

Russia's Nuclear Posture and the Threat That Dare not Speak Its Name

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The overwhelming focus of the limited Western writings on the contemporary Russian military and its nuclear forces is predominantly European. This exists in spite of the fact that Russia under Vladimir Putin and Dmitri Medvedev has proclaimed itself a Eurasian power. Western commentary on the Russo-Georgian Conflict of August 2008 highlight this tendency. The conflict in this context becomes about Georgia's desire to join the West via membership in NATO and the Russian military response, although aimed at the Georgian government under President Mikheil Saakashvili and the Georgian Armed Forces, was intended to undermine US and NATO interests in Europe.¹ The same can be said about the Obama administration's "reset" of US-Russian relations and the emphasis placed upon reaching an agreement on offensive nuclear forces, which are a legacy of the militarized Cold War confrontation in Europe. Obama's address in Prague in 2009 spoke of the promise of a "global zero" for nuclear weapons, but the approach to Russia focused upon strategic offensive nuclear forces to the exclusion of tactical and theater nuclear arms. The language of the treaty stresses measures to ensure strategic stability between the two signatories, even as the global security environment has moved from bipolar, through unipolar to an emerging multipolar system. The recently published National Security Strategy does seem to recognize this multipolar context and speaks of Russia as a regional partner along with along with China, India, and other "increasingly influential nations" such as Brazil, South Africa, and Indonesia.² The document speaks of Russia as a partner for the United States in Europe and Asia in the context of fighting terrorism and providing stability for Afghanistan but not in terms of larger Asian security themes, leaving the impression that the White House does not envision an Asian dimension to the partnership.³ Indeed, in the post-Cold War world has moved from a bipolar system, through a unipolar one, to multipolarity, the US-Russian security dialogue has been remarkably Euro-centric, whether it was about "strategic partnership, NATO-Russian cooperation, Russian hostility to NATO expansion and out-of-area operations, or the US deployment of ABM assets into Central Europe."⁴ In fact, this silence in

¹ Ronald D. Asmus, *A Little War that Shook the World: Georgia, Russia, and the Future of the West*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

² White House, *The National Security Strategy of the United States*, (27 May 2010), p. 3, http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/rss_viewer/national_security_strategy.pdf Accessed 31 May 2010.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

⁴ The obvious exception to this view is Zbigniew Brzezinski. His book, *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy And Its Geostrategic Imperatives*, reflected the assumptions of its time which assumed America's status as a super power in a unipolar landscape, where the US could forge arrangements with other regional powers. Brzezinski forecast a China's sphere of influence that included not only the Russian Far East but also eastern Siberia and left the impression among Russian readers that what he was purposing was a new geopolitical recasting of the board to

the West can be put at Moscow's own door. Only this spring a group of NATO "elders" visited Moscow to discuss NATO's new "Strategic Concept" just shortly after the publication of Russia's new Military Doctrine, which had once again treated NATO as a "danger and threat" for the actions it had taken on the periphery of Russia, including NATO expansion.⁵ During the conversations led by former US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and the Vice Chair of the Expert Group, Jeroen van der Veer, the former CEO of Royal Dutch Shell, the "elders" had asked the Russian officials and scholars with whom they met about Russian perceptions of the growing power and influence of the People's Republic of China. The Russian response officially and unofficially was a studied silence. The conversation did not transcend the issues dividing Russian and NATO perspectives on European security.⁶ Russian foreign policy commentary on Chinese-Russian relations continue to stress the elements of partnership involved in the two states' interest in multipolarity to counter American hegemony, even as US policy under Obama has stressed international engagement and a "reset" with Russia. At the same time he noted that neither Moscow nor Beijing desired that the Shanghai Cooperation Organization would become an anti-Western military alliance. The only point negative point made by Aleksandr Lukin in an assessment of those bilateral relations was that China would, for time to time, encourage Russia to take anti-Western actions that China itself would not do.⁷ Western observers have seen more tension between Russia and China in Central Asia. Jeffrey Mankoff and Leland R. Miller have written of their bilateral competition affording the United States more room to maneuver politically and economically in that region.⁸

Some Russian authors have raised an alarm over an emerging security challenge to Russia's Far East from a Chinese military that already has the marks of a military super power in comparison with Russia's own conventional forces. Aleksandr Khramchikhin spoke of a Chinese military that combined mass and modern technology deployed along Russia's eastern frontiers at a time when it was evident that China no longer had to contemplate using military force to regain Taiwan.⁹ For well over two decades Soviet and Russian military planners have looked upon tactical nuclear forces as the ultimate guarantor of Russian security in the East. For the last fifteen years the national political and military elite have been agreed that there was no

Russia's disadvantage. The book was particularly "popular" in Russia in 1999 during NATO's campaign against Serbia when it was taken as an accurate portrayal of American policy goals. See: Zbigniew Brzezinski. *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy And Its Geostrategic Imperatives*. (New York: Basic Books, 1998).

⁵ Prezident Rossii, *Voennaia doktrina Rossiiskoi Federatsii*, (5 February 2010).

⁶ Andrei Terekhov, "Mudretsy NATO napomnili Moskve o Kitaiskom vyzove," *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, (12 February 2010).

⁷ A. Lukin, "Russian-Chinese Relations: Keeping up the Pace," *International Affairs*, No. 1 (2010), p.27.

