

**CICERO FOUNDATION GREAT DEBATE PAPER**

**No. 11/04**

*September 2011*

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**RUSSIA'S EMBRACE OF TACTICAL  
NUCLEAR WEAPONS**

**ITS NEGATIVE IMPACT ON U.S. PROPOSALS FOR  
NUCLEAR ARMS REDUCTIONS**

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ISBN/EAN 978-90-75759-00-6

Cicero Foundation Great Debate Paper No. 11/04

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The Cicero Foundation was founded in 1992 in Maastricht, on the occasion of the signing of the Maastricht Treaty, as an independent pro-Atlantic and pro-EU think tank.

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## ***ABSTRACT***

In this paper is analyzed how the U.S. and Russia have implemented the Presidential Nuclear Initiatives of the early 1990s, in which both the U.S. and the Soviet Union/Russia committed themselves to considerable reductions of tactical nuclear weapons (TNWs). While the U.S. has strongly reduced its stockpiles, this is not the case with Russia. On the contrary, since 2000 Russia has put a new emphasis on TNWs in its military strategy. This new policy has been accompanied by changes in Russia's security concept, its nuclear doctrine, and its foreign policy doctrine which have led to growing concerns that TNWs could play a role in the former Soviet space as 'blackmail weapons' vis-à-vis the Baltic states and Ukraine. Because of the central position of TNWs in the Russian military strategy, President Obama's proposals to start negotiations on TNWs is met with skepticism in Moscow. Only a total elimination of these weapons or an equilibrium on a low level can take the threat away. However, prospects for a negotiated outcome are bleak. The U.S. administration should carefully weigh the pros and cons of TNW negotiations and prevent these from offering the Kremlin an easy propaganda tool that divides the Atlantic alliance. It should especially resist the Russian condition that before starting the negotiations the U.S. should withdraw its (few) remaining TNWs from Europe.

**“... the number of tactical warheads in the U.S. arsenal has dwindled from thousands to approximately 500. Russia has also reduced the size of its tactical nuclear arsenal, but starting from much higher levels and at a slower pace, leaving it with an estimated 5,000 such devices – 10 times the number of tactical weapons held by the U.S.” “As in the Cold War, nuclear weapons are central to the Russian geopolitical calculus.”(1)**

Gabriel Schoenfeld

### *Introduction*

In recent years the Kremlin has put a new, and unexpected, emphasis on tactical nuclear weapons as weapons that are fit to fight a limited war. This renewed interest of the Russian leadership in using tactical nuclear warheads on the battleground is a reason for concern. Recent reviews of the Russian Security Concept and the Foreign Policy Doctrine (Medvedev Doctrine) make these concerns even more acute because they could, eventually, announce new military adventures in the Russian Near Abroad. Ironically, this new Russian assertiveness takes place in an international context in which many political leaders and NGOs have been pleading for a reduction in the role of nuclear weapons. In his Prague Speech of April 5, 2009, US President Barack Obama even went so far as to plead for the abolition of *all* nuclear weapons. The question, however, is whether the US will find a cooperative partner in the Kremlin to achieve this goal.

### *Tactical Nuclear Weapons: Obsolete Weapons?*

Until recently there was a general feeling that tactical nuclear weapons (TNWs) had become obsolete and, if they might have had a function in the past, they no longer had any function to play in the post Cold-War world. The idea that tactical nuclear weapons had no real function - neither on the battleground, nor as a deterrent - was one of the reasons that they were not included in the nuclear arms reductions agreements between the Soviet

Union/Russia and the United States. Tactical nuclear weapons were, one could almost say, the *stepchildren* of the nuclear arms reduction agreements. They were considered less a *quantité négligeable* (because there were so many of them), than a *qualité négligeable*. At the end of the Cold War tactical nuclear weapons seemed to represent a *minor* problem in comparison to the large stocks of strategic nuclear weapons. Therefore the leaders of the two superpowers thought that they would be able to tackle this problem not by prolonged treaty negotiations, but rather by a 'quick fix' in a less official way. It was U.S. President George Bush Sr., who, in September 1991, just after the failed coup in Moscow of August 1991, made a unilateral declaration that the US would destroy a great number of its tactical nuclear weapons. This example was promptly followed by Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev, who announced that the Soviet Union would remove all *naval* tactical nuclear weapons. The Soviet reductions would include all nuclear tipped sea-launched cruise missiles from surface ships, multi-purpose submarines, and land-based naval aircraft. A considerable portion of these warheads, he said, would be destroyed; the remainder would be centrally stored. Gorbachev also announced that the Soviet Union would destroy all nuclear landmines and ground-launched short-range nuclear weapons, including nuclear artillery shells.

After the demise of the Soviet Union in December 1991, the Soviet nuclear arsenal was taken in charge by the Russian Federation and in January 1992 Russian President Boris Yeltsin reiterated Gorbachev's proposal. Both U.S. and Soviet/Russian unilateral declarations are now known as *Presidential Nuclear Initiatives* (PNIs). It is worthwhile to note that in taking these Presidential Initiatives the U.S. and Russia not only proclaimed their willingness to destroy the delivery vehicles – as was the case in the agreements on strategic nuclear weapons reductions – but also the *warheads*.

The rationale behind these unilateral Presidential Nuclear Initiatives of 1991-1992 were four:

1. The disintegration of the Soviet Union created an urgency for immediate action
2. Many tactical nuclear weapons were obsolete
3. There was a growing feeling that these weapons were useless

4. New technological breakthroughs in the 1990s, especially in the field of precision-guided weapons, had a great impact on the way conventional warfare was conducted and recourse to nuclear battlefield weapons seemed less urgent than before.

I will elaborate on these four elements hereunder.

### *A Sense of Urgency*

When the Soviet Union disintegrated, both the U.S. and Russia had a shared interest in making certain that the tactical nuclear weapons that were deployed or stored outside Russia on the territories of the new republics, would not fall into the hands of unstable governments, or – even worse – of terrorists or local militias that were fighting civil wars. Quick action, therefore, was necessary. It was this sense of urgency that was behind the Presidential Nuclear Initiative of U.S. President Bush. But the unilateral, and almost improvised, way the problem of these weapons was approached had important consequences for the situation today. In the absence of a formal treaty there were only *unilateral* commitments and promises. These commitments and promises could not be verified: there were *no* legal binding texts, there were *no* binding procedures, and there were *no* mutual inspections. One did not even know the exact *number* of tactical nuclear warheads that Russia possessed in 1991-1992. This is because, with respect to Russia's nuclear stockpiles - despite all the talk of *glasnost* - there reigned a total absence of transparency. Russia never gave any specific information. It only provided *percentages* of the (original, *unknown* number of) warheads that it said to be in the process of destroying or storing. Gorbachev had announced a rather concrete schedule: naval warheads would be eliminated by 1995, anti-aircraft missile warheads by 1996, nuclear mines by 1998, and nuclear artillery shells and warheads of tactical missiles by 2000. But there was no verification of this process and, when asked, Russian officials gave different percentages at different moments, a fact which did not help to boost trust.

When, in the year 2000, the deadline for the full implementation of Gorbachev's and Yeltsin's unilateral initiatives had been reached, it was a big question for Western observers as to how to make a reliable estimate of the remaining size of the Russian tactical nuclear stockpile. According to estimates in the early 1990s, at the time that Gorbachev and Yeltsin announced their PNIs, the Soviet Union/Russia possessed between 15,000 and 25,000

tactical nuclear weapons.(2) The great gap between the two figures indicates the level of uncertainty. This uncertainty was also reflected in the great variety of estimates of the number of Russian warheads that would be withdrawn or destroyed. These numbers oscillate between 8,000 and 15,000. If one would take the higher figure for 1991 of 25,000 and deduct the lower figure of 8,000, then there would still remain 17,000 tactical nuclear warheads in Russia *after the implementation of the PNI*. And if one, additionally, would take into account the fact that an unknown portion of warheads included in the PNI had not been destroyed, but centrally stored, then the total number of remaining warheads could still be even higher.

Of equal importance is the question as to how these figures compare with those of the United States. The United States had already begun to reduce its tactical nuclear warheads in the late 1970s, more than a decade before President Bush announced his 1991 Initiative. The number of operational warheads declined from more than 7,000 in the mid-seventies to below 6,000 in the 1980s.(3) In the middle of the 1990s the number of operational warheads sank to fewer than 1,000.(4) In June 2010 the total was reduced to 150-200 B61 gravity bombs which were stored at six bases in five countries: Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, Italy, and Turkey. "A December 2008 Defense Department report on the U.S. nuclear mission stated that the number of US nuclear weapons in Europe had been reduced 'by more than 97 percent since their peak in the 1970s' (...)."(5) The U.S. commitment to reduce the role of tactical nuclear weapons was expressed in the Spratt-Furse amendment, adopted in 1994 by the U.S. Congress, which forbade research and development that could lead to the production of nuclear warheads with a yield below five kilotons. Although this amendment lost force in 2003, subsequent U.S. legislation permitted the production of so-called 'mini-nukes' only with the consent of Congress.

### *Obsolete Weapons?*

In the year 2000, when the PNIs expired, the number of tactical nuclear warheads still deployed by Russia exceeded by several times the number deployed by the U.S. Did this mean that Russia cheated on its promises? Not necessarily. Certainly, it might have been cheating and, due to the lack of verification procedures, it easily could have done so, but there is no doubt that a certain number of Russian tactical nuclear weapons had been

destroyed. This for the simple reason that many of the warheads were *obsolete*. Through the Cooperative Threat Reduction Program of U.S. Senators Sam Nunn and Richard Lugar the United States has helped Russia and the other successor states of the Soviet Union to deactivate more than 7,000 nuclear warheads since 1991.

### *Useless Weapons?*

Tactical nuclear weapons are *battleground* weapons that can be used during a *limited* war. The U.S. was the first to invent them in the beginning of the 1950s and to develop strategies for their use. After the Soviet Union had acquired the H-bomb, the U.S. strategy of massive retaliation was no longer considered to be credible. In a small conflict in Europe the U.S. could no longer credibly threaten to destroy Russian cities if the other party had the same weapons. But the U.S. and NATO were confronted with the fact that the conventional armies of the Warsaw Pact outnumbered by far the conventional forces of the NATO allies. The *flexible response* strategy was NATO's answer. It was a strategy to deploy and eventually use tactical nuclear weapons in the European theater in order to compensate for the numerical inferiority of NATO's armies. Russia followed the example and thereupon started a tactical nuclear arms race. But soon strategists began to doubt the usefulness of these weapons that were conceived to deter an enemy from starting an offensive or from continuing an attack. Instead of de-escalating a conflict - as they were supposed to do - they could easily lead to a further nuclear escalation on both sides. Even Henry Kissinger, who in his book *Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy* still had defended the concept of a limited nuclear war(6), later became more skeptical. But because the weapons existed they remained in the arsenals of both superpowers. The Soviet Union issued a no-first use declaration, yet the U.S. and NATO refused to do the same, due to their ostensible conventional inferiority vis-à-vis the Warsaw Pact countries in the European theater.

After the disintegration of the Warsaw Pact and the demise of the Soviet Union, the roles were inverted. Now it was no longer NATO that was confronted with a conventional superiority of the other side, but Russia that was confronted with an expanding NATO. The conventional superiority of the NATO armies was still enhanced by the technological revolution in conventional warfare, due to the introduction of precision guided weapons and integrated command and control systems, both fields in which the U.S. was the undisputed

leader. This situation led Russia to reconsider the role of tactical nuclear weapons. Tactical nuclear weapons were increasingly considered an essential building block in the Russian panoply to repair this situation. As Gunnar Arbman and Charles Thornton of the Swedish Defence Research Agency remarked, "...There is a paradox in Russia's military decline: the deterioration of its conventional forces means Russia must rely more heavily on its TNWs."(7)

#### *Putin's New Emphasis on a Role for Tactical Nuclear Weapons*

In the period before he became the Russian President, Vladimir Putin had already played a crucial role in this new emphasis on tactical nuclear weapons in the Russian military strategy. In March 1999, Putin, the new director of the FSB (the main successor organization of the former KGB), was appointed by Yeltsin to Secretary of the Security Council of the Russian Federation.(8) A few weeks later, on April 29, 1999, Putin attended for the first time the Council when it had met in a closed meeting in order to discuss the Russian nuclear deterrence. The closed meeting lasted only one hour and a half and was so secret that even the chiefs of Air Force, the Navy and the Strategic Rocket Forces (the last is the department in charge of the Russian strategic nuclear arsenal) were excluded from participating. In the briefing after the meeting, Security Council Secretary Vladimir Putin said that the Council had adopted three documents: one on the development and security of nuclear weapons research, one on a concept for the use of nuclear weapons, including tactical nuclear weapons and "the third document, said Putin, was so secret that even its title could not be disclosed."(9) This led to all kinds of speculation in the media. There were rumors that the NATO intervention in Kosovo, that had been initiated one month earlier, could have played an important role here. This appears true due to the fact that the ratification of START II had been blocked by the Russian State Duma following NATO intervention. This represented only a mixed blessing for Russia, because it meant that Moscow had to extend the service life of aging missiles that had been scheduled for elimination under the Treaty.

But this fact alone could not be the subject of the secret third document. One guess was that it had more to do with new initiatives concerning the production and the use of tactical nuclear weapons. According to the Russian defense expert Pavel Felgenhauer, the Council had taken the decision to develop a new, *low-yield* nuclear warhead.(10) The yield was

estimated to be between twenty-five and one hundred metric tons of TNT, which would give it a force of between 1/150 and 1/600 of the bomb of Hiroshima (which was approximately 15 kilotons). Felgenhauer wrote that the number of these new weapons might reach up to 10,000.(11) Not only would this mean that Russian military strategy had taken a U-turn by putting a new emphasis on tactical nuclear weapons, but by introducing these low-yield weapons on such a massive scale, it would trivialize these weapons and make their use in an early phase of a conventional conflict more probable. The question was raised how these plans fitted into the Presidential Nuclear Initiatives of 1991-1992 that intended to diminish the number of tactical nuclear weapons. Because these Initiatives neither had a legally binding character, nor contained any control and verification mechanisms, one had to satisfy oneself with the reassuring words of the Russian government.

#### *The New Russian Strategy of Nuclear "De-escalation"*

It was clear that the *high-tech* NATO intervention in Kosovo had produced a shock effect on the Russian leadership. The Kremlin was no longer certain that it could effectively defend its territory against even a limited conventional attack. It could, therefore, have come to the conclusion that it would need to resort to the use tactical nuclear weapons. The sense of urgency became clear when in June 1999, immediately after the April meeting of the Russian Security Council, a large scale military maneuver was organized with the code name: *Zapad 99* (West 99), in which an attack on the Kaliningrad oblast was simulated. During the simulation, this small Russian enclave between Poland and Lithuania could only be held for three days. In order to avoid defeat, Russian troops deployed tactical nuclear weapons 'to de-escalate' the conflict.(12) The simulated use of nuclear weapons included two TU-95 [Bear] and two Tu-160 [Blackjack] heavy bombers, launching nuclear air-launched cruise missiles (ALCMs) against Poland and the United States.(13) After the Zapad 99 maneuver had tested the new strategy, it was formalized in a new National Security Concept that was officially published on January 14, 2000. This was exactly two weeks after Putin had been appointed to Acting President by Yeltsin.

The difference between this new Security Concept and the preceding one of 1997 was important. In the 1997 version one could read that Russia preserved for itself the right to use "all forces and means at its disposal, including nuclear weapons, in case an armed aggression

creates a threat to the very existence of the Russian Federation as an independent sovereign state.” In the new version it was written that Russia preserved for itself the right to use “all forces and means at its disposal, including nuclear weapons, in case it needs to repel an armed aggression, if all other measures ... have been exhausted or proved ineffective.” According to Nikolai Sokov, “The difference boils down to the conditions for using nuclear weapons and their mission. No longer are nuclear weapons reserved solely for extreme situations; now they can be used in a small-scale war that does not necessarily threaten Russia’s existence.”(14)

The new Russian emphasis on tactical nuclear weapons under Putin led to concern in the West. In the U.S. Nuclear Posture Review of 2001 this concern was not openly ventilated, but a secret paragraph was leaked on a website in which one could read that “Russia’s nuclear forces and programs (...) remain a concern. Russia faces many strategic problems around its periphery and its future course cannot be charted with certainty. U.S. planning must take this into account. In the event that U.S. relations with Russia significantly worsen in the future, the U.S. may need to revise its nuclear force levels and posture.”(15) Charles Ferguson of the Center for Nonproliferation Studies wrote that “the leaked portions of the full report sparked widespread concern that the United States could develop new nuclear weapons and *lower the threshold of nuclear use.*”(16)

#### *The Zapad 2009 Maneuvers: A Simulated Nuclear Attack on Poland*

On September 8, 2009, exactly ten years after the Zapad 99 maneuvers, the Russian army organized a new Zapad exercise, baptized Zapad 2009. This time it was not an exclusively Russian affair: the armies of both Russia and Belarus participated in these joint military maneuvers that were conducted on Belarusian territory and in the Kaliningrad oblast. According to the Russian government 12,600 troops (about 6,500 troops from Belarus and 6,000 from Russia) participated, which kept the total just under the limit of 13,000. This is the number, defined by the OSCE, which would have given other OSCE countries, and especially the neighboring states, the right to send observers. In fact, this number was misleading, because Zapad 2009 was a part of a greater military maneuver, called *Osen 2009* (Autumn 2009). This maneuver consisted of Zapad 2009 and Ladoga 2009. Ladoga 2009 took place in the Leningrad Military District and had already started on August 10, but it ended on

the same day as Zapad 2009. Officially 7,000 troops participated in the Ladoga 2009 exercise, which would bring the total of the troops participating in Autumn 2009 to about 20,000. According to estimates, however, the total number of troops was greater than 30,000.(17) NATO spokesman James Appathurai protested that the extent of the exercises, in addition to the fact that Russia did not invite observers to the maneuvers, were considered by NATO as a violation of the Vienna obligations.

