

International Affairs

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Russia and the West: Time for Détente 2.0

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TODAY'S INTENSE CONFRONTATION between Russia and the West is causing increasing anxiety both among political experts and among ordinary people all over the world. Polemics between the two sides tend to be sharper than propaganda philippics of the Cold War era.¹

The euphoria of the 1990s over the “end of history” with the standoff between the two world systems being over and replaced by an ideology of “a new security space from Vladivostok to Lisbon” made political elites on both sides of the destroyed Iron Curtain think that the division of Europe into two parts was a thing of the past and that foundations were being laid for a “common European home,” a continent without dividing lines and borders based on hostility.

Russia and the West no longer perceived each other as adversaries in a potential conflict. At the same time, the West no longer saw Russia as a serious geopolitical player with military, political, and other interests that might have run against Western principles and Western ideas of the post-Cold War world structure. Russia was in effect consigned to the modest role of a backyard, if territorially large, country that was to be tutored by the West on its foreign, defense, and economic policies and on all other vital matters.²

This role implied that Russia would silently put up with unfriendly moves that the West has been making for the past 15 to 20 years with unconvincing, not to say absurd, explanations. In this period, NATO has nearly doubled in size, coming right up to Russian borders; the United States has withdrawn from its Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty with Russia

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and instead has been building a unilateral global missile defense with an infrastructure spreading to various, including European, countries,³ developing the prompt global strike project⁴ and setting up military bases; principal Western countries have continuously been enlarging their military budgets; and there have been persistent efforts to oust Russia from its historical spheres of influence.

Unilaterally assuming the role of world policeman, the United States and its most zealous satellites began to impose their own rules on various parts of the planet. This has set off a wave of wars and conflicts that, according to objective estimates, have claimed more than a million lives, but possibly several million and triggered a global migration crisis, which is far from over.

Our fears that this policy would have unpredictable and extremely dangerous consequences were ignored as figments of our imagination. One instance was the absolutely shallow, flippant Western reaction to a speech made by Vladimir Putin in Munich in 2007, nearly ten years ago. In that speech, the Russian president drew a clear and simple picture of potential effects of double-standard hegemonic policies in a pseudo-unipolar world.

Hence, today's highly critical state of international relations is nothing unexpected. It is a logical outcome of a prolonged and determined policy of reformatting the world to match the interests of the United States and the West in general. It is also the aftermath of a line to drive Russia to the periphery of global processes, which has recently taken the form of more aggressive but fruitless attempts to isolate the country.

The protracted Ukrainian crisis gives extra gravity to this process. It has further soured Russia's relations with the West, primarily the United States and NATO. Many political scientists believe that the world is moving toward a new, comprehensive phase of confrontation that, in some respects such as internal dynamics, would be similar to some extremely dangerous aspects of the Cold War.

The West openly accuses Moscow of torpedoing the political and legal foundations of the postwar order in Europe, violations of international law, and aggressive schemes threatening European stability and the security of countries bordering Russia. The West also claims that Moscow is failing to comply with the Minsk agreements and warns that it will never recognize the "annexation" of Crimea and the returns of the referendum that enabled the Crimeans to state their historical will and reunite with Russia.

Thereby the West departs from objective principles and methods of analysis that are generally accepted in the scholarly world, and not only there either. It deliberately ignores causalities and takes events out of their political and historical context. Fair responses from Russia supported by conclusive evidence are branded as “Kremlin propaganda,” which the West tries to counteract by what, at the end of the day, is gagging.

THIS CONFRONTATION with its “possible/impossible” gamble is becoming increasingly dangerous. These days one almost routinely talks about the possibility of world war three, a war that would inevitably involve wide-scale use of nuclear weapons with consequences that everyone is well aware of as they have

been described in detail in scientific and political books and essays. The specter of a bloodcurdling nuclear catastrophe is again roaming the world, and humankind is getting used to it as part of today’s reality.

In these alarming circumstances, Russia should take a firm leadership role and propose a stabilization program, a set of pragmatic concrete measures to prevent deep crises such as the present-day crisis and consolidate the global security system. Unfortunately, in the West there are very few politicians today of the caliber of de Gaulle, Brandt, the Kissinger of the 1970s, or later figures such as Chirac, Schroeder or even Berlusconi, leaders who are capable of unbiased policies aimed at serving the needs of their nations and those of the entire international community. Nevertheless, there is increasing realization among some Western politicians and among experts who are close to ruling elites that the status quo is unacceptable, that the crisis has gone much too far and may have irreversible consequences.

More than ever before, the world needs constructive solutions that can improve mutual understanding and help build confidence; in a sense, it needs a new East-West détente, “détente 2.0” or “21st-century détente.”

In this article, we primarily try to explain why it is essential to aban-

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don the escalating confrontation and gradually resume dialogue on armaments control and on ways to reduce the danger of war.

Security should indeed be humankind's main concern. While the confrontation is gaining momentum, there is practically no progress on arms control in Europe. Russia has warned that it will not reduce its strategic nuclear forces any further without taking account of the global strategic stability situation. The Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) has effectively become part of history. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) is not doing enough to maintain security despite being the only security forum in its area of responsibility. Dialogue on the European missile defense is stalled. There have been departures from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF Treaty). The Treaty on Open Skies, which used to be seen as an insignificant addition to more serious agreements, is the only accord that still works, albeit not without snags.

Russia, as is well known, has reaffirmed its loyalty to the INF Treaty. It is not going to resume the manufacture of intermediate- and shorter-range missiles prohibited by the treaty or to withdraw from the accord because of the emergence of new types of weapons, even though the treaty needs some technical adjustments. On the other hand, Moscow accuses the United States of direct violations of the treaty and argues that U.S. measures in building a global missile defense represent some of these violations. Russia still adheres to the principle that the INF Treaty must remain in force, and that it should be universalized and extended to all nuclear powers. This principle is recorded in Russian-American statements at the 62nd Session of the UN General Assembly and at the Conference on Disarmament and in a declaration issued by the Russian and American presidents in Sochi, Russia, on April 6, 2008.

In 2014, the United States accused Russia of departing from the INF Treaty by testing a missile, although it still cannot explain what that missile was. At first Washington said that it was a P-500 cruise missile, and today it hints that it was one of the Kalibr cruise missiles, though air- and sea-launched Kalibr missiles have a range of 2,600 kilometers.

Russia responded with countercomplaints.⁵ The United States, Moscow said, "continues its tests in the interests of missile defense using target missiles which have characteristics similar to those of intermediate- and shorter-range ballistic missiles." The United States also "continues to increase production and use of heavy attack UAVs [unmanned aerial vehicles or drones] that clearly fall under the INF Treaty definition of

ground launched cruise missiles,” namely MQ-9 Reaper and Avenger drones. But Russia’s main source of concern are land-based Aegis Ashore interceptor missile systems, some of which were deployed in Romania in 2015 and some are due to be deployed in Poland. Aegis Ashore missiles use multifunctional launchers of the same type as the Mark 41 Vertical Launching System (Mk 41 VLS), a ship-borne launcher used for firing Tomahawk missiles.

The United States claims that these land-based Aegis missiles have detectable distinctive characteristics and that their launchers cannot launch cruise missiles, although the Americans refuse to be more specific. Russian officials respond that these explanations are too hazy to satisfy them and that they consider those weapons as intermediate-range missiles, something that Putin confirmed during a visit to Greece in May 2016. Russian-American consultations have failed to resolve the problem.

However, a compromise is apparently still possible. There are no essential obstacles to negotiating new memorandums of understanding or definitions (such as those in the ABM Treaty) of new weapon systems that would make the latter easily distinguishable from land-based intermediate- and shorter-range missiles.⁶ The two nations would also be able to negotiate parameters for tests of target missiles, a matter that was first raised ten years ago. They would be able to work out new definitions of combat drones and methods for distinguishing them from prohibited ground-based cruise missiles. They might reach an agreement on transparency measures for multifunctional vertical missile launchers that have been installed at U.S. missile defense bases in Romania and are going to be put up in Poland and Romania, and an agreement on detectable differences.⁷ Moscow, for its part, might address the United States’ concern over Russian tests of the new cruise missile.

The technical expert group that was set up by Russia and the United States when they resumed consultations might prove to be a useful mechanism for filling some of the legal gaps left by the INF Treaty. It might recommend specific technical parameters and characteristics. This would certainly be hailed in Europe and help strengthen the regional security system. On the other hand, even though both sides promise to comply with the INF Treaty, the absence of new agreements seriously impedes arms control both in the bilateral and in the European format.

Russian-U.S. talks on tactical nuclear weapons (TNWs) have been deadlocked for a long time. Russia refuses to disclose its amounts of

TNWs or the locations of their storage sites. It believes that having its TNWs on agendas for Russian-American security talks is a far-fetched and artificially inflated idea.⁸ Moreover, Russia accuses the United States of violating the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (Non-Proliferation Treaty or NPT) by modernizing its nuclear potential in Europe with “unclear objectives,” namely by deploying B61-12 aerial bombs, which are TNWs, in five European member countries of NATO. Moscow says that pilots from non-nuclear member countries of NATO are trained to use nuclear weapons in the course of joint nuclear missions and that this represents a violation of the NPT.

Neither Russia nor the United States is prepared to back down even though Obama has pledged under a Congress resolution to start negotiations with Russia, and even though key European nations have shown interest in discussing TNWs issues with Moscow.

