

AN ARCTIC NUCLEAR WEAPONS FREE ZONE – A VIEW FROM RUSSIA¹

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Russia as a legal successor of the Soviet Union remains committed to the strengthening of the nuclear non-proliferation regime, firmly supports existing nuclear weapons free zones as a key element of the NPT and is in favor of creating new ones in accordance with Article VII of the non-proliferation treaty.

During the period since 2010 NPT review conference Russia has ratified Protocols I and II to the NWFZ Treaty in Africa (Pelindaba Treaty). In concert with the ASEAN countries and P-5 partners substantial progress has been achieved in the legal framing of the NWFZ in South-East Asia with the aim of signing the corresponding protocol by nuclear P-5 states in the nearest future.

Serious attention is also being paid to promoting coordinated efforts of the NPT depositories (Russia, UK, USA) in the implementation of the 2010 NPT review conference decisions concerning creation of the NWFZ in the Middle East and holding in 2012 of a conference devoted to this issue.

As to the Arctic NWFZ, the Danish Institute for International Studies should be commended for its initiative to convene in August 2009 a representative specialized conference with informative and balanced agenda and outstanding list of speakers³. Hopefully this seminar will be in a position to further clarify challenges and opportunities before us.

It is commonly recognized nowadays that there are three major factors determining the situation in the Arctic. Firstly, the end of military and political confrontation of the Cold War, when the Arctic was nearly exclusively perceived as the area of flight trajectories of strategic nuclear bombers as well as routes of strategic submarine patrols. Now the threat of a global nuclear war has gone down, the US-Russia arms

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³ Conference on Arctic NWFZ, Copenhagen, 10-11 August 2009, DIIS Report 2010:03.

control treaties being a key element in a gradual move towards the world without nuclear weapons.

Impartial assessment of the arms control process shows that nuclear potentials of Russia and the USA were steadily going down during the last 20 years. The 1994 START I Treaty resulted in removal of about 40% of the deployed strategic nuclear weapons of the two countries and the 2010 New START Treaty provided for fourfold reduction of this quantity. The 1987 Treaty on Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces eliminated a whole class of intermediate and short range nuclear missiles. The 1991 unilateral Presidential initiatives led to drastic reductions of the US and Russian tactical nuclear weapons (TNW) stockpiles. According to official statements all Russian TNW were removed since then from their delivery means and placed at central storage facilities within national territory with adequate safety and security measures⁴, the current stockpile of these devices constituting no more than 25% of its 1991 level.

Substantial efforts were also undertaken by both countries to diminish the possibility of nuclear launches resulting from accidents, unauthorized actions or misinterpretations: strategic nuclear bombers were put off full time alert and “Open ocean targeting“ was mutually agreed upon meaning that in case of an accidental missile launch a missile would land in the open ocean.

Two other factors are contributing to the opening up of new opportunities in the Arctic area: the emergence of novel technologies and fast thawing of the Arctic ice – both of them making natural resources as well as shipping routes more accessible. One has to note that ice-cap depletion has also a military dimension, namely an eventual increased US multipurpose nuclear submarines and missile defense AEGIS warships deployment in the Northern Seas may be considered by Russia as a threat to strategic stability.

Russia became the first Arctic state to adopt in 2008 a long-term Arctic strategy in response to the new realities with the emphasis on:

- using local resources to provide social and economic advances of the country;
- sustaining the Arctic as a zone of peace, stability and cooperation;
- protecting fragile arctic ecosystems;
- exploiting the advantages of the North Sea Route, the national transportation artery of Russia.

All other Arctic states adopted similar Arctic strategies (Denmark was the last one to do this in August 2011) the key common point being the statement that national interests of each Arctic state can be met only through multilateral cooperation.

Russia is carefully monitoring developments in the Arctic and considers the situation in the area as positive, stable and predictable on the whole proceeding from the assumption that that there are no problems which could require a military solution.

⁴ Statement of the Russian delegation at the first session of the NPT preparatory committee, New York, April 11, 2002.

Unfortunately opposite views are still being expressed at different international forums and in the media alleging that conflicts or even wars in a struggle for the Arctic resources are inevitable. Such a bleak assessment may be explained either by a lack of knowledge of realities or by their deliberate distortion. But the truth is that a “race“ for territory, energy and protein has been curtailed indeed by historical decisions of the 2008 Illulissat meeting, when five Arctic coastal states agreed that their basic framework for future cooperation, territorial delimitation and resolution of disputes and competing claims would be the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

Moreover, it is also a fact that practically all Arctic resources have been already divided. According to the calculation of Danish colleagues⁵, 97% of the discovered and potential resources of the Arctic are located in the zone of sovereignty, sovereign rights and jurisdiction of the Arctic states. As to the remaining or potential issues of delimitation they can be solved in a calm and professional manner within the UNCLOS framework.

