood that there was no way for them to match this American effort, and they became extremely suspicious and apprehensive. The U.S. spending on BMD was not actually that big, just one percent of the U.S. defence budget. When spending on such a scale continues for decades, results are to be expected even if the level of ambition is significantly lowered.

The Soviet response to SDI was to immediately launch countermeasure projects, aiming at nullifying the efficiency of any future U.S. missile defence. The cost is estimated to be but a small fraction of the cost of BMD systems themselves. The improvements could include hardening of missiles against laser radiation, development of more sophisticated warhead decoy systems and introduction of a new ICBM, Topol-M (a.k.a. SS-27 Stalin), which has higher acceleration in the vulnerable ascent phase and may also fly in depressed trajectories.³⁵ The missile has been tested with a maneuverable warhead.³⁶ The unpredictable flight trajectory makes defence against it

³⁴ Aake Pesonen, *Tuli-isku ja taivaalle*, Kirjayhtymä, Helsinki 1983, p. 162 (in Finnish). The massive Soviet air raids against Helsinki on three nights in February 1944 are one such exception. Because of the intense Finnish anti-aircraft barrage fired accurately and closely in front of the attacking Soviet strategic bomber formations, those were forced to change their attack direction and eventually dropped 95 percent of their bomb loads into the sea. The Finnish capital suffered only moderate damage, much to the surprise of the Russians who thought that the city had been essentially wiped out.

³⁵ Wikipedia, *RT-2UTTH Topol-M* (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/RT-2UTTH_Topol_M#cite_note-27)

³⁶ Pavel Podvig, *Putin's miracle weapon revisited*, February 7, 2005.

(http://russianforces.org/blog/2005/02/putins_miracle_weapon_revisite.shtml). There is reason for caution concerning maneuverable re-entry vehicles. The stress and thermal load on re-entry is extreme and the test made on February 18, 2004 is reported to have ended in failure. The re-entry vehicle burned up.

extremely difficult. Altogether, Topol-M is a very potent strategic missile although its performance characteristics may have been somewhat inflated. More than two decades after Reagan's initiative Russian military and political leaders were able to state proudly that this missile and other new and upgraded land and sea-launched missiles have the capability to penetrate any missile defence system in the world.³⁷

It is important to note that ballistic missile defence has for long enjoyed bipartisan support in the United States and that development work has gone forward regardless of who has resided in the White House. The difference in opinion between Republicans and Democrats is not that big. Democrats tend to favour deployment of only technically mature systems, while President George W. Bush's administration gave more emphasis to the political will and determination to actually claim an initial operational capability, in fact on a rather dubious technical basis. Present U.S. missile defence system programs are, however, not aimed at defeating state-of-the-art Russian ballistic missiles, but rather unsophisticated missiles, comparable to U.S. and Soviet missile technology of the late 1950's and 1960's. Such missiles are found in North Korea and Iran.

President George W. Bush announced in December 2001 that the USA intends to withdraw from the ABM Treaty. The decision came into effect six months later. Russia, for its part, announced immediately that she was no longer bound by the provisions of the unratified START II Treaty, which particularly prohibited multiple warheads on land-based ICBM's.

The first new generation of U.S. ground-based interceptor missiles were deployed at the Ft. Greely Army Base in Alaska, beginning in July 2004, and at Vandenberg Air Force Base in California late the same year. Discussions with Poland and other potential European partners regarding a possible third site in Europe began in 2002. This plan to counter a future threat from Iranian ballistic missiles met with very strong opposition in Russia and set the political stage for many years to come.

Russia was from the very beginning convinced that a ballistic missile defence site in Poland, with its tracking radar to be located in the Czech Republic, were not aimed at Iran but at Russia herself. From the Russian side it was pointed out that a mere look at the map is proof enough. And indeed, a look at a flat map would suggest that the straight path from Iran to the USA passes over southern Italy and Spain, and over the Atlantic to the U.S. east coast.³⁸

This impression is false, however. The earth is not flat, but a globe. A ballistic missile cannot fly such a route without violating basic physical laws (Newton's laws). If one, on the other hand, pulls a string on a globe from Iran towards the USA one immediately finds out that Poland and the Czech Republic are in the right place, below the potential missile trajectory.

