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FROM RESTRAINING TO DETERRING:

**NUCLEAR WEAPONS, GEOPOLITICS,
COALITION STRATEGY**

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This book is essentially a public version of the report produced by the Institute of World Military Economics and Strategy (IWMES) at the National Research University-Higher School of Economics whose purpose was to assist in the effort to update Russia's policy of strategic deterrence. It is also a product of the efforts undertaken jointly with our fellow experts and partners from the leading countries of the World Majority aimed at redefining the very concept of deterrence, including nuclear deterrence. The book summarizes the results of studies, workshops, and situation analyses conducted in 2023 and 2024, including a three-day meeting held in May 2024. It is a public version of the report presented to the Russian leadership.¹ The authors are grateful to all the participants in the situation analyses for their helpful ideas that have been extensively used in this book.

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INTRODUCTION AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The conflict in Ukraine—Russia’s Special Military Operation—is a war, albeit so far indirect, between Russia and the U.S.-led collective West. This circumstance and the conflict itself prompt us to take a fresh look at the military deterrence and geopolitical containment of our main adversaries.

The existing deterrence theory was formed during the Cold War under U.S. intellectual leadership and then adapted to the situation of declared partnership with the West that never materialized. The transition from the failed partnership to a new standoff, and then to an open confrontation, makes however a return to the original Cold War format impossible. The reason is a radical change in the geopolitical, geo-economic, ideological, social, and military-technical context in which Russia is implementing its national security strategy.

The Ukraine crisis has highlighted Russia’s main security problem: nuclear deterrence does not protect the country from the adversary’s geopolitical aggression that can pose an existential threat to the state.

The Russian word ‘*sderzhivanie*’ which serves as an equivalent of ‘deterrence’, although long accepted and used in official documents, is not quite accurate when it comes to the nuclear forces’ mission. ‘*Sderzhivat*’ means ‘to restrain’, but we do not “restrain” a possible nuclear or other attack from a potential adversary, but rather try to awake fear in the potential aggressor, who is planning an attack, of assuredly unacceptable or even catastrophic consequences for himself. Thus, in Russian, instead of nuclear *sderzhivanie*, we suggest nuclear *ustrashenie* – literally (re)awakening fear in the adversary’s hearts and minds as the true Russian equivalent of deterrence. This is not a play in words. Not only the name, but the substance of the concept itself needs to be strengthened materially if we really want to sober up our adversaries and thus deter them – and we need it badly, before it’s too late.

The nature of nuclear weapons makes nuclear deterrence a strategic tool at almost any level, regardless of the yield of a nuclear warhead or the range of its carrier. Given the nature of nuclear weapons and the aura or even mythology surrounding them, the use of nuclear weapons is a step

of strategic importance. This situation may change if, God forbid, these weapons are used and it turns out that this can be done on a limited scale without triggering escalation to a global catastrophe. But such use would weaken their role as a tool designed to prevent war. This is another argument to think harder and act with utmost responsibility when reshaping nuclear strategy from restraining adversaries to deterring them.

Nuclear deterrence has many functions (they are listed and analyzed below). Misunderstanding and underestimating them reduces the political effectiveness of the nuclear factor in Russia's military-political strategy.

Given the combined military, military-economic, and demographic capabilities of Russia's main adversaries—the United States and its NATO allies—we should not try, as the Soviet Union did, to achieve overall military parity with them. Moreover, parity as numerical equality in warheads and their carriers was not a reliable indicator of nuclear deterrence's effectiveness in the past. Instead, we propose such a criterion as the military-technical, political, and psychological ability to conduct *active* nuclear deterrence - that is, the ability and determination to use nuclear weapons when the fundamental interests of Russia – are jeopardized.

Nuclear deterrence is the most important, but not the only, component of military deterrence. General-purpose forces ensure national security and constantly stand ready to repel an enemy attack. The adversary, however, must be convinced that Russia will not allow itself to be defeated by factoring out nuclear weapons and is determined to decisively defeat whoever encroaches or is preparing to encroach on its sovereignty, territorial integrity, or the lives of its citizens.

In addition to the military component, Russia's strategic posture includes an equally important spatial element: geopolitical containment. A significant problem of modern Russian strategic thinking seems to be the fact that strategic security is associated exclusively with only one of its elements—nuclear.

In no case should we separate different types of strategic deterrence. It was the lack or inefficiency of geopolitical containment vis-à-vis the West after the end of the Cold War that led to an armed conflict in Ukraine. This situation needs to be urgently corrected in all

strategically important areas. Russia needs to build anew the system designed to prevent a hostile presence along its entire border, primarily by working jointly with other CIS countries. Nuclear deterrence and non-nuclear strategic deterrence by general-purpose forces should be complemented with efforts to limit or push back a hostile presence in those countries, as well as stave off threats to Russia's fundamental security interests in the future.

The long-neglected importance of geopolitical containment of the United States in the post-Soviet space after the collapse of the USSR and the insufficiency of nuclear doctrine in the Ukraine conflict, which began in 2014, forced Russia to launch its Special Military Operation (SMO) in February 2022. From the very beginning, Russia's military actions were accompanied by references to the nuclear factor/ So far this has helped prevent direct military interference in the conflict by the United States and its allies. At the same time, the high threshold for the use of nuclear weapons, the obsolescence and notorious "frivolity" of the nuclear doctrine ("they will not dare encroach on our fundamental interests because Russia is a nuclear superpower") have emboldened the adversary, allowing him to hope that Russia can be defeated on the battlefield or worn out.

Indeed, aware of Russia's nuclear capabilities, Washington has been trying to avoid a direct clash between not only American but also other NATO countries' troops and the Russian Armed Forces. The idea of a NATO "no-fly zone" over Ukraine was abandoned. The West's attempts to exert pressure on Minsk were countered by the deployment of Russian operational-tactical nuclear missile systems in Belarus. The French president's statements that regular NATO troops could be sent to Ukraine have so far garnered no support in Washington.

Nevertheless, the United States has come to the conclusion that Western countries can wage a proxy war against Russia in Ukraine and even constantly up the ante without fearing Russia's nuclear response. So the Kiev regime has proved to be an almost ideal tool in Washington's hands as a cheap mercenary, turning Ukraine into expendable material. The United States has even set a goal, unheard of during its previous relations with Moscow, to defeat Russia strategically by using the Ukrainian army as a proxy and providing it with all-out Western support.

European elites, infected with a virus of “strategic parasitism”— a belief that peace is forever and the fear of war is a thing of the past—even more than their U.S. counterparts have completely lost the ability to think strategically. Faced with a complex crisis and seeing their legitimacy wane, they have gone berserk. European ruling circles are making moral, political, and military-economic preparations for a large-scale war with Russia.

The Russian Armed Forces have been holding the initiative on the battlefield since the end of 2023. Moscow’s current task is to seize the initiative in the war in general. The adversary is trying to wear out Russia’s material resources and break its mental stamina. Given economic, social, psychological, and other factors, this war has to be won by Russia in a relatively near—a maximum of two years—perspective. But we should not deceive ourselves: the confrontation with the collective West, requiring internal—political and moral—mobilization, will continue for a long time after that.

It takes a lot to achieve victory, and not only on the battlefield. Since the confrontation between Russia and the collective West is an integral part of a global crisis triggered by a grueling and painful transition from U.S.-led Western hegemony to a new, more balanced world order, Moscow should actively interact with its partners in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. This requires drafting and implementing a flexible coalition strategy to advance the converging interests of Russia and countries that represent the World Majority.²

However, shared interests, while being necessary, are not a sufficient basis for coalition-building. There need to be common values. Russia is not going to impose its ideology (which has yet to be developed as soon as possible) on anyone, but, having officially declared itself³ a state-civilization, it has challenged the Western model of global Westernization and set its own agenda for building a new world order as a diverse cluster of numerous cultures and several global-level civilizations.

Going back to the issues related to the current war, we believe it necessary to take the following steps.

² See our previous report: Russia’s Policy with Regard to the World Majority. M.: HSE, 47 p.

³ In the Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation adopted in 2023.

Military-political, military-technical, and military steps

Rethinking the previous “peaceful” approach to the nuclear doctrine as restraining the adversary, and getting rid of the habit of mainly responding to the adversary’s moves.

Transiting from restraining to deterring, bringing back the fear into the collective West’s decision-making, frustrating its escalation plans, and stymying its attempts to prevent Russia from achieving its goals in the special military operation.

Discussing prospects for the Ukrainian conflict with Russia’s international partners from the World Majority countries (especially the SCO and BRICS members), and preparing them for a possible use of nuclear weapons by Russia. Once our partners get used to this idea, this will considerably increase the effectiveness of Russia’s nuclear deterrence. We also need to communicate more closely, both officially as well as unofficially, with our Chinese, Indian, and Pakistani partners, on a wide range of military-political issues.

Opposing the Western model of escalation in Ukraine with a comprehensively developed Russian escalation strategy and a formula for peace and security in Eurasia as a whole, including its European region; supplementing the Special Military Operation with a special diplomatic one.

Warning NATO countries that if they send their regular troops⁴ to Ukraine, Russia will view them as participants in the armed conflict, and treat their military contingents and national territories as priority targets for Russian strikes.

Clarifying the conditions for the use of nuclear weapons, expanding them, and thereby lowering the doctrinal threshold for their use; speeding up a major revision of the outdated and “frivolous” nuclear doctrine.

⁴ This refers specifically to military contingents, i.e., units and forces, not individual military service members or small groups that have long been present in Ukraine.

Considering the option of seceding from the Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty that prohibits nuclear tests in the atmosphere, underwater and outer space,⁵ and from the underground nuclear test moratorium;⁶ starting preparations for resuming such tests.

Declaring a no-fly zone for foreign unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) in neutral airspace over the Black Sea, outside the territorial waters of the Black Sea states.⁷

Starting preparations for launching space systems capable of “deactivating” U.S. reconnaissance satellites.

Warning NATO countries that if they attempt to impose a naval blockade on the Kaliningrad Region or St. Petersburg, Russia will respond by attacking such countries with all the necessary types of weapons.

Convincing members of the ruling elites in the United States and the West as a whole that they personally will no longer be able to feel physically comfortable and fully protected as the places of their gathering will be explicitly targeted.

President Vladimir Putin has already warned that in response to the Western supplies of long-range weapons to Ukraine, Russia “reserves the right [to supply weapons—Auth.] to states or even some legal structures that experience certain, including military, pressure.”⁸ The list of possible recipients of such Russian systems is quite long, ranging from the Middle East to the Far East, and from Latin America to Africa.

Conducting military exercises, whose scenario provides for nuclear strikes on specific NATO countries in accordance with the announced doctrinal changes.

Carrying out underground nuclear tests.

⁵ in the atmosphere, in outer space and under water; effective since 1963.

⁶ Not conducted in Russia since 1990.

⁷ Declaring no-fly zones in areas where military exercises or military operations take place is a common practice in international relations. It was exercised, in particular, during the wars in the Persian Gulf, the Balkans, Libya, etc.

⁸ The Russian President’s speech at the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum on 7 June 2024.

Testing space systems designed to disable satellites.

“Hunting down” NATO’s UAVs over the Black Sea.

Commencing regular patrolling off the coasts of the United States and its allies by the Russian Aerospace Forces and the Navy.

Shooting down NATO’s UAVs over the Black Sea.

Disabling U.S. and NATO reconnaissance spacecraft.

Striking the contingents of Western troops that have entered Ukraine.

If Ukrainian warplanes are stationed on the airfields in NATO countries (such as Romania or Poland), striking these bases, initially with non-nuclear ammunition.

Carrying out cyberattacks on critical infrastructure in Europe and North America.

Destroying NATO logistics infrastructure elements (including submarine cables, etc.).

Employing non-nuclear systems to strike key logistics hubs in NATO countries used to supply the Ukrainian Armed Forces with Western weapons.

Warning the adversary about Russia’s readiness and determination to strike U.S. strategic targets, starting with American military bases abroad.

Sending the last warning signal by carrying out a ground test of an ultra-high-yield nuclear warhead (of over 50 megatons).

Launching massive non-nuclear strikes on targets in European countries supporting the Kiev regime, with a warning that if they attack the territory of Russia or the Russian Armed Forces in

response, Moscow will use nuclear weapons against military bases, transport hubs, and command and control centers in European countries.

So, crossing the nuclear threshold by using nuclear weapons against targets in NATO countries will be an absolute last resort.

The adversary must be publicly notified that if he continues attacks on our territory and/or our Armed Forces, a second and then a third rounds of nuclear strikes will follow. The third round will target U.S. bases in Europe and beyond.

All of the above and other forced steps on our part should be preceded by relevant changes in Russia's Military Doctrine.

In view of the proposed doctrinal amendments, Russia will have to increase the production of appropriate weapons capable of carrying nuclear warheads, including intermediate and shorter-range missiles.

The United States, which withdrew from the INF Treaty in 2019, is already producing such systems, taking them to exercises in Asia and planning to deploy them in Germany in the near future. President Vladimir Putin has already made a statement⁹ about the need to start the production of intermediate and shorter-range missiles in Russia and their subsequent deployment wherever necessary.

It is fundamentally important that at each stage—in parallel with the abovementioned military-political, military-technical, and military measures—the Russian leadership remain in contact with the U.S. leadership in order to make Washington aware of the seriousness of Moscow's intentions and at the same time of its readiness to end the conflict on conditions suitable for Russia. Occasional contacts shall be maintained at the level of defense ministers and the directors of the intelligence services of the two countries. Russia and America should stay in constant

⁹ At a meeting with permanent members of the Russian Security Council on 28 June 2024

contact with each other, for example, through the nuclear risk reduction centers created under strategic arms reduction treaties.

In the field of strategic communication with the adversary, we should ensure maximum consistency between our actions and statements. Sporadic and contradictory public statements give the impression of our lack of focus and are more likely to provoke than deter the adversary. Particularly harmful are public threats that are not followed by practical steps, so the adversary stops taking our warnings seriously. It is important to develop and use a clear system of signals for the adversary.

Geopolitical Containment

Along with strengthening the military deterrence of the adversary (including through nuclear weapons, and our readiness and determination to use them), it is necessary to recreate the system of geopolitical (spatial) containment. Geopolitical containment, along with military deterrence (and constraining the adversaries by means of coalition building to be discussed below), is an integral part of the strategic deterrence system.

It should be assumed that in the first half of the 21st century, containing the adversary geopolitically and rolling him back from Russia's near abroad is of existential importance for Russia, and current threats in this area are no less relevant than the threat of a nuclear attack in the Cold-War era or of large-scale military aggression before 1945 was. Tectonic shifts in the system of international relations require a proactive policy to prevent a new wave of conflicts and their degeneration into another world war (probably the last one for humanity).

Geopolitical containment is implemented primarily by political, economic, informational, and other non-military means, but in close connection with military deterrence, both nuclear and non-nuclear. The purpose of geopolitical containment is to maintain or create a security belt along Russia's border, primarily with the CIS countries.

A security belt is an area outside foreign military blocs and free from foreign military bases. Not all states located in this area should be or become Moscow's military allies, but close, "allied"

(*soyuznicheskie*) relations with neighbors and their basic loyalty to Russia are necessary. The immediate goal of Russia's geopolitical containment is to prevent the adversary from opening a "second front" after Ukraine, whether in the Arctic, Kazakhstan, Central Asia, Transcaucasia, or the Far East.

Russia's geopolitical containment strategy must be proactive. The lesson of Ukraine shows that even a high degree of ethnic and cultural affinity, close economic interaction, strong family ties, similar interests of the elites, and huge financial subsidies to neighbors do not guarantee long-lasting friendly relations between the new states and Russia. The adversary skillfully uses nationalism in these states to turn it against our country.

It is necessary to timely block attempts to transform the so-called multi-vector foreign policy pursued by our neighbors into an explicitly anti-Russian vector. This is exactly what happened in Ukraine after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The West attempted to use this tactic in Belarus and is now trying to do the same in Moldova. The United States and its European allies are encouraging Armenia, Kazakhstan, and Central Asian states to distance themselves from Russia.

The strategy of geopolitical containment does not imply just readiness to resist color revolutions, conflicts incited from outside, all kinds of provocations, etc., although all this is extremely important. There is a need for systematic work with the political, cultural, and academic elites in neighboring countries, regardless of their attitude to the existing system of power in their respective countries; and for patient and creative work with the younger generation in order to evoke interest in Russia, its culture and language.

Of particular importance is information work both in the traditional and social media, especially in the national languages of the neighboring countries. This will require launching comprehensive regional and country studies focused on neighboring states, and raising the level of domestic expertise in these fields.

The geopolitical containment strategy implies deeper comprehensive integration within the Union State of Russia and Belarus; stronger integrative ties—not only economic, but also political, cultural, scientific, and technical, etc.—within the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU);

close security and defense cooperation with the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) member states; cultural, sports, information, and humanitarian cooperation within the CIS.

Flexible coalition strategy is a third element of strategic deterrence

Last but not least, it is important to develop a third dimension of strategic deterrence: building flexible international coalitions to counter and confront U.S. global hegemony, as well as to generally strengthen international security and stop sliding towards World War III. An expanded strategic partnership between Russia and China will serve as the core of such coalition framework.

This coalition is already forming de facto. Belarus in Europe, Iran in the Middle East, and North Korea in East Asia are gravitating towards its Russian-Chinese core, and so are several more World Majority countries such as Syria, Venezuela, Cuba, Nicaragua, Eritrea, and the Alliance of Sahel States.

This coalition is able not only to foil U.S. attempts (which has already happened), especially after the start of the SMO, to isolate Russia in the world, but also to significantly limit the hegemon's influence in the east, west and south of the Eurasian continent, to bind its capabilities or force it to disperse them, etc.

Moscow and Beijing are also ready for closer coordination in various regions of the world (for example, the Middle East, Central and Northeast Asia). Of particular importance is the development of Russian-Chinese cooperation in functional areas such as military-strategic, military-technical, logistics, as well as cybersecurity.

In parallel with the development of relations with China, Russia should persistently step up strategic interaction with India. It should not be reduced solely to frustrating the West's efforts to undermine cooperation between Moscow and New Delhi. Such interaction is absolutely necessary in order to improve the efficiency of BRICS and the SCO, revive the RIC group (Russia, India, China), form a Greater Eurasian Partnership, and build a security system in

Eurasia. It would be advisable to start, perhaps at the expert level at first, a permanent and structured dialogue with India on military-strategic issues.

A similar kind of dialogue should be opened with Pakistan in order to eventually move towards a trilateral and then a quadrilateral discussion (Russia/China/India/Pakistan) on ways to strengthen nuclear deterrence, and reduce the risk of war that can develop into a nuclear confrontation. In the longer term (two to three years), this discussion should also involve other countries (the DPRK, Israel, Iran, Saudi Arabia, et al.), with France as a European power with autonomist inclinations possibly joining it in the future.

In the meantime, Russia, China, and India are the main pillars of emerging Greater Eurasia, at least until European countries go through a change of their globalist ruling elites and thoroughly reassess world trends, to eventually shake off their vassal dependence on the United States.

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) can serve as a prototype for a continental security system in Eurasia – without, for the time being, its “European peninsula”. Such cooperation and interaction among the World Majority countries at a time when the West is rallying around the United States can significantly strengthen the positions of both Russia and China. The SCO includes four nuclear powers, three of which have strained relations with each other (China-India and India-Pakistan). Russia, which is in a better position in this regard, could initiate a dialogue, consultations and eventually negotiations, in order to draft a continental agreement on the strengthening of strategic stability in Eurasia.

The very nature of international relations suggests that the strategic containment of China in the long term is a problem that can potentially face Russia. There is no point in talking now in detail about possible factors that may necessitate such containment, but it is necessary to outline some of the current aspects of Russia’s strategic position in relation to China. These include: strategic stability in bilateral relations which should eliminate hypothetical incentives for a political standoff and armed conflict between the two neighboring nuclear powers; strategic interaction, that is, close and equal military-political and military-strategic cooperation between Moscow and Beijing to ensure continental and global security; and mutual confidence-building measures. Russia should build its nuclear deterrence forces in such a way as to exclude, even in the distant

future, the possibility of Chinese pressure on Russia. The nuclear factor should help strengthen long-term friendly cooperation between the two countries.

STRATEGIC DETERRENCE: DEFINITIONS

Russia is a major self-sufficient country, a world power, an original civilization.¹⁰ Its foreign and defense policy and the international strategy built on its basis oppose any claims to world hegemony, whoever makes them. In the Patriotic War of 1812 and the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945, Russia not only repelled enemy invasions, but it also crushed the contenders for world domination, establishing a new international balance as a result. It is the search for a stable balance in the international arena, and not the struggle for its own domination, that has been a characteristic feature of Russia's foreign policy throughout its history.

