



საქართველოს სტრატეგიისა და საერთაშორისო ურთიერთობების კვლევის ფონდი
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Russia's View – Nuclear Arsenal, Threats and Opportunities

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In September 2019, the Council of Foreign and Defense Policy of the Russian Federation published a document, entitled "[*The New Understanding and Ways to Strengthen Multilateral Strategic Stability*](#)", on its website. The document was formulated by experts from Russian NGOs and various state structures by using the so-called situational analysis method. The method consists of various stages, including the analysis of existing information, the formulation of possible scenarios of developments and a situation analysis on the basis of which experts make respective conclusions and put them together in the form of a single document.

"The New Understanding and Ways to Strengthen Multilateral Strategic Stability discusses the influence that ultra-modern nuclear and strategic weapons have on world order, the dynamics of international politics, the behavior of large states and international security.

From this document, we compiled those assessments that reflect the **threats** and **opportunities** facing Russia, given the background that various countries in the world, including the Russian Federation, possess nuclear arsenals and ultra-modern systems for strategic purposes. Based on these assessments, we drew conclusions about Russia's view of the contemporary world order and its strengths and weaknesses.

Threats Facing the Russian Federation According to "*The New Understanding and Ways to Strengthen Multilateral Strategic Stability*"

- The current extent of the proliferation of nuclear weapons must be considered irreversible. Likewise, it would be pointless to try to continue the bilateral Russian-American strategic arms reduction process in a situation where the factor of third nuclear countries and non-nuclear strategic weapons has an increasingly growing influence on Moscow's and Washington's nuclear doctrines;
- Nuclear weapons still maintain their containment effect as in some sense they prevent the outbreak of wars between nuclear states. Despite this, strategic stability is weakened. This, first and foremost, is caused by the possible emergence of a non-nuclear conflict which could lead to nuclear war;
- The current intensity of the rivalry between the great powers, hostile non-military actions and strong and aggressive ideological rhetoric create a background for a dangerous escalation of any conflict;
- Strategic stability is further weakened because of increasing US-Chinese and US-Russian confrontations;
- The West is looking for an external enemy. At first, Russia was considered to be such while lately China has been seen as a bigger adversary. The US pursues a confrontational policy towards Russia and China as powers which have broken the collective West's 500-year-long military, political and economic supremacy, and refused to fit themselves into the US-led international order and recognize American leadership;
- The purpose of the US confrontational policy is not to make "a deal" with Russia or China but force them to give up their current domestic and foreign policy models, transform themselves in line with American values and recognize US leadership. The duration of the confrontation is predicted to be at least six-to-ten years with Russia and 15-to-20 years with China;
- Military aspects of the US confrontational policy with regard to Russia include, above all, the US's attempts to use scare tactics in order to create the impression of a looming uncontrolled arms

race which Moscow simply cannot win due to its smaller economic potential. The US obviously expects Moscow either to get drawn into a new arms race and strain itself or simply get scared and make concessions to bring the US back to the negotiating table;

- As opposed to starting a war, the US instead prefers to use sanctions, trade wars, information warfare, politico-diplomatic and virtual psychological pressure, and a threatened (as in the case of Russia) and real (with China) arms race;
- The US gives preference to the policy of “strategic patience” in hope that the opponent will give up its confrontational policy and/or change itself;
- More serious risks of inadvertent military clash come from the US’s continuous efforts to build up its military infrastructure, including missile defenses and drones in Eastern Europe, its plans to increase its low-yield nuclear weapons arsenal and put those weapons on strategic delivery systems;
- The same threat is posed through the US concept of limited nuclear war which considers the possibility of using non-strategic nuclear weapons in a non-nuclear conflict and the official adoption of the preemptive strikes doctrine against Russian (as well as Chinese) targets;
- The states that lack such strategic systems like those Russia showed in 2018 will have motivation to act upon the worst possible scenario and suspect Russia of constant attempts to create such military capabilities that would allow it to win a war, including a nuclear one, without sustaining irreparable damage;
- The probability of Russian-Chinese cooperation turning into a confrontation is extremely low in the foreseeable future, even taking into account that China continues becoming stronger in the military-strategic sense. At the same time, if China makes the decision to create strategic forces comparable with those of the US and Russia, this may raise some concerns in Moscow in the future and further increase the existing imbalance in the combined power of the two countries;
- Some experts believe that China may make a breakthrough in the next ten-to-15 years and create strategic nuclear weapons comparable with those of Russia and the US;
- Already existing information and communication (cyber) technologies, according to experts, make it possible, first, to inflict critical damage upon states and block the operation of elements of their critical infrastructure such as power, transportation and health care systems, paralyze communication and the work of government institutions, and cause man-made disasters whose effects are comparable with the devastating consequences of nuclear strikes.

