



RUSSIAN DEFENSE AND ARMS CONTROL POLICY AND ITS PROSPECTS AFTER THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

Alexander G. Savelyev ¹

*Institute of World Economy and International Relations (IMEMO),
Russian Academy of Sciences*

Abstract:

This article explores the possible scenarios in Russia's arms control and disarmament policies after President Medvedev's inauguration. The author analyzes the experience of the Putin presidency and the U.S.-Soviet agreements during the Cold War, to conclude that the problem of ABM systems and the "strategic stability" principle has become the central one. Therefore, Russia and the U.S. need to rethink their approaches and accept the new realities of their strategic relations in the 21st century.

Keywords: Russia; United States; arms control; disarmament.

Resumen:

Este artículo explora los posibles escenarios en las políticas de desarme y control de armamentos de Rusia tras la toma de posesión del presidente Medvedev. El autor analiza la experiencia de la presidencia de Putin y de los acuerdos EE.UU.-URSS durante la Guerra Fría, concluyendo que los sistemas ABM y el principio de "estabilidad estratégica" se han convertido en el problema central. Por tanto, Rusia y EE.UU. necesitan revisar sus posiciones y aceptar las nuevas realidades de sus relaciones estratégicas en el siglo XXI.

Palabras clave: Rusia; Estados Unidos; control de armamentos; desarme.

Copyright © UNISCI, 2008.

The views expressed in these articles are those of the authors, and do not necessarily reflect the views of UNISCI. *Las opiniones expresadas en estos artículos son propias de sus autores, y no reflejan necesariamente la opinión de UNISCI.*

¹ Alexander G. Savelyev is Head of the Department of Strategic Studies, Institute of World Economy and International Relations (IMEMO), Russian Academy of Sciences.
Address: Department of Strategic Studies, Center for International Security, IMEMO RAN, 23 Ulitsa Profsoyuznaya, Moscow 117997, Russia. *E-mail:* saveliev@imemo.ru.



Introduction

December 2007 was the 20th anniversary —practically unnoticed to the wider public— of the signature of the INF Treaty. This Treaty liberated Europe from one of the categories of nuclear weapons possessed by the United States and the Soviet Union, including Pershing II and SS-20 ballistic missiles. The lack of official interest to this date looks rather strange if we recall the “boiling” situation in Europe prior to this Treaty. The signature of the INF Treaty was a great relief to innumerable number of people, who protested against NATO plans to deploy American ground-based cruise missiles and Pershing in Europe, and who also demanded the withdrawal of Soviet SS-20s. And the achievement of this goal marked a great turning point from confrontation to real improvement of all the spectrum of relations between the USSR and the West in general — from ideology to arms control and security problems.

Within all the spectrum of arms control agreements, signed before and after the INF Treaty, this document plays the central role. It is the only one which called not for freezing and not for reductions, but for the complete elimination of a wide spectrum of weapons of mass destruction. And this Treaty for the first time included a simple idea: that reliable security can be provided even without “very good” nuclear weapons.

But this understanding came to the leadership of the two great states not overnight. It took years and years of very intensive negotiations, hard debates between them and inside the political establishments and decision-makers of each country. The Parties managed to pass a period of very serious confrontation, when the USSR withdrew from the negotiations after the United States started the deployment of ground-launched cruise missiles (GLCM) in Britain in 1983. After the resumption of the negotiations in 1985 it took two and a half years to come to a final agreement and to sign the Treaty.

From the first sight, it took too much time to come to a very simple decision: “zero option” on medium- and intermedium-range nuclear-armed missiles. But the main problem was not in these very missiles, but, alongside with the others, in working out a common understanding of the principles of security, which proved to be extremely important during all the period of the Soviet (Russian)-American arms control negotiations. Without this common understanding one could hardly expect real progress in arms control in the past and it is unlikely to expect it in the future. And in this article the author will try to prove such a statement.

1. Brief historical overview

There is no need to describe in detail all the arms control agreements signed during the Cold War period and after it. The facts and figures are well known and they are present in dozens if not hundreds of publications. What is less known is the decision-making process in the Soviet Union and the United States, and the reasons why the countries defended this or that position during the negotiations and why in a number of cases this or that position had been changed. For example, it is interesting to notice that in the very beginning of the US-USSR SALT-I negotiations (started in autumn 1969) the Soviet delegation arrived to Helsinki without any formulated position. The delegation had general directives from the Politburo to listen to the American side and to collect all the possible information without presenting any concrete proposals. The only thing the Soviet side was “armed” with was the principle of “equal



security”, which for a long period became the basis of the position of the USSR at practically all arms control negotiations.

The very formulation of this principle was rather simple: the Parties of the Treaty must take into consideration all the factors which defined their security. But in practice it meant that the Soviet Union must receive a sort of “compensation” for the US forward-based systems, capable to reach the territory of the USSR; as well as for the French and British nuclear forces, since these two states were the NATO allies of the US.

By standing firm at this position, the Soviet side managed to sign an agreement with the US which partially reflected the “equal security” approach. In the Interim Agreement on the Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms of May 26, 1972, the USSR received an obvious advantage in the number of ICBM and SLBM launchers over the US. The American side realized the importance of having a basic principle for the negotiations only after SALT-I was signed. During the hearings in Congress, Senator Johnson insisted on the Amendment which strongly provided that in the future arms control agreements the United States must follow the principle of “equality”. The Jackson Amendment to Public Law 92-448 Approving the Interim Agreement was adopted on September 23, 1972.

It is obvious that these two principles contradicted each other in many aspects. But the Parties managed to solve this problem in SALT-II Treaty by combining the two principles in one: “equality and equal security”. Of course, the US and the USSR preserved their original understanding of the basic principle of arms control. But, at the same time they clearly understood that there was impossible to reach an agreement without compromises. Having in mind extremely large strategic arsenals, which exceeded 12,000 for each of the countries, these compromises couldn’t undermine the security. And in any case, the arms control agreements were considered more important than the structural imbalance and relatively minimal advantages of this or that Party. There also existed a possibility to improve the shortcomings of the Treaty in the future agreements. It was true for both “players”, since the process of arms control after SALT-I became a part of the security policy of the Soviet Union and the United States, and they wanted it to become a non-stop “game”.

It took rather a long time before the Parties became to an equal understanding of the main principle of their strategic relations; which brought real fruits during the Gorbachev-Reagan period. This new (from the official point of view) principle, “strategic stability”, was for the first time fixed in the INF Treaty and after that in the START-I and START-2 agreements. But it was not very easy (at least for the Soviet Union) to accept this principle to replace the “equal security” approach.

With regard to the American side, from the very beginning of the SALT-I negotiations in 1969 the members of the US delegation started to explain the main provisions of the strategic stability theory to their counterparts. Their main goal was to urge the USSR to agree upon the limitations on the ABM systems. At that time the enthusiasm about the prospects of creating and deploying an effective ABM system for the territory of the USSR was much lower than several years ago, so the idea that an unlimited anti-ballistic defense could undermine security found its supporters in the Soviet Union. One of them was the member of the Soviet SALT-I delegation and future Marshall of the Soviet Union and Chief of the General Staff, Nikolai Ogarkov, who had been always very sceptical about the ABM systems in general. Thus, the American ideas about strategic stability and the importance of the limitation of the ABM systems played an important role in the Soviet internal struggle around the future of the ABM systems. As a result, alongside with the Interim Agreement the Soviet Union and the United



States signed the ABM Treaty, which for 30 years defined strategic relations between the two states alongside with the other arms control agreements.

With regard to the “strategic stability” principle, it was accepted in the USSR only after Mikhail Gorbachev came to power. At that time, there were serious debates in the country on security policy, arms control, military doctrine and the role of armed forces in preserving security. Gorbachev stated that security was a political problem and it had to be solved mostly by political means. The military and the conservative sector of the experts and officials were afraid to openly oppose the General Secretary, but tried to interpret his statements in the most “acceptable” way to them. They said that Gorbachev was right, but since there were no such political means, for the time being security had to be preserved by military instruments.

One of the points of these debates was that even Gorbachev and Shevardnadze could not accept Western approaches to security and stability and Western terminology overnight. Sometimes, that caused misunderstandings and even confusion. Thus, Shevardnadze once stated that nuclear deterrence must be rejected by the USSR and the US since it reflected all the spectrum of military confrontation. At the same time, he accepted the idea of strategic stability (maybe because it sounded less aggressive than “deterrence”). But the experts clearly understood that strategic stability was based on nuclear deterrence, and there was no way to reject nuclear deterrence without full and complete nuclear disarmament.

Anyhow, the Soviet leadership soon realized that in practice the “strategic stability” principle did not contradict very much the principle of “equal security” once accepted by the Soviet Union. Moreover, using the American approach to stability, the USSR started a very active campaign against the “Strategic Defense Initiative” (SDI), which in the second half of 1980s was the central point of Soviet security policy. The “prevention of arms race in the outer space” played a very important role within all the spectrum of the Soviet approaches to arms control negotiations. Preserving and strengthening “strategic stability” was used as an instrument of this policy, not without success.

In this situation, the Americans could not reject their own principle, for political reasons. At the same time, they could not argue against the basic principles of strategic stability, one of which demanded strong limitations on the ABM systems and prohibition of the strategic defense of the territory. So the US side had nothing to do but to confirm that the ABM Treaty was a “cornerstone of strategic stability” and to continue to “play the arms control game” under the rules they managed to establish in the previous decade, the 1970s. During all the Gorbachev-Reagan period, the American principle of “strategic stability” played at the Soviet side and never let the US theoretically ground the idea of SDI and the mutual transition to strategic relations with the reliance on ballistic missile defense.

For the Soviet Union, it was also not very easy to fully adjust to the new principle of security and strategic relations with the United States. While in the negotiation on “defense and space” issues the USSR argued with the US from the “strategic stability” approach, in INF and START talks it still followed the principle of “equal security”. For example, if the United States considered the negotiations on the mentioned issues as three separated “deals”, the USSR insisted on a strong linkage between INF, strategic offensive forces and “space-strike weapons”. During the first stages of INF and START negotiations, the USSR continued to demand compensation for the US forward-based systems as well as for the British and French nuclear forces. Moreover, the USSR demanded this compensation twice at a one moment during both the INF and START talks. Only in the very final moment the Soviet



Union agreed to separate INF talks from the “package”, which made it possible to sign this Treaty in 1987.