In the ongoing military conflict with the U.S.-led collective West—de facto the third or fourth Patriotic War (the Russo-German War of 1914-1918, which is part of the First World War, was once called the Second Patriotic War)—Russia actually acts as the military-strategic core of the World Majority: Asian, African, and Latin American countries striving to break free from 500-year-long Western dominance. This is essentially a struggle with the world hegemony of any power that tries to curb the development of other nations and imposes its own values and rules of conduct on them.

Russia's strategic goal in the confrontation with the West is primarily the protection and advancement of its national interests. National interests are an absolute priority for us. These interests, however, require a polycentric world order based on equitable interaction between states and civilizations. Russia's strategic deterrence today is a strategy for achieving victory in the struggle for freedom from single-power hegemony, and, of course, for ensuring favorable conditions for internal spiritual and economic development, and the strengthening of sovereignty.

¹⁰ The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, endorsed by a decree of the President of the Russian Federation on 31 March 2023.

The authors of this book rely on the National Security Concept, the Military Doctrine, the Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, and other official guiding documents. We propose a detailed and at the same time holistic approach to strategic deterrence that covers its military (primarily nuclear) and geopolitical aspects.

One of the important purposes of this book is to clarify the definitions of some key terms and provisions, primarily the concept of strategic deterrence. We believe it necessary to expand the understanding of this term to include, along with the military component (nuclear deterrence and non-nuclear deterrence, ways to deal with biological and cyber threats, as well as threats from space), the geopolitical component (spatial containment/expelling/roll-back of the malign adversarial presence from regions critical to Russia's security), as well as the coalition aspect (the creation of flexible coalitions with friendly countries to jointly tackle threats from a common adversary).

The book also assesses the historical experience of Russia's strategic deterrence policy; analyzes the military-political situation during the ongoing armed conflict in Ukraine; offers recommendations for enhancing nuclear deterrence to achieve victory and for redefining the Russian nuclear doctrine; lists some possible rungs on the ladder of strategic escalation; proposes ways to step up geopolitical containment along Russia's border, as well as some ideas regarding the creation of an international coalition to confront/oppose the collective West which is trying to retain its waning hegemony. By strategic deterrence, we mean actions aimed at preventing or thwarting threats to the fundamental (vital) interests of the Russian Federation or its allies (currently primarily Belarus). The latter would constitute a case of Russia's extended strategic deterrence.

Strategic deterrence is carried out by political, military, economic, information, and other means. Strategic deterrence is not a passive or purely defensive policy tool. On the contrary: the containment strategy is to be implemented actively and, if necessary, preemptively.

Military deterrence is aimed at convincing a potential adversary that his hostile actions are futile or extremely damaging/fatal for himself. Military deterrence can be both nuclear and non-nuclear.

Convincing the adversary of the futility of attacking Russia depends mainly on the strength and resilience of our own strategic defense system in the broadest sense of the word. Convincing an aggressor that his actions are extremely damaging/fatal for himself depends on our ability to destroy the adversary by overcoming any of his possible defenses. The most important elements of strategic deterrence are the unity and patriotism of society and economic stability.

We suggest redefining Russia's nuclear strategy – now called *sderzhivanie*, which literally means restraining the adversary, - as *ustrashenie*, which stands for evoking fear in an adversary, which is a much closer equivalent of deterrence. We do not seek to “restrain” the adversary's possible nuclear or other attack but rather aim to frighten the would-be aggressor with the guaranteed catastrophic consequences of such an attack for himself.¹¹

Nuclear deterrence is carried out by creating nuclear capabilities intended for various purposes and maintaining them in combat readiness. The credibility of the deterrence posture is ensured by our unflinching determination to use it if there is a threat, as well as by public support for such determination.

We resort to deterrence to influence both the rational thinking of a potential adversary (dissuading him from taking certain steps as inappropriate) and his emotions (first of all, fear of the consequences his own actions may entail).

It must be borne in mind that some groups hostile to Russia, such as fanatics or suicide bombers, cannot be affected by deterrence methods. When they become our enemies, they are not to be deterred but destroyed. This book is not about them but about states to which the policy of fear reawakening is quite applicable.

The nature of nuclear weapons makes nuclear deterrence a strategic tool at any level regardless of the yield of a nuclear warhead or the range of its carrier. Therefore, from the point of view of

¹¹ Some may consider the word combination ‘fear reawakening’ inappropriate in terms of style and uncharacteristic for our military-political terminology. And yet, we believe that it most accurately describes the purpose of this type of strategy. ‘Fear reawakening’ is necessary in order to sober up an adversary. It is the sobering up that is the purpose of fear reawakening.

strategic deterrence, it seems unnecessary to distinguish between strategic and non-strategic nuclear weapons.

There is, however, a distinction between nuclear and conventional deterrence. To deter a potential adversary's conventional military aggression, it is necessary to have general-purpose forces capable of repelling an external attack and fulfilling the set tasks, using, among other things, the effect of nuclear deterrence. Nuclear and non-nuclear weapons and their platforms are in close dynamic interaction with each other ("entangled"), which makes it difficult or impossible to distinguish between them.

Given the superior combined military, military-economic, and demographic capabilities of Russia's main adversaries—the United States and its NATO allies—we should not try, as the Soviet Union did, to achieve overall military parity with them.¹² Russia makes up for the difference in capabilities by adopting a nuclear deterrence posture and staying ready to use it pro-actively and if necessary, pre-emptively.

Along with deterring a potential adversary by military force, strategic deterrence includes an equally important spatial (geopolitical) component. This component was practically absent in Russia's international strategy vis-à-vis the West after the end of the Cold War. Unlike post-WWII Soviet policy, modern Russian policy neither outlined the boundaries of geopolitical containment nor defined the relevant tasks; as a result, the policy remained reactive and passive, which predictably led to the Ukraine crisis.

In the current situation and in the foreseeable future, the spatial (geopolitical) deterrence of a potential adversary has to be implemented in a number of spheres by displacing or rolling its malign presence back from the areas of Russia's vital interests.

¹² As President Vladimir Putin said in his annual Address to the Federal Assembly on 29 February 2024, the Soviet Union's participation in the arms race imposed by Washington cost the country 13% of GNP in 1981-1988. This significantly weakened the Soviet economy. In his speech on 27 March 2024, the President compared the current military spending in the United States (\$810 billion) and Russia (\$72 billion), emphasizing that any talk of Russia's intention to attack NATO countries in such a situation is "nonsense." The Soviet Union's exact military expenditures are not known. They might have exceeded 13% of GNP. In addition, the USSR spent colossal amounts of money for purposes closely related to military-political tasks by supporting socialist-leaning countries and countries of the socialist camp/commonwealth, and providing subsidies to almost all union republics—all these expenditures were essentially an investment in the country's external security.

These include primarily Ukraine, but not only it. There is a task of creating and maintaining a security belt along Russia's border from Ukraine and Moldova to Transcaucasia and Central Asia and even further to the Far East and the Arctic. A security belt implies allied, partner or other lasting non-hostile relationships with the countries surrounding the Russian Federation.

Spatial deterrence means active protection of Russia's security interests in these territories from hostile actions of geopolitical adversaries such as regime change through so-called color revolutions, expansion of military blocs, creation of military bases, military-related bio-laboratories, attempts to eliminate Russia's presence and influence in neighboring countries, etc. Spatial deterrence also means supporting, including by practical actions, friendly regimes in neighboring states and maintaining the general balance of power in the world.

TYPES AND FUNCTIONS OF STRATEGIC DETERRENCE: THEORY AND PRACTICE

There are several types of strategic deterrence performing different functions. *Strategic deterrence I* is the ability to impress upon a potential adversary that if he launches a nuclear strike on our territory, a retaliatory strike with unacceptable damage will be inevitable. An assessment of such damage is subjective and depends on the country, population, territory, political system, level and quality of elites, and public sentiment.¹³ What matters is that the prospect of such unacceptable damage should deter the adversary from launching a nuclear attack.

The socio-psychological situation in the world has changed since the Cold War. Nearly eight decades of relative peace between nuclear powers have produced what might be called “strategic parasitism”¹⁴—near-extinction of the fear of war, including nuclear war. Generational change—the passing away of not only WWII veterans but also of many of those who were

¹³ In the 1950s, open U.S. publications named the Soviet Union's loss of 40% of the population and 60% of production capacities “unacceptable.” At the same time, even a single enemy nuclear strike on American territory was considered “unacceptable” in declassified U.S. documents.

¹⁴ Karaganov S.A. How to Prevent the Third World War//Russia in Global Affairs. 26 September 2023. URL: <https://globalaffairs.ru/articles/vek-vojn-statya-pervaya/>

actively involved in the post-WWII confrontation—has lowered the ruling elites’ “pain threshold.” Now we do not know what would be “unacceptable damage” for the adversary or for other nuclear powers. The intellectual and moral degradation of the Western liberal-globalist elites, and their shrinking responsibility to their societies and to human civilization as a whole are exacerbated by despair as their world and the West’s centuries-old global dominance are collapsing.

To reinforce the main function of nuclear weapons—nuclear conflict deterrence—scientists and practitioners have posited that any nuclear war will inevitably escalate to the global level. This was followed by the “nuclear winter” theory—a cooling of the planet after a massive exchange of nuclear strikes, making it unsuitable for human life. These theories are unprovable. Fortunately, we have not had a chance to test them in practice.

The statement that any nuclear conflict will inevitably escalate into a global thermonuclear war is also unprovable. It almost certainly runs counter to the nuclear powers’ operational plans. Mass consciousness, increasingly thinking in terms of the virtual rather than the real world, stops believing in this concept. Societies and elites are growing increasingly less fearful of a nuclear apocalypse. As a result, the instinct of self-preservation becomes dangerously weakened.

So far the United States has in every possible way avoided actions that could lead to a direct military clash with Russia. Instead it has been using proxies like the incumbent Kiev regime. So, the first, main, type of deterrence continues to work, including during the war in Ukraine, but its effectiveness is decreasing.

Deterrence II means preventing a direct military clash between nuclear powers in a conventional conflict. Explicitly or implicitly, Nuclear Deterrence I initially implied that any war between nuclear powers is inadmissible because such a war theoretically carries a high, if not inevitable, risk of escalation to a nuclear war. But this function also partially stops working. A direct military clash between nuclear powers is still considered unacceptably dangerous. During the Cold War, indirect clashes between the Soviet Union and the United States—in Korea, Vietnam, the Middle East, and Afghanistan—occurred outside the areas of the two nuclear powers’ vital interests. But what was previously unthinkable has happened now. The Americans and their

client states have provoked a large-scale war in Ukraine, where the fundamental security interests of great nuclear power Russia are concentrated.

The theory that regional conflicts inevitably escalate to a global nuclear war was put forward by the Americans and, in part, the British, and picked up by the Soviet Union for good purpose—to prevent any direct clash. Under modern circumstances, however, the thesis, also upheld by Russia, that “a nuclear war cannot be won and it must not be fought,” plays into the hands of the forces that seek to utilize their military-economic superiority to start wars using solely conventional weapons, primarily the United States.

Restoring the function initially designed to prevent any war is necessary not only for changing the situation around Ukraine but also for maintaining universal peace. Large-scale wars, especially those between nuclear powers, should be entirely excluded from international practice. Otherwise, the world, which is going through a long transition, witnessing the collapse of the old international system and at the same time seeking to build a new one and a new balance of power, is doomed to an “age of wars,” which will most likely eventually lead to a global war. Previous theories need, at a minimum, to be corrected and probably revised.

Deterrence III, or extended deterrence. In other words, it means preventing an attack on the allies of a nuclear power that threatens a potential aggressor with a nuclear response. According to this doctrine, the United States has guaranteed its allies a “nuclear umbrella,” declaring its readiness to strike the “aggressor” if NATO (or Japan, or South Korea) starts losing a war involving general-purpose forces. This U.S. promise was and remains a pure bluff, and here is why.

During the Cold War, the United States did not intend to use nuclear weapons against the USSR “in defense” of American allies, fearing an imminent retaliatory strike on its own territory. Nevertheless, Soviet strategists believed in such a possibility and, fearing a repetition of 22 June 1941 (the day that Nazi Germany invaded the Soviet Union) if the adversary unleashed a nuclear war, prepared to “rush” forward in case of emergency, got conventional armed forces ready for a nuclear war, engaged in the nuclear and conventional arms race, and as a result, overstrained the country’s economy.

Now the Americans extensively use expanded deterrence (Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty) to maintain NATO's unity even though it is a bluff.

It is known for a fact that since the mid-1950s, when the Soviet Union acquired the ability to launch a retaliatory nuclear strike on the United States, the Americans no longer considered the possibility of using nuclear weapons against the USSR in defense of their allies. During military drills, simulating a Soviet offensive in Europe, the U.S. rehearsed a hypothetical use of nuclear weapons against the advancing Warsaw Pact forces. This was done in order to make the U.S. allies believe in the reliability of American nuclear guarantees. This option, however, was absolutely unacceptable for West German leaders: Chancellors Helmut Schmidt (in office from 1974 to 1982) and Helmut Kohl (served from 1982 to 1998) personally said so to one of the authors, which can be found in the relevant literature. Since the NATO scenario provided for U.S. nuclear strikes on German territory, potentially killing thousands (hundreds of thousands or even millions) of Germans, both chancellors refused to command the exercises. The allies knew that extended deterrence was, and still is, the U.S.'s bluff. That is why the British (in 1952) and the French (in 1960) created their own nuclear forces despite Washington's displeasure and partly even disapproval.

To strengthen extended deterrence, the Europeans, not the Americans as the Soviet Union claimed, initiated the transfer of American intermediate-range (classified as medium-range systems in the USSR) to the missiles to Europe in the 1970s. Apparently the Europeans did not have much faith in Washington's promises and sought to create a physical nuclear missile "link" between Western Europe and the United States. At that moment, the pro-Atlantic forces in the United States (primarily the military-industrial complex) agreed to oblige Western Europeans, especially since the Soviet Union had provided a convenient excuse by deploying, which was not strategically necessary, its Pioneer medium-range missiles (SS-20 by NATO classification) and aiming them at NATO countries. Later, when the opportunity arose after the signing of the INF Treaty, the Americans pulled out their missiles from Europe.

In recent decades, some American military officials (including, as far as is known, Ashton Carter, who served as U.S. defense secretary in the Obama administration) have tried to revive the extended deterrence doctrine, sending signals that if Russia "invades" the Baltic states and

launches nuclear strikes on Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, the United States can use tactical nuclear weapons. Given Carter's reputation as a highly qualified and reasonable expert, it can be assumed that his statement was a blatant bluff. So no such signals have been sent ever after. In America itself, Carter was laughed at by his colleagues from Harvard and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology as a "paper strategist."

It must be understood that the constantly mentioned Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty does not automatically guarantee that the U.S. would go to war in order to protect its NATO allies. Declassified verbatim reports from hearings on the meaning of this article held during the ratification procedure in the U.S. Senate and the White House indicate that neo-isolationist American senators led by Robert Taft insisted that they would support the treaty only if it contained no automatic guarantees to the allies. Nevertheless, officials in Russia—during the Soviet period and now—preferred to interpret Article 5 as the U.S.'s commitment to automatically interfere in the event of a conflict in Europe. This is just perplexing. It can be assumed that the Soviet Union, where the defense policy was dictated by the military-industrial complex, did not want to underestimate the danger posed by NATO (which was mostly minor at that time). In addition, it was generally believed that this article of the North Atlantic Treaty curbed the arms (including nuclear arms) race in Europe. But why we still pretend that this interpretation is correct is not entirely clear. Most likely, the reason is mental inertia or lack of education. There is no need to inflate the threat. It is big enough as it is.

According to officials (for example, Nikolai Patrushev, when he was the Russian Federation Security Council Secretary), Russia extends nuclear deterrence concept to its allies. But the nuclear doctrine mentions almost exclusively a response to a nuclear attack on the territory of Russia and the use of nuclear weapons if the very existence of our state is threatened.

This raises the question: If, for example, Poland or Lithuania attacks brotherly Belarus, will we swallow it and sacrifice the lives of tens of thousands of our own and Belarusian soldiers? Eastern European limitrophe states and their masters should have no doubt that in this case they will face almost automatic nuclear destruction. The Belarusian people and our other allies must be confident in their safety.

Russia's current Military Doctrine contains positive ambiguities, and some of its provisions can be interpreted on very close examination as nuclear guarantees. But clarity is needed. The geopolitical position of Belarus, its strategic importance for Russia, historical and human ties, the emotional attitude of the Russian people to the Belarusians, and finally, the existence of the Union State mean that the protection of Belarus is the protection of Russia itself. This fact should be reflected in the Military Doctrine. In any case, the decision to use nuclear weapons will be made by the Russian President, who is also Supreme Commander-in-Chief, in coordination with top military commanders.

Soviet/Russian extended deterrence stopped working when the country was in decline from the late 1980s to the early 2000s. During that period, the United States and its allies in NATO, which until then had been a defensive alliance, committed several egregious acts of aggression against Russia-friendly countries such as Yugoslavia, Iraq, and Libya, thus destabilizing the entire Balkans, the Middle East, and North Africa.

In 1999, during the barbaric NATO bombings of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro), the threat of using nuclear weapons in defense of the Serbs was considered in Moscow, but this option was rejected, apparently because of Russia's weakness in other areas and the growing incapacity of the then Russian President.

Deterrence IV is a demonstration of a country's readiness to use nuclear weapons in the event of any attack on its territory by general-purpose forces only. In addition to Russia, most other nuclear states—the UK, France, Israel, India, Pakistan, and North Korea—seem to uphold this position.

For the U.S., this type of deterrence is irrelevant. In reality, no one can threaten America with an invasion or massive use of non-nuclear weapons against its territory. But it is extremely relevant for Russia, and failure to use it due to an outdated and frivolous doctrine have allowed the West to lead the way in escalating the Ukraine conflict by supplying Kiev with increasingly long-range weapons, which were then used by the Ukrainian Armed Forces to attack Russian cities and strategic infrastructure. It is unlikely that the Germans would support the supply of

longer-range missiles to Kiev if they knew that in response to attacks on Belgorod, one of their cities, such as Frankfurt, would be, or at least could be, destroyed.

The same is true of the Poles, Romanians, Czechs, et al., as well as the French and the British. European countries, with their small territories, complex political systems and limited (in the case of London and Paris) nuclear forces, are unlikely to be prepared for a strategic duel with Russia. There would be no long-range arms supplies to the West's Ukrainian puppets if European donor countries were afraid of Russian strikes. It is noteworthy that the Americans, who have retained the remnants of strategic thinking, prefer to push their allies into supplying such weapons instead of doing it themselves.

Deterrence V. Nuclear weapons can mitigate a non-nuclear arms race. In the public mind, maintaining and increasing nuclear capabilities is often associated with an arms race. In many ways it was so during the Cold War, when Washington and Moscow stockpiled nuclear weapons largely senselessly and thoughtlessly, ignoring either normal logic or reasonable strategic calculation. But even then, reliance on nuclear weapons allowed the more rational parts of the West, especially the European countries, out of responsibility to their citizens, to save on conventional weapons. The United States and, to an even greater extent, its European and Asian allies began to reap “nuclear peace dividends” long before they had the opportunity to get a “peace dividend” after the end of the Cold War. The consumer boom in Europe and North America occurred largely due to these “nuclear dividends.”

Unfortunately, this function of deterrence was neither understood nor used in the Soviet Union. Gripped by the 22 June 1941 syndrome, the Soviet leadership, free from pressure “from below” and enjoying a close “bond” between the political and military elites and the military-industrial complex (the so-called Marshal Ustinov phenomenon: Dmitri Ustinov, the top Soviet official in charge of the defense industry, served as defense minister in 1976-82), entered into the nuclear and conventional arms race. The exact military expenditures of the Soviet Union are unknown. According to the estimates recently cited by President Vladimir Putin, they accounted for approximately 13% of the country's GDP in the 1980s. But, as there were simply no accurate statistics for the overall defense expenditures, it is likely that they exceeded 13%. Together with the aid to socialist countries, socialist-leaning states in the “Third World,” and subsidies to most

union republics, the country's external security costs put an exorbitant financial burden on the Soviet Union. So it is surprising that it lasted so long.

Nowadays, the latter two types of expenditures draining Russia's national wealth are not so relevant. However, the risk of sliding into a conventional arms race, including cyber, space and biological weapons, is very real.

