

Russia's Nuclear Quest Comes Full Circle

Lessons from Two Post-Soviet Decades

Vladimir Orlov

On December 25, 1991, Mikhail Gorbachev handed over the briefcase containing Russia's nuclear launch codes to Boris Yeltsin. Eighteen months after Russia declared its sovereignty from the Soviet Union and six months after his election as Russian president, Yeltsin received the keys to the country's nuclear arsenal. Yet another agonizing six months would pass before Russia firmly established its status as the legal successor to the Soviet Union in matters of nuclear weapons. Over the next several years an awareness slowly developed about what kind of heritage Russia had acquired and how best to put that heritage to use.

'Continuity' was a word that jumped out at the beginning of Yeltsin's administration and was used immediately in relation to the policy of nuclear non-proliferation. No matter what external pressures the new Russia might experience, especially in its first five years, any statements and actions in the sphere of nuclear non-proliferation, which were often distorted by these pressures, still remained 'continuous.' Simply put, Russia continued the traditional Soviet non-proliferation policy. It was *traditionally Soviet*, and not a policy of the last years of Gorbachev's rule. Since then, nobody in Moscow has fiddled with the idea of creating a nuclear-weapons-free world by 2000 or any other magical date.

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NOT A BURDEN!... REALLY?

The presence of nuclear weapons in Russia is much more of an asset than a liability. Yeltsin and his first team understood immediately that nuclear weapons are not a burden. Yet how does one reap dividends from this “tangible asset” and “non-burden”? That has proven to be a real headache.

The way Russia gained complete control over its own nuclear arsenal is both as thrilling and weird as anything Russia experienced in the early 1990s. The sole distinction is that the risks now stretch far beyond the borders of the former Soviet Union.

The Soviet Union had conducted some nuclear activity in each of the fifteen Soviet republics. Moreover, a number of nuclear weapons had been deployed to those regions as well. Moscow was aware that if nuclear weapons were allowed to remain outside the Russian Federation for a long time, it would be very difficult to ensure their safety. Tensions grew in early 1992 on media rumors in the U.S. and Israel (attributed to “reliable intelligence sources”) that Kazakhstan had allegedly sold Iran one or two nuclear warheads. Although it was clear at once that those rumors were baseless and had political implications, there was barely a single person in Moscow who could guarantee that this “fantasy” would not turn into reality if the government wasted any time.

When Russia's nuclear policy was still in its infancy, the government's most dramatic step was concentrating all former Soviet tactical nuclear weapons (TNW) in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. The Soviet military managed to largely anticipate the further development of events before the legal formalization of the Soviet Union's collapse. This competent step would drastically reduce the real threat of nuclear proliferation, which otherwise would inevitably follow soon after the Soviet Union's breakup. The withdrawal of tactical nuclear weapons, in military language, “took place in a complicated operational environment in view of an upsurge in the activity of political groups,” some of which might try to use force to prevent this withdrawal.

Let me draw just one example. Tactical nuclear weapons were removed from Azerbaijan amid tight secrecy, and the armaments were delivered to a military airfield without incident. However, a group of civilians from the Azerbaijani Popular Front blocked the runway and tried to prevent the aircraft from taking off. The situation was so tense

that the crew had to fire warning shots from the mid-range bombers sent to transport the nuclear weapons. Fortunately, the crowd dispersed, there were no casualties, and the aircraft left safely.

The main problem after the collapse of the Soviet Union was the presence of strategic nuclear weapons, alongside those in Russia, in three other newly-established countries: Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan. Kazakhstan's nuclear arsenal was equivalent to the nuclear forces of Britain, France and China combined on the day the Soviet Union collapsed.

Initially, Russia laid no claim – at least verbally – to the undivided control over strategic nuclear forces. On December 21, 1991, two weeks after the emergence of the Commonwealth of Independent States and the date of Kazakhstan's accession to the organization, the four countries signed the Alma-Ata agreement on joint measures to control nuclear weapons. On December 30, 1991, the CIS countries in Minsk concluded an agreement whereby they recognized “the need for a unified command of the strategic forces and of maintaining unified control over nuclear weapons.” Article IV stipulated that “until the complete elimination of nuclear weapons, decisions on the need to use them shall be made by the President of the Russian Federation in coordination with the heads of the republics of Belarus, Kazakhstan and Ukraine, and in consultation with the other heads of state of the Commonwealth.”