Opportunities for the Russian Federation According to *New Understanding and Ways to Strengthen Multilateral Strategic Stability*

- Demise of nuclear bipolarity and the fact that non-nuclear weapons are acquiring strategic properties do not necessarily increase the risk of nuclear war and an uncontrollable arms race. On the contrary, they can even help deter the US from pursuing a destructive policy similar to that in the 1990s-2000s;
- Russia considers some of the US’s decisions from the angle of its own interests. More specifically, this includes attacks on non-nuclear Yugoslavia, Iraq and Libya, and the de facto refusal to use force against a nuclear armed North Korea as well as the unilateral secession from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action for the settlement of Iran’s nuclear issue;
- Some allies have seen their trust in US nuclear guarantees weakened;

- Traditional elites in Western countries have suffered a political fiasco, lost control over the government formation process and have no support among a considerable part of their electorate. The West, in general, is also losing positions;
- The intensification of internal political struggle practically in all leading Western countries distracts a part of the elites' attention from foreign and security policy as they are more focused on the infighting;
- The intellectual and moral decline of elites in many countries is a particularly serious problem. Television-generation people have come to power who tend to react immediately to news and visual images and who care more about their own image than about anything else. They are unable to think strategically or even on their feet and are increasingly irresponsible. Meanwhile, the "the iPhone generation" is just around the corner, with probably even more manifest faults like these;
- Special attention should be paid to the strengthening of trust-based military-strategic dialogue between Russia and China not in order to limit either country's strategic capabilities but in order to further strengthen trust and reduce the risk of a possible escalation of an arms race in the Asian Pacific;
- Russia should strengthen channels of prompt communication with China in order to keep each other informed and coordinate activities if a crisis breaks out or if relations with third countries deteriorate;
- Russia and China already effectively contain the US on military-political and politico-psychological levels;
- A positive element of the military-strategic environment of huge importance is that Russia has acquired the newest strategic systems, primarily hypersonic cruise missiles, hypersonic glide vehicles and nuclear armed submarine unmanned vehicles, which enable it to reliably destroy a potential adversary in a second strike and a launch-under-attack counter-strike;
- In the past decade, the West's expansion to ex-Soviet republics has so far been stopped by Russia's firm actions. Ukraine's or Georgia's admission to NATO seems to have been removed from the agenda or postponed;
- One of the key priorities in strengthening multilateral strategic stability is support for efforts to achieve a new quality of political relations between nuclear powers, primarily Russia, the US and China, and overcome the current acute phase of confrontation.

Conclusion

The document published on the website of the Council on Foreign and Defense Policy of the Russian Federation in September 2019, entitled *"The New Understanding and Ways to Strengthen Multilateral Strategic Stability"*, should not be considered as an expert opinion. It largely reflects the views of official Moscow, especially since various state structures participated in the formation of the document.

This document, much like the other documents formulated by other organizations of a similar nature, has propagandist goals which could be stated as follows:

1. Discrediting the West and the United States, in particular, on the international stage;
2. Underlining Russia's constructive role;
3. Focusing on Russia's growing power and the irreversibility of this process.

From the main assessments made in the document, the following aspects require special attention:

1. Moscow believes that its recent firm policies are completely justified; these policies, include, among other things, military aggression against Georgia and Ukraine. Hence, it will continue following this line of policy in the future as well.
2. One of the best opportunities for Russia to fulfill its interests on the international stage are the differing positions of the Western states on important issues. Therefore, deepening divisions on specific issues between these countries will remain on the Russian agenda.
3. Russia considers nuclear and ultra-modern weaponry to be the most important determinant of its power and influence. This, in Moscow's view, represents a sort of a guarantee that the West will be unable to give an adequate response to Russia's aggressive policies.
4. Moscow considers partnership with China to be an efficient way of unified action against the US. Given this background, Moscow avoids openly speaking about potential threats coming from China against Russia even on the level of experts. However, at the same time, it fully realizes that such threats are to be expected in the future.