In the future, this function will become even more pertinent as new great powers enter the world stage. It is necessary to block a multidimensional arms race by emphasizing that it cannot be won.

The most useful function of this type of deterrence is that it makes the pursuit of superiority in other areas meaningless by qualitatively increasing the cost of armaments for general-purpose forces, missile defense, high-precision long-range non-nuclear systems, space and bio-weapons. This is also borne out by the recent history of the United States, which made a huge technological leap in the 1990s and early 2000s, wasting trillions of dollars and outpacing almost all other nations combined only to discover—after a series of defeats—that such superiority means little in the modern world, including due to the impossibility of or unpreparedness for escalation to the nuclear level.

Unfortunately, Russia has made this function of nuclear deterrence less effective in recent years by unreasonably raising the threshold for the use of nuclear weapons.

The fact that nuclear weapons help save on general-purpose forces is one of the reasons why there is such a powerful anti-nuclear lobby in the United States. It feeds partly on idealistic pacifists and partly on people who understand the danger of nuclear weapons. But mainly it is the interests of the military-industrial complex producing conventional weapons. This position is shared by those elements of the American deep state that hope to convert U.S. economic power into political advantages through an arms race. Finally, nuclear weapons are historically disliked by infantry generals and marshals because they make their plans senseless and their funding requests unnecessary.

Relations between Russia and China look excellent in the foreseeable future. In the more distant future, their nuclear arsenals will prevent them from trying, even hypothetically, to gain non-nuclear superiority. This eliminates Russia's concerns about China's possibility to achieve such superiority. Therefore, nuclear weapons are objectively one of the factors that help maintain long-term friendly relations between the two countries and reduce mutual suspicions.

Russia's dwindling reliance on nuclear deterrence and the thoughtless decision to raise the threshold for the use of nuclear weapons objectively open the door to a conventional arms race. This benefits mainly countries with great demographic and economic potential, as well as their moneyed elites connected with the military-industrial complex. The threshold for the use of nuclear weapons must be lowered to prevent an arms race in other areas as well.

Russia must stop the biological and space arms race unleashed by the United States. But a priority task now is to block the competition in the latest types of conventional weapons. The drone revolution that has taken place before our eyes is already making conflicts increasingly deadly, both on the front lines and far beyond, which further blurs the border between war and peace.

Deterrence VI. Nuclear weapons help democratize international relations. If it were not for the deterrent role of nuclear weapons, which limit the massive use of military force in general, the United States would hardly have allowed the "new" world powers, especially China, to rise, let alone do it so quickly. If Moscow had no nuclear weapons, the United States could well have "finished off" Russia when it was weak after the collapse of the USSR.

In the 1940s-1960s, our country achieved strategic parity with the United States through enormous efforts and sacrifices (including famine in the second half of the 1940s, and underconsumption in subsequent decades). This does not mean numerical parity—such an interpretation is incorrect and partly even harmful—but the ability to respond to an enemy strike at any level.

While ensuring its own security, our country concurrently fulfilled a mission of international and historical significance by cutting the ground from under the West's 500-year-long

domination that had rested on its military superiority, which also sustained Western dominance in other spheres such as politics, economy, culture, etc. This dominance allowed Europe/West not only to oppress other nations and civilizations, but, most importantly, to siphon off at first colonial and then neocolonial rent, which was used for making breakthroughs in science, culture, and military affairs. Having knocked out this foundation, our country paved the way for the anti-colonial and then anti-neocolonial liberation of the world from under the Western yoke. Russia terminated this function of deterrence during its shameful downfall in the 1990s but relaunched it in the 2000s-2010s.

Following the U.S./West's recent military-political failures in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, and Syria, Israel's current inability to achieve its declared goals in Gaza and, of course, the West's ongoing slow defeat in Ukraine; following the major economic crisis of 2008 and China's rapid rise (which would not have been possible without geopolitical and strategic support from Russia), the World Majority countries are now entering a new and probably final stage of their liberation from Western domination.

The fury with which the West has attacked Russia, seeking to defeat it strategically and thus take it out of the game, is largely, if not entirely, caused by the real risk of losing its age-old ability to siphon off wealth from the rest of the world and by the desire to regain military superiority in the eyes of the international community.

Deterrence VII is one of the most important, albeit least explored, functions of nuclear deterrence, namely its civilizing influence. The possession of nuclear weapons theoretically capable of destroying countries and continents, if not all of humanity, changed mentality, "civilized" the ruling elites of the nuclear-armed countries and made them more responsible. People and political groups whose views could provoke a nuclear clash were expelled from these elites or kept away from areas related to national security. This is clearly borne out in particular by the evolution of the American ruling elite and their views.

The last American politician holding most radical military views who sought the U.S. presidency was U.S. Senator Barry Goldwater of Arizona, nicknamed the "bomber." He was talented and

quite popular, but the American ruling elite and the deep state simply demolished him in the 1964 elections.

A similar evolution, as far as is known, occurred in the Soviet leadership, but it is more difficult to trace. In any case, nuclear gamble (the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962) was one of the key reasons for Nikita Khrushchev's removal from the post of Soviet party and government leader, also in 1964.

It is rather likely that signals from Moscow that, by 1983, the Soviet leadership had considered a U.S. attack highly probable due to the fierce anti-Soviet rhetoric of then U.S. President Ronald Reagan and his closest associates, led to a major reshuffle in the military-political wing of the U.S. Administration in the middle and the second half of the 1980s. The Deep State removed the "super hawks" from power, replacing them with more moderate officials.

In recent years, this function of deterrence has been dramatically reduced by the abovementioned "strategic parasitism." A part of elites seeks to get rid of the restraining and civilizing role of nuclear weapons in order to untie their hands for non-nuclear aggression. This trend manifested itself in the United States, when it began to downplay the risk of conventional war escalation to a nuclear one, as well as the danger of the latter. Moreover, incumbent U.S. President Joe Biden and his Secretary of State Anthony Blinken have gone as far as stating that nuclear war is less dangerous than global warming.

When Russia reminded the White House of a possible nuclear response to the U.S. geopolitical/military aggression in Ukraine, the Americans toned down their rhetoric both at the top and expert levels. This was followed by studies and articles about the risks nuclear escalation could have for the United States. On the contrary, the European ruling elites, who have completely lost the ability to think strategically, if not think at all, keep running wild. Obviously, this most important "civilizing" function of nuclear deterrence-fear reawakening needs to be "refreshed."

Deterrence VIII, or self-deterrence, follows from deterrence's civilizing function. Understanding the danger of conflict escalation has always forced the leaders of nuclear powers to exclude

options that can lead to the nuclear level and to a global nuclear conflict. Objectively, all parties to the nuclear equation are indirectly interested in being “deterred.”

During the period of “nuclear abolitionism”—a push for total elimination of nuclear weapons—under Mikhail Gorbachev and Ronald Reagan, its opponents on both sides spoke up against the chimera of a “nuclear-free world,” apparently being guided, among other things, by the need to be prudent and preserve self-restraint. This function still works. But it needs to be reinvigorated and buttressed through renewed international discussion on the place and role of nuclear weapons in national strategies and world politics. Asian nuclear powers should also be engaged in this discussion. It is they with whom we should develop a new theory of deterrence in the first place.

The function of self-restraint is also based on moral imperatives. It must be infernally scary to order the use of the “weapon of God,” which He probably sent to people through the nuclear physicists Robert Oppenheimer, Enrico Fermi, Igor Kurchatov, Andrei Sakharov and their colleagues to save humanity, which had insanely unleashed two world wars in one generation.

But this function can also be harmful. Taking advantage of our country’s self-restraint, the Americans and their allies lead the way in escalating the conflict in Ukraine, crossing or allowing their puppets in Kiev to cross any conceivable red lines. We should understand this function, but we should not allow it to sap our determination and ability to have the upper hand in this escalation. One must understand that if the adversary does not realize that we are ready to use nuclear weapons in extreme cases, albeit with moral damage to ourselves, its function—salvation of humanity (especially its Western parts, which are losing their mind)—will not work. It is necessary to reawaken the waning sense of self-preservation. It should be remembered that in the Old Testament, God brought down a fiery rain—an analogue of a limited nuclear strike—on the residents of Sodom and Gomorrah who had bogged down in all-permissiveness and debauchery. This story has had an educational impact on humanity for thousands of years.

Naturally, no one wants to think about the use of nuclear weapons. But if we abandon them because of moral concerns, we will condemn ourselves and the whole world to a much worse

fate—global Armageddon. As contradictions between major powers deepen, they are likely to clash in a new world war if the fear of such war loses its deterrent power.

Deterrence IX, or geopolitical containment. Geopolitical containment implies limiting the adversary's expansion territorially, ideologically, and economically, and, ideally, rolling him back from a strategically important region.

Geopolitical containment is a comprehensive strategy that incorporates not only political, economic, and ideological, but also military tools, including nuclear. In Soviet foreign policy theory, “socialist internationalism” was an analogue of this concept. In practice, the USSR repeatedly used military force to “defend the gains of socialism” in Eastern Europe or “help revolutionary, anti-imperialist forces” in other regions of the world.

A void that appeared in the current Russian theory and practice was promptly filled by the adversary. The West launched a frontal assault on the geopolitical interests of our country by widely expanding NATO and the EU, and plotting color revolutions in post-Soviet countries. Failure to understand this cost us dearly. We lost territories and markets, mainly because of our economic and internal political weakness, but also because of illusions, simply put stupidity, as we had failed to understand the essence of the imperialist powers' policy, which requires constant expansion to new markets and territories.

As our other possibilities had shrunk dramatically, we refused to play the remaining nuclear card as part of our national power. In the 1990's, calls for activating at least passive nuclear deterrence-fear reawakening were indignantly dismissed, and the advocates of this approach were accused of “old thinking.” Also ignored were warnings that NATO expansion, almost the only way to limit which was enhanced deterrence, would inevitably lead to a large-scale war in Europe. Those warnings have proved correct.

EVOLUTION OF RUSSIA’S APPROACHES TOWARDS STRATEGIC DETERRENCE

The armed conflict in Ukraine—essentially a proxy war¹⁵ between Russia and the U.S.-led collective West—prompts us to take a fresh look at the military deterrence and geopolitical containment of our main adversary.

The existing containment theory formed during the Cold War under U.S. intellectual leadership and was then adapted to the situation of declared partnership with the West that never materialized. Attempts to replace mutual nuclear deterrence with a “nuclear partnership” and mutual assured destruction with “mutual assured nuclear security”¹⁶ proved futile.

Yet, the transition from a failed partnership to a new standoff, and then to an open confrontation, is not tantamount to a return to the original Cold War-era format. The reason is a radical change in the geopolitical, geo-economic, ideological, social, and military-technical context in which our country is implementing its foreign policy strategy.

The Ukraine crisis has highlighted Russia’s central security problem: nuclear deterrence in the ways it has been practiced so far by Moscow (i.e. in the format of only seeking to “restrain” the adversary) does not protect the country from the adversary’s geopolitical/indirect military aggression that can pose an existential threat to our state. We must draw a lesson from this experience.

The idea of deterrence is rooted in deep antiquity. There is a Roman maxim reading as *si vis pacem, para bellum*. This maxim is based on the idea that war is caused by the weakness of one of the subjects, which, and so is human nature, becomes a victim of an attack. The idea that the desire for peace must be reinforced with the ability and willingness to defend oneself means that

¹⁵ The fact that Russia’s Special Military Operation in Ukraine had developed into a war as a result of Western intervention was publicly admitted in March 2024 by presidential press secretary Dmitry Peskov.

¹⁶ Post-Cold War Nuclear Weapons. Ed. A.G. Arbatov and V.Z. Dvorkin. M.: Rosspan, 2006, p.107

only the sufficient potential to fight back and, importantly, explicit determination to utilize that potential can cool a potential aggressor's hotheads.

However, the exact opposite is also true: wars often excessively (or so the opponent always thinks) strengthen one of the contenders. According to Thucydides, one of the early strategic thinkers of the ancient world, this was the cause of the Peloponnesian War (5th century BC).

This leads to another maxim: in order to be effective, deterrence must be accompanied by certain strategic restraint. The created capability must meet the necessity and sufficiency criteria in order to be able to deter aggression. Strategic deterrence, therefore, is a kind of political-military (politics plays a leading role here) art.

The theory of nuclear deterrence in its present form has come into the Russian strategic vocabulary from the English language. Over the years of Soviet-American arms control negotiations at first, and then during Moscow's attempts to build a strategic partnership with Washington, the general idea of nuclear deterrence, just like some other American strategic concepts (such as strategic stability, arms control, nuclear non-proliferation, etc.), was accepted by our military-political, military, and academic communities. Needless to say, "deterrence Russian style"¹⁷ differed from the original American concept from the very beginning: we have used the word *sderzhivanie*, i.e. "restraining" the adversary, rather than *ustrashenie*, which actually aims to deter the adversary by instilling fear in him. However, the intellectual dependence on the adversary, who later temporarily became our partner, and his way of thinking was obvious.

As long as relations between Moscow and Washington were declared a partnership, such closeness was seen as a positive factor. When discussing strategic issues, Russians and Americans spoke the same conceptual language, even though its Russian version was largely a translation from English. The deterioration of Russian-American relations, their actual rupture, and the degradation of the partnership to a standoff eventually leading to an active confrontation

¹⁷ See, e.g., Dmitry Adamsky. *The Russian Way of Deterrence: Strategic Culture, Coercion and War*. Stanford University Press, 2023.

created a new situation. Russia abandoned the early post-Soviet idea of integration into the Euro-Atlantic community and proclaimed itself an original state-civilization.¹⁸

Intellectual dependence on the partner who has once again become an adversary is no longer tolerable. Based on our strategic culture, we need to create our own conceptual framework.

There is yet another—only outwardly linguistic—problem. The Americans have two concepts and both are translated into Russian as *sderzhivaniye*. One of them is called containment, and the other is (nuclear) deterrence. The former, conceived at the very beginning of the Cold War, means spatial (geopolitical) containment of the adversary, preventing the spread of his political influence beyond national territory; the latter owes its existence to the creation of nuclear weapons and means intimidating the adversary with the ability and determination to launch a nuclear strike on him. In the Soviet and the current Russian strategic vocabulary, *sderzhivaniye* usually refers to the latter concept.¹⁹

It is important to remember that the concept of strategic deterrence was used in the USSR and then Russia almost exclusively in relation to nuclear confrontation (and then to coexistence) between the two largest nuclear powers. The word ‘strategic’ referred primarily to strategic nuclear forces. In other words, it implied deterring the adversary’s nuclear attack or large-scale armed aggression by creating appropriate capabilities. As a result of such narrow understanding of strategic deterrence as a factor in the relationship between the strategic nuclear capabilities of the USSR/Russia and the U.S., a simplified—in fact poster—slogan that the “nuclear shield of the Motherland” (aka “sword”) is a guarantee of the country’s security²⁰ began to be perceived as reality.

One can see the bitter irony in the fact that, having accepted the concept of deterrence, preserved it after the Cold War and even made it universal, our military-political leadership in the late

¹⁸ The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, endorsed by the President of the Russian Federation on 31 March 2023.

¹⁹ Interestingly, the French, who have created nuclear weapons on their own, use the term ‘dissuasion’ in this case. The Germans, who do not and are not to have nuclear weapons, translate the English word ‘deterrence’ as *Abschreckung*, i.e., intimidation.

²⁰ This was largely true during the Cold War, when a direct armed clash between the two blocs, led by the Soviet Union and the United States, respectively, most likely would have resulted in an exchange of massive nuclear strikes. The situation changed dramatically after the end of the Cold War.

Soviet and early post-Soviet periods deliberately discarded the concept of geopolitical containment as irrelevant. It is possible, however, that the leadership simply did not understand the essence of that policy. Moreover, Russia immediately encountered the problem of NATO expansion, in reunited Germany at first, then in Eastern Europe and, finally, in its own immediate neighborhood.

As a result, Russia not only lost its deep strategic foreground in the west (Warsaw Pact member countries and the Baltic republics), but it also lost the integrity of its historical core, part of which—Ukraine—over the last three decades turned into what President Putin has described as “anti-Russia.”²¹ This wide foreground did not remain unattended for long. As early as 1994, NATO commenced its enlargement, doubling the number of its members in three decades.

In addition, strategic non-nuclear deterrence remains insufficiently developed both theoretically and conceptually. This particularly concerns such new areas of bitter rivalry as cyberspace, biological weapons, and outer space. Information and especially cultural domains are the most important non-military areas of confrontation.

Therefore, the current acute confrontation—proxy war—between the collective West and Russia creates an objective need to rethink the concept of strategic deterrence in relation to the present and future objectives of Russia’s foreign policy strategy and military policy.

In order to do this, it is necessary to summarize, in the most general terms, the experience of our strategic deterrence policy (in its broad meaning): during the confrontation between the USSR and the U.S.; during a quarter of a century of presumed partnership between Moscow and Washington; and finally, during the conflict in Ukraine since 2014.

The border between war and peace became blurred in the second half of the 20th century. The confrontation between the USSR and the U.S. was characterized alternatively as a “Cold War

²¹ The USSR had its own analogue to containment in the form of international duty and the need to protect the gains of socialism. In practice, the concept was used from the early 1950s and verbalized in 1968, following the redeployment of Warsaw Pact troops to Czechoslovakia. In the West it was known as the “Brezhnev Doctrine.” In the late 1980s, Mikhail Gorbachev abandoned it. In the first half of the 1990s, Boris Yeltsin basically recognized the freedom of former Warsaw Pact member countries to choose their foreign policy orientation. (Apparently not quite understanding the consequences, he also almost declared the freedom of choice for Russian regions by inviting them to “take as much sovereignty as you can swallow”).

between the Free World and the Communist bloc” (a common American expression) and at the same time as “peaceful coexistence of states with different social systems that does not rule out the class struggle” (official Soviet concept). Both definitions are true in principle, but only their combination gives a complete picture. The Soviet-American confrontation was both peace and war. In other words: war (indirect, hybrid, ideological, etc.) in formally peacetime. In the 21st century, the hybrid nature of interstate struggle, which has engulfed many new areas of interaction, has become even more obvious and much more pervasive.

After the end of World War II, in order to ensure its security in Europe—initially in case of a renewed German military threat—the Soviet Union created a fairly wide belt of “forced-friendly” states, whose unconditional loyalty was ensured, as a rule, by the establishment of pro-Soviet regimes led by local communist parties.²² This buffer zone, where the Soviet Union kept large contingents of troops, significantly increased the strategic depth of the Moscow-controlled territory and at the same time made the position of the likely adversary in the center of Europe—the United States/NATO—strategically vulnerable.²³

At the same time, in response to the creation of the atomic bomb in the United States, its practical use against Japanese cities (which also came as a warning to the USSR, then a formal U.S. ally), and the subsequent American plans to drop atomic bombs on Soviet cities, Moscow sped up the creation of its own nuclear and then hydrogen weapons. As a result, in a matter of several years, thanks to enormous scientific and organizational efforts, economic and human sacrifices, the Soviet Union destroyed the U.S.’s nuclear monopoly. The creation of long-range aircraft and shortly thereafter of intercontinental ballistic missiles in the Soviet Union put an end to the strategic invulnerability of the United States.

Having built a strategic missile and nuclear balance, the USSR prevented the Third World War. The world’s two leading powers established a relationship of mutual nuclear deterrence, which

²² In addition, Finland and Austria officially assumed neutral status.

²³ In the Far East, the Soviet geopolitical containment of defeated Japan included, in addition to territorial changes and close relations with Mongolia as well as the incorporation of Tuva into the USSR, the creation of a Soviet military base in Port Arthur, assistance in the foundation of the DPRK, and support for the CCP’s rise to power in China. Despite all efforts, the Soviet Union failed to create its own occupation zone on the Japanese islands (Hokkaido). In the Near and Middle East, the USSR unsuccessfully tried to create buffer zones in Iranian Azerbaijan, establish control over the Black Sea straits, and influence the policy of the newly created State of Israel.

was based on the reality of mutual assured destruction²⁴ in the event of a nuclear war between them. At the same time, both sides assumed that any war between the USSR and the West would inevitably evolve into a nuclear one. As a result, the Cold War remained cold (for the Soviet Union, the U.S., and their closest allies) throughout its entire duration.