In reality, the unified strategic nuclear force was never created. The very idea of forming it was a compromise, to which Russia agreed at a dramatic moment immediately after the Soviet Union's breakup. Moreover, Yeltsin was keen to reassure the West, as well as to earn the army's benevolent neutrality towards the dismantling of the Soviet Union. At the time many military leaders were adamant that the central command of the nuclear force should remain, so this desire of the Russian leader played a major role.

Whatever the case, just one closer look at the Minsk agreement is enough to see that it was shaky. In addition, none of the states that emerged in the territory of the former Soviet Union, except for Russia, was able to maintain an adequate readiness, proper technical condition, and security of nuclear warheads, as well as highly-qualified and adequately paid employees. In addition, “multiple control” not only failed to reassure the West, but, on the contrary, caused a nervous reaction: “Whose finger is on the nuclear button?”

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The lack of an effective Defense Ministry in Russia made things worse. First, General Konstantin Kobets held the office of defense minister (there was no ministry, though) from August 19 to September 9, 1991. Subsequently, the position was abolished altogether. Furthermore, there was not a defense minister in the Russian government set up in October-November 1991. Yeltsin wanted Gorbachev to think he had no intention of dismantling the integral state, because if Russia set up a Defense Ministry of its own, this action would have been seen as one of the most "explosive" options that could put an end to the Soviet Union. It was only on March 16, 1992 that Yeltsin signed a decree establishing the Russian Defense Ministry and appointed himself acting Defense Minister. Pavel Grachev took over on May 18. The spring and summer of 1992 saw Grachev's tough confrontation with Marshal Yevgeny Shaposhnikov, a former Soviet Defense Minister, who then was appointed to lead the CIS Joint Command. This agency was amorphous and powerless, something especially evident against the background of the rapid expansion of the powers vested in Grachev and his ministry, including those in matters of nuclear arms control. By the autumn of 1992, one of the "nuclear briefcases" went to Grachev, and in the spring of 1993 another one was removed from Shaposhnikov. As a result, all effective control over the strategic nuclear forces continued to be implemented exclusively from Moscow, without any participation from Minsk, Kiev or Alma-Ata.

On June 6, 1992, nine CIS member-states (Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Ukraine) confirmed their support for Russia's participation in the nuclear weapons nonproliferation treaty (NPT) as a country possessing nuclear weapons, and declared they were ready to join the NPT as non-nuclear weapon states. On that day, the question of Russia's status as the legal successor to the Soviet nuclear potential was finally settled.

Yet it took another two years for all strategic nuclear weapons to be withdrawn from the territories of Belarus, Kazakhstan and Ukraine to Russia. There were no problems in Belarus and the last nuclear warhead had left the country by the end of 1996. Kazakhstan, which in terms of technology was able to independently produce nuclear weapons on par with Ukraine and certainly more than Belarus, experienced a brief, but

heated, debate about whether it should declare itself a nuclear state. However, President Nursultan Nazarbayev firmly quashed the controversy, for he had decided to make his country a good example of progress towards a nuclear-free world. By the autumn of 1996, Kazakhstan had no nuclear weapons left in its territory.

However, Ukraine was a much more complicated case.

In May 1993, Ukraine's famous political figure of the day, Serhiy Holovaty, told me: "We should have a powerful deterrent against Russia's aggressive policy. Otherwise, Ukraine will suffer the plight of Georgia, Moldova and Tajikistan, where Russia is reasserting its vital interests with imperial methods." Yet at that point one Ukrainian diplomat (now foreign minister) Kostiantyn Hryshenko felt obliged to intervene: "It is a great problem and a hard fact that we cannot afford at the military, political, or economic level to keep nuclear weapons." It was the confrontation of these two positions that determined the situation from 1992-1993.

