

# **GLOBAL NUCLEAR ZERO AS A MULTILATERAL MINIMUM DETERRENCE CONCEPT – A VIEW FROM RUSSIA<sup>1</sup>**

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It is a commonly recognized fact nowadays that a nuclear deterrence doctrine implemented by the USA and the USSR during forty years of the Cold War has been a decisive factor in escaping a nuclear Armageddon.

But there is also a growing understanding that there exists a basic contradiction in the concept of mutually assured destruction as an inalienable element of military-political relations between the two superpowers. On the one hand it is evident that more than 20 years after the breakdown of the Soviet Union the concept of mutually assured destruction became a relic of foretime since it staves off already nonexistent threat of a premeditated mass attack of great powers against each other and does not deter the real challenges of modern times – nuclear terrorism, proliferation of WMD and means of their delivery, ethnic and religious conflicts. The other half of the conflicting “equation“ is that both countries declare that as long as nuclear weapons exist they will continue to maintain a safe, secure and effective nuclear arsenal to deter potential adversaries and reassure allies of security commitments to them.

Though the Military Doctrine of Russia and the US Nuclear Posture Review (both adopted in 2010) stipulate that the use of nuclear weapons would be considered only in extreme circumstances, there is still a risk of an unauthorized or accidental launch. Moreover, in the era of globalization the preservation of nuclear deterrence is inevitably conducive to further nuclear proliferation.

It goes without saying that the best way to discard the concept of nuclear deterrence would be to achieve a world without nuclear weapons but the implementation of this idea put forward by President Obama five years ago in Prague may take several decades. It is worth noting that the Russian expert community is of the view that giving up nuclear weapons does not mean lighting up “green light“ to regional or local wars with resort to conventional arms or systems using new physical principles. In other words a non-nuclear world is not equivalent to the current world after deduction of nuclear weapons but to a transformed international community based on the principles of equal security to all countries independent of their size and military power.

It is also evident that arms control remains a key element in gradual move towards the world without nuclear weapons. Impartial assessment of arms control process

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<sup>1</sup> A paper presented at the International Conference “The Arab Spring As A Complicating And Enabling Factor For The Helsinki Conference“ (Nicosia, June 12-14 2014).

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shows that nuclear potentials of Russia and the USA were steadily going down during last decades. The 1994 START Treaty resulted in a removal of about 80% of all strategic nuclear weapons in existence at that time. The 2010 New START Treaty further provided for fourfold reduction of deployed strategic nuclear warheads and for two-fold reduction of strategic carriers.

Nevertheless, pessimistic appraisals concerning the prospects of further nuclear cuts started showing up recently in both countries. The backbone of such a mood is that the US-Russian reset is allegedly in recess due to the fact that the two countries are in deep disagreement over such strategic issues as the missile defense, tactical nuclear weapons and the US Prompt Global Strike capabilities.

Unfortunately the situation has been recently exacerbated by the developments around Ukraine. With the crisis in this country evolving and a biased assessment of the Russia's position towards these events by the Western leaders and mass media, explained either by a lack of knowledge of realities or by their deliberate distortion, it seems we are moving to the point where the trust among the arms control process partners may be definitely lost.

Being optimist by nature I still believe this will not happen and the common sense will prevail.

I presume that at the end of the day we may become witnesses of the repetition of the August 2008 war with Georgia long-term scenario. As one may recall in these days most of the Western leaders and the overwhelming majority of the US and European mass media were blaming Russia as an impudent aggressor against "tiny and defenseless" Georgia. Thereafter the West undertook "punitive" measures against Russia including mothballing cooperation with NATO. Noteworthy that six months later the interpretation of events was completely reversed when a special EU commission came to a conclusion that it was Saakashvili who started the hostilities by giving the order to call down fire of multiple rocket systems against the capital of South Ossetia killing numerous Russian peace-keepers and many local residents. That is under such circumstances Russia had nothing to do but to retaliate.

Complementary to the arms control initiatives there are other important building blocks conducive to a world without nuclear weapons including inter alia prompt entry into force of CTBT, the early commencement of negotiations at the Conference on Disarmament on a verifiable and non-discriminatory treaty banning the production of fissile materials for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosives, early discussions at the CD on negative security assurances to non-nuclear states.