These maneuvers were very intimidating from the perspective of the three Baltic states, Finland and Poland.(18) And this not only because they were conducted close to the borders of these countries, but also because of the character of the exercises: in the enclave of Kaliningrad Russian troops stormed a “Polish” beach, they attacked a gas pipeline, and – last but not least - they simulated a tactical nuclear attack on Poland.(19) This led to an outcry in Warsaw and the Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Radosław Sikorski, wrote an official letter to the Secretary General of NATO and to President Obama, asking the latter to station US troops on Polish soil. The simulated attacks on Poland during these maneuvers were accompanied by *real* cyber-attacks originating in Russia.(20) Although the maneuvers were announced as purely defensive, preparing for the eventuality of ‘terrorist’ attacks, both the character of the exercises and the build-up of the troops were considered by Western military analysts to be extremely offensive. According to Anna Dunin, the Ladoga 2009 maneuver resembled “the Red Army’s preparation for the invasion of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, and an attack at Finland in 1939. For the purpose of the exercises, the border between Russia and these states was accepted as a hypothetical front line.”(21) Unprecedented was also the participation of three of the four Russian fleets(22): apart from naval infantry forces of the Baltic Sea Fleet, three large landing ships with the Black Sea Fleet’s naval infantry and two large landing ships of the Northern Fleet participated in amphibious operations in the Kaliningrad enclave. The participation of these three fleets, coupled with the emphasis on amphibious landing operations, are rather unusual methods to fight ‘terrorists’.

According to the Estonian defense analyst Kaarel Kaas, “The scope of the exercises, the weaponry used, the troops involved and the scenario rehearsed all indicate unequivocally that Russia is actually rehearsing a full-scale conventional strategic military operation against

a conventional opponent. A look at the map makes it clear that there are no other conventional forces in the region than those of NATO member states.”(23)

In the same period that this nuclear saber rattling took place, announcements were published in the Russian press on the coming modernization and extension of the non-strategic nuclear arsenal. “Probably, tactical nuclear weapons [on submarines] will play a key role in the future,” told Vice Admiral Oleg Burtsev, deputy head of the Navy General Staff, the Russian News agency RIA Novosti. “There is no longer any need to equip missiles with powerful nuclear warheads. We can install low-yield warheads on existing cruise missiles (...).”(24) These long-range cruise missiles, launched from attack submarines were intended to attack aircraft carrier strike groups, as well as coastal targets.(25) These announcements clearly *contradicted* commitments made by Gorbachev in his 1991 Presidential Nuclear Initiative, commitments later reiterated by Yeltsin, that the Soviet Union/Russia would remove all naval tactical nuclear weapons.

#### *A New Nuclear Doctrine: The Preventive Use of Tactical Nuclear Weapons in Local Wars*

The Zapad 2009 maneuvers, like the Zapad 99 maneuvers ten years earlier, were destined to test a new military doctrine. This appears true because in the fall of 2009 the Security Council of the Russian Federation was preparing a review of the Security Concept of 2000. The secretary of the Council, Nikolay Patrushev - a former director of the FSB – gave two weeks after the Zapad 2009 maneuvers an interview to *Izvestia* on the proposed changes in the military doctrine.(26) He stated that the old doctrine (of 2000) was “a document of a period that has gone, that of the end of the twentieth century.” In the strategic situation in the world until 2020, he said, “the emphasis will change from massive armed conflicts to local wars...” The new doctrine offered, according to him, new options to permit the possible use of nuclear weapons: “In critical situations for the national security one should also not exclude a preventive nuclear strike against the aggressor.”(27)

The possible use of *preventive* nuclear strikes in *local* wars implied a totally new approach by the Russian leadership. In the strategic concept of 1993 the use of nuclear weapons was reserved to its function as a deterrent in *global and regional* wars. Its use against non-nuclear states (that had signed the Nonproliferation Treaty) was excluded (as long as they did not fight alongside a nuclear armed aggressor). In the strategic doctrine of 2000 the

possible use of nuclear weapons had already been extended from regional to *local* wars. And in 2009, the last inhibition was given up: the use of tactical nuclear weapons against non-nuclear countries that are signatories of the Nonproliferation Treaty was no longer excluded. The presence of a 'terrorist threat' or any other pretext could now be invoked to justify a preventive nuclear strike in a local war against a *non-nuclear* country. These changes in the Security Concept of Russia seemed to reflect the neo-imperialist ambitions of the Kremlin, especially directed against former Soviet republics that were not members of NATO, such as Ukraine and Georgia, but eventually also Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan. Would the Kremlin really be prepared to deploy, or threaten to deploy, tactical nuclear weapons in a conflict with what itself calls its 'brother nations'? Let us take a look at the facts.

A Russian threat to use tactical nuclear weapons against so called 'brother nations' is not new. In his book *Collapse of an Empire*, Yeltsin's former prime minister, Yegor Gaidar, tells the following story:

"In the fall of 1991 the Russian leadership did not discuss plans for using nuclear means against other republics in the event of territorial disputes. However, perceptions are as important as facts. From an article in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* of October 24, 1991: "Even such a democratic newspaper (I used to think) as *Moskovskie Novosti*... published on the front page information from the corridors of the Russian government that there was a possibility of a preventive nuclear strike on Ukraine. When Ivan Plyushch and I were in Moscow, I asked Gorbachev and Yeltsin about it. Gorbachev replied, 'You know, Kostya, you'll do better if you read fewer newspapers.' And Yeltsin said that he had discussed the possibility with the military and that they don't have the technology. Neither reply satisfies me or the residents of Ukraine."(28)

Just read one more time the last two lines: Yeltsin, who at that time was hailed in the West as a genuine democrat, "discussed the possibility [of a preventive nuclear strike on Ukraine] with the military." This discussion, however, had no follow-up, and the reason for this was: "because they [the military] don't have the technology." So, a preventive nuclear strike on Ukraine – at that time formally still a part of the Soviet Union - was not excluded for moral reasons, but for *pragmatic* reasons: because in the turmoil of a Soviet Union that was falling apart, the use of tactical nuclear weapons with all the safeguards and precautions it

presumed, was no longer viable. That was then, during the turmoil of 1991. But eight years later again rumors emerged about the possible use of tactical nuclear weapons, this time against Chechnya.(29) The question, therefore, is: is there any reason to assume that Putin's government would act with more restraint than Yeltsin's – especially after having amended the Russian Security Concept in such a way as to make the use of tactical nuclear weapons against non-nuclear states possible?

#### *Protecting Russian Citizens 'Wherever They May Be'*

The new Russian Security Concept of 2009 is, in itself, already a sufficient reason for concern. And it is even more so if one considers another recent development. Some weeks after the war in Georgia, President Medvedev gave an interview to the three government controlled Russian TV stations, Channel One, Rossiya, and NTV. In this interview he developed the five points of the "Medvedev Doctrine" on Russia's foreign policy priorities. The fourth point of this doctrine emphasized that "protecting the lives and dignity of our citizens, wherever they may be, is an unquestionable priority for our country."(30) When the interviewer asked him if a separate law was needed to put this foreign policy in place, Medvedev answered: "The legal framework is in place and working, and there is no need for adjustments."(31) Later he changed his opinion, because one year later, on August 10, 2009, he would issue a proposal for a new law(32) that would be the legal basis for the use of the Russian armed forces beyond the borders of the Russian Federation. This law had become necessary because of the intervention of Russian troops in Georgia one year earlier. This intervention was not only a breach of international law, but – ironically – equally of existing *Russian* law. The new law would amend the Law on Defence by allowing the use of Russian military forces outside the borders of the Russian Federation for the following four tasks:

1. to counter an attack on the armed forces of the Russian Federation or other armies deployed outside the territory of the Russian Federation
2. to counter or prevent aggression against another government
3. to protect citizens of the Russian Federation abroad
4. to fight piracy and to guarantee the security of ship traffic

The first three of these four cases deserve special interest. The first case would allow the Russian President to use Russian troops stationed abroad in case these troops were attacked. Because Russia still has many troops and military bases in most post-Soviet states (i.a. in Armenia, Belarus, Ukraine (navy), Moldova, Georgia (South Ossetia and Abkhazia), Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan), this could eventually offer occasions to create 'incidents' and to interfere *manu militari*. The second case is "to counter or prevent aggression against another government." Here it is interesting that the word 'government' is used and not 'state'. This gives Russia the possibility to defend the 'government' of South Ossetia or Abkhazia against 'aggression' of the – legal - Georgian government, given the fact that these breakaway provinces are not recognized states in accord with international law. Because Russian military action abroad would not only be justified in order to counter aggression against another government, but equally to *prevent* aggression, this would Russia give the freedom to attack Georgia when the 'government' of South Ossetia felt threatened by Georgian military preparations.