⁸ Jeffrey Mankoff and Leland R. Miller, "China-Russia Competition Opens a Door for America," *Forbes*, (22 April 2010), <http://www.forbes.com/2010/04/22/china-russia-politics-tension-markets-economy-oil-gas.html?boxes=marketschannelnews>

⁹ Aleksandr Khramchikhin, "Millionny soldat plusu sovremennoe vooruzhenie," *Nezavisimoe voennoe obozrenie*, (9 October 2009).

conventional military threat from China because of improved relations. But that situation has been changing rapidly over the last several years. Indeed, even as Russia's Ministry of Defense and General Staff prepare to conduct a strategic-operational exercise, *Vostok-2010* this summer, there has been remarkable silence on the exercise's scenario.¹⁰

The issue of Chinese advanced conventional capabilities has forced a reconsideration of Moscow's military response. These tensions, in conjunction with other emerging military transformations among non-European nuclear powers, should highlight the difficulties associated with stability outside of the main European framework, which become even more complex in Russia's Asian frontiers. Nuclear disarmament which does address the military-technical revolution associated with advanced conventional weapons, informatization and network-centric warfare will not address the much more complicated role which nuclear weapons will be expected to play as a instrument of theater deterrence.

In this context, Russia's nuclear arsenal remains, however, a key variable in Eurasian security. At present that arsenal is estimated to be significantly smaller than that of the 40,000 at the end of the Cold War but is certainly in excess of 14,000 weapons, including 3,113 strategic warheads and 2,079 non-strategic warheads deployed and another 8,000 in storage or waiting dismantling as of 2008.¹¹ A significant portion of these are stored east of the Urals and form a major component of Russia's geo-strategic posture in the non-European strategic axes which include the Caucasus, Central Asia, Siberia, the Russian Far East, and the Arctic.¹² With regard to Asian security, the nuclear weapons deployed and stored in the Siberian Federal Okrug and the Far Eastern Federal Okrug form the basis of Russia's theater nuclear forces. These forces include the nuclear weapons of the Russian Pacific Fleet, Air Force, Strategic Rocket Forces, and Army deployed there.¹³ The theater role of such forces in case of armed conflict with the PRC has been candidly described by

At present the Russian Ministry of Defense and the General Staff are in the process of re-defining those strategic axis and reducing the number of military districts from six to four and creating operational-strategic commands in each. They include: the Western covering Europe with its headquarters in St. Petersburg, the Southern covering the Black Sea, Caucasus and

¹⁰ Roger McDermott. "Russian Military Prepares for *Vostok 2010*," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, (2 June 2010).

¹¹ Robert S. Norris and Hans S. Kristensen, "Russian Nuclear Forces, 2008," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, Vol. 64, No. 2 (May-June 2008), pp. 54-57. 62.

¹² Iurii Mikhailov, "Sistema ugroz bezopasnosti Rossiiskoi Federatsii in ee obespechenie," *Orientir*, No. 5 (May 2010), pp. 49-52.

¹³ On the facilities in these two okrugs see the two chapters by Christina Chuen and Dmitry Kovchegin in: James Clay Moltz, Vladimir A. Orlov, and Adam M. Stulberg, eds.. *Preventing Nuclear Meltdown: Managing Decentralization of Russia's Nuclear Complex*. (Aldershot, England and Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate, 2004), pp. 105-134, and 184-210.

Caspian with its headquarters in Rostov-on-Don, the Central covering Central Asia with its headquarters in Yekaterinburg, and the Eastern covering the Far East and Pacific Ocean with its headquarters in Khabarovsk. This concept is to be tested in conjunction with "Vostok-2010," a major exercise in Siberia and the Russian Far East scheduled for execution in late June and early July.¹⁴ Since 1999 Russia has conducted operational-strategic exercises dealing with its western strategic direction on a regular basis. Those exercises have included the first use of nuclear weapons to de-escalate and bring about conflict termination in a scenario involving a conventional attack upon Russia from the West by coalition forces enjoying tactical-technical qualitative superiority over Russian conventional forces. The limited nuclear strikes seemed to have designed disrupt C4ISR and precision strike capabilities of the aggressor forces in order to halt the attack.¹⁵ Vostok-2010 is the first to address the Eastern strategic direction and has been associated with the implementation of the military "new look" championed by Minister of Defense Anatoly Serdiukov and Chief of the General Staff, General Nikolai Makarov, as part of the transformation of the Russian military into a brigade-centric force, capable of conducting advanced conventional operations and network-centric warfare.¹⁶ As one of the Russian reformers described the "new look" it was a gamble on nature of the future war which the Russian Army would face.¹⁷

The driver behind this shift in direction is not military-technological development in the West but a deep reappraisal of the security situation in Russian Siberia and the Far East. In an article devoted to Russia's "Eastern Vector" General Makhmut Gareev pointed the emergence of NATO as a global security organization with a foot print in Central Asia as a result of the Afghan War and predicted rising tensions between a US-led NATO and the People's Republic of China. While he focused on NATO's non-military means of exerting influence, particularly on the model of the "color revolutions" in Ukraine and Georgia that had brought regimes hostile to Russia to power, his primary focus was on the unleashing of armed conflict in regions where Russia was lacking in combat potential and especially combat readiness.¹⁸ Gareev returned to this theme of combat readiness in a follow-on article about lessons learned from the Great Patriotic War. In addition to citing the surprise attack of Nazi Germany in 1941, Gareev pointed to the outbreak of local fighting between the Soviet Union and the PRC along the Amur River in

¹⁴ "The Quantity of Military Districts in Russia Will Be Reduced from Six to Four by December 1 and Operational Strategic Commands Will Be Formed," *Defense & Security*, (31 May 2010).

¹⁵ Jacob W. Kipp, "Russian Non-Strategic Nuclear Weapons," *Military Review*, 81, No. 3 (May-June 2001), pp. 27-38.

