



# 21st Century Strategic Stability

## A U.S.-Russia Track II Dialogue

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# **Twenty-First Century Strategic Stability: A U.S.-Russia Track II Dialogue**

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## Acronyms

BMD	Ballistic missile defense
CFE	Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty
DPRK	Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea)
DOE-NNSA	Department of Energy – National Nuclear Security Administration
DTRA	Defense Threat Reduction Agency
EMR	European Midcourse Radar
GRU	Main Intelligence Directorate
ICBM	Intercontinental ballistic missile
INF	Intermediate Nuclear Forces
MAD	Mutually Assured Destruction
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NNWS	Non-Nuclear Weapon State
NSNW	Non-Strategic Nuclear Weapons (also known as tactical or battlefield nuclear weapons)
NPS	Naval Postgraduate School
NPT	Non-Proliferation Treaty
PASCC	Project on Advanced Systems and Concepts for Countering WMD
PGM	Precision-guided munition
SRBM	Short-range ballistic missile
SLBM	Submarine-launched ballistic missile
SSBN	Ballistic missile submarine
TNW	Tactical nuclear weapons
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
VDV	Russian Airborne Troops

## Background

The 2014 Track II U.S.-Russia Dialogue, “21st Century Strategic Stability,” was held in Monterey, California, from May 23-24, 2014. This dialogue was formally unofficial, but many participants have had experience in or connections to government. The event brought together U.S. and Russian experts to shed light on the two countries’ perspectives, both conceptually and operationally, on regional trends impacting strategic stability, as well as the twenty-first century foundations of strategic stability itself. The goal of the dialogue was to identify important elements of each side’s strategic outlook; highlight potential areas of cooperation; and identify possible means of overcoming problems in the U.S.-Russia relationship. If we needed an example of how a regional crisis can unexpectedly affect strategic stability, the dialogue could not have been more timely, as it took place amidst the crisis over Ukraine.

The dialogue was organized by the Naval Postgraduate School’s (NPS) Center on Contemporary Conflict and was funded by the U.S. Defense Threat Reduction Agency’s (DTRA) Project on Advanced Systems and Concepts for Countering WMD (PASCC). The following pages review the proceedings of this meeting and provide analysis on the panel presentations and ensuing discussions.

## Executive Summary

The opportunities for cooperation in strengthening strategic stability between the United States and Russia have been greatly reduced by the deterioration of the relations between the two countries as well as by their different views of strategic stability in bilateral relations and in several key regions of the world. The situation has been further complicated by the Kremlin's belief that the United States' primary goal is regime change in Russia, and by the politicization of expert, media, and official analysis in Russia. Russia considers practically all U.S. policies (e.g., missile defense, conventional Prompt Global Strike, democracy promotion, use of military force in the Middle East) as a threat to strategic stability. Russia views the situation in the Middle East through the prism of the competition with the United States. Russia has relatively little interest in strengthening strategic stability in the China-India-Pakistan relationship, being more preoccupied with protecting Central Asia from Islamist fighters. When it comes to China, there are chances for a discrete dialogue between Russia and the United States, if and when the relations between Washington and Moscow improve. In the current situation, nuclear arms control negotiations, both at the strategic and non-strategic levels, have little chance of success. If the Russian economy continues to slow down, it is possible that Russia may consider further U.S.-Russian bilateral reductions of strategic nuclear weapons. In the meanwhile, unofficial contacts (Track II) between U.S. and Russian experts should be maintained in order to understand how our competing visions of doctrine and capabilities might play out in a confrontation or crisis where the use of force is a real possibility.

## 1. Overview of Political and Technological Trends and Implications for U.S.-Russian Relations

Opening the dialogue, one American participant observed that the Russian annexation of the Crimea and subsequent support for separatists in Eastern Ukraine have “fundamentally altered the U.S. view of Russia throughout the government,” and that it would “take years for [the U.S. and Russia] to find the right model of interaction that lets the bilateral relationship move forward without implying a legitimization of the Crimea annexation.” The deterioration of the official relationship, observed the speaker, makes Track II discussions even more important, and “forces us to think in long-range terms.” He listed the three political trends that will play key roles in future attempts to achieve strategic stability: the failure of the U.S. – Russian “reset,” the fading of the vision President Obama set forth in Prague of a world without nuclear weapons, and the rise of China as a significant player in global affairs and a complicating factor in relations between the United States and Russia. The speaker noted that absent the vision of a nuclear-free world, and with Russia proclaiming American missile defense as the obstacle to any further strategic arms reductions, the reason for new strategic arms control and reduction talks has disappeared; at the same time, in the speaker’s opinion, neither Russia nor the United States wants New START to expire in 2020 without being replaced by a follow-on arms control framework.

The most important technological trend of the future will be the proliferation of weapons that can have a strategic impact. According to an American speaker, there are two primary elements of Russian policy that would make it difficult to find common ground regarding the implications of these new capabilities for strategic stability. One factor is the 2010 Russian Military Doctrine, which designates the U.S. and NATO as the main threats to Russia and suggests reliance on nuclear use for de-escalation, which, according to the American speaker, could potentially lead to escalation rather than de-escalation during a crisis. The second factor is the Russian perception of the “increasing U.S. reliance on precision strike and ballistic missile defense.” While these

trends have not been driven by U.S. offensive intentions against about Russia, the Russians view these systems as directed against them.