Moreover, the elimination by the Soviet Union of the leading Western power's nuclear monopoly and its unprecedented strategic invulnerability undermined the West's international positions. The loss of military superiority by Western countries significantly accelerated the process of decolonization and the emergence of many new states that declared their political and ideological independence from the West. The independence of some of these countries—from Egypt to Cuba—was directly guaranteed by the Soviet Union's nuclear weapons and their possible use.²⁵ In other cases—as in Algeria, Angola, Mozambique, South Yemen, Indonesia, Vietnam, and a number of other countries—their independence or territorial integrity was ensured by military and military-technical assistance and political support from the USSR, a major nuclear power, and partly from China, which created its own nuclear weapons in the mid-1960s.

The strategic relationship between the USSR and the United States was severely tested during the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, which put Moscow and Washington on the brink of a nuclear war. However, it also prompted them to begin the process of diplomatic regulation (limitation and then reduction) of nuclear weapons in 1963. This process served as the basis of relations between the Soviet Union and the U.S. until the very end of the Soviet period.

At the turn of the 1970s, the USSR achieved military-strategic parity with the United States, which at that time meant that the Soviet Union had acquired the status of a world power equal to the United States. Nuclear capability was the basis of the state's international position in the

²⁴ Mutual assured destruction is originally an American term. The USSR placed emphasis, for ideological reasons, on the fact that a nuclear war would destroy imperialism (i.e., the West's socio-economic and political system), but at the same time it stated that such a war would be accompanied by colossal casualties and destruction, which the peace-loving Soviet Union could not allow; hence, the policy of peaceful coexistence, proclaimed at the 20th Congress of the CPSU in 1956. However, this position came up against Chinese Communist Party leader Mao Zedong's view that the death of hundreds of millions of people was an acceptable price for the total destruction of imperialism and for the triumph of socialism on a global scale.

²⁵ During the Suez Crisis of 1956, the USSR directly warned Great Britain and France that if they did not stop their military intervention undertaken jointly with Israel against Egypt, Moscow could use all its military power against them. At that point, the U.S. also took a negative stance on the Anglo-Franco-Israeli gamble, and the foreign military intervention in Egypt was stopped.

second half of the 20th century. The highest international status achieved in the entire history of the country determined the self-awareness of the Soviet party and military-political leadership of the country.

In Soviet policy, the nuclear component of strategic deterrence was only part of the external security system. In addition to its nuclear capabilities, the Soviet Union also had large general-purpose forces, as well as a significant political and ideological weight in the world. This allowed the USSR to project its influence across all of Eastern Europe that was considered critical for the country's security. Ideologically, this strategy of spatial containment was framed as the "international duty" of the socialist countries to defend the "gains of socialism."²⁶ Similar considerations of geopolitical containment were behind the decision to send Soviet troops to Afghanistan in 1979. (The threat turned out to be exaggerated and the USSR fell into a geopolitical trap. The invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 stalled badly needed reforms in the USSR itself.) But this is a separate story.

Geopolitical containment was not a purely theoretical concept. Moscow repeatedly used military force to suppress mass protests in East Germany (1953), an armed uprising in Hungary (1956), and liberal political trends and reforms in Czechoslovakia (1968). When the Polish Communist Party's grip on power was in jeopardy in 1980, the crisis was brought under control by the Polish Army, without the use of force from the outside, but the presence in Poland of the Northern Group of Soviet Forces and Moscow's readiness to use them if needed, served as the most important factor of stabilization.²⁷

It is especially important to emphasize that military (nuclear and conventional) deterrence and geopolitical containment (military-political presence in Eastern Europe) left the West no chance throughout the 1950s-1980s to encroach on the Soviet nuclear superpower's sphere of influence. The American concept of "rolling back Communism" was stillborn, and probably a bluff – as

²⁶ In the West, this approach was dubbed "Brezhnev Doctrine."

²⁷ Under those conditions, the Soviet Union's political influence on the Polish Army top commanders helped stabilize the situation.

both Hungary and Czechoslovakia had demonstrated. The USSR had the capabilities and the will to ensure both the nuclear deterrence and geopolitical containment of a potential adversary.²⁸

The Soviet Union, however, fell victim to its own strategic miscalculation. Attempts to move from containing the West with a focus mainly on nuclear missiles (Nikita Khrushchev's approach) to overall military-strategic parity (under Leonid Brezhnev) with all the likely main opponents (with China joining their ranks) were adversely affected by a significant gap in the Soviet and American economic capabilities, and eventually the Soviet Union's growing technological inferiority.

The Soviet economy overstrained itself in the second half of the 1970s. In Moscow's foreign policy, the modernization of Soviet medium-range missiles in Europe without proper political preparation prompted Western European countries to request additional security guarantees from Washington in the form of deploying similar American missiles, which created an asymmetric threat to the Soviet Union. The lack of a clear foreign policy strategy in the Soviet Union created a situation where the exorbitant demands of the military-industrial complex²⁹ overrode both economic and foreign policy considerations, with dire consequences for the country.

Mutual nuclear deterrence during the Cold War was limited from the outset. It kept the United States from attacking the USSR and from trying to upset the military-political balance on the central front of the confrontation—in Europe; it forced the Soviet Union to withdraw nuclear missiles from Cuba, and the United States, in turn, removed its missiles from Turkey.

At the same time, nuclear deterrence did not affect other regions of the world. In the early 1950s, the Soviet Union and China were heavily engaged in the war against American and allied forces in Korea even though the U.S. had nuclear weapons and their delivery platforms (strategic bombers). As a result, the U.S. was unable to achieve victory and had to accept a truce that remains in effect up to date. In the 1960s and 1970s, the USSR provided large-scale military

²⁸ The USSR simultaneously waged two Cold Wars: with the United States and its allies, and with China. In 1979, Moscow demanded that Beijing stop its invasion of Vietnam "before it's too late." China heeded the warning and withdrew its troops from Vietnam.

²⁹ Especially after Dmitry Ustinov, Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee, who supervised the military-industrial complex, was appointed defense minister in 1976.

assistance and all-round support to the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam) in its fight against the U.S. aggression. The Vietnam War resulted in a humiliating defeat for the United States.

The Americans considered using nuclear weapons in Korea (as well as in Vietnam to help the French colonial troops in 1954, which Paris strongly requested). In both cases, Washington decided otherwise.

In Afghanistan in the 1980s, the United States and other opponents of the USSR actively and widely used Afghan resistance forces to make the Soviet Union bleed. However, they did not achieve a complete success. In 1989, the USSR withdrew its troops from Afghanistan, but the pro-Soviet regime in Kabul held out for another 18 months and fell only when the new post-Soviet government in Moscow stopped providing material and technical assistance. During the entire 10-year Afghan war, the Soviet Union never considered the possibility of using nuclear weapons.

It can be generally concluded that during the Cold War, the Soviet Union successfully implemented a strategy that could be called nuclear deterrence (in the full sense of the word) while at the same time geopolitically containing its main adversary, the United States. The Soviet leadership made a serious mistake during that period by letting the country get involved in an arms race—especially a non-nuclear one—against the United States and its allies (while at the same time confronting China), which significantly undercut the Soviet economy and became one of the main causes of the general crisis in the Soviet Union in the 1980s.

In the final years of the Soviet Union's existence, its leadership headed by Mikhail Gorbachev scrapped the strategic deterrence policy, including both nuclear deterrence and geopolitical containment. This was explained by the “new political thinking” proclaimed by Gorbachev and his associates, who, as far as can be judged, expected socialism and capitalism to converge in a kind of Soviet-American world “bi-hegemony.” But this idea proved illusory.

The Soviet Union's nuclear capabilities barely survived mutual Soviet-American arms cuts just to meet “defense sufficiency” requirements but lost their former significance after the end of the

Cold War. In 1990, Moscow and Washington made a joint official statement “delegitimizing” nuclear war that “must never be fought” as it “cannot be won.” At the same time, nuclear weapons stopped acting as a guarantor of geopolitical containment, which Gorbachev consciously and strongly denounced, apparently being unaware of the possible consequences of his decision. This created a bitter paradox. The Soviet Union voluntarily abandoned geopolitical containment and soon ceased to exist at a time when its Armed Forces, including their nuclear capabilities, were at the peak of their power.

Economic strain, underestimation of the role of the Armed Forces, including nuclear weapons, as a factor of national power, the acute intellectual inadequacy of the late Soviet-era elites caused by decades of ideological unanimity and bureaucratic stagnation, and the loss of national idea (in its communist form at that time) in the Soviet Union led to its geopolitical defeat. The ensuing economic and moral crisis resulted in the loss of a significant part of human, economic, scientific, technical, and technological potential, comparable to losses in a large-scale war.

After the end of the Cold War and the first-ever collapse of a nuclear power—the USSR, Moscow entered a period of strategic uncertainty. Its historical opponents in the West had turned into formal partners, but they spurned Russia’s claims to equal status in the declared partnership. Acting out of pragmatic considerations, the United States and its allies insisted that Russia take over all the strategic nuclear weapons of the former USSR and take its place in the UN Security Council. At the same time, they basically refused to recognize Russia as a power that independently determines its security interests.

The Basic Provisions of the Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation, endorsed by Boris Yeltsin’s presidential decree on 2 November 1993, did not name any military or military-political threats posed by major powers; nor did they identify Russia’s possible adversaries. So having inherited the Soviet nuclear deterrence capabilities, Moscow did not identify the object of deterrence. Moreover, Russia’s desire to become an ally of the United States and join NATO,³⁰ or at least establish a strategic partnership with it, contradicted the very essence of the deterrence policy. Russia voluntarily abandoned the most important—nuclear—component of

³⁰ In January 1994, during U.S. President Bill Clinton’s visit to Moscow, Boris Yeltsin suggested admitting Russia to NATO before Eastern European countries. Similar but vaguer suggestions made since 1992 were “gently” turned down. On the contrary, Washington launched the NATO expansion process in mid-1994 in order to consolidate its geopolitical victory.

its national power, albeit just for a while. The potential (largely excessive but extremely important) created by the efforts and hardships of the Soviet people over more than four post-war decades went to waste.

In spatial terms, Russia's foreign policy called for forming a "belt of friendly states" (i.e., a security belt) around the country but failed to deliver. The creation of the CIS and the conclusion of the Collective Security Treaty did not bring stability to the former Soviet space. Numerous armed conflicts broke out along Russia's border from Transnistria to the Pamir Mountains, and they had to be stopped by Russian troops.

Moscow was prompted to break strategic uncertainty by U.S./NATO plans and their practical steps, primarily NATO's expansion and its war against Yugoslavia. The United States and its allies quickly reneged on their promises not to enlarge NATO to the east, made in 1990 to the Soviet leadership. As a result of a five-year process, Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary were admitted to the alliance in 1999. In the same year, NATO bombed Yugoslavia for weeks. This brutal act of aggression was intended to consolidate the U.S./Western victory and overwhelming supremacy.

Unable to counteract Western policies, Moscow began to adapt to the new reality. In 1997, Russia and NATO signed the Founding Act, which could not but be interpreted as Moscow's reluctant agreement with the alliance's expansion and was a major geostrategic miscalculation; in 1995, Russian peacekeepers in Bosnia and Herzegovina were subordinated to NATO's Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR), an American general; and during the Kosovo crisis in 1999, Russian diplomats tried to persuade Belgrade to accept the demands of the "international community," that is, in fact, of the United States and its allies.

Moscow considered a nuclear response to NATO's aggression in the Balkans but decided against it due to economic weakness, the actual political incapacity of the then Russian president, and the general political and moral impotence, if not "degradation," of the country's leadership (Yeltsin family's rule and the so-called Seven Bankers' cabal). The only "detering" act was the Russian paratroopers' surprise march from Bosnia to Kosovo's Slatina Airport in 1999. Although the American SACEUR was prepared for a violent clash with the small Russian

contingent, the British commander decided not to risk it: the memory of the Soviet military power was still too fresh in his mind.

Added to the list of actions infringing upon Russia's interests in Europe were U.S. and Western support for separatism and terrorism in the North Caucasus, as well as their geopolitical activity in the post-Soviet space in a bid to upset integration processes in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). The understanding that without nuclear weapons Russia would repeat the fate of Yugoslavia forced Moscow, for the first time since the collapse of the USSR, to verbalize its nuclear deterrence policy. In November 1999, President Boris Yeltsin publicly cautioned U.S. President Bill Clinton: Don't forget even for a moment that Russia is a nuclear power.

During the period of Russia's political, economic, and military weakness in the 1990s, strategic deterrence was actually identical to nuclear deterrence in its narrow sense—preventing a nuclear attack on Russia. But even in such a narrow interpretation, the Russian deterrence concept faced a new challenge as the U.S. stepped up the development of missile defense systems (ABM). The U.S. withdrawal from the ABM Treaty in 2002 and the subsequent loss of hopes for an equal partnership with the West prompted President Vladimir Putin to resume, after more than a decade-long hiatus, efforts to strengthen and modernize Russia's nuclear deterrence capabilities.

At the same time, geopolitical containment remained inadequate due to the country's overall weakness. In 2003, the so-called Rose Revolution, inspired and supported by the West, took place in Georgia, followed by the self-styled Orange Revolution in Ukraine in 2004, and the not-too-gentle Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan in 2005. Color revolutions, starting in Belgrade in 2000, when Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic was overthrown, became the main method of "advancing democracy" (and Western influence to the detriment of Russian influence and the sovereignty of the respective countries) in the post-Soviet space. In 2003, the United States and the European Union succeeded in foiling Moscow's attempt to settle the Transnistrian conflict. The U.S. and UK aggression in Iraq in the same year clearly exposed the expansionist nature of Washington's foreign policy for all to see.

An attempt by the leaders of France (Jacques Chirac), Germany (Gerhard Schroeder), and Russia (Vladimir Putin) to form a “new Entente”³¹ to curb the George W. Bush Administration’s reckless efforts was stymied by Washington. Soon much more pro-Atlanticist politicians came to power in Berlin in 2005 (Angela Merkel) and in Paris in 2007 (Nicolas Sarkozy). NATO continued its eastward expansion, absorbing the Baltic countries (which dramatically increased the direct military threat to Russia) and Slovakia in 2004, and then Romania and Bulgaria in 2007. Aware that Moscow had no possibilities to counter this expansion, the Russian leadership reacted to the latest admissions outwardly calmly, without unnecessary emotions.

Conclusions, however, were drawn. Speaking in September 2004 shortly after a terrorist attack in Beslan, President Putin said: “We have stopped paying due attention to defense and security issues,” adding that “the weak get beaten.” He stressed that the terrorists were helped by the forces that still saw Russia, one of the largest nuclear powers, “as a threat” that “must be eliminated.” “Terrorism,” Putin said, “is, of course, only a tool for achieving these goals.”³²

President Putin did not explicitly name those forces, but in 2007, he delivered a keynote speech at the Munich Security Conference, openly challenging U.S. global hegemony. Many in the West assessed the Russian leader’s remarks as a declaration of a new Cold War against Washington and its allies. In fact, Putin’s speech in Munich for the first time in the post-Soviet history of Russia publicly justified full-fledged strategic deterrence. But the West did not stop its expansion.

In the following year 2008, the United States made the first attempt to launch the process of Ukraine’s admission to NATO. President Putin personally traveled to Bucharest for a NATO-Russia Council summit to warn Washington and its allies against the precarious step. Prior to that, the Russian leadership had informed the leaders of France and Germany that the United States was urgently planning to admit Ukraine into NATO. Vladimir Putin bluntly stated that plans to induct Ukraine into NATO would divide Ukraine and demolish its statehood, thereby drawing Russia’s “red line.” Thanks to the position of France and Germany, which were angered by the U.S. plans to admit Ukraine without proper procedures, the decision to grant NATO

³¹ An expression coined by then Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov.

³² Russian President Vladimir Putin’s Address on 4 September 2004.

membership to Kiev was not adopted back then, but at Washington's insistence it was announced that Ukraine and Georgia *would* become NATO members anyway. In fact, this dramatically accelerated the countdown to the war in Ukraine.

The more expansionist circles in the United States and its allies took the Russian leadership's position as an encouragement for the West to step up its efforts to spread Western influence. Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili, who organized an assault on South Ossetia in an attempt to forcibly restore the territorial integrity of his country, acted with the support of the U.S. Administration's faction led by Vice President Dick Cheney.

Saakashvili's gamble failed. Moscow's military response and the defeat of the Georgian army clearly showed that NATO's further expansion into the territory of the former USSR would inevitably mean an armed clash with Russia. In addition, Moscow recognized the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, thus creating buffer zones separating it from Georgia. For the first time since 1991, Russian strategic deterrence began to acquire a geopolitical dimension.

The five-day war with Georgia prompted Russia to start military reform, which eventually allowed the country to create compact and combat-ready forces capable of fighting in local conflicts. As a result, Russia conducted several successful military operations a couple of years later to spatially contain the adversary.

In 2009, Russia undertook its last attempt to lay the foundation for equal partnership with the West and avoid confrontation with it. Two years later, in 2011, it came to an end. Following the latest effort to establish strategic partnership with NATO, Russia's Military Doctrine adopted in 2010 allowed the use of nuclear weapons only if the very existence of the state was threatened. But this attempt proved fruitless as neither the United States nor its allies were interested in truly equal relations. Putin's return to the presidency crushed the U.S.'s plans to gradually "tame" Russia as a political and resource appendage of the collective West.

The partnership with the West yielded negative results as far as Russia's strategic deterrence was concerned. Moscow failed to integrate into the Euro-Atlantic security system on equal terms and to curb the growing military threat. The strategic offensive arms control process continued,

but the United States refused to negotiate a missile defense agreement and even seceded from the ABM Treaty. NATO countries also declined to ratify the adapted Conventional Armed Forces in Europe Treaty. But most importantly, the West steadily moved NATO's political and military infrastructure towards Russia, thus eliminating the remains of its strategic buffer.

Russia was being forced out both economically and humanly. Newly admitted NATO and EU member states canceled visa-free agreements with Russia; trade barriers were raised. Relying on its military-political power, the West resorted to economic blackmail. Suffice it to recall its bizarre demands that Russia should lift restrictions on the export of round timber to Finland or it would face sanctions. (Russia was supposed to continue round timber supplies to Finland in order to keep its sawmills running). The West pressed on in a bid to de-industrialize our country. In fact, Russia itself contributed to that for a while, obviously underestimating the role of the defense sector not only from a military-political but also from a technological point of view. Russia's geopolitical containment of the West faced a complete fiasco.

By the mid-2010s, Russia had restored its international agency, paid off foreign debts, begun to upgrade strategic nuclear capabilities, and created effective general-purpose forces capable of fighting in local conflicts. In his Address to the Federal Assembly in 2018, President Putin announced plans to strengthen Russian strategic forces, which was expected to significantly enhance the country's nuclear deterrence potential.

So Russia's strategic deterrence policy retained the ability to ward off a nuclear attack and a major war with NATO and at the same time stopped local conflicts along the Russian border. However, the task of preventing a regional war with a middle power relying on all-out support from the United States and Western countries remained unresolved. The threat of nuclear war in this case seemed disproportionate to be effective, but the country still lacked the ability to achieve a quick victory over a relatively strong adversary enjoying Western support.

In addition, Russia continued to downplay reliance on nuclear weapons, which was a serious omission which only convinced the West that Moscow would almost never use nuclear weapons. This omission proved quite costly when an almost inevitable military conflict erupted. A more

adequate and offensive nuclear doctrine might have forced the West to retreat without a fight, but this is something we should remember for the future.

It took almost a decade for Russia and the United States to move from partnership to confrontation, but the year 2014 was a turning point. The United States, which had once again become our open geopolitical adversary, did not see, unlike during the Cold War, any obstacles that could hinder its actions. Not only had Washington masterminded and supported a coup in Ukraine, but it also started to actively develop military and intelligence cooperation with Kiev, thus deliberately intruding into the area of Moscow's vital interests. Russia's attempts to resolve the conflict diplomatically and avoid confrontation with the United States failed. Washington ignored Moscow's security concerns and began to turn Ukraine into a cheap tool for exerting military-political pressure on Russia.

Seeking to protect Russia's vital interests, its leadership used the army to take control of the Crimean Peninsula in February 2014. As a result of a referendum held soon after that, the Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol became part of Russia.

Despite the Federation Council's mandate, the Russian leadership did not repeat the "Crimean scenario" in Donbass even though the Russia-leaning Donetsk and Lugansk regions voted in May 2014 for their independence from Kiev. Moscow was still hoping for an agreement with the new authorities in Kiev and with the West.

The Minsk accords signed in 2014 and 2015 were seen in Moscow as a way to settle the Ukraine crisis. By contrast, Ukraine and Western countries signed them in order to buy time for Kiev's revenge and to create a costly and permanent military threat to Russia that would tie its hands in the international arena.