¹⁶ Aleksei Nikolsky, "To Be Assessed by East," *Vedomosti*, (9 March 2010), p. 2. On the "new look" as a gamble on advanced technology and network-centric warfare see: Aleksandr Kondrat'ev, "Stavka na 'voiny budushchego,'" *Nezvasimoe voennoe obozrenie*, 27 June 2008).

¹⁷ Aleksandr Kondrat'ev, "Stavka na 'voiny budushchego,'" *Nezvasimoe voennoe obozrenie*, 27 June 2008).

¹⁸ Gennadii Miranovich, "Vostochnyi vektor," *Krasnaia zvezda*, 3 March 2010).

1969 forced the mobilization of an entire military district. He also noted the risks involved when national political leadership did not appreciate the military-political situation they were addressing when they ordered the use of force. Gareev here drew attention to the decision to intervene militarily in Afghanistan in 1979 and the decision to intervene in Chechnya in 1994. In both Afghanistan and Chechnya, the governments blundered into wars that they did not want because they failed to understand the implied tasks that followed from the initial order and failed in their political guidance to take into account the real situation on the ground. The relevance of these lessons from all four conflicts is the nature of the true connection between politics and strategy:

The final and decisive word belongs to the political leadership but in the working out of the most important military-political decisions, military professionals and other specialists must take part, otherwise policy will not apply to the real life. And the main point is that politicians and diplomats are obliged to create favorable conditions for the actions of the Armed Forces.¹⁹

On the issue of "new look" Gareev endorsed its content, i.e., the creation of its own precision-strike weapons and the necessary technological base to support the conduct of network-centric warfare." At the same time, he called for the working out and implementation of more active and decisive strategy, and operational art, and tactics to impose upon the enemy those actions, including contact warfare, which he most seeks to avoid.²⁰

Combat readiness becomes in this regard one of the primary concerns of military professionals, since combat potential, when not linked to actual combat readiness, can create a false appreciation of the military power available. Here the nation's capacity to mobilize additional military power defines its ability to manage the escalation of a local conflict towards a decision in keeping with national interests.²¹

This is supposed to be the exact focus of Vostok-2010.²² The "new look" military which the Ministry of Defense has set out to create via a brigade-base ground force capable of launching precision strikes and conducting network-centric warfare faces a particular challenge in the Siberia and the Far East, where Chinese military modernization has moved the PLA from a mass industrial army built to fight people's war to force seeking to rearm as an advanced conventional force and conduct their own version of network-centric warfare. A year ago, informed Russian

¹⁹ Makhmut Gareev, "Opyt pobeditelei v Velikoi voine ne mozhet ustaret'," *Nezavisimoe voennoe obozrenie*, (9 March 2010).

²⁰ Ibid..

²¹ Ibid...

²² Alesksei Nikol'skii, "Otsenku dast 'Vostok'," *Vedomosti*, (9 March 2010).

defense journalists still spoke of the PLA as a mass industrial army seeking niche advanced conventional capabilities. Looking at the threat environment that was assumed to exist under Zapad 2009, the defense journalist Dmitri Litovkin spoke of Russian forces confronting three distinct types of military threats: "an opponent armed to NATO standards in the Georgian-Russian confrontation over South Ossetia last year. In the eastern strategic direction Russian forces would likely face a multi-million-man army with a traditional approach to the conduct of combat: linear deployments with large concentrations of manpower and fire power on different axis. In the southern strategic direction Russian forces expect to confront irregular forces and sabotage groups fighting a partisan war against "the organs of Federal authority," i.e., Internal troops, the border patrol, and the FSB.²³ By spring of this year, a number of those involved in bringing about the "new look" were speaking of a PLA that was moving rapidly towards a high-tech conventional force with its own understanding of network-centric warfare.²⁴ Moreover, the People's Liberation Army, conducted a major exercise "Stride-2009" which looked like a rehearsal for military intervention against Central Asia and/or Russia to some Russian observers.²⁵

Speaking of the deployment of two newly-organized brigades along the Russian-Chinese border on the Irkutsk-Chita Axis, Lieutenant-General Vladimir Valentinovich Chirkin, the recently appointed commander of the Siberian Military District, stated that the brigades were deployed there to counter the presence of 5 PLA combined arms armies across the border. From 2003 to 2007 Chirkin commanded an army in the Siberian military district. On the rationale for the deployment, Chirkin stated: "We are obligated to keep troops there because on the other side of the order are five Chinese armies and we cannot ignore that operational direction." He added that the Ministry of Defense intended to develop an army headquarters for command and control of the brigades.²⁶ In a related report Chirkin described the PLA forces across the border as composed of three divisions and 10 tank, mechanized, and infantry brigades, which he described as not little but also "not a strike force." As to the role of the new brigades, Chirkin put them as part of a deterrent force aimed as friendly reminder to the PRC: ". . . dispute the friendly relations with China our army command understands that friendship is possible only with strong countries, that is whose (sic) who can quiet a friend down with a conventional or nuclear club."²⁷

The gamble on the nature of future war described by Kondrat'ev in supporting the development of network-centric warfare capabilities, comes down to the issue of the Russia's capacity to arm, create, train, deploy and keep combat ready forces capable of conducting advanced conventional warfare. In the absence of such forces, the deterrence equation is reduced to the credibility of the nuclear option in deterring conventional attacks. Given the economic and demographic realities

²³ Dmitri Litovkin, "Ucheniia popali v seti," *Izvestiia*, (28 September 2009).

²⁴ A. Kondrat'ev, "Nekotorye osobennosti realizatsii kontseptsii 'setetsentricheskaia voina' v vooruzhennykh silakh KNR," *Zarubezhnoe voennoe obozrenie*. No. 3 (March 2010), pp. 11-17).