In 2010, Poland and Sweden proposed that Russia unilaterally set up two nuclear-free zones – one in Kaliningrad region and one on the Kola Peninsula, i.e. in areas where the Russian Baltic and Northern fleets were based and where Moscow was expected to deploy TNWs. In a letter to key U.S. senators in February 2011, Obama announced that his administration would shortly start negotiations with Moscow to reach an agreement to reduce disparity between Russian and U.S. TNW stockpiles and on verifiable measures to implement it.

Though no negotiations have begun, experts and nongovernmental organizations have come up with quite many ideas that can form a sound intellectual basis for talks that all European countries need.⁹ These include proposals for measures such as checking whether doctrines on the application of TNWs match potential regional threats that they would be used to fend off; exchanging information on types and delivery means of TNWs and on sizes and location sites of their stockpiles; moving TNWs from operational deployment sites into reserves; and prohibiting their reactivation. These measures could be followed by visits to TNW storage sites, the provision of evidence of destruction of TNWs, visits to inspect personnel training courses, setting up an ad hoc consultative group to organize dialogue between Russia and NATO, the use of the Russia-NATO Council as a negotiation mechanism, and “consultations about consultations.”

However, none of these suggestions is likely to materialize in the near future. Apparently any such measure will become possible when Russia and NATO heal at least some of their deep rifts over European security

issues and restore confidence that is essential for a constructive dialogue. To sum up, at the moment Europe's TNW issue is a matter for non-governmental experts to deal with.

On multilateral disarmament, many of the Western countries practically completely side with Russia. They support key multilateral regimes created by the NPT, the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on their Destruction (the Biological Weapons Convention or BWC), the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on their Destruction (the Chemical Weapons Convention or CWC), the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva, and the disarmament activities of the United Nations.¹⁰ European countries prefer to stay away from practical moves on multilateral disarmament and nonproliferation issues (Germany is an exception, having become more active recently), watching what happens in contacts on these matters between Russia and the United States. At the same time, this is a fruitful set of issues to fuel a near-term revitalization of dialogue between Russia and the EU, including talks between Moscow and Group of Five Euro (G5), which has become one more forum on non-proliferation and arms control now that the Conference on Disarmament is stagnant and the Russian-American dialogue stalled.

As regards conventional armaments in Europe, the issue needs essentially new ways of approaching now that CFE is effectively defunct and the continent is the site of rapidly escalating military activity with the revival of plans to set up "European armed forces" and Russian concern about NATO putting up bases near its borders. Russia has completely suspended its participation in CFE, which has been an important element of European security architecture for nearly 25 years. The NATO member states that are CFE signatories have announced that they no longer have any commitments that apply to Russia but maintain their commitments applying to all other fellow signatory nations.¹¹

NATO's inflexible position in negotiations during the past decade and its pressure on Moscow to withdraw comparatively small troop contingents from Gudauta in Georgia and Kolbasnaya in Transnistria following decisions by the OSCE summit in Istanbul in 1999 have practically destroyed military transparency and predictability mechanisms for the entire space from the Atlantic to the Urals.¹²

It would be possible to use the OSCE as the site for a new process

involving 36 states – the 30 countries that have signed and ratified CFE and six NATO member nations that are not CFE signatories. This process could be pursued in the format of ad hoc groups. However, the Ukrainian crisis clearly rules out such a process. Obviously, large-scale disarmament measures would be a medium-term task and are unfeasible without Russia and NATO normalizing their relations.

Because of the mutual crisis of confidence, it would hardly be realistic to expect any near-term breakthrough. But that does not mean that we should passively wait for better times without making pragmatic attempts to resume constructive interaction. This position would play into the hands of groups in the West that base their policies toward Russia on Russophobia.¹³

There have been signs in the West lately, mainly in the EU, of some tiredness with the confrontation with Russia, and there have been suggestions, albeit rather indecisive, for relaunching armaments control processes, mainly focusing on European stability and security.¹⁴ These suggestions are based on the so-called Harmel strategy, a combination of a policy of deterring Russia and a policy of seeking negotiations with it.¹⁵

AS FOR practical ways of achieving military stability in Europe, this work might start today with negotiating step-by-step confidence-building and transparency measures.

Specifically, the following measures can be suggested (some of them are already being implemented):

- The Russia-NATO Council could relaunch its activities after a meeting in 2016, and the two sides could explore the possibility of developing new cooperation and consultation mechanisms. It might also be worth analyzing the possibility of updating the 1997 Russia-NATO Founding Act;

- Regular meetings between Russian parliamentarians and members of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly might be useful channels for exchanges of opinions. In our view, parliamentary and public diplomacy, a factor that has been pushed into the background in the past few years, might become an important means of normalizing the situation in Europe;

- Because of increasingly frequent flights by Russian and NATO warplanes near each other's borders,¹⁶ the two sides could sign an agreement or memorandum of understanding (similar to former Soviet-American

agreements) to prevent dangerous incidents and prohibit alarming military activity on both sides of the Russia-NATO borders. In fact, Moscow is already discussing risk reduction and transparency measures of this kind with the NATO leadership.¹⁷ Russia could also sign bilateral agreements to that effect with individual NATO member countries;

- Later on, mechanisms could be evolved to prevent incidents that might spark nuclear conflicts in Europe. Such mechanisms could be based on agreements similar to the 1973 Soviet-U.S. Agreement on the Prevention of Nuclear War and the 1987 Soviet-American agreement to set up national nuclear risk reduction centers in the then Soviet Defense Ministry and the U.S. State Department. There could, moreover, be multilateral Russia-NATO nuclear risk reduction centers, possibly with EU involvement. A European center for the prevention of dangerous incidents could be set up that would have a direct line of communication with the Russian Armed Forces General Staff and the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff (today, the latter practically has no functioning hotline linking it to the Russian General Staff). The Russian Defense Ministry has sent proposals to that effect to NATO. A memorandum of understanding that might be signed between Russia and NATO would give that body a second wind;

- Russia and NATO could set up a “group of sages” from among former prominent politicians and military leaders, experts, and members of nongovernmental organizations to discuss key challenges posed by TNWs, and make suggestions for stability and security guidelines for the Euro-Atlantic region and for practical measures. This group would, for instance, compare the military doctrines of the two sides. The OSCE has hosted a top-level meeting on doctrines, the OSCE High-Level Military Doctrine Seminar, which was held in Vienna in February 2016. Euro-Atlantic institutions could play a role in these processes, and neighboring states could make their contributions as well;

- Eventually, a “Helsinki 2.0” or “Détente 2.0” process could be launched to make an in-depth analysis of the Euro-Atlantic security system;

- Another important potential measure are broader contacts between the militaries of Russia and NATO in the interests of greater predictability and confidence and in order to prevent dangerous incidents and keep the two sides informed about each other’s activities in general. Such information could include warnings and notifications about large-scale troop movements and the stockpiling of large amounts of weapons, especially near mutual borders. There could also be exchanges of visits to military exercises, including snap maneuvers.

As a more distant objective, Russia and NATO could set up joint information centers on the coordination of military activities. The Russian Defense Ministry has already changed its rules on the disclosure of information on military exercises;

- In the absence of new arms control agreements, Russia and NATO could develop a system of mutual notifications about military exercises and naval and air force patrolling in the Baltic and Black Sea regions and elsewhere in order to avoid misinterpretations and dangerous incidents. Russia and the pro-U.S. coalition swap similar information in the Syrian conflict.¹⁸ In the future, Russia and NATO could ponder what additional security guarantees they could give each other under new agreements and what confidence-building and transparency measures they could take in border areas. They could provide each other with purely military information such as information on large stockpiles of weapons and on planned NATO troop redeployment to regions in Baltic states that lie near the Russian borders or to areas in Poland that are close to the border of Belarus.

Such mechanisms would chiefly be safety nets against dangerous incidents and systems to preclude dangerous instability;

- Russia and NATO members could consider joining forces in peacekeeping or counterterrorist operations in third countries where they have similar or identical interests. This would help build confidence between the two sides and between their militaries.

It might be best for Russia to start its cooperation contacts with NATO by building bilateral contacts with individual members of the alliance, say Germany or France, rather than with NATO as a whole;

- It definitely remains an extremely important task to develop more effective arms control mechanisms. This would involve work on agreements on intermediate- and shorter-range missiles, on treaties on open skies and on the Vienna document, and providing the OSCE with more resources for maintaining regional security.

Although today closer cooperation between Russia and the West in arms control may seem a utopian idea to some people, expert-level work on some aspects of the issue would help make all security activities in the Euro-Atlantic region more predictable and strengthen stability. Hence it would meet vital needs of both Russia and NATO and serve to reduce risks of conflicts.

THE UNITED STATES, Western Europe, and NATO need a new eastern policy no less than Russia needs to normalize its relations with the West. Détente 2.0 should be based on mutual determination to try to defuse current high tensions, which essentially are an unnatural state of international relations in the 21st century. Russia is not responsible for the confrontational sentiments that have swept the West in recent years. But it is Russia alone that is capable of taking the leadership of healthy forces, which exist everywhere, including in the United States and countries that are its principal allies, in tackling the paramount task of putting humankind back on the path of stable and productive development as an alternative to the dangerous course of all-out and escalating confrontation.

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Key words: détente 2.0, confrontation, Russia, United States, West, NATO.