A Russian participant remarked upon several paradoxes and inconsistencies in arms control agreements and the American approach to strategic stability. In his view, the American attitude to strategic stability changes too quickly—only a few years ago the United States was not interested in discussing strategic stability, but now it is in fashion again. It is difficult to measure strategic stability in any precise way because strategic stability involves a complex interplay of nuclear and non-nuclear weapons including: precision-guided munitions (PGMs); offensive and defensive weapons, such as ballistic missile defense; strategic and non-strategic nuclear weapons; and latent weapons that are not yet deployed and may not exist except on paper. The Russian speaker also suggested that we consider the possibility of a “strategic shock” – an unanticipated change in the geopolitical situation (like the crisis in Ukraine) – that could upend existing perceptions of strategic stability. He gave several examples of paradoxes one finds in today’s arms control:

- Long-range PGMs are ICBMs with conventional warheads. Should we count these PGMs as strategic weapons even though the current strategic arms control treaty does not prevent the parties from substituting conventional warheads in place of nuclear warheads on ICBMs? What would be the equivalence between ICBMs armed with conventional versus nuclear warheads?
- Conventionally armed cruise missiles can deliver precision strikes against Russian strategic forces, but they are not included in strategic arms control treaties.

There are also subjective factors, such as the attitude of the Russian leadership to BMD systems that are neither nuclear nor, for the most part, strategic in nature. Nevertheless, according to the Russian panelist, “Putin and others views these weapons as dangerous and refuse to buy technical arguments that these weapons are

not a threat.” He suggested that the closer these BMD systems are to the Russian border, the more dangerous the Kremlin perceives them to be.

In conclusion, the Russian speaker said that “we cannot live without each other and without arms control,” and suggested that Russia would soon be disappointed with its relationship with China and return to the emphasis on relations with the United States.

One American speaker remarked that the context of strategic stability in Europe would depend on U.S.-Russian relations. In the recent past, the relationship had its ups and downs: the successes of 1993 were limited by problems over BMD and Kosovo, only to recover at the beginning of George W. Bush and Vladimir Putin presidencies, then to take a tumble over Georgia, recover somewhat during the “reset” of 2009-2011, and then to take another plunge beginning in 2011. How can this relationship be made more sustainable and predictable?

Here the discussion inevitably turned to the crisis in and around Ukraine. One Russian participant observed that it would be particularly difficult to resolve this crisis because it is rooted in Putin’s domestic politics: his political strength relies on nationalism, and he whips up nationalist fervor by creating an image of Russia surrounded by enemies. He drew a historical analogy: “When I think about the beginning of the collapse of the USSR, I think of Afghanistan, and when I think about the collapse of Russia, I think of Crimea.”

One American participant agreed that Putin’s policy towards Ukraine is rooted in the domestic politics of Russia. Further, the participant observed that Putin’s policy towards Ukraine is not fundamentally different from Russia’s policy towards Georgia and Moldova, and asked if the policy towards Ukraine is seen in the West as such a pivotal moment only because Putin presented it so dramatically in his March 18, 2014 speech.

A Russian participant noted that according to officials of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, despite the conflict over Ukraine, contacts with the United States on

arms control continue and that Russia is supposedly open to all proposals. In reality, however, Russia is not ready for any new proposals. As he explained, “Russia denies that there is a new cold war, but this is the fact of life, and the sooner we acknowledge it the better off both sides will be in a search for a new *modus vivendi*.”

Another Russian participant observed that it is necessary to understand the psychology of both sides. Russia, the participant said, “has the complex of invasion – it is primitive, but it works” when it comes to mobilizing the Russian public in support of the government. This can help explain the Russian reaction to NATO enlargement and to the planned deployment of American missile defenses in Eastern Europe. The second Russian complex is that of technological determinism. It believes that anything that is being actively developed and designed by the United States will necessarily be deployed. The third complex, of course, is that of a Great Power, in which everything done by other nations must be directed at Russia, because it is such an important power. The speaker also observed that the United States does not engage Russia on the subjects that only Russians consider to be a problem but the Americans do not: for instance, precision-guided munitions, missile defense, etc. An American participant observed that missile defense has traditionally been one of the biggest stumbling blocks in U.S.-Soviet/Russian relations: the Reagan-Gorbachev summit in Reykjavik stumbled upon BMD, as did START II. One cannot discuss strategic relations with Russia without discussing BMD, but the Kremlin’s refusal to accept the technical limitations of America’s proposed BMD systems in Eastern Europe will continue to hamper efforts to move the discussion forward.

## **2. Strategic Stability in the 21st Century**

An American speaker on the panel noted that Russia and the United States do have some areas of agreement, such as the complexity of the multipolar world, the significance of China’s rise for the nuclear balance of power, and the growing complexity of the nature of military power, which now involves competition in

multiple domains. At the same time, the speaker continued, there are also important areas of disagreement. As noted earlier, America's efforts to develop BMD are viewed in Russia as a threat to its deterrent. The United States "recognizes Russian concerns that [American missile defense] might become a threat [to Russia's strategic deterrent] a decade or more in the future and believes that the best way to avoid that outcome is to cooperate rather than compete." The speaker also noted that Russia has taken steps to modify its military posture to ensure future effectiveness against U.S. BMD—a topic that generates little discussion. The U.S. had indicated that it would like to move away from Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD) towards a relationship based on mutual assured stability/mutual assured security, in which "deterrence would play a continuing but subsidiary role." Russia, however, appears to believe that moving away from MAD puts it in jeopardy; according to one Russian participant, "the U.S. will have 'freedom from attack and freedom to attack' that, sooner or later, will be exploited by an ideologically driven U.S. in a manner that jeopardizes vital Russian interests."

An American speaker observed that Russia and the United States have different views of the main threats to stability. The United States believes that "the big emerging security challenge is posed by regional actors with nuclear weapons and long-range missiles," while Russia believes that "principal dangers are posed by the United States and NATO, though China is rising as a potential danger; regional WMD actors are a problem but not a threat." These "areas of disagreement are persistent and in some respects deepening. In these areas, dialogue has deepened understanding but not confidence or trust. It is unclear what further dialogue on these topics might yet accomplish."