²⁵ "Ucheniia," *Zarubezhnoe voennoe obozrenie*, No. 8 (31 July 2009), and Aleksandr Khranchikhin, "Starye osnovy novoi doktriny," *Voенно-Promyshlennyyi Kuryer*, Bo. 6 (17 February 2010), p. 5.

²⁶ "Novosti," *VPK-Voennopromyshlennyyi kur'er*, (3 March 2010).

²⁷ "Russia Strengthens the Border with China," *Argumenty nedeli*, (4-10 March 2010).

of Siberia and Russian Far East, Russia seeks by non-military means to preclude the emergence of a Chinese military threat. However, Russian observers also are aware of the fact that an imminent military threat for Beijing can emerge out of regional instability, which is beyond Russia's unilateral means to control.

As the most recent Russian Military Doctrine of 2010 states, nuclear weapons remain the primary instrument of deterrence against both nuclear and conventional attacks upon Russia and in defense of Russia interests, territorial integrity and sovereignty.²⁸ The doctrine does not explicitly state that Russia will use nuclear weapons in preemptive attack against such threats, as had been discussed by senior members of the Security Council in the fall of 2009, but leaves the decision to use such weapons in the hands of the President of the Russian Federation. The context of use will, however, is defined by the nature of the challenges and threats that Russia faces across Eurasia. A second classified document, "The Foundations of State Policy in the Area of Nuclear Deterrence to 2020," which was issued at the same time as the Military Doctrine has had portions leaked to the mass media. These describe two types of threats that could lead to the use of nuclear weapons: 1) attacks upon vital economic and political structures, early warning systems, national command and control, and nuclear weapons systems, which fits a US-led NATO threat involving conventional forces capable of conducting global strikes against such targets; and 2) during an invasion by an enemy's ground units onto its territory if Russia's Armed Forces do not manage to stop their progress deep into the country through conventional means of waging war, which fits more closely with an assault by the PLA against the Russian Far East.²⁹

The first concept resembles one popularized by General-Major Vladimir Slipchenko in his discussions of six generation warfare and no-contact warfare on the model of NATO's campaign against Kosovo but applied on a global scale.³⁰ Slipchenko speculated on the use of long-range precision-strike systems for attacks upon enemy economic, administrative, and military infrastructure. The second one, which was not contained in the 2000 version of Russian military doctrine is quite new and reflects what the Russian military recognizes is an emerging threat from the PRC. In a polemic with Slipchenko in 2005 General Gareev had discussed such a conflict which would require the development of a mass mobilization base to conduct a protracted war which employed precision-strike systems but did not achieve annihilation of the opponent's forces.³¹ Both Slipchenko and Gareev agreed that nuclear deterrence had become self-deterrence in the post-Cold War era.

Facing West and East

For Russia, which inherited the Soviet nuclear arsenal, but has faced a serious change in its international position, the nuclear equation is, in fact, shaped by Russia's status as a regional power in a complex Eurasian security environment, where nuclear issues are not defined exclusively by the US-Russian strategic nuclear equation but by security dynamics involving interactions with Russia's immediate periphery. On the one hand, Russia's security responses

²⁸ Prezident Rossii, *Voennaia doktrina Rossiiskoi Federatsii*, (5 February 2010).

²⁹ Vladimir Mokhov, "Osnovy natsional'noi bezopasnosti," *Krasnaia zvezda*, 6 February 2010).

³⁰ Vladimir Slipchenko, *Beskontaktnye voyny*. (Moscow: "Gran-Press," 2001), pp. 29-39.

³¹ Vladimir Slipchenko and Makhmut Gareev, *Future War*. (Ft. Leavenworth, Foreign Military Studies Office, 2007), pp. 67-68.

have been shaped by a post-Soviet decade of sharp internal political crises, economic transformation, social instability, demographic decline, and the collapse of conventional military power. The impact of these developments have been uneven across Russia, leading to very distinct security environments which have demanded regional responses. The initial focus of security concerns for both the Soviet Union and the Russian Federation was primarily upon European security. This was the primary focus of the US-Soviet strategic competition and the place where its militarization was most evident.

The end of the Cold War began with the attempt to reform the Soviet system under Mikhail Gorbachev by means of Perestroika and glasnost and embraced the idea of getting time and space for reform by removing the ideological roots of East-West confrontation from Europe. As presented by Aleksandr Yakovlev, one of Gorbachev's key advisors, the policy involved the removal of the primary driver of East-West conflict, the military confrontation between NATO and the Warsaw Treaty Organization.³² Demilitarization of the Cold War in Europe and Soviet military disengagement from international conflicts, especially Afghanistan, were part of an effort to save a system that had lost the capacity to innovate and survived on the basis of bureaucratic inertia and coercion. Reform risked both domestic and international complications.³³ In Europe, the first real indicator of successful de-militarization was the INF Treaty of 1987 abolishing entire classes of intermediate-range nuclear forces with operational-strategic impact on the European theater, followed by moves under the OSCE towards greater military transparency, and consummated by the Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty of 1990 setting limits on forward deployed conventional forces in Central Europe and on its flanks from the Atlantic to the Urals.³⁴

Political developments, however, made this security regime obsolete when the Velvet Revolutions of 1989 replaced governments allied with the Soviet Union and led to the abolition of the Warsaw Treaty Organization in December 1991. In the meantime, political discontent and raising nationalism within the USSR undermined Gorbachev's program of gradual reform and led to a confrontation between hardliners opposed to further reform and nationalists calling for both the abolition of Soviet power and the end of the Soviet Union. Boris Yeltsin, elected President of the RSFSR in June 1991 became the spokesman for national, democratic opposition to the existing Soviet order. The attempted coup by hardliners in August 1991 failed and Yeltsin emerged as leader of a Russian Federation that was willing to see the Soviet Union abolished, which occurred on 31 December 1991. In a matter of months the Col War bilateral international

³² Christopher Shulgan. *The Soviet Ambassador: The Making of the Radical Behind Perestroika*, (London: McClelland and Stewart, 2008).