The most important *nouveauté*, however, is the third case, which gives the Russian government the right to interfere militarily to protect Russian citizens abroad. In many post-Soviet republics not only live large ethnic Russian or russophone minorities, but in the past the Russian government has actively distributed Russian passports to non-Russians – especially in Georgia (South Ossetia and Abkhazia), Moldova (Transnistria), and Ukraine (the Crimea and Odessa).(33) Incidents and pretexts to 'protect' Russian citizens abroad are easily created or found. It is clear that these amendments to the Russian Law on Defence are in flagrant conflict with existing international law and with the provisions of the OSCE that in 1992 created the post of High Commissioner on National Minorities to promote the peaceful resolution of ethnic conflicts. The former Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Andrei Kozyrev, warned already in an article in *Foreign Affairs* in 1994 against 'extremist nationalists', and 'partisans of imperial policies', who "view the Russian-language population of the former Soviet republics as a kind of fifth column in the new independent states, following essentially the same logic as Hitler in relation to the Sudeten Germans."(34) This warning came – then – from a democratic member of the Russian government. Today the extremist nationalists against whom he warned are *in* the government and it are they who amend the laws. "Deputy Prime Minister Sergei Ivanov pointed out that ninety-two percent of Sevastopol's

residents were “our compatriots,” meaning Russian speakers,” wrote Taras Kuzio. “This view would be the same as France stating it has “compatriots” in Quebec and Francophone Africa.”(35) On October 23, 2009, the amendment on the use of Russian troops abroad was approved by the State Duma.(36)

### *The Ghosts of War: Is Russia Preparing for Nuclear Blackmail in its Near Abroad?*

On different occasions Russia’s neighbors have expressed their concern with respect to the Kremlin’s embrace of tactical nuclear weapons. On February 8, 2011 the Lithuanian minister of defence, Rasa Jukneviene, declared on the Lithuanian state radio that “Lithuania is concerned about the accumulation of tactical nuclear weapons at its frontiers, especially in the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad (...).” “It is a secret for nobody that those weapons are just beside us, in the region of Kaliningrad, but also east of our east frontiers (...).” “It is in our interest that all these arms, particularly tactical nuclear weapons that menace our very existence, do not pile up at our frontiers.”(37) Not only the presence of tactical nuclear weapons, but also the recent changes in the Russian Security Concept and foreign policy doctrine should set off alarm bells. The protection of Russian minorities *wherever they are*, as well as the *preventive* use of nuclear weapons even against *non*-nuclear countries that are signatories of the Nonproliferation Treaty: these measures are very menacing and are considered by the governments and populations of neighboring counties as possible building blocks to prepare for the next steps in the *reconquista* of the former Soviet empire. Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov thought it necessary to make reassuring remarks on the new military doctrine in the direction of Ukraine, stating that: “ ... no one, particularly our Ukrainian friends, should have reason for concern.”(38) But if the Baltic states, that are members of NATO, have reasons to worry, then this is certainly the case for Ukraine and Georgia. Western governments, however, seem – until now - not to be alarmed. Nor do most Western political analysts show a minimum of concern. On the contrary. At the same time that this Russian saber rattling was taking place, Alexander Rahr, who is director of the Russia-Eurasia program of the German Council on Foreign Relations, declared that “the West has ‘forgiven’ Moscow its military intervention in Georgia.”(39) Forgiven? Maybe one could hardly expect otherwise: Rahr is a prominent member of the Valdai Club, Putin’s personal ‘focus group’ for foreign policy which, apart from Russian experts, mainly consists of uncritical Western Putin fans.

### *An Imminent 'Desovereignization' of Ukraine?*

If it is true that the West has 'forgiven' Russia its aggression in Georgia, this could soon be regretted. History teaches us the lesson that unsanctioned aggression, instead of bringing peace, brings the opposite: more aggression, and often on a greater scale. It is telling that after the war in Georgia Russia has not kept a low profile, but, on the contrary, has accelerated its military build-up, flexed its muscles by continuing its strategic bomber patrols near NATO territory, simulated the use of tactical nuclear weapons, allowed preventive nuclear strikes on non-nuclear states, formulated a potentially aggressive foreign policy, and adapted its military doctrine to justify the use of its troops abroad. All these steps are signs on the wall and could announce trouble ahead. The position of Ukraine as an independent and sovereign state is particularly at stake. During the Russia-NATO Council session in Bucharest in April 2008, Putin called Ukraine "a complex State formation. If the NATO issue is added there, along with other problems, this may bring Ukraine to the verge of existence as a sovereign state."<sup>(40)</sup> *To the verge of existence as a sovereign state?* The menace could not be more clear, especially when Putin later in a discussion with President Bush added that Ukraine 'is not a real country'. On March 16, 2009, the Kremlin pundit Gleb Pavlovsky wrote in the *Russkiy Zhurnal*, a prominent Russian online magazine of which he is the owner, an article with the title "Will Ukraine Lose Its Sovereignty?"<sup>(41)</sup> This article, full of wishful thinking, was followed four days later by an interview with Sergey Karaganov, head of the Presidium of the Council on Foreign and Defense Policy, which had the title: "No One Needs Monsters. Desovereignization of Ukraine". In this article Ukraine was depicted as a failed state that was in a process of 'passive desovereignization'. The author warned that "...Russia will not want to see absolutely ungovernable territories close by."<sup>(42)</sup> Yuriy Shcherbak, former Ukrainian ambassador in Washington, wrote in a reaction: "In military language it is called the ideological-propagandistic support of the future operation on capturing the territory of a sovereign state."<sup>(43)</sup>

A similar scenario was already suggested by Leon Aron, an American analyst, one year earlier. "With almost three-quarters of Sevastopol's 340,000 residents ethnically Russian, and 14,000 Russian navy personnel already 'on the inside'," wrote Aron, "(...) an early morning operation in which the Ukrainian mayor and officials are deposed and arrested and the Russian flag hoisted over the city should not be especially hard to accomplish. Once

established, Russian sovereignty over Sevastopol would be impossible to reverse without a large-scale war, which Ukraine will be most reluctant to initiate and its Western supporters would strongly discourage.”(44) Taras Kuzio called the Crimea ‘Europe’s Next Flashpoint’. According to him, “seventy percent of Russians believe that relations with Ukraine could deteriorate over the sovereignty of the Crimea, and three quarters of Russians support the defense of Russians living in the Crimea.”(45) “Future conflict is no longer beyond the bounds of the imaginable,” wrote Kuzio. “Books outlining fictional future wars between Russia and Ukraine have become increasingly popular in Russia.”(46) Ukraine’s former minister of defense, Sergiy Grytsenko, warned that Ukraine’s military “could be made ready to defeat any large-scale Russian attack with minimal outside military assistance if Kyiv follows through on announced military reforms and if Ukraine is provided additional help with certain niche capabilities.”(47) A Russian attack on Ukraine would, indeed, not be comparable with the war against Georgia. Ukraine, with its population of 46 million, would make a formidable opponent.

And it is here that the Russian tactical nuclear weapons would, eventually, come into the picture. Against a non-nuclear Ukraine these weapons would make a difference. Russian tactical weapons are not only meant to compensate for the conventional superiority of NATO, they have a second – hidden – function: to serve as a means to put pressure and eventually blackmail the non-nuclear post-Soviet states. In an 1983 article Robert McNamara emphasized “that nuclear weapons serve no military purpose whatsoever. They are totally useless – except to deter one’s opponent from using them.”(48) This was true in the stand-off between the two superpowers. In the present situation, however, things are different. For a revisionist country that disregards the obligation of the Nonproliferation Treaty that forbids nuclear countries to threaten non-nuclear countries with nuclear strikes, it is possible to use these weapons for nuclear blackmail. The recent changes in Russia’s Security Concept, together with Medvedev’s five foreign policy priorities, make it possible to threaten to use these weapons in eventual armed conflicts in the former Soviet space. Not only the Baltic states, two of which have large minorities of ethnic Russians, have a reason to feel threatened. Ukraine especially has a reason to feel concerned. The Russia-friendly overtures of the pro-Russian President Viktor Yanukovich, who, in the Kharkiv Agreement of April

2010, extended the base treaty of the Russian Black Sea Fleet in Sevastopol from 2017 to 2042, and, eventually, to 2047, did nothing to change the negative attitude of the Kremlin vis-à-vis Ukraine. On the contrary, Russian politicians continue to denounce Ukraine and consider it at best an 'artificial' country that has no right to exist, if not a failed state and geopolitical 'monster' that is on the brink of a process of 'desovereignization'. Comments, such as made by Valery Fadeyev, editor of the political journal *Ekspert*, at the height of the financial crisis: "Ukraine is cheap, we can buy it,"(49) – although sounding less aggressive - express the same contempt for Russia's neighbor and its status of an independent state. "Russia's vociferous appetite is limitless," wrote Kuzio, "and every compromise made by Yanukovich will only lead to further demands on Ukrainian sovereignty."(50) The case of Yury Luzhkov, the former mayor of Moscow, makes this clear. In 2008 Luzhkov was barred from entering Ukraine after being declared *persona non grata* by the Ukrainian government because of his recurrent attacks on Ukrainian sovereignty over the Crimea. President Viktor Yanukovich revoked that decision in June 2010. Despite this, and despite the fact that Yanukovich had extended the Black Sea Fleet's presence in Sevastopol after 2017 for another 25 years, Luzhkov "told a press conference in Moscow on July 19 [2010] that he would not change his view on the status of Sevastopol which is 'a Russian city'. (...) We must never leave either Sevastopol or the Crimea; since losing Sevastopol which is strategically important 'would be tantamount to losing the south of Russia,' he told naval officers in Moscow three days later."(51) In the fall of 2011 between Russia and Ukraine a new stand-off is gaining momentum. The reason is the unwillingness of Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich, although considered to be 'Russia friendly', to accept Putin's invitation to enter the Customs Union of Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan, – a project dear to Putin, because this would recreate a Russia-dominated space which resembles the former Soviet Union. On May 19, 2011, the Ukrainian parliament has given priority to negotiations with the EU on a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA), which brings Ukraine in the long run more economic benefits. "Yanukovich," wrote Olga Shumylo-Tapiola, "understands that the choice is not a simple one of gas prices, it is about security and independence in real terms."(52) Ukraine, indeed, has to make a choice between becoming a Russian *guberniya*, a governorate ruled from Moscow, or to keep its independence.

### *Tactical Nuclear Weapons: The Ideal 'Blackmail' Weapon?*

According to Thomas Schelling there is a difference between small-yield nuclear weapons and other, conventional weapons, even if the distinction is not physical. This difference “is psychic, perceptual, legalistic, or symbolic.”(53) Even a small-yield weapon is, therefore, not ‘just-another-weapon’. “What makes atomic weapons different,” wrote Schelling, “is a powerful tradition that they *are* different.”(54) This difference is the *taboo* that rests on a habit of nonuse. The threat to use these weapons or the actual use of these weapons will produce a great psychological shock. “... The ‘ban’ on first use,” wrote Herman Kahn in 1963, “has in some sense been in effect for eighteen years. It gains force, real and symbolic, with each additional year. This suggests that with another decade or so of nonuse, a breach might be so unfamiliar an act, so fraught with danger, that an aggressor would make only tentative or gingerly use of nuclear weapons, feeling his way. Or he might seek his advantage in the psychological significance of the act – in its demonstration of commitment, even of recklessness or ruthlessness.”(55) Kahn continued: “... the possibilities for large gains by either straight blackmail or blackmail combined with some calculated limited use of nuclear weapons may grow very large.”(56) “In other words, that side that is more willing to escalate, and most capable of winning at the higher levels, may have a great advantage. This advantage is perhaps more likely to accrue to aggressive and “dynamic” nations than to the relatively passive and *status-quo*-oriented West.”(57) Putin’s revisionist and neo-imperialist Russia is certainly such an “aggressive and dynamic” nation that would be ‘more willing to escalate’. According to a study, one of the functions of Russia’s tactical nuclear weapons is “to make it possible for Russia to conduct limited nuclear strikes in a regional (or theater) war while avoiding an escalation to intercontinental nuclear operations or any other geographical extension of the conflict.”(58) Another function is “to inhibit the intervention of outside powers (such as the United States or NATO) in regional conflicts involving Russia.”(59) Tactical nuclear weapons have, therefore, for the Kremlin not only a military and operational utility, but - maybe even more - a *political* utility. These weapons are assigned a crucial role in creating what the Kremlin calls a ‘sphere of privileged interest’ in the post-Soviet space destined to *inhibit foreign intervention* and in this way *de facto* reestablish a kind of Brezhnev doctrine of restricted sovereignty in what Russia calls its ‘near abroad’.

### *Obama's Proposal for Negotiations on Tactical Nuclear Weapons: A Dead End?*

It is against this background that one should assess the recent U.S. proposals to start negotiations with Moscow on the reduction of tactical nuclear weapons. When the U.S. Senate ratified the new START Treaty in December 2010 it adopted a resolution obliging the government to start bilateral talks with Russia on cutting the TNW stockpiles. The new START Treaty came into force on February 5, 2011. In a message to the Senate Obama announced that he wanted to start negotiations with Russia within a year. This means that he expected talks to start before February 2012. The first official reactions from the Russian side, however, were mitigated. According to Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov "it is too early to discuss limiting TNW with the United States because Russia needs to see the way the U.S. fulfills its commitments under the New START."<sup>(60)</sup> And when Mikhail Margelov, the head of the foreign relations committee of the Russian Federation Council, the Parliament's Upper House, visited Washington in April 2011 for talks with U.S. officials, he reacted in an outspoken way on the American proposal saying that "it was unlikely that there were 'even two people who would zealously support the abandonment of tactical nuclear weapons' among the members of the Federation Council's foreign relations or defense and security committees."<sup>(61)</sup> To the same conclusion came also Isabelle Facon, a French researcher, after interviewing defense experts in Moscow in 2008. "Russia," she wrote, "(...) expresses a very feeble interest in the perspective to include these weapon categories [TNWs] in the processes of arms control."<sup>(62)</sup> The Russian position mirrors the position of NATO during the Cold War: the Kremlin maintains it needs these weapons to compensate for the conventional superiority of the other side. Does this mean that Russia will not engage in negotiations? This is not sure. Because the Kremlin will carefully weigh the different options it has at its disposal.

### *The Kremlin's Three Options*

The Kremlin has at least three options:

1. Russia can refuse negotiations and just wait and see how a lack of public support and political will in the NATO countries will put an end to the deployment of U.S. tactical nuclear weapons in Europe.

2. Russia can start serious negotiations with the U.S.
3. Russia can start a protracted process of non-obliging *preliminary* talks in which it does not commit itself to anything, but fully uses the opportunity to influence Western public opinion.

Ad 1. The first option: to refuse negotiations, is not wholly irrational. Russia can use the argument that it needs TNWs to compensate for the relative superiority of the NATO forces. NATO used the same argument during the Cold War vis-à-vis the conventional superiority of the Warsaw Pact. Moreover, a refusal to negotiate would not stop the discussion in NATO on the role of tactical nuclear weapons in Europe. There is, to begin with, a growing skepticism on the usefulness of these weapons in the United States itself. Jeffrey A. Larsen wrote that the U.S. Navy “does not like its remaining NSNW [tactical nuclear] mission”.(63) According to him, “the military services are not the only ones tired of the mission. Nuclear weapons and nuclear policies have very few advocates in government circles any longer. U.S. Strategic Command, historically one of the strongest advocates for these weapons, has multiple new missions, only one of which involves nuclear weapons and strategic deterrence. The Joint Chiefs of Staff no longer has much interest in nuclear weapons, except as a secondary residual responsibility, and in mid-2006 the office that deals with nuclear matters under the Secretary of Defense was downgraded organizationally. It is now very difficult even identifying the responsible authority for nuclear matters in the Department of Defense.”(64)

The diminishing U.S. interest in nuclear weapons can be traced back to the demise of the Soviet Union. In a famous speech delivered on Monday, June 1<sup>st</sup>, 1992 at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Les Aspin declared: “The United States is the biggest conventional power in the world. (...) A world without nuclear weapons would not be disadvantageous to the U.S. In fact, a world without nuclear weapons would actually be better.”(65) Shortly afterwards Les Aspin would become Bill Clinton’s Secretary of Defense. Seventeen years later Aspin’s ‘world without nuclear weapons’ would make a come-back in Barack Obama’s Prague Speech.(66) It is telling that on May, 27, 2008, the Republican Presidential candidate John McCain in his Denver speech equally “called for a world free of nuclear weapons” and declared his intention to explore with Russia the means to reduce and possibly eliminate tactical nuclear weapons in Europe.(67)

### *Nuclear Doubts in Europe*

Nuclear weapons – and especially tactical nuclear weapons - are on the way of becoming the stepchild of U.S. military policy. But it is not only the Americans who have their doubts. On April 21, 2005, the Senate of Belgium – one of the European host countries for U.S. tactical nuclear weapons – passed a unanimous resolution calling for the gradual withdrawal of all American nuclear weapons from Europe. Some months later in Germany the Free Democrats and the Green Party called on their government to raise the question of a nuclear withdrawal in the NATO Nuclear Planning Group.(68) Germany, equally a host country, has become one of the most important protagonists of withdrawal. During the meeting of NATO foreign and defense ministers in Brussels in October 2010, Germany's foreign minister Guido Westerwelle declared with the pathos of a peace apostle: "The disarmament caravan is on the move. Disarmament is coming up the agenda. We want the peace dividend."(69) Asking for 'a peace dividend' in 2010, almost twenty years after the fall of the Berlin wall, may seem anachronistic – especially for a country that has, for many years, had a reputation of being a notorious laggard in defense spending. But equally the Dutch asked for a reduction. On February 15, 2011, during a debate on NATO's New Strategic Concept the Dutch Senate adopted a motion that the reduction of tactical nuclear weapons should be a target of Dutch foreign policy.(70) In the light of the growing opposition within NATO – in Europe, as well as in the U.S. – against maintaining TNWs in Europe, it seems plausible that Russia, even in the case that it would not enter into formal negotiations, it could obtain its main goal: the removal of U.S. tactical nuclear weapons from European territory.

Ad 2. The second option for Russia is to start serious negotiations with the U.S. This option is much less attractive. Not only because Moscow has the impression that it has to give away much more than it will obtain, but also because these negotiations cannot start without giving the other party full information on its tactical nuclear arsenal: the numbers, types, and the locations. This information is considered a state secret. The question also is: negotiate on what? Michael Quinlan has suggested that the U.S. should offer two things: a retreat of the U.S. tactical nuclear weapons from European territory and a proposal to shelve the stationing of elements of the Ballistic Missile Defense in Poland and the Czech Republic and instead accept a cooperative US/Russia BMD arrangement.(71) He proposed this in 2008. In the meantime the Obama administration has already scrapped the BMD radar in the Czech

Republic and the ten interceptor missiles in Poland in the framework of the U.S. 'reset' policy. By this unilateral measure the Obama administration has considerably weakened its negotiating position. A third negotiating chip would have been to stop the enlargement of NATO into the former Soviet space. But despite the woolly promises to Georgia and Ukraine, enlargement is no longer on the agenda. On June 3, 2010, the Ukrainian parliament officially rejected any ambition to join NATO. The urge, therefore, for Russia to take a place at the conference table will be even less than before.