The Ukrainian politicians who pressed for the preservation of the country's nuclear status were not sincere. In fact, Ukraine hoped this nuclear bluffing would, firstly, bolster its prestige as an independent country on the international stage, and, secondly, and most importantly, that it would worm out substantial economic aid from the West in exchange for the subsequent transfer of warheads located in its territory to Russia.

In January 1994, in a trilateral statement by the presidents of Russia, Ukraine and the U.S., Ukraine finally confirmed its non-nuclear status and pledged to send all of its nuclear weapons to Russia. Kiev, in fact, achieved all its aims, including Russia's obligation enshrined in the declaration "to refrain from economic coercion" and "to respect existing borders."

Initially, Moscow felt certain that the withdrawal of nuclear weapons from Ukraine would be resolved in a "brotherly manner" and without outside interference. However, in the end it had to accept the involvement of the U.S., whose participation was not merely symbolic and mediatory, but equitable, if not crucial.

By the end of 1996, Russia had pooled the entire nuclear arsenal in its territory discreetly and without a loss. Moscow took no steps that might cement cooperation with CIS countries in nuclear energy and nuclear safety following this nuclear withdrawal from post-Soviet space.

The unspoken message was: "We have so many problems of our own at home that we do not care about your problems." Russia made the same foreign policy mistake in other areas too in the 1990s. In 1994, Russia ignored a request from Kazakhstan to accept enriched uranium from the Ulba plant, and, in 1998, the country refused to take more than four kilograms of enriched uranium from Georgia. As a result, the U.S. took over what was Russia's natural role. The Americans began to systematically work with nuclear institutions and experts from CIS countries. Russia's self-disengagement logically resulted in its ousting.

UNDER PRESSURE

Russian policy in the field of nuclear non-proliferation and arms control is divided into two stages. One fits within the framework of the 1990s. The other, which started in the early 2000s, has continued to this day.

A distinctive feature of the first stage was that the nuclear non-proliferation policy was implemented under the influence of hard domestic political circumstances and enormous pressure from external players.

There are two major problems as far as domestic factors are concerned. Firstly, a deep economic and social crisis that shook Russian society, coupled with instability and growth of the terrorist threat. Neither the Russian nuclear industry nor the nuclear weapons complex as a whole had been prepared for such a strain.

Export contracts were used to rescue the nuclear industry. However, there were not enough contracts, and some potential clients waiting on the doorstep of the agencies concerned (the Iranians, Pakistanis) were not always free of controversy. Romantic dreams about the prospects for cooperation with "the new friend" the United States quickly ran into harsh realities: one can recall the anti-dumping measures against Russian uranium and the sanctions against Glavkosmos for its cooperation with India. Interdepartmental coordination inside Russia turned out to be lacking; nearly every contract now required the rubber stamp of U.S. senators.

The first Chechen war, started in 1994, caught the Sredmash Empire (the Soviet Union's omnipotent nuclear industry agency known under the euphemistic name Ministry of Mid-sized Machine Building) completely off guard. Terrorists set their eyes on nuclear facilities, which had no protection even from the air. Today, when the situation has been more

or less resolved, I can say that it was our tremendous good fortune in the 1990s that Russia avoided a large-scale nuclear terrorist attack.

The situation was not any better in the armed forces. On the face of it Russia's nuclear shield was still there, but people in the know were perfectly aware that it was aging rapidly. In November 1996, Major-General V.N. Obarevich, an inspection chief at the Defense Ministry's nuclear weapons safety watchdog, admitted: "I just cannot imagine how people survive [...] those who handle nuclear weapons. People have no money to live on. An officer, a major, who is supposed to be on duty tomorrow for the maintenance of nuclear weapons, faints from hunger today. How can nuclear weapons be serviced? This is a piece of ammunition, you know, which requires expendable materials. For these supplies there is no money, either. Today we are in a situation where we do not even have the proper slippers to give officers to walk about the warheads maintenance area – wearing ordinary shoes there is not allowed. That's the limit!"

