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# **PLOUGHSHARES FUND**

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### **WHAT SHOULD BE CHANGED IN THE US-RUSSIAN MILITARY-POLITICAL DIALOGUE IN THE COMING YEAR?**

*A Policy Memo*

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The US-Russian relations in the field of security at a present stage are rather contradictory. On the one hand the policy of “reset” in bilateral relations initiated three years ago by President B.Obama has brought concrete results like the Prague Treaty on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms and very optimistic documents of the last summit of the NATO-Russia Counsel (Lisbon, November 2009). On the other hand the deadlock in bilateral consultations on the European missile defense system may block any further arms control talks (conventional weapons, non-strategic nuclear weapons, etc.) which is declared by both sides to be one of their foreign policy priorities.

Russian refusal to start practical cooperation on missile defense (renewal of joint exercises, creation of joint data exchange center(s), joint missile threat assessment, technological cooperation, etc.) without clear legally binding guaranties that the future US/NATO European missile defense system is not aimed at the Russian deterrence potential (moreover Russia insists on concrete limitations of the number of interceptors, their speed and range, areas of sensors and interceptors’ deployment) creates a deadlock in the negotiations since such a document (even if President B.Obama would sign it, which is highly problematic in the coming US presidential elections) has practically no chances to be ratified in the US Senate.

Of course the present situation is rooted in the fundamental absence of trust between Russia and its western partners, first of all the United States. But trust is like a building: its destruction may take very short time, but construction will definitely take years. So it’s hardly possible to quickly build up something if it has been destroyed for about fifty years.

Nevertheless if there is enough political will on both sides the present deadlock may be unblocked. I think that present and future president of Russia may demonstrate such a will and make Russian position on guaranties more acceptable to the USA (e.g. signing a document on ABM cooperation at a level of heads of states and governments like Rome Declaration of 2000) but will definitely require reciprocity. Adjustment of the American Phased Adaptive Approach for Europe namely giving up the deployment of interceptors and sensors in Poland and Baltic sea envisaged by phase three may be considered as a reciprocal step.

Unfortunately we must admit that the year 2012 is not the best year for breakthroughs in the US-Russian dialogue on security issues especially for missile defense compromises. The reason is obvious – the year of presidential elections in the United States is not the best time for a president running for re-election to demonstrate political will and make compromises on the most sensitive national security issue. In Russia conditions for the present and the future President to make such compromises are more favorable.

I think that the dialogue on missile defense cooperation, conventional arms control in Europe, NATO – Russia relations will continue in the year 2012. But I hardly envisage real progress on any of the above mentioned topics. And I practically exclude the start of a dialogue on non-strategic nuclear weapons because of the sensitivity of the issue for Russian Federation and dependence of any compromise on it on the progress in other security and arms control issues. The same goes for the possible consultations as regards further reductions of strategic offensive weapons.

Of course all said will be true in case of routine, predictable without any surprises development of Russian - American relations. If for example the US administration under the pressure of “the friends of Georgia” will push through the decision to give to Tbilisi the membership action plan at the coming NATO summit in Chicago our bilateral relations will be damaged and arms control dialogue stopped.

Nevertheless the bilateral relations with the United States is still one of the main priorities of the Russian foreign policy. International security situation, strategic stability and effect of joint answer to the new threats and challenges to a very large extend depend on them. Taking into consideration the degree of influence of the United States, the system of its allied security and economic commitments, the quality of the US – Russian relations turns out to be one of the key factors for creation favorable external conditions for the steady socio-economic development of Russia.

Instead of constant search for illusionary parity or friendship with the United States or on the contrary perception of Washington as the source of all evil and trouble Russia should learn how to cooperate with the USA for the sake of its own national interests. For me it is obvious that without cooperation with the United States and reaching with it new security and arms control agreements Russia will not be able to secure global military-strategic stability, build up new European security system, prevent possible conflicts in post-Soviet space, effectively fight extremism and terrorism. And in the long term without support and assistance from the United States and its allies it will be much more difficult for Russia to carry out modernization of the Russian economy on the basis of high technologies and innovation.

As a whole the relations between Russia and the United States in the field of security remain to be rather contradictory, combining elements of cooperation and principal contradictions. But I am sure that real, long-term interests of Russia and the United States are not antagonistic and coincide on the majority of modern security issues.

Of course the above said is not the task for the coming year since serious improvement of US – Russian relations requires building up much greater amount of trust between our countries which may take years. May be to facilitate the process our leaders should go further and change the policy of “reset” for the policy of “upgrading the operating system” of our bilateral relations.