

# **Nuclear Missions in the Post-Post Cold War System**

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## New interest in nuclear weapons since late 1990s:

Proposals to make nuclear weapons more usable:

- Russia: 1996 (Viktor Mikhailov and Aleksandr Chernyshov, *NATO's Expansion and Russia's Security*)
- US: 2000 (Stephen Younger, *Nuclear Weapons in the Twenty-First Century*)

Official endorsement – 2000-2001:

- Russia: 2000 (National Security Concept, Military Doctrine)
- US: 2002 (Nuclear Posture Review)
- France: 2001 (statements by Chirac)

1998: India, Pakistan

North Korea.

Iran?

**Will the trend continue, decline, or grow?**

## Post-Cold War period is over, a new international system is emerging

- 2000 elections in the US and Russia: the first post-post-Cold War administrations
- International terrorism, especially in the US and Russia
- Wars in Kosovo (1999) and Iraq (2003)
- North Korea's withdrawal from the NPT, questions about the Iranian nuclear program

## Features of the New International System

- End of bipolarity has made the system less manageable. States have greater freedom in foreign and defense policy. Old alliances and groups (e.g., NAM) have weakened.
- Shape of the emerging system not yet known. Currently seems unipolar, but US does not have power to fully control events. New potential leaders are emerging – China, India trailing closely behind.

### Options:

- unipolar
- concert of powers
- “classic” multipolarity
- long transitional period (high degree of unpredictability)

## Features of the New International System

- International law and international regimes (though mostly shaped by the US) are less relevant even for the US: do not constrain other states, do not punish. For others – do not protect from the US. *Expectations no longer converge.*
- New threats have emerged, more on the way. Sources, scale, and nature of future threats are difficult to predict.

Defining characteristic of the post-post-Cold War system – low predictability. Consequence – shift from threat-based to capabilities-based planning. This includes nuclear weapons.

## Enhanced reliance on nuclear weapons:

- New missions and/or
- Nuclear weapons associated with more plausible scenarios

## Combination of Variables that Enhances the Role of Nuclear Weapons

- Perception of acute external threat.
- Perception that alternative security tools (international law, international organizations, alliances, conventional armed forces) are inadequate
- Perception that nuclear weapons can yield tangible benefits while negative consequences are limited and/or controllable.

## *“Perception of Acute External Threat”*

For the US:

- international terrorism – a two-generation war,
- regional powers capable of denying US influence (including by acquiring WMD), supporting its enemies, denying US access to natural resources.

For Russia:

- outside support for secessionist movements, domestic opposition, hostile neighbors.

Began with Chechnya (fear of Kosovo scenario).

Putin in the fall of 2004: unnamed countries wanting to “tear juicy morsels” from Russia.

Vladislav Surkov: “secret war” against Russia waged by “those in the United States, Europe, and the Orient, who still view Russia as an enemy.”



## *“Perception of Acute External Threat”*

Common problem for all states – uncertainty about the systems’ shape, unpredictable threats. Uncertainty enhances attractiveness of nuclear weapons as the ultimate protection:

- for nuclear states (in addition to meeting existing threats) – guarding against changes of other NWS behavior (for US and Russia – concern about resumption of major conflict with the other party)
- for US allies and other developed states – as a security guarantee in case of doubts in a US “umbrella” (Japan vs. China)
- for potential foes of the US and other developed states – as a security guarantee vs. more powerful adversaries or as a guarantee of unimpeded expansion (Iraq in the 1980s)

## *“Absence of Alternative Security Instruments”*

### **Alliances:**

For the US – traditional allies do not provide tangible support, sometimes resist (except Japan), ad-hoc coalitions provide political support, but too weak to share burden (New Europe vs. Old Europe).

Russia – allies need to be bought or cajoled, no prospect of sharing burden.

### **International law:**

US – no support from the UN, need to work outside UN structures. International law restricts instead of helping.

Russia – UN and international law cannot shield from force or threat of force from stronger powers/coalitions; the shock of Kosovo.

### **Conventional forces:**

US – stretched, might not take out certain types of targets (bunkers, deployed WMD, etc.)

Russia – too weak vis-à-vis states of concern (US, NATO), too small for several local wars, outdated.

## *“Nuclear Weapons Can Yield Tangible Benefits”*

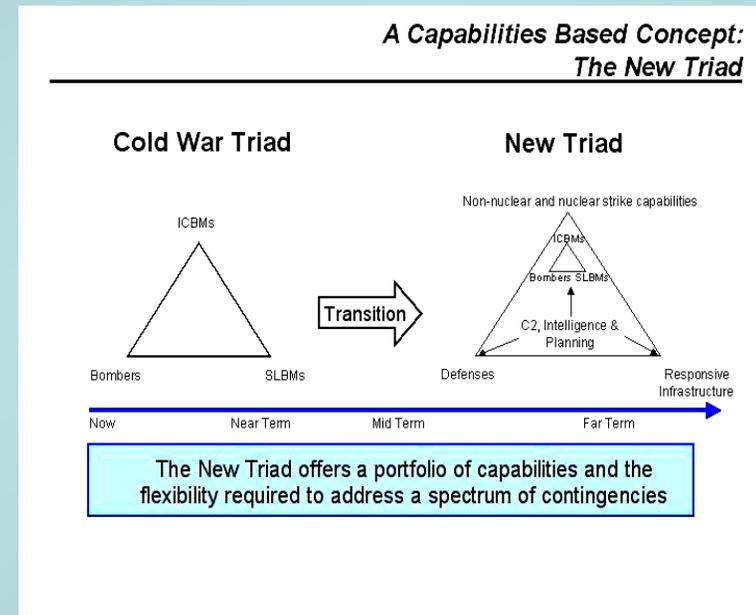
Known or predictable threats require local and regional level military solutions (scale of wars in Kosovo, Afghanistan, or Iraq-2003). Within the context of such wars limited nuclear use could support specific tasks, including: destroy certain targets, destroy deployed WMD, deter through threat of limited strikes or deescalate by employing limited strikes.

