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FROM NUCLEAR DETERRENCE TO COMMON SECURITY

On October 15, 2010 the *Izvestiya* newspaper published an article headlined “From Nuclear Deterrence to Common Security”. The article was co-written by Evgeny **Primakov**, the former Russian Prime Minister (1998–1999), Foreign Minister (1996–1998) and serving member of the governing board of the Russian Academy of Sciences; Igor **Ivanov**, the former Russian Foreign Minister (1998–2004), Secretary of the Security Council (2004–2007) and Professor at MGIMO-University; Evgeny **Velikhov**, the President of the Kurchatov Institute; and Gen. Mikhail **Moiseyev**, former Chief of the Russian General Staff and First Deputy Defense Minister of the Soviet Union (1988–1991). The authors put forward a number of propositions which have yet to win general acceptance. The PIR Center has asked several experts on international security to give us their opinion of the article and answer the following questions:

- Has the ideology of mutual nuclear deterrence really become obsolete?
- What is the future role of nuclear weapons in national security?
- Should nuclear disarmament be linked with conventional arms reductions?
- How can other countries be engaged in the nuclear disarmament process?
- How can the attraction of nuclear weapons be reduced for the smaller countries?

Security Index has put these questions to: Nobuyasu **Abe**, Director of the Center for the Promotion of Disarmament and Non-Proliferation at the Japan Institute of International Affairs and former UN Under Secretary General for Disarmament Affairs (2003–2006); Aleksey **Arbatov**, Director of the Center for International Security at the Institute of World Economy and International Relations (IMEMO), Russian Academy of Science, and PIR Center Advisory Board member; Lt Gen. Evgeny **Buzhinsky**, former Head of the International Treaty Department and Deputy Head General Directorate for International Military Cooperation at the Russian MoD (2002–2009); Col Gen. (rtd) Viktor **Yesin**, First Vice-President of Russia’s Academy of Security, Defence and Law Enforcement, Adviser to the Commander-in-Chief of the Strategic Missile Forces (RVSN); Steven **Pifer**, Senior Fellow of the Center on the United States and Europe and Director of the Brookings Arms Control Initiative; Alexander **Radchuk**, Advisor to the Chief of the Russian General Staff; Alexander **Savelyev**, Head of the Strategic Studies Department at the Center of International Security at the IMEMO; Yury **Fedorov**, PIR Center Executive Board member and Security Index Editorial Board member; and James **Acton**, Senior Associate of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

IGOR IVANOV, MIKHAIL MOISEYEV, EVGENY PRIMAKOV, EVGENY VELIKHOV:¹ The year 2010 has seen important events in the sphere of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, with a positive impact on global security. The presidents of Russia and the United States have signed a new Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty in Prague. It has made strategic ties between the two nuclear powers more stable, transparent and predictable. A summit on nuclear security in Washington has passed resolutions to enhance the safety of nuclear materials worldwide. The 2010 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Nonproliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) concluded with the signing of the final document on strengthening the treaty.



Useful as these steps are, they have not touched upon the strategic nuclear ideology of mutual deterrence. It is the paradox of nuclear deterrence that largely addresses the threats of the last century, while in the new global and multi-polar world, any major armed conflicts between great powers and their allies are highly unlikely.

At the same time, nuclear deterrence is not effective against the new threats of the twenty-first century, including the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and delivery systems, global terrorism, ethnic and religious conflicts, and cross-border crime. Nuclear deterrence in some cases can provoke proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

To prevent the negative impact of nuclear deterrence on cooperation among global players, it is necessary to decrease arms levels through pacts based on the principle of minimum sufficiency, and also to promote strategic stability to ensure equal security for all and exclude the possibility of the first nuclear attack or rocket launch due to technical error or erroneous interpretation of the other party's intentions or a lack of time for decisionmaking by the political leadership. The new START meets all these requirements, but much remains to be done.

The next stage of nuclear disarmament cannot be exclusively bilateral. It will require restrictions and confidence measures towards other nuclear countries. Unlike the United States, Russia's geostrategic position makes it accessible to all nuclear countries, which has to be taken into account for deep disarmament.

The concept of nuclear deterrence has become an insurmountable obstacle on the path to global nuclear disarmament. It is no secret that there are not just supporters, but also opponents of nuclear disarmament in the United States, Russia, and other countries. Some are still guided by Cold War stereotypes, but many voice specific and justified concerns related to the process of disarmament. Their arguments cannot be simply ignored. For example, there is a widespread belief in Russia that the country's nuclear potential is a key element of Russia's great power status.