By the end of START-1 talks, the USSR also failed to defend its “linkage and compensation” position and agreed to sign the Treaty even without reaching an agreement on defense and space issues. A strong desire to reduce strategic offensive arms by half and to have real control and predictability in the sphere of strategic weapons overweighed the numerical approach, which was the basis of “equal security” principle. The number of weapons capable to reach the territory of the USSR and the US was no longer an official Soviet argument at the negotiations. Shortly after the signature of the START-1 Treaty, the USSR ceased to exist. For the following time, Russia and the United States became very busy with the “Soviet heritage”: the nuclear weapons which were deployed at the territories of newly-emerged states, Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan. It took several years to solve the problem and to withdraw these weapons to the territory of Russia. Only after these three states agreed to join the NPT Treaty as non-nuclear states and signed the Lisbon Protocol, the START-1 Treaty could enter into legal force. It happened on December 5, 1994 with a period of validity of 15 years, i.e. until December 5, 2009. With regard to the nuclear weapons of these “third states”, by May 1995 all of them were withdrawn from the territory of Kazakhstan, by June 1996 from Ukraine and in November 1996 from Belarus.

The main achievement of arms control during Yeltsin period (1990s) was the START-2 Treaty, which was negotiated in a very short time. On June 17, 1992 Russia and the United States signed a “Framework Agreement” on the future Treaty, and on January 3, 1993 the START-2 Treaty was signed. Many experts believe that START-2 would have never been prepared in such a short period of time if the START-1 had not been a great job lasting for about 6 years, from 1985 to 1991. The fact that many provisions of START-2 were based on START-1 achievements testifies in favor of this point of view.

START-2 provided for more radical reductions of strategic offensive arms of each Party, down to 3,000-3,500 warheads deployed at strategic delivery vehicles, including 1,700-1,750 warheads for sea-launched ballistic missiles. But, to my view, the main achievements of this Treaty were not the reductions themselves, but the real and practical implementation of the “strategic stability” principle in the document. Thus, it put a complete ban on multi-warhead ICBMs. Due to the theory of strategic stability, these weapons (which were often described as “first-strike weapons”) are the most destabilizing, and their complete removal from the force inventory could really improve security of the Parties.

The Russian political and military leadership openly accepted the principle of “strategic stability” and after signing the START-2 they made corresponding statements. At the same time, following this principle, the Russian side continued to insist that the United States officially confirmed that the ABM Treaty remained the “cornerstone of strategic stability” and that the Parties would follow this document strictly “as it was signed in 1972”. In this regard, for some period of time one of the main directions of Russian security and arms control policy was focused on the idea of strengthening the ABM Treaty without making any amendments to it.

Having this goal in mind, Russia managed to urge the Clinton Administration to sign a set of documents in New York, in September 1997, including two Protocols to the ABM Treaty. The first one expanded the number of participants of this agreement from two (Russia and the United States) to five (plus Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan). Another Protocol “drew a line” between strategic and non-strategic ABM systems. The Parties also signed a



Protocol to the START-2 Treaty, which defined a new timetable for the reduction of the strategic offensive forces of the two states, since the process of ratification of the Treaty took much more time than it was expected. The United States ratified this Treaty (without the mentioned Protocols) on January 26, 1996. Russia did the same only in April 2000 by the new State Duma and under the new Russian President Vladimir Putin. But this Treaty never entered into legal force, since the United States refused to ratify the New York Protocols. The reason was not in the problem of extending the period of reductions of strategic forces, but in the Protocols to the ABM Treaty, which the new Administration of G. W. Bush could not accept. Since all these Protocols came in one “package” with the START-2 Treaty, the latter became a victim of the US position concerning the future of ballistic missile defense. To my view, it was a very strong indication that the United States was not ready to follow the principle of “strategic stability” any more. It was true at least for the present Bush Administration.

2. Putin’s defense and arms control policy

Vladimir Putin started his arms control and security policy activities right after he was designed as “successor” to President B. Yeltsin in late 1999. Thus, even before he was officially elected, as acting president he approved one of Russia’s most important documents concerning security issues: the Concept of National Security of Russian Federation (January 10, 2000). On April 21, Putin approved the Military Doctrine of Russian Federation. These documents remained in force during his all his presidential term. But “in between” these two dates, as it was mentioned above, the Russian legislators finally ratified the START-2 Treaty after several years of intensive debates.

Putin played a very active role in the process of ratification. He personally went to the State Duma on April 14, 2000 and called the deputies to approve the START-2. In order to achieve a positive solution to this problem, Putin had to take a rather strong position. In his speech he put forward a number of conditions which would make it possible for Russia to follow the obligations under START-2. This statement clearly reflected the compromise achieved between political and military leadership of the country. It becomes clear if one remember that two months earlier, in February, 2000, the Chief of the Main Department of International Military Cooperation of the Russian Ministry of Defense, General Leonid Ivashov, openly stated (in an article published in *Izvestiya*) that the Ministry was not interested in the START-2 and START-3 Treaties. This statement was never denied, neither by the Defense Minister nor by any other high-rank military official.

