

**GREAT POWER
DETERRENCE RELATIONSHIPS:
RUSSIA, THE UNITED STATES AND EUROPE**

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Deterrence is nuclear above all for the Russian leadership, even though it has recently focused increasingly on non-traditional threats (including terrorism, drug trafficking, and information threats)¹. The key importance of nuclear deterrence for Russia has been demonstrated by various dimensions of its defense policy since the early 1990s. This includes Moscow's commitment to modernize its strategic forces, even in the harshest budgetary times of the post-Soviet period. On the doctrinal front, Russia has since 1993 explicitly rejected the no-first-use principle. A lowering of the threshold for the use of nuclear weapons is also visible in various Russian doctrinal documents. This has been illustrated by the ongoing discussion on — and training for — “calibrated” use of nuclear weapons with a pre-determined level of damage for the de-escalation of a conventional conflict.

It should also be noted that the emphasis on the nuclear factor fits well with Vladimir Putin's effort to reconcile Russia with its past achievements, including technological and security investments. The former Russian president has consistently insisted that there are many things in the Soviet legacy that the Russians should be proud of, and take advantage of, in the effort to restore a great power status for their country. This

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¹ Some experts in Moscow, including serious people like Andrey Kokoshin, a former Security Council secretary, have mentioned a triad to fight terrorism, including nuclear forces together with conventional and special forces (“Russia Setting Up New Triad for Combating Terrorism – Lawmaker,” Interfax-AVN, 24 December 2002). But it has proved difficult to find much substantive information about this angle of the current strategic debate in Russia.

approach has been used for space capabilities and for military power, including nuclear weapons. In both fields, one of the mottos of Vladimir Putin has been to demonstrate that the potential that Russia has inherited from the USSR constitutes a valuable asset that now helps Russia fully take its place on the world scene².

This nuclear focus, which was noted in the 2008 National Defense Strategy of the U.S. Department of Defense³, is unlikely to vanish in the foreseeable future. The current discussion on the review of the Russian Federation's military doctrine, underway since 2005, has been an expression of this as it has suggested, among other things, that "*nuclear weapons will retain their current role*" and that Russian officials and experts perceive that there are "*significant threats to Russia's interests and security, including threats from the United States, that [warrant] continued reliance on nuclear deterrence*"⁴. A draft of a new "white book" by the Russian Ministry of Defense, leaked in the Russian press in August 2008, apparently, and unsurprisingly, says that the nuclear triad will remain the core of the Russian armed forces for the next two decades, and that Russia will continue to maintain a strong nuclear capability as a reliable deterrent of potential threats⁵.

In this context, the United States' distancing itself from the traditional bilateral arms control and disarmament architecture — notably by withdrawing from the ABM Treaty — and its plans in the field of missile defense have been met with a strong negative reaction in Moscow, which

² By contrast, in the Yeltsin era, the Russian political leadership had tended to underrate the importance of these Soviet legacies as it was widely claimed that the collapse of the USSR owed much to excessive investments in these strategically and ideologically important fields.

³ "*Moscow has signaled an increasing reliance on nuclear weapons as a foundation of its security*", the document stresses, saying that this is one of the actions that "*suggest a Russia exploring renewed influence, and seeking a greater international role.*" *National Defense Strategy*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Defense, June 2008, p. 4.

⁴ This appeared clearly during a conference on the future military doctrine that took place in January 2007 under the auspices of the Russian Academy of Military Sciences in Moscow. See Nikolai Sokov, "Russian Academy of Military Sciences Debates Role of Nuclear Weapons in Conference on New Military Doctrine", *WMD Insights*, March 2007 (www.wmdinsights.com).

⁵ "Russia Prioritizes Nuclear Triad, Hi-Tech Weaponry in Future Wars", RIA Novosti, 1 August 2008. The draft document is titled "The new physiognomy of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation" (*Novyi oblik Vooruzhennykh sil Rossiyskoy Federatsii*).

sees these developments as highly disturbing and as a source of vulnerability⁶. As with many other issues where its objectives diverge from Washington's, the Kremlin, in order to promote its interests, has been trying to play the "European card". This has created serious problems and dilemmas in the already tense EU-Russia relationship.

Nuclear deterrence for Russia: an existential and multifunctional tool

There are plenty of factors that will keep the Russian focus on nuclear weapons alive for a long time ahead. Even though Russia does not expect a large-scale conflict to take place, it feels threatened from many directions and vulnerable given the state of its armed forces. As Russian security expert Dmitri Trenin sums up, "*Even in the absence of credible external threats of appropriate caliber, this [the possession of nuclear weapons] works to reassure the high command and the political leadership that the country is adequately protected against any hypothetical large-scale attack*"⁷. Even though the Russian military budget has steadily increased since the early 2000s, the situation in the conventional forces is not going to improve rapidly nor easily given the enduring destructive impact of the crisis that the army lived through in the 1990s and the real state of the defense industry.

In addition, keeping U.S. military power in check and correcting the imbalances in Russia-U.S. relations remain key objectives of Russian foreign and security policy. In this perspective, nuclear deterrence is and will remain an essential tool. For Russia, keeping a credible nuclear deterrent is a matter of making the military balance with the United States less uneven⁸. The

⁶ On this issue, see Isabelle Facon, "A 'New Strategic Framework' for Russian-American Relations?", in Fondation pour la Recherche Stratégique, *French Strategic and Military Yearbook 2002-2003*, Odile Jacob Editions, 2003, pp. 39-54.

⁷ Dmitri Trenin, "Russia's Nuclear Policy in the 21st Century Environment", *Proliferation Papers*, IFRI Security Studies Department, Autumn 2005, p. 7.

⁸ Russian leaders often mention the gap between the size of the national defense budgets of Russia and the United States. From a "qualitative" point of view, Russian strategists have emphasized the danger posed by U.S. high-tech weapons that could have a strategic impact – i.e., be used against Russian strategic targets. From this point of view, one should not underestimate the deep impact that the NATO operation in the Balkans in 1999 (*Allied Force*) has had on the world vision of Russian *élites*. Even now, almost ten years later, one can find quite a number of Russian officials and experts that say that if Russia had not been armed with nuclear weapons, it would certainly have suffered the same fate as Serbia in the context of the Chechnya wars.

emphasis on nuclear weapons is also very much about guaranteeing Russia's strategic independence from Washington despite the blatant asymmetries between the two countries in power tools, both military and economic. Nuclear deterrence is viewed in Moscow as a guarantee against possible U.S. political pressure, which the Russians see as a highly plausible possibility given Washington's unilateralist moves and its increasing interventionism in recent years.

Also, the nuclear status and potential serve well Russia's traditional global ambitions, which this country has never abandoned and for which a more or less balanced partnership with the United States is a key precondition. In its effort to present itself as a key world power, Moscow likes to say that its nuclear weapons are a global stabilizing factor since Russia, through its nuclear deterrence policy, is theoretically able – so it wants to believe – to exert some restraining pressure on U.S. policy, a circumstance which Russian leaders present as positive for the international community, faced with the destabilizing consequences of American unilateralism. More generally, so far neither Russia's world economic and trade positions nor its capability to project force are sufficient to allow it to justify fully its claim that it is a power with global reach. As a result, the nuclear factor is one of the few elements that support this claim. It is in this very same perspective that Russia frequently stresses that as the second biggest nuclear power it shares with the United States a special security responsibility on the world stage. More indirectly, its ability to provide its allies with the protection of its nuclear umbrella has been an asset in Russia's keeping its credibility as a military protector of the former Soviet republics within the Collective Security Treaty Organisation⁹, thus in its retaining some political authority over them. This also is crucial to Russia's international ambitions since keeping a predominant influence in its former empire, as demonstrated by its fierce opposition to Ukraine's and Georgia's joining NATO, is seen in Moscow as a precondition for the realization of its aspiration to global power status.

⁹ This organization includes Russia, Belarus, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kirghizstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan.

Another factor that will, in the foreseeable future, confirm Russia's emphasis on nuclear weapons is that it feels it needs to deter not only the United States but also other states, including the new and potential nuclear powers that are located close to its territory. In addition, Russian policy towards China contains "*an element of nuclear deterrence, even if well-camouflaged and discreet*"¹⁰, as the bilateral power equation with Beijing is overall not very favourable for Russia, except in the military field, and more particularly in the nuclear component.

Thus, while for Washington the strategic nuclear relationship with Moscow is no longer as central as it used to be, for Russia the nuclear balance with the United States in particular, and the credibility of the nuclear deterrent in general continue to be quite high on the security agenda. As viewed from Moscow, nuclear weapons are about security, sovereignty and status as a great power – all factors that proved to be driving forces in Russian foreign policy under Putin, and that obviously will remain so under President Medvedev. It is important to underscore here that Russia's increasing reliance on the nuclear factor concerns non-strategic nuclear weapons (NSNW) as well. In contrast with NATO, Russia has not downplayed the importance of such weapons¹¹. Moscow sees them as important resources for compensating for the relative weakness of its conventional armed forces. Russian strategists have developed the concept of calibrated nuclear strikes aimed at discouraging a military adversary from continuing its attack against Russia in a situation in which the latter's armed forces have proved unable to stop the aggression. Such strikes are supposed to cause the adversary a "set" or "required" or "pre-determined" (not "unacceptable") level of damage that will convince him to stop the attack. This is what Russian strategists call the "de-escalation" of a conventional con-

¹⁰ Dmitri Trenin, "Russia's Nuclear Policy in the 21st Century Environment", op. cit., p. 10.

¹¹ See Rose Gottemoeller, "Elimination of Short-Range Nuclear Weapons Designed to Be Forward Deployed", *Reykjavik Revisited*, Hoover Press, forthcoming; Isabelle Facon et Bruno Tertrais, "Les armes nucléaires 'tactiques' et la sécurité de l'Europe", *Recherches & Documents*, Fondation pour la Recherche stratégique, 2008 (www.frstrategie.org).

flict¹². Most Western and Russian experts agree that this approach leaves a significant role for NSNW.

Russia fighting uncertainty and dynamism in the international nuclear policy landscape

Attached as it is to traditional nuclear deterrence, Moscow has proved eager to try to preserve stability and transparency in the international nuclear policy landscape. Despite all the nuclear muscle flexing over the past years (including highly publicized tests of old and new ICBMs and the renewal of strategic bomber patrols), it does not want to be driven to invest too much in its nuclear arsenal. The Russian leadership, while determined to strengthen the national military tools, has many other priorities to tackle, and has kept reiterating that it does not want to repeat the mistakes of the past through overinvestment in defense to the detriment of social and economic programs. Russian officials and experts often call for an agreement with the United States on the reduction of strategic nuclear arsenals to 1,500 deployed warheads, which indicates Moscow's lack of both financial resources and political will to accelerate the rate of production of new strategic missiles (currently 5 to 7 Topol-M ICBMs a year¹³). In this sense, this country does not have the same flexibility as the United States has to "tailor" its nuclear forces – even though, objectively, the collapse of the START II treaty and the signing of the Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty (SORT) have both allowed Russia to determine independently the struc-

¹² This notion was conceptualized in an article in a Russian MoD review (V. I. Levshin, A. V. Nedelin, M. E. Sosnovskiy, "O primeneniі yadernogo oruzhiya dliya deeskalatsii voennykh deystviy", *Voennaya Mysl'*, n° 3, May-June 1999, pp. 3437). This notion also appears in the 2003 "White Book" of the Russian Ministry of Defense: de-escalation of aggression is "*forcing the enemy to halt military action by a threat to deliver or by actual delivery of strikes of varying intensity with reliance on conventional and (or) nuclear weapons*" (*Aktual'nye zadachi razvitiya vooruzhennykh sil Rossiyskoy Federatsii* [Actual Goals of the Development of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation], Russian Ministry of Defense, October 2003, p. 70). One might also recall the scenario of the Zapad (meaning "West") military exercises conducted in 1999, when the Russian forces simulated a NATO attack on the Russian territory of Kaliningrad. In this scenario, when the Russian army did not succeed in repelling the adversary, it resorted to limited use of nuclear weapons to stop the attack.

¹³ According to Alexei Arbatov and Rose Gottemoeller, in "New Presidents, New Agreements? Advancing U.S.-Russian Strategic Arms Control", *Arms Control Today*, July-August 2008.

ture of its nuclear forces¹⁴. This is why Russia remains interested in arms control and any measures that will codify approximate equality with the United States in nuclear capabilities.

While Russia has renounced the ambition to maintain a strict numerical nuclear parity with the United States, it remains strongly interested in “qualitative parity”. In other words, Moscow intends to maintain the traditional deterrence relationship and nuclear balance with the United States. As a consequence, the Russian leadership is profoundly upset by any move – political or technological – that introduces elements of uncertainty and dynamism in the international nuclear policy landscape, and reduces its levers on U.S. nuclear policy. That includes the distance taken by the United States from the traditional bilateral arms control architecture and the Pentagon’s pursuit of missile defense programs.

Moscow has been trying hard to oppose the Bush administration’s explicit disaffection with formal bilateral arms control measures. It was only because Russia proved supportive of the United States in the wake of the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks that the Administration agreed to sign a formal arms control treaty with Russia (the SORT treaty also known as the Moscow Treaty). Therefore, “*in the rather brief negotiations for the minimalist Moscow Treaty in 2001-2002, Russia managed to obtain the form it wanted — a legally-binding treaty*”. However, “*the U.S. basically dictated the content*”¹⁵. For this reason, Russia has never been completely satisfied with this treaty, and as tensions have been growing since 2001 in Russian-U.S. relations¹⁶, Moscow has been pushing for a treaty that would be much more precise and constraining than SORT in the post-START I

¹⁴ The collapse of the START II treaty enabled Russia to keep its MIRVed ICBMs. Article 1 of the SORT Treaty of 24 May 2002 says that “*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*”.

¹⁵ Jenifer Macby & Edward Ifft, “The End of START?”, *Washington Post*, 20 April 2007.

¹⁶ Among the events that have caused these tensions to develop one should mention the Iraq war, the colored revolutions in Georgia and Ukraine, the proposed U.S. missile defence deployments in Poland and the Czech Republic and Washington’s support for Kyiv’s and Tbilisi’s joining NATO.

context¹⁷. In the Russian view, such a treaty should certainly be less detailed than START I, but it should establish new ceilings for both weapons and delivery vehicles, and be legally binding. Moscow also wants the issue of the bilateral imbalance in reserve arsenals to be handled in any negotiation on the post-START I future. In addition, the new treaty, the Russians stress, should include inspection and verification mechanisms, which the Russian side views, together with the corresponding bilateral dialogue and interaction, as means to keep a closer eye on the evolution of U.S. nuclear forces, and to compensate partly for the flexibility that the United States has – and that Russia does not have – in terms of “tailoring” nuclear forces. It is quite interesting, by the way, to see Russia advocate binding treaties at a time when its foreign policy discourse is increasingly centred on the notions of freedom of action, strategic autonomy, and diplomatic independence.

Since the 1990s, Russia has been working to avoid any breakthrough in the development of missile defences, owing to a belief that such defences could erode the whole rationale of mutual deterrence, and compromise the traditional balance between offense and defense capabilities. Some prominent and influential Russians seem to fear that U.S. missile defense technology, though clearly not mature yet, is superior to that available to Russia, and/or that the United States has a superior economic potential to exploit BMD technology. In other words, these Russians fear that over the longer term the United States may gain a strategic advantage beyond Russia’s grasp. This is why Moscow long resisted Washington’s desire to abandon the ABM Treaty, which the United States finally did in December 2001¹⁸. Since then, in its nuclear weapons programs, Russia has focused on systems that are supposed to enable Moscow to overwhelm any U.S. missile defence. The Russian leadership has also been fiercely trying

¹⁷ The START I Treaty is due to expire in December 2009. Its confidence and verification measures are supposed to serve for monitoring the implementation of the SORT treaty. However, the latter runs until 31 December 2012. Therefore the failure to devise follow-on arrangements would leave SORT without verification procedures.

¹⁸ Another reason for the Kremlin’s resistance has been its concern that U.S. missile defence efforts may entice the Chinese to enlarge their own strategic nuclear arsenal, thus narrowing the strategic gap with Russia.

to prevent the deployment of the “third site” of the U.S. missile defence system, which would include ten interceptor missiles in Poland and a radar installation in the Czech Republic. This has, among other things, led to tensions between Russia and its European partners, as the former has tried to enlist the latter in its effort to put a brake on the increasing dynamism of Washington’s strategic policy.