³⁷ For a recent statement, see Nikolay Khorunziy, Interview with Lieutenant General Sergey Skokov on three main threats to Russia, Stoletiyе.ru, November 5, 2009. General Skokov: "For example, there has been a lot of discussion about the fact that Russia will have new RS-24 missiles, with individually targetable reentry vehicles, by the end of 2009 and that our new submarines will be equipped with Bulava missiles in 2010. The number of such missiles and when they will be deployed is not so important. It is most important that there be a capability for the countering of threats. The Americans have been frightening the world with their "star wars" projects for decades but they simply have not developed a reliable shield against Russian missiles." See also USATODAY, *General says Russiawill counter U.S. missile defense plans*, May 25, 2008 (http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/2008-05-27-us-russia_N.htm)

³⁸ Vladimir Belous, *Outside View: The missile-defense flap*, UPI, Moscow, April 11, 2007 (accessed at <http://www.accessmylibrary.com/article-1G1-161861095/outside-view-missile-defense.html>) Major-General, Doctor of Technology, Vladimir Belous: "The second reason is that a look at a map or a globe will show you beyond a shadow of a doubt that ballistic missiles on their way from Iran ... to the United States do not need to cross Poland or the Czech Republic. ... Iranian missiles would find it more convenient to travel to the Western Hemisphere via Turkey, Greece, Italy and Spain. When you realize this, it becomes clear that U.S. anti-missiles in Poland are meant to intercept Russian, rather than Iranian, missiles, because one of their possible trajectories to the United States would go over and across Europe."

The second Russian concern dealt with the uncertainty of what kind of missiles would indeed be deployed in the planned ten silos in Poland. Without powerful inspection rights Russia could not rule out the possibility that offensive medium range ballistic missiles could be deployed instead of ground-based interceptors. The experience of the medium-range accurate Pershing II missiles from the 1980's, that scared the Soviet leadership, thus came back to haunt the most suspicious.³⁹ It seems that the advice given to the Russian leaders dismissed the nature of decision-making in the United States Congress as well as the public control mechanisms in the USA.

The third argument has been that missile defence systems in Poland would undermine Russia's strategic deterrence posture. The number of interceptors envisioned (10 missiles) are thought to be able to destroy about three unsophisticated ballistic missiles. Even if the Polish site was enlarged several times over, that would not matter.

When the Russian side reluctantly began to admit that Russia's strategic deterrence posture was not threatened in the foreseeable future, the argument was focused on the European Missile Radar (EMR), a high resolution tracking X-band radar, albeit of rather limited range, that was planned to be stationed in the Czech Republic. A panel of American and Russian technical experts concluded: "The main Russian concern is the EMR. The Czech Republic is a convenient place from which to gain a better view of Russian ICBMs and to defend the east coast of the United States. The Russians see enormous potential for upgrading the power of the EMR, giving the U.S. global missile defense system a broad capability to track ICBMs launched from the European part of Russia, providing information not only for the missile interceptors based in Poland but for those based in Alaska too. Deployment of the EMR will, in the Russian view, create over the territory of the United States a "missile defense umbrella" against a potential Russian ICBM attack."⁴⁰

The EastWest Institute's assessments draw heavily on results obtained by Professor Theodore Postol at Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He is a prominent scientist who has argued in the same manner as the Russians, namely that an X-band radar in the Czech Republic would be very well suited for collecting sensitive data from Russian missile tests. As arguments he uses slides showing Russian missile trajectories, the missiles being launched from missile bases at Vypolzovo, Tatishevo and Dombarovskiy towards Washington, D.C. Some of the missiles could at least in theory be intercepted over Finland.⁴¹

It is important to point out, that the trajectories are deliberately chosen in such a way as to prove the point that Russian missiles would be in danger. As an illustration of operational targeting, this represents but a very limited case. The bulk of the Russian strategic missiles would be assumed to fly along more northern trajectories towards other targets, outside the reach of the U.S. interceptor missiles.

Even the simplified set-up used contains several fundamental flaws. Firstly, the impression is given that the military setting discussed is valid at present and also in the future. No missile defence is, however, deployed in Europe now and therefore the risk to Russia's strategic deterrence is for the

³⁹ Dr Vladimir Kozin made a direct reference to the Pershing-2 issue at the seminar in Helsinki in October 2007. President Putin compared the U.S. plans with the situation in Cuba in 1962, when Soviet medium-range missiles were perceived to be a deadly threat to the USA. See RIA Novosti, *Putin compares U.S. missile defense plans with 1962 Cuban crisis*, 26.10.2007 (<http://en.rian.ru/russia/20071026/85635882.html>). This particular Russian mindset was revealed also to Israel, when the Russians had asked the Israeli missile engineer Uzi Rubin when Israel intends to fit nuclear charges to their Arrow interceptor missiles. Uzi Rubin, private communication, Helsinki, 11-12 December 2009.