The main conditions put forward by Putin, concerned the non-violation and non-withdrawal from the ABM Treaty. He also declared a number of counter-measures which would be taken by Russia in case the United States withdrew from the ABM Treaty. They not only included Russian withdrawal from START-2 and refusal to negotiate START-3 for further reductions of strategic offensive forces, but also withdrawal from the INF and CFE Treaties and a number of other unilateral actions.

In the official Russian rhetoric, possible US activities in the field of ballistic missile defense were called as “attempts to undermine global stability”. Symbolically, US actions in Iraq in 1998 and Yugoslavia in 1999 were “simply” described as “an aggression”. One can conclude that Russian leadership considered the ABM activities as more dangerous than attacks against the third states. It means, to my view, that the “strategic stability” principle



became very (if not the most) important one for Russian security from the very beginning of the 21st century (and Putin's presidency).

This principle was repeated for several times in both the National Security Concept and in Military Doctrine of Russian Federation. It was described as a condition for further reductions of nuclear and conventional forces on a bilateral (with the US) and multilateral basis. In these documents Russia expressed its readiness for further reductions of nuclear forces, but at the same time it called the Russian nuclear forces the instrument (factor) to preserve strategic stability and peace.

Russia's position on "strategic stability" was rather well-grounded. At the same time, it did not offer any room for manoeuvre and was not flexible at all. That is why Russia lost the opportunity in 2000 to achieve an agreement with the US on possible amendments to the ABM Treaty, which would allow the United States to deploy a "thin" defense against unauthorized and accidental missile strikes, as well as against limited strikes from the "third" states. Having in mind that the position of the Clinton Administration on the ABM problems was rather controversial (on the one hand, the US President in a Joint US-Russian Statement on the Principles of Strategic Stability of June 4, 2000 confirmed that the ABM Treaty was an important factor of international security and a "cornerstone of strategic stability", but on the other hand accepted the idea of a "limited" defense, which contradicted to this Treaty), a sort of compromise could be found. But Russia did not make a single step in this direction, even refusing to negotiate any amendments to the ABM Treaty. Most probably, such a position was taken by Russia because its military leadership and official experts managed to convince President Putin that the United States would not dare to withdraw from the ABM Treaty unilaterally.

After the START-2 ratification, the Russian political leadership started a very active policy aimed at gaining international support to Russia's position with regard to the ABM Treaty. These activities created an impression that preserving the ABM Treaty was even more important for Russia than continuing of the process of reductions of nuclear arms. Due to available open information (reports of information agencies), in the course of several meetings with the representatives of the US and high-ranking representatives of foreign countries the Russian side raised the problem of the ABM Treaty and strategic stability in the first place, and the question of ratification of START-2 (with the New York Protocols) by the United States in the second. Any statement from the foreign side about the necessity to preserve the ABM Treaty and about its importance for strategic stability was presented by Russia as a big success of Russian policy and diplomacy.

Having understood that a security policy based on the simple rejection of US proposals and ideas concerning ballistic missile defense could be counter-productive, the Russian leadership took a number of steps to present an alternative plan to the American one. Thus, in June 2000 Putin put forward a proposal to develop together with the European countries a tactical BMD system (which was not prohibited by the ABM Treaty) to provide a reliable defense for Europe and Russia from a ballistic missile threat. This idea was put forward during Putin's "working" visit to Italy. Russian president asked Italian prime minister G. Amato to play a role of a "mediator" for this proposal and to "investigate" its perspectives with the other European leaders.

From the "tactical" point of view this "initiative" was worked out rather well. Thus, a few days after it was pronounced, the Russian defense minister presented its details at a Russia-NATO meeting in Brussels. He offered a list of possible field of cooperation, including:



- joint evaluation of the character and scale of missile proliferation and missile threat;
- joint development of a concept of European BMD system, the stages of its development and deployment;
- establishment of a joint missile warning centre;
- joint military exercises;
- joint research and experiments;
- joint development of non-strategic BMD systems;
- development and deployment of a non-strategic BMD system for protecting UN peace forces and civil population.

It was also declared that Russia was ready to have an even closer cooperation, but it could be possible only in case the ABM Treaty remained in force.

From a “strategic” point of view, Putin’s proposal played a negative, then a positive role for Russia. By putting it forward, Russia indirectly accepted that the missile threat for Europe could exist and, moreover, that this threat might be eliminated by the development and deployment of a non-strategic BMD system. In another words, Russia accepted that ballistic missile defense could play a positive role for security and, consequently, strategic stability at a regional level.

One must accept that Putin’s attempts to preserve the ABM Treaty unchanged were a success. The Clinton Administration did not dare to make a decisive step in order to solve a growing (as they saw it in the United States) threat to US security by going beyond the limits of the ABM Treaty. But it became more and more clear that such an imbalanced situation could not last for a long time. The ABM Treaty “problem” was radically solved under the Bush Administration, and it happened without a dramatic increase of tension between Russia and the United States. Nobody in 2000 could predict such a scenario.