According to the American speaker, such recent developments as the annexation of Crimea, the deep grievances against the West expressed by Vladimir Putin in his March 18 speech, and Russia's apparent violation of the Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty are having an impact on U.S. perceptions of the security environment. The United States is paying attention to new aspects of the Russian military doctrine such as the "development of a 'theory of victory' for regional conflicts against a

conventionally superior nuclear power and its allies involving ‘pre-nuclear deterrence’ and, if that fails, preemptive use of theater nuclear weapons to deescalate a growing crisis.” Russia is also developing “new capabilities for theater conventional strike, full nuclear integration at the theater level, emerging aerospace defense capabilities including improving regional BMD, plus a modernization program for strategic systems with advanced BMD penetration aids (that also redresses long-standing Russian concerns about the imbalance in strategic force up-load potential).” From the American standpoint, these developments go well beyond the maintenance of a stable strategic bilateral nuclear balance; they “significantly increase the risk that Russia will challenge a NATO security guarantee and lead to a situation in which [Russia] faces a choice between losing or implementing either ‘pre-nuclear’ conventional strikes on strategic targets in the West or initiating nuclear ‘de-escalation’ strikes.” These developments would make conflict more likely and would increase the risks of nuclear escalation should such a conflict occur.

What should the U.S. strategy be towards Russia? The United States, according to one speaker, is in the process of making significant adjustments in its approach to Russia. Until March 2014, the U.S. approach to Russia was a laissez-faire strategy with regard to developments in Russia’s strategic posture. It was generally held that NATO did not face an enemy in Russia, but this has since changed; going forward, Russia will be at the center of NATO policy and posture adjustments. At the same time, “NATO will not abandon the long-term vision of a future relationship with Russia that is more normal and positive.” Though it maintains plans against no country, NATO will remain a nuclear alliance so long as nuclear weapons remain within the arsenals of NATO member states. NATO supports territorial missile defense as a mission, but its focus is on threats emanating from the Middle East, not from Russia. The need to maintain the credibility of the alliance and the Article 5 guarantee will lead to new efforts to mitigate the threat posed by Putin’s claim that he is obliged to protect Russian-speakers living within NATO member states’ borders. NATO Planning will be adapted to enable effective defense of the Baltic states and any other NATO members that might be subject to coercion and attack, to include bolstering the capacity to project power into

the Baltics. Returning to the persistent BMD issue, the speaker indicated that if Russia proceeds to deploy INF systems, NATO will likely take steps to re-orient its nascent BMD posture so that it is effective against attacks from both the Middle East and from Russia, which could include the restoration of the European Midcourse Radar (EMR) radar in Central Europe that was a part of the original “third site” plan. If NATO proceeds with BMD against Russia, however, it would not pursue defense dominance; rather, it would likely seek a limited defense for the purpose of blunting Russian coercive threats. The speaker suggested that a minority in the U.S. BMD community would take advantage of this situation to argue that U.S. BMD homeland defense should be tailored to provide protection against Russian strategic strikes. He added, “If the INF treaty collapses, NATO will then be free to consider whether improved conventional strike capabilities of its own are needed to balance and deter the theater conventional strike capabilities Russia is deploying to support ‘pre-nuclear deterrence.’” This could include the development and deployment of intermediate-range non-nuclear strike systems in Europe.

A U.S. speaker further observed that there could be “adaptations to NATO’s nuclear posture.” These may include ensuring deterrence is effective for new problems while avoiding a return to Cold War-era concepts and approaches. “Those new problems include deterring Russian nuclear ‘de-escalation’ strikes and also ‘pre-nuclear’ strikes of a strategic kind (i.e., those that create extreme circumstances by threatening the vital interests of the United States and/or its allies).” He further suggested that the accelerated development of new U.S. stand-off nuclear-armed cruise missiles could compensate for any potential shortfalls in the perceived deterrence credibility of NATO’s nuclear sharing arrangements.

An American noted, “The sadly ironic result of President Putin’s actions to ‘snap back hard’ is that the West will now adapt its military posture by deploying capabilities tailored to deter Russia and defeat it if necessary—an intention that did not exist until his reactions to a Western strategy that does not exist. Of course, these capabilities will

be focused on negating the threats Russia might make in a war against a NATO ally and not on negating its strategic posture vis-à-vis the U.S.”

A Russian speaker responded that the next Russian military doctrine is likely to be even worse from the American point of view. The speaker noted that the 2010 military doctrine contradicted the contemporaneous military doctrine on a number of important points, with the new military doctrine being much more anti-American. The next military doctrine is likely to mention the United States by name as a threat, something that its predecessor did not. He explained that in the past, military doctrine was produced by an interagency process, which had a mediating effect on hardliners in the military. For example, in the 1990s and early 2000s, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs opposed the Ministry of Defense on a number of points, with the diplomats emphasizing stability and cooperation and the military emphasizing threats. This is no longer the case, and as a result, the military’s preference for a confrontational approach dominates the doctrine.

The speaker noted that Russian determinations of strategic stability are not based on objective analysis; rather, any attempts at formal modeling in Russia simply reflect political preferences. Russia, the speaker continued, brands as destabilizing any weapon or system that its political-military leadership does not like, be it PGMs, BMD, or anything else. In the speaker’s opinion, Russia and the United States should not be “addicted to symmetrical moves in development of strategic weapons.” The speaker remarked that during Gorbachev’s era, despite his public proclamations that the USSR was not going to engage in a symmetric arms race with the United States, the Soviets wasted billions of rubles on attempts at symmetric responses to the United States. Now, he continued, the same is happening: Russia is engaged in a concerted BMD effort under the cover of space defense. As far as undermining Russia’s relations with the West, the speaker continued, NATO enlargement has been much more important than BMD. The Russian attitude has been emotional, as demonstrated by Putin’s outburst, when he said that he simply could not imagine NATO troops in Crimea. This fear is shared overwhelmingly by the Russian elite, which helps explain Russia’s actions in

Crimea: Russia reacted to what it perceived as the West crossing a red line. The list of destabilizing factors, from the Russian point of view, includes NATO's conventional superiority over Russia and American breaches of international law in the Balkans and Libya. The speaker suggested that the West has viewed Russia as unreliable since the war with Georgia in 2008, and he foresees a period of instability even after Putin's eventual departure from power. One important condition for achieving strategic stability, continued the Russian speaker, is to acknowledge Russian and American zones of vital interest. It is a reality that Russia views the countries along its borders as its zone of vital interests, and neglecting this reality will lead to instability.