³³ Jacob W. Kipp. "Perestroika and Order [Poryadok]: Alternative Futures and Their Impact on the Soviet Military," *Military Review*, No. 12 (December 1989), 2-16.

³⁴ George L. Rueckert. *Global Double Zero: The INF Treaty From Its Origins to Implementation*. (Westport, Connecticut.: Greenwood Press, 1993); John Borawski. *From the Atlantic to the Urals: Negotiating Arms Control at the Stockholm Conference*. (Washington, D.C.: Pergamon-Brassey International Defense Publishers, 1988); Ivo H. Daalder. *The CFE Treaty: An Overview and an Assessment*. (Washington, D.C.: The Johns Hopkins Foreign Policy Institute, 1991); and Michael R. Beschloss and Strobe Talbott. *At the Highest Levels: The Inside Story of the End of the Cold War*. (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1993).

system had shifted to a unipolar order dominated by a US-led Atlantic-European community. The Russian Federation found itself dealing with the dismemberment of the Soviet Union and the re-gathering of the Soviet nuclear arsenal under its control and preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons, fissionable materials, and nuclear weapons expertise, a policy supported by the Bush and Clinton administrations. Hope of a strategic partnership, which flourished in Washington and Moscow in the early 1990s, were cooling by the second half of the decade.

On the other hand, the emergence of the US as the sole super power put a distinct complication in Russia's responses to these regional issues and led to efforts to cultivate the creation of a multipolar counter-balance to US influence. As framed by Foreign Minister Evgenii Primakov the new order was supposed to rest on cooperation among Moscow, Beijing, and New Delhi to balance Washington's global influence. Neither New Delhi nor Beijing endorsed a policy of trilateral balancing, but Moscow and Beijing did move towards a de facto security system with the signing of the five-power Treaty on Deepening Military Trust in Border Regions in 1996. The agreement, a part of the relaxation of tensions associated with the end of the Cold War, was seen in Moscow as the foundation for balancing in a relatively benign environment in Central Asia and the Far East. Russia embraced arms sales to the Peoples Republic of China as a desperation measure to keep its own military industrial complex from complete collapse. In the absence of domestic orders, foreign sales kept design bureaus and production facilities operational. A case in point was the sale of Su-27M fighters to the PRC in 1992, which kept the design bureau in Moscow and the production plant at Komsomsk-na-Amure open.³⁵ Russia did not see the PRC as an immediate military threat, was interested in reducing its own forces deployed in the Far East, and was most concerned with averting the total collapse of its defense industry. Primakov's vision of a trilateral balancing mechanism among Moscow, Beijing and New Delhi did not depend upon arms sales but it provide geopolitical justification for such sales to China and India. It had assumed relatively stable and benign relations among all three actors.³⁶

The Putin decade of recovery, which began in 1999 and still continues under the Medvedev-Putin Tandem, was marked by a significant economic recovery, internal stability, state recentralization, and until very recently only marginal improvements in conventional military power. For much of the decade, favorable oil and gas prices, allowed Russia to practice Putin's own brand of energy diplomacy across Eurasia by cultivating supplier-consumer relations with major powers while exercising energy discipline on states on its own periphery.³⁷ The decade began with a fundamental shift in the content of Russian security relationship in Asia. The point of departure was the disillusionment with Euro-Atlantic engagement after NATO expansion and the NATO-conducted air campaign against Yugoslavia and in the face of Russia's vigorous objections to military actions undertaken without a mandate from the UN Security Council. At

³⁵ V. Usol'tsev. "Golubye molnii' i Rosssiiskie letchiki edut v Kitai," *Krasnaia zvezda*, (11 April 1992).

³⁶ R. Weitz. "The Shanghai Cooperation Organization: The Primakov Vision and Central Asian Realities," *Fletcher Forum of World Affairs*, Vol. 31, No. 1 (2007), pp. 103-118.

³⁷ Marshall I. Goldman. *Petrostate: Putin, Power and the New Russia*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

the same time deteriorating security in the Caucasus and Central Asia invoked the need to create a new security regime to cover Asiatic Russia.³⁸ On the one hand, renewed war in Chechnya raised the prospect of increased involvement by radical Islamic elements there and across the Caucasus. In Central Asia, the spread of Islamic radicalism by the Taliban out of Afghanistan had called into question the existing security structures provided by the Commonwealth of Independent States. Russia, which had intervened in the Tajik civil war of 1992-1997 and helped with the United States to broker a peace settlement there, now found itself faced by a more general regional Islamic threat, which had actually helped to drive the opposing Tajik factions into cooperation. That threat was the spread of jihad from Afghanistan into Central Asia. The PRC, which faced its own Islamic separatist threat among the Uyghur population, which made up plurality of the population in Xinjiang, China's frontier region with Central Asia, had its own reasons to support collective security arrangements in the late 1990s. In this context, in 2001 Russia joined with four other Central Asian states (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan), and China to form the Shanghai Cooperation Organization with an expressed mandate to cooperate against "terrorism, separatism and extremism."³⁹ In addition to this regional security function, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization also became a vehicle for Moscow and Beijing to express their concerns over US hegemony in the international system and to create a counter-weight to NATO as the alliance moved more actively into out-of-area operations affecting Central Asia, especially after its intervention into Afghanistan and the US development of bases in the region, especially Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. The tensions became particularly acute after the US intervention in Iraq when it appeared that the US was planning for a long-term presence in both Iraq and Afghanistan. The acquisitions of nuclear weapons by India and Pakistan in 1998 had intensified the India-Pakistan conflict and brought with it the possibility of a new "great game" in Central and South Asia, played by nuclear armed states and increasing tensions among Moscow, Beijing, and New Delhi with the United States and NATO directly engaged in Afghanistan.⁴⁰