⁴⁰ EastWest Institute, *Iran's Nuclear and Missile Potential – A Joint Threat Assessment by U.S. and Russian Technical Experts, May 2009*, p. 15 (<http://docs.ewi.info/JTA.pdf>)

⁴¹ Theodore A. Postol, *The Proposed US Missile Defense in Europe: Technological Issues Relevant to Policy*, American Association for the Advancement of Science, Washington, D.C., August 28, 2007 . (http://russianforces.org/files/BriefOnEastEuropeMissileDefenseProposal_August24,2007_FinalReduced.pdf)

time being nil. Secondly, if the plans of the former U.S. government would have been implemented and the GBI's in Poland and the EMR in the Czech Republic had achieved anything reminiscent of credible combat capability, then the SS-25 Topol missiles in Vypolzovo as well as the remaining SS-19's in Tatishchevo would be gone.

The Soviet-built strategic missiles have been phased out successively for many years now. The Commander of the Strategic Rocket Forces, Colonel-General Andrei Shvaichenko said in December 2009, that by 2016 the old missiles with extended service lives will constitute just 20 percent of the strategic missile force.⁴² The remaining missiles will be retired, the last heavy SS-18 Mod2 (R-36M2 Voyevoda) missiles will be withdrawn from combat duty in 2019.⁴³

The most important flaw is, however, that the Postol pictures don't represent normal Russian peacetime testing behaviour, but rather wartime combat situations. Peacetime tests are often performed from the Russian space base at Plesetsk a few hundred kilometres south of Arkhangelsk, or from other missile proving grounds such as Kapustin Yar or Baikonur, both far away.⁴⁴ The distance from the planned radar site in the Czech Republic to Plesetsk is 2 000 kilometres. The missiles launched from Plesetsk fly east, over uninhabited ground, toward the target area in Kura on the Kamchatka Peninsula, practically in the opposite direction from the proposed EMR site. Because of the curvature of the earth, the EMR radar would not be able to see anything, since the missiles' flight trajectories remain below the radar horizon.

Russia's opposition to the U.S. plans was so strong, that she on several occasions threatened to implement military countermeasures.⁴⁵ Deployment of the new nuclear capable theatre missile system Iskander in Kaliningrad was mentioned repeatedly. The Bush Administration signed agreements related to the missile defence infrastructure with both the Czech Republic and Poland in July and August 2008. By then the issue had become much more than merely an issue of missile defence. For the political leaders in Poland and the Czech Republic Iranian missiles were irrelevant, what counted was the possibility to engage the United States militarily in the region.⁴⁶ This was perceived as perhaps the only way to ensure that NATO's security guarantees became more credible.

President Obama's decision in September 2009 to abandon the so-called missile defence shield in Europe changed the stage in a moment. The USA is essentially returning to missile defence concepts developed during the Clinton Administration. Emphasis is on flexible systems like the sea-based Aegis system and Standard Missile-3. It is still too early to analyse the implications of the

⁴² RIA Novosti, *Russia to keep silo-based ballistic missiles in the future*, 8 December, 2009, (http://en.rian.ru/military_news/20091208/157155105.html).

⁴³ RIA Novosti, *Russia to keep SS-18 missiles in service until 2019*, 10 April 2009, (<http://en.rian.ru/russia/20090410/121049655.html>)

⁴⁴ Peace-time testing from some operational missile bases like Vypolzovo or Tatishchevo may imply safety risks for the local population as the missiles fly over inhabited areas. A successful test launch of a R-36M2 (SS-18) missile from a silo of the missile division in Dombrovskiy was performed on 24 December 2009. Pavel Podvig, *Successful launch of R-36M2 missile*, Russian strategic nuclear forces Blog, December 24, 2009 (http://russianforces.org/blog/2009/12/successful_launch_of_r-36m2_mi.shtml)

⁴⁵ RIA Novosti, *Russia could aim rockets at European missile shield – Putin-2*, 14 February 2008 (<http://en.rian.ru/world/20080214/99238596.html>) Putin: "Our experts believe the system threatens our national security. ... If it appears, we will be forced to respond appropriately - we will have to retarget part of our systems against those missiles."

⁴⁶ Andrew Nagorski, *Lech Kaczynski: How the West Got Georgia Wrong*, Newsweek, October 6, 2008 (<http://www.newsweek.com/id/161170/page/2>). President Kaczynski: "I'm a proponent of this [missile shield] not because I believe Iran will launch a nuclear attack or that this is a tool in the struggle with Russia, but because this deepens the interest of the United States in this area. It's in the interests of my country to have the closest possible relations with the United States."

U.S. policy change, but altogether the new policy may strengthen the defence posture of those U.S. allies in Europe that have expressed the greatest concern after the war in Georgia.⁴⁷

The UK House of Commons Defence Committee recently made the following recommendation:⁴⁸

“NATO has an important role in reassuring its Eastern European members about their security. NATO should provide this reassurance through robust contingency plans that cover the eventuality of attack on Baltic Member States and that set out NATO’s planned military response. In addition, NATO should maintain a visible military presence in the Baltic States, including maintaining its air-policing and conducting exercises in the region.”

It is worth noting that the Aegis cruisers are formidable air-defence assets, and they also have a very potent offensive capability as platforms for Tomahawk cruise missiles. If these ships deploy to the Baltic Sea or the Arctic, as has been suggested, it means quite new challenges for Russia.⁴⁹ It is important to note that Prime Minister Putin voiced strong reservations also about the present revised U.S. missile defence plans at the end of 2009.⁵⁰ “In order to maintain the balance without planning to develop a missile defence system, which is very expensive and of unclear effect, we should develop offensive strike systems.”

Russian and U.S. views on nuclear weapons – fundamental differences

Two quotes from a report, written by very influential Russian individuals (Professor Sergei Karaganov is the main writer), sums up the Russian perception of the value and role of nuclear weapons for the country.⁵¹

“Russia views [the] preservation [of the nuclear arms parity] as the foundation of its military security, one of the main levers of influence in the world arena, and the most important argument in favor of equitable dialogue with the United States.”

“Since the United States enjoys unconditional preponderance over the rest of the world in the sphere of conventional weapons, deep nuclear cuts may lower the deterrence potential of the Russian nuclear arsenal, which is the main factor of Russia’s security and of its influence in the international political system. [emphasis in original].”

⁴⁷ Reuters, *Poland agrees rules for hosting U.S. forces*, November 27, 2009 (<http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE5AQ3IP20091127>) The USA and Poland have agreed on compensatory security measures in late 2009, as the USA is to deploy Patriot missile units in Poland.

⁴⁸ House of Commons Defence Committee, *Russia: a new confrontation?*, Summary, Tenth Report of Session 2008–09, prepared 10 July 2009 (<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200809/cmselect/cmdfence/276/27602.htm>)

⁴⁹ Rear Admiral Brad Hicks in, *The Changing Strategic Landscape for (Sea-Based) Missile Defense*, Center for Technology and National Security Policy, Fort Lesley J. McNair, Washington, D.C., December 2-3, 2009 (http://www.ndu.edu/ctnsp/NCW_course/Sea%20Based%20BMD%20Agenda.%20Updated%2011-03-2009.pdf). See also Pravda, *New Anti-Russian Missile Defense Plot Brewing in Washington*, October 16, 2009 (http://english.pravda.ru/russia/kremlin/109931-anti_russian-0)

⁵⁰ Prime Minister of the Russian Federation, *Prime Minister Vladimir Putin talks with journalists about the outcomes of his visit to the Primorye Territory*, 29 December 2009 (<http://premier.gov.ru/eng/>; accessed at Johnson’s Russia List, <http://www.cdi.org/russia/johnson/2009-237-41.cfm>). See also Tom Balmforth, *START As You Mean To Stop*, RussiaProfile.org, 30 December, 2009.

(<http://www.russiaprofile.org/page.php?pageid=International&articleid=a1262195983>) “Having established for themselves a shield against our offensive weapons systems, our partners will feel completely secure... Then our partners will be able to do anything they want. Aggression will immediately increase both politically and economically. The balance will be broken,” Putin said.

⁵¹ Sergei Karaganov et al., *RECONFIGURATION, NOT JUST A RESET: Russia’s Interests in Relations with the United States of America*, Report for the meeting of the Russian-U.S. section of the Valdai International Discussion Club, Moscow, June 2009 (http://en.rian.ru/valdai_op/20090701/155399564.html)

U.S. President Barack Obama's commitment to a world free of nuclear weapons, first stated in Prague in April 2009 and reiterated at the UN Security Council special meeting on nuclear weapons in September, poses grave challenges for Russia. Russia formally endorses the concept, but not with the same enthusiasm as the last President of the Soviet Union Mikhail Gorbachev did in the mid 1980's.

President George W. Bush was not interested in lengthy arms control negotiations, but preferred unilateral decisions. With a stroke of his pen in December 2007 half the U.S. nuclear stockpile, some 5 000 nuclear warheads, were transferred to dismantlement. Just before the end of his tenure as President the USA had reduced the number of operational strategic warheads to below 2 200, the upper ceiling of the so-called Moscow Treaty of 2002. This took place almost four years earlier than the Treaty mandated. Both events did not receive any attention in the news media, a clear sign of how irrelevant President Bush found nuclear weapons to be.

President Obama's ambition is to further reduce nuclear weapons well below today's numbers. Unlike former Presidents, Barack Obama seems to have a personal interest to influence the final wordings in the forthcoming Nuclear Posture Review, which may in fact turn a completely new chapter of how nuclear weapons are perceived by the U.S. government. There are indications that the only practical operational role left for U.S. nuclear weapons may be to deter other states from attacking or threatening to attack the United States and its friends and allies with nuclear weapons.⁵²

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton clarified during her congressional nomination hearing that the ambition of this Administration is to address all nuclear weapons, not only long-range strategic weapons. The Obama administration would seek to negotiate "deep, verifiable reductions in all U.S. and Russian nuclear weapons, whether deployed or non-deployed, strategic or non-strategic."⁵³ That is way beyond Russia's readiness. Moscow greeted with satisfaction Washington's readiness to resume negotiations on a follow-on treaty to START, the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty. The question of the grave imbalance in non-strategic nuclear weaponry (a.k.a. tactical nuclear weapons) will have to wait.

The Karaganov discussion group mentioned above recommended in June 2009 that "Russia should only agree to minor cuts of nuclear weapons to a level that would not be much below the ceiling stipulated in 2002". This of course also reflects the view of the Russian military. General Nikolai Makarov, Chief of the General Staff, stated in early June 2009 that "we will be making practically no changes to the Russian strategic missile forces."⁵⁴

Framework numbers were agreed upon in Moscow in July 2009 during President Obama's visit. START ceilings were defined as 1 500 – 1 675 strategic nuclear warheads on 500 – 1 100 strategic delivery vehicles.

The agreed ceilings concerning warheads, modest reductions below the Moscow Treaty, seem to correspond well with the recommendations of the Karaganov discussion group. The upper number concerning delivery vehicles is a U.S. preference. The operational nuclear weapon requirements have changed so dramatically since the end of the Cold War that deploying many warheads on

⁵² Paul Richter, *Obama's nuclear vision mired in debate*, The Los Angeles Times, January 4, 2010 (<http://www.latimes.com/news/nation-and-world/la-na-obama-nuclear4-2010jan04.0.1799502.story>). The new Nuclear Posture Review will be delivered to the Congress on March 1, 2010.

⁵³ Hillary R. Clinton, Testimony before the U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, January 13, 2009 (<http://foreign.senate.gov/hearings/hearing/20090113/>) and <http://www.senate.gov/fplayers/CommPlayer/commFlashPlayer.cfm?fn=foreign011309&st=435>

⁵⁴ AFP, *Russia to wait on US before cutting nuclear arsenal*, June 5, 2009 (http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5iJeUjaEpdTZJB0NGuwAT8qN_4LTg)

American delivery vehicles no longer makes sense. The Russians think rather differently. The awesome heavy missile R-36M2 (SS-18 Satan) with its ten high-yield warheads, each with about 50 times as big explosive power as the Hiroshima bomb, still commands respect.

The negotiations have been described as constructive, but eventually the START Treaty expired on 5 December 2009 before a new treaty was agreed upon. A number of technical problems still remain to be solved, which may prolong the negotiations.⁵⁵ The ratification of the follow-on treaty is also expected to several months. Interim arrangements concerning implementation and verification therefore had to be agreed upon.

Russia was expected to publish its long awaited military doctrine before the end of 2009, but once again it was delayed.⁵⁶ The Secretary of Russia's National Security Council Nikolai Patrushev, the former chief of the FSB, indicated in October 2009 in an interview for *Izvestia* that the new military doctrine may have clearer wording concerning the use of nuclear weapons in local conflicts, essentially meaning a lowering of the nuclear threshold.⁵⁷ In that interview Patrushev stated:

“With regard to the provisions that regulate the possibility of using nuclear weapons, this section of the military doctrine is written in the spirit of the fact that Russian Federation is a nuclear power, which is capable of using nuclear deterrence to deter potential adversaries from aggression against Russia and its allies. It is the most important priority of our country in the foreseeable future.

We also adjusted the conditions of use of nuclear weapons to counter a conventional aggression – [now they apply] not only to full-scale wars, but also to regional and even to local wars.

In addition, the doctrine provides flexibility in the possibility of use of nuclear weapons depending on the situation and the intentions of the enemy. In situations critical for national security we do not rule out a possibility of using a preventive (or pre-emptive) nuclear strike against the aggressor.”⁵⁸

This clarification indicates that the doctrinal adjustments to Russia's strategic posture emphasize the context and rationale for non-strategic nuclear weapons. Substantially this is nothing very new, since military-theoretical discussions about this topic were published already ten years ago. At that time the concept of de-escalating military conflicts by using single tactical nuclear weapons became public.

⁵⁵ Prime Minister Putin's remarks on 29 December 2009 added to the confusion regarding the state of the talks. He strongly linked the missile defence issue with the eventual outcome of the START negotiations, which probably reflects military hard-line attitudes and practical difficulties in the end-game of the negotiations. See note 49 and Will Stewart, *Vladimir Putin calls for more weapons to stop America doing 'whatever it wants'*, The Times, December 30, 2009 (<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/europe/article6970921.ece>)

⁵⁶ Russia Today, *Russia's new military doctrine: more threats, smaller risks*, 17 December, 2009 (<http://rt.com/prime-time/2009-12-17/russia-new-military-doctrine.html>). “The number of military threats listed in the document has also been enlarged, according to the 17-page draft document. Those will include other nation's ignoring of Russia's strategic security interests, attempts to tip the balance of power in the neighbourhood of Russia and her allies, and moves to change the balance in “nuclear and missile sphere”, like deployment of an anti-ballistic missile system. Also on the threats list is interference with Russia's internal policies, territorial disputes, arms race and undermining of international measures on arms limitation and reduction, possible deployment of weapons in space, and military conflicts near Russian borders.”

⁵⁷ Pavel Podvig, *New Russian doctrine and preventive nuclear strikes*, Russian strategic nuclear forces blog, October 14, 2009 - http://russianforces.org/blog/2009/10/new_russian_doctrine_and_preve.shtml . (Article in original: *Меняется Россия, меняется и ее военная доктрина* *Izvestia*, - <http://www.izvestia.ru/politic/article3134180/>). See also RIA Novosti, *Russia may revise use of nuclear weapons in new military doctrine*, 8 October 2009 (http://en.rian.ru/military_news/20091008/156393316.html).

⁵⁸ Ibid. The translation is essentially Dr. Pavel Podvig's. He points out that Patrushev really made it clear that preventive strikes, as distinguished from pre-emptive strikes, are to be reckoned with.

Regardless of what the final wording in the new doctrine will be, the Russians have made clear that the role of nuclear weapons for the defence of their country is increasing, and that even preventive nuclear strikes cannot be ruled out. Citing the Chief of the General Staff, Army General Nikolai Makarov, Rossiiskaya Gazeta reported in December 2009 that the new doctrine endorsed by the National Security Council would express Russia's intent to use nuclear weapons in a first strike in defence of its statehood.⁵⁹ General Nikolai Makarov provided the context in a subsequent article. He described the use of nuclear weapons for self-defence against enemies threatening Russia or its allies with nuclear weapons, and when a threat to Russian statehood emerged. "In extreme circumstances, when there are no other means to save the country, then nuclear weapons will be used."⁶⁰

The role of non-strategic nuclear weapons in Russia's defence policy was once again emphasised during military exercises conducted recently. The Russian army performed several high-profile exercises in the summer of 2009, for instance Ladoga 2009 close to Finland and Zapad 2009 (West 2009), a joint exercise conducted by Russia and Belarus in the vicinity of the Baltic Sea area in September. This latter exercise coincided with the 70 year anniversary of the Soviet invasion of Poland, which 2009 was cast as "potential aggressor". Russian armed forces stormed a "Polish" beach in Kaliningrad and the hostilities against NATO forces were reportedly terminated by a simulated Air Force use of tactical nuclear weapons.⁶¹ The earlier Zapad exercise in 1999 also ended in the use of tactical nuclear weapons to thwart a NATO attack that could not be stopped otherwise. The message from Russia is clear, tactical nuclear weapons still matter in the context of Russia's present defence posture. During the current process of transformation of Russia's defence forces tactical nuclear weapons are needed. A reference to NATO's famous doctrine of Flexible Response is often made.⁶² An opposite and not very convincing view has, however, been presented recently.⁶³ Russia's strong refusal to negotiate with USA on reductions in tactical nuclear weapons is directly linked to this issue. Russia wants to maintain a clear distinction between strategic and tactical nuclear weapons. Strategic nuclear weapons are there for ultimate deterrence purposes.