During the discussion period of this panel, several Russian and American participants indicated that they found the presentation of the American speaker "disturbing," as it appeared to reverse the cooperative trend of the last 25 years. Regarding Russia's military doctrine, one American participant observed that the 2010 military doctrine was already quite shocking because it mentioned NATO as threat, but did not mention either China or the threats emanating from Central Asia and Afghanistan. The same participant questioned why Russia is worried about the exceedingly distant prospect of Ukrainian membership in NATO and of NATO military forces in Crimea when there are more immediate and pressing security threats in its immediate neighborhood. Several Russian participants observed that American actions to assuage official Russian concerns would be ineffective not only because the political leadership believes that America is an enemy but also because Putin's administration needs America as an external enemy. Even if the United States were to drop all plans for BMD tomorrow, said one Russian participant, Russia would invent something new to complain about, suggesting that "Russian complaints about strategic military problems are a verbalization of subliminal fears of a color revolution. And Putin wants a guarantee that no color revolution happens in Russia." One of the American participants, a specialist on Russian politics, agreed that Putin believes that the West is "out to get him."

The debate then returned to nuclear weapons. An American participant observed that 15 years ago the U.S. saw nuclear arms control as the centerpiece of U.S.-Russian relations. When President George W. Bush showed his disdain for arms control, Russia perceived it as a sign of contempt for their interests, and President Obama's efforts to alleviate Russian suspicions have failed. The American national security community has come to a conclusion that no approach will satisfy Russia, and therefore the United States should simply stop worrying about Russia. At the same time, the Obama administration has noticed that Russia is modernizing its strategic counterforce capability, and there is no appetite for unilateral reductions on the American side – any reductions must be bilateral.

### **3. Europe: Problems of Regional Stability**

In the wake of Russia's annexation of Crimea, there was a general consensus among participants on both sides that the sense of stability Europe has enjoyed since the end of the Cold War has been broken. Participants expressed their expectation of a new period of sustained instability in Europe, which will demand more attention from the United States. There was general agreement that over the last twenty years, the West had systematically underestimated the depth of Russia's concern about Western intentions, and overestimated the potential to manage those concerns through such mechanisms as joint councils. It was further suggested that Russia's domestic political context was pivotal in understanding Russia's recent actions. In the 1990s and early 2000s, Russia was focused internally and needed to keep friction with the West to a minimum. Today, however, Putin has seen that challenging the West and inflating the threat it poses plays very well at home. Faced with a moribund economy and a vulnerable political position, Putin has used patriotic mobilization and expansion to shore up domestic support for his regime. His March 18 speech, in which he asserted the right to protect Russian speakers everywhere, was particularly popular.

The problem, according to Russian participants, is that the regime has now fallen into a self-made trap where they must continue to challenge the West in new ways in order to maintain the support Putin has gained at home by challenging the West over Ukraine. If Putin loses the initiative, domestic support will begin to unravel and Russia's deep economic, political, and social problems will reemerge. Finding new exploitable opportunities thus becomes paramount. Participants suggested several potential vulnerabilities that Putin might be tempted pursue, including abrogation of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, a return to nuclear testing, or developing concepts for and conducting exercises with non-strategic nuclear weapons (NSNW). While the military utility of such steps might be minimal, the political impact could be substantial.

For NATO and the United States, the problem of seeking strategic stability in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is complicated by Russia's domestic instability and unpredictability; without predictability, stability is hard to achieve. Participants expect NATO to return to territorial defense as its primary purpose and organizing principle. Debates about changes in NATO's nuclear force posture will most likely be shelved. The challenge, however, will be crafting a response that deters aggression at all levels. Russian participants noted that Putin is playing with a different kind of war, one in which fifth columnists and "little green men" are used to create ambiguity and plausible deniability while still achieving Putin's objectives. As NATO debates sending troops to the Baltics, it will need to think hard about how it might respond to nontraditional threats such as, for example, the seizure of a radio tower in Latvia. Among possible NATO options, participants suggested NATO think about inviting Sweden and Finland to join as full members, or consider closing the Baltic and Black Sea Straits to the Russian Navy. There were mixed opinions over how far Putin might push the alliance; while some participants did not expect him to test Article V, there was a general recognition that the complicated nature of alliance politics remain a weak point for NATO. In the short term, NATO is being drawn together to defend against a revanchist power, but that sentiment may be difficult to sustain over time if Putin can be patient. Energy politics further complicate the picture. While much has been made of Europe's

reliance on Russian natural gas, Russia is equally reliant on European customers for its overall economic health. Within Europe, however, the energy access question affects alliance cohesion. Participants agreed that Germany is the key piece to this puzzle.

On the topic of arms control, participants did not foresee the collapse of New START or the repudiation of major Cold War arms control agreements, and indeed there was recognition that in the past, arms control was often most appreciated when relations were rocky. Nevertheless, future negotiations may be jeopardized, and agreements will be difficult to reach and limited in scope. Participants agreed that there will be no movement on NSNW or missile defense treaties in the near term, though some participants thought it could be useful to revisit and update the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty.

#### **4. Middle East: Strategic and Non-Strategic WMD Dynamics**

Unlike in Europe and East Asia, weapons of mass destruction are not applied on a systematic basis to influence allies or adversaries in the Middle East. As a U.S. panelist observed, there are no formal extended deterrence agreements with Middle Eastern states, thus limiting the involvement of the major powers. Instead, the U.S. speaker noted, the Middle East is reliant on conventional deterrence and defense, with large armies that are ill-equipped to function as power projection instruments. Traditional notions of strategic stability don't apply to the Middle East, he argued; rather, the region has experienced endemic warfare about long-held political disputes between states. Domestically, the Arab Spring highlighted the internal problems in the region, and the aftermath has made it clear that there is no path to long term peace and stability in the region.