Russia’s commitment to traditional deterrence: the impact on Europe

Russia’s strong commitment to a rather traditional, conservative vision of deterrence and to the centrality of nuclear weapons in its defense policy has affected Europe-Russia relations in several ways. Indirectly in the first place: the energy that Russia has been spending on trying to keep its traditional strategic relationship with the United States alive is energy that has not been available for strengthening the Russian-European partnership in general, and Russia-“new Europe” relations in particular. One consequence of this lies in the intensity of the controversy over the proposed U.S. missile defense in Poland and the Czech Republic: it is quite possible that the Russian position would not have been that tough if the systems were to be deployed in states other than former Warsaw Pact countries with which Russia’s relations have markedly deteriorated since the collapse of the Soviet bloc. This political hurdle has been heightened by Moscow’s clinging to what many in Europe perceive as Cold War symbols and attributes (for example, the “nuclear balance of terror” rationale), which has reinforced, in many European countries, an image of Russia as a past-oriented, frustrated, and thus potentially threatening power. This of course has not been conducive to developing more confident and stable Russian-European relations.

It is only logical that Russia has been trying to get direct or indirect support from European governments on the U.S. missile defense plans, since several of them question the necessity and feasibility of the planned missile shield. But certain of the Russian responses to the various factors and dimensions of the alteration of the traditional deterrence relationship with the United States have introduced elements of militarization in Europe-Russia relations. Many of the “asymmetric” responses to the U.S. missile defense plans in Europe that Russia has been putting forward

in recent months¹⁹ would, if realized, have a direct impact on European security. Russia has not only argued that the U.S. missile defence systems have nothing to do with the security of NATO's European members and that they would, on the contrary, augment the threat to Europe by creating “*an additional stimulus for the arms race in the Near East and in North Africa*”²⁰. Moscow has also threatened to point missiles at the countries that will host the American missile defence systems. In addition, high-level officials have said that Russia would envision withdrawing from the INF treaty and resuming production of short and intermediate range missiles, which has brought back some of the atmosphere that prevailed during the crisis of the “euromissiles” in the early 1980s. There are also repeated rumours that Russia may give up the Presidential Nuclear Initiatives on non-strategic nuclear weapons of 1991-92, or at least redefine the nature of these commitments, or decide to deploy non-strategic nuclear weapons in Kaliningrad²¹ or in Belarus. This prospect appears all the more disturbing because Moscow has already sent a strong message that it is prepared to withdraw from arms control commitments by announcing, in 2007, a moratorium on its implementation of the CFE treaty. This is problematic for European security, and possibly connected with the U.S. plans to deploy missile defence elements in Poland and the Czech Republic in that Russia may decide to deploy more conventional forces in locations from which it could threaten the new military sites.²²

¹⁹ Russia's reliance on so-called asymmetric measures is presented by Russian leaders as a reflection of their goal of not getting into a new arms race that would be harmful to its internal development. (See, for example, Sergey Lavrov, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Strategicheskaya stabil'nost' ne mozhet ostavat'siya eksklyuzivnoi oblast'yu rossiysko-amerikanskikh otnocheniy” [Strategic Stability Cannot Remain an Exclusive Sphere of Russian-American Relations], Interview, *Indeks bezopasnosti*, n° 3 (86), Tom 14, p. 13.) However, Moscow has not put only negative options on the table. It has also proposed the establishment of a global missile defence system that would include Russia, the United States and Europe, joint ballistic missile threat assessment, and joint use of the Gabala radar in Azerbaijan and of another radar based in Armavir, Russia.

²⁰ See Yuriy Baluevskiy, then head of the Russian General Staff, “PRO Soedinennykh Chtatov: chto dal'che ?” [U.S. Antimissile Defenses: What About the Future?], Agency of Federal Studies, www.FLB.ru, 26 July 2006 (last accessed: July 2008).

²¹ Actually, there are already concerns within NATO about Russia's possibly maintaining nuclear weapons in this Russian region, which is sandwiched between Poland and Lithuania.