The terrorist attacks against the United States on September 11, 2001 brought dramatic changes in the US security posture. The main emphasis of the American security approach was at counter-terrorist operations and the protection of the US territory. Three months later, on December 13, 2001 the United States sent diplomatic notes to Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Ukraine notifying them of the US withdrawal from the ABM Treaty. The reason for the withdrawal was explained as follows:

Since the Treaty entered into force in 1972, a number of state and non-state entities have acquired or are actively seeking to acquire weapons of mass destruction. It is clear, and has recently been demonstrated, that some of these entities are prepared to employ these weapons against the United States. Moreover, a number of states are developing ballistic missiles, including long-range ballistic missiles, as a means of delivering weapons of mass destruction. These events pose a direct threat to the territory and security of the United States and jeopardize its supreme interests. As a result, the United States has concluded that it must develop, test, and deploy anti-ballistic missile systems for the defense of its national territory, of its forces outside the United States, and of its friends and allies. [Under such circumstances,] ...the United States has decided that extraordinary events related to the subject matter of the Treaty have jeopardized its supreme interests. Therefore, in the exercise



of the right to withdraw from the Treaty provided in Article XV, paragraph 2, the United States hereby gives notice of its withdrawal from the Treaty. In accordance with the terms of the Treaty, withdrawal will be effective six months from the date of this notice.

This step was not very surprising for Russia. Moscow knew in advance that the United States was going to withdraw from the Treaty. The fact that Putin's statement regarding the US decision to withdraw from the ABM Treaty was issued on the same day, December 13, 2001 proves it. The question for Russia was how to react. On the one hand, this withdrawal ruined the basic principle of strategic relations with the United States, "strategic stability". On the other hand, the US openly proclaimed that the Cold War and the hostile relationship between the two powers were over, and Russia was not an enemy for the United States any more.

In this situation, Russia decided not to react very sharply to the American move. In his statement regarding the US decision, President Putin accepted the right to withdraw from the Treaty under exceptional circumstances but called that decision a "mistake". Not a single word was pronounced about possible Russian counter-measures, which were mentioned above. He also stated that the American decision did not "pose a threat to the national security of the Russian Federation". The statement also explained why the national security of Russia was not affected: not because the Cold War was over, and not because the United States and Russia were not enemies any more, but because "... Russia ... has long possessed an effective system to overcome anti-missile defense". In this relatively short statement, Putin also referred twice to the necessity of preserving strategic stability: "Now that the world has been confronted with new threats one cannot allow a legal vacuum to be formed in the sphere of strategic stability", and "Russia will continue to adhere firmly to its course in world affairs aimed at strengthening strategic stability and international security".

It was obvious that the United States, for whatever reasons, ignored the Russian direct references to the importance of the strategic stability issue. The US Administration just welcomed the part of Putin's statement about "no threat to the national security of the Russian Federation" and paid no attention to what Russia understood under such a threat. To my view, if we could speak of an American mistake, it was not the decision to withdraw from the ABM Treaty, but to completely ignore the principles which must create the basis for the strategic relations with Russia after the Cold War; as well as the inability of the United States to present something instead of the "strategic stability" principle for the discussions and probable acceptance by the two states. And it was not enough to put forward standard ideas of "mutual interests and cooperation". The main problem and the task were to prove that the "strategic stability" principle must go, together with the Cold War and US-Soviet confrontation. Since it has not been done, "strategic stability" continued to play a role of a "mine", which sooner or later could deeply worsen or even undermine US-Russian strategic relations.

After the failure to agree about all the peculiarities of the START-2 Treaty, Russia and the US very quickly managed to achieve progress on further reductions of strategic offensive arms. On May 24, 2002 the two Presidents signed a Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty (SORT) in Moscow. It is interesting to note a number of specific features of this Treaty. First, it was prepared very quickly, in a few months. The document itself looks more like a declaration rather than an international arms control agreement. It does not contain specific articles (not to speak of protocols) on control and verification. There are no obligations of the Parties to have a certain structure of strategic forces, nor stages for reductions. It just states that "...by December 31, 2012 the aggregate number of such [i.e. strategic nuclear] warheads



shall not exceed 1,700-2,200 for each Party. Each Party shall determine for itself the composition and structure of its strategic offensive arms, based on the established aggregate limit for the number of such warheads”.

Finally, one can easily find that this Treaty is very much similar to the US Nuclear Posture Review, published in January 2002: the same final date for reductions, the same numbers, and the same declaration. There was no secret about the US intention to reduce their strategic offensive forces unilaterally, but Russia insisted that the intention had to be fixed in an international Treaty.

The SORT Treaty showed two different approaches to security issues which the United States and Russia started to follow in the 2000s. The US idea can be formulated as follows: “since Russia and the US are not enemies any more, each of the countries can do everything it considers to be necessary for its national security”. The Russian approach is more traditional: “the Parties should follow the established rules of arms control, and make further reductions as well as necessary modernization of their strategic forces without undermining strategic stability”. In practice, during all the first decade of the 21st century we are witnessing the struggle between these two approaches.