Ad 3. For the Kremlin there still remains a third option, which is not refusing to negotiate, but demanding *preliminary talks* that can subsequently be extended *sine die*. These preliminary talks could be used to start a propaganda offensive in the direction of the governments and public opinions of the European countries in order to obtain more unilateral concessions. In fact, Russia has already chosen for this strategy. In the *Krasnaya Zvezda* (Red Star), the official paper of the Russian Ministry of Defense, Viktor Yesin, the former chief of staff of the Strategic Rocket Forces, the Russian nuclear deterrent, is quoted, saying that if talks start without prior consultations this will lead to nothing.(72) He also said "that Russia apriori cannot negotiate with the U.S.A. to reach parity in tactical nuclear weapons," as is the case for strategic nuclear weapons. Instead there must be a 'broad context' and the US should also include in the talks "general purpose forces, anti-missile defenses [and] long-range precision-guided weapons." Equally, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov was quoted, saying "It would be better to start from withdrawal of U.S. tactical nuclear weapons from Europe and from dismantling related infrastructures as to ensure greater predictability and transparency here."(73) His boss, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, came with other demands. "Lavrov laid out a much more complex agenda for any future talks about non-strategic nuclear weapons by including as topic for discussion 'potential weaponization of space, strategic missiles equipped with conventional explosives and other non-nuclear conventional weapons'. Lavrov also added the need to include in such negotiations other nuclear powers."(74) Linton F. Brooks wrote: "Russians are exceptionally concerned with advanced conventional weapons. They would welcome limits on such weapons. The United States always resisted suggestions for limits on conventional military technology and should probably continue to do so."(75)

Lavrov asked that eventual negotiations should be multilateral instead of bilateral and that advanced U.S. conventional weapons be included in the talks. Although these demands are part of the negotiation game and some of them even not completely unfounded,(76) the expressed maximalism does not augur well. When U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Rose Gottemoeller proposed that Russia and the U.S. exchange data on the numbers, types, and location of their tactical nuclear weapons deployed in Europe prior to beginning talks, this was described by Viktor Kazimirov, a Moscow-based expert, as ‘illogical and unrealistic.’(77) But it is clear that without total transparency as concern the number, types, and location of the warheads, negotiations cannot even start. Additionally, there is a problem of *definition*. When U.S. officials speak about non-strategic nuclear weapons, they refer to the *technical* specifications of these weapons: their short range and their relative small nuclear yield. The Russians, on the contrary, refers to their *use*: because U.S. tactical nuclear weapons stationed in Europe can reach Russia they must, according to them, be qualified as ‘strategic’. One of the conditions formulated by the Kremlin to begin negotiations is that the U.S. should withdraw these weapons from Europe. “The U.S. short-range weapons in Europe have been a perennial sore point for Russia,” wrote Brent Scowcroft and William Perry in a report in 2009.(78) However, it is clear that if the U.S. would agree to withdraw U.S. warheads from Europe *before* the start of negotiations, it would offer the Kremlin not a concession, but give away its most important trump card. After unilaterally scrapping the BMD installations in Poland and the Czech Republic, it would represent a second major concession *without a quid pro quo* in the field of arms reduction. Instead of inciting the Russian side to start serious negotiations, “it is far more likely,” wrote Yost, “that the Russians would simply ‘pocket’ the unilateral withdrawal of the U.S. NSNF [tactical nuclear weapons] as something they had always demanded.”(79) This is the reason why Russia will not flatly refuse to negotiate, but will stress the importance of preliminary talks, and start a propaganda offensive in old Soviet style in the direction of Europe to convince the governments and public opinions of Europe on the ‘reasonableness’ of the Russian demands. It must not be excluded that this propaganda offensive will be met with success.

#### *A Naïve ‘Offer’ of the Peace Movement*

In a recent report of the Dutch inter-church peace organization IKV Pax Christi, which has received much attention in the international press, the authors wrote: “The NPG [NATO’s

Nuclear Planning Group = the 28 member states minus France] could mandate the U.S. to approach Russia with a clearly defined *offer*. The offer would be that NATO is ready to withdraw all U.S. TNW from Europe, if the Russians are willing to enter into negotiations on a wide range of defence and disarmament issues *including NATO concerns about Russian TNW and their locations.*"(80) The authors not only want to isolate France, which is critical about a withdrawal of U.S. tactical warheads from Europe, by means of assigning a NATO initiative to the Nuclear Planning Group, in which France is not represented. They also suggest that NATO should offer to withdraw all American TNWs from Europe "if the Russians are willing to enter into negotiations". This would offer the Russian leadership a major concession *without obliging it to commit itself to anything*. The only Russian interest would be 'to enter into negotiations' and stretch these negotiations indefinitely, knowing that the U.S. warheads, when they have disappeared from Europe, will not easily come back.

This for six reasons. In the first place, because it will be difficult to restart the special training of European teams and to reclaim European storage sites that have been abandoned. In the second place, because European governments could be tempted to scrap modernization programmes for dual capable aircraft and switch to cheaper planes that can only conduct conventional missions (the Greeks, for instance, abandoned their dual capable aircraft already in 2001 and subsequently gave up their nuclear tasks). In the third place, because there is also the question of *political will*: which European government would want to *retake* nuclear tasks after having abandoned these? In the fourth place, the option to redeploy these weapons in Europe *only in case of a crisis* would be flawed, because "the return of nuclear weapons in Europe, especially in Germany, in time of crisis (...) would risk, if it would be badly managed, to empoison a conflict situation."(81) In the fifth place, it would erode the cohesion of NATO in which the European participation in nuclear tasks plays a major role.(82) In the sixth place, a unilateral retreat of US tactical nuclear weapons from Europe would only replace the existing tactical nuclear imbalance by a virtual Russian monopoly of these weapons in Eurasia, thereby facilitating possibilities of nuclear blackmail by the Kremlin in the post-Soviet space.

## *Conclusion*

The problem remains: how to get someone at the negotiating table who has no strong interest to negotiate. Ambassador Robert Joseph, a former Director for Proliferation Strategy, warned that in the case of tactical nuclear weapons, “old arms control notions – perhaps jazzed up somewhat – represent nothing more than a problem masquerading as a solution.”(82) The same opinion is expressed by Linton F. Brooks: “One of the biggest myths in Washington, wrote Brooks, “is that the ability to identify a problem proves there must be a solution. This case is an example of that myth: the “solution” of a traditional arms control arrangement may seem attractive, but it is unlikely to solve the “problem” of Russian non-strategic nuclear weapons. Some things are really too hard.”(83) It could well be that as concerns the problem of Russian TNWs the lessons of the INF debates of the 1980s are still valid today: only by assuming a resolute and unified stance (at that time: the double decision of NATO) can the other side be brought to real concessions.

## NOTES

- (1) Cf. Gabriel Schoenfeld, "Russia's Nuclear Threat Is More Than Words", *The Wall Street Journal*, August 22, 2008.
- (2) Amy F. Woolf, *Nonstrategic Nuclear Weapons*, CRS Report for Congress, Washington (Congressional Research Service), January 28, 2009, p. 16.
- (3) A study, published in 1984, gives the following specification: "of the roughly 6,000 American nuclear warheads currently at NATO's disposal in Europe, 1,670 are artillery shells that can strike targets less than 10 miles away. Another 700 warheads are designed for air defense, detonating with a blast sufficient to knock a wing of enemy aircraft out of the sky. A further 370 are atomic demolition munitions (ADM), which can be installed in a few hours at previously dug sites – tunnels, mountain passes, and other topographically opportune locations – to retard the advance of tanks and other vehicles." (Leon V. Sigal, *Nuclear Forces in Europe – Enduring Dilemmas, Present Prospects*, Washington D.C. (The Brookings Institution), 1984, p. 157).
- (4) Cf. Amy F. Woolf, o.c., p. 7.
- (5) Robert S. Norris and Hans M. Kristensen, "US tactical nuclear weapons in Europe, 2011", *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 67(1), p. 65.
- (6) In chapter 7 on "The Problems of Limited Nuclear War" Kissinger wrote: "With proper tactics nuclear war need not be as destructive as it appears when we think of it in terms of traditional warfare." (Henry A. Kissinger, *Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy*, New York (Doubleday), 1958, p. 152.
- (7) Gunnar Arbman and Charles Thornton, *Russia's Tactical Nuclear Weapons - Part I: Background and Policy Issues*, Stockholm (Swedish Defence Research Agency), November 2003, p. 7.
- (8) About the reasons why Yeltsin appointed Putin to director of the FSB, and shortly afterwards to secretary of the National Security Council and Acting President, there still exists much speculation. Former Prime Minister Mikhail Kasyanov suggested that

in the last year of Yeltsin's reign a secret palace revolution had taken place in the Kremlin, led by the army and the FSB. But according to Yuri N. Afanasyev, rector of the Russian State University for the Humanities, this soft *coup d'état* by the siloviki had taken place as early as 1993: "It has become evident," wrote Afanasyev, "that the real winner in the October 1993 showdown between Yeltsin and the Soviet parliament was the military-industrial complex, acting in unison with the bureaucracy. At the time, the events of October were seen as a victory of democracy, a removal of obstacles on the path to reform. It now appears that the military exacted certain concessions before bailing out Yeltsin by storming the parliament. The very day after the resolution of the parliamentary insurrection, Yeltsin convened a Security Council meeting that had only one item on the agenda: a new military doctrine that expanded Russia's security interests throughout the territory of the former U.S.S.R. and rescinded the no-first-use nuclear weapons pledge from the Gorbachev era. This move was initiated before fires were put out and before the dead were buried, as if in all of Russia, in all the world, there were no more important problems." (Yuri N. Afanasyev, "Russian Reform Is Dead – Back to Central Planning", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 73, No. 2, March/April 1994, p. 23).