Key to role of nuclear weapons in post-post-Cold War system – limited use (limited by targets, by number, and possibly by yield).

## *“Nuclear Weapons Can Yield Tangible Benefits”*

US: Nuclear Posture Review - integration of nuclear weapons into strike weapons. Examples of missions (from abandoned Doctrine for Joint Nuclear Operations):

- enemy has WMD and ready to use it;
- Enemy WMD located in deeply buried hardened bunkers;
- Enemy conventional forces exceed US forces in the theater



Russia: deterrence of limited conventional attack through threat of limited counterforce nuclear strike inflicting “predetermined” damage (commensurate to the level of benefits expected by enemy) – deescalation of a Kosovo-style scenario.

## Restrictions on Limited Use During Cold War

-- escalation to a full-scale strategic conflict was almost guaranteed because stakes were perceived as very high (survival of political, economic, and social system).

-- limited nuclear use against third countries (Korea, Vietnam) could legitimize limited nuclear use by the other side against one's own clients.

*During Cold War limited nuclear use was primarily assigned to short- or intermediate-range weapons, was feasible only in the context of WWII in support of large-scale operations.*

## Limited Use in Post-Post-Cold War System

- risk of large-scale nuclear war (“World War III”) is negligible,
- stakes in any feasible conflict among nuclear powers are limited,
- escalation from limited to large-scale war is unlikely.

As a result, limited nuclear use has become theoretically feasible for the first time – both among NWS and by NWS against non-nuclear third parties.

# Nuclear Missions in Post-Post-Cold War System

1. Strategic deterrence – a “just in case” mission, stabilizer of great power relations (primarily US-Russia, also US-China to a lesser extent).
  
2. Limited nuclear use in the context of limited, primarily conventional conflicts against specific select targets.
  - 1a. (For conflicts between NWS) Credible strategic deterrence remains a foundation for successful limited use because it rules out escalation.

# Implications for Postures

Current missions do not require large arsenals

⇒ Arsenals are and will be reduced. Optimization, not disarmament.

Among NWS, reduced level of threat reduces interest in traditional arms control agreements.

⇒ Parties trade restrictions on the other side for own flexibility, overlook uploading capability (Russia), forego verification (US) – premises of the 2002 Moscow Treaty.

# Implications for Postures

- Delivery vehicles with intercontinental range allow maximum flexibility.
- Since requirements of strategic deterrence are limited, strategic delivery vehicles can be assigned to limited use missions.

Long-range aircraft (strategic and medium range) seem to fit missions best



- Short-range systems (tactical) no longer seem very relevant or needed.
- Low-yield weapons mandatory for the US, desirable for Russia.

## Other Examples – France and China

### France:

- In response to large-scale terrorist acts or direct threat (missile strikes). In January 2006 added cutting off vital supplies (oil).
- Against “political, economic, and military power centers.”
- Long-range assets, minimal collateral damage.

### China (?)

Russian deescalation strategy seems optimal for conflict over Taiwan.

# Conclusions

Enhanced role of nuclear weapons primarily results from:

- properties of the emerging international system or at least from the uncertainty of the transitional period;
- low risk of escalation to global nuclear war;
- limited utility –whether real or perceived – of conventional forces for certain types of missions;
- multiplicity of threats and challenges, resulting overextension (insufficiency) of conventional forces.

## Conclusions

Reliance on nuclear weapons cannot be willed away.

Reliance on nuclear weapons cannot be reduced by a political decision.

Reliance on nuclear weapons cannot be reduced by changing administrator(s).

To reduce the role of nuclear weapons, address the underlying causes:

- reduce the level/nature of threats or
- develop alternative security instruments.

# Conclusions

## Existing Partial Alternatives:

### New regimes:

- Moderate success with PSI;
- Limits on proliferation of nuclear fuel cycle technologies. Too late to address existing problems, but could stem the next round of proliferation.
- Expanded inspection regime (Additional Protocol).

Most effective – inspection regime in Iraq in the 1990s, but degree of intrusiveness cannot be easily replicated in fully sovereign countries

### Conventional weapons:

high-yield conventional warheads, conventional Tridents (could create problems with nuclear states).

Informal cooperation among developed states (NWS, G-8): difficult to achieve without major change of policies (opportunity already missed?)

# Conclusions

Much will depend on the shape of the new international system:

- least reliance on nuclear weapons: US dominance or concert of powers
- traditional role of nuclear weapons (strategic deterrence) - bipolar world (US-China?)
- greatest reliance on nuclear weapons: multipolarity or long transitional period