Russia in the meantime undertook yet another geopolitical containment operation, for the first time in the post-Soviet period outside the former Soviet space. During a counterterrorism operation in Syria, launched in 2015, the Russian Aerospace Forces defeated ISIS (Daesh) fighters and prevented the Western-backed Arab Spring militants from changing the regime in Damascus. Thus Moscow not only prevented the spread of radical movements to Central Asia,

but it also broke U.S. monopoly on the use of force in the Middle East, and significantly strengthened its own position in the region and the world as a whole. This was a challenge to Washington.

Tension in U.S.-Russian relations grew rapidly. In 2016, the U.S. Democratic Party top functionaries blamed Russia for their candidate's failure in the U.S. presidential election. Political circles in America portrayed Russia and its leadership as the worst enemy of the United States, a weak and outlawed adversary. Washington's policy towards Moscow had turned not just hostile but openly provocative. So Ukraine was destined to become a weapon against Russia, against Russia's relations with the EU, and against Europe itself, especially Germany as an economic competitor and a political player potentially autonomous from the United States.

The situation was approaching a denouement. Unlike during the Cold War, Moscow had to deter the adversary from a position of relative weakness. In 2019, the Kremlin tried to organize a top-level dialogue with newly elected Ukrainian President Vladimir Zelensky, thus offering the last opportunity to overcome the crisis. However, acting under U.S. influence, the Ukrainian president made a fatal decision to seek political support among Ukrainian ultranationalists and in the West.

As Ukraine became increasingly dangerous for Russia, Moscow managed to thwart geopolitical threats from the other two sides. In 2020, the Russian security forces were put on alert and stood ready to repel the West's attempt to stage a color revolution in Belarus. But it did not come to their direct intervention. With the help and support from Russia, the Belarusian authorities managed to take the situation under control. In January 2022, Russia, for the first time in the history of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), carried out a joint peacekeeping operation to stabilize the socio-political situation in Kazakhstan. For Russia, both Kazakhstan and Belarus are of paramount strategic importance, and the deterring effect of its successful missions is invaluable.

In Ukraine, however, deterrence did not work. In 2021, Russia tried to draw U.S. attention to its security concerns through a show of force during prolonged military exercises on the border with Ukraine. Washington responded to this signal by inviting Moscow to hold top-level talks

but showed no readiness to engage in productive dialogue on Ukraine. The Americans were willing to discuss only their own agenda, as they had always done after the end of the Cold War.

Moreover, immediately after the summit in Geneva in June 2021, the United States redoubled its efforts to turn Ukraine into a military base, an “unsinkable aircraft carrier,” against Russia. American combat planes and British warships in the Black Sea region were ordered to carry out brazenly provocative actions. Backed by Washington, the Ukrainian leadership also acted extremely impertinently and provocatively.

In such a situation, Moscow, in December 2021, came up with a package of proposals, essentially an ultimatum, regarding ways to strengthen security in the region and in Europe as a whole. Priority was given to the need to formalize NATO’s refusal to expand further into the territory of the former USSR and return NATO’s military infrastructure to where it had been before 1997, i.e., before the eastward expansion began. Russia emphasized that if its proposals were rejected, it would take “military-technical measures” to protect its interests.

The United States turned down Russia’s proposals, obviously provoking the Kremlin. The Russian leadership was essentially put in a dilemma: either surrender politically to the United States, giving up positions on a wide range of issues and undermining confidence in the national leader, or move from threats to action, i.e., use of force to solve the problem. Washington believed this was an almost win-win situation for the U.S.: Moscow’s capitulation would have delivered a severe blow to Russia and its leadership, while an attempt to use force in Ukraine would almost inevitably have created a “new Afghanistan” for Moscow, to be followed by regime change and the final solution of the “Russian question” for the West.

STRATEGIC DETERRENCE AMID CONFRONTATION BETWEEN RUSSIA AND THE COLLECTIVE WEST

Geopolitical containment of the United States did not work in the case of Ukraine. After a pro-Western coup d'état in Ukraine in 2014, Moscow tried for eight years to settle the crisis politically, but its efforts were ignored by the West, and in the end, in February 2022, Russia had to start its Special Military Operation. From the very beginning, this operation was carried out under a “nuclear umbrella”: President Putin, clearly referring to nuclear deterrence, warned the United States and its allies against direct interference in the conflict. However the West's accrued confidence, shored up by propaganda, that Russia will practically never use nuclear weapons, Western “strategic parasitism”—diminished fear of war, as well as a delay in Russia's movement up the ladder of nuclear deterrence escalation, and a frivolous military doctrine largely invalidated these warnings.

During the first two and a half years of the armed conflict, Russia's nuclear deterrence policy proved partially successful. Washington remembers Russia's nuclear capabilities and tries to avoid a direct clash with its Armed Forces. The West's initial idea of a no-fly zone over Ukraine was quickly abandoned. Attempts to put pressure on Minsk were resolutely countered by the deployment of Russian operational-tactical nuclear missile systems in Belarus.

An alternative to direct U.S. intervention was not passive observation of events, but a proxy war in which Ukraine proved to be an almost ideal (and cheap) tool in Washington's hands. Shortly after the start of the armed conflict in Ukraine, the United States set a goal, unheard of for its relations with Moscow, to defeat Russia strategically using the U.S./West-backed Ukrainian Armed Forces.

Acting in pursuit of this goal, Washington, with London's assistance in the spring of 2022, derailed Moscow's attempt to negotiate a security deal with Ukraine. Kiev received clear instructions from the West to win on the battlefield. After that, Russia's SMO developed into a regional war along the 2,000-km front line. In the new situation, the conflict in Ukraine acquired existential significance for Russia.

The existential nature of this conflict unequivocally means, as per Russian doctrinal documents, that under certain conditions—when the existence of the state is threatened—Russia can use nuclear weapons. The U.S. could not ignore this circumstance completely. Although the U.S. had come to the conclusion that the likelihood of Russia using nuclear weapons was very low, American military assistance to Ukraine during the conflict was ramped up gradually in a creeping (“testing”) manner. But Russia was slow to respond.

Apart from bad impacts, a protracted military operation has also had many positive effects. A significant part of the “fifth column” has fled the country, the pro-Western faction has weakened, the Western-centrist attitudes in the Russian elite have begun to erode; measures taken by the West, whose fire Russia brought upon itself, have crippled the comprador class created by the unsuccessful reforms of the 1990s and those who attended to its needs. Having come back to its habitual millennium-old position of “armed Great Russia”³³ or “the military organization of the people inhabiting it,”³⁴ Russia has begun to revive spiritually, economically, scientifically, and technologically. It is true though that this boost cannot last forever. As Russia’s participation in the First World War showed, people’s fatigue and squabbling in the leadership created a situation where defeat was snatched from the hands of victory in 1916-1917, followed by the collapse of the state itself.

The failure of the Ukrainian-NATO offensive in 2023 was a crucial but not yet turning point in the war. There is no question of defeating Russia on the battlefield any more. The war has become protracted. The U.S. strategy has changed to wearing out Russia by taking advantage of the collective West’s material resources and exploiting the readiness of the Kiev regime, armed and guided by Washington, to fight to the last Ukrainian. However the ultimate goal of the war, that is, defeating Russia one way or another, remains on the agenda.

By “testing” Russia’s reaction, the United States steadily climbed the ladder of (non-nuclear) escalation, encouraged by the absence of Russia’s crushing retaliatory strikes for the destruction of the Nord Stream gas pipelines by the Americans and their accomplices, for complicity in the sinking of the cruiser *Moskva*, the Russian Black Sea Fleet’s flagship, as well as for UAV raids

³³ Klyuchevsky V.O. Russian History Course. M., 1937. Part 2. p. 47

³⁴ Bordachev T.V. Muscovy’s Strategy. How the 13th-15th Century Political Culture Influenced the Future of Russia. M.,

on the strategic aircraft base in Engels and early warning system stations, an attempt to attack the Moscow Kremlin—the main residence of the head of the Russian state, and strikes on Russian cities. Caution was understandable but proved counterproductive.

Russia's self-restraint reduced the effectiveness of nuclear deterrence. The situation has been exacerbated by the diminishing fear of nuclear weapons in the West. There are several reasons for that: asymmetries in relations between great powers (primarily the U.S. and Russia); (conscious) advancement of the idea that the use of nuclear weapons has become politically and morally unacceptable in the 21st century and thus nuclear fear reawakening is an anachronism;³⁵ technological progress in the development and production of new types of non-nuclear weapons; and also to a large and decisive extent, the feeling of all-permissiveness and impunity acquired by the U.S. foreign policy establishment after the end of the Cold War.

The adversary, initially wary of Moscow's possible reaction, is escalating the conflict by striking not only the Crimean Bridge but also deep into Russian territory. More and more areas are reached by Ukrainian combat drones, from Veliky Novgorod and St. Petersburg to the Saratov region and the outskirts of Sochi. Ukraine has moved from attacks on the Zaporozhye nuclear power plant in Energodar to subversive operations against nuclear power plants in the Kursk and Smolensk Regions. While previously Western countries dispatched certain groups of military personnel to Ukraine, including advisers, specialists, and purportedly volunteers, in March 2024, they started publicly discussing the possibility of sending regular troops and high-precision long-range weapons to Ukraine. In August 2024, with U.S./British support and assistance, Ukrainian forces made an incursion into Russia's Kursk region, and managed to occupy a slice of Russian territory across the border.

The situation has spurred an unprecedented public discussion in Russia around the need to ratchet up nuclear deterrence, and go for escalation, ultimately including nuclear strikes against targets in NATO countries.³⁶ If Russia delivers on its threat, the United States will face a dilemma: respond with nuclear strikes on Russia, thus risking nuclear retaliation against its own territory, or admit that the widespread interpretation of notorious Article 5 of the Washington

³⁵ In 1995, the UN Court ruled that the use of nuclear weapons is illegitimate in principle.

³⁶See articles and public speeches by S.A. Karaganov 2023-2024.

Treaty is actually a myth. This would essentially be tantamount to admitting the obvious: that there is no American “nuclear umbrella” over allies. Such an admission might, as Western capitals fear, cause the Western bloc to fall apart.

Signals sent by Moscow since the beginning of the summer of 2022 have produced certain results and sparked an international discussion on the danger of nuclear war. The United States stopped saying at first that Russia would never use nuclear weapons, and then started talking about the risks of nuclear conflict escalation. But while Russia hesitated to move up the nuclear deterrence escalation ladder, Washington and its allies continued to add fuel to the fire, conducting their own (non-nuclear) escalation almost with impunity. Russia’s retaliatory strikes on Ukraine do not scare Washington. It is very likely that the United States is preparing to throw European allies into the inferno of the conflict after Ukrainians. Having lost their intellectual and political self-sufficiency, the latter are obediently heading for a slaughter, led by their own comprador liberal-globalist elites.

DETERRENCE STRATEGY PROBLEMS

An important problem of modern Russian strategic thinking seems to be the fact that strategic deterrence is often identified with only one of its aspects—nuclear. Such a perception is obviously a legacy of the Cold War. But what had been effective during the bloc confrontation between the Soviet Union and the U.S. lost its power after the collapse of the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Union itself. Moscow’s attempts to integrate into the Washington-dominated global system further complicated the situation. In fact, not only had the balance of power changed, but so did the economic situation, the social basis, and the ideological and political framework of Russian-American relations.

Another problem is the insufficient emphasis on nuclear deterrence, which allows the adversary not only to unleash conflicts but also to escalated them and hold the strategic initiative.

Nuclear deterrence still prevents a nuclear strike on or massive invasion of Russia, but these threats are now much less likely than they were during the Cold War. In the Ukraine crisis, by

2022, Russia was in a position where the threat of its nuclear strikes remained, in fact, the only means of Russian strategic deterrence.³⁷ In 2014-2022, aided by the West, Ukraine turned into the world's most hostile state with regard to Russia. As a result, our country faced a top-level threat, as assessed by our top leaders.

The main reason why strategic deterrence proved ineffective in the 1990s-2000s is the general (political, economic, technological, military, and ideological) weakness of Russia; uncertainty about its place and role in the world; Russia's deep integration in and subordination to the Western financial and economic system; and dependence on advanced Western technologies, including military ones, in areas such as communications, intelligence, troop and arms control automation, etc. The West simply was no longer afraid of Russia. A significant part of the Russian ruling class had fallen into dependence on the West to varying degrees. Russia had become particularly reliant on Western markets in the business sector that involved many senior government officials and politicians.

But this is not what played a critical role. Rather, it was unrealistic, as it turned out, hopes for an equal partnership, peaceful mutually beneficial cooperation and lasting agreements with the West based on a balance of interests. Over a quarter of a century of formal partnership, intellectual dependence on the Western worldview and concepts of international relations became the norm. These concepts left Moscow with no sphere of vital interests. So geopolitical containment was losing its legitimate basis. Russian top politicians joined the Western chorus of voices renouncing Russia's right to have its own sphere of influence, and recognizing NATO's right to expand.

Focused entirely on relations with the West, Moscow overlooked its rapidly dwindling influence in the near abroad. Although this area was of priority importance to Russia's foreign policy, it lacked strategic vision; economic and cultural factors were poorly used, no effective political work was conducted, and analytical support for foreign policy had sagged. It is important to note that until the mid-2000s, Russia's determination to defend its interests in the near abroad

³⁷ To some extent, this resembled the U.S. situation in the 1950s, when the massive retaliation doctrine turned out to be inapplicable to the threats to Western dominance in various regions of the world. As a result, the United States did not use nuclear weapons in Korea in 1950 and in Vietnam in 1954. In the early 1960s, they replaced the massive retaliation concept with a flexible response strategy, which de facto ruled out any nuclear strikes on the USSR and envisioned no first use of nuclear weapons.

contrary to the West's policy was out of the question. When it regained its determination, many opportunities had already been missed.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ENHANCING DETERRENCE STRATEGY IN THE UKRAINE CONFLICT. "ESCALATION LADDER"

For Russians, the assumption that Russia is supposedly destined to win in Ukraine is dangerous. The war is widening, including into the pre-2022 Russian territory. The geography of enemy UAV and missile strikes is expanding. The deferred effect of sanctions will make itself felt. Psychological tension in society is building up albeit slowly. The adversary hopes that weakened by losses and hardships, morally tired of a long war, incessant assaults on border areas, terrorist attacks and sabotage, and now also strikes deep into its territory, Russia can be psychologically broken by the entry of NATO troops into Ukraine and the real prospect of imminent nuclear war with the collective West. The Western-oriented Russian elite have shrunk, but they are still there, lying low and waiting for the right moment to snatch power and revert Russia's foreign policy course. This would have disastrous consequences for Russia's international position and for the country itself. The current situation requires strategic and decisive action.

Life itself makes us define the nature and status of the conflict in Ukraine. This has long been a major regional war increasingly involving NATO countries. Changing the status of the conflict to a war will allow Russia to use its resources better and fight the adversary more effectively. Repeated statements at the highest level that the conflict in Ukraine is fateful for Russia, in fact, support this view.

Russia needs to clarify its goals in the ongoing conflict. The previous conceptual nature of the SMO goals was intended to ensure the freedom of diplomatic maneuver. President Putin's speech at the Russian Foreign Ministry on 14 June 2024 pursued, as far as can be judged, important tactical goals. Today it is clear that no agreements satisfying the vital interests of Russia can be achieved either with the Kiev regime (which is neither independent nor even legitimate) or Washington in the foreseeable future. Moreover, recent experience shows that the United States and its allies are not fulfilling their obligations under the agreements they signed.

At the same time, the warring army and the country as a whole must understand what exactly they are fighting for.

Once the goals are clarified, it is necessary to specify the strategy for achieving these goals and then assign relevant tasks to government agencies. It should be assumed that a ceasefire and armistice along the line of engagement will not only fail to suit Russia, but, in fact, they will mean its failure to reach its goals with likely grave consequences for the country already in the medium term. The so-called Korean scenario of ceasefire along the line of engagement must be unequivocally rejected; the adversary, if he opts for it, will instead seek the “German scenario” that implies restoring the “territorial integrity of Ukraine” in the future, provoking a new war, and causing Russia to fall apart.

Russia needs to seize the initiative not only on the battlefield, which it did by the beginning of 2024, but also in the war in general. It must be realized that victory in the war must be won in a relatively near—a maximum of two years—perspective, or better still, a year sooner.

The Western strategy of a protracted conflict is aimed at exhausting Russia and destabilizing it from within. The U.S. ruling circles need war in order to weaken Russia and thus eliminate the most active and powerful opponent of America’s global hegemony before they proceed to take on their rival—China. Without Russia, the World Majority nations will lose their most decisive and resourceful ally. As is often the case, Americans are acting by proxy. As Ukraine has fully lent itself to the U.S. cause on the battlefield, Washington wants its European allies to carry out large-scale remilitarization and bear the brunt of wider confrontation with Russia.

Present-day globalist elites in European countries seek to use the war in Ukraine in order to retain power at the national and EU levels, as well as to consolidate the EU itself around the conflict with Russia. For European countries to set their military-industrial complex in motion, they need time and guarantees of a long confrontation with Russia. To this end, the West is stepping up its involvement in the war in Ukraine from currently supplying increasingly long-range missiles and Western combat planes to a possible future dispatch of NATO troops to

Ukraine.³⁸ Critically, a significant and so far leading part of the European ruling elites is made of compradors ready to serve U.S. interests at the expense of their own countries and peoples.

Western strategies and plans have to be torpedoed lest they lead to a world nuclear war. Decisive steps need to be taken to this end. These include:

Foiling Western efforts to prevent Russia from achieving its goals in Ukraine should be defined as the immediate goal of an active deterrence strategy in the Ukraine conflict. The adversary should have no doubts that if he ignores the factor of nuclear deterrence, Russia will use its long-range weapons against his troops and facilities on his own territory, including—in a step or two—nuclear ones.

Removing the unspoken taboo on attacks on symbolic objects such as the government quarter in Kiev, Ukrainian army, Security and Intelligence Service command centers, as well as on the most important infrastructure facilities, including bridges across the Dnieper, railway bridges and tunnels, supply routes from the Polish border, and other targets in Western Ukraine.

Creating maximum problems for the Kiev regime's propaganda machine, including the Internet, television and radio broadcasting companies, and, separately, call centers. It is not clear why the Kiev regime's television and other information centers have not been demolished yet. It would be logical to liken their destruction to NATO strikes on a television center in Belgrade in 1999. The adversary must know that the time of impunity for crimes is irreversibly gone.

Rethinking the previous "peaceful" approach to strategic deterrence, getting rid of the habit of mainly responding to the adversary's moves or even deliberately missing the blows, thus "not taking the bait." This approach does not help deescalate the conflict, and on the contrary it encourages the adversary to raise the stakes further as clearly borne out by the West's support ranging from the supply of Javelin anti-tank systems to the delivery of F-16 aircraft and ATACMS tactical missiles, and from sending mercenaries to making plans to deploy NATO regular troops to Ukraine.

³⁸ French President Emmanuel Macron's initiative (March 2024).

Lowering the doctrinal threshold for the use of nuclear weapons; expanding the conditions for their use by amending the Russian Military Doctrine and the Fundamentals of Nuclear Deterrence Policy to include scenarios implying threats that fall short of endangering Russia's statehood.

Revising the notorious formula: "a nuclear war cannot be won, and it must never be fought," since such truncated wording deprives Russia of the most effective means of containing the exorbitant ambitions of the world's only hegemon—the United States—that possesses enormous military and military-economic capabilities.

Declaring that in order to prevent nuclear war, it is necessary to exclude the possibility of any war between nuclear powers, including proxy ones, and for this purpose respect the security interests of any, including nuclear, states, act on the basis of equality and take into account the principle of indivisible security. Until this goal is achieved, Russia will have to strengthen strategic deterrence in all of its forms.

To emphasize the importance of the proposed changes, it would be reasonable, when referring to nuclear deterrence, to completely abandon the term '*sderzhivaniye*' (literally: restraining), which has a passive connotation, and replace it with '*ustrasheniye*' (literally: fear reawakening) as the proper Russian equivalent. Given the real balance of power between Russia and the West, it is "nuclear fear reawakening" that should play a central role in our strategy for ending the Ukraine conflict on conditions suitable for Russia. The strengthened Russian strategy of deterrence must be active and, if necessary, proactive.

Conducting regular, close and immediate—we have lost much time already—consultations with Russia's international partners from among the World Majority countries (especially SCO and BRICS members). Initially this can be done at a senior expert level. Russia should convincingly prove to the leadership, elites, and societies of friendly countries the fairness of its approach, and the validity and accuracy of its political course; convince them that our struggle in Ukraine is part of a global movement for a new world order, free from the hegemony of one country or a group of countries, and that Russia's defeat would be their defeat as well.

Communicating closer with our Chinese partners, including unofficially, on a wide range of issues from strengthening strategic stability and improving strategic deterrence to specific aspects of the military-political situation in various regions of Eurasia (Europe, the Middle East, Central, Southeast and East Asia, and Arctic) and the strategic assessment of individual states (U.S., European Union, Japan) and their development prospects.

Proposing our own nuclear deterrence concept and theory. Our partners, just like most of us until recently, still follow the ideas that came from the West. An in-depth conversation about ways to strengthen nuclear deterrence under Russia's intellectual leadership will make its position stronger. By conveying our views, including those concerning the use of nuclear weapons in the war over Ukraine, we will significantly amplify the effect from our deterrence (as "fear-reawakening") policy. Partners from the World Majority countries, especially India and Pakistan, will inevitably (with our tacit support) convey relevant messages to the United States.

Opposing the Western model of conflict escalation in Ukraine with the Russian escalation strategy. By disrupting NATO's efforts in Ukraine we will eliminate the risk of civilization's destruction in a head-on collision between Russia and NATO, for this is exactly what the Western escalation strategy leads to. In addition, this will help us avoid a war of attrition.

Such a strategy could include political and military steps taken in a certain sequence (progressively increasing in intensity) depending on the actual situation. (Nuclear deterrence-fear-reawakening escalation ladder).

It is extremely important that by strengthening our reliance on nuclear deterrence we will help put a "safety catch" back in place in the international system, that is, the fear of nuclear war, which is largely gone now. This is necessary for maintaining international peace not only between Russia and the West but in the world in general. In the next 15 to 20 years, the shift of tectonic plates under the old international system will inevitably produce more conflicts, which, if not stopped, can lead to a world war regardless of the current Russia-West confrontation.

Political steps

Making it clear that if NATO countries send their troops to Ukraine, Russia will view such states as participating directly in the armed conflict. Diplomatic relations with these states will be severed, and their troops will become priority targets for Russian strikes. At the same time, Russia will lower the level of diplomatic relations with all countries that provide most active military assistance to Ukraine (Baltic states, Poland, Romania). The next step is to recall the families of the Russian diplomatic staff from the respective countries.

Clarifying that nuclear doctrine amendments expanding the conditions and lowering the threshold for the use of nuclear weapons do not mean that Russia is preparing to use ultra-low-yield nuclear weapons. They mean the ability to use nuclear weapons of any yield when there is no direct threat to the existence of the Russian state. Our President has already mentioned that our non-strategic weapons pack a big punch.³⁹ (For changes in the doctrine, see the relevant section).

Establishing a no-fly zone for foreign unmanned aerial vehicles over the Black Sea outside the territorial waters of the Black Sea states, with such UAVs to be subsequently shot down.

Issuing a warning that attempts by NATO countries to impose a naval blockade on the Kaliningrad Region or St. Petersburg will be repelled by Russia with direct attacks on such countries, using all the necessary types of weapons, including nuclear ones. Coastal countries participating in such a blockade would simply be obliterated.

Persuading representatives of the American deep state that the U.S. should withdraw from the conflict in Ukraine without losing face.

Convincing our World Majority partners of the legitimacy of a possible use of nuclear weapons by Russia as a last resort. Informing Russia's partners about its views on the role of nuclear weapons in the future world order.

Military-technical steps

³⁹ Plenary session of the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum//Russian Presidential Administration. 7 June 2024.URL: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/74234>.

Conducting military exercises, whose scenario provides for nuclear strikes on specific NATO countries in accordance with the announced doctrinal changes, and simulating such strikes using conventional missiles.

Skipping two steps. Launching conventional missiles at NATO's military and logistics centers, and then, possibly, at symbolic targets across Europe.

Supplying Russian weapons to forces that oppose the United States and its allies in various regions of the world from the Middle East to Latin America as a preemptive response to Western assistance to Kiev and the use of Ukraine as a weapon against Russia. The United States is much more dependent on the outside world than Russia is. In the 1980s, during their confrontation with the USSR, the Americans supported the Afghan mujahedeen, who lived *inter alia* off drug trafficking. Today, the United States is fighting a low-grade war against drug cartels on its southwestern border, thus exposing its vulnerability. The UK and other Western countries, which are actively involved in the Ukraine conflict, also have their own weak spots.

Conducting underground nuclear tests.

Carrying out space testing of systems designed to disable spacecraft.

Hunting down NATO's UAVs over the Black Sea, downing UAVs outside the territorial waters of the Black Sea states and all territorial waters adjacent to the territories that still belong to Ukraine.

Carrying out regular patrolling off the coasts of the United States and its allies by the Russian Aerospace Forces and the Navy.

Some military measures if the West rejects de-escalation efforts:

Striking Western troops deployed to Ukraine.

Destroying UAVs and other NATO aircraft within the no-fly zone over the Black Sea.

Disabling U.S. and NATO reconnaissance spacecraft.

Attacking NATO bases hosting Ukrainian combat planes, initially with non-nuclear weapons.

Conducting cyberattacks against critical infrastructure, as well as destroying logistics facilities in European countries.

Using non-nuclear weapons to attack logistics hubs in NATO countries that are used for supplying Western weapons to the Ukrainian Armed Forces.

Severing submarine cables in the Baltic Sea at first and then in the Atlantic, preceding such actions with a public demonstration of Russia's military-technical capabilities for such operations.

Sending the last warning by carrying out a ground test of an ultra-high-yield nuclear warhead (of over 50 megatons).

Launching non-nuclear strikes on military and logistics targets in European countries that actively support the war against Russia, to be followed by attacks on symbolic political targets such as government and parliament buildings. These steps should be accompanied by strong warnings of nuclear retaliation if they strike back.

Most importantly, starting political and propaganda work inside Russia to convince society of the need for such measures to save Russia and the lives of its soldiers, and prevent a world war.

Restoring and developing the civil defense system.

An absolute last-resort measure: crossing the nuclear threshold to deliver nuclear strikes on targets in NATO countries. Since the threat of nuclear war with strikes on the United States is

unacceptable for Washington, this is the only threat that can force it to retreat and stop its aggression against Russia.

It is fundamentally important that at each stage—in parallel with the abovementioned political events and military-technical and military measures—the Russian leadership shall remain in contact with the U.S. leadership in order to make Washington aware of the seriousness of Moscow's intentions and at the same time of its readiness to end the conflict on conditions suitable for Russia. Russian-American contacts could, for example, be maintained through nuclear risk reduction centers created under strategic arms reduction treaties.

Using unofficial channels that need to be established and/or restored to inform the U.S. leadership, including the deep state, that Moscow is ready to ensure the U.S.'s withdrawal without humiliation and shame. If, for example, the United States stops financing the Kiev regime, we could present the subsequent defeat of the Ukrainian army not as a defeat of the United States but as a defeat of its allies in Kiev and Brussels. We should also emphasize the American leaders' prudence and Russia's willingness to cooperate with them in facilitating conflict resolution on a broader scale, in limiting arms (so far rhetorically) and gradually rebuilding trust.

In the field of strategic communication with the adversary, we should ensure maximum consistency between our actions and statements. Sporadic and contradictory public statements give the impression of our lack of focus and are more likely to provoke than deter the adversary. It is important to develop and use a clear system of signals for the adversary.

Warnings must be made on a one-off basis. Under no circumstances should we issue empty threats—the notorious red lines. Our words must by all means be backed by action—this is the basic principle of reawakening fear. A transfer of nuclear weapons from arms depots to combat units and other activities that the adversary can track with his reconnaissance systems should be a signal of impending nuclear strikes.

Since the active deterrence strategy targets primarily the military-political leadership of the United States and other leading Western countries, as well as the circles that stand above them,

these groups of people should be deprived of psychological comfort. Russia should publicly inform them that it will aim its nuclear deterrent at the places where members of the U.S. and Western elites reside. They must understand that they can no longer live in a comfortable and fully protected state.

Russia needs to strictly follow the hierarchy of goals—strategic goals taking priority over tactical ones—and avoid situations where private (usually economic) considerations outweigh all others to the detriment of common interests.

Russia should exclude a situation where only the territory of Russia, Ukraine, and NATO's European countries come under attack during a war. To deter attacks on Russian strategic targets (strategic aviation airfields, missile warning systems, public administration and national defense centers, peaceful cities and infrastructure, etc.) or sabotage against them, the principal adversary—the United States—should be warned of Russia's readiness and determination to strike U.S. strategic targets, starting with American military bases abroad. Perhaps such strikes should be delivered at earlier stages of escalation.

UPDATING THE NUCLEAR DOCTRINE

In order to deter the United States effectively and reawake its fear of nuclear war, Russia needs to update its nuclear doctrine, including its public version contained in the Foundations of State Policy of the Russian Federation in the Area of Nuclear Deterrence, endorsed by Presidential Decree #355 of 2 June 2020. The purpose of the amendments is to strengthen the reliability of Russia's nuclear deterrence with regard to potential adversaries, as well as its effectiveness as one of the means of preventing aggression against Russia or other significant damage to the national security of our country, save resources, and, most importantly, human lives.

The updating of the doctrine is not necessitated solely by the ongoing Special Military Operation and the current open confrontation with the collective West. The amendments should be intended for long-term use, serve to ward off a wide range of conflicts, not only nuclear ones, prevent an arms race in other areas, and influence the mentality of the elites in these countries in a manner

that suits Russia. These amendments need to take account of the emergence in the future of new threats to Russia's national security and international security in general, including the emergence of new nuclear powers, as well as possible contradictions between Russia and countries that are currently pursuing a neutral or friendly policy towards our country. In addition, our friends and allies, including potential ones, must be confident that Russia is able and ready to come to their rescue. This is why an updated nuclear doctrine should be addressed to a wide range of Russia's current and potential adversaries, including both nuclear and non-nuclear powers, and not limited solely to the United States and other Western countries.

The changing strategic situation in the world, the nature of modern armed conflicts, the growing possibility of proxy or hybrid conflicts, and the convergence between economics and security require Russia to clearly lower the threshold for the use of nuclear weapons in the public version of its nuclear doctrine. This becomes especially important now that the collective West is stepping up "subthreshold actions" and "probing the boundaries of the permissible" in the current proxy war.

The nuclear threshold should be lowered on certain conditions, including:

- ensuring that the military organization of the state and its political leadership are ready, if necessary, to actually use nuclear weapons in accordance with the lowered threshold;
- avoiding unnecessary risks of accidental or unintended escalation, as well as an arms race;
- ensuring that Russia's partners do not view its updated nuclear doctrine as open nuclear blackmail;
- developing simultaneously non-nuclear strategic deterrence capabilities, including by using non-military instruments.

Given the changed nature of the international strategic situation, it would be advisable to expand the list of military dangers in the Foundations and in the Russian Military Doctrine to include the following:

- a hybrid or proxy war against the Russian Federation;
- possible non-nuclear strikes resulting in mass casualties and damaging critical, including military infrastructure;

- the intention of some states to develop and deploy low-yield and ultra-low-yield nuclear weapons and make preparations for their use. In this case, Russia reserves the right to employ its entire nuclear arsenal if such weapons are used against it.

The Foundations' list of military dangers, the elimination of which requires nuclear deterrence, should be expanded to include the following:

- deployment of general-purpose forces in countries adjacent to Russia or its allies, if such forces are offensive in nature and outnumber the general-purpose forces of Russia or its allies in this strategic or operational area;
- a hybrid or proxy war against Russia.

It is absolutely necessary to change the conditions for the use of nuclear weapons in a conventional conflict. "A threat to the very existence of the state" should be replaced with "a threat to the strategically important national interests of the Russian Federation and its people." Such amendments will lower the nuclear threshold and at the same time significantly expand the list of possible scenarios under which Russia can resort to nuclear weapons, as well as preserve the crucial principle of strategic uncertainty. To this end, the Military Doctrine and the National Security Strategy should also be amended. In the Military Doctrine, the "threat to the very existence of the state" construction should be altered, while the National Security Strategy should define "strategically important national interests of the Russian Federation and the security of its population."

All of Russia's nuclear weapons, both strategic and non-strategic, are strategic deterrents. Moreover, under certain circumstances, non-strategic nuclear weapons can be used to counterbalance the adversary's superiority in conventional arms. Ideas concerning the use and role of non-strategic nuclear weapons stated in the Fundamentals of the State Policy of the Russian Federation in the Field of Naval Operations for the Period Until 2030 (approved in 2017) should also be extended to the Foundations and the Military Doctrine.

The 'objects of nuclear deterrence' need to be clarified to include the following:

- states waging a proxy or hybrid war against Russia, regardless of whether or not they have nuclear weapons;

- non-nuclear states hosting offensive or missile defense systems, nuclear weapons and (or) other WMDs of Russia's potential adversaries, which can be used against the Russian Federation and (or) its allies.

It is important to amend the Foundations to include a provision stating that Russia reserves the right to use nuclear and non-nuclear weapons, deployed in third countries or in the open sea or airspace above it, against the military facilities or logistics systems of the adversary directly or indirectly involved in an armed conflict against Russia.

The Foundations should clearly state that Russia reserves the right to conduct demonstrative nuclear tests on its territory or deliver a preemptive strike on the adversary's territory, while minimizing damage to its population and armed forces as much as possible, as a last resort to convince the adversary to stop its actions that threaten Russia's strategically important national interests.

Conveying this idea to a potential adversary through diplomatic channels would be an alternative to incorporating such provisions in the public version of the nuclear doctrine to allow demonstrative nuclear tests and preemptive nuclear strikes.

A potential adversary should be informed that:

- a preemptive nuclear strike can be delivered with (to minimize real damage) or without a preliminary warning;
- if the adversary intercepts a warhead used for a demonstrative nuclear strike, it will be repeated against the same or another target, using, if necessary, several warheads;
- under certain circumstances, a preemptive nuclear strike can be preceded or replaced by a preemptive high-precision non-nuclear strike, including hypersonic one.

The public version of the nuclear doctrine should clarify that once the President authorizes the uses of nuclear weapons in principle, concrete decisions on their use can be made by military command and control bodies in respective strategic areas, and by the commanders of respective forces and naval groups.

It is also advisable to amend the list of conditions for the use of Russian nuclear weapons to include a situation where the adversary delivers massive non-nuclear strikes on the territory of Russia and/or its allies with non-nuclear weapons during a conflict. Provision should be made for the use of nuclear weapons in situations when the adversary attacks Russia's satellites, nuclear or hydroelectric power plants, the damage or destruction of which can significantly complicate the operation of the general-purpose forces, cause mass casualties or substantial damage to the environment or other baleful consequences that threaten strategically important national interests of Russia, and the life and health of its citizens.

Consideration should be given to drafting and partially publishing a list of target categories—or even specific primary targets—for nuclear and non-nuclear strikes in key strategic areas. Currently, a list of specific targets in NATO countries only should be made public, and it should not include targets on the U.S. national territory. A universal list of primary target categories should be included in the Foundations.

The list of priority targets for attacks in the event of nuclear, non-nuclear or proxy war against Russia should include areas where the elites of potential adversaries usually gather. The elites must realize that they will not be able to sit it out.

The doctrinal approach to the notion of 'strategic stability' should be clarified. In a narrow (traditional, since the Cold War) sense, it means a lack of incentives for a nuclear first strike. This meaning is still valid, but an expanded interpretation is now more relevant, as it implies the absence of the need or real possibility to use armed force in relations between nuclear powers. The expanded meaning makes strategic stability a more complex concept, implying that it is directly related to the general potential for conflict between nuclear-armed states, including their military aspects (both nuclear and non-nuclear), as well as non-military components.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ For the rationale for such a peaceful approach, see: S.A. Karaganov, D.V. Suslov, *New Understanding and Ways to Strengthen Multilateral Strategic Stability*//HSE, Moscow. 2019. 55 pp. URL: https://globalaffairs.ru/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/doklad_strategicheskaya-stabilnost.pdf.

See also an article by the same authors: S.A. Karaganov, D.V. Suslov, *Containment in a New Era. How to Strengthen Multilateral Strategic Stability* // *Russia in Global Affairs*. 2019. #4. URL: <https://globalaffairs.ru/articles/sderzhivanie-v-novuyu-epohu/>.

Since many states seek to build a nuclear-free world, Russia should consider taking steps to amend its strategic planning documents to reflect its positive attitude towards nuclear-weapon-free zones and readiness to maintain the status of such zones in the interests of national and regional security. This concerns primarily outer space, Central Asia, and Mongolia.

Russia should consider the possibility of devising, and formalizing in the Foundations, the basic principles for a strategic nuclear deterrence planning and coordination body between Russia and its allies. Specifically, an operational nuclear planning body can be created within the framework of the Union State of Russia and Belarus; also a body or mechanism for nuclear deterrence coordination could be set up between Russia and China.

Russia's updated nuclear doctrine does not imply passive deterrence; rather, it calls for reawakening the adversary's fear in order to sober him up and make him abandon dangerous actions against our country.

To implement these new provisions, it is necessary to improve nuclear weapon delivery systems such as Sarmat, Avangard, and others; increase the readiness of Russia's strategic nuclear forces, and the resilience of the nuclear deterrence infrastructure.

In practical terms, Russia should probably consider not only creating but also deploying medium- and shorter-range systems to increase pressure on U.S. and other Western military bases. The United States is already deploying medium-range systems in Asia and has announced plans to deploy them in Germany after 2026. With U.S. hypersonic missiles in the offing, medium-range missiles no longer look as intimidating as they did in the 1970s. Nevertheless, the situation will be more dangerous and will require Russia to take special measures, including confidence-building ones, and redefine the concept of strategic stability, construed primarily as the absence of incentives to unleash any wars.

The U.S.'s global hegemony is largely based on the belief of its allies that they are protected by the American "nuclear umbrella." This "umbrella" is actually a myth. One of the purposes of Russia's fear-reawakening strategy is to destroy the Europeans' faith in notorious Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty. But information work alone is not enough to dissuade them, although

it is important. Instead, Russia should demonstrate its physical ability and determination to act contrary to the Europeans' mythologized ideas about the scope and nature of American guarantees.

NATO and EU member states are U.S. allies. Europe's notorious strategic autonomy is virtually non-existent. Nevertheless, some of these countries—the UK, France, Poland, Romania, the Baltic states, Finland, and, under certain conditions, Germany—are able to undertake dangerous provocative actions that can lead to escalation. The fear-reawakening strategy should leave no doubt in the ruling groups of these countries and the U.S. that such provocations could end in the physical destruction of the respective states, primarily their elites.

The presence in NATO's ranks of three nuclear powers, the existence of the Nuclear Planning Group, and the nuclear sharing arrangements make NATO a nuclear-armed alliance. The participation of its members in the military conflict with Russia, including by proxy, as in Ukraine now, enables Russia to use any means of armed struggle against these states, their armed forces and their national territories. This should be stated in Russia's Military Doctrine.

Two European NATO countries—the UK and France—are nuclear powers, and their arsenals should be considered an integral part of the U.S.-led collective West's nuclear capabilities. Moreover, both London and Paris have become increasingly hostile towards Russia. The British and French ruling elites, obviously hoping that the nuclear status of their states gives them immunity, need to be reminded—as Moscow did during the Suez Crisis in 1956—of the immense (compared to Russia's) vulnerability of these countries should they resort to military provocations.

Moscow should warn Berlin that its attempts to acquire nuclear weapons will by all means be suppressed by Russia, including by force. Using unofficial channels, but as publicly as possible, Russia should make it clear to Germany, which has unleashed two world wars, that it will be destroyed if it aspires (as under Hitler) to seek nuclear weapons. The Germans must be made to once again feel guilty for the monstrous crimes committed by their country and people, and get rid of the illusion of moral superiority, which, as their active role in expanding NATO and

inciting war in Ukraine shows, they do not deserve. The same applies to Japan, whose aggression and atrocities claimed tens of millions of lives in Asia, primarily China.

Moscow should make the most of its future strategic success in Ukraine to convince a number of NATO countries to restore normal good-neighborly relations with Russia instead of playing a fatal role of instruments in U.S. hegemonic policy.

The updating of Russia's nuclear doctrine should be accompanied by active work to clarify the main provisions of the revised strategic planning documents and the reasons for their amendment to Russia's partners and allies, including the CSTO member countries, China, India, Iran, North Korea, Pakistan, and possibly other countries. It is also necessary to begin expert discussions with partners and allies on rethinking and revising the nuclear deterrence theory, which in its current form was devised under the prevailing influence of the Western expert community to serve the interests of the West but has now become outdated and is losing its validity. These dialogues should also be used to prepare the leadership of friendly countries for a possible use of nuclear weapons by Russia in order to strategically defeat the West in the Ukraine war, as well as to restore the priority role of nuclear deterrence in averting any large-scale war, the likelihood of which increases as the international system goes through an acute crisis.