Though the recent NPT PrepCom in New York was not in a position to produce a consensus report on recommendations for the 2015 Review Conference the paper issued by the chairman highlights the importance of the above-mentioned practical steps on the road to global zero.

The paper underscores as well a significant contribution of Nuclear Weapon Free Zones to achieving a world without nuclear weapons and to strengthening regional

security. It reaffirms the importance of convening without further delay the postponed 2012 Conference on the establishment of a Middle East zone free of WMD taking as its terms of reference the 1995 NPT Resolution.

Russia as a legal successor of the Soviet Union remains committed to the enhancement of the WMD non-proliferation regimes, firmly supports existing NWF zones as a key NPT element and is in favor of creating new ones. Serious attention is being paid to promoting coordinated international efforts in the implementation of the 2010 NPT review conference decisions concerning creation of the WMDFZ in the Middle East. The May 7, 2012 Russian Presidential Decree to this effect reads “The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, together with other federal executive bodies ... are instructed to support the establishment in the Middle East of a zone free of weapons of mass destruction and means of their delivery.”

Several rounds of multilateral consultations held in 2012-2013 showed that the main point of discord among the eventual participants of the WMDFZ in the Middle East was the scope of the Helsinki Conference. While Arab nations and Iran were saying they would like to see the Conference agenda stick to its original mandate, Israel on its part was insisting that the original subject of the meeting should be discussed in the context of broader security concerns facing the region.

Russian expert community proceeds from the assumption that the forthcoming Helsinki Conference even with a thorough preparatory work and an adequate list of participants will not become a panacea for the region but would be a first step in a long process of practical implementation of the 1995 NPT review conference resolution.

Nevertheless the Conference could take some decisions related to building regional confidence building measures and outline first blueprints of the future agreement related to the creation of the WMDFZ in the Middle East.

Among such moves could be a joint declaration of all participants with commitment to refrain from attacking declared nuclear facilities, a proposal to develop a road map leading to putting of all nuclear infrastructure of the region under IAEA safeguards, fixing rigid time frame for the CTBT ratification by “lagging” countries.<sup>3</sup>

For evident reasons special attention should be paid to the participation in the Conference of the two key players – Iran and Israel.

Active participation of Iran in the Conference is quite logical since initially this country was one of the authors of the WMDFZ in the Middle East proposal. If Iran backs out of the Conference this could be interpreted by some of its opponents as an indirect indication of its covert nuclear program. The good news here is that the members of the League of Arab States and Islamic Republic of Iran have recently deposited letters with the UN Secretary-General confirming their support for declaring Middle East a region free from WMD.

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<sup>3</sup> White paper “Ten Steps Towards a WMDFZ in the Middle East,” p. 18, PIR Center publication, 2013, Moscow.

More complicated is the situation with Israel. Not being an NPT member Israel formally does not have to comply with the resolutions of its review conferences. But on the other hand Tel-Aviv has real concerns related to nuclear proliferation in the region and the Helsinki Conference is a good venue to become an insider of eventual “denuclearization“ process and to take part in making consensus decisions. Moreover this would be an additional occasion to promote its own agenda in the field of chemical and biological weapons and the means of their delivery non-proliferation. It seems also that Israel could make a gesture of a good will, without causing a detriment to its own national security, that would facilitate prompt convocation of the Helsinki Conference, namely by announcing the plans to ratify CTBT shortly.

As to discussing at the Conference and afterwards the regional security aspects, which seem to be of paramount importance to Israel Russian official representatives do not exclude such a possibility with the understanding that the main thrust of the debate should however be concentrated on WMDFZ in the Middle East.<sup>4</sup>

Summing up one has to recognize that the window of opportunity for convening Helsinki Conference is rapidly shrinking and it is a must for the international community to undertake all necessary effort with patience and perseverance to make this event a reality.

*June 23, 2014.*

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<sup>4</sup> *Security Index*, N.3 (106), p. 91, PIR Center quarterly publication, 2013 (in Russian), Moscow.