Norway became the first Arctic state to have its submission on extended limits of its continental shelf approved in 2009 by the UN Commission on the limits of the continental shelf. All Arctic coastal states in the substantiation of their existent and future claims on the external limits of their continental shelf will have to prove scientifically to the UN Commission, as did Norway, that geologically continental shelf is the continuation of the continent. Russia plans to submit in the near future additional data in substantiation of its claim. Canada and Denmark are also planning submission to the UN Commission. The US is carrying out the relevant work while the US Administration announced its intention to ratify the UNCLOS. Another positive example of a civilized solution of the Arctic issues is the Russian-Norwegian treaty on maritime delimitation and cooperation in the Barents Sea and the Arctic Ocean, which just has entered into force.

One has also to single out another issue, which is often dramatized by the media and the expert community – an alleged militarization of the Arctic. In substantiation of this thesis references are being made inter alia to Canada putting forward new military capabilities in the North to protect its sovereign rights, Denmark releasing an all-party defense position paper suggesting the creation of a dedicated Arctic military contingent, Norway and Sweden conducting major Arctic military practices, Russia planning the formation of a special Arctic force.

In our view such apprehensions are not justified since they do not correspond to the reality. It is noteworthy that such a competent institution as SIPRI in its 2011 background paper⁶ does not overestimate military potentials of the coastal Arctic states refuting conjectures about the arms race in the region. The key conclusion of the SIPRI paper is that a limited modernization of military capabilities and a limited

⁵ A.Vasiliev, Ambassador at large, “Russia’s approaches to international cooperation in the Arctic“, *The Arctic Herald*, N 1, 2012, p. 14.

⁶ SIPRI Background paper “Military capabilities in the Arctic“, March 2012.

growth of military power have nothing to do with power projection into the areas of the Arctic with unclear ownership. These efforts are rather for patrolling and protection of recognized national territories that are becoming more accessible, including for illegal activities. Thereupon conventional military forces specially adapted to the harsh Arctic environment are projected to remain small. The SIPRI report states also that Russia's eventual expansion of its fleet in the Arctic appears more a matter for providing protection for its strategic submarines than the program building up for a military struggle over the Arctic resources.

It would be appropriate to stress at this point that the current comprehensive military reform in Russia is not equivalent to launching a new arms race and has a declared goal of restoring the defense potential drastically reduced during a long and devastating period of economic crisis and many years of scarce financing. Anyway, the defense budget of Russia even in 2020 will be at least five times less than that of the US.

And now let me pass on directly to the subject of our seminar.

First of all I would like to say that while recognizing the attractiveness of the Arctic NWFZ, I share the view of many 2009 DIIS Conference participants that its implementation is anything but simple due to numerous strategic and political obstacles ahead.

One of the key questions is how can the participation in the Arctic NWFZ be reconciled with membership in an Alliance having a nuclear umbrella? We have already a negative experience in this respect with the Central Asia NWFZ when the Western nuclear states have chosen to refuse recognition of the Zone on the ground that the first para of Article 12 of the Treaty may be interpreted as giving precedence to the Tashkent Treaty on collective defense and therefore leads to undermining of the Zone if Russia were to deploy nuclear weapons in defense of a Central Asia state. Some people propose as a solution a change in the NATO's strategic concept but such a move does not seem to be practicable in the foreseeable future.

NATO's Defense and Deterrence Posture Review (DDPR) adopted in May 2012 in Chicago clearly states that nuclear weapons are a core component of NATO's overall capability for deterrence and defense and pledges that all components of NATO's nuclear deterrent have to be maintained safe, secure and effective as long as NATO remains a nuclear alliance. Moreover DDPR reiterates that the supreme guarantee of the NATO security is provided by the strategic nuclear forces of the Alliance, particularly those of the USA.

As it is stated in the 2009 Conference proceedings the Arctic NWFZ is unique in the sense that it would be the first agreement to encompass the territory of two nuclear weapon states and would potentially require the denuclearization of the Zone rather than just preventing future actions (which is typical for existing NWFZ), would not cover entire states but only regions of states. The negative security assurances required of the two nuclear powers would be especially problematic. No doubt that overcoming these obstacles would be a major task requiring a long diplomatic effort.

And last but not the least, we all agree that the Arctic NWFZ would not be possible without additional disarmament measures. The New START Treaty made a substantial contribution to the strategic stability by enhancing predictability of US-Russian relations, but a year and a half after its ratification the “reset” between the two countries seems to be in trouble and next steps in nuclear arms reductions remain uncertain. One has to acknowledge that despite the statements to the effect that the Cold War is over long time ago the truth is that recent problems in the Russian-American strategic dialogue are the product of remaining distrust which is contaminating the debate on missile defense cooperation, tactical nuclear weapons and the US Prompt Global Strike plans.

