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REPORT

The New Understanding and Ways to Strengthen Multilateral Strategic Stability

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This report is based on the results of a situational analysis directed by Sergei A. Karaganov and held at the Russian Foreign Ministry on May 21, 2019. The session participants included leading Russian independent and government's experts in security and arms control issues, including new-generation experts.¹ See Appendix 1 for the list of the participants – independent experts, who did not object against being listed.

The participants disagreed on many issues, thus revealing overall confusion in the expert and political community and a clear split over approaches towards strategic stability and nuclear arms control. There are those who prefer continuing the approach established during the Cold War, and those who call for a revision of the previous understanding of strategic stability and ways to ensure it, taking into account the fundamental changes that have taken place and continue to occur in the military-strategic situation. These disagreements are stated in the report below. There is just as much, or maybe even more, confusion and disaccord among foreign experts.

The report's conclusion and recommendations are debatable. We propose to discuss them with a wider circle of Russian experts and with representatives of the Chinese and the US expert communities. A preliminary version of the report was discussed with American experts at a closed session with narrow participation of the Working Group on the Future of the US-Russia Relations (project of the Higher School of Economics and Harvard University), which took place in Helsinki on July 5 – 6, sponsored by the Valdai International Discussion Club and Carnegie Corporation of New York.

The report contains, above all, the conclusions made by its authors who bear full responsibility for its content. They would like to thank the participants of the situational analysis session and of the Helsinki session of the Working Group on the Future of the US-Russia Relations for their observations, suggestions and ideas, which have also been reflected in the report.

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0. Executive Summary

0.1. Strategic stability is in deep crisis. The U.S. has been consistently destroying its traditional architecture—the system of nuclear arms control agreements, again considering options to use nuclear weapons in a conventional conflict for winning the war, and refusing to begin serious negotiations to strengthen strategic stability. This creates a vacuum in the field of nuclear weapons and lowers the threshold for their use at a time when the risk of an armed clash between nuclear powers in the current political and technological situation remains quite high.

0.2. However, the main reason for the crisis is much deeper and lies in fundamental changes in the military-strategic landscape, which make the previous understanding of strategic stability obsolete, and renders traditional arms limitation mechanisms ineffective or even senseless.

0.3. Changes in the military-strategic landscape are as follows:

- Many non-nuclear weapons (high-precision weapons, long-range conventionally-armed missiles, missile defense systems, space-based, primarily satellite and eventually laser weapons, and cyber weapons) have de facto acquired strategic properties; the frontier between nuclear and non-nuclear strategic weapons has increasingly blurred. This increases the risk of nuclear escalation in a non-nuclear conflict and war by mistake, and makes it practically impossible to calculate the strategic balance and identify weapons subject to limitation.
- Emergence of a “nuclear multipolarity” due to irreversibility of the current scale of nuclear arms proliferation and a possible increase in China’s nuclear arsenal. This undermines the logic of bilateral Russian-U.S. nuclear arms control.

0.4. The main factors that impair strategic stability and increase the risk of war between nuclear powers with its further escalation to the nuclear level as well as of arms race are:

- A dangerous decline of competence and responsibility among members of many elites, especially in Western countries, and growing “strategic parasitism,” that is, an assumption that peace will never end, as well as dwindling public resistance to militaristic policies;
- The U.S. confrontation with Russia and China: its desire to reproduce Reagan’s “success” of the 1980s in relations with Russia (inflict a geopolitical

defeat through arms race) and repeat the Reagan scenario of stagnation in Japan with regard to China, thus slowing down its military modernization and technological development;

- The risk of direct military clash between Russia and the U.S. and between China and the U.S. in regional conflicts and its further escalation to a non-nuclear and nuclear war;
- The risk of war, including nuclear war, if cyber-attacks are directed against satellites, missile attack early warning systems or critical infrastructure, including provocations by third parties;
- A possible deployment near Russia and China of high-precision weapons capable of destroying nuclear facilities and reaching the target within a short time;
- Use of nuclear weapons by third parties against each other, the disappearance of the “nuclear taboo” and further proliferation of nuclear weapons.

0.5. At the same time, there are also factors that strengthen strategic stability and reduce the risk of intentional war between nuclear powers and of arms race:

- The newest Russian weapons guarantee its ability to inflict unacceptable damage upon the U.S. in a second nuclear strike regardless of the quantitative or qualitative development of strategic offensive and defensive weapons in the U.S. in the next ten to fifteen years. So there is no need for Russia to get involved in an arms race and spend money on quantitative military-strategic “parity” with the U.S.
- Strategic partnership between Russia and China, a high level of trust and the absence of a zero-sum game between them, as well as a low probability that their bilateral relations may degrade to rivalry in the foreseeable future. A possible increase in China’s nuclear capabilities will not pose a military threat to Russia.
- Western political elites are not eager to start a war with other great powers and prefer instead to inflict a geopolitical defeat upon Russia and China using other, primarily non-military, methods.
- Strengthening of asymmetrical deterrence amid waning transparency—ability of weak countries to deter militarily stronger states using the factor of uncertainty.
- A possible acquisition by non-nuclear systems, including information and communication technologies, of strategic deterrent features.

0.6. These factors, on the one hand, indicate that there is a low risk of premeditated war, specially a nuclear one, between nuclear powers; but on the other hand, they substantially increase the risk of unintended military conflict between them and

its possible escalation to a global nuclear war. It has become much more difficult to control escalation and prevent military clashes between nuclear powers. The overall state of strategic stability has become much more complex and less manageable, more susceptible to various accidents and influences by non-nuclear factor and third parties. **On the whole, the risk of nuclear war and mankind annihilation has increased even though no one has any intention to start it.**

0.7. The fundamentally new and complex strategic situation requires a new definition and understanding of the term 'strategic stability' and new approaches towards reducing the risk of nuclear war.

0.8. The traditional understanding of strategic stability as a situation in Russian-U.S. relations in the field of nuclear weapons whereby neither side has any incentives to deliver a nuclear first strike against the other and both sides maintain approximate parity in their strategic nuclear forces through bilateral nuclear arms limitation regimes has become obsolete. Today strategic stability has a multilateral nature, involving China and other nuclear states. Furthermore, a non-nuclear conflict may cause a damage comparable to a nuclear one and is more likely to provoke the use of nuclear weapons than ever before.

0.9. **In the new situation, strategic stability should reflect the ability of nuclear powers to prevent military clashes, including non-nuclear and unintended ones.** This will require not just military, but mainly political and international political measures, including the lessening of confrontation between nuclear powers and restoration of trust which seems to have gone completely.

0.10. There is the need to introduce a new term, 'multilateral strategic stability,' meaning *such a state of relations between nuclear powers which enables them to prevent any military clash between them, including intentional and unintentional ones, because any such clash may develop into a global nuclear war.*

0.11. Its underlying factor is still deterrence which is based on a potential aggressor's awareness of unavoidable punishment and guaranteed ability of the victim of aggression to inflict unacceptable damage upon the aggressor in a second strike. In the new situation, multilateral mutual deterrence appears to be the main foundation of multilateral strategic stability. This automatically excludes nuclear disarmament. Moreover, since it is necessary to prevent not only a nuclear first strike but also any, including non-nuclear, military clashes between nuclear powers, new ways to strengthen multilateral strategic stability are necessary, other than those that were used during the Cold War and after it.

0.12. Limitation and reduction of nuclear weapons and approximate parity in strategic nuclear forces no longer work and have become senseless from the military-strategic point of view, highly unlikely in multilateral formats and is hampered by the fact that in conditions of military technologies sophistication it is impossible to calculate a strategic balance and allocate the arms subject for

limitation and reduction. So continuing traditional nuclear arms reductions seems unrealistic even in a bilateral format between Russia and the U.S., let alone in a trilateral (Russia, China, and the U.S.) or multilateral one.

0.13. Top priority measures to strengthen international / multilateral strategic stability are as follows:

- Strengthening channels of military-to-military communication,
- Strengthening multilateral and bilateral transparency and predictability regimes in the military-strategic sphere without any arms limitation commitments,
- Strengthening dialogues between Russia and the U.S and between China and the U.S. on their nuclear doctrines and military strategies, further deepening the Russia-China strategic dialogue,
- Developing rules of military conduct in areas that are most prone to military clashes, such as information and communication technologies, high-precision non-nuclear weapons, outer space, artificial intelligence, as well as rules and codes of conduct in regional conflicts,
- Developing measures and codes of conduct (de-escalation) in the event of a military clash between nuclear powers,
- Extending the New START for a new term as a temporary measure designed to keep its nuclear arms transparency measures, and considering the possibility of preserving these measures if quantitative limitations are lifted.

0.14. In the medium and long term, an important measure to strengthen multilateral strategic stability should be comprehensive and conceptual dialogues between Russia and China, between Russia and the U.S., and between China and the U.S. to discuss fundamental aspects of strategic stability, which, however, would not seek to achieve quick results. They may focus on the current military-strategic situation in the world and its prospects, the philosophy of strategic stability in the new situation and desirable measures to strengthen it, mechanisms enhancing deterrence and trust, preventing military clashes and curbing arms race, as well as nuclear doctrines and priorities in the development of the armed forces. These dialogues should actively involve track two diplomacy and the expert community.

0.15. An equally important measure that strengthens multilateral strategic stability is support for efforts to build a new quality of political relations between nuclear powers, primarily Russia, the U.S., and China, and overcome the current acute confrontation between them. This will require the sides to acknowledge the inadmissibility of any military clash with each other and the importance of de-escalating and ending it within the shortest time possible if it occurs, as well as the fact that systemic confrontation between them is dangerous for security and harmful for their foreign policy interests.

0.16. It would be desirable for the Russian top leadership to openly proclaim the “struggle for peace”—prevention of war between nuclear powers—one of important objectives of the Russian foreign policy and back it up with “peace initiatives” designed to revive a rational fear of war among the elites and societies in great powers and normalize and improve relations between them.

1. Problem Statement

1.1. Undermining of strategic stability has become today one of the most pressing and vital issues of global security and international relations in general. The reasons are the development of a new types of weapons, the consistent and ever accelerating demolition of traditional mechanisms that used to curb the arms race and reduce the risk of war—bilateral Russian-U.S. negotiations and strategic nuclear arms limitation and reduction agreements, the U.S. secession from the Iran nuclear deal, all happening amid the dramatic deterioration of the U.S.'s relations with Russia and China and their descent into a new confrontation, which has, among other things, a military dimension.

1.2. On August 2 2019 The U.S. and Russia ended their participation in the Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty of 1987 due to Washington's refusal to comply with it because of alleged Russian violations. The U.S. made no effort to preserve the treaty and never engaged in serious negotiations with Russia either on the treaty itself or arms control in general; on the contrary, the U.S. did everything to make such negotiations impossible and used its accusations against Moscow as an excuse for scrapping the limitations it considered disadvantageous. The Trump administration is showing no willingness to extend for another five-year period the key existing nuclear arms limitation treaty and the only regime ensuring the transparency and predictability of strategic offensive weapons (New START) which was adopted in 2010 and will end on February 5, 2021. It is increasingly talking of linking its prolongation with extending limitations to non-strategic nuclear weapons, in which Russia enjoys quantitative advantage. Instead of extending the New START in its current shape, the U.S. proposed to launch trilateral negotiations between the U.S., Russia, and China. Since this proposal can hardly be implemented, it might be no more than just a pretext for abolishing the New START, while shifting the blame for the complete demolition of the nuclear arms control system to Moscow and Beijing. None of these steps by the Trump administration has so far met any resistance from the Republican establishment. Moreover, its INF initiative was basically supported by Democrats. In 2002, the U.S. unilaterally seceded from the ABM Treaty, which was considered a cornerstone of strategic stability in its traditional understanding.

1.2.1. There is no doubt that the U.S., at least the Republican part of the American elite, is trying to get a free hand in the military-strategic sphere and intentionally seeking to dump the remaining nuclear arms limitation mechanisms, apparently thinking that this will allow it to gain the upper hand in the new confrontation with China and Russia now that the U.S. still exceeds the power of Russia and China and has greater resources for a new arms race.

1.2.2. Vis-à-vis Russia the Trump administration was trying to repeat “Reagan’s success”: weakening the Soviet Union by drawing it into an arms race and military-political crises. As far as China is concerned, the incumbent American administration is trying to pursue the same policy the U.S. pursued with regard to Japan in the 1980s when unequal and unfair economic restrictions imposed on Japan halted its growth and development for many decades ahead. The participants agreed that the situation had changed dramatically since then and the U.S. would not be able to repeat Reagan’s “success.”

1.3. It is quite unlikely that when a new (Democratic) administration comes to power, the U.S. will make a U-turn and resume support for the traditional bilateral strategic nuclear arms limitation and reduction agreements with Russia (this is where the participants in the situational analysis disagreed, with some of them still thinking that a Democratic administration will revive the traditional arms control). Experts who think that such a return by Washington is unlikely have the following reasons:

First, Democrats, just like Republicans, view China as a strategic competitor which has to be contained, including by military means. It is unlikely that they will agree to further bilateral reduction or even limitation of strategic nuclear arms with Russia as this would allow China to narrow the gap in strategic nuclear capabilities against the U.S.

Second, it was the Obama administration, which the advocates of the traditional concept of strategic stability and arms control in the U.S. and Russia portray as the paragon of a responsible and correct approach towards this issue, that in reality overstepped that approach. After signing the New START, it suggested elaborating a treaty that would limit and reduce not only strategic but also non-strategic (tactical) nuclear weapons, which were not covered by Soviet-American and Russian-American arms limitation agreements, with the exception of the INF Treaty. Since then a consensus has been built in the U.S. that new bilateral nuclear arms control agreements with Russia (after the New START) can only be signed if they cover non-strategic nuclear forces where Russia has quantitative advantage due to objective geographical factors. Today Democrats fully adhere to this

consensus, whereas many Republicans advocate limitation and reduction of the Russian tactical nuclear weapons as a precondition for the New START prolongation till 2026.

Third, it is highly unlikely that even a Democratic administration will agree to conclude new bilateral nuclear arms control agreements with Russia unless they try to cover the newest nuclear delivery vehicles which do not fall under the traditional nuclear triad (hypersonic glide vehicles, hypersonic cruise high range missiles, unmanned submarine nuclear weapons delivery systems, etc.) and in which Russia has gone significantly further ahead.

1.4. The probable scenario is that the existing bilateral Russian-U.S. nuclear arms limitation and reduction regimes and related transparency and confidence-building measures will be scrapped. The question is whether it is going to happen in 2021 or later if the Trump administration decides to extend the New START.

1.5. At the same time and partly due to the same reason multilateral nuclear arms control regimes — the nuclear test moratorium regime still fulfilled by Russia and the U.S., based on the CTBT, which has not entered into force so far, and the nuclear non-proliferation regime (NPT)—are losing their vitality too. In June 2019 Washington claimed that Russia might be violating its self-imposed moratorium on nuclear testing. This can only suggest that the Trump administration is seeking to give up its own moratorium and resume nuclear testing. The withering away of bilateral Russian-American nuclear arms control agreements will have a negative impact on the nuclear non-proliferation regime which is based on the obligation of the nuclear powers to reduce their nuclear arsenals (Article 6 of NPT). Stronger rhetoric will be used to claim that the NPT will simply codify injustice on a global scale unless the official nuclear powers reduce their nuclear arsenals.

1.6. As a result, for the first time since the 1950s, there emerges a political and legal vacuum in the field of nuclear weapons amid the U.S.'s confrontation with two great powers—Russia and China—which disagree with Washington's hegemony, and amid the U.S. desire to have free rein in the military, including strategic, sphere.

1.7. However, the main reasons for the acute strategic stability crisis are deeper and more fundamental than the incumbent American administration's approaches. They are as follows²:

- Many non-nuclear weapons (high-precision non-nuclear weapons, conventional long-range missiles, missile defense systems, anti-satellite weapons, space-based weapons designed for striking Earth objects (including eventually laser weapons), cyber weapons) are de facto acquiring strategic properties and the frontier between nuclear and strategic non-nuclear

² This list is not complete. See Section 2 for a more detailed analysis.

weapons is becoming increasingly blurred, which makes it impossible to calculate the strategic balance and identify weapons subject to limitation and reduction;

- There is a greater risk that strategic nuclear missiles may be fired by mistake due to a false missile attack signal sent by satellites because hypersonic missiles are harder to be tracked by radars, and, consequently, it is harder to confirm their launch and calculate their flight trajectory, which is necessary for authorizing a counter-strike;
- The frontier between strategic and non-strategic nuclear weapons is also getting increasingly blurred intertwined as the INF Treaty fell apart and the U.S. is seeking to increase its low-yield nuclear weapons arsenal and to put them on strategic delivery systems, which also destroys the value of the limitation and reduction of strategic nuclear arsenals proper;
- The proliferation of nuclear weapons has become irreversible (India, Pakistan, Israel, and in the prospect North Korea), with no guarantees that they will not spread further (panelists disagreed on this issue);
- A sense of responsibility among members of many elites, especially in Western countries, has dropped to a dangerously low level amid growing “strategic parasitism”—a feeling that peace will never end—and diminishing public resistance to militaristic policies;
- The overall military strategic landscape has become much more complex as the U.S. and Russia take into account the third nuclear powers factor and the current state of nuclear proliferation can hardly be reversed. A “nuclear multipolarity” is emerging.

1.8. At the same time, it would be a mistake to say that the strategic stability situation today is definitely worse than it was during the Cold War. There are factors that strengthen strategic stability and reduce the risk of arms race and premeditated war between nuclear powers. See Section 2 for a detailed analysis of these factors which were not contested by experts.

1.9. Thus, the current state of strategic stability has clearly become much more complex, less manageable, and more susceptible to all kinds of accidents and influences from non-nuclear factors and third parties. **The threat of nuclear war and mankind annihilation has generally increased even though none of the sides intends to start it.** The strategic situation has changed fundamentally and become more complex, requiring a new definition and understanding of the term ‘strategic stability’ as well as new approaches towards reducing the risk of nuclear war.

1.10. The traditional understanding of strategic stability has become obsolete. That understanding has been construed as a situation where Russia and

the U.S. have no incentives for delivering a nuclear first strike against each other and maintain the potential for mutual assured destruction through approximate strategic nuclear parity, gradual nuclear arms cuts, and a ban on the creation of missile defense systems. It no longer reflects the multilateral nature of the current strategic situation or the acquisition by non-nuclear weapons of strategic properties. Some experts believe that strategic parity itself is an artificial and dangerous concept because it only increases mistrust and provokes an arms race.

1.11. The classical definition of strategic stability was given in the “**Soviet-United States Joint Statement on Future Negotiations on Nuclear and Space Arms and Further Enhancing Strategic Stability**” (June 1990). It says that the objectives of the Soviet-U.S. negotiations were *“to reduce further the risk of outbreak of war, particularly nuclear war, and to ensure strategic stability, transparency and predictability through further stabilizing reductions in the strategic arsenals of both countries. This will be achieved by seeking agreements that improve survivability, remove incentives for a nuclear first strike and implement an appropriate relationship between strategic offenses and defenses.”* The Joint Statement then specifies that the main measures to remove incentives for a nuclear first strike would be *“reducing the concentration of warheads on strategic delivery vehicles”* and *“giving priority to highly survivable systems.”*

1.12. Other official definitions of strategic stability expand this term to the notion of international security in general, which is essentially correct but deprives it of instrumental value. For example, the “Joint Statement of the President of the Russian Federation and the Chairman of the People’s Republic of China on the Strengthening of Global Strategic Stability” signed on June 25, 2016, defines strategic stability as *“a state of international relations characterized by the following factors: in the political sphere—strict compliance by all states and associations of states with the principles and norms of international law and the UN Charter which regulate the use of force and coercive measures, respect for the legitimate interests of all states and peoples when solving pressing international and regional problems, and inadmissibility of interference in the political life of other states; in the military sphere—preservation by all states of their military capabilities at a minimal level necessary for meeting national security needs; deliberate abstention from developing military capabilities, building and expanding military-political alliances that could be viewed by other members of the international community as threatening their national security and would force them to take countermeasures to restore the broken balance; resolution of disagreements through positive and constructive dialogue, mutual confidence-building measures and cooperation.”*

1.13. Therefore, it is necessary to work out a new definition of strategic stability which, on the one hand, would reflect qualitative changes in the strategic situation in the world, and, on the other hand, would be strict enough so as not to bloat it

to international security in general. Our version of such a definition is proposed in Section 3.

1.14. The same applies to the instruments that keep strategic stability. The traditional method when mutual deterrence has been maintained through strict and legally binding and verifiable regimes of the Soviet/Russian and the U.S. nuclear arms limitation and reduction, approximate parity, and a prohibition on the development of missile defense systems no longer works.

- First of all, these regimes have been consistently destroyed by the U.S., and, as was stated above, will most likely fall apart completely within several years.
- Secondly, trust between Russia and the U.S. has vanished almost entirely over the past several years, especially in Moscow, impeding creation of new strict nuclear bilateral arms control regimes. The Russian leadership and elite simply cannot trust the U.S. and expect it to comply with agreements even if they are adopted. At the same time, the risk of premeditated nuclear war between Russia and the United States, which was quite high in the 1960s-1980s and forced Moscow and Washington to sign arms limitation agreements, consciously abandoning certain types of weapons (for example, strategic missile defense systems), seems to be relatively low today. This is a rather unjustifiable assumption and one of the manifestations of “strategic parasitism,” that is, addiction to peace.
- Thirdly, the system of strengthening strategic stability based on bilateral limitation and reduction of certain types of strategic nuclear weapons in Russia and the U.S. without taking into account third nuclear parties and the entirety of factors affecting the risk of nuclear war, including the increasing entanglement of nuclear with non-nuclear, and strategic with non-strategic nuclear weapons, loses its relevance.

1.15. At the same time there is no consensus, or even tentative understanding, in the Russian political community, in the U.S. or elsewhere on what a new definition of strategic stability should be like and how it should be maintained in the new strategic environment (this became quite obvious during the situational analysis).

1.15.1. Some experts, mainly those who support the traditional arms control system in Russia and the U.S., suggest adhering to the classical definition of strategic stability understood as the absence of incentives for a nuclear first strike and as prevention of nuclear war in general but believe that it should be expanded to third nuclear powers, primarily China. At the same time, they insist on continuing the previous process of limiting and reducing strategic nuclear weapons between Russia and the U.S. on a bilateral basis, leaving out both third nuclear powers and non-nuclear strategic weapons. This group of experts claims that third parties’ nuclear capabilities cannot compare with those of Russia and the U.S., that non-nuclear weapons

cannot cause as much destruction as nuclear weapons do, and that the use of nuclear weapons is illegal and immoral in any case, and therefore their use is unacceptable under any conditions.

1.15.2. This approach is at variance not only with the new strategic environment and the official policies of Russia and the U.S. which insist on taking into account other factors that can influence strategic stability, but also with itself. Recognizing the multilateral nature of strategic stability, while continuing to insist on bilateral limitation and reduction of strategic nuclear weapons by Russia and the U.S. seems to be a process for the sake of process. But some experts, even those who are skeptical about further arms reductions, hold on to the “process for the sake of process” approach in order to create at least a semblance of improved political relations with the U.S. which are at their lowest since the 1950s.

1.15.3. Another point of view, advanced by the Trump administration and part of the U.S. expert community, is that it is necessary to expand the nuclear arms control system to China, thus making it trilateral and also covering non-strategic nuclear weapons the existence of which in Russia and China has always been a matter of concern for Washington.

1.15.4. The implementation of this approach seems unlikely in the short and medium term, and attempts to do so can only increase mistrust between Russia and the United States, and, most important, erode trust and complicate relations between Russia and China. Strict arms control regimes, complete with detailed verification and monitoring systems, are created between adversaries and for relations based on mistrust when the sides a priori expect each other to try to breach agreements in order to gain an advantage. If such systems are created between friends, they will poison relations and bring hostility into them. For this reason alone trilateral negotiations between Russia, the U.S., and China can hardly do any good. In addition, China strongly refuses to participate in any arms limitation systems until its strategic nuclear forces reach a level comparable with those of Russia and the United States. Although China has not announced such an objective officially, most experts who spoke on this issue during the situational analysis believe that this will happen in the foreseeable future. Finally, it is unclear what exactly should be limited in a situation where nuclear and non-nuclear weapons become increasingly intertwined. Attempts to limit all systems, the use of which may provoke nuclear war, are doomed to failure in any format, especially a multilateral one, if for no other reason than because it is impossible to calculate the balance—a crucial condition for traditional strategic nuclear arms control regimes between Russia and the U.S.

1.15.5. A third group of experts suggested going with the flow and passively watching the disintegration of the existing regimes, offering nothing in their place, and thus knowingly allowing for a political and legal vacuum in the field of strategic weapons. The advocates of this point of view said that Russia had in recent years made a leap in creating new strategic systems, primarily hypersonic ones, and therefore it had no reason to fear a possible offensive and defensive weapon buildup in the U.S. or elsewhere, and could carry out effective deterrence without any transparency or limitation measures, at least in the next ten years or so. This approach also has its flaws and does not appear to be quite suitable. Although the risk of a deliberate nuclear attack on Russia is in fact not quite high and will remain so in the foreseeable future regardless of the development of strategic nuclear weapons in other countries, a total vacuum of regimes, first, increases the risk of accidental conflict, including a nuclear one (war by mistake); second, it cannot prevent a non-nuclear conflict, which, in turn, can lead to nuclear escalation, especially amid ongoing confrontation between Russia and the U.S., growing confrontation between the U.S. and China, total mistrust between Russia and the U.S. and between China and the U.S., and a dangerous decline of strategic culture, primarily in Washington. Finally, a complete absence of regimes will whip up the arms race between the U.S. and China.

1.16. This report, based on the results of the situational analysis, is an attempt to work out a new understanding of strategic stability, taking into account the new strategic environment, which would be suitable for use in practical foreign and defense policy, as well as to propose measures—both in the field of strategic weapons and outside it—that reflect the new situation and strengthen strategic stability. Another purpose of the report is to step up expert discussion inside Russia, between Russia and the U.S. as well as between Russia and China.

The text below expounds on the points made above and makes recommendations on how to strengthen multilateral strategic stability.

2. A New Strategic Environment

The international strategic environment has changed fundamentally in recent years and appears to be quite controversial. Demise of nuclear bipolarity and the fact that non-nuclear weapons are acquiring strategic properties do not necessarily increase the risk of nuclear war and uncontrollable arms race. On the contrary, they can even help deter the U.S. from pursuing a destructive policy similar to that in the 1990s-2000s. The erosion of strategic stability is rather caused by a possible non-nuclear conflict and its escalation into a nuclear war as well as by the growing confrontation between the U.S. and China and between the U.S. and Russia. It would be appropriate, therefore, to identify both neutral factors that neither impair nor strengthen strategic stability but make it more complex and change the way it is strengthened, and factors that contribute to stabilization or destabilization.

2.1. Emerging “Nuclear Multipolarity”

2.1.1. The situation of nuclear bipolarity characteristic of the Cold War and the subsequent period, when the USSR / Russia and the U.S. were focusing in their nuclear policies almost entirely on each other, is coming to an end. Washington and Moscow are already taking the third nuclear countries’ potential into account. For the U.S. the factor of China staying outside of any nuclear arms limitation regimes is gaining particular significance in the context of them strengthening containing China policy and regarding it as a military adversary. The current scale of nuclear proliferation seems irreversible. Whereas non-formal members of the “nuclear club” pursue independent nuclear policies and sophisticate the nuclear weapons delivery vehicles. Altogether this creates “nuclear multipolarity”.

2.1.2. Some experts believe that China may make a breakthrough in the next 10-15 years and create strategic nuclear weapons comparable with those Russia and the U.S. have. Based on open data concerning Chinese R&D projects, these experts expect China to reach a level of 500-600 nuclear warheads on strategic delivery systems in the next five years and over 1,000 by the end of the next decade. It is known that China is planning to deploy a new generation of heavy liquid-fueled ICBMs; new generations of SSBNs armed with new submarine-launched ballistic missiles; and full-fledged strategic bombers using stealth technology. China is also expanding production facilities and nuclear arms infrastructure, especially nuclear-powered submarines.

2.1.3. The implementation of these plans will allow China to achieve the politically and psychologically important situation of strategic nuclear parity with the U.S. and gain overwhelming strategic superiority over India. Although the majority of Russian and American experts doubt that Chinese leadership would take this decision, they agree, that today Beijing possesses the economic and technological resources for this, as well as the necessary groundwork. Unlike, for instance, France, which lacks such an economic potential for a similar leap forward at the national level. As China acquiring this potential coincides with the U.S. decision to consider China as strategic adversary and conduct containment policy against it, Washington already today regards Beijing as one of determinants of its strategic nuclear arms development policy and nuclear doctrine.

2.1.4. The irreversibility of the current scale of nuclear arms proliferation, including the extremely low probability of complete and irreversible denuclearization of North Korea, should raise no doubts. India, Pakistan, North Korea and Israel pursue independent nuclear arms policies and have their own missile programs, the modernization of which, as in the case of North Korea, creates deterrent potential which can be used against nuclear superpowers as well. Still, experts disagree on further nuclear arms proliferation prospects.

2.1.5. Some of them say that the current U.S. policy (attacks on non-nuclear Yugoslavia, Iraq, and Libya, and de facto refusal to use force against a nuclear-armed North Korea for the sake of direct dialogue with it after declared successful ICBM testing; regime change in non-nuclear countries; unilateral secession from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action for the settlement of Iran's nuclear issue, and open provocations aimed at forcing Tehran to give up the deal; unilateral demolition of nuclear arms limitation and reduction regimes) and the waning trust among some of the U.S. allies in the reliability of American guarantees, especially in the long term, make further proliferation of nuclear weapons almost inevitable. In their opinion, there is a high probability that Iran will reach the threshold level, to be followed by Saudi Arabia and Egypt as well as Japan and South Korea (the latter may also deploy U.S. nuclear weapons on their territories).

2.1.6. However other experts, while admitting that there is a NPT crisis, noted that cascaded proliferation of nuclear weapons was unlikely in the foreseeable future. They believe that Iran, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Japan, South Korea, as well as Germany, will realize that the risks of acquiring nuclear weapons will significantly outweigh their possible gains. There are also internal political limitations for many of these countries as well as the consensus among nuclear powers – the NPT members that there should be no further spread of nuclear weapons.

2.1.7. The emerging “nuclear multipolarity” significantly complicates the nuclear equation and makes Russia and the U.S. adjust their strategic policies to take into account the factor of third countries, which will effectively put an end to the

bilateral reduction and limitation of nuclear weapons. In addition, the current scale of nuclear arms proliferation, let alone its new wave, increases the risk of nuclear arms use by third countries against each other (Pakistan-India), which will break the nuclear taboo and may increase the perception of nuclear weapons as weapons of war rather than just deterrence. Finally, the current scale of nuclear arms proliferation increases the risk of nuclear arms falling into the hands of non-state actors (in case of statehood crisis in Pakistan or North Korea).

2.2. Blurring of the Lines between Nuclear and Non-Nuclear Weapons

2.2.1. Rapid development and diversification of military technologies, the creation and uncontrolled introduction of new weapons, the disintegration of arms limitation regimes or even the rules of conduct do not necessarily accelerate the arms race or increase the risk of nuclear war. This depends on the political context and technologies. If strategic non-nuclear weapons, cyber weapons, etc. are regarded as offensive weapons against a nuclear state, they will impair strategic stability and provoke nuclear escalation. If they are regarded as deterrent that keeps a potential aggressor, including a nuclear one, from launching an attack, they have a stabilizing effect. However new military technologies all the same create an unregulated “gray zone” in strategic relations and render senseless both the traditional process of strategic nuclear arms limitations and reductions, which is based on keeping a comparable number of strategic delivery vehicles and nuclear warheads in Russia and the U.S., and the traditional understanding of strategic stability as the absence of incentives for delivering a nuclear first strike.

2.2.2. The fact that many non-nuclear weapons, including information and communication technologies, are acquiring strategic capabilities deprives nuclear weapons of their traditional exclusivity in inflicting unacceptable damage upon nuclear powers. This increases the risk of nuclear weapon use in response to a non-nuclear strike as provided for in the U.S. and NATO doctrinal documents (including the use of nuclear weapons in response to a cyber attack, let alone a counterforce strike using high-precision missiles) and statements made by the heads of state. They also mention a high probability of a nuclear counter-strike in case of a missile attack without even verifying whether it is a nuclear or a non-nuclear attack.

2.2.3. The increasing blurring of the lines between nuclear and strategic non-nuclear weapons as the latter acquire the ability to destroy strategic targets (undermine the adversary’s strategic nuclear forces) and inflict irreparable damage (by destroying critical infrastructure, including nuclear power plants which can be blown up in a cyber attack) in the total absence of arms limitation regimes for non-nuclear weapons renders countability, traditionally used for arms control purposes, senseless and makes it impossible to calculate the strategic balance (however

relative it may be). It is impossible in principle to calculate how much various non-nuclear weapons, including cyber weapons, “weigh” against strategic nuclear arms and work out a formula that would be suitable for all types of strategic weapons. Attempts to put all strategic weapons in one basket and limit everything will most likely lead nowhere.

2.2.4. The advent of completely new types of strategic nuclear delivery vehicles, such as hypersonic cruise missiles, hypersonic glide vehicles that fly on a non-ballistic trajectory and can bypass any missile defense system, including space-based ones, unmanned submarine vehicles with nuclear warheads, and other weapons which are not limited by current agreements also makes it impossible to calculate the strategic balance. Apparently there is no formula for determining the “weight” of these weapons against classical strategic delivery vehicles.

2.2.5. Besides, the previous approaches towards limiting and reducing strategic nuclear weapons can no longer be used now that lines between strategic and non-strategic nuclear weapons become increasingly blurred, especially since the latter do not fall under any limitations and their Russian, the U.S., and Chinese arsenals are incomparable. The U.S., Russia, and China, on the one hand, put increasingly growing emphasis in their nuclear policies on non-strategic nuclear weapons, and on the other hand, Moscow, Beijing, and Washington are likely to regard a non-strategic nuclear strike against them as a strategic nuclear strike and will respond accordingly. Attempts to stop distinguishing between strategic nuclear weapons and tactical nuclear weapons and limit all of them together are hardly practical because of the completely different capabilities and roles non-strategic nuclear weapons play for the U.S., Russia, and China, let alone other nuclear states.

2.2.6. None of the non-nuclear systems and weapons that have acquired strategic properties falls under any of the existing limitations or even the rules of the game shared by most of the powers. And yet it would be impossible to create special arms control regimes for them or recreate the previous ones (ABM, INF Treaties). An unlimited accumulation and modernization of these weapons underscore the critical importance of strengthening nuclear deterrence and makes further attempts to limit and reduce strategic nuclear weapons not only senseless but also downright dangerous.

2.2.7. Technologies which pose the greatest challenge to the traditional understanding of strategic stability and nuclear arms control systems are cyber systems, weapons deployed in outer space, high-precision conventionally-armed weapons, and the newest, primarily hypersonic, strategic delivery vehicles. There is also the factor of missile defense, which can hardly be prohibited or even limited for the time being.

2.2.8. High-precision non-nuclear weapons are acquiring strategic properties because of their potential ability to deliver a counterforce strike (for example, to

destroy missile silos, strategic aviation airfields, and potentially even road- and rail-based ICBM launchers). There are different assessments in this respect. Back in 2013, Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin said that a high-precision non-nuclear strike could destroy up to 90 percent of Russia's strategic nuclear forces³. Expert assessments are somewhat more modest, but everybody agrees that a counterforce strike using high-precision non-nuclear weapons would inflict significant damage upon strategic nuclear forces and provoke a nuclear launch-under-attack or retaliatory strike.

2.2.9. In the U.S. the concept of strategic non-nuclear counterforce strike was officially adopted and reflected in the Prompt Global Strike program, which envisages the use of intercontinental, including hypersonic, missiles for high-precision non-nuclear strikes. Although the U.S. has no such capability yet, the program remains valid. The development of these systems coupled with the modernization of missile defenses, designed to disarm remaining enemy strategic nuclear forces which were not destroyed by a counterforce strike, make further limitation and reduction of strategic *nuclear* forces and priority attention to the prevention of a nuclear first strike senseless.

2.2.10. There were different opinions at the situation analyses on whether the newest strategic nuclear, primarily hypersonic cruise missiles and hypersonic glide vehicles like those demonstrated by the Russian President in 2018, were stabilizing or a destabilizing factor. Experts agreed, however, that, most of these systems, first, did not fall under the remaining arms control agreements (New START), and second, they could not compare with traditional strategic delivery vehicles. Therefore, their development and deployment makes it impossible to calculate the strategic balance required for classical arms limitation regimes and to determine corresponding thresholds.

2.2.11. According to experts, the main risk hypersonic missiles and hypersonic glide vehicles pose to strategic stability is that they cannot be seen by radars. Therefore, the only information concerning the nature of an attack, the flight trajectory and a possible place of landing would come from satellites. But it would be impossible to verify this information and especially figure out a potential target on the ground. This, in turn, would provoke a counter-strike (launch-under-attack strike) immediately after a satellite signal is received, thus increasing the risk of nuclear war by mistake. First of all, as experts pointed out, satellites regularly send false signals. Secondly, the target may not be the country being provoked for a counter-strike.

2.2.12. Already existing information and communication (cyber) technologies, according to experts, make it possible, first, to inflict critical damage upon states

³ The text of Dmitry Rogozin's remarks at a press conference. — *Rossiiskaya Gazeta*. — June 28, 2013 // <https://rg.ru/2013/06/28/doklad.html>

and block the operation of such elements of their critical infrastructure as power, transportation, and health care systems, paralyze communication and the work of government institutions, and cause man-made disasters whose effects are comparable with the devastating consequences of nuclear strikes. Second, the current level of cyber technologies presumably can disrupt the work of military satellites, including those which are part of the ballistic missile early warning system, missile defense systems, and strategic nuclear forces in general. A cyber attack on such satellites will most likely be regarded as part of a large-scale attack and can provoke a preventive strike, including a nuclear one. However, the participants did not come to agreement on whether a cyber attack could disrupt the work of a nuclear weapon control system and provoke an unauthorized strike. Most experts believe this is still unlikely for the time being, but the degree of uncertainty is growing.

2.2.13. No consensus was reached on whether cyber technologies could act as an instrument of deterrence, including strategic deterrence. Some experts believe that the awareness of the risk of having critical government systems disrupted by a cyber attack will deter a potential aggressor. But in this case no strategic balance can be calculated even approximately as any non-nuclear country, even though relatively weak in military terms, will be able to inflict enormous damage on a nuclear aggressor with a “retaliatory cyber strike.” Other experts think that the destructive effects of information and communication technologies are not sufficient yet for effective deterrence. It is the lack of common understanding about whether or not cyber technologies can act as deterrence that has a destabilizing impact on the situation now. Another destabilizing factor is that there is no consensus on what retaliatory military measures a state, including a nuclear one, can take if it comes under a cyber attack which disrupts the work of its critical infrastructure. Difficulties with attribution of the origin of a cyber attack poses a danger too. In any case, the fact that information and communication technologies are acquiring the ability to inflict strategic damage (whether in a first or retaliatory strike) undermines the traditional understanding of strategic stability and balance.

2.2.14. The most destabilizing technologies in outer space are, according to experts, anti-satellite weapons capable of messing up the work of ballistic missile early warning systems and satellite-based elements of strategic nuclear forces control systems, as well as systems that can determine with high precision the location of road- and rail-based ICBMs, thus reducing their survivability and provoking a launch-under-attack or even preemptive strike. As for space-based missile defense systems, the creation and deployment of which in the foreseeable future is hardly possible, they can become a serious destabilizing factor in relations between the U.S. and China. Russia, whose newest strategic systems can bypass space-based missile defense systems yet to be created, should not regard their appearance as a weakening of strategic deterrence.

2.2.15. Experts did not agree on the artificial intelligence impact on strategic stability. On the one hand, its advent reinforces ballistic missile early warning systems, making it possible to determine the speed and trajectory of adversary missiles with greater accuracy. On the other hand, it increases the efficiency of technical intelligence, thus reducing the survivability of road- and rail-based missiles and strategic submarines, making them an easier target for counterforce strikes, including those using non-nuclear high-precision weapons. In any case, its development and use in the military sphere, coupled with the modernization of high-precision weapons, changes the traditional understanding of strategic balance and enhances the strategic value of non-nuclear weapons.

2.3. Factors Impairing Strategic Stability

2.3.1. Political Factors

2.3.1.1. Apart from military-technical factors, the most important factor that increases the risk of military clashes between nuclear powers is the state of political elites and political systems in leading Western countries, including the United States. A change of generations and the passing away of people who lived through acute phases of the Cold War and World War II, the West's hegemony and the absence of external counterbalances in the 1990s-2000s, the military-technical revolution of the 1980s-1990s, and the advent of the "contactless warfare" concept, and, most importantly, seventy-five years of relative peace have reduced the fear of war. Most people believe that there will be no war because there simply can be no war. Public resistance to militarism and arms buildup has declined. A situation which we call "strategic parasitism" emerged. There is a similar, albeit not as manifest, situation in Russia.

2.3.1.2. Traditional elites in Western countries have suffered a political fiasco, lost control over the government formation process and have no support among a considerable part of their electorate. The West in general is losing positions, too, which leaves part of the elites in a state of despair and prompts revenge-seeking sentiments among others. The intensification of internal political struggle practically in all leading countries distracts attention from foreign and security policy and makes it a hostage, and often an instrument, of internal infighting. Almost all countries have stepped up the search for an external enemy in a bid to solve their internal political problems and problems within the traditional Western alliances. At first Russia was traditionally declared an enemy, and now China becomes increasingly viewed as such.

2.3.1.3. The border between military and non-military, including political and

propagandistic, methods of struggle is disappearing, creating a dangerous “gray zone” where it is hard to determine whether downright hostile actions against a country (for example, severe economic sanctions, regime-change attempts with the help of information and communication technologies, etc.) is a war which requires a military response or not yet. **In this situation, the current intensity of rivalry between the great powers, hostile non-military actions, and strong and aggressive ideological rhetoric create a background for a dangerous escalation of any conflict, the so-called black swan.**

2.3.1.4. A sharp outburst of hostile rhetoric with regard to Russia and China, mostly false, demonizing and dehumanizing, and often looking like war preparations, has the same effect. In this situation, leaders, even cautious ones, have their hands tied. The situation is similar, albeit not as dramatic, in Russia and China. Their political systems are different from one another, but they offer a greater freedom of action that is less dependent on increasingly anti-Western and anti-American public sentiments. Still, these sentiments do narrow options for balanced decision-making.

2.3.1.5. The intellectual and moral decline of elites in many countries is a particularly serious problem. Anti-meritocratic selection is in progress. Television-generation people have come to power who tend to react immediately to news and visual images and who care more about their own image than about anything else. They are unable to think strategically or even on their feet, and are increasingly irresponsible. These processes are particularly noticeable in modern democracies. Meanwhile, “the iPhone generation” is just around the corner, with probably even more manifest faults like these.

2.3.2. Geopolitical Factors

2.3.2.1. The main geopolitical factor that impairs strategic stability is the confrontational policy the U.S. pursues towards Russia and China as powers which have broken the collective West’s 500-year-long military, political, and economic supremacy, refused to fit themselves into the U.S.-led international order and to recognize American leadership. Washington has launched an angry counterattack in hope to restore its supremacy and bring back the “end of history” which seemed so real just recently but then was lost. The purpose of the U.S. confrontational policy is not to make “a deal” with Russia or China, but force them to give up their current domestic and foreign policy models, transform themselves in line with American values and recognize the U.S. leadership. Most members of the American establishment still believe that the U.S. can do this if for no other reason than

(false) anticipations of Russian-Chinese geopolitical collision. Duration of the confrontation is predicted as at least six to ten years with Russia and fifteen-twenty years with China.

2.3.2.2. Unlike in the Cold War period, the military dimension does not play a leading role in the new confrontation, but given the state of Western elites described above and the “strategic frivolity” of their foreign and military policies, this confrontation increases the risk of military clash with its further uncontrolled escalation to a nuclear conflict, as well as of arms race, especially between the U.S. and China.

2.3.2.3. Military aspects of the U.S. confrontational policy with regard to Russia include, above all, the U.S.’s attempts to use scare tactics in order to create the impression of a looming uncontrolled arms race which Moscow simply cannot win due to its smaller economic potential. These attempts manifest themselves in the U.S.’s consistent efforts to destroy the remaining arms control regimes and refusal to begin a serious dialogue on strategic stability (and even to use this term). The U.S. obviously expects Moscow either to get drawn into a new arms race and strain itself or simply get scared and make concessions to bring the U.S. back to the negotiating table.

2.3.2.4. More serious risks of inadvertent military clash come from the U.S.’s continues efforts to build up its military infrastructure, including missile defenses and drones, in Eastern Europe, its plans to increase its low-yield nuclear weapons arsenal and put those weapons on strategic delivery systems in order to neutralize the “nuclear escalate to deescalate” doctrine ascribed to Moscow, its return to the concept of limited nuclear war which considers the possibility of using non-strategic nuclear weapons in a non-nuclear conflict, and official adoption of the preemptive strikes doctrine against Russian (as well as Chinese and Iranian) targets as a way of non-strategic missile defense. These steps clearly indicate that the U.S. allows the possibility of a regional military conflict with Russia (primarily in Europe) and is taking measures to prevent Russia from winning it, while trying to reduce the risk of its escalation to the strategic level. This is a rather dangerous tendency: for Russia, the use of tactical nuclear weapons or conventionally-armed medium-range missiles against it would mean a strategic strike and would inevitably trigger a nuclear second strike against the U.S.

2.3.2.5. As regards China, military aspects of confrontation will consist of Washington obtaining freedom of hands in the nuclear and missile area, preserving and even some increasing of its military presence in East and South East Asia, trying to consolidate its Asian allies, intensify their military cooperation among each other and to increase military cooperation with India. If China takes the decision to make a leap forward and reach strategic

nuclear parity with the U.S., the latter's position in Asia might weaken. At a minimum, this would accelerate the arms race in Asia Pacific region—strategic and non-strategic, nuclear and non-nuclear, offensive and defensive (missile defense).

2.4. Factors Strengthening Strategic Stability

2.4.1. One of the most important factors that stabilize international security and reduce the risk of war between great powers, including nuclear war, is relations between Russia and China.

2.4.1.1. First of all, both countries already effectively contain the U.S. on the military-political and politico-psychological levels, thus not allowing Washington to act with as much impunity as it did in the 1990s-2000s. Although this has led to acute confrontation between the U.S. and Russia and between the U.S. and China, American policy on the global stage will be (and is already) becoming less dangerous. The strategic environment has become more balanced over the past several years, and the U.S. is now less inclined to take steps that can provoke its military clash with Russia or China.

2.4.1.2. Secondly, although Russia and China are not military allies and have no intention to become such, they have built a partnership which is distinctively based on trust and absence of a zero-sum game. The peaceful nature of their relations stems not from deterrence and unavoidable retaliation but from their commitment to continued friendship, many shared strategic interests, and understanding that a partnership breakdown would cost both of them dearly. Since both countries trust each other, they need not burden each other so far with any mutual arms limitation or reduction regimes and monitoring and verification measures.

2.4.1.3. Unlike the West, both Russia (albeit to a lesser extent because of a weaker economy) and China are on the rise and generally satisfied with the direction in which the world and the balance of power are evolving. They are powers of a new global status quo, while the West's policy becomes increasingly plagued with elements of revisionism and even some sort of revanchism for the failures suffered in the past fifteen years. But history never ends, and the West might stop its decline on a new level. This will be yet another incentive for pursuing a peaceful policy advocated by Moscow and Beijing.

2.4.1.4. The probability that Russian-Chinese relations will degrade to rivalry and enmity in the foreseeable future is not quite high even though China will continue to become stronger, including in the military-strategic sphere.

This alone creates a significant component of cooperation in international relations, makes them less prone to conflict and ensures stability at least for one of the sides of the U.S.-Russia-China strategic triangle. In the future, continued Russian-Chinese partnership will contribute to enmity reduction between the U.S. and Russia and between the U.S. and China. As the U.S. comes to understand that its expectations of collision between Moscow and Beijing are not to come true, it will have to gradually give up its policy of simultaneous containment and attempts to restore its global superiority in general.

2.4.1.5. Finally, the trust-based partnership between Russia and China creates a positive basis for their bilateral dialogue on strategic stability and development of “gold standards” or codes of conduct in various military spheres, compliance with which will minimize the risk of war between nuclear powers. These standards should not reproduce arms control regimes and verification and monitoring measures similar to those between Russia and the U.S. because such systems are created for adversaries, not partners.

2.4.1.6. At the same time, if China takes the decision to create strategic forces comparable with those of the U.S. and Russia, this may raise some concerns in Moscow in the future and further increase the existing imbalance in the combined power of the two countries. The situation requires a long-term and in-depth dialogue between Beijing and Moscow on military-strategic issues.

2.4.2. A positive element of the military-strategic environment of huge importance is that Russia has acquired the newest strategic systems, primarily hypersonic cruise missiles, hypersonic glide vehicles and nuclear armed submarine unmanned vehicles, which enable it to reliably destroy a potential adversary in a second strike and a launch-under-attack counter-strike regardless of how the latter’s offensive and defensive strategic weapons develop.

2.4.2.1. However, some experts claimed that the creation of such systems in Russia, which puts it ahead of the U.S. in terms of hypersonic cruise missiles and hypersonic glide vehicles capable of carrying nuclear weapons, only provoked new arms races, thus adversely impacting both Russia’s own military security and strategic stability in general. They also argued that Washington would by all means try to catch up and outdo Russia in these spheres, and that its greater economic possibilities would allow it to surpass Moscow quite fast both quantitatively and qualitatively.

2.4.2.2. But this argument seems to neglect the fact that the very possession of such systems by Russia guarantees its ability to inflict unacceptable damage upon the U.S. regardless of whether the latter has such systems or not and how many. Even if the U.S. significantly outnumbers Russia in such systems,

this will not in any way reduce Moscow's ability to reliably destroy them in a retaliatory strike, thus maintaining its effective deterrent potential.

2.4.2.3. So unless effective and economically affordable ways are found to neutralize such systems (with none anywhere in sight so far), any arms race on the part of Russia will be senseless. The development of the U.S. offensive and defensive strategic systems in the foreseeable future will not impair Russia's strategic deterrent potential. There is no need for Russia to try to catch up with the U.S., maintain approximate parity in strategic nuclear forces or make up for their quantitative growth by creating some new systems. Russia's newest nuclear and non-nuclear systems will preemptively wreck any attempt to draw Russia into a new arms race and wear it out similarly to what Reagan did to the Soviet Union. It is more likely that self-wearing down might start. Thus, the Russian newest systems objectively curb arms race.

2.4.3. Another factor that strengthens strategic stability is that neither society nor political elites in leading countries want a big war. "Strategic frivolity" in the U.S.'s behavior is based on the conviction that regardless of its military activities, there will be no full-blown war between nuclear powers (which actually makes it more dangerous). There is no real militarism of the early 20th century kind in the U.S., Russia, China, let alone Europe. But a likely lack of desire to risk a big war does not belittle the danger of inadvertent escalation, especially amid the West's continuing efforts to exasperate enmity and growing contradictions in Western societies, which can push them into distracting military adventures fraught with escalation. There is little resistance to such policies in society and expert community which have become used to peace and which have stopped fearing war—a situation we call "strategic parasitism."

2.4.3.1. Despite fierce confrontation between the U.S. and China and between the U.S. and Russia, war is not considered its permissible, let alone desirable, instrument (as it was in the 20th century). Preference is given instead to sanctions, trade wars, information warfare, politico-diplomatic and virtual psychological pressure, threatened (as in the case of Russia) and real (with China) arms race as well as "strategic patience" in hope that the opponent will give up confrontational policy and/or change itself. Some of these instruments can provoke a military clash "by mistake," but no one is certainly eager to start a big war. Experts also noted that the military-industrial complex no longer played as much role in the U.S. politics and economy as it did during the Cold War, which also reduces the risk of arms race.

2.4.3.2. There are also fewer factors that could prod Russia into risking a military clash with the U.S. and NATO: the latter's expansion to ex-Soviet republics beyond the Baltic states has so far been stopped by Russia's firm

actions in the Crimea and Donbass. Ukraine's or Georgia's admission to NATO seems to have been removed from the agenda or postponed. Moscow's firm actions over the past ten years have generally stopped the West's expansion, thus reducing the risk of full-blown war with Russia.

2.4.4. Another stabilizing factor is the diversification of asymmetrical methods of deterrence necessitated by the disintegration of arms limitation regimes, growing "strategic ambiguity" and the increasing number of technologies which can ensure non-nuclear deterrence. This benefits militarily and economically weaker states which thus gain the opportunity to deter stronger powers without the need to build up their own nuclear capabilities all that much and by using non-nuclear and asymmetrical deterrence, while not disclosing their real possibilities and intentions.

2.4.4.1 No consensus was reached on this issue, and the supporters of the traditional understanding of strategic stability and arms control believe that weaker states, on the contrary, need strong arms limitation regimes in order to keep stronger states from gaining strategic superiority and thus impairing deterrence.

2.4.4.2. Whereas those who are skeptical about both the possibility and desirability of renewed arms control efforts on the old basis claimed that the removal of nuclear arms limitations from the agenda would allow the sides to focus on strengthening the potential for assured retaliation using the ways which they find most suitable rather than maintaining quantitative comparability of nuclear weapons. As a result, incentives for a nuclear arms race wane, with effective nuclear deterrence curbing conventional arms race and making politicization and instrumentalization of non-nuclear supremacy impossible. The U.S. could fully realize this: since the 1980s and up to the 2000s it invested colossal amounts of money in non-nuclear weapons in hope to gain military superiority but achieved the opposite result, losing its global positions. The money was basically wasted away.

2.4.4.3. China is a vivid example of how non-participation in arms control regimes and the absence of transparency can benefit a weaker country. Although the U.S. retains its military-strategic supremacy, the lack of accurate data concerning China's nuclear capabilities and nuclear doctrine has a deterrent effect on the U.S. policy. This allows Beijing to develop its nuclear strategic forces and armed forces in general in a way that suits it best, while staying away from arms race and not spending much money in pursuit of quantitative parity. Even if Beijing brings its strategic nuclear forces to a level comparable with that of the U.S. and Russia, it will do so of its own free will due primarily to political factors and considerations of prestige rather than arms race.

2.4.4.4. Another vivid example of asymmetrical deterrence is the positive influence nuclear proliferation that has already happened has on relations between nuclear powers, both between new and old and between the new ones. Even unconfirmed suspicions that North Korean nuclear armed missiles can reach the continental U.S. have already made Washington change its policy, give up its bellicose rhetoric and begin a respectful bilateral dialogue with an incommensurably weaker country, which until now seemed unthinkable. In other words, even a suspicion that at least one nuclear warhead can reach the continental U.S. or hit American allies has a deterrent effect, even though the U.S. has a strategic missile defense system deployed in Alaska. Nuclear deterrence has so far been effective in relations between India and Pakistan too. When Islamabad built its nuclear weapon, a series of big wars between them ended, and if military clashes occur, both sides seek to prevent their escalation.

2.5. Conclusions: Assessment of the Current State of Strategic Stability and Its Prospects

2.5.1. The analysis of geopolitical and technological changes in the military-strategic sphere and of negative and positive factors shows that the military-strategic situation is on the whole nearing a critical point. On the one hand, the threat of premeditated war, especially a nuclear one, between nuclear powers is low. Despite the U.S.'s confrontation with Russia and China, none of them considers war a way of achieving its objectives with regard to each other. Not only Russia and China but also tiny North Korea and non-nuclear countries (if they can inflict serious damage using non-nuclear weapons) have an increasingly growing deterrent effect on the U.S. On the other hand, **the entirety of military-technical and political factors—confrontation whipped up by the U.S., state of elites in some leading countries, destruction of arms control regimes and related confidence-building measures—objectively increase the probability of unintended nuclear war.**

2.5.2. Although initiated by the U.S. as part of its confrontational policy with regard to China and Russia, the destruction of the traditional arms control system seems inevitable due to the geopolitical and technological changes in the strategic landscape discussed above. Moreover, it offers certain advantages by enhancing asymmetrical deterrence on the part of weaker states. The restoration of the global balance does not allow the U.S. to pursue a destructive policy similar to that in the 1990s and 2000s.

2.5.3. New military technologies have both a stabilizing and a destabilizing effect in terms of arms race and a threat of nuclear war. The destabilizing effect is produced not so much by the weapons themselves or the absence of quantitative

limitations as by the absence of the rules of the game, the intensity of the political confrontation being imposed by the U.S., and the growing risk of military conflict between great powers and its escalation into a nuclear one. New weapons make such escalation much more likely than the Cold War-era weapons did.

2.5.4. “Nuclear multipolarity” all by itself does not automatically increase the risk of nuclear war and multiple arms races. In fact, trust-based partnership between Russia and China is one of its aspects. Moreover, substantial differences in strategic (including non-nuclear) capabilities possessed by different centers of power make an arms race and attempts to preserve quantitative comparability of similar strategic nuclear forces senseless. The threat of nuclear war in a multipolar context, just like in a bipolar one, depends entirely on the sides’ belief in unavoidable and unacceptable retaliation.

2.5.5. Russia’s nuclear security and the stability of its relations with the U.S. and China are ensured for a decade or even two ahead. With China they are based on partnership and trust, which both sides wish to preserve and imperceptibly back up with their nuclear capabilities (“good fences make good neighbors”). With the U.S. they are based on Russia’s acquisition of newest strategic weapons (hypersonic cruise missiles, hypersonic glide vehicles, submarine nuclear armed unmanned vehicles) which enable it to inflict unacceptable damage upon the U.S. in a retaliatory or a launch-under-attack counter-strike regardless of the development of American military-strategic systems. As a result, the probability of a new strategic arms (offensive and defensive, nuclear and non-nuclear) race between Russia and the U.S. has been minimized, provided, of course, Russia does not repeat the mistakes made by the Soviet Union which allowed itself to be drawn into an arms race, sometimes even leading it and spending tremendous amounts of money, thus causing the country to become weaker and eventually fall apart despite its military power.

2.5.6. At the same time, it would be a mistake to think that the new military-strategic landscape is stable. The main threat comes from a risk of **military conflict between nuclear powers, including an unintended nuclear or non-nuclear conflict, which can subsequently escalate into a global nuclear war, with the probability of such escalation now being higher than before.** There have been more prerequisites and causes for such conflicts lately. For example, such a conflict may be caused by:

- A cyber-attack against the ballistic missile early warning system and critical infrastructure, which may also be carried out by third countries or non-state actors;
- A technical error of the ballistic missile early warning system;
- Dangerous miscalculations and mistakes in the U.S. interpretation of the Russian and Chinese nuclear doctrines and vice versa, which might provoke

a nuclear war (for example, some make false assumptions that Russia will not respond with a strategic nuclear strike against the U.S. if it comes under a non-nuclear missile attack itself or if non-strategic nuclear weapons are used against it; or that Russia will use non-strategic nuclear weapons as soon as it starts losing a non-nuclear war on foreign territory, and that the U.S. should make up for this with non-strategic mobile nuclear weapons);

- Regional tensions getting out of control and use of non-nuclear military force on the local and regional levels (Baltic, Black, South China Seas); American experts consider a military conflict between Russia and the Baltic states to be the most probable scenario of a war between Russia and the U.S. with a nuclear escalation;
- Warship and military aircraft collisions due to dangerous encounters;
- An accidental or deliberate local military clash in regional conflicts (Venezuela, Syria);
- A military situation in Europe getting out of control if the U.S. deploys its shorter- and medium-range missiles in Central and Eastern Europe and low-yield nuclear weapons deployed on strategic delivery systems near the Russian borders; a similar scenario in Asia;
- Nuclear powers' getting involved in military conflicts near their borders (the U.S. and China over North Korea, and Russia and the U.S. over Ukraine).

2.5.7. Let us repeat that because of the growing intertwinement of nuclear and non-nuclear, strategic and non-strategic weapons, it will be increasingly difficult to prevent a non-nuclear conflict between Russia and the U.S. or between China and the U.S. from developing into a global nuclear war. These factors further reduce the chance, faint as it is, of limiting a nuclear war to a “tactical” or local one.

3. The New Understanding of Strategic Stability

3.1. Definition of Multilateral Strategic Stability

3.1.1. The analysis of changes in the military-strategic landscape shows, first, that the previous understanding of strategic stability as a state of bilateral relations between Russia and the U.S. and the correlation of their strategic capabilities is outdated. The nature of strategic stability is now multilateral and involves third nuclear powers. Second, the understanding of strategic stability as a prevention of nuclear war and a nuclear first strike is also obsolete. A non-nuclear conflict may cause just as much damage as a nuclear one and provoke, with even greater probability than before, the use of nuclear weapons. Third, it would be inappropriate to define strategic stability as “the absence of stimuli” on the part of nuclear powers to inflict a first nuclear strike upon each other: no intentions to make a sudden military aggression, especially a nuclear one, against each other apparently exist even despite the acute confrontation between the U.S. and Russia and between the U.S. and China, and are unlikely to appear in the foreseeable future.

3.1.2. **In the new military-strategic environment strategic stability should characterize the ability of nuclear powers to manage their bilateral relations and avoid any direct military clashes, including non-nuclear and inadvertent ones.** Therefore, *the strengthening of strategic stability requires not just military, but also and mainly political and international measures and decisions, including the reduction of confrontation between nuclear powers and restoration of trust which is now gone almost completely.*

3.1.3. **Such fundamental changes in the nature of strategic stability create the need for a new term, ‘multilateral strategic stability,’ and its new definition matching the new military-strategic landscape.**

3.1.4. The situational analysis did not produce any consensus on this issue. The advocates of the traditional approach suggested preserving the classical definition as the absence of incentives for a nuclear first strike and expanding it to third countries, primarily China, probably slightly lessening the emphasis on a nuclear first strike. They propose defining strategic stability as *the absence of incentives for nuclear war between nuclear powers and the ability of nuclear powers to prevent it.* From this point of view, a non-nuclear war between nuclear powers, if it does not involve the use of nuclear weapons (for example, due to

the sides' self-imposed restrictions) does not violate strategic stability. This approach seems to be incorrect simply because it cannot be implemented: there are no mechanisms that would guarantee non-use of nuclear weapons if a non-nuclear military conflict breaks out and escalates between nuclear powers. On the contrary, new military technologies and the evolution of the U.S. and Russian nuclear doctrines create much broader incentives than before for their use during a non-nuclear conflict rather than at its start.

3.1.5. We propose **defining “multilateral strategic stability” as follows: *such a state of relations between nuclear powers where they are able to prevent any military clash with each other, both intentional and unintentional, as any such clash might evolve to a global nuclear war.* This is determined by the quality of political and military-political relations between nuclear powers with each other, the state of their strategic capabilities and ability to reliably inflict irreparable damage in a second (retaliatory) strike, the state of political elites, the quality of communication between the military and political elites of the nuclear powers, the state of international environment, and other factors that determine the level of threat of war between nuclear powers.**

3.2. Old and New Factors of Strategic Stability

3.2.1. Multilateral strategic stability, just like the previous strategic stability, is ensured by deterrence which, in turn, is based on a potential aggressor's awareness of unavoidable retaliation and guaranteed ability of the parties to inflict irreparable damage upon each other in a retaliatory strike. It is deterrence that can more effectively than anything else (international law, institutions, etc.) keep unallied nuclear powers from a deliberate military clash with each other, let alone a nuclear attack. In this respect, the current state of Russian-Chinese relations, where deterrence is not the major basis of partnership, is a great achievement.

3.2.2. However, the new military-strategic landscape requires new ways to ensure deterrence and prevent any military clashes, including non-nuclear ones, between nuclear powers. The focus on limitation and reduction of nuclear weapons and maintenance of approximate strategic nuclear parity no longer works: it is senseless from the military-strategic point of view and impossible for objective reasons, which have been analyzed in the previous Sections.

3.2.3. In the new situation the focus should be on strengthening channels of communication between the military, on building bilateral and multilateral dialogues on strategic stability issues, the state of strategic weapons and nuclear doctrines, on creating multilateral and bilateral regimes of transparency and predictability without any arms limitation obligations, on developing rules of conduct in the military sphere in areas most prone to military clashes such as cyber

technologies, space, participation in regional conflicts, as well as on strengthening political dialogue between nuclear powers in general and reducing the intensity of confrontation between them. Special attention should be paid to the strengthening of trust-based military-strategic dialogue between Russia and China not in order to limit either country's strategic capabilities but in order to further strengthen trust and reduce the risk of a possible escalation of arms race in the Asia Pacific. More detailed recommendations on how to strengthen multilateral strategic stability in the new situation are given in Section 4.

4. Ways to Strengthen Multilateral Strategic Stability

4.1. Refraining from New Nuclear Arms Limitation and Reduction Agreements and Negotiations on Them

4.1.1. The main objectives of the strategic arms control agreements and regimes system in the previous military-strategic context were prevention of nuclear war, limitation of nuclear arms race, and resource saving. In the new context these objectives are not sufficient as it is necessary to prevent not only nuclear but any war between nuclear powers, and limit not only nuclear arms race but non-nuclear strategic weapons too. It seems that these objectives cannot be achieved through nuclear arms limitation and reduction regimes which require approximate strategic parity. Moreover, further attempts to solve these tasks by way of new arms limitation negotiations and agreements will most likely produce the opposite result: new regimes will not be created, mutual suspiciousness will increase, and the failure of the talks will only step up enmity and competition between great powers.

4.1.2. Therefore, it would be prudent to regard the collapse of bilateral Russian-American and possibly multilateral (CTBT, NPT) nuclear arms control agreements not as the end of the world but as a normal, albeit negative, process taking place amid fundamental changes in the military-strategic landscape, which the sides should accept and move forward. Applying the traditional approach to a new context and trying to work out new arms limitation agreements is not only impossible but probably even counterproductive.

4.1.3. First of all, traditional arms limitation agreements can hardly be turned into multilateral or at least trilateral ones for the time being, for example, by expanding the New START and the INF Treaty to China. Such attempts will only create artificial tension between Moscow and Beijing, escalate confrontation between the U.S. and Russia and between the U.S. and China, and accelerate the collapse of the New START.

4.1.4. Likewise, it would be pointless to try to continue the bilateral Russian-American strategic arms reduction process in a situation where the factor of third nuclear countries and non-nuclear strategic weapons has an increasingly growing influence on Moscow's and Washington's nuclear doctrines. Regardless of third nuclear countries, Russia's and America's approaches and priorities

with respect to nuclear arms control are so different that it will most likely be prohibitively difficult for them to reach a consensus. The U.S. would seek to limit Russia's newest strategic systems which are not covered by the New START and its non-strategic nuclear arsenal; Russia, for its part, would try to do the same with regard to the U.S. missile defense systems, military space programs, and high-precision non-nuclear weapons. As a result, by starting negotiations the sides would only deepen mutual enmity and mistrust, but the U.S., which has extensive information and propaganda possibilities, would get certain advantages.

4.1.5. Secondly, because the line between nuclear and strategic non-nuclear, nuclear strategic and non-strategic weapons is becoming increasingly blurred, it is impossible to distinctively divide them into those which are subject to limitation and reduction and those which are not. Further strategic nuclear arms reduction efforts amid the diversification of systems capable of inflicting strategic damage will require negotiation agendas to cover all weapons at once, which is hardly possible in practice.

4.1.6. Thirdly, because of the diversity of strategic nuclear and non-nuclear, strategic and non-strategic weapons, including the newest ones, it is impossible to calculate the military-strategic balance and comply with one of the key principles used in traditional agreements, that is, approximate parity or comparability of similar weapons. (If "parity" was ever suitable for that at all).

4.1.7. Fourthly, in the current strategic situation approximate numerical parity of similar strategic systems is no longer required for effective deterrence.

4.1.8. Therefore, it would be unadvisable to initiate new arms limitation negotiations with the U.S. or agree with the Trump administration's (likely purely propagandistic) proposal of trilateral talks with China on the reduction and limitation of nuclear weapons. These talks are doomed to failure and will only give the U.S. an excuse for refusing to extend the New START. China is unlikely to agree to such talks for the time being anyway and should probably be given a free hand in rejecting the U.S. initiative. In fact, Beijing has many times counted on Russia's veto, while refraining from exercising its own veto right in the UN Security Council.

4.1.9. At the same time, a total vacuum of regimes and rules of interaction in the strategic sphere is dangerous. Although a lack of transparency may give a weaker country some advantages in raising the stronger side's concern about the consequences of the use of force, related risks appear to be much more serious, namely, increased tension and higher risks of unintended military clashes.

4.1.10. The absence of reliable information about the potential adversaries' strategic systems and military, including nuclear, doctrines, will make the sides that lack such strategic systems like those Russia showed in 2018 acts upon the worst

possible scenario and suspect others of constant attempts to create such military capabilities that would allow them to win a war, including as nuclear one, without sustaining irreparable damage. This, in turn, would only escalate arms race, even if it is senseless from the military point of view, and strain relations further. In addition, in the absence of transparency and other channels of communication, especially at a time of crisis or heightened tensions, the sides may interpret unusual moves of each other's strategic military systems, military exercises with the use of strategic, including nuclear, weapons, cyber operations or erroneous attack warning signals as the beginning of a real full-blown military attack.

4.2. Refraining from both Arms Reduction and Arms Race

4.2.1. The main way of preventing a premeditated war (both nuclear and non-nuclear) between nuclear powers, is nuclear deterrence which means the guaranteed ability to inflict unacceptable damage upon the aggressor in a retaliatory nuclear strike. This, in turn, requires a tangible and strong, from the military and political point of view, nuclear arsenal. Its reduction—unilateral, bilateral or multilateral—would probably be counterproductive in the current military-strategic situation. Following the U.S. actions in Iraq and Libya, which had no nuclear weapons or had abandoned their nuclear arms programs, Washington's secession from the ABM Treaty, the INF Treaty, and the Iran nuclear deal, the claim that reduction of nuclear capabilities is a condition for preserving the NPT Treaty no longer works, if has ever worked at all. In the absence of previous arms control and transparency regimes, it would be advisable not only to maintain reliable deterrent potential but also voluntarily demonstrate it, even unilaterally, so that other countries could see at least some of its possibilities. This will have a deterrent effect and strengthen strategic stability.

4.2.2. Rejection of traditional arms reduction agreements does not necessarily lead to arms race. The latter largely has politico-psychological and economic (the role of the military-industrial complex) roots and occurs when either one side tries to neutralize the deterrent potential of the other side and wants to achieve/preserve its own strategic supremacy, or when the other side suspects the former of this desire, or both at the same time. For Russia, this problem has been removed from the agenda for at least the next ten to fifteen years: it will probably be impossible to neutralize its flexible guaranteed retaliatory capability in the foreseeable future no matter how the U.S. strategic systems develop. For China, a solution could be a strategic dialogue with Russia and the U.S., which will show that even in the absence of systems similar to the Russian ones it will nevertheless be able to inflict unacceptable damage upon the U.S. in a retaliatory strike, despite its strategic nuclear forces being still incomparable with those of the U.S.

4.3. From Arms Limitation to Channels of Communication and Codes of Conduct

4.3.1. An important way to prevent an inadvertent war and curb arms race between nuclear powers in the current military-strategic environment and without arms control agreements is to create and/or strengthen between them:

- channels of military-to-military communication which would operate on a constant basis as a mechanism of de-escalation at a time of crisis and other sensitive situations (for example cyber-attacks, air or ship collisions, military exercises imitating the use of nuclear weapons and high-precision non-nuclear weapons, the deployment of the latter near borders, changes in the alert status of strategic nuclear forces, etc.);
- permanent dialogue between Russian and the U.S. militaries on strategic stability in addition to the dialogue that exists between their foreign ministries, and lifting of the American legislative restrictions on such a dialogue;
- dialogue between the military, national security offices, and foreign ministries, which would provide an instrument for permanently keeping each other informed about their state of strategic nuclear forces, other strategic systems, nuclear doctrines and objectives of the military policy in general;
- strengthening of Russian and American Nuclear Risk Reduction Centers within the Russian Ministry of Defense and the U.S. Department of Defense, strengthening of dialogue between these Centers;
- transparency and predictability measures in the military-strategic sphere as a whole, which would include voluntary invitation of inspectors and observers from other countries, regular briefings on the combat characteristics of nuclear and strategic non-nuclear weapons and the purpose of military drills, and regular consultations and briefings on nuclear doctrines and military doctrines in general. Some of the transparency and predictability measures can be borrowed from the Russian-American arms control agreements. Transparency regimes should apply not only to nuclear weapons but the military policy of nuclear powers in general, thus minimizing the risk of military clashes between them due to a mistake or miscalculation;
- it would be advisable to resume intensive, including non-governmental, discussions on the strategic situation in order to build confidence, create more channels of communication, work out a new common strategic culture, and create groups of elites interested in such a dialogue and normal political relations. Such dialogues, trialogues and joint research can eventually help to find new ways to curb arms race and reduce the risk of war. Russia should play an integrating part in such consultations, proposing its own agenda.

During the Cold War such expert network played a largely positive role in reducing the level and severity of contradictions. Although it worked primarily on the basis of American scenarios and groundworks.

4.3.2. Official channels of communication and transparency and predictability measures should be created first of all between Russia and the U.S. before the New START expires. Therefore, relevant negotiations should be started right away. As an alternative, the side could agree to formalize strategic nuclear forces transparency measures provided for in START-3 as a separate agreement and expand them to those newest Russia and American strategic systems, which fall under the definition of strategic nuclear force, but at the moment are not covered by this treaty. The sides should also seek to develop transparency measures with regard to non-nuclear strategic weapons.

4.3.3. Secondly, it would be advisable to develop communication and transparency mechanisms between the U.S. and China. They should also cover both strategic nuclear forces, nuclear weapons deployed on non-strategic delivery systems and military policy in the non-nuclear sphere, including measures to prevent a military clash between the U.S. and China in the South China Sea.

4.3.4. Thirdly, Russia should strengthen channels of prompt communication with China in order to keep each other informed and coordinate activities if a crisis breaks out or relations with third countries deteriorate. It would also be advisable to gradually strengthen the mutual transparency of Russian and Chinese nuclear arsenals and strategic non-nuclear forces and military doctrines. The sides should probably seek to build de facto allied relations in the military-strategic sphere without making any formal commitments to protecting each other in case of attack by a third party. But the latter should understand that such actions are possible and likely. Such relations will significantly strengthen deterrence and reduce incentives to pursue an aggressive and militarized policy.

4.3.5. Fourthly, it would be prudent to create and strengthen channels of military-to-military communication and transparency between Russia and European countries, as well as separately between Russia and NATO, working through the NATO-Russia Council, in order to prevent any military clashes in the Baltic and Black Seas, and in Europe in general. At the same time, we reaffirm the position that a political dialogue with NATO, an alliance which has tainted itself with acts of aggression and destabilized Europe with its enlargement, would be harmful.

4.3.6. Such channels of communication and transparency measures can be both informal and voluntary, and official, depending on their participants' preferences. What is important is the level of predictability and the promptness of reaction which they will generate.

4.3.7. A second priority in preventing an inadvertent war is to work out the rules of conduct in areas that are most prone to produce escalation of military conflicts,

such as cyber technologies, outer space, weapons designed for delivering a surprise counterforce strike, and regional conflicts. **The risk of inadvertent war depends not so much on the limitation of weapons and armed forces or their absence as on the states' behavior, especially in “gray zones” which exist between strategic and non-strategic, military and non-military (hybrid) activities and which do not fall and have never fallen under any quantitative limitations.**

4.3.8. It would be advisable to create multilateral regimes and codes of conduct in these areas, which would apply first of all to Russia, China, and the U.S., and eventually cover all nuclear states, countries with non-nuclear strategic capabilities, and their allies. This work should probably draw on the ideology laid out in the OSCE Vienna Document 2011 on Confidence- and Security-Building Measures.

4.3.9. Such codes can be developed in different ways: either in a multilateral format, starting with a dialogue between Russia, China, and the U.S., or on a bilateral basis between Russia and China or between Russia and the U.S., or even through unilateral initiatives inviting all interested sides to join in or enter into negotiations. It would be advisable to make maximum use of the expert community's resources and dialogues as part of track two and track one and a half diplomacy. Just like transparency measures, these regