



NUCLEAR ARSENALS IN 25 YEARS

The future of nuclear weapons has recently been widely discussed. The latest trends indicate that the role of nuclear weapons in national security will diminish. The same relates to the U.S. nukes deployed around the world – one can witness the withdrawal of nuclear weapons from Great Britain and Greece, reduction of bases in Germany, or the initiative of the four U.S. politicians in 2007 and 2008, which draws the attention of the world community to *nuclear zero* and disarmament issues. So what is the future of nuclear weapons in the world? What will the role of nukes in national security be and how will it change?

These questions are addressed to our discussion participants. One of them is Alexander **Saveliev**, who heads the strategic studies section in the Center for International Security of the Institute of World Economy and International Relations (IMEMO) and took part in the elaboration of the START I Treaty. Another is Col.-Gen. (ret.) Yevgeny **Maslin**, Director General of *Aspekt-Konversiya* and member of the PIR Center Executive Board, who served for more than 40 years in the Russian Armed Forces. The third participant is Amb. Roland **Timerbaev**, Chair of the PIR Center Executive Board and one of the authors of the NPT.¹

SECURITY INDEX: Which scenario for nuclear arsenals development would you predict for the next 25 years? What are the key trends?

ALEXANDER SAVELIEV (IMEMO): 25 years is a long term. And there can be any scenario drawn – up to the most apocalyptic ones. I would like to say that we need some framework – in which context do we consider the issue of the nuclear weapons and their future? We can make any forecasts only proceeding from the current trends. Russia will stay, the United States will not disappear as well, all other major actors in international affairs remain the same. There are no catastrophes, wars, even though the world is not extremely stable. Hence, we are extrapolating the current situation on the future and expect that nothing extraordinary will happen.

Russia and the United States possess fewer and fewer nuclear weapons. Our strategic forces were reduced from 12,000 to roughly 2,000 in the last 15 years. Will we reach the *zero* point? We would, if it was not for the third countries that are nuclear weapon states *de jure* and *de facto*. For instance, will India, Pakistan and Israel get legal recognition as nuclear weapon states? Will there be other countries in this club? India has always condemned the NPT for its discriminatory character, since the treaty fixed forever the right of five nations to dictate their will to the rest of the world. And many states unofficially support this point of view.

Unfortunately, the third non-nuclear weapon states have an impression that they are not treated appropriately on the world arena, unless they possess nuclear weapons. If you have nukes, the attitude is different – you are listened to, you can solve your problems much easily, especially in your relations with great powers. For India its nuclear program is more important in political terms, for raising its influence rather than for solving military tasks with respect to



Pakistan or China. This trend is difficult to overcome – the role of nuclear weapons as a political tool for non-military tasks is increasing. And here it is quite difficult to make predictions.

This trend allows me to make the first conclusion that in 25 years nuclear weapons will not disappear. It is difficult to imagine Russia and the United States will disarm while leaving the issue open for China, India, the U.K., or France.

On the other hand, Russia and the United States have the largest arsenals. It is clear to everyone that they do not need such amount of weapons. But who doesn't need them more? It seems that the Americans – they can accomplish their military tasks quite well with conventional forces. Nuclear weapons do not add the advantages, they are the headache. Russia acts differently – many leaders assume that nuclear weapons are our only remedy against future conflicts and confrontation with the rest of the world. I can only hope that such *love* for arsenals is a temporary thing.

Another thing that is important is not the quantity of weapons, but the predictability. If we have to build our relationship with some state (India, Pakistan, or Israel), we will do this and will neglect their nuclear programs, the lack of IAEA control, etc. And it is not the disarmament that is crucial here, but the awareness of the capabilities and plans for the future. All this data can be obtained through surveillance mechanisms, but interpretation, explanations are required.

For instance, there was a statement that China builds up 80 launching sites for missile deployment. Why? There is no explanation. How can we discuss strategic stability from the Chinese point of view? At various conferences we asked the Chinese, «Do you plan the first strike?» They wondered – why? «Because from the point of strategic stability, your systems are vulnerable. And we can only regard your deployment as provocative, as the preparation for the first strike.» The Chinese did their best to avoid the answer, but as a result admitted – «We do not believe that we will be attacked. If we are attacked, we will think at least one week before making a retaliatory strike.» And then they argued that their missiles were stationed without warheads and it would take time to install them, so any hasty decisions will not be possible. Such approach is quite curious. I find it most dangerous when there is an automatic decision – for instance, when the president gets three minutes to think – yes or no.