The gist of the logjam over the European Missile Defense System is that Russia expresses serious concerns about the NATO’s Phase Adaptive Approach, which could in the end put at risk Russian potential of nuclear deterrence. The US and other NATO countries express willingness to provide a political statement that the European MD system does not jeopardize Russia’s national security but are not ready to adopt a legally binding commitment fixing quantitative and geographic limits to the System which would be agreeable to the Russian side.

The overall situation was aggravated by an exchange of harsh rhetoric on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean. In the US Senate nomination of a new Ambassador to Moscow was coupled with a demand not to disclose to Russians confidential information on SM-3 Aegis missile for European MD system under pretext it could be passed on to Iranians. Was not either helpful a recent statement by the Republican candidate for the US presidency Mitt Romney who branded Russia the number one geopolitical foe. No wonder that Russian President Vladimir Putin promptly reacted by declaring that such a comment made Russia feel justified in opposing America’s missile defense plans in Europe.

Another issue that impeded the launch of substantial negotiations on further nuclear cuts was tactical nuclear weapons (TNW). Independent experts concur that Russia’s apparently increasing reliance on nuclear weapons, including the tactical component, is determined by geostrategic and economic factors. Firstly, Russia, as opposed to the USA, is within the reach of nuclear weapons of several de jure and de facto nuclear states and this reality must be adequately tackled. Secondly, Russia’s nuclear posture is linked to a perception of NATO superiority in conventional forces in Europe against the backdrop of a weakened military capability of Russia⁷.

A standing Russian position on TNW is that its withdrawal from Europe constitutes a precondition for beginning negotiations with the USA on this issue. Such a stance is replicated by Russian diplomatic and military communities at different forums abroad and in Moscow the emphasis of the discourse being put on the asymmetric composition of the American and Russian TNW – while all Russian tactical nuclear

⁷ General Makarov: “Tactical Nuclear Weapons – A Deterrence Against Enormous Stockpiles Accumulated In Europe”, ITAR-TASS, December 10, 2008.

weapons were removed from delivery means and placed at central storage facilities within national territory, nearly 200 US bombs are still stored in five European countries at active bases inside aircraft shelters.

At the same time the size and location of the Russian TNW have become a source of serious concern to the USA and other NATO member-countries. The final US Senate resolution on the New START Treaty ratification stipulates initiation, following consultation with NATO Allies but not later than 1 year after the entry into force of the New START Treaty, negotiations with Russia on agreement to address disparity between TNW stockpiles of Russia and the USA and to secure and reduce TNW in a verifiable manner.

The prevailing view in Moscow after the NATO Summit in Chicago is that the DDPR did not change the Alliance nuclear status quo and only copied the Lisbon formula that “NATO is prepared to consider further reducing its requirement for non-strategic nuclear weapons assigned to the Alliance in the context of reciprocal steps by Russia, taking into account the greater Russian stockpiles of non-strategic nuclear weapons stationed in the Euro-Atlantic area“. It is also noted that the DDPR TNW real cuts have been reduced to a vague promise to develop confidence building and transparency measures between NATO and Russia, which is necessary but not sufficient.

Summing up one has to recognize that prospects for launching in the near future the next round of bilateral talks on further nuclear cuts are dim due to the reasons enumerated above. Consequently, the chances for the Arctic NWFZ to become a reality remain substantially reduced. It goes without saying that the totality of problems associated with the Arctic NWFZ does not pass unnoticed in Russia – a dominant view took shape in the Russian political establishment and the expert community that time is not yet ripe for the creation of such a zone. It is significant that they assimilate the Arctic NWFZ initiative from the point of view of urgency to the ambitious goal of a world without nuclear weapons, which, as President Obama put it in his Prague speech three years ago, might not be reached in his lifetime.

Notwithstanding such a pessimistic assessment reputable voices are heard in Moscow that the Arctic NWFZ principles could be discussed within the framework of the Arctic Council – a competent and effective high-level intergovernmental forum comprising eight Arctic states.

Under the auspices of this body numerable cooperative projects are being conducted in the field of mitigation of climate change, elimination of sources of environmental contamination, oil and gas exploration, etc. At the 2011 Nuuk AC Ministerial meeting a package of measures was approved to strengthen the Arctic Council by establishing its permanent secretariat with its own budget in Tromso, Norway and to make more binding the Council’s recommendations. After two years of negotiations the first legally binding pan-Arctic document in history, the Agreement on cooperation in aeronautical and military search and rescue in the Arctic, was signed in Nuuk. Negotia-

tions have started in October 2011 to work out a new pan-Arctic agreement on cooperation in preparedness and response to marine oil spills in the Arctic.

The Arctic Council does not deal yet with the matters of military security, however the expansion of economic activity and increasing urgency for the protection of natural resources and critical infrastructures call for developing and strengthening military cooperation between Arctic countries to ensure predictability and stability of these processes. In this context the first meeting of Chiefs of Staff of all Arctic states held last April under the AC auspices could play a special role in this respect.

The consultations on the Arctic NWFZ could become a part of the security agenda if the Arctic Council participants deem it appropriate.

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