The other internal problem was a side effect of Yeltsin's *Byzantium* – confusion in decision-making, personnel reshuffles, and a tug of war between agencies. In the Soviet Union conflicts of interest had existed among various departments, too, especially between the Foreign Ministry and the military-industrial complex. Libya in the late 1970s provides a good example. Libyan leader Colonel Gaddafi had requested assistance from Soviet organizations to create a full nuclear fuel cycle, including a heavy-water reactor, using natural uranium and a heavy water production unit. Soviet leaders and the atomic agency were ready to make a deal (Gaddafi then offered about \$10 billion), but the Foreign Ministry, according to the recollection of Ambassador Roland Timerbaev, disagreed, and the sensible approach prevailed. In addition to "supreme collective intelligence," i.e. the ruling Politburo, there was a special government approval mechanism to consider such decisions in the interdepartmental commission for the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons.

Such a commission or any other coordinating body has never been restored in independent Russia. This mistake was illuminated several times during Yeltsin's administration. Atomic Energy Minister Victor Mikhailov's trip to Tehran in January 1995 and the signing of a protocol of intent to build a gas centrifuge plant was a characteristic example.

Mikhailov (known in the West for his book entitled *I Am a Hawk*) exceeded his powers, which, in the context of Russia's non-proliferation policy, should not have been done by any means. The Kremlin learned about Mikhailov's activities from the Americans.

Although largely forgotten now, there was a time in Russia's recent past when the national legislature played a very active and independent role in various matters, including foreign policy decisions. Government agencies had to master the skill of presenting solid arguments in favor of the ratification of various international agreements on non-proliferation and arms control, such as START II (buried by the U.S. Senate), or agreements with the U.S. on the Nunn-Lugar program for Cooperative Threat Reduction (CTR), which made it possible to obtain hundreds of millions of dollars to strengthen Russia's nuclear security. Also, there were dishonorable affairs (in terms of Moscow's international standing), like the case in which the then vice president, Alexander Rutskoi, put in front of parliamentarians bagfuls of secret documents related to so-called "red mercury."

Nonetheless, without understating the role of the internal problems, it should be recognized that the main pressure on Russian policy in the field of non-proliferation, and which often deformed it, came from the outside.

Yeltsin had to study "on the go," and all of a sudden he discovered that there are no friends in foreign policy except for one's own interest. Since Russia's foreign policy interests failed to be formulated, and the country had been weakened from within, it sometimes proved a sitting duck for the U.S. in the CIS and other regions of the world where Russia tried, sometimes haphazardly, to "hoist its flag or keep it flying."

At first there was "preliminary bombardment." From 1992-1994 the world was systematically persuaded into believing Russia was "a big nuclear bazaar," where anyone could buy nuclear materials. Since I myself at that time had a chance to dig through piles of documents on that score, I do not idealize the situation then with accounting and control of nuclear materials in Russia, especially since I have just mentioned the acute problems the nuclear industry was facing. However, this was one portion of truth per portion of half-truth and two portions of lies. The "nuclear smuggling" affairs were perfect examples. They culminat-

ed with the August 14, 1994 seizure at Munich Airport of 300 grams of weapons-grade plutonium, which arrived on a flight from Moscow and likely came from Obninsk, a nuclear center near the Russian capital.

However, as I look back on the events of fifteen years ago, I think not only about how sophisticatedly Russia was being “harassed and bullied” at the time, but also about what a “blessing in disguise” it was. The “smuggling scandals” drew the attention of the Russian authorities to the true problems of nuclear safety, and the G8 was mobilized for the Global Partnership program. Launched in 2002, the program attracted some desperately needed funds into Russia to ensure the security of nuclear materials and weapons, to dismantle defunct nuclear submarines, and to eliminate chemical weapons.

The most visible U.S. pressure on Russia was manifest in two cases: Iran and India.