If we give optimistic forecasts about the future of nuclear weapons, I would see the following picture – nuclear weapon states demonstrate some transparency, exchange information on the availability of nuclear weapons and plans for their modernization.

Besides, since some nuclear weapon systems have long service life, one may predict which of them will stay in the next 25 years. Let take our *Yury Dolgoruky* submarine and three submarines of the same project – they will stay, since they can be operational for over 20 years. Topol-M will also exist. The United States must have the same predictable arsenal. It is not that clear which weapons will the U.K. preserve. It is time they replaced their Trident missile, while they keep thinking – whether this should happen at all. However, in Great Britain the approach is slightly different. The opponents of disarmament ask the following question – is the U.K. ready to allow France to be the only nuclear power in Europe? The answer is evident.

YEVGENY MASLIN (ASPEKT-KONVERSIYA): I agree entirely with Alexander. Nuclear weapons are political tools, even though we and the Americans tried to convert them into a battlefield weapon. I was young and thought sincerely that the third world war would be a nuclear warfare and the Soviet Union would definitely win. This was the time of confrontation of ideologies, now we don't have it.

If we remember the history of nuclear weapons development, they could not help emerging – the human thought cannot be stopped, this is the matter of scientific progress. And I am absolutely sure that in 25 years nukes will exist on the planet. And 25 years is not a long term, even in 50 years they will exist. And these weapons will disappear only when mankind starts thinking about some global things. For instance, global warming, or a piece of Jupiter breaks away and falls down on the Earth. Then human beings would realize that it is time to stop threatening each other, especially with nuclear weapons and nukes will die. Before that – no, I have serious doubts.

One example. I was in China in 1994. This was a romantic time in Russia, the end of ideological confrontation, the Americans were close friends, nearly relatives, everyone was exchanging smiles. And the issues of nuclear security and safety were raised jointly, the Nunn-Lugar law and the Cooperative Threat Reduction program. So at that time our Defense Minister asked me to visit Beijing – China conducted a nuclear test and that caused the wave of interest on the part of the world community.

I started to ask the Chinese – how could we promote jointly the nuclear safety and security agenda? I was also quite romantic, even after 40 years of dealing with nuclear munitions during my military service. The Chinese immediately shut and suggested to hold negotiations at midnight. So, an empty hall at midnight, I am sitting in front of the Chinese head of the weapons department (it turned out that he was a son-in-law of Deng Xiaoping). And as far as security is concerned, he says, «Everything is safe and secure in our country.» Full stop.

That is how the dialogue ended. In principle, we did not know so much about the Chinese nuclear weapons. However, Beijing will maintain its nuclear arsenal and will further develop its armed forces, and even plans to reach the Moon.

In fact, nuclear arsenals are being cut. But this is true with respect to Russia and the United States, which together possess the largest amount of nuclear weapons. Russia carries out such reductions more actively, as the service life of those munitions in the United States is longer. The service life, I'd like to stress it. And no wonder the Americans once initiated the CTBT. And they twisted arms of everyone, including Russia, to have this treaty signed, simply because the service life of their weapons is longer.

When the service life of a warhead is over, certain munitions should be checked for safety. And such check is only possible with the help of a nuclear explosion. The United States was insisting on the signature of the CTBT, but its warheads had been tested before. Meanwhile, Russia started the moratorium on 1989 and missed all the opportunities. So now we have signed the CTBT and ratified it, while the Americans have not. What is the reason for that? Why do they keep their test range in Nevada within the six-month readiness period?

And we continue to cut down our weapons, even though we have good facilities for nuclear research – Arzamas, Snezhinsk – and have technologies enabling us to test the safety of nuclear charges without explosion.

SECURITY INDEX: Yevgeny Petrovich, you mentioned the issue of safety and security of nuclear arsenals. Do you think that the security of weapons storage facilities is growing in Russia?

YEVGENY MASLIN: We have to ensure the security of nuclear munitions and to protect them from any penetration. The Americans have a different concern – to prevent theft. They do not care about penetration, but believe it important to avoid delivery to New York or some other place. So it is important to think about security of storage.

SECURITY INDEX: Under these circumstances, grave concerns emerge due to the state of storage security in the United States. One of the recent examples is Russia's report to the United States about security of storage of U.S. nukes in Turkey and its non-compliance with the existing challenges and threats. Russia passed this information confidentially and Washington accepted it with gratitude and enhanced the security. Another example is the flight of the U.S. aircraft, which brought seven cruise missiles from one part of the United States to another, while the pilots did not even know that they were carrying nuclear warheads. Is it typical of the U.S.A only? Does it mean that the skills of personnel do not coincide with the current level of threats? Or perhaps, this is a general trend, since the level of danger is much lower now than before.

YEVGENY MASLIN: As far as the security of nuclear arsenals is concerned, there is some information that people serve in the United States without appropriate training. In the 1990s we listened to Senator Nunn in Monterey and in his lecture he mentioned the inspection of such facilities in Europe. He was addressed by a sergeant who tried to sell him a nuclear charge for \$500 after some small talk. In Turkey the security regime was eventually tightened. And there is no surprise in it. Since the 1990s we have launched the program of personnel reliability for



those people, who work with nuclear weapons. This was a serious program and thanks to the United States, which allocated money. We acquired polygraphs in the 1990s for the 12th Main Directorate of the MOD, even though it was not obligatory by the law. And people are also tested on drug addiction with the help of this program. The United States also tries to incorporate this practice.

Security depends on the number of warheads and their deployment. I used to be a key supporter of the idea of non-connection of a nuclear warhead and a missile. And depending on the situation, on the pace of conflict, the ammunition could be taken closer to the delivery vehicle, etc. But we and the United States still have warheads mounted on ICBMs and SLBMs. Everyone convinces the other that there are allegedly no flight missions (especially this was typical of President Yeltsin), no targets, but the nuclear danger does not disappear.

Russia, as a matter of fact, has the most exact compliance with all nuclear safety and security requirements. There are other examples as well. Look at Germany – there is a base of nuclear bombs belonging to the United States in Bochum. A U.S. inspection was there and concluded that the maintenance of warheads did not comply with norms of nuclear safety and security. I have been reiterating to the Americans, «If a plane falls down on this nuclear storage facility, or terrorists attack it – how will you dare to look at the eyes of your European partners then?»

ALEXANDER SAVELIEV: I have a comment to Yevgeny Petrovich. We securely store nuclear munitions. The United States does the same. What for? Is it the time to raise the issue of their elimination? The parties point at each other, but nobody speaks about the stored weapons. The Americans have 400 or 600 warheads in Europe, we have thousands of them, according to unofficial data. Maybe we should start dealing with those weapons, make another step forward? Or is there a scenario to return them to the armed forces?

YEVGENY MASLIN: There is no such scenario. How many of them do we have? I don't know, but we had dozens of thousands. What does it mean to dispose of nuclear munitions? This is an amazing process. First of all, nuclear material should be stored. None could imagine when they were produced that there would be time to dismantle them. And when we withdrew all those weapons from former Soviet republics, we actually violated all principles of nuclear safety and security. The containers were put on each other in the storage facility – this is strictly prohibited. Our plants could not cope with this amount. Dismantlement and disposal of nuclear munitions is a complex and labor-intensive process, it requires many support activities, so we cannot do it quickly.

Secondly, we are fulfilling our commitments, even though none could believe it – this relates to the signed and non-verified agreement on tactical weapons. It has been implemented, I guarantee this, and we have done even more than agreed. This is a natural process – a few years pass and the weapons should be disposed of, nothing can be done with this. Service life of a missile can be extended, but with nuclear charges such approach is ineffective, it is extremely dangerous. So this is the natural movement to *nuclear zero* – we manufacture very small quantities of new munitions.

ROLAND TIMERBAEV (PIR CENTER): I worry about the very tone of our discussion. In our thoughts we should proceed from the assumption that nuclear weapons will come to an end, perhaps, sooner than in 25 years and should get ready for this.

Naturally a certain number of nuclear warheads should be preserved and stored in some international center under international protection, if a comet falls down on the Earth.

SECURITY INDEX: Today we discuss the Nunn, Schultz, Perry and Kissinger initiative. Everyone regards this as a political initiative that will help to intensify the nuclear weapons reductions. In your opinion, will this initiative facilitate the Russia-U.S. negotiations? Is it possible to engage France, Great Britain and China and restore the interest in further nuclear disarmament? Or does this initiative simply reflect the current interests of certain groups?

ALEXANDER SAVELIEV: I am skeptical about the *nuclear zero* initiative. I even think that this proposal would rather harm than help. If they contacted retired politicians in Russia and agreed with them (e.g. with Yevgeny Velikhov, who is not a politician, but an influential person), then one could hope that such initiative would get a feedback. Now it is not serious to speak

about any response. After the initiative the Americans came here to probe the grounds – and nearly everywhere got a negative response.