In the SORT Treaty, the Parties found a compromise on the term “strategic stability”, which was replaced by “international stability”. The wording is as follows: “... this Treaty will help to establish more favorable conditions for actively promoting security and cooperation, and enhancing international stability”. If one can only guess what Americans had in mind under “international stability”, for Russia it was absolutely clear. Thus, in the legal act (Federal Law of the Russian Federation No. 62-FZ) of ratification of SORT (entered into legal force on May 29, 2003) it is established that the President of Russian Federation “...defines the main directions of international activities of the Russian Federation in the sphere of strategic offensive arms and antiballistic missile defense with the aim to strengthen strategic stability and promotion of national security of the Russian Federation” (Article 3). The Law also states that “the deployment by another state or group of states of an antiballistic missile system capable to sufficiently decrease the effectiveness of the strategic nuclear forces of the Russian Federation” can be viewed as an event which jeopardizes Russian supreme interests and, hence, to be the reason for the withdrawal from the SORT Treaty (Article 4).

It is obvious, to my view, that there is enough to prove the fact that Russian security policy is totally based on the “strategic stability” principle. And if one wants to understand what is behind this or that Russian proposal, Russian position or any move in the field of strategic weapons (whether offensive, or defensive), this understanding is possible to achieve only having in mind the general approach of the Russian leadership to the role and the importance of strategic stability to national security.

The phenomenon of Russian reliance on nuclear weapons after the Cold War and the end of general East-West confrontation can be explained by several reasons. One of these reasons is the economic crisis, which seriously affected Russian armed forces and defense industry. As a result, conventional capabilities reduced dramatically, which brought the military and political leadership of the country to the conclusion that for the time being nuclear weapons would be the only effective means to preserve national security. Of course, there were many difficulties in the Russian strategic forces as well. The low rate of modernization, the deployment of a single warhead ICBM “Topol-M” alongside with the withdrawal of multiple warhead systems (mostly because of their age) made deep reductions of Russian strategic



forces inevitable. That is why Russia was very active in the field of arms control, proposing even deeper reductions of strategic warheads than those established by the SORT Treaty,.

At the same time, this “disarmament activity” has its own limits. These limits are defined by the necessity to preserve both Russian security and “strategic stability”. That is why Russian security and arms control policy under Putin can be described as rather controversial. On the one hand, economic, technical, and international politics reasons call for deep reductions of strategic nuclear weapons. On the other hand, “strategic stability”, the need to respond to security challenges (including expansion of NATO and US activities in the field of ballistic missile defense) demand modernization and even growth of the Russian nuclear capabilities. Having met a number of difficulties in modernizing the strategic offensive forces, some Russian experts and even officials argue in favour of intermediate-range missiles (which are prohibited under the INF Treaty), calling for withdrawal from this international agreement.

The sensitivity of Russian leadership and a part of the expert society to the problem of strategic stability presented itself very often during Putin’s presidency. Sometimes it exceeded all the reasonable levels. For example, in the March/April 2006 issue of *Foreign Affairs*, an article by two American experts (not very well known in Russia), Keir A. Lieber and Daryl G. Press, was published with the title “The Rise of U.S. Nuclear Primacy”. The authors speculate about the growing gap in the military capabilities of Russian and US strategic nuclear forces, and predicted that in the nearest future the United States would gain a first-strike potential. In other words, a hypothetical US first strike against the Russian strategic forces would theoretically result in a “no-retaliation” scenario. For whatever reasons, this article attracted a very serious attention from not only many Russian experts, but also officials. One can count dozens responses and commentaries in the Russian press on this article. Practically all of them stated that American experts were wrong and Russia still possessed second-strike capabilities. Moreover, according to some information, this article became a subject of discussions at an official level, including the Defense Ministry and the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces. Most probably, only after the Russian military proved to the political leadership that strategic stability was not undermined, and Russia would possess reliable retaliatory forces for the foreseeable future, the discussions about the mentioned article calmed down.

During the last years, Russia started to use nuclear factor not only as a mean to preserve its security, but also as an instrument of public and foreign policy in general. President Putin (not to speak of high-ranking military officials) never forgets to refer to Russian nuclear forces, the prospects of their modernization, their efficiency, reliability... practically in all his statements which are wholly or partly connected with security problems. To my view, this is not an indication of a “growing Russian aggressiveness”, but just an attempt of the Russian leadership to demonstrate (probably, first of all to the Russians, rather than to the international community) the ability of the authorities to keep the country at the level of the “great” states in the world.

The most serious challenge to Russian security (as the Russian political-military leadership understands it) was presented by the US plan to deploy an ABM system in Eastern Europe. Practically through all 2007 and early 2008 this problem has been the central one within all the spectrum of Russian security policy directions. From the very beginning, the Russian official reaction to the planned deployment of an ABM radar in the Czech Republic and 10 interceptors in Poland was very nervous.