Participants agreed that the United States and Russia have little ability to influence the internal dynamics of these states. For the United States, the Middle East throws America's domestic political problems into stark relief. One American participant

noted that the Obama administration has experienced unprecedented difficulties achieving consensus over responses to such crises as the Egyptian and Libyan revolutions, the civil war in Syria, or Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons. The United States, he argued, has lost its sense of how it might use force to achieve strategic ends, or what those ends should even look like. Nevertheless, its alliances and alignments within the region remain salient, thus limiting its ability to pivot away from the Middle East and toward the Asia-Pacific. The United States' reliance on functioning oil markets necessitates its ongoing involvement in the Middle East, which it primarily maintains through defense commitments and arms sales to regional allies and partners.

Russia, for its part, views the Middle East as a place to regain prestige and status, and as an arena to contest U.S. domination. One Russian participant suggested that some in Russia saw the Arab Spring revolutions as a provocation of the West and as a chance for Muslims to realize and implement their own political traditions. He argued that Putin sees parallels between Russia and the Muslim world as great civilizations that have been oppressed by the West. In this worldview, Russia is a natural partner for the Muslim world as it works against Western hegemony. Nevertheless, the participant did not believe Russia would be able to realize its ambitions in the Middle East. Further, he suggested that Russia's actions in the region have been in part driven by Chinese economic interest under a practical Sino-Russian alliance. Russia also benefits from instability in the Middle Eastern energy markets; rising energy prices have been a central driver of Russian economic growth.

Within this overarching context, participants discussed several Middle Eastern countries and conflicts that pose challenges or questions for regional stability as well as for strategic stability between the United States and Russia.

#### SYRIA

Both sides suggested that after Ukraine, the likelihood of any U.S.-Russian cooperation on Syria is extremely low. One Russian participant saw the Ukrainian crisis as connected to the situation in Syria, and noted that Russia is unable to deal with the

Syrian opposition. Russia fears that Islamist fighters will return to Russia after participating in the Syrian war; the participant said that 2,000 mujahedeen from Russia were in Syria, and that as they come back, they will kindle Islamic absolutism in Russia. The potential for radical Islam to spread to Russia's Muslim population brings with it the specter of terrorism.

## IRAN

Iran's pursuit of a nuclear capability generated significant discussion as well as significant disagreement over the effects of potential Iranian nuclearization. One participant argued that the deterioration of U.S.-Russian relations would have its most serious consequences in the efforts to negotiate Iran's nuclear future.

While participants agreed that an Iranian nuclear weapon was not ideal, most did not see military force as a viable response at this stage. One U.S. participant suggested that even if Iran went nuclear, it would soon come to learn that nuclear weapons aren't particularly useful weapons, and in the long run a nuclear Iran might not be particularly problematic. The difficult period of nuclear learning, however, would be dangerous, particularly as Iranian thinking about doctrine, command and control, and deterrence remains opaque.

## **5. India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan: Strategic and Non-Strategic WMD Dynamics**

Efforts to share lessons learned from the Cold War and to promote confidence-building mechanisms and arms control treaties in South Asia have met with minimal success. One participant with deep experience in conducting South Asian Track II dialogues explained that the South Asian strategic community rejects the applicability of the Cold War, though there has been some evidence that they have gradually absorbed the principles and recognized that the dilemmas faced by the United States and USSR also exist in South Asia. Nevertheless, despite all the Track II dialogues and other platforms

for discussion, according to a Russian participant, South Asia's difficulty in agreeing to meaningful confidence-building measures or arms control treaties is rooted in several interconnected issues. India and Pakistan are both building up and modernizing their arsenals, which is difficult to limit when neither side feels it has a secure second-strike capability. Further, Pakistan is not interested in mere parity with India; rather, it seeks an advantage in the nuclear realm to make up for its conventional weakness vis-à-vis India. Meanwhile, India does not view Pakistan as a co-equal state, and is unwilling to accept mutual vulnerability with Pakistan; India views its nuclear arsenal as directed at China, and equality for Pakistan would weaken New Delhi vis-à-vis China. India has also expressed its unwillingness to exchange even basic information about its nuclear weapons within an arms control framework, lest that information be stolen by China.

Recent political changes have the potential to generate significant changes to the security dynamics of the region, but it's unclear at this stage how that will play out. The overwhelming success of India's BJP in the recent elections provides Prime Minister Narendra Modi with substantial latitude in governing, even as the party's tendency toward hawkish positions could prove problematic in the event of a crisis. One Russian participant drew parallels between Modi and Putin, suggesting that for political and strategic reasons, Modi will need to demonstrate his willingness to protect Indians anywhere. Pakistan also conducted successful elections in 2013, though it is still too early to tell whether the civilian government will be able to gain and maintain political control over the military.

Afghanistan is currently awaiting the results of national elections that will see the departure of Hamid Karzai after thirteen years as President. The U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan has left some experts questioning whether the U.S. will start to lose interest in South Asia as it continues to pivot towards the Asia-Pacific, though others suggest that India is well positioned to act as the lynchpin to the rebalance strategy even as India seeks to avoid angering China or falling into a commitment trap with the United States.

For Russia, the primary goal is to build a security community in Central Asia that is capable of dealing with drug trafficking and terrorist migration from Central Asia into Russia. One Russian participant stated that Russia is attempting to balance its involvement in Afghanistan with its relations with Pakistan in order to develop new arms markets. Russia's engagement with China also opens the way to the Pakistani arms market. While Russia will have active dialogue with Kabul, Beijing, and Islamabad, however, this participant suggested that prospects for real cooperation exist only between Moscow and New Delhi. Russia sees its comparative advantage to be in strategic projects, such as aircraft carriers, nuclear submarines, and advanced missiles, where competitors like Israel, Germany, France, and the United States are reluctant to cooperate with India.