For most of the decade, Russian official literature on foreign policy, national security strategy and military doctrine focused upon the United States and NATO as the chief sources of challenges and threats to Russian national security with secondary attention given to internal sources of instability (extremism and separatism) and to international terrorism. This official position masked what were developing concerns regarding the security of its own Eastern Siberian and Far Eastern domains. Those security concerns are rooted in Russia's historical experience with this distant and relatively isolated territory.

Russian cossacks pushed into the Far East in the mid-17th century and a network of settlements spread. These remotes lands were more connected with Moscow by sea than by land, with the Russian Navy maintaining a nominal presence to enforce Russian claims. The integration of

³⁸ Roy Allison and Lena Jonson, eds.. *Central Asian Security*. (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2991).

³⁹ Shanghai Cooperation Organization Charter, " *China Daily*, (12 June 2006), http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2006-06/12/content_614628.htm Accessed 15 April 2010.

⁴⁰ Feroz Hassan Khan. "The New Great Game in Central Asia/South Asia: Continuity and Change," in: Charles Hawkins and Robert L. Love, eds.. *The New Great Game: Chinese Views on Central Asia*. (Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas: Foreign Military Studies Office, 2006), pp. 1-16.

these regions into Imperial Russia took a quantum leap in the last decade of the 19th century with the construction of the Trans-Siberian railroad under the leadership of the Minister of Finances Sergei Witte. Witte saw the railroad as the key to Russian development of Siberia and to access to the China market. However, before those benefits could be reaped, Russia found itself drawn into imperial rivalries over Manchuria and Korea, leading to war with Japan and defeat. During the war the railroad became the chief means of Russian strategic mobility and underscored the need for the development of more infrastructure in Eastern Siberia and the Far East. But the tsarist regime collapsed in the course of another war, and foreign powers (US and Japan) found it easy to intervene there during the Russian civil war, which followed the Bolshevik seizure of power and the decision to make peace with the Central Powers. Bolshevik power was slow to consolidate its control in the Far East, which did not come until 1922, when the Japanese military withdrew and the Far Eastern Republic, which had served as a buffer between Soviet territory and the Japanese zone of occupation, was abolished. Under Stalin there was a major effort at developing the Soviet Far East, which included mobilization of Komsomol (young communist) cadre to set up new settlements and the creation of vast mining and forestry projects under the NKVD and composing islands in the GULag archipelago. After the Japanese occupation of Manchuria in 1931, intensive efforts were made to strengthen the defenses of the Soviet Far East and the Mongolian People's Republic, an ally of the Soviet Union from its establishment in 1924. Soviet forces fought to limited border engagements with the Japanese Kwantung Army in 1938 at Lake Khasan, near Vladivostok, and at Khalkhin-Gol in the Manchukou-Mongolian border in 1939. During the Second World War the Soviet Far East was the arrival point for lend lease materials from the United States shipped on Soviet-flagged ships and served as the staging area for the Soviet offensive of August 1945 which announced Soviet entry into the war against Japan and led to the Soviet occupation of Manchuria and North Korea and the seizure from Japan of southern Sakhalin and the Kuril islands. In both Manchuria and north Korea Soviet military presence facilitated the establishment of local Communist regimes. In the postwar period, the Soviet Far East continued to a major part of the GULag until Stalin's death and the dismantling of the camp system. During the Cold War the Soviet Far East was the staging area for support to North Korean and Chinese Communist forces engaged in the Korean War. With the emergence of the Sino-Soviet conflict and especially after the border incidents with China in 1969, the Far East became a military bastion, which it remained until the collapse of the USSR. In the decade that followed the collapse of the USSR the Russian Far East experienced demographic decline and economic crisis, from which it began a slow recovery. The region has endured an energy crisis, criminality and corruption. Tensions between Moscow and the Far East grew sharp with the global economic downturn and the decline in world energy prices, when Moscow sought to impose a tariff on imported automobiles, which had been a thriving business in Vladivostok. In December 2008, local protestors took to the streets under the slogan: "Authorities: Raise the Standard of Living, not the Tariff." They were met by MVD riot police sent from Moscow to restore order by applying their batons to the demonstrators' bodies.⁴¹

⁴¹ G. A. Ziuganov. "Rasprava vo Vladivostoke ne dolzhena ostat'sia beznakazannoi," *Pravda*, (15 December 2008).

In part, these were a legacy of the collapse of the Soviet system, which had treated those regions as the forward bastions of its security in the context of deteriorating relations with the People's Republic of China. Moscow had invested heavily in maintaining a military presence and infrastructure in the region by intensive investment, including the Baikal-Amur Main Line [*Magistral*], which was to provide the transportation infrastructure to give the region strategic depth for defense but was never completed. With the collapse of the Soviet Union that military infrastructure was allowed to decay since Moscow had no resources to fund it. In the absence of continuing investment credits, Moscow granted the regions local self-government and looked to economic transformation on the basis of international trade to revive the area. There was much hope expressed in Moscow that Japanese capital, Chinese workers, and Russian raw materials would make the Russian Far East into a part of the dynamic Asia-Pacific economy. Instead, the Far East saw a radical decline in population (7.9 million in 1989) and economic activity, leading to a total population in the Far East of 6.7 million by the 2002 census and making the region one of the most under-populated regions in the world in terms of persons per square mile. In fact, however, most of the population in the Russian Far East is concentrated in a ninety-mile belt of settlement from Chita in the West to Vladivostok on the Pacific with the Trans-Siberian Railroad providing the single corridor for trans-regional transportation through it. Russia did move to resolve border disputes with the PRC under President Boris Yeltsin, which led to a general settlement in 1995 but left the settlement of conflicting claims over certain strategic islands in the areas of Chita and Khabarovsk unresolved. In 2005, these issues were resolved with the transfer of about half the disputed territory to China. In spite of the fact that islands near Khabarovsk were directly across from this major Russian city and defense center, military authorities down played any military threat to the city, although the Border Guards did express concern about possible illegal immigration.⁴² In the general climate of improved Sino-Russian relations no military threat seemed to exist.

There were, of course, all sorts of concerns about illegal Chinese settlers coming into the Far East. Viktor Ishaev, the Governor of Khabarovsk Krai from 1991 to 2009, repeatedly raised the issue of Chinese migration in into the region as part of plan for the "peaceful capture " of the Russian Far East.⁴³ But unlike under Yeltsin, a stronger central government was able to keep local problems and perceptions from impacting the conduct of bilateral relations. Likewise, on nuclear issues, if the great concern had been regionalism and the actions of local officials with regard to supporting and protecting existent nuclear infrastructure from decay, criminal penetration, and incompetent management in the 1990s, when the center was weak, under Putin the center re-established control and co-opted local political leaders to the center's interests reducing the risks of crisis between the center and the Far Eastern periphery.⁴⁴ Putin's strategy,

⁴² Sergei Blagov, "Russia Hails Border Deal with China Despite Criticism, *Eurasian Daily Monitor*, Vol. 2, No. 102 (25 May 2005), http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=30445

⁴³ Jeanne L. Wilson. *Strategic Partners: Russian-Chinese Relations in the Post-Soviet Era*. (Armonk, New York: M. E. Sharpe, 2004), pp. pp. 126-127.

⁴⁴ This process has been addressed in the work of Christina Chuan. See: Christina Chuan, "Nuclear Issues in the Far Eastern Federal Okrug," in: James Clay Molts, Vladimir A. Olav, and Adam M. Stolberg, eds.. *Preventing Nuclear Meltdown: Managing Decentralization of Russia's Nuclear Complex*. (Aldershot, England and Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate, 2004), pp. 105-134.

which has continued under President Medvedev, was to seek to bring about the economic integration of Russia into the global economic processes that have turned Asia into an engine of globalization. Russia has formally engaged with regional organizations such as APEC, which it joined in 1998, and fostered a partnership relationship with ASEAN. However, Russia has not achieved

And in the Far East Russia's primary gamble was on the prospect of good relations with China. Down to 2009, China was consistently described as Russia's strategic partner, the primary engine of Asia's economic transformation and growing global influence. Russia was to serve as a source of advanced military technology and raw materials and provide China with a stable rear supporting its international position.⁴⁵ No mention of China as a strategic threat came from official sources, although commentators might worry about a yellow peril of Chinese settlers into the Far East or complain of Chinese goods driving out domestic products in local markets. Konstantin Pulikovskiy, a former general and President Putin's envoy to the Far Eastern Federal Okrug from 2000 to 2009, spoke of Chinese investment as vital to the future of the region.⁴⁶ Russia's residual influence in North Korea had declined rapidly after the collapse of the Soviet Union as the issue of North Korean nuclear weapons development emerged. In 2000, President Putin invited Kim Jong Il to visit Russia, which he did in the summer of 2000. Pulikovskiy, who accompanied Kim in his rail trip to Moscow, became the Russian official with the closest ties to Kim Jong Il and appreciated the importance of North Korea to Russia's own security interests and appreciated China's strongest influence in Pyongyang.⁴⁷ After Kim Jong Il's visit to Russia in 2000, some spoke of the personal ties between Kim and President Putin as re-defining Russian-North Korean relations, but developments over the rest of the decade confirmed China's greater access and influence during the Six Party Talks over North Korea's nuclear program. Russia's approach to that on-going crisis has been to support its legitimate security interests in Northeast Asia via preserving peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula.⁴⁸ In this capacity it has engaged in the Six Party Talks. Russia could and did develop economic ties with South Korea over the last two decades, as it kept its limited influence in North Korea. This balancing has been evident in Moscow's approach to the crisis set off by the sinking of the South Korean patrol corvette, the *Cheonan*, by an acoustic torpedo, which an international investigation,

⁴⁵ Vladimir Pyle, "Spasitel'myi Kitai?" *Orientir*, No. 3, (March 2009), pp. 8-11.

⁴⁶ "Far East looks to China for investment," *The Russian Journal*, (10 October 2003), <http://www.russiajournal.com/node/16455> Accessed 20 April 2010

⁴⁷ Konstantin Preobrazhensky, "Through Russia With Kim Jong Il," *North Korean Review*, Vol. 1, No. 1, (29 February 2004), http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=26321 Accessed 15 May 2010.

⁴⁸ Alexander Vorontsov. "Current Russia-North Korea Relations: Challenges and Achievements," Brookings, (February 2007), http://www.brookings.edu/papers/2007/02northkorea_vorontsov.aspx Accessed 15 March 2010.

carried out by U.S. and Australian experts concluded was fired by North Korean forces.⁴⁹ Moscow most wants to avoid a regional crisis become a armed conflict and inviting the intervention of other powers, especially the United States and the People's Republic of China in support of South and North Korea.