- (9) Nikolai Sokov, "The April 1999 Russian Federation Security Council Meeting on Nuclear Weapons", Center for Nonproliferation Studies CNS, Monterey Institute, June 1999. Available at <http://www.nti.org/db/nisprofs/over/rfsecmtg.htm>
- (10) Pavel Felgenhauer, "Ogranichennaya Yadernaya Voyna? A Pochemu By I Net?" (A Limited Nuclear War? And Why Not?), *Segodnya*, May 6, 1999.
- (11) We have to put this number in perspective. According to a Russian scientist, in the Soviet period 18,020 tactical nuclear weapons were deployed. Of these 18,020 about two thirds: 12,320 were deployed in Russia proper and the rest in other Soviet republics. If one compares this with the number of 10,000 new tactical nuclear weapons, mentioned by Felgenhauer, one might ask what will be the net result of the Presidential Nuclear Initiatives of 1991-92, meant to drastically reduce the number of Russia's tactical nuclear weapons. (Cf. Vladimir Belous, "Takticheskoye yadernoye

oruzhiye v novykh geopoliticheskikh usloviyakh” (Tactical Nuclear Weapons in the New Geopolitical Circumstances), *Yadernyi Kontrol*, No. 14, February 1996, p. 2).

(12) This theory of “de-escalation” was put forward in an article in the Russian defense magazine *Voennaya Mysl* (Military Thought) in the same period. (Cf. V. Levshin, A. Nedelin, M. Sosnovskiy, “O primenenii yadernogo oruzhiya dlya deescalatsii voyennykh deystviy” (On the use of nuclear weapons for the de-escalation of armed conflicts), *Voennaya Mysl*, No. 3, May-June 1999). ‘De-escalation’ would soon become one of the keywords, if not an almost magical formula, in the new Russian strategy to use tactical nuclear weapons. In fact it is Orwellian ‘newspeak’ for its opposite: escalation. Because it is clear that a de-escalation that ends the hostilities will only take place if the other party in the conflict does *not* resort to the use of tactical nuclear weapons. This fact is recognized by Herman Kahn, who wrote: “...de-escalation cannot guarantee that re-escalation will not occur.” According to him, case studies “show re-escalation to be a common problem simply because one side or the other cannot resist a probing action to test if it has sold out too cheaply.” (Herman Kahn, *On Escalation – Metaphors and Scenarios*, Baltimore, Maryland (Penguin Books), 1968, p. 234).

(13) Cf. David S. Yost, “Russia and Arms Control for Non-Strategic Nuclear Forces”, in: Jeffrey A. Larsen and Kurt J. Klingenberger (Ed.), *Controlling Non-Strategic Nuclear Weapons – Obstacles and Opportunities*, United States Air Force Institute For National Security Studies, Fairchild Drive, Co., July 2001, p. 131.

(14) Nikolai Sokov, “Russia’s New National Security Concept: The Nuclear Angle”, Center for Nonproliferation Studies CNS, Monterey Institute, January 19, 2000. Available at <http://cns.miis.edu/pubs/reports/sokov2.htm>

(15) Cf. Richard Weitz, “Revitalising US-Russian Security Cooperation: Practical Measures”, London (Routledge – for the International Institute for Strategic Studies IISS), 2005, p. 9. Available at <http://www.hudson.org/files/documents/weitz%20complete.pdf>

- (16) Charles D. Ferguson, "Nuclear Posture Review", Center for Nonproliferation Studies CNS, Monterey Institute, August 2002. (My emphasis, MHVH). Available at [http://www.nti.org/e\\_research/e3\\_15a.html](http://www.nti.org/e_research/e3_15a.html)
- (17) Anna Dunin, "Intel Brief: Poland on Edge Over Russian Drills", *ISN Security Watch*, November 18, 2009. Available at <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/isn/Current-Affairs/Security-Watch/Detail/?lng=en&id=109702>
- (18) Already the *name* of the maneuver: *Zapad 2009*, is for the Poles a traumatic affair. A first Zapad exercise took place in the first half of September 1981. It involved all branches of the Soviet forces and included amphibious landings in Poland, near Gdańsk. The exercise was meant as a clear warning at the address of the Solidarność movement that was active in the same city at that time that the Soviet Union could easily crush the movement with military means. Three months later General Jaruzelski outlawed Solidarność and imposed martial law.
- (19) Cf. Matthew Day, "Russia 'simulates' nuclear attack on Poland", *The Telegraph*, November 1, 2009.
- (20) Anna Dunin, "Intel Brief: Russia Online and On the Attack", *ISN Security Watch*, October 28, 2009. Available at <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/isn/Current-Affairs/Security-Watch/Detail/?ots591=4888CAA0-B3DB-1461-98B9-E20E7B9C13D4&lng=en&id=108943>
- (21) Anna Dunin, "Intel Brief: Poland On Edge Over Russia Drills", o.c.
- (22) The only fleet that did not participate in the maneuvers was the Pacific Fleet, stationed in Vladivostok in Russia's Far East. Originally the Soviet Union had only two fleets: the Baltic Fleet and the Black Sea Fleet. It was Stalin who created the Pacific Fleet in 1932 and the Northern Fleet in 1933. The creation of the Pacific Fleet was a direct answer to the occupation of Manchuria by Japan in 1931/1932. (Cf. Michael McGwire, "Soviet Naval Doctrine and Strategy", in: Derek Leebaert (ed.), *Soviet Military Thinking*, London, Boston, Sydney (George Allen & Unwin), 1981, pp. 133-134).

- (23) Kaarel Kaas, "Words and Steel", International Center for Defence Studies, Tallinn, September 19, 2009. Available at [http://www.icds.ee/index.php?id=73&L=1&tx\\_ttnews%5Btt\\_news%5D=554&tx\\_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=100&cHash=dc9d99d56b](http://www.icds.ee/index.php?id=73&L=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=554&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=100&cHash=dc9d99d56b)
- (24) "Russia could focus on tactical nuclear weapons for subs", *RIA Novosti*, March 23, 2009.
- (25) Cf. *Aviation Week*, April 12, 2009.
- (26) "Menyayetsya Rossiya, menyayetsya i ee voyennaya doktrina" (When Russia changes, also its military doctrine changes), *Izvestia*, October 14, 2009.
- (27) Ibid.
- (28) Yegor Gaidar, *Collapse of an Empire – Lessons for Modern Russia*, Washington D.C. (Brookings Institution Press), 2007, p. 247. The article to which Gaidar referred was V. Portnikov, "Yeltsin obsuzhdal s voennymi vozmozhnost yadernogo udara po Ukraine..." (Yeltsin discussed with the Military the Possibility of a Nuclear Strike against Ukraine...), in the *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* of October 24, 1991.
- (29) Cf. David S. Yost, o.c., p. 127: "Incidentally, some Russians in late 1999 and early 2000 reported that "official representatives of the Defense Ministry" had been "hinting at the possibility of using low-yield tactical nuclear warheads in Chechnya." The speculation about possible use of NSNF [non-strategic nuclear forces] in Chechnya led to Colonel-General Valeriy Manilov, Deputy Chief of the General Staff, explicitly ruling it out in February 2000 (...)."
- (30) "Interview given by Dmitry Medvedev to Television Channels Channel One, Russia, NTV", August 31, 2008. Available on the Kremlin website [http://eng.kremlin.ru/text/speeches/2008/08/31/1850\\_type82912type82916\\_20600\\_3.shtml](http://eng.kremlin.ru/text/speeches/2008/08/31/1850_type82912type82916_20600_3.shtml)
- (31) Ibid.
- (32) "V gosudarstvennyuyu Dumu napravlen zakonoprojekt, napravlennyyi na sozdanie pravovogo mekhanizma, obespechivayushchego vozmozhnost Prezidentu

operativno ispolzovat formirovaniya Vooruzhennykh Sil za predelami strany” (Project of Law Addressed to the State Duma concerning the Creation of a Law Mechanism that Guarantees the Possibility for the President to Use Formations of the Armed Forces in an Operational Way Outside the Frontiers of the Country), President of Russia, August 10, 2009. Available at <http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/5152>

- (33) To give two examples. On November 3, 2009, Vladimir Yastrebchak, ‘foreign minister’ of Transnistria, Moldova’s separatist region, declared that Russia continued to issue its citizenship to residents of this region, “so that the number of holders of Russian passports amounted to 150,000 compared with 130,000 half a year ago...” This means that *one third* of the population of the region has Russian passports. According to him this process was “aimed at ensuring the right to free movement.” (“Russian passport holders in Moldova’s Transnistria on the rise”, Moldova.org, November 3, 2009. Available at <http://politicom.moldova.org/news/russian-passport-holders-in-moldovas-transnistria-on-the-rise-204295-eng.html> ). A second example is Ukraine. “The Russian government has illegally distributed passports to Crimean’s and Odessa citizens of Ukraine, which infringes upon Ukrainian legislation that does not recognize dual citizenship,” wrote Taras Kuzio. “The estimates [in 2008] range from 6,000 Russian passports given out (...) to 100,000 passports (...)” (Cf. Taras Kuzio, *The Crimea: Europe’s Next Flashpoint*, The Jamestown Foundation, Washington D.C., November 2010, p. 24).
- (34) Andrei Kozyrev, “The Lagging Partnership”, in: *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 73, No. 3, May-June 1994, p. 70.
- (35) Taras Kuzio, *The Crimea: Europe’s Next Flashpoint?*, o.c., p. 34.
- (36) “Russian law on use of troops abroad gets final approval from Duma”, Interfax, October 25, 2009.
- (37) “Armes nucléaires: la Lituanie inquiète”, *Le Figaro*, February 8, 2011.
- (38) “Russia’s military doctrine, law on defense pose no threat to anyone – Lavrov”, ITAR-TASS, October 23, 2009.