²² Alexander Nikitin, “New Old Agenda: Current Nuclear Disarmament Concerns”, Conference *Revitalizing Nuclear Disarmament: Policy Recommendations of the Pugwash 50th Anniversary Workshop*, Pugwash, Nova Scotia, 57 July 2007.

The issue of Russian NSNW, which is a serious concern for Europeans, seems to be instrumentalized by Russia in its effort to get the United States to heed its proposals about the post-START I future. Firstly, Russian military experts consider these weapons a factor that helps to correct the growing numerical gap between Russia and the United States in strategic nuclear weapons.²³ Moreover, this issue appears as one of the cards Moscow can play in the context of its negotiations with Washington on strategic problems, since U.S. officials in both the Republican and the Democratic parties have expressed an interest in engaging Russia on the issue of arms control measures for this category of weapons. In May 2008, John McCain said, “*In close consultation with our allies, I would also like to explore ways we and Russia can reduce – and hopefully eliminate – deployments of tactical nuclear weapons in Europe*”²⁴.

The Russian threats about their arms control commitments have so far remained hypothetical prospects, and the Russians would certainly weigh the unavoidable political, security and economic risks that they would face should they decide to make one of these threats (regarding the INF treaty, missile targeting, or non-strategic nuclear weapons) a reality. But at any rate, reinstating the utility and prominence of such tools cannot be conducive to a better security climate in Europe. In addition, the Russian public diplomacy posture is confusing, adding to the Europeans’ feeling of vulnerability in the face of Russia’s new assertiveness. Indeed, these hints regarding the INF Treaty and the PNIs began in the late 1990s and long predate the U.S. proposal to base BMD system elements in Poland and the Czech Republic²⁵. In addition, these same non-strategic nuclear systems are viewed by the Russian military as key assets for deterring China and other potentially hostile powers in Russia’s neighbourhood.

²³ *Nestrategicheskoye yadernoye oruzhiye – problemy kontrolya i sokratcheniya* [Non-strategic Nuclear Weapons– Problems of Control and Reduction], by A.S. D’iyakov, E.V. Miyasnikov, T.T. Kadyshchev, Center for Arms Control, Energy and Environmental Studies, Moscow Institute of Physics and Technology, 2004, p. 3.

²⁴ Remarks by U.S. Senator John McCain on Nuclear Security, 27 May 2008, available at <http://www.johnmccain.com/Informing/News/Speeches/e9c72a28-c05c-4928-ae29-51f54de08df3.htm>

²⁵ See David Yost, “Russia’s Non-Strategic Nuclear Forces”, *International Affairs*, Vol. 77, n° 3, July 2001, pp. 544-545.

Therefore it is not easy to understand whether, when Russia puts its NSNW and INF commitments into question, it “just” wants to use this as another bargaining chip to try to bring the United States to discuss the future of nuclear arms control and of the bilateral nuclear balance in a way that will best advance its interests, or whether it really intends to widen its military options in connection with other perceived security problems.

At any rate, it appears that Russia’s strategy to try to mobilize the Europeans against the U.S. initiatives that, Moscow argues, would undermine the traditional bilateral strategic balance has failed. While initially the “*German, Polish, and other European governments [had] indicated that Russian opposition to U.S. BMD policies made them uneasy about endorsing the plans*”, and while some European officials say off the record that the Russian position and objections on the issue can be deemed sound on the substance²⁶, Russian threats and pressures have certainly encouraged NATO’s European members to finally “*recognise the substantial contribution to the protection of Allies from long-range ballistic missiles to be provided by the planned deployment of European-based United States missile defence assets*”²⁷. This failure may well push Moscow to stiffen its positions further.

Conclusion

The potential for destabilization of the security situation in Europe is far from negligible, even if thus far Moscow has refrained from implementing most of the “asymmetric” responses to Washington that would have an impact on European security. The European Union has urged Russia and the United States to actively negotiate a post-START I treaty and a verifiable agreement to achieve the greatest possible reductions in non-strategic nuclear weapons²⁸. The EU has also indicated, in substance, that it does not want to be a hostage of the divergence in policies between

²⁶ Richard Weitz, “U.S. BMD Plans Gain NATO’s Endorsement but Not Russia’s”, *WMD Insights*, June 2008; “US Missile Defense: A Strategic Challenge for Europe”, *CSS Analyses in Security Policy*, Vol. 2, n° 12, April 2007.