First of all, the Russian leadership unanimously described this system as “an element of the US nuclear strategic forces”. It means that the ABM system in Europe is seen in Moscow as an inseparable part of the US strategic forces, whose main goal is to intercept a retaliatory strike or weaken it to the “acceptable level”. In other words, this system can seriously undermine strategic stability.

Secondly, Russia continues to insist that the ABM system in Europe is aimed exclusively against Russian strategic forces, since neither North Korea nor Iran possess ballistic missiles capable to reach European territory. President Putin compared the US ABM “European initiative” with the deployment of Pershing nuclear ballistic missiles in Europe in 1983, and the current situation with the Cuban missile crisis of 1962.

Third, Russia declared that it would undertake effective “asymmetric” counter-measures in order to reduce this threat and to make the strategic situation more stable. One of these measures is to target the elements of the ABM system in Europe with Russian strategic missiles. Alongside with this, some experts and even military officials, including the Chief of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces, General Yuri Baluevsky, made rather straightforward statements about the possibility that Russia would withdraw from the INF Treaty as a reaction and counter-measure to the deployment of an American ABM system in Europe.

For whatever reasons, the Russian leaders do not want to see a contradiction in their statements. They completely ignore the fact that from the technical point of view the interceptors deployed in Poland cannot hit the Russian strategic missiles targeted against the United States. They also ignore the number of interceptors to be deployed, around 10; that is practically nothing in comparison with the number of missiles in the Russian Strategic Forces. Finally, this very nervous reaction to the American plan contradicts the statements by the same Russian officials, including the President, about the high capabilities of Russian missiles to penetrate any kind of modern ABM system. One can only speculate about this phenomenon. Probably, it can be explained by the fact that the United States put forward this plan without any consultations with Russia, which is considered unacceptable from the point of view of a “new type of US-Russian relations”. The situation has become less favorable for an agreement, due to deep contradictions between the two states on a number of international problems: Kosovo, Georgia, NATO expansion, etc. The Russian leadership, not without reason, considers the US behavior in the future to be unpredictable; which is not welcomed by Russia. That is why it is not surprising that some Russian representatives declare that the third ABM site in Europe is not the last one, and that the United States will never stop at this point.

Several Russian attempts to present an alternative plan to the unilateral US deployment of an ABM system in Europe have failed. A set of negotiations between the US and Russian Defense and Foreign ministers have also failed. But, in my view, it does not mean that Russia and the United States are approaching a new tour of confrontation. There are still good chances to improve the situation. But a lot will depend on the new leaders of the two states, Russian President Dmitri Medvedev and a new US President (a Republican or a Democrat).

3. The prospects

The present level of US-Russian security and arms control relations is far from being good. Not to speak about serious contradictions in this sphere, mentioned above, the situation in



arms control needs a sort of “re-vitalization”. Looking through all the spectrum of arms control relations between the two states, one can find that:

- there are no arms control negotiations between Russia and the United States, only “consultations”, mostly on ABM problems without real prospects for success;
- the ABM Treaty does not work any more, which means that in this field there is no kind of legal limitation on any sort of the ABM activities;
- the CFE Treaty practically does not work: Russia suspended its participation in this Treaty for an indefinite period of time;
- the START-1 Treaty will expire in December 2009;
- the START-2 Treaty did not enter into legal force;
- the SORT Treaty still works, but this agreement does not provide for any kind of verification and control measures;
- with regard to the INF Treaty, the question of a possible withdrawal of Russia as a response to the US ABM deployment in Europe is raised at different levels.

In my view, it is clear that the situation in this sphere is not satisfactory at all. It is also clear that there does not exist an easy way to solve it. Russia, being “captured” by the “strategic stability” principle, will not give up its position concerning the US ABM system. The United States is obviously not ready to negotiate and to sign any agreement on antiballistic missile systems, having in mind that only few years have passed since they “liberated” themselves from the limitations of the ABM Treaty. And if the new Russian President Medvedev, at least for the first 2-3 years, follows the course established under President Putin, the problem of ABM systems and the “strategic stability” principle will remain as the central one in Russian-American strategic relations. Having all this in mind, one can propose several scenarios of the future of arms control and security relations between Russia and the United States:

1. Russia proposes to sign a new treaty on further reductions of strategic offensive nuclear arms, and a new ABM Treaty which prohibits the deployment of the elements of strategic ballistic missile defense system outside the national territory of Russia and the United States and in outer space. Specific limits can be proposed for the numbers and the characters of the ABM system of the territory of the country, as well as for “non-strategic” ABM systems. As we mentioned above, the United States would most probably reject such a proposal for limitations on the ABM systems. With regard to further reductions of strategic nuclear offensive arms, one cannot exclude the possibility that this idea could attract some attention from US Democrats, rather than the Republicans.
2. The opposite variant: the United States proposes an agreement on further reductions of strategic nuclear arms. There is no doubt that Russia would reject this proposal, if the United States were not ready to solve the ABM problem simultaneously.
3. One cannot exclude a confrontational scenario. For example, if the two states fail to reach an agreement on the future of their strategic relations and the United States continues its activities in the ABM sphere ignoring Russian dissatisfaction, Russia



may respond in the INF and SORT Treaties by unilaterally withdrawing from them. In this case, the Parties would enter a period of political confrontation which would last until they managed to achieve a mutual understanding on the nature and the principles of their strategic relations.