After Iran started building the Bushehr nuclear power plant in 1992, Russia gradually came to realize it was sinking in quicksand. On the one hand, Russia needed money badly. Also, this transaction was to be Russia’s first major nuclear deal in the Middle East, with many others to come, and not only in the nuclear sphere: projects were also planned for hydrocarbons and military-technological cooperation. On the other hand, Russia’s Foreign Intelligence Service publicly stated in 1993 that Iran was implementing a “program for military-applied research in the nuclear field,” but even in case of its unhindered development Tehran would need at least ten years to create nuclear weapons. As a result, construction proceeded at a slow pace (the nuclear power plant became fully operational only in September 2011), relations with the Iranians improved and worsened alternately, and the level of bilateral trade and economic cooperation remained surprisingly modest. However, Russia repeatedly received criticism from the Americans and Israelis: for questionable deals with Iran (or attempts to conclude them) and contracts that were absolutely clean in terms of nuclear non-proliferation.

In 1995, Moscow suggested considering Russian-Iranian nuclear cooperation as “a kind of proving ground for objectively exploring the opportunities and the need for a member state of the nuclear club to comply with its obligations under Article IV of the NPT, under which the contracting parties should promote equitable, non-discriminatory coop-

eration in the field of peaceful nuclear energy, but at the same time not permit conditions for the spread of nuclear weapons." Yet Russia's calls fell on deaf ears. For several years Russia was faced with firm obstructions to military-technical cooperation with Iran, and Yeltsin was forced in 1995 to sign a humiliating Russian-U.S. document. Russian concessions were a signal to Iran and other nations. Russia "bows" to the Americans, thus the country is perceived as an unreliable and non-independent partner in nuclear affairs.

U.S. pressure on Russia over its cooperation with India was one more painful lesson. During his 1992 election campaign, Senator Albert Gore initiated a ban on Russia's supply of cryogenic rocket engine technology to India. Although Russia at that time was not a party to the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) and had no liabilities under that plan, it was forced to comply with the U.S. demands.

In 2000, Russia supplied India with 58 tons of uranium dioxide for the Tarapur nuclear power plant to ensure its safe operation. Washington interpreted this as a "serious threat" to the non-proliferation regime. This time Russia refused to give in. The bitter irony – and lesson – is that a few years later the U.S. would initiate the removal of restrictions on nuclear trade with India, imposed by the Nuclear Suppliers Group.

FROM WASHINGTON TO BEIJING

Paradoxically, the U.S., the one country that has exerted the most pressure on Russia in nuclear non-proliferation matters for the past two decades, remains Russia's major partner in the dialogue on non-proliferation and disarmament. In the past, the Soviet Union and the U.S. kept non-proliferation issues apart from their differences and even in the most difficult years (including the particularly dramatic 1983) consultations on non-proliferation proceeded as usual. The two nuclear superpowers, with more than 95 percent of the world's total nuclear weapons, know they have a special responsibility for the future of the international non-proliferation regime, which they themselves had built in a different historical period.

Russian-U.S. cooperation in strengthening the architecture of the regime culminated with the extension of the NPT in May 1995. Then Russia and the U.S. worked very closely as a team and were productive.

Their interests fully coincided in that the treaty should be prolonged indefinitely. In terms of the regime's effectiveness, such an approach was far from obvious: it would be much better, for example, to extend the NPT for successive 25-year periods, and to "take the temperature" in between to see if all parties are fulfilling their obligations in good faith. Yet from the pragmatic point of view, it was important for Washington and Moscow to prevent the treaty from falling apart. They coped with their mission beautifully, by consensus, without a vote. Although after that their interest in the NPT, as one should have expected, largely receded, and later both parties confined themselves to mostly ritual actions and declarations.

In recent years Russia and the U.S. continued a steady, relatively comfortable, and generally consistent dialogue on all nuclear non-proliferation, disarmament and nuclear safety issues (with no serious nuances related to the change of administrations and foreign policies in Washington). If one takes a closer look, it turns out that even such external irritants as the conflict over Iraq in the early 2000s or over missile defense now do not radically change this picture.