The official Polish reaction to Zapad 2009 is that Poland wants the USA and NATO to deploy troops in Central Europe. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov expressed astonishment over such news.⁶⁴

The European position concerning NATO's non-strategic nuclear weapons in Europe seems to be in transition. Pressure is growing in Germany for the removal of U.S. nuclear weapons from Europe.⁶⁵

⁵⁹ Vladimir Poletayev, *Right to Nuclear First-Strike*, Rossiiskaya Gazeta, December 22, 2009 (<http://www.rg.ru/2009/12/22/doktrina.html>; <http://dlib.eastview.com/browse/doc/21102830>) and Юрий Гаврилов, *Защитный удар - Новая военная доктрина России скоро будет представлена на утверждение президенту страны*, Российская газета, 23 декабря 2009 г. (Rossiiskaya Gazeta, December 23, 2009 (<http://www.rg.ru/2009/12/23/doktrina.html>))

⁶⁰ Jacob W. Kipp, *Russian Nuclear First Use: A Case of Self-Defeating Exaggeration?*, Eurasia Daily Monitor, Volume 7, Issue 7, January 12, 2010. (http://www.jamestown.org/programs/edm/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=35902&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=27&cHash=b50c6d1081)

⁶¹ Matthew Day, *Russia 'simulates' nuclear attack on Poland*, The Daily Telegraph, 1 November 2009 (<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/poland/6480227/Russia-simulates-nuclear-attack-on-Poland.html>)

⁶² RIA Novosti interview with former Deputy Minister of Defence, GRU colonel (retd.) Vitaly Shlykov, head of the Security Policy Commission of the Defense Ministry's Public Council. (http://en.rian.ru/valdai_op/20090914/156124823.html)

⁶³ Miles A. Pomper, William Potter, and Nikolai Sokov, *Reducing and Regulating Tactical (Nonstrategic) Nuclear Weapons in Europe*, The James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies, Monterey Institute of International Studies, December 2009, p. 14. "Contrary to common assumptions, short-range weapons do not appear to have a place in that strategy [i.e. de-escalation] simply because potential targets are too distant".

⁶⁴ RIA Novosti, *Lavrov says surprised Poland seeking U.S. protection from Russia*, RIA Novosti, 5 November 2009 (<http://en.rian.ru/world/20091105/156725321.html>)

⁶⁵ Julian Borger, *Germans press for removal of U.S. nuclear weapons in Europe*, The Guardian, 6 November 2009 (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/nov/06/germany-removal-us-nuclear-weapons>)

Germany's new Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle is the driving force here, and Germany is supported by the Belgians and the Dutch.

The USA has silently withdrawn most of its free-fall B61 nuclear bombs from Europe, the only type of tactical nuclear weapon still deployed in Europe. The operational value of such gravity bombs can be questioned, since it appears that only stealth aircraft could have real capability to penetrate heavily defended airspace. Such aircraft, certified to carry nuclear weapons, are not operational in any European air force.

Removing the non-strategic nuclear weapons from Europe altogether will force NATO members to find other ways of ensuring extended deterrence. It would, however, be wishful thinking to assume that Russia would follow suit and remove and eventually dismantle its own non-strategic nuclear weapons. One Russian observer asked rhetorically in Helsinki in June in a closed seminar: "Why would Russia trade thousands of non-strategic nukes for less than two hundred?"

Conclusions

"Do you in Finland think much about who actually works out the threat assessments in Russia?" This issue was raised by a senior researcher at the Swedish Defence Research Establishment (FOI) in Stockholm in spring 2004. The Swedish colleagues were convinced that the Russian military intelligence GRU seemed to be getting the upper hand. This was worrisome since the GRU's performance in the past is not very impressive. On the contrary, the assessments and estimates produced were too often both unreliable and distorted. If the quality of information given to the President by his advisers in the intelligence community is poor, we should be prepared for unpleasant surprises.⁶⁶

Time eventually proved the Swedes to be right. Examples given above concerning nuclear decision-making in the USA, basic technical and physical facts related to the issue of the third U.S. ballistic missile defence site in Europe, and certain basic provisions of the CFE Treaty, have clearly been presented to the Russian leaders in a biased way. Sometimes the assessments are even in outright violation of the laws of nature.