²⁷ Bucharest Summit Declaration Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Bucharest on 3 April 2008, paragraph 37.

²⁸ See Alexander Nikitin, “New Old Agenda: Current Nuclear Disarmament Concerns”, *op. cit.*

the United States and Russia on strategic matters, even if some member states are affected in one way or another. This is NATO's business, the European Union would say. Russian pressures related to proposed U.S. missile defence deployments in Poland and the Czech Republic have not been fruitful, and have even had a result contrary to what Moscow sought (i.e., the Bucharest NATO summit declaration, and the signing of bilateral agreements between Washington and Warsaw and Prague in summer 2008). With such an ambivalent posture, the Europeans probably indicate, in addition to their internal divisions on a number of foreign and security policy issues, that they find it difficult sometimes to locate their rightful place in the triangle with Moscow and Washington.

A change in mutual perceptions at the Russia-U.S. level is certainly a necessary condition to avoid a recurrence of such situations in Russian-European relations. The Russian posture – focused as it is on preserving the traditional nuclear balance with the United States – has not helped such a change to take place. Nor has Moscow been encouraged to undertake such a change. The United States may not be as interested as Russia is in maintaining this traditional relationship, but the fact is that Washington continues to preserve a massive, actively deployed deterrent capability directed against Russia. The discussion in the United States about American nuclear primacy has not gone unnoticed in Russia²⁹, and has only made Moscow more determined to ensure that the nuclear balance remains stable – not more willing to consider that nuclear weapons should be put into the background. Strengthening the Russian-American relationship in fields other

²⁹ Russia, like China, tends “to interpret the 2001 Quadrennial Defense Review and Nuclear Posture Review as signaling a desire to create the kind of military capabilities that would allow the United States to coerce and confront even nuclear-armed major powers” and an effort by Washington to try “to escape the nuclear balance of power.” (Brad Roberts, “Great Power Deterrence Relationships in the Early 21st Century”, Discussion paper prepared for a conference on *NATO and 21st Century Deterrence: New Concepts, Capabilities, and Challenges*, NATO Defense College, Rome, April 29-30, 2008). This concern has also been expressed in Russia in connection with Keir A. Lieber's and Daryl G. Press's article “The Rise of U.S. Nuclear Primacy”, *Foreign Affairs* issue of March-April 2006, which Russian military experts have interpreted as a direct reflection of Pentagon views on the issue despite the very negative reaction that this paper received in the DoD. U.S. officials such as Peter C.W. Flory, then the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Policy, rejected the Lieber-Press analysis as riddled with factual and analytical errors. See Flory's response to the Lieber-Press article in the September/October 2006 issue of *Foreign Affairs*.

than strategic and security issues (for example, in trade and economics) may help. However, the situation seems less conducive than ever to such a positive evolution, given the cold wind that has been blowing in Moscow-Washington relations since the Georgia crisis in the summer of 2008.

This is problematic. At a time when Westerners reflect on evolving notions and concepts of deterrence³⁰, Russia, which, as we have emphasized in this paper, has not modified significantly its strategic thinking and is not inclined to redefine its concepts as much as the West is, is at best sceptical, at worst suspicious about new conceptual approaches. In other words, Russia is certainly quite perplexed about what it may perceive as the absence of a clear conceptual framework and even as ambiguity “on the other side”. For the situation to remain more or less stable, we should avoid any further misunderstandings on such crucial issues. This in turn calls for more information exchanges, more transparency and, probably, a dose of formal arms control. In September 2008, the situation was not, unfortunately, auspicious. Due to the war in Georgia, the Bush administration was considering suspending the talks with Russia on missile defence and nuclear disarmament, and the activities of the NATO-Russia Council had been frozen. It remains to be seen whether the future new U.S. Administration will offer an opportunity to redefine the global framework of deterrence.

³⁰ This is demonstrated, for example, by the series of workshops dealing with “tailored deterrence” under the auspices of NATO and the U.S. Defense Threat Reduction Agency.