China is a nuclear power, Russia's largest and most important strategic partner and external asset. Relations between Russia and China are the best in their entire history and continue to improve. Russia's partnership with China has become an insurmountable obstacle to Western attempts to isolate Russia during the Ukraine crisis. For this positive dynamics to continue, Russia should consistently deepen its dialogue with Chinese partners on strategic stability and nuclear deterrence, including the scope of the two countries' nuclear capabilities.

In this regard, consultations and seminars need to be constantly held at the expert level in order to work out similar approaches to nuclear planning and strategic stability. Russia needs a close dialogue with Chinese colleagues to convince them that their plans (if any) to increase their nuclear capability to match that of Russia and the United States are counterproductive. Such a buildup will only force the Americans to start a new nuclear arms race and will also raise concern

in the Russian strategic community. However China's efforts to enhance its nuclear deterrence capabilities to a reasonable extent will help strengthen strategic stability and peace.

Once again, it is worth emphasizing that the composition of the nuclear deterrence forces and the doctrine regulating their use should ensure that Russia and China have no suspicions about each other.

Based on the above, work should start without delay to launch an in-depth expert discussion with representatives of the World Majority states that have nuclear weapons or are on the way to creating them, including, possibly, Israel, on strategic deterrence in order to influence the military-political circles of the respective countries, build confidence, and send signals through them to the United States and its allies. In the future, when the acute phase of the SMO ends, Russia should start discussions with experts in the United States and other Western countries (separately) in pursuit of these goals.

Obviously, the implementation of the active nuclear deterrence strategy will require further modernization of the Russian nuclear capabilities. This topic deserves to be considered separately.

STRATEGIC DETERRENCE DURING FURTHER CONFRONTATION

The end of hostilities in Ukraine after the SMO goals have been achieved will create a new situation in Europe and the world,⁴¹ but the confrontation between Russia and the West will not end in the foreseeable future. The West is already setting up a permanent large grouping of NATO forces and assets, which can also be armed with nuclear weapons, near the western border of Russia. Further strategic estimates should provide for a long-term—at least one-generation-long—conflict with the West. But, of course, this conflict should not be allowed to drag on. If the Western coalition starts losing key members, which cannot be ruled out, we should make use of that. But in no case should we relax, even if the West is forced to make concessions. Analytical

⁴¹ Ukraine's post-war options are not discussed in this book.

reports (on the U.S. and Europe) have shown that confrontational mentality in the West is deeply rooted and so this conflict can partially end only when the current generation of elites goes.

There are many forces in Russia, primarily among the old economic elite, that would like to return to their convenient pre-SMO status quo. So it is necessary to continue to tap the energy of the conflict to keep rebuilding the country and reviving it spiritually, scientifically, technically, and economically, with a view to nationalizing the present elites and cultivating new ones.

A state ideology is urgently needed, mandatory for those who seek to join the country's governing (and respected) elite. Intellectually, the problem is solvable. But the country's top leadership should give the right impetus and reaffirm its readiness to go by such an ideology.

For us, the purpose of the confrontation, in addition to the internal changes mentioned above, is to ensure the security interests and free development of Russia, as well as to establish a new polycentric world order in place of U.S. global hegemony.

In the foreseeable future, therefore, the United States will remain the principal adversary for Russia and the main object of its nuclear deterrence strategy. This strategy will aim at convincing the American ruling class that putting military and other pressure on Russia would be completely futile and dangerous for the U.S. itself. Achieving this goal will mean restoring strategic stability between Russia and the United States, disrupted by Washington, and in the world as a whole.

The long-term goal of Russia's entire policy vis-à-vis the United States is to facilitate its return to the position of one of the great world powers it held before World War II and, on this basis, balance the interests of Moscow, Washington, Beijing, and New Delhi as the norm of their relations.

The U.S. can give up its world hegemony claims only if the fundamental tenets of its foreign policy pursued in recent decades change, which will require a major shift in the consciousness and, probably, in the composition of the U.S. ruling class. This is unlikely to happen in the foreseeable future. Although changes of such a scale and depth will depend primarily on internal

dynamics in the United States, the results of the U.S.'s confrontation with Russia, China, and a number of other World Majority countries will largely determine the future role of America in the world. One of the ways to bring the United States back to its historical norm is to increase its foreign policy and strategic costs, and the overall cost of the American empire.

GEOPOLITICAL CONTAINMENT ALONG RUSSIA'S BORDER

Geopolitical containment is part of strategic deterrence. It is implemented mainly by political, economic, and information means in close relationship with military deterrence, both nuclear and non-nuclear. The purpose of geopolitical containment is to maintain or create a security belt along the Russian border, primarily in the near abroad. This is a territory outside foreign military blocs and free from foreign military bases. The spatial containment strategy should be proactive. Its immediate goal is to prevent the adversary from opening a "second front" after Ukraine.

Russia comes in contact with the outside world through four key "façades": northern (Arctic); western (European); southern (West Asian) and eastern (Asia Pacific). These "façades" represent the four main areas of geopolitical containment.

The northern strategic area is of paramount importance for Russia. The Arctic zone of the Russian Federation (AZRF), covering more than half of the country's territory, having an exceptionally long coastline and containing a wealth of natural resources, is Russia's most valuable national resource. We can confidently say that in the 21st century Russia will grow through the Arctic and Siberia as a whole.

In the Arctic, Russia's neighbors are NATO countries led by the United States. After the start of the SMO, these countries assumed a particularly strong anti-Russian position. The "battle for the Arctic" is already under way. It may not necessarily take on the character of a military showdown, because such a head-on clash between Russia and any of its neighbors could potentially develop into a major war. Nevertheless, the confrontation in the region is likely to be increasingly intense.

Strategic containment in the Arctic will primarily imply strengthening Russia's positions (military, economic, logistics, etc.) in the AZRF, in the Russian exclusive economic zone (EEZ), including the continental shelf, and Russia's rights in the Svalbard archipelago. Special attention should be paid to strengthening Russia's legal position in justifying its right to expand the EEZ along the underwater Lomonosov and Mendeleev Ridges, which are a continuation of the Siberian continental platform. At the same time, it must be understood that Russia's efforts to expand its economic zone in this region are unlikely to win international approval for obvious political reasons. Therefore, the only guarantor of the EEZ's integrity is Russia itself and its capabilities, including military ones.

In economic terms, Russia is able to curb the adversary's pursuits in the region by accelerating the economic development of the AZRF (energy; mining, including rare and rare-earth metals; logistics, etc.). Spurring interest in cooperation with Russia among large friendly countries (China, India, etc.) could become an additional development factor, but such cooperation should proceed on Russia's terms, without infringing on its sovereignty, rights, and interests.

Seeking to isolate Russia, its opponents, led by the United States, have stopped cooperation with our country in the Arctic. They will most likely increase pressure on Russia in the region in the foreseeable future. Therefore special attention should be paid to deterring the adversary's attempts to obstruct the operation and further development of the Northern Sea Route (NSR). Its development will require not only building more icebreakers but also enhancing the capabilities of the Russian Navy, its Northern and Pacific Fleets, and the Russian Armed Forces in general in order to ensure the normal functioning of the NSR in the interests of Russia and world trade.

In the Arctic, the contours of conflicts over the borders of the Arctic states' exclusive economic zones are beginning to come into view. Protecting Russia's interests and backing Russian diplomacy with military power is another important aspect of containment.

In the western strategic area, containing the adversary—NATO countries—will remain a priority even after the end of the war in Ukraine. Peace with the West—in the sense of finding a new

mutually acceptable formula of relations—is still a very distant prospect. Until then, an armed confrontation between Russia and NATO will continue in this region.

The effectiveness of deterrence in Ukraine can be guaranteed not by a formal or informal agreement with the United States/West, but by Russia's real capabilities and its ability to stand for and defend its own interests.

The following can, in principle, provide such guarantees:

Placing the territory of Ukraine (with the exception of its western regions) under the control of the Russian Armed Forces;

Eliminating the current neo-Nazi (Banderite) political regime in Kiev and the entire ultranationalist political elite in Ukraine;

Disbanding and reforming the Ukrainian Armed Forces, abolishing Ukrainian security agencies, primarily the Security Service and the Defense Ministry's Main Intelligence Directorate, with the exception of the police and law enforcement agencies;

Determining the future status of certain Ukrainian regions, possibly through regional referendums;

Creating a Ukrainian state (tentatively called New Ukraine) made up of the Ukrainian territories that have not been incorporated into Russia, and assisting the future Ukrainian authorities in building new Ukrainian statehood. But before that its infrastructure must be demolished in order to rule out a recovery of the Ukrainian military-industrial complex.

Building close relations between Russia and the new Ukraine in the political, economic, cultural, military, and other areas. "Re-encoding" the consciousness of people in Ukrainian regions that will be incorporated into Russia similarly to how people in East Germany (GDR) were reformed.

A legislative ban on neo-Nazi propaganda in the new state is one of the most important conditions for its recognition by Russia.

Forcing anti-Russian elements out of the regions that will come under Russia's control (including mandatory issue of passports and the adoption of a Russian citizen's duties). Special (martial) rule may be introduced in these regions for a transitional period. Those unwilling to adopt Russian citizenship and related duties are to be evicted.

In the likely case that the West may try to wage a terrorist war from the territory of the new Ukrainian state, Russia must retain the possibility to conduct limited interventions into that territory. It is possible to introduce de facto occupation regime for a transitional period on the formally independent territory of New Ukraine.

In no case should Russia repeat the Soviet Union's mistake when, after the end of World War II, the liberated regions of Ukraine recovered faster than the neighboring regions of the RSFSR and largely at the latter's expense. The territory of the new Ukraine, if any, should become a demilitarized agrarian buffer zone.

This set of tasks will require unconditional priority and enormous efforts over a long period of time. In fact, this will become "the second part of the war," as outstanding Russian strategist Alexander Svechin put it. We must understand that failure to ensure post-war geopolitical containment in Ukraine will devalue the results of Russia's military victory.

In Moldova, which neighbors Ukraine, Russia needs to fend off the West's geopolitical aggression and solve the longstanding problem of Transnistria as part of the general geopolitical reshaping of this part of the post-Soviet space. In the short term, the goal of deterrence is to prevent an attack on Transnistria by Chisinau that may be undertaken jointly with Kiev. The Moldovan authorities should have no doubts that in this case Russia will use force to protect its peacekeepers and a large community of (about 250,000) Russian citizens living in Transnistria and Gagauzia.

Moscow should not only be interested in Moldova remaining a neutral and federalized (Transnistria, Gagauzia) state, but it should also be ready to counter attempts to draw that country into NATO, and not just protest against that. Political methods are absolutely necessary for that, but they alone would not be enough. Military deterrence of NATO countries will require Russia to build up its military presence in this part of the Black Sea region and, in particular, take control of Odessa and Nikolaev (ideally, incorporate these regions into the Russian Federation). In fact, deterrence in this region is acquiring features similar to displacing and possibly even rolling back the adversary.

Bucharest must understand that Russia will not allow Moldova to be absorbed by Romania, just as it did not recognize Romania's annexation of Bessarabia after the First World War. As a member of NATO and one of the indirect participants in the conflict in Ukraine, Romania must also be aware that by hosting Ukrainian combat planes and Western troops for subsequent redeployment to Ukraine it will invite Russian strikes on these bases and contingents. This must be conveyed to Bucharest right away both through diplomatic and media channels. People in Romania should know that their ruling elite are putting them in mortal danger.

In the Balkans, our foreign policy containment strategy is aimed at supporting (jointly with China) Russia-friendly political forces in Serbia and Republika Srpska, which, together with Hungary and Slovakia, make up a group of states that seek, to the extent possible, to defend their national interests despite the U.S., NATO, and EU pressure. People in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina's Republika Srpska for the most part have always been friendly towards Russia. Moscow supports, including at the UN, the legal rights of Serbia and the rights of Serbs in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Russia has neither commitments nor possibilities to influence the situation by force, but it is quite able to firmly defend its principled position on the Kosovo issue.

In the northern segment of the Russia-West confrontation in Europe, the Russia-Belarus alliance provides strong support to the geopolitical containment efforts. The Russian leadership's actions during the 2020 political crisis in Belarus set a successful example of strategic deterrence. The crisis helped the Belarusian leadership get rid of the "multi-vector policy" illusions and make the right choice. The position assumed by Minsk—Russia's only real ally in the war in Ukraine—since the very beginning of the SMO has been extremely valuable for Moscow.

The West, however, still hopes to change the political regime in Belarus and push it towards the Ukrainian scenario. The most effective strategy for Russia would be even closer integration with Belarus within the Union State, which should seek to expand this integration to the non-state sector and entire society. The need for further military integration of the two countries and improved combined force interoperability is obvious.

Military deterrence of the adversary remains extremely important. The deployment of Russian nuclear weapons in Belarus in 2023 has de facto extended Russia's nuclear deterrence to cover Belarus. NATO countries must be aware that an attack on either of the Union State's countries will be an attack on both of them, and that if the adversary tries to block Kaliningrad, Moscow and Minsk will jointly take measures to physically restore its connection with Russia and Belarus.

The adversary's attempts to block Kaliningrad have so far been deterred by the presence of a large group of combat-ready Russian troops in the region. Russian operational-tactical missiles and nuclear weapons on various platforms deployed in the Kaliningrad enclave serve as a nuclear deterrent. The United States and its allies in the Baltic region should have no doubt that attempts to impose a naval blockade on Kaliningrad and/or St. Petersburg will be regarded as a declaration of war on Russia and may entail a nuclear response.

With the admission of Finland and Sweden to NATO (an insane and suicidal step by their elites), Russia has got, for the first time in more than two centuries, extremely unamicable neighbors in the Baltic region and Northern Europe. As a result, Russia's border with NATO has doubled in length. There is a risk that Northern Europe as well as the Baltic states, Poland, and Germany may be turned into a bridgehead for exerting U.S. military-political pressure on Russia, for deploying U.S. nuclear warheads and, ultimately, for carrying out NATO attacks on our country.

The U.S. is considering deploying its intermediate- and shorter-range missiles in Europe, particularly in Germany. Therefore Russia should start speaking about a possible emergence of "revanchist Germany," while making it clear that it can become a primary target for Russian nuclear strikes. Moscow should warn Berlin in no unclear terms that if it seeks nuclear weapons,

Germany—which has unleashed two world wars and brought terrible troubles to humanity—will be destroyed. At the same time, it cannot be ruled out that one generation after the West’s defeat in Ukraine, Germany will return to the path of rapprochement with the East in a new Eurasian format. Of course, we should not bet on that.

In response to NATO’s movement towards Russia’s northwestern regions and St. Petersburg, Moscow has recreated the Leningrad Military District and formed several new military forces. In addition to augmenting general-purpose forces, Russia is also strengthening its nuclear deterrent system in this region.

Russia’s strategic deterrence in Northern Europe targets the leadership of NATO countries, their ruling classes and societies. The purpose is to make sure that they are fully aware of the fact that if Finland, Sweden, as well as NATO’s longtime members Norway and Denmark are turned into a weapon of American provocations against Russia, they will face the most serious consequences, up to becoming legitimate targets for Russian nuclear strikes.

Russia should use expert discussions to warn the ruling circles of NATO countries, including newly admitted members, about the obvious, namely that their membership in the alliance does not guarantee their security but, on the contrary, increases the likelihood of nuclear strikes on them. Particular attention should be paid to possible strikes on Brussels, the seat of NATO and the European Union, which has been especially hostile towards Russia lately.

Anti-Russian provocations are most likely to come from the Baltic states. These small countries build their policies on unbridled Russophobia, fueling it by constantly provoking Moscow. In addition, the intellectual level of elites in these countries is even lower than in other European countries, where it has dropped sharply in recent years. Since the usual methods of geopolitical deterrence and military fear reawakening are not effective against Vilnius, Riga, and Tallinn, deterrence in this case should be aimed at their “senior partners” in NATO, primarily the United States and Great Britain. Thoroughly thought-out and rigorous measures to ensure uninterrupted land, air, and sea transit to Kaliningrad and the normal operation of St. Petersburg as Russia’s seaport and naval base can be a signal of danger to these countries.

Poland has consistently held an anti-Russian position and is now seeking to become the main U.S. and NATO ally and stronghold against Russia. Poland's geopolitical containment should be ensured by Russia's victory in Ukraine, the strengthening of Russian-Belarusian integration, and the growth of Russia's military power and overall economic potential. The military deterrence of Warsaw implies an unequivocal warning about Russia's possible strikes on logistics hubs in Poland, which are used for the transfer of Western weapons to Kiev, as well as other facilities (airfields and seaports) through which military supplies go from the West to Ukraine. Russia's possible response to attempts to block Kaliningrad has already been mentioned above.

At the same time, there is no need to intentionally scare, let alone provoke, the Poles. In fact, such actions can be not only unnecessary but also harmful. The Poles have already frightened themselves and are now afraid of Russia's power. However, we should not underestimate Poland as the largest country in Eastern Europe and a contender for leadership in the region. We should also remember the long-standing mutual recriminations between Poland and Ukraine. If modern Ukrainian statehood collapses, Polish claims to Western Ukraine, which will pose no threat to Russia, can become a deterrent against Western Ukrainian nationalists.

Germany has lately been showing black ingratitude towards Russia. The German political and media elites are seeking political and (indirectly) military revenge for the defeat of Nazi Germany by the Soviet Union. The object of our deterrence is the German ruling class, which has wholeheartedly joined the campaign in support of U.S. global hegemony and ruined the historical reconciliation between the Russians and the Germans after the reunification of Germany that had become possible thanks to Moscow's good will.

Russia should convincingly warn members of the German political elite and explain to the German society that Berlin's more active involvement in the West's proxy war against Russia in Ukraine will create an immediate threat to Germany itself. As for Germany's possible attempts to acquire nuclear weapons (directly or through the EU) or get broader access to U.S. nuclear capabilities, Moscow should make it clear that it will definitely not tolerate that and will stop such attempts by force, up to the complete destruction of this country, which has brought so much trouble to Europe and the whole world.

In the south (West Asia), the most important object of Russia's geopolitical containment is the United States and its allies, primarily Great Britain, as well as France that has been particularly active lately. Washington, London, Paris, and the EU leadership in Brussels are trying to take advantage of the situation in Armenia following its surrender of Karabakh in order to disrupt Yerevan's allied relations and partnership with Moscow.

The adversary has already made significant progress. In the current situation Russia needs to take rigorous efforts to protect its interests and subsequently supplant and even roll back Western influence. Moscow's active strategy should include long-term work with Armenia's political class in order to help forces that defend Armenian national interests and value good relations with Russia. This strategy should also be aimed at young people who need to be shown real benefits from interaction with Russia. The purposeful use of the economic factor is of key importance: Russian companies are the largest foreign investors in Armenia. In addition, a large Armenian community in Russia can also make an immense contribution to the implementation of the Russian strategy.

Russian-Armenian military and security ties can play a special role in implementing the Russian strategy of geopolitical containment/roll-back of the West in Armenia. The Russian military presence in Armenia (102nd military base in Gyumri and border guards) is a source of Russia's influence and a visible symbol of its interest in maintaining its position in this part of Transcaucasia.

The crisis in relations with Armenia can only be resolved if nationally oriented, and therefore pro-Russian, political forces come to power in Yerevan. Russia should help these forces, while avoiding gross interference in Armenia's affairs. The current government in Yerevan should have no doubts about the most serious consequences if it breaks agreements with Russia and demands a withdrawal of its troops.

Azerbaijan is Russia's important and friendly partner and at the same time a close ally of Turkey. While developing close and mutually beneficial relations with Baku, officially characterized as "allied", Moscow should at the same time constantly make it clear to the Azerbaijani authorities

that it is in their interest to continue to pursue a balanced foreign policy and limit Turkish military-political influence and presence in the country.

Turkey itself is a U.S. ally, a NATO member, and a rising regional power with big ambitions in Eurasia. In this sense, Ankara is a serious regional competitor to Moscow. At the same time, however, Turkey is Russia's partner and companion on many issues. Turkish ambitions should be contained mainly by political and economic means, taking into account the areas of Turkey's dependence on Russia and its numerous vulnerabilities, including in Syria and Iraq. But the main reason for Turkey's restraint is its interest in cooperation with Russia. This interest should be encouraged and strengthened.