Over the last two decades Russia has looked to Japanese investment even in the face of lack of progress in resolving the territorial dispute over the Kurile Islands, which had kept Japanese-Soviet and now Japanese -Russian relations frozen -- the Soviet Union and then Russia offered a two of four split of the island chain with Russia retaining the northern and Japan getting the southern. Japan demanded the return of all four islands, which Russia refused. Russian energy diplomacy under Putin favored Chinese interests over Japanese. Realists in Moscow saw no major movement in Tokyo's security regime with Washington and simply gave a lower priority to the improvement of bilateral political relations, even though Moscow continued to court Japanese invest in the Russian Far East. Border incidents and disputes over fishing rights led to periodic flare-ups but no major crisis, As so Moscow was willing to keep its policy towards Japan in line with that of Beijing. Moscow supported the Six Party talks but with the clear understanding that Beijing had the best leverage with Pyongyang. Moscow supported counter-proliferation initiatives but has worried that US impatience and/or North Korea provocations could lead to war and greater instability in northeast Asia an even risk a Sino-American confrontation. The Russian concern about Sino-American conflict raises in conjunction with the two major points of contentions between the two powers: Taiwan and the Korean peninsula. The concerns have become greater as the conduct of the North Korean regime has become more erratic.

Strategic nuclear weapons loomed very large in the Yeltsin era when the strategic arsenal was expected to play a major political role in assuring Russia in getting and retaining a strategic partnership with the United States and a major say in the emerging post-Cold War order in Europe. Since 1999, Russia has emphasized the deterrent function of its strategic nuclear forces but has focused its posture on conflict management to discourage military intervention on Russia's periphery. of Russian military has for two decades placed the likelihood of nuclear war at a very low level and even seem the possibility of a general, coalition war at a low probability. That said, the Russian government has also recognized that its immediate periphery is quite unstable, fraught with local conflicts that can turn into local wars, and lead to foreign military interventions against the national interests, territorial integrity, and sovereignty of Russia. The question of the "near abroad," a euphemism for the independent states that emerged on Russia's periphery with the breakup of the USSR, has been closely tied to Russian national interests, a Russian sphere of influence, and the protection of Russian minorities living in the successor states. Russian intervention in ethnic conflicts in this region has been seen in the West as one of the central areas of conflict with Russia, especially in the aftermath of the Russo-Georgian War

⁴⁹ "Russian Specialists Arrive in S. Korea to Probe Warship Sinking," RIA Novosti, (31 May 2010); "Russia, N. Korea to Continue Consultations to Settle Inter-Korean Conflict, RIA Novosti, (28 May 2010), and "Russia, South Korea to Discuss Cheonan Issue Thursday," RIA Novosti, (2 June 2010).

of August 2008.⁵⁰ For Russian leaders the Russo-Georgian conflict revealed a number of problems associated with command and control of modern conventional forces, especially the integration of air-land combat, which became a driver for the Ministry of Defense "new look."⁵¹ At the same time, however, Chinese military modernization made the gamble on strategic partnership less inviting if China was intent upon developing large-scale theater warfare capabilities embracing advanced conventional weapons and network-centric operations. The default military gamble on non-strategic nuclear forces to deter a remote Chinese threat became less appealing. Thus, in June and July the Russian Military Defense and General Staff will conduct Vostok-2010 with the intent of assessing Russia's capacity to mobilize and deploy its "new look" conventional forces to defeat a military intervention against the Russian Far East and will test both the combat capabilities and combat readiness of these forces to deal with that threat.⁵² The outcome of that exercise will be a major test for the "new look" and define the role of theater nuclear forces in the Far East --whether they will remain the response of necessity or become a true second order response, giving Moscow the capacity to manage such a conflict to a political solution that does not put into risk the territorial integrity of Russia or its survival as a sovereign state. Much will depend upon Russia's capacity to rearm its forces with advanced conventional capabilities, which will depend on the adaptability of its military industrial complex, and on its capacity to escape its relative geo-strategic isolation in the Far East if relations with China should deteriorate.

These developments may fundamentally shift the geo-strategic context of President Obama's global zero initiative on nuclear weapons. For the last two decades, Russia's nuclear arsenal in Asia was first seen internationally as a problem of management and control as it declined in size and operational readiness. Operationally, even in its reduced capacity, it was for Russia the only military option open in case of attack in a region effectively denuded of conventional military power. China's relative military inferiority made that prospect remote. Both Moscow and Beijing could look to strategic partnership without the prospect of an emerging military threat. Chinese military modernization has in the last year changed that perception in Moscow. Now, with the emergence of a potential conventional threat from its former strategic partner, Russia is in the process of evaluating whether its reformed conventional forces might achieve a viable deterrence in case of attack from a modernized Chinese military. In the absence of such a capability, Russia will be forced to gamble even more on theater nuclear forces and be even less willing to consider reductions in its non-strategic nuclear forces. In the context of an increasing military confrontation on the Korean peninsula and periodic tensions between Washington and Beijing over Taiwan, Russia's new posture adds one further complication to Eurasian security for all parties and makes Asian nuclear force reductions an even more complex problem for Washington to manage.

⁵⁰ Ronald D. Asmus, *A Little War that Shook the World: Georgia, Russia, and the Future of the West*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

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⁵² Valerii Shcheblanin, "Voennaia bezopasnost' na vostok Rossii budet obespechena," *Buriatiia*, (20 February 2010).