## 6. China, Japan, and the Koreas

During this panel, there was significant discussion about China's nuclear modernization efforts and their impact on nuclear doctrine and strategy. China maintains a no-first-use policy and a strategy of minimum deterrence, reflected in their estimated 250 warheads and 180 missiles and nuclear-capable aircraft.<sup>1</sup> As their nuclear capabilities improve, however, some participants predicted that China would move to a limited deterrent position, in which China saw its nuclear weapons as capable of deterring conventional attacks, even if they continued to publicly embrace a no first use doctrine. Recent and forthcoming technical developments have included new generations of ballistic and cruise missiles, new strategic bombers, and the first combat patrols of the Jin-class ballistic missile submarine, as well as advancement in anti-satellite weaponry and anti-submarine warfare capabilities. One Russian participant pointed out the vast resources being invested in research and development

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<sup>1</sup> Both American and Russian participants judged reports that China has 3,000+ warheads hidden in tunnels to be non-credible, based on fissile material production rate, the number of known delivery platforms, and the production rate for delivery systems.

but noted that comparatively little is being devoted to full-scale production of any particular missile. He concluded that China does not yet have systems it deems worth producing en masse, but that when a system is seen as bringing the desired results, it will be able to shift resources to production quickly. Platforms may grow rapidly and unexpectedly, causing a deep transformation in how the Chinese nuclear arsenal is maintained and controlled. Russia and China continue to cooperate in the development of strategic systems, with Russia acting as a provider of key components, including engines, missile homing systems, and other specialized systems.

Neither American nor Russian participants saw the foundations for strategic stability with China, though for different reasons. For the United States, there is no consensus around accepting mutual vulnerability with China, which is a necessary and foundational element to strategic stability. While some in the United States recognize that vulnerability exists, there is disagreement about whether to acknowledge it publicly; as one participant explained, “it would have repercussions for ally assurance, and there is little chance China would change its behaviour in any way.” For Russia, the threat from Chinese nuclear modernization is even more acute; as one Russian participant noted, any Chinese intermediate-range ballistic missile is a strategic weapon to Russia, and even short-range weapons can reach Russian Far Eastern cities. The Russian response has been the development and expansion of the naval component of its nuclear forces, including the revitalization of the ballistic missile submarine (SSBN) base in Kamchatka and the development of a new generation of SSBNs and submarine-launched ballistic missiles. In the short term, Russian participants did not see China as an active threat, but expressed their concern that much depended on China’s political development over the next 10 years. According to one American participant, the key to Chinese strategic stability in regard to both the United States and Russia would be for China to feel confident in its retaliatory capability and its ability to produce enough political pain to deter any initial attack.

Meanwhile, China has indicated that it is not interested in discussing formal arms control agreements until the United States and Russia have drawn down much further.

One Russian participant suggested that given their huge investment in research, development, and rapid prototyping, it's unlikely that China will engage in arms control until its transformation of its nuclear forces has reached some sort of conclusion. Without greater clarity about China's intentions for its nuclear arsenal, however, agreements between the United States and Russia on a successor to New START will be very difficult.

Both sides agreed that North Korea seems committed to developing a nuclear capability and delivery system with the goal of being able to strike the United States or its allies. Participants disagreed about how advanced North Korea's missile capabilities were, with some suggesting that the limited number of tests suggests they still have a long way to go. Other participants, however, noted that North Korea is building its ballistic missiles off of existing missile designs, and that testing activity should not be seen as a particularly useful measure of progress. For North Korea, tests have thus far been primarily political statements, rather than part of an integrated program of weapon development. One participant argued that the question is not whether they can reach 100% certainty, but whether they can raise sufficient doubts in an adversary's mind about their ability to conduct a nuclear strike. Beyond their nuclear capabilities, North Korea's penchant for small-scale attacks against South Korea, such as the *Cheonan* incident or the shelling of Yeonpyeong Island, remains highly problematic. In response to these provocations, South Korea has adopted "proactive deterrence," which includes requirements for pre-emption and, according to one American participant, "greatly enflames the danger of escalation."

For the United States, assurance of Japan and South Korea remain high priorities. These countries face a scale of challenges and threats from China and North Korea, though the threat to South Korea from China is seen to be fairly minimal. On the low end, North Korea's small-scale attacks and China's use of grey zone tactics in the South China Sea and declarations of expansive maritime claims present potential vectors for hostilities to escalate. Further nuclear developments by China and North Korea could intensify these stability-instability paradox dynamics. At the mid-level, changing

nuclear postures could increase the potential for conventional conflict, and for the United States' allies, there is a concern that threats to the United States homeland could reduce America's willingness to defend them in a crisis. To mitigate these risks, the United States has pursued conventional superiority and missile defense; while this has had implications for U.S.-China relations, according to one participant, America has decided that the missile threat from North Korea is "too acute and present to sacrifice the defense of the homeland and allies to China's implacable concerns." Some participants questioned whether Japan and South Korea are confident in the United States' extended deterrence commitments, and others questioned whether these countries might – or should – pursue their own nuclear forces. One American participant argued that the United States' power in Asia is a direct result of our alliances. If either Japan or South Korea chose to acquire nuclear weapons, the other would probably follow suit, and the *raison d'être* of the alliance would evaporate, taking with it America's relevance and influence in the region and leaving greater tensions between more nuclear-armed countries. Another American participant argued that such an unravelling of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) would have grave consequences for relations with the United States, particularly their commercial sectors.

## **7. The Russian Military and Strategic Stability**

As described by a Russian expert, after the war against Georgia in 2008, the Russian leadership realized that even after eight years of significant investment in the armed forces, the Russian military was outmoded. With this realization, a major reform of the armed forces was undertaken. Large-scale changes took place: 130,000 officer billets were cut together with 90,000 billets of "praporshchik" (the Russian equivalent of a non-commissioned officer). Between 70 and 80 percent of units and formations were eliminated. The organization of the military changed from divisions to brigades, with a few exceptions such as Airborne Troops. The number of units in the armed forces decreased eleven fold, from 1189 to 179. The aim of these reforms was to ensure that

each unit is fully manned at all times, allowing it to go into combat without further mobilization. The result has been a wholesale rejection of the mobilization-based model of the military that had been in existence since the 1860s but could no longer be effective, as proven in the Georgian war, when eighty percent of all military units were not battle-ready. This new model promised greater effectiveness and more rapid mobilization times.