Effective work to prevent our adversaries from using the Crimean Tatar factor against Russia in Crimea is an example of the Russian authorities' recent successes. The Russian strategy is aimed at containing Turkish influence in Russia's North Caucasus, Volga and other regions, as well as in friendly countries in the Caucasus and Central Asia.

Russia's operation to enforce peace in South Ossetia in 2008 and the rise of moderate political forces to power in Georgia have become the main factors of stability in the region. The development of Russian-Georgian economic relations and the calm situation on the borders of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, secured by Russian troops and border guards, remain the key instruments of Moscow's policy to contain Tbilisi. At the same time, given the West's intention to open a new front of confrontation with Russia in Georgia, Moscow should stay vigilant and carefully counter attempts at political revenge by aggressive pro-American forces in Georgia, which are now in opposition to its government. Russia should resolutely block the West's attempts to destabilize the situation in Abkhazia. Given the constructive policy of the incumbent Georgian authorities, Russia should promote the development of ties between the two countries, including human contacts.

Iran pursues a friendly policy towards Russia and currently does not need to be deterred. Moreover, Tehran is Moscow's de facto ally in the confrontation with the United States and the collective West. Russian-Iranian relations are part of an emerging coalition designed to protect the national interests of states from U.S. hegemonic actions. In addition, Iran is an important

element in the balance of power in the Near and Middle East, as well as in Transcaucasia and Central Asia, where it partly counterbalances Turkey's influence. Interaction with Iran allows Russia to more successfully promote and defend its interests and restrain anti-Russian aspirations of Western countries.

Iran's nuclear program as it is poses no threat to Russia. Further compliance with the UN anti-Iranian sanctions makes no sense. It should be borne in mind, however, that the creation of nuclear weapons by Tehran will set an example for other states in the region, primarily Saudi Arabia and Turkey. Such nuclear proliferation may become inevitable, leading to even greater strategic emancipation of the countries in the region from the United States, but it can also create new security risks for Russia in the event of a nuclear conflict.

Russia should step up expert and diplomatic dialogue with Tehran on nuclear deterrence, gradually engaging—or acting in parallel—other regional states that have come close to obtaining nuclear status (Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt). At some point, a similar dialogue should also be started with Israel.

An exchange of strikes between Israel and Iran in the spring of 2024, while capping the situation in the short term, can become a prologue to their future direct military confrontation, which may also embroil the United States. Although we should avoid direct involvement in this conflict, support and assistance to Iran fall in line with Russia's goals to contain the United States. At the same time, Russia has no interest in Israel's fall, which may be precipitated by its present leadership's policy.

In Central Asian, Russia borders Kazakhstan, which is of great geopolitical importance for our country. The problems for Russia there include the pro-Western orientation of a significant comprador part of the Kazakh elites and the deep penetration of Western interests into Kazakhstan's economy, politics, and society. There is a risk that the rise of Kazakh nationalism, backed and fueled by Moscow's Western opponents, could lead to the degradation of Kazakhstan's relations with Russia, similarly to what happened between Russia and Ukraine, or more likely to destabilization in the neighboring country. This situation requires a systemic

approach to facilitate the reorientation of the critical mass of Kazakhstan's elites and society to the development of ties with Russia and to Eurasian integration projects.

In January 2022, Russia quickly arranged a successful CSTO operation to stabilize the political situation in Kazakhstan. This success, however, should not mislead us because core problems remain. Moreover, while waging a proxy war against Russia, the United States and its European allies are actively seeking to undermine Kazakhstan's relations with Russia. If these attempts are not actively and ingeniously countered, especially at the political level, a new crisis may break out, more complex and dangerous than the one in 2022. We should coordinate our policy towards Kazakhstan with Beijing, which is not interested in destabilization in the neighboring country either. (If, of course, this is not done yet).

A geopolitical containment strategy requires a coherent approach to Central Asia. As part of this approach, relations with Kazakhstan are complemented and counterbalanced by ties with another regional heavyweight—Uzbekistan. Tashkent is more self-sufficient and therefore more internationally and politically resilient than Astana. Despite the West's attention to Uzbekistan, its influence on the economy, politics, and society in this country is much weaker than on Kazakhstan. The Uzbek elite are stronger and more sovereign. Given Tashkent's reverential attitude towards foreign-policy independence, the Russian strategy of containing Western influence in this case should be aimed at deepening essentially allied and integrative bilateral ties with Uzbekistan. The door to the CSTO and the EAEU should remain open for Uzbekistan. Potentially, Uzbekistan could become Russia's key ally in the region, if Moscow pursues a focused policy to this end.

In Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, in addition to countering the hostile influence of third countries, Russia's policy has to deal with local ethnic nationalism and Islamist extremist and terrorist activities, both local and regional. These groups and their activity have been deterred through Russia's strengthened defense posture in these countries, the participation of Bishkek and Dushanbe in the CSTO, as well as contacts between security services. Terrorists and extremists are usually hard to frighten, which is why they must be destroyed. Russia's active and coordinated migration policy, combined with the integration of some of the immigrants who can and ought to become Russian citizens, is of critical importance for national security. These issues

need to be addressed as part of Russia's comprehensive (non-existent so far) immigration strategy.

Since gaining independence, Turkmenistan has kept aloof in the international arena. This closed and strictly neutral country poses no threat to Russia's security. To consolidate this status, Russia should develop security and military-technical cooperation as well as cultural and information ties with Ashgabat.

In general, Russia should become the holder of geopolitical balance in Central Asia, limiting and, ideally, minimizing the influence of external players such as the United States, Europe, and Turkey in the region. Russia should pursue a mixed policy with regard to China in Central Asia by developing comprehensive cooperation where it benefits both countries, avoiding actions running counter to China's economic interests, if they do not directly infringe on the interests of Russia, and gently pushing China back to preclude the spread of its military presence in the region.

Afghanistan under the Taliban is gradually stabilizing. De facto, Moscow has already recognized the present Taliban regime that confidently controls the situation in the country. The government structure in Afghanistan is an internal matter for the Afghans themselves. What is important for Russia is that this country no longer serves as a mainstay for radical organizations and terrorist groups.

Russia should use its military strongholds in the region—military bases in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan—to closely watch these groups and, if necessary, suppress them in cooperation with Afghanistan and friendly countries in the region. Particular attention should be paid to thwarting attempts by the United States, Great Britain, and other unfriendly states to use the territory of Afghanistan as a base for organizing terrorist attacks and anti-Russian forays.

In the Asia-Pacific region, Russia borders U.S. allies—Japan and South Korea. The three countries have lately been strengthening their alliance. Tokyo and Seoul are providing assistance to the Kiev regime, albeit on a significantly smaller scale than NATO countries. Russia's relations with Japan and South Korea have come to a halt and are degrading.

In this situation, Japan and South Korea have once again, as during the Cold War, become the objects of Russia's strategic deterrence. Moscow has closed the question of territorial delimitation with Japan; peace treaty talks have been put on hold.

At the same time, the Japanese and South Korean (especially the latter) political elites still show some willingness to act independently, which the Russian strategy must not only take into account but also use whenever possible. To this end, Russia should maintain and develop an informal dialogue with the expert communities in the two countries. The development of relations between Russia and the DPRK gives Moscow significant leverage for exercising its influence vis-à-vis South Korea.

Russia should probably take Seoul's possible pursuit of nuclear weapons in stride. These weapons will not directly and seriously threaten Russia's interests, but over time they can motivate South Korea to seek greater strategic autonomy from the United States.

At the same time, similarly to the policy towards Germany, Russia should harshly suppress any attempts by Tokyo to acquire nuclear status as illegitimate for a country that unleashed World War II in the Pacific and is responsible for the death of tens of millions people in Asian countries.

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea is, of course, not an object of deterrence by Russia. In the context of the West's proxy war against Russia, Pyongyang is actually Moscow's ally, which is formalized in a bilateral agreement signed in June 2024. In addition, interaction and mutual understanding between Russia and the DPRK serve the purpose of deterring their chief adversary—the United States. North Korea's nuclear missile capabilities distract part of the U.S. military power, thus helping contain the United States. Moscow should develop and deepen relations with Pyongyang, taking into account the complex geopolitical and strategic situation in Northeast Asia.

So the geopolitical component of strategic deterrence is designed to make it impossible for the adversary to use contradictions, crises, and conflicts along Russia's borders to harm its interests. Geopolitical containment is in many ways more difficult than military deterrence, including

nuclear deterrence, as it requires a single strategy covering politics, economy, information, cultural, scientific, educational, and youth policies, as well as coordinated efforts of many government agencies and non-state institutions.

Spatial containment is much broader than geopolitics. It includes, in particular, such areas as cyberspace and outer space. Containing the adversary in these areas is a new and extremely urgent problem. It deserves separate consideration.

COALITION DETERRENCE STRATEGY. RUSSIAN-CHINESE STRATEGIC INTERACTION

Finally, the third component of strategic deterrence is coalitions that can expand their own capabilities, contain or divert enemy forces, etc.

In 1955-1991, the Soviet Union had the Warsaw Pact Organization—a wide and compact armed buffer zone, which at the same time was an advanced position for four groups of Soviet troops in this crucial strategic area. Established by the Soviet Union in 1949, the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance created an integrated economic space in Eastern Europe, off limits to the West. Numerous outposts of Soviet influence in Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America allowed the Soviet Union to be a full-fledged world power that not only held back the United States but also actively challenged Western positions in different regions of the world.

The Soviet Union's weak spot was the lack of really powerful allies in the Soviet camp it could rely on after a break with China, and at the same time the need not only to support but often keep weak client states. The Russian Federation's situation is different. Moscow has no allies in the sense the Soviet Union had them in the past or Washington has them now. At the same time, Russia has a number of independent powerful partners.

For Moscow, relations with Beijing are relations of a global, not just continental, Eurasian, scale. Close interaction between the two great powers is the most important factor in the strategic deterrence of the United States and the collective West. This interaction evolves not within an

alliance or a bloc, but as part of an emerging coalition strategy shared by major powers. The Moscow-Beijing link—with New Delhi hopefully joining them in the future—is the backbone of a new security system in Eurasia and in the world as a whole. The expanded strategic partnership between Russia and China is becoming the core of this coalition.

Such a coalition is already taking shape. Iran and the DPRK, as well as a number of other World Majority countries are joining its Russian-Chinese core. This coalition would be able not only to foil U.S. attempts to isolate Russia in the world, which Washington has already failed to do, but also seriously limit and then significantly reduce U.S. influence in the east, west, and south of Eurasia.

Moscow and Beijing, however, are ready for closer policy coordination in various regions (the Middle East, Central and Northeast Asia). Of particular importance is the development of cooperation in functional areas such as military-strategic, military-technical, logistics, as well as other security areas (countering terrorism, combating epidemics, responding to natural and man-made disasters, fighting climate change, etc.).

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) can serve as a prototype for a continental security system in Eurasia, without the “European peninsula” for the time being. Such cooperation and interaction among the World Majority countries at a time when the West is rallying around the United States can significantly strengthen the positions of both Russia and China. The SCO includes four nuclear powers, three of which have strained relations with each other (China-India and India-Pakistan). Russia, which is in a better position in this regard, could initiate a dialogue, and eventually negotiations, in order to draft a continental agreement on strengthening strategic stability in Eurasia and creating a continental security system.

We must understand that China is a top-tier world power with growing nuclear capabilities, a state-civilization with a unique worldview, interests and values, which do not always and fully match the Russian ones. Regular Russian-Chinese relations are more than three centuries old.⁴²

⁴² Formally, even eight centuries old, if we count Alexander Nevsky’s trip to Karakorum, the capital of the Mongol Empire, in 1247-1249, to receive a patent to rule. At that time, Kublai Khan, whom we know of through Marco Polo, was in Karakorum where he began his rise to power to eventually become an emperor and the unifier of China and the founder of the Yuan dynasty.

They have seen different times, including an acute confrontation with major armed clashes on the border in the second half of the 20th century.

In the 21st century, as mutually acknowledged, Russian-Chinese relations are at their best in history. We believe that there will be no risk of sharp changes in these relations as long as the present CCP/PRC leadership, headed by Xi Jinping, remains at the helm. The confrontation between China and the United States, on the one hand, and between Russia and the United States, on the other, is systemic and serves as an additional incentive for strengthening Russian-Chinese interaction.

What makes the Russia-China partnership quite distinct is that the two countries not only interact where they have similar interests, but they also effectively eliminate contradictions where they exist. The current political system in China and the strong personal relationship between the Russian President and the Chinese leader allow us to hope that there will be no contretemps in bilateral relations in the foreseeable future.

However, the very nature of international relations suggests that the strategic containment of China in the long term is a problem that can potentially face Russia. There is no point in talking now in detail about possible factors that may necessitate such containment, but it is necessary to outline the existing elements of Russia's strategic position in relation to China. These elements include: strategic stability in bilateral relations which should eliminate hypothetical incentives for a political clash and armed conflict between the two neighboring nuclear powers; strategic interaction, that is, close and equal military-political and military-strategic cooperation between Moscow and Beijing; and mutual confidence-building measures. Russia's strong nuclear capabilities are important for preventing Beijing from harboring expansionist aspirations even in the distant future.

In parallel with the development of relations with China, Russia should step up strategic interaction with India. It should not be reduced entirely to countering the West's efforts to undermine cooperation between Moscow and New Delhi. Such interaction is absolutely necessary in order to improve the efficiency of BRICS and the SCO, form a Greater Eurasian Partnership, and build a security system in Eurasia. It would be in Russia's interest to help reduce

mutual suspicions and deepen mutual understanding between New Delhi and Beijing, and to stymie Western efforts to drag India into the anti-Chinese camp.

Russia, China, India, Iran, and possibly Turkey are the main pillars of the emerging Greater Eurasia, at least until European countries shake off their vassal dependence on the United States, become ready to pursue a constructive policy towards Russia, and partially reorient their attention to the East.

Russia has the ability to create coalitions on a variety of grounds. OPEC+ plays a significant role in regulating oil prices and thus deterring Western attempts to influence them in order to put pressure on the Russian economy; there are opportunities to coordinate trade in natural gas, other energy resources, raw materials, and food products. Close cooperation with countries that, like Russia, are under U.S. and Western sanctions also seems natural.

A unique geostrategic position of Russia as Northern Eurasia and its cultural openness provide a chance to become a future balancer and guarantor of Arab countries' sovereignty as new great powers, including China, India, and Iran, are most likely to start fighting for the energy-rich Middle East.

In addition to the Union State of Russia and Belarus, CSTO member countries, and strategic partnerships with China, Iran, and the DPRK, Moscow has built close relationships with a number of countries in other parts of the world, from Syria and Myanmar to the African Sahel and Latin America/Caribbean. Such broad geography allows Russia to deter its adversaries around the world.

The goal of creating a pan-Eurasian system of security, cooperation and development, which has already been proclaimed but has not been elaborated yet, should be an important element of containing the United States and ensuring Russian interests and international peace. It can be a network organization bringing together the CSTO, the EAEU, the SCO, ASEAN, and the Arab League.

Moscow, which de facto acts as a balancer in the future Eurasian security system, should probably suggest holding annual conferences to discuss the creation of such a system. The Shangri-La Forum in Singapore clearly gravitates towards the U.S. and the UK; the Beijing Xiangshan Forum is Sinocentric; in addition, some Asian countries see China as a potential hegemon. Russia could play a positive role in this regard and increase its international prestige thanks to the high quality of its diplomacy, an independent position, and the absence of hegemonic aspirations.

It is advisable for Russia to continue and step up its efforts to increase risks to American assets abroad, including military bases and key enterprises. If the current confrontation continues, its cost for the adversary may grow since the United States (whose empire is sprawled across the world) is much more vulnerable than Russia.

Russia should join forces with its partners—China, India, and Iran—in order to start building a coalition to protect maritime shipping routes: the Northern Sea Route, routes across the Red Sea, and from Suez to the Persian Gulf.

Russia's interest in the speediest development of North-South continental corridors also requires the creation of a coalition to defend this logistics route. Countries such as Azerbaijan, Iran, Turkey, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, India, Egypt, African, and other states naturally fit into this coalition.

Given Russia's competitive advantage—its willingness and ability to use military force and diplomacy backed by it—Moscow should step up the policy of providing security guarantees—in exchange for friendly and beneficial actions—to Central Asia and the Middle East that are likely to remain unstable in the coming decades.

THE NEED FOR COMPREHENSIVE STRATEGIC DETERRENCE

Apart from the military (nuclear and conventional), geopolitical (security belt), and coalition aspects discussed above, strategic deterrence has many other dimensions, including internal political and geo-economic.

The main condition for deterring the adversary on Russia's own political turf is mobilized public consciousness to preserve national unity and thwart the adversary's attempts to divide our society and provoke conflicts between ethnic, religious, and other groups inside the country. In order to consolidate society, Russia needs a working system of social and public values, and what can be called a Russian civilizational platform, that is, a modern analogue to what was previously known as ideology.

Let us repeat it once again: the country urgently needs a "Russian dream idea" for itself and the world, consistently pursued by the authorities, meeting the basic needs of people, upholding social values, and leading forward. It cannot and should not be mandatory for all people of Russia, but for those who are ready to actively serve their country and gain public recognition. Such an ideology is vital in the face of an emerging new world, highly turbulent and unstable in geopolitical, geoeconomic, and geo-ideological terms, a world where the struggle for the minds and hearts of people will inevitably intensify. The country must find its own path in this new world.

The external element of political containment involves Moscow's systematic interaction with those forces in foreign states that are able to effectively counter the anti-Russian policy pursued by the United States and its allies. But active interference in the affairs of other countries turns out to be counter-productive.

Geo-economic containment aims to limit the pressure from external sanctions. The main focus should be on the development of our own production and technological capabilities and the strengthening of relations with friendly countries. Geo-economic containment also has an active negative side—damaging the economies of states hostile to Russia—but it is not prevalent. As the experience of the SMO has shown, political considerations often take precedence when the

leaders of unfriendly states make their decisions even despite significant economic losses sustained by the countries that initiated anti-Russian sanctions. Russia is obviously interested in becoming as much independent as possible from the financial system created by the West and tailored to its interests. All attempts to integrate into it are doomed to failure. The faster Russia starts using independent payment and banking systems, the more effective its geo-economic containment of the adversaries will be.

It needs to be stressed that Russia urgently needs to devise a policy of reindustrialization on a new basis in order to build an economy that will give it maximum independence from the external turbulent world but at the same time allow it to stay open to mutually beneficial cooperation.

Strategic deterrence is acquiring its specific forms in such areas as cybersecurity, military biological activities, and military space programs. These topics need to be explored separately. Russia needs to build a comprehensive deterrence strategy focused not only on traditional but also on new threats and challenges.

ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS

Social sciences, including deterrence theory, describing the activities of ordinary of people and leaders, must be sovereign in order to effectively serve the interests of their states. Concepts and theories that came mainly from the West, a priori designed to serve Western (mainly American) interests, are outdated or harmful. Social sciences and education need a major overhaul in order to ensure *inter alia* more effective strategic deterrence. This can be done together with the intellectual and political elites of the World Majority countries. Obviously, special attention now is paid to natural and technical sciences, and to the training of necessary specialists. The authors consider themselves social scientists but think that priority should be given to natural sciences. “Nationalizing” science and especially social sciences, and making them more independent and serving primarily national interests should not mean intellectual seclusion. That is why consistent work is needed to ensure the freedom of scientific and intellectual discussion despite international and internal political restrictions. Its curtailment was one of the main reasons for

the collapse of the Soviet Union, and is now for the degradation of the Western elites and the West as a whole.

Couching and implementing a comprehensive strategic deterrence policy is the responsibility of the top political leadership of the country. This work requires deep integration of effort in a number of important areas such as national security, defense, foreign policy, economy and finance, technology, information support, etc.

It seems logical to have a single body to constantly assess the situation in different areas and prepare solutions to prevent, repel, and thwart threats and dangers in the field of strategic deterrence.

In the existing system of public authorities, it could be a special strategic planning department directly subordinated to the President as the Supreme Commander-in-Chief. Ideally, however, our country embroiled in a long-term confrontation with the collective West needs a modern analogue to the WWII-era State Defense Committee—the highest executive and coordinating body of the state—taking into account, of course, new internal and international realities. This is necessitated by the scale of current threats and associated tasks.

Also needed is higher-level integration between scientific research and executive agencies to train and retrain a new generation of world political economy experts. Joint effort should be taken together with specialists from the leading World Majority countries to build the framework of a new world order to replace the crumbling old one. Russia is ideally positioned to organize this work quickly and systemically.