4. Another situation would take place if the two states, even without achieving concrete agreements in the security sphere, refrained themselves from any action which might cause a counter-reaction from the other side. In such a case, we would face rather favorable prospects for further negotiations and agreements in the security and arms control sphere.
5. Finally, the most positive scenario would be that the Parties agreed upon the new principles of their strategic relations instead of the principle of “strategic stability”, negotiated and signed a new treaty on deep reductions of strategic nuclear forces, and together tried to involve the rest of nuclear states into the process of nuclear disarmament. This alternative looks like the most attractive, but the least likely in the nearest future.

To my view, the most probable scenarios among the five presented above are numbers 3 and 4. The promising thing is the fact that Bush and Putin are unlikely to leave their successors not only a number of problems to be solved, but also a real confrontation between the two great nuclear states. It means that scenario number 4 is the most probable one. At the same time, this does not mean that under the new presidents of the United States and Russia the situation of strategic uncertainty will remain. In this or that way, both sides will have to establish the rule of their relations, be it confrontational or cooperative. But in order to avoid confrontation, the leaders of the US and Russia must accept some compromises. These compromises must be worked out together, but before that the United States and Russia will have to achieve an agreement within the leaderships of each of the two states. Otherwise, the chances for success will be very low. In this regard, I would like to offer an historical example.

In 1971, the SALT-1 negotiations between the United States and the USSR were in a complete deadlock for about two years. One of the reasons for the lack of a progress was the position of the Soviet Union, which did not want to include submarines with ballistic missiles into the future agreement. The USSR proposed to place a limitation only on the number of ICBMs on both sides, and did not want to “touch” the Navy because of the position of the Soviet military, namely the Commander-in-Chief of the Soviet Navy Admiral S. Gorshkov and Defense Minister Marshall A. Grechko. At that time, the Soviet military had huge plans to build and deploy a great number of submarines, and did not want to have even minimum restrictions in this field for the future. In 1971 it became absolutely clear that there would be no Soviet-American agreement on strategic offensive forces if the USSR did not change this position.

In this situation, Secretary-General L. Brezhnev, who always tried to avoid confrontation within the leadership of the country, did not start pressing upon the military. He just set up a Special Commission of the Politburo, appointing the Defense and Foreign ministers, the Chairman of the Military-Industrial Commission, the KGB Chief and two Secretaries of the Communist Party responsible for military industry and international affairs as its members. The task of the Commission was to give straightforward answers to a few “simple” questions. These questions were:



- Does the Soviet Union need normal and predictable strategic relations with the United States?
- If the answer to the first question is positive, will the role of the future agreement with the US (SALT-1) be very important from the point of view of the relations with the United States?
- Finally, if the answers to the first two questions are positive, what must the USSR do in order to achieve an agreement with the USA?

Even the “hawks” in the Soviet leadership had to accept that it was much better for the national security of the USSR to have normal and predictable relations with the United States, rather than confrontation and an uncontrolled arms race. It was also impossible to reject the importance of arms control for these relations. Finally, all the members of the Commission agreed (or had to agree) that the USSR would have to change its official position and include ballistic missile submarines and sea-launched ballistic missiles into the SALT-1 agreement.

I think that maybe today it is the right time for Russia and the United States to give to themselves the answers to the same simple questions. Do we need good relations between our states? Is arms control important for our relations? What kind of principles should we follow in our security relations? Is “strategic stability” still important, since we are not “potential enemies” any more?

It is obvious that the leadership of the United States and Russia for the last years would not be able to rethink their approaches to security and arms control. The US and Russian Administrations are in office for eight years each, and have had enough time to think their policy over and to implement it as they understood it. So the “only hope” is that the new Russian and American leaders will not simply follow the courses of their predecessors. The situation in spring 2008 clearly shows that without rethinking the basic approaches and principles of the US-Russian strategic and arms control relations, the two states (and the East and West in general) can enter a period of “Cold War II” and waste their time and energy on confrontation and “counter-measures”, instead of working together to make the world more stable and safe.

The last attempt to avoid confrontation was made by Putin and Bush during their summit in Sochi (Russian Federation) on April 6, 2008. They adopted a “US-Russian Strategic Framework Declaration”, where both parties agreed that the US and Russian relationship should be based on the core principles of friendship, cooperation, openness and predictability. It is symbolic that the Declaration does not contain any mention of “strategic stability”. Quite the opposite, it states that the United States and Russian Federation “must move beyond past strategic principles”. At the same time, this document clearly shows that Russia remains under a strong influence of these “past strategic principles”, expressing its disagreement with the decision to deploy ABM sites in Poland and Czech Republic. According to Putin, Russia could only agree to a joint system with joint command and control. Since this proposal looks absolutely unacceptable, the new Russian president and the future US president will have to solve many problems in the field of security and arms control. And their success will mostly depend, in my view, on the ability of the military-political elites of the two states to accept the new realities of the 21st century.