- (39) Alexander Rahr, "The West has 'forgiven' Moscow its military intervention in Georgia", RIA Novosti, September 28, 2009.
- (40) "What precisely Vladimir Putin said at Bucharest", *Zerkalo Nedeli*, April 25, 2008. <http://www.mw.ua/1000/1600/62750/>
- (41) Gleb Pavlovsky, "Will Ukraine Lose Its Sovereignty?" *Russkiy Zhurnal*, March 16, 2009. <http://www.russ.ru>
- (42) "No One Needs Monsters. Desovereignization of Ukraine", Interview with Sergey Karaganov, *Russkiy Zhurnal*, March 20, 2009. <http://www.russ.ru>
- (43) Yuriy Shcherbak, "Ukraine as a Failed State: Myths and Reality", *The Weekly Digest*, No. 15, Kyiv, May 26, 2009.
- (44) Leon Aron, "Russia's Next Target Could Be Ukraine", *The Wall Street Journal*, September 10, 2008.
- (45) Taras Kuzio, *The Crimea: Europe's Next Flashpoint?*, o.c., p. 34.
- (46) Ibid.
- (47) Ibid., p. 26.
- (48) Robert S. McNamara, "The Military Role of Nuclear Weapons: Perceptions and Misperceptions", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 62, No. 1, Fall 1983, p. 79.
- (49) Quoted in Nicu Popescu and Andrew Wilson, *The Limits of Enlargement-Lite: European and Russian Power in the Troubled Neighbourhood*, Policy Paper, European Council on Foreign Relations, London, June 2009, p. 29.
- (50) Taras Kuzio, *The Crimea: Europe's Next Flashpoint?*, o.c., p. 33.
- (51) Pavel Korduban, "Vladimir Putin, Moscow Mayor and Patriarch Kirill Promote Russian Interests in Ukraine," *Eurasian Daily Monitor*, Vol. 7, Issue 145, July 28, 2010.
- (52) Cf. Olga Shumylo-Tapiola, "Ukraine and Russia: Ever Closer Neighbors?", *Policy Outlook*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, June 8, 2011, p. 8. This author, however, displays a naïve optimism, when she writes "that Putin is not the

only one who defines Moscow's foreign policy agenda", opposing him to ... Medvedev, for whom Ukraine would be "an important neighbor with whom stable relations will bring benefits."(p. 9). This opinion completely disregards the facts: firstly, that it is Putin and not Medvedev who sets the foreign policy agenda; secondly, that Medvedev's policy on Ukraine is completely in line with Putin's as became clear in August 2009 when Medvedev wrote a an extremely aggressive and threatening open letter to (then) President Yushchenko. Also Shumylo-Tapiola's conclusion that "tensions between the two parties will continue." But that "the people-to-people contacts that exist between Ukraine and Russia serve as a guarantee against any military intervention by Moscow,"(p. 10) are more the product of wishful thinking than of a realistic assessment of the situation.

(53) Thomas C. Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict*, Cambridge, Mass. and London (Harvard University Press), 1980, p. 257.

(54) *Ibid.*, p. 260.

(55) Herman Kahn, *On Escalation – Metaphors and Scenarios*, o.c., p. 127.

(56) *Ibid.*, p. 119.

(57) *Ibid.*

(58) John T. Cappello, Gwendolyn M. Hall, and Stephen P. Lambert, *Tactical Nuclear Weapons: Debunking the Mythology*, INSS Occasional Paper 46, USAF Institute for National Security Studies, USAF Academy, Colorado, August 2002, p. 17.

(59) *Ibid.*, p. 18. Cf. also David S. Yost, o.c., p. 127. Yost, writing in 2001, gives the example of "ruling out any NATO intervention in the Chechnya conflict analogous to NATO's actions in the Kosovo conflict (...)." But Chechnya was still a conflict *inside* the Russian Federation. The later modifications of the Security Concept and the Foreign Policy Principles, however, implicitly refer to regional conflicts between the Russian Federation and sovereign post-Soviet successor states.

(60) "U.S. to seek agreement with Russia on tactical nuclear weapons reduction", *RIA Novosti*, April 22, 2011.

- (61) “Moscow keeps tactical nuclear weapons cuts issue low-key - Russian senator”, *RIA Novosti*, April 30, 2011.
- (62) Cf. Isabelle Facon, *Désarmement et maîtrise des armements nucléaires: les positions russes et leurs déterminants nationaux et internationaux*, Fondation pour la Recherche Stratégique, Paris, Recherches et Documents No. 07/2009, p. 54.
- (63) Jeffrey A. Larsen, *The Future of U.S. Non-Strategic Nuclear Weapons and Implications for NATO – Drifting Toward the Foreseeable Future*, A report prepared in accordance with the requirements of the 2005–06 NATO Manfred Wörner Fellowship for NATO Public Diplomatic Division, Brussels (NATO), October 31, 2006, p. 44.
- (64) *Ibid.*, p. 45.
- (65) Les Aspin, “Three Propositions for a New Era Policy”, Commencement Speech at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, June 1<sup>st</sup>, 1992. Available at <http://web.mit.edu/press/1992/propositions-0603.html>
- (66) “Remarks by President Barack Obama”, Prague, April 5, 2009. Available on the official portal of the White House [http://www.whitehouse.gov/the\\_press\\_office/Remarks-By-President-Barack-Obama-In-Prague-As-Delivered/](http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-By-President-Barack-Obama-In-Prague-As-Delivered/)
- (67) “McCain breaks with Bush on nuclear disarmament”, *The New York Times*, May 28, 2008.
- (68) Cf. Isabelle Facon, *Désarmement et maîtrise des armements nucléaires: les positions russes et leurs déterminants nationaux et internationaux*, o.c., pp. 40 and 47.
- (69) “Germany demands NATO show greater commitment to nuclear disarmament,” *The Guardian*, October 10, 2010.
- (70) *Natowatch.org*, March 11, 2011.

- (71) Michael Quinlan, *Thinking about Nuclear Weapons – Principles, Problems, Prospects*, Oxford (Oxford University Press), 2009, pp. 174 – 176.
- (72) Viktor Ruchkin, “V shirokom kontekste” (In a Broad Context), *Krasnaya Zvezda*, April 29, 2011.
- (73) “Russia urges U.S. to withdraw tactical nuclear weapons from Europe”, *Interfax*, February 7 2011.
- (74) Jacob W. Kipp, “A Long Way to Zero: Moscow Remains Reluctant to Take Next Step”, *Eurasian Daily Monitor*, Vol. 8, Issue 30, February 11, 2011.
- (75) Linton F. Brooks, “Diplomatic Solutions to the “Problem” of Non-Strategic Nuclear Weapons”, in: Jeffrey A. Larsen and Kurt J. Klingenberger, *Controlling Non-Strategic Nuclear Weapons – Obstacles and Opportunities*, o.c., p. 205.
- (76) According to Jacob W. Kipp, Russia’s reliance on tactical nuclear weapons must be also be explained “in the face of the military modernization of the [Chinese] People’s Liberation Army (PLA) which has itself developed a formidable arsenal of advanced weaponry.” (Jacob W. Kipp, o.c.).
- (77) Cf. Roger McDermott, “Moscow Lowers Expectations on Tactical Nuclear Breakthrough”, *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Vol. 8, Issue 85, May 3, 2011.
- (78) “U.S. Nuclear Weapons Policy”, Independent Task Force Report No. 62, William J. Perry and Brent Scowcroft, Chairs, Council on Foreign Relations, New York, 2009, p. 34.
- (79) David S. Yost, “Russia and Arms Control for Non-Strategic Nuclear Forces”, o.c., p. 145.
- (80) Susi Snyder and Wilbert van der Zeijden, *Withdrawal Issues – What NATO countries say about the future of tactical nuclear weapons in Europe*, IKV Pax Christi, March 2011, p. 26. (emphasis in the original text, MHVH).
- (81) Bruno Tertrais, *L’arme nucléaire après la guerre froide – L’Alliance atlantique, l’Europe, et l’avenir de la dissuasion*, Paris (Economica), 1994, p. 205.

- (82) This argument is, for instance, put forward by Perry and Scowcroft, who wrote: “The Task Force believes that basing U.S. short-range nuclear weapons still has political value to some NATO countries because removing them might raise political questions about the credibility of U.S. extended deterrence.” (...) (William J. Perry and Brent Scowcroft, “U.S. Nuclear Arms Policy,” o.c., p. 34).
- (83) Robert Joseph, “Nuclear Weapons and Regional Deterrence”, in: Jeffrey A. Larsen and Kurt J. Klingenberger (Ed.), *Controlling Non-Strategic Nuclear Weapons – Obstacles and Opportunities*, o.c., p. 95.
- (84) Linton F. Brooks, o.c., p. 207.