We are convinced that Russia's foreign image will be largely ensured by its economic modernization, rising living standards, social and political rights and freedom, and development of science and culture. However, as long as the threat of "power projection" is used in international relations, Russia will have to retain sufficient military, including nuclear, potential to protect itself, its allies, and its lawful interests.

Thus, nuclear disarmament requires greater confidence among nations, along with greater international security and stability. The Obama administration has revised its global security agenda, shifting to a new, multilateral approach with a focus on strengthening global security regulations and institutions, the use of diplomacy in dispute settlement, and equal partnership with Russia. It is important that these principles are reflected in the foreign policy of the United States and its allies.

This applies to anti-ballistic missile defense, conventional weapons and strategic non-nuclear weapons, as well as space militarization plans. Taking a long-term perspective, we came to the conclusion that the world without nuclear weapons is not our existing world minus nuclear weapons. We need an international system based on other principles and institutions. A nuclear-free world shall not become a world of wars using other weapons of mass destruction, conventional arms, advanced non-nuclear weapons, and systems based on new physical principles. It is not just about major wars, but about local conflicts as well. Today, small countries view nuclear weapons as a means to offset the huge advantage of great powers in terms of conventional weapons. It is this idea that provokes nuclear proliferation at the regional level, triggering the threat of nuclear terrorism. To eliminate such threats, it is necessary to build a reliable mechanism for peaceful settlement of major and local international and border conflicts.

Nuclear disarmament necessitates a thorough overhaul of the entire international system. This will also help solve other key problems of the twenty-first century related to global economy and finance, energy supplies, environment, climate, demography, epidemics, cross-border crime, and religious and ethnic extremism. Nuclear disarmament is, therefore, not a goal in itself but rather an important area, precondition, and method for reorganizing international life on more civilized principles and according to the demands of the new century.

SUBJECT: IDEOLOGY. HAS THE CONCEPT OF MUTUAL NUCLEAR DETERRENCE REALLY BECOME OBSOLETE?

Alexander **Radchuk**—by email from Moscow:

The article is essentially a response to the Western group of Four Wise Men by Russia's own Four Wise Men, who are equal to their Western counterparts in terms of their political weight and stature. I believe the key proposition of this article is that a "world without nuclear weapons is not our existing world minus nuclear weapons." Hence the need for a *new system of international security* which would take into account the new geopolitical reality.

Of course, nuclear disarmament is not realistically achievable, not only in the near or medium term, but in the long term as well. But as a political goal, as a slogan, it can be useful in finding a solution to many other issues, as the article rightly points out.

I do not believe that the ideology of nuclear deterrence has become obsolete. It is undergoing transformations in line with the changing views of the role and place of nuclear weapons in national security. These transformations also reflect the appearance of new types of weapons which can effectively achieve the same objectives that could previously be achieved only with the help of nuclear weapons. Deterrence is always mutual, because it relies on the interaction of a rational pair of leaders (or elites) of two countries. It is always present in the relations between nuclear-weapon states if there is a possibility of a conflict between them which can potentially be resolved through the use of force.

Aleksey **Arbatov**—by email from Moscow:

I completely agree with the article by the four Russian statesmen. Its analysis goes further than the original and the follow-up articles by the four American wise men.

It is true that the ideology of nuclear deterrence has become obsolete. That is because, in the future, the role of nuclear weapons in national security will inevitably diminish—either as a voluntary policy or by necessity. It is possible that such a diminution will result from mutual nuclear weapons reductions or the strengthening of the NPT. But it can also result from the proliferation of nuclear weapons and from progress in military technology, missile defense systems and new space weapons.

Steven **Pifer**—by email from Washington:

The past 25 years have seen major changes in the political relationship between Washington and Moscow. Neither side today thinks of deterrence in the same way that it did during the Cold War; one obvious example: in the late 1980s, each side deployed some 10,000 strategic nuclear warheads, while they agreed under New START to reduce to 1,550 strategic warheads. That said, absent some very creative thinking, it seems to me that deterrence—perhaps a more benign form of deterrence—will remain part of both U.S. and Russian security policies as long as nuclear weapons exist.

Once New START is ratified and enters into force—I believe this is a question of when rather than if—the United States and Russia will need to consider what they do next. They should consider one more round of negotiations that would reduce *only* U.S. and Russian nuclear arms, hopefully including non-strategic and non-deployed strategic warheads as well as deployed strategic weapons. Keeping the negotiations bilateral for one more round would defer the complicated dynamic of a multilateral negotiation. After that, however, the process of reducing nuclear arms will have to be expanded to bring in other nuclear powers.