The crisis in multilateral disarmament efforts may now put the level of good relations to test. Above all I mean the collapse of the Geneva Conference on Disarmament, which has for many years been unable to break the deadlock in launching negotiations on a treaty banning the production of fissile materials for military purposes (Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty – FMCT). The Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) has not yet entered into force (and it will not in the foreseeable future – let there be no illusions about that), so in this context the lack of any progress on the multilateral track requires surgical intervention. There has also been little movement on reform of the Conference on Disarmament, or its dissolution and the formation of a new structure based on new principles. FMCT talks need to be moved to another platform, yet there has been little progress on this. Russia is not prepared for this, while the U.S. has been getting ready.

It is remarkable that Russia's dialogue on nuclear non-proliferation with China outwardly looks as consistent, although Russia has a far shorter history with China than that with the U.S. At this point, Russian and Chinese interests in non-proliferation coincide significantly.

Nevertheless, we can easily find some distinctions, such as approaches to the Indian sub-continent. Moreover, Beijing has not ratified the CTBT (which brings it closer to the U.S.). Yet with regard to Iran, North Korea and FMCT prospects, the countries' positions look very similar. When it comes to disarmament, the situation is both much harder and easier. On the one hand, Beijing, as far as we know, has a very modest nuclear arsenal. One suspects that China could rapidly increase its nuclear arsenal, but there have been no signs of this as yet. Thus, any comparison with Russia would be out of place. On the other hand, the positions of Russia and China are almost identical at the level of declarations. Today, the number of points of agreement between Moscow and Beijing is growing. Both countries share the sharply negative attitude towards strategic missile defense and want to prevent an arms race in outer space.

Yet at some point, Moscow will have to leave this comfortable *ménage à trois* and choose between Washington and Beijing. The problem of strategic missile defense might work as a catalyst, or this state of uncertainty could last for a while. Nobody today is prepared to make such a choice.

HAVING ONE'S SAY

One may have the impression that over the past 20 years Russia has failed to formulate an independent policy in the field of nuclear non-proliferation. Indeed, Moscow's foreign policy in general and in non-proliferation, in particular, has been and still remains largely reactive: we shall respond to NATO's eastward expansion (and then retreat); we shall respond to U.S. aggression in Iraq (and then forget about it); we shall respond to the missile defense deployment plans with Iskander launchers in the Kaliningrad region (shall we, really?). But such a vision would be simplistic.

In the field of nuclear non-proliferation, Russia has put forward dozens of major initiatives in recent years. It has coped with the "recipient of international aid" and the "lame duck" syndromes. In non-proliferation and disarmament matters, Russian diplomats have pursued their own policy with confidence and without regard for others.

The main problem of Russia's non-proliferation policy, the way I see it, is this: serious and well-considered proposals are allowed to die quietly as a rule. Russia is helpless in promoting its own grand initiatives.

In April 1996, Yeltsin gathered the G8 nuclear safety and security summit in Moscow. The meeting was a success; the leaders signed declarations drafted in advance and were generally kind to Yeltsin. However, one fundamental Russian initiative was ignored; namely, countries that possess nuclear weapons should make a commitment not to deploy such weapons outside of their own territory. Today, four of the five acknowledged nuclear states (and eight of the nine actual nuclear states) adhere to this rule. The deployment of nuclear weapons beyond national territory is not prohibited by the NPT, but such a ban would strengthen the spirit of the treaty. Today this concerns the remaining two hundred or so U.S. warheads in Europe. Russia kept recalling this initiative later on, but it did so in passing, even shyly, and the net effect was that the proposal would never deserve the slightest mention in any of the NPT-related documents, or in large security forum resolutions.

In the mid-1990s, 'nuclear-weapon-free zones' were all the rage as the non-proliferation catchword. Indeed, this is one of the most effective, well-established regional mechanisms to reduce the number of nuclear weapons in the world and their location. Today the entire Southern Hemisphere is nuclear-weapon-free, yet Russia is understandably more interested in the Northern Hemisphere. There have been several initiatives (first and foremost, one put forward by Belarus) proposed for the creation of a NWFZ in Central and Eastern Europe. Russia at the time vigorously supported this initiative, while Poland condemned it as vigorously. Today Russia has enough authority to promote this initiative, authored by one of the countries of the region and its ally. However, the issue is no longer in fashion and has largely been forgotten.