All the more "disturbing is also the re-emergence of certain modes of thinking which from the time of Gorbachev until the late 1990's had been receding, at least at official level, and one is a conspiratorial view about absolutely everything", said the British Russia expert James Sherr in testimony before the House of Commons Defence Committee.⁶⁷ The Committee's own summary assessment was the following:

"There are weighty reasons why Russia will continue its current policy. The latter is increasingly created by traditional Soviet motivations: morbid suspiciousness; an imperial syndrome; attempts to play the US off against Europe; the desire to preserve Central and Eastern Europe as zones of probable expansion, *et cetera*. The war in the Caucasus proves that Russian international behaviour for the most part is decided by circles, which wittingly provokes Russia's defiant and aggressive

⁶⁶ It is very disturbing that the mindset of former KGB chief Vladimir Kryuchkov seems to be alive and well in the Kremlin. Jack Matlock, the former U.S. Ambassador to Moscow, gave the following description in 1995: "[Kryuchkov] consistently failed in his primary duty to supply Gorbachev with accurate intelligence. His reports were deliberately skewed to promote the particular policies he favored. Furthermore, he resorted to outright lies ... His shrill alarms over nonexistent foreign interference, while perhaps useful in maintaining a bloated intelligence budget, deflected attention from the real problems the Soviet Union faced ..." Jack F. Matlock, *Autopsy of an Empire – The American Ambassador's Account of the Collapse of the Soviet Union*, Random House, New York, 1995, pp. 665-666.

⁶⁷ Oral evidence by Mr. James Sherr before the House of Commons Defence Committee, 24 February 2009, in the House of Commons Defence Committee, *Minutes of Evidence - Russia: a new confrontation?*, Summary, Tenth Report of Session 2008–09, prepared 10 July 2009, p. Ev 13.

(<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200809/cmselect/cmdfence/276/09032401.htm>)

international behaviour with a view to restore a mobilized economy and its privilege status in the political system.”⁶⁸ The U.S. think-tank *Stratfor* recently published a detailed assessment of the Kremlin “circles”.⁶⁹

The current Western *rapprochement* with Russia, the willingness to leave the war in Georgia behind quickly, including the real territorial gain of Russia’s proxies in violation of the accords between the EU and Russia, the U.S. willingness to “reset” its Russia policy, are likely to be interpreted in the Kremlin as weakness. The very pronounced silence in Washington, Brussels and all major capitals in Europe regarding simulated employment of tactical nuclear weapons in the Zapad 2009 exercise against Poland, a member state of EU and NATO, raised questions of concern. It may, however, be wise policy to address the security deficiency felt by Poland and other states in Central and Eastern Europe in concrete, albeit more discrete ways.⁷⁰

Even Finland was recently reminded of Russian military perceptions of military history and its implications for current policy. The official website of the Russian Ministry of Defence (www.mil.ru) writes about the lessons of the war between the Soviet Union and Finland in an article – *65 years since Finland’s withdrawal from the Second World War*.⁷¹ The article ended in a thinly veiled threat: “Alas, many Finnish politicians (and not only Finnish, and not only politicians) prefer to forget the lessons of the last war. They think that modern Russia is not the Soviet Union. This is a dangerous misconception. Russia is always Russia no matter what she is called.”

⁶⁸ House of Commons Defence Committee, *Russia: a new confrontation?*, Summary, Tenth Report of Session 2008–09, prepared 10 July 2009, p. Ev 84.

(<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200809/cmselect/cmdfence/276/27602.htm>)

⁶⁹ STRATFOR, *The Kremlin Wars 1-5*, October 22-30, 2009 (http://www.stratfor.com/theme/the_kremlin_wars). The Kremlin “circles” that the British defence committee refers to, are understood to be two competing clans led by Deputy Prime Minister Igor Sechin and Deputy Chief of Staff of the Presidential Administration Vladislav Surkov, respectively. Mr. Sechin’s clan, the “siloviki”, rely strongly on the FSB and the power ministries, while Mr. Surkov’s clan includes liberal-leaning economists called “civiliki”, but also people directly connected to the GRU. Interestingly enough President Medvedev is ranked below Mr. Surkov, who is perceived to be the real Grey Cardinal. Mr. Surkov also has a long career in the military intelligence and is, in fact, now referred to as the chief strategist of the GRU. The role of Prime Minister Vladimir Putin is to balance these two factions and act as the final arbiter between the two clans.

⁷⁰ RIA Novosti, *Poland, US sign SOFA deal on troop deployment terms*, December 11, 2009 (<http://en.rian.ru/world/20091211/157203058.html>)

⁷¹ Министерство обороны Российской Федерации, *65-летие выхода Финляндии из Второй мировой войны в сентябре 1944 г. (65 years since Finland’s withdrawal from the Second World War in September 1944)* (<http://www.mil.ru/940/65186/66882/index.shtml>)