Alexander **Savelyev**—by email from Moscow:

I believe the point of the article by the four Russian statesmen is as follows. For all the achievements made in the area of disarmament and security in 2010, they say unambiguously that this is clearly not enough to counter the new challenges and threats in the twenty-first century. They believe that one of the obstacles to further progress towards a more secure world is the ideology of nuclear deterrence. They propose that further progress towards nuclear disarmament should be made through building "greater confidence among nations, along with greater international security and stability."

Although the authors propose what seems like a clear set of specific actions, their article still leaves the impression of incompleteness and lack of clarity on many issues. For example, they categorically assert that "the next stage of nuclear disarmament cannot be exclusively bilateral."



That is a moot point, at the very least. There are also questions about their proposal that further arms reductions should be based on the “principle of minimal sufficiency.” But the authors fail to explain what exactly that principle means in real terms.

Finally, the most contentious idea of the article is that of strengthening strategic stability as something opposite to the principle of nuclear deterrence. But strategic stability is in fact based on that principle. Any plan to strengthen strategic stability should include efforts to reinforce the principle of nuclear deterrence, regardless of the new meaning people try to attribute to strategic stability. All of the above suggests that the theoretical basis underpinning the idea of a world without nuclear weapons still needs a lot of work.

There is little doubt that the ideology of nuclear deterrence has become obsolete, as the authors of the article rightly point out. But, in my opinion, they should have made the next logical step and recognized that the principle of strategic stability has also become obsolete. It should be relegated to the dustbin of our history of confrontation and strategic stand-off between the two nuclear superpowers in the bygone era of a bi-polar world. We need to realize that we need new principles which would be more in line with the current nature of our multilateral relations. As a minimum, these principles should reject the very value and usefulness of nuclear weapons as an instrument of waging war or providing military security. If we manage to develop and agree such principles, nuclear disarmament will receive a new impulse. It will no longer depend on mathematical calculations to figure out how many times over we can destroy each other during the first or retaliatory strike. Such a move would also help us to engage third-party countries in the process of nuclear disarmament and reduce the attraction of nuclear weapons as an instrument of national security. These problems require a lot of hard work by the politicians, military, diplomats, and experts, preferably on a multilateral basis. I believe that the article calls just for that—albeit indirectly.

Yury **Fedorov**—by email from Prague:

The article by Primakov, Ivanov, Velikhov, and Moiseyev is a set of platitudes and truisms. Some of them are correct, while others have little in common with reality, to put it mildly. It is hard to argue with the authors’ assertion that nuclear deterrence (and in truth, nuclear weapons themselves) are powerless against international terrorism or transnational crime. But hundreds of books and thousands of articles have already been written to explain just that. Also correct, albeit trivial, is the authors’ conclusion, made after thinking in the longer time frame, that “the world without nuclear weapons is not our existing world minus nuclear weapons.” Unfortunately, the authors offer no solutions for how to make sure that wars are no longer part of international affairs. I would like to believe though that the answer to that question will be given after another round of deep reflection.

The questions raised by *Security Index* are more interesting.

The ideology of nuclear deterrence (and not only mutual deterrence) is a reflection of the actually existing situation in the relations between some, but not all nuclear-weapon states. That situation, for its part, results from a political or ideological conflict between them. The ideology—or rather the politics and strategy—of nuclear deterrence will remain for as long as there remain conflicts whose escalation is being prevented by means of nuclear deterrence, either mutual or unilateral.

Viktor **Yesin**—by email from Moscow:

The authors’ ideas about a long-overdue transformation of the concept of nuclear deterrence on our way to the goal of universal nuclear disarmament are clearly very attractive. These ideas are based on realistic assessments of our present situation. But in order to implement these ideas we need, as the authors rightly point out, a deep reorganization of the entire international system. Such a system needs to be based on a very different set of principles and institutions.

In my opinion the article is well argued and to the point. The question now is whether the international community will make good use of these recommendations. I really hope the ideas voiced by Primakov, Ivanov, Velikhov, and Moiseyev will be given serious consideration, especially by the leaders of the G20.

I agree with the proposition that the ideology of mutual nuclear deterrence has become obsolete. The main argument in favor of this proposition is that such an ideology is useless against the real threats of the twenty-first century. It is effective only against threats from the past century; the

likelihood of these threats materializing is now close to zero. The role of nuclear weapons in the national security strategies of the leading nuclear powers will diminish. At the same time, the so-called problem nations, which are facing pressure and the implicit threat of the use of force by the leaders of the international community, view the acquisition of nuclear weapons as a guarantee of their military security.