ROLAND TIMERBAEV: Why should we proceed with the disarmament? We have the issue of nonproliferation which is not resolved. The treaty has flaws. For instance, I am concerned about Japan, which can launch the nuclear program any moment. Brazil is a matter of concern as well. It has enrichment capacity and none protests against this, while Iran, which does not have indigenous capabilities and is at the beginning of the process, falls under sanctions all the time. So we can think about nuclear-free world, but should not forget about security.

YEVGENY MASLIN: Obviously we should strive for *zero* – the time demands for that! And this should be done by active politicians, not pensioners. Look – after retirement everyone starts saying that all that he has done in the future was bad. All those Schultzes, Kissingers, myself – we all say how good it would be to live without nuclear weapons. Hence, even though it is not probable, we should speak about it and should strive for it.

How many warheads do we need? This was a headache for scientists. We have always been developing nuclear weapons in response to something. From the point of the military, it is clear that 30,000 warheads mean no winners. To my mind, 500 warheads would be enough.

On the other hand, people are against this, e.g. in Arzamas. If we move to *zero*, we should stop production. And there are many other factors. The ideology of the General Staff is that nuclear weapons should stay until we catch up with the leaders in conventional weapons. So this is psychology. Nuclear weapons are allegedly responsible for preventing a war. You can often hear – the Americans bombed Yugoslavia. But if Yugoslavia had had nuclear weapons, it would not have been bombed. The Russian population, at least 70 percent, which is far from politics names the United States as a principal enemy. And if we tell these people – we eliminate nuclear weapons – what will happen?

SECURITY INDEX: Don't you think that there is a huge ideological pressure on Russia to force it to move towards *nuclear zero*? Since 1968 each state drifts to *zero*, but the finish line is far away. Maybe this goal should be abandoned?

ALEXANDER SAVELIEV: I see nothing bad about this – let this goal exist. One should not look as a savage in the world politics. Even the Nunn-Lugar initiative was useful in the past – the Americans helped us to eliminate the weapons, which were not weapons. If a submarine stays without missiles, and the only problem is its leaking reactor, it is not a weapon. And the United States provided us with money for elimination. A normal independent state should not reach such critical stage when we cannot dismantle the things that we have created.

SECURITY INDEX: You have touched upon the Nunn-Lugar program devoted to cooperative threat reduction. It is also known that it was aimed at newly independent states to encourage them to abandon nuclear weapons and nuclear programs, including Russia. Is this program still effective?

YEVGENY MASLIN: The Cooperative Threat Reduction program is still working. The Americans continue to help Russia, even though the amount of assistance is different. We dismantle nuclear submarines and there are not so many of them left. The United States also eliminates silos – these activities come to an end; and the dismantlement of railway missile systems has been completed. But the Americans practice selective approach – they help to eliminate those systems which pose a threat to them. For instance, nuclear submarines with cruise missiles – they do not assist in their disposal, while those armed with ballistic missiles are being eliminated. And one of the elements of this program is to enhance the safety and security of nuclear arsenal – in the Strategic Missile Forces (Washington does not want the terrorists to get access to the nukes) and in the 12th Main Directorate. This is not only the matter of security, I can also notice some sort of desire to control the nuclear reserves of Russia. But we do not abandon this program so far.

SECURITY INDEX: And are the Americans get selective access?

YEVGENY MASLIN: There is an intergovernmental agreement. Once I was a strong opponent of granting the United States access to our facilities. But they were stipulating their aid with the



access opportunities. And we agreed that we would exchange photos. Under the current agreement, when the protection systems are being installed at the facility, the Americans enjoy the right to inspect them – at the beginning, in the middle and at the end, but to see only certain points.

ALEXANDER SAVELIEV: It is fair to say that when the weapons were developed none thought about their future elimination. And the Americans are right – they pay and would like to supervise the spending, while accomplishing in parallel some intelligence and other tasks. We should also learn from this. We have manufactured many submarines and never thought that the reactors should be unloaded. We produced nuclear weapons, but our dismantlement facilities do not correspond with the demand. Now that we make new generation nuclear munitions, it is high time we thought about the future and their disposal. This would be another small mental step towards nuclear disarmament. 🐘🐘

Note

¹ The discussion took place at the International Summer School on Global Security held by the PIR Center on July 10, 2008.