According to this speaker, a new system of military education will be necessary to create the personnel needed to operate under this new model. A new type of officer, educated and confident, must be trained, along with new types of NCOs and enlisted men. Minister of Defense Anatoly Serdyukov (2007-2012) was charged with making these changes. Serdyukov was interested in the American system of military education. He wanted to unite all Russian institutions of military higher education, of which there were 65 in 2008, into four educational and research centers. At present, Russian officers spend about 10 years in education and training. Serdyukov's idea was for officers to receive four years of basic education and training, then regularly attend short courses of 6-10 months, which would be required for promotion.

If this system were implemented, the authorities would have received well-educated, self-confident personnel. But Putin needs officers who will carry out any order given, whether legal or not, and educated, self-confident people may be less inclined to do so. Problems arose also from Putin's insistence on a one-million-men-strong military (Serdyukov's reforms would have inevitably resulted in a less than a million troops). According to Putin, a smaller military does not fit his image of Russia as a great power. It is impossible, however, for Russia to maintain a military of such a size because of demographic problems. To have one million men under arms would require conscripting all young men of draft age, and, in the process, ruining the system of higher education.

The reform process was halted in 2012 and Serdyukov was fired – officially for corruption, though according to a Russian speaker, he was no more corrupt than others in Putin's entourage. Rather, he was fired because the military reform went too

far, in Putin's opinion, by threatening to create a highly professional (in the Western sense) officer corps and making it clear that a force of a million was both impossible and unnecessary.

Nevertheless, the reforms did bolster Russia's military effectiveness, as was demonstrated in Crimea. As a result of the reform effort, Russia has a rapid deployment force, mostly comprised of volunteers. This includes the Airborne Troops (VDV), which recently formed 29 battalions of volunteer paratroopers; six brigades of marines; nine brigades of the Main Intelligence Directorate of the General Staff (GRU); and three or four elite ground forces units—altogether between 50,000 and 80,000 men. These forces showed their effectiveness in Crimea, though it was not the takeover of Crimea itself that was so impressive: that operation could have been carried out by two brigades of GRU because of Russian troops already on the ground and the support of the population. Much more impressive, however, was the rapid deployment of forces to the Ukrainian border, which took less than three days—a major achievement for Russian troops. By comparison, when the Chechen rebels invaded Dagestan in 1999, it took two and a half weeks to deploy Russian troops from the Volgograd area to Dagestan.

This military reform was promoted for many years by liberal, pro-Western Russians, who wanted to make the Russian military more like the U.S. armed forces: all volunteer, flexible, mobile, and not dependent on extensive and time-consuming mobilization. For many years, the government and the Russian military resisted. Now, some major elements of the reform advocated by Russian liberals have been implemented – and these liberal ideas are serving the authoritarian regime quite well. This military reform will have a serious impact on strategic stability in Europe and in the world. In the 1990s, the Russian argument was that their conventional forces were so weak that they had no choice but to rely on nuclear forces. Today, Russia has more or less effective conventional forces, though not sufficient to stand up against either China or NATO. These forces cannot be made much larger because of demographics. Thus, for a wider conflict, Russia still must rely on nuclear weapons, even as its

successes in Georgia and Ukraine may have made the Kremlin more inclined to accept risks of small-scale conflicts along its periphery; these conflicts, however, may unexpectedly escalate to large-scale wars that Russia could contain only using its nuclear weapons.

During the period of Putin's rule, the Kremlin has understood relations between Russia and the United States to be based on nuclear deterrence. This relationship model allowed Moscow to feel equal to Washington and provided Moscow with the opportunity to make regular claims that U.S. actions violated strategic stability. In recent years, as was discussed earlier, these complaints have revolved around U.S. plans for BMD and conventional PGMs. In one Russian speaker's opinion, both these issues have been used as pretexts to express in military terms the entirely different complaints and fears of the Kremlin (i.e., Putin's belief that the West is responsible for all the "color revolutions" in Eastern Europe and Central Asia and his belief that the West is preparing to organize another one—this time in Russia).

## Conclusions and Recommendations

U.S. and Russian views of challenges to strategic stability in several crucial regions of the world differ substantially, the gap only made wider by the sharp deterioration of U.S.-Russian relations, which is unlikely to be reversed in the near future. It will take time and a change in the international political situation toward a relaxation of tensions to overcome this crisis and resume cooperation on strategic stability.

Participants on both sides of the dialogue were concerned that the general deterioration of U.S.-Russian relations was having a negative impact on strategic stability. The Russian elites viewed U.S. actions regarding strategic systems specifically, and international politics in general, as destabilizing. The greatest irritants continue to be U.S. missile defense plans and conventional Prompt Global Strike, as well as the American use of force in the Middle East and, especially, support for Ukraine in its conflict with Russia. The two countries' visions for strengthening strategic stability are drastically different. While the United States has stated on a number of occasions that it would like to move away from nuclear deterrence, Russia considers it to be the mainstay of its security. The main threats to the United States are regional actors armed with nuclear weapons and long-range delivery systems, while for Russia the main threats are the United States and NATO, with China as a potential danger. Regional actors that have or may acquire nuclear weapons are seen as a problem but not a threat.

The situation is further complicated by the fact that threat analysis in Russia has become highly politicized and expert opinion is ignored if it does not fit in with the preferences of Vladimir Putin. Some of the Russian participants suggested that the Kremlin's complaints about American missile defense and conventional PGS are rooted in the Russian concern that the main goal of American policy is regime change in Russia.

The existing nuclear arms control agreements (such as New START and the INF Treaty) may survive, but it is quite likely that for the first time since the 1970s there will be no strategic arms control agreement when New START expires in 2020. The factor of China is another stumbling block: until China's plans for the future of its nuclear arsenal are clear, Russia is not likely to engage in further reductions of nuclear weapons. The only hope for a renewed process of reductions of strategic nuclear weapons would be a slowdown of Russia's economy that would make it impossible to maintain the current size of its strategic forces.

In the unanimous opinion of the Russian participants, there is little chance for successful negotiations on the reductions of non-strategic nuclear weapons or on missile defense. The Russian government considers NSNW as essential for compensating for the relative weakness of their conventional forces vis-à-vis NATO and China, and it views American missile defense plans as an attempt to destroy Russia's ability to deter an American nuclear attack.

The military reform carried out by Russia between 2008 and 2012 has created a potential challenge to strategic stability. Russia now has a capability to conduct operations against its small neighbors relying primarily on its special forces; it does not, however, have conventional forces sufficient for a conflict with NATO or China. Emboldened by its success in Georgia and Ukraine, Russia may be more inclined to accept risks of small-scale conflicts along its periphery; these conflicts, however, may unexpectedly escalate to large-scale wars that Russia could contain only using its nuclear weapons.

Russia views the Middle East as a place to regain prestige and status, and as an arena to contest U.S. domination. Both sides suggested that as a result of the crisis over Ukraine, the likelihood of any U.S.-Russian cooperation on Syria is extremely low. One participant argued that the deterioration of U.S.-Russian relations would have their most serious consequences in the efforts to negotiate Iran's nuclear future.

Maintaining strategic stability in South Asia is a relatively low priority for Russia. Regarding that region, Russia's primary concern is the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in Afghanistan and Pakistan that could spread into Central Asia. The United States, in contrast, is concerned about the potential for conflict in the China-India-Pakistan triangle. While Russia and the United States do not compete (except in arms sales to India) in South Asia, there is little ground for cooperation in maintaining strategic stability there.

There may be grounds in the future for a common understanding regarding China. Neither American nor Russian participants saw the foundations for strategic stability with China, though for different reasons. In the short term, Russian participants did not see China as an active threat, but expressed their concern that much depended on China's political development over the next 10 years. One Russian participant suggested that given China's huge investment in research, development, and rapid prototyping, it's unlikely that China will engage in arms control until its transformation of its nuclear forces has reached some sort of conclusion. The crisis in Ukraine has pushed Russia closer to China, but this rapprochement has been forced by circumstances; if and when U.S.-Russian relations improve, some discrete cooperation vis-à-vis China would be possible.

For the United States, the assurance of Japan and South Korea remain high priorities, and therefore North Korea's pursuit of nuclear capabilities represent a direct challenge to strategic stability in the region. For Russia, North Korea is only a limited problem; it will follow China's lead in dealing with North Korea.

Stepping back from this recent dialogue, Russian policy is difficult to predict for two reasons. One, all important decisions are made by one man – Putin – who does not have institutional barriers to his exercise of powers, and reportedly does not tolerate advice contrary to his inclinations. Two, Russia's economy is deteriorating and thus, plans made today (especially for weapons acquisition) may have to be abandoned tomorrow. The latter scenario may open possibilities for further reductions of strategic nuclear

weapons, although this would require a change in Putin's well-established negative attitude toward further U.S.-Russian bilateral strategic arms reductions and toward any discussion of NSNW reductions.

It is helpful to emphasize an observation made during the Dialogue by one of the Russian participants, that Russia's conduct in foreign affairs is deeply rooted in the nature of Putin's regime, which has a shaky political foundation of corrupt bureaucracy, media manipulation, electoral fraud, repression and criminality. Mobilization of the public against the external enemy helps the regime, as evidenced by the sky-high approval ratings that Putin received after the annexation of Crimea and aggression against Ukraine, accompanied by frenzied anti-American propaganda. It is also increasingly apparent that Putin himself shares the anti-American sentiment prevalent today among the Russian public. Mobilizing public opinion against the United States has been far more beneficial for Putin than improved relations with the United States were for his predecessor Boris Yeltsin. He is not likely to back away from the policy that helps him stay in power, requiring him to view the United States as an enemy and to treat every American policy initiative as a trap.

Putin has made it clear that he will deal with the United States only after the latter changes major foreign policies such as democracy promotion, interventions in the Middle East not approved by Russia in the UN Security Council, missile defense, and support for sovereignty of former Soviet republics bordering Russia. Since the United States is unlikely to abandon these policies, it would not be in Putin's character to change his stance. Even if the United States develops arms control initiatives that are not against Russian interests, Putin may react negatively just out of a desire to "punish" the United States.

Recommendations: What can we do in this difficult situation?

- Engage China in discrete discussions of strategic stability. This is bound to attract Russia's attention and motivate Russia to engage in similar discussions with the United States.

- As suggested by one of the participants in the dialogue, the United States should discuss with Russia only those arms control issues the United States is interested in, thus excluding missile defense, prompt global strike, etc.
- Continue thinking and discussing how new capabilities in space, cyber warfare, precision strike and missile defense are related to our past concept of strategic stability, which developed from Cold War nuclear-led thinking.
- Attempt a series of bilateral workshops, seminars and table-top exercises on how our competing visions of doctrine and capabilities might play out in a confrontation or crisis where the use of force is a real possibility. Such a confrontation is unlikely but not impossible. For political reasons, these discussions cannot occur at the government level. They also cannot simply involve academic specialists, who may lack a visceral understanding of military behavior in crisis. We conclude that they should be conducted at the Track II level and involve heavy participation by retired senior military officers on both sides.
- Russia and the United States lack a common understanding of how to act in the event of third party use of WMD. An especially dangerous scenario would involve an unattributed WMD attack against either nuclear superpower; Russia's obsession with the idea that the United States is out to destroy Putin's regime by any means could trigger catastrophic actions on the part of Russia. It would be beneficial to discuss a joint algorithm for reacting to such a development that would allow the United States and Russia to avoid a very dangerous crisis when third parties use WMD.