SUBJECT: THEORY. WHAT SHOULD BE THE FUTURE ROLE OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS IN THE INTERNATIONAL SECURITY SYSTEM?

Evgeny **Buzhinsky**—by email from Moscow:

The key phrase here is that “the world without nuclear weapons is not our existing world minus nuclear weapons.” The world must change. For now, it is too early to talk about nuclear disarmament.

The ideology of mutual nuclear deterrence is still working, although it is now playing a rather ritual role, since a conflict between the United States and Russia involving the use of nuclear weapons is almost entirely unrealistic. But nuclear weapons will continue to play a significant role in Russian national security until we have achieved an acceptable balance with our main conventional weapons partners (taking into account their membership of military-political alliances), especially the balance in high-precision weapons, and until nuclear disarmament becomes a multilateral process.

In order to achieve that balance, Russia and the United States will have to reduce their nuclear arsenals to the size of the Chinese or French arsenals, find a solution for the whole host of contradictions between India and Pakistan, and settle the Palestinian conflict. Unfortunately, all of the above is unrealistic for the foreseeable future. But it will be fundamentally important for the West to change its policy of foisting its own standards, especially in the humanitarian sphere, on the smaller countries.

Yury **Fedorov**—by email from Prague:

The role of nuclear weapons in national security depends on how the country’s leadership perceives national interests—and I am not talking only about the security interests which can be upheld through the use or the threat of use of nuclear weapons. These perceptions are different for each of the nuclear-weapon states. In some cases nuclear weapons are seen as an instrument of preventing a nuclear strike by the potential adversary. In others they are seen as a means of neutralizing the superiority of the potential adversary in conventional forces. They can be used to deter a third party from intervening in a regional conflict resulting from expansionist policies of a nuclear-weapon state. How effective such deterrence can be remains an open question. For example, a small nuclear arsenal could well be destroyed in a pre-emptive strike using modern high-precision non-nuclear weapons.

Theoretically, in a number of cases—though not always—nuclear disarmament can be linked not only to conventional arms reductions but, even more importantly, to eliminating the imbalances in this area, setting up regional or sub-regional zones of reduced military activity, and other confidence-building measures, including highly intrusive transparency regimes, etc.

Alexander **Radchuk**—by email from Moscow:

In the future the role of nuclear weapons will increasingly be limited to preventing global (large-scale) conflicts. In maintaining regional and local stability, preference will be given to conventional (especially high-precision) weapons.

There is no doubt that nuclear disarmament must be linked to conventional arms reductions. That is the only way of maintaining the balance of power, which will remain for a long time to come the cornerstone of global and regional security and strategic stability.

The issue of engaging other countries in the nuclear disarmament process is incredibly complex. It is impossible to find a definitive solution to this issue since no alternative has yet been found to nuclear weapons, especially for countries which are not very rich. That is why it will hardly be possible to reduce the attraction of nuclear weapons for the smaller countries. That is especially true given the example set by North Korea and Iran, who are using their nuclear programs as a trump card in their dealings with the outside world.



Nobuyasu **Abe**—by email from Tokyo:

I believe that the concept of nuclear deterrence is becoming obsolete; eventually it will become irrelevant because nuclear weapons will play an increasingly limited role in national security. Nevertheless, the concept retains its relevance for now, although its significance is substantially diminished compared with the Cold War period.

Nuclear disarmament must be linked to conventional arms reductions. These processes must run in parallel, although there does not have to be any rigid link between them. The success of the CFE has helped us to strengthen mutual trust and created a climate which had made it possible for Russia and the United States to sign the INF treaty. But if we make these two processes rigidly linked, so that one cannot make any progress without the other, it will be a serious obstacle to achieving our ultimate goals.

SUBJECT: PRACTICE. HOW CAN WE SOLVE THE KEY PROBLEMS RELATED TO NUCLEAR (NON)PROLIFERATION?

Aleksey **Arbatov**—by email from Moscow:

Nuclear disarmament must be linked to conventional weapons reductions. This is our main leverage in solving a number of issues, including high-precision weapons, missile defense, and weapons in space.

Other countries can be encouraged to join the nuclear disarmament process by reducing the role of nuclear weapons in our own doctrines and strategies, and by reaching reasonable agreements that would take into account their security interests. The attraction held by nuclear weapons can be reduced through a steady process of nuclear disarmament, by pursuing a determined nonproliferation policy and offering attractive economic and political incentives.

Nobuyasu **Abe**—by email from Tokyo:

In order to engage other countries, such as China, in the nuclear disarmament process it would be useful to improve political and security relations between the United States and Russia on the one hand, and China on the other. Clear signals that the US and Russian arsenals will undergo steady reductions will mean that China will have no need to increase its own nuclear arsenal, and that it will later be able to join the disarmament process. On the other hand, if China declares that it has no plans for achieving nuclear parity with the United States and Russia, and that it is ready to join the nuclear disarmament process, such a statement would help Moscow's and Washington's efforts.

Yury **Fedorov**—by email from Prague:

There are several ways of engaging countries other than Russia and the United States in the nuclear disarmament process. One way is to offer them sufficiently reliable security guarantees, similar to the guarantees given by the United States to its NATO allies. That is exactly how Western Germany was prevented from going nuclear during the Cold War. Another way is to persuade these countries that the threats they want to neutralize by means of nuclear deterrence no longer exist, or that their nuclear arsenals would be unable to neutralize those threats in any case. Finally, when talking about countries led by irrational leaders or groups, such as Iran or North Korea, the best way of achieving their nuclear disarmament is a disarming first strike. In any case, it is important to abandon the widespread but extremely naive notion that by cutting their own nuclear arsenals Russia and the United States can stimulate the nuclear disarmament of other countries.

James **Acton**—by email from Washington:

Primakov, Ivanov, Velikhov, and Moiseyev have got it exactly right. Nuclear disarmament is not merely about verifiably eliminating nuclear weapons but—primarily—about creating the conditions that would enable a world without nuclear weapons to be a safe and secure one. Unfortunately, the immediate challenges are such that the arms reductions process may grind to a halt long before the world ever needs to face the daunting task of crafting a robust non-nuclear security architecture.


Agreeing limits on deployed strategic weapons—the staple of arms control—is likely to be the easy part in the next round. Much harder are all the other issues that Russia and the United States face: ballistic missile defense, high-precision conventional weapons, tactical nuclear weapons, upload capability, and heavy ICBMs. Whether agreement on these issues is even possible remains to be seen—but, even in the best case, a treaty on further reductions is some years away. In the meantime, I hope the pursuit of a treaty will not prevent the two states from agreeing on a range of mutually beneficial confidence-building measures. They could open the Joint Data Exchange Center, verify the absence of tactical nuclear weapons at sites where they used to be stored and conduct a joint assessment of the threat that cruise missiles pose to silos to give but three examples.

Moscow and Washington are increasingly concerned about nuclear-armed states besides one another. However, the simple reality is that today Russia and the United States still possess nuclear arsenals over 20 times larger—and considerable more capable—than anyone else. While the arms reductions process must eventually be multilateralized, it is far too early to do so. This is not to deny that other nuclear-armed states have a role to play. They can and should participate in more informal multilateral confidence-building and transparency measures. Moreover, they could also be examples. Other nuclear-armed states, some of which face considerably more acute threats than either Russia or the United States do today, appear to have been just as successful in deterring aggression but with much smaller arsenals. This should prompt Moscow and Washington to should ask themselves whether they have anything to learn about nuclear strategy from the “minnows.” Rethinking nuclear strategy—and, in particular, the value of large arsenals—would make the next steps significantly easier.

Viktor **Yesin**—by email from Moscow:

The inherent link between nuclear disarmament and conventional disarmament was recognized back in the 1960s, when the NPT was being negotiated. Lack of progress on conventional arms reduction and especially new measures being taken by the United States to develop new and highly capable conventional weapons systems, including missile defense systems and high-precision weapons, could potentially not only freeze the nuclear disarmament process but even reverse it.

As for engaging other countries in the nuclear disarmament process, that would be possible by establishing an auxiliary body in the framework of the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva to deal with nuclear disarmament issues—as stipulated, for example, in the Final Document of the 2010 NPT Review Conference. But the priority at the current stage is to conduct a conference on nuclear disarmament in the Nuclear Five format, i.e. attended by the United States, Russia, Britain, France, and China. Such a conference would enable these nuclear-weapon states to strengthen mutual trust and develop new rules of conduct, synchronizing their actions on proportionate reductions of their nuclear arsenals.

The way to make nuclear weapons unattractive for the smaller countries is to eliminate the very motivation of these countries for acquiring nuclear weapons. The primary task here is to offer all the countries which do not have nuclear weapons legally and internationally binding guarantees that the nuclear-weapon states will neither use nor threaten to use their nuclear weapons against non-nuclear countries. Then at some point in the future an international convention banning nuclear weapons could be adopted. 



For more information on disarmament, please visit the section “Ways towards Nuclear Disarmament” of the PIR Center website: <http://pircenter.org/view/disarmament/eng>.

NOTE

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