Another proposal by Moscow (supported by Washington) was to make the bilateral Russian-U.S. treaty banning intermediate and shorter-range nuclear missiles universal. This decision could be a significant step forward in reducing missile threats around the world. However, after successfully pioneering this idea, Russia has remained idle (very "successfully" too) instead of promoting it. Professionals understand perfectly well that the problem is extremely difficult, for it affects the interests of Russia's key partners, such as India. However, this passivity increasingly gives one the impression that, in the long run, Russia is not interested in the implementation of its own proposals; all the country

needs is "initiatives for the sake of initiatives" timed for some high-profile events.

Having learned to work with the U.S. and the G8, Russia is sometimes completely unable to interact with its natural allies and partners. Russia has missed many opportunities to raise support for its initiatives from the Collective Security Treaty Organization member-states. Nothing is being done within the CIS (the only example I can remember was joint work by Russia and Ukraine within the framework of proposals for Article X of the NPT). The resources of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization remain untapped. The BRICS group has in no way manifested itself in non-proliferation matters. It is clear that India's non-participation in the NPT makes the situation very delicate, but I have no doubt that, for example, the issue of nuclear power engineering in relation to non-proliferation would be an attractive theme for BRICS.

I can see only two positive exceptions here, both of which are relatively recent.

First, Russia has made a proposal for multilateral approaches to the nuclear fuel cycle through the creation of an International Uranium Enrichment Center (IUEC) in Angarsk. The Foreign Affairs Ministry and the Russian State Atomic Energy Corporation (Rosatom) have performed remarkably well. The IUEC was created, it operates, and, though it does not yet involve Iran (whose participation many wanted to see originally), four countries are already cooperating and the center is open to others. When our partners, primarily those in the developing world, see such persistent, systematic work towards a certain goal and its achievement within the proclaimed deadlines, respect for Russia's policy cannot but increase.

Second, Russia has put forth a proposal to convene an international meeting to discuss the prospects of a zone free from weapons of mass destruction (WMDFZ) in the Middle East. This "ace up the sleeve" proved to be timely and appropriate, and in 2010 the idea was followed up in a NPT Review Conference resolution. Now it is important to ensure that in preparations for the 2012 Conference on the WMDFZ in the Middle East, Russia should not lose its independent voice nor feel overwhelmed by the amount of preparatory and often unrewarding work that has to be done to translate the idea into practice in exchange for

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political dividends for Russia. Furthermore, this should *not be to the detriment of Russia's own interests.*

WHAT FOR?

There are two trends in understanding what the new Russia expects from nuclear non-proliferation.

First, there is a school of thought I would call the 'activists.' They invariably start with: "Yes, we want..." (new agreements, initiatives and joint projects). They sincerely believe that remaining a leader in the international regime of nuclear non-proliferation is in Russia's favor, for it enhances the country's role and prestige in the world. Moreover, Russia is also able to take part in key global meetings. In other words, it is better to have a VIP access-without-restrictions card than not to have one at all. The NPT is eternal, nuclear weapons are powerful, our tanks are fast, and one simply needs to take part in the Brownian motion called non-proliferation, to participate in everything and everywhere "to keep up the momentum."

However, there is another school, that of "don't-give-a-damn." These people usually begin with something like: "No, we don't need anything." If they are to be believed, Russia is a VIP cardholder anyway and nobody will ever take it away. So why bother then? Why brace oneself? What is the use of all these "action plans"? A good way to show off just a little bit, that is all ... Russia should not make new commitments that might limit its freedom to maneuver.

Russia should rethink what it has inherited from the Soviet Union in nuclear matters, the role of nuclear weapons, and their relevance in the future. Furthermore, Russia should consider how it can best use to its own advantage the opportunities offered by the nuclear non-proliferation regime, and how this regime can be modified to meet the realities of the new century.

For now, however, Russia, after the first round of the nuclear quest, is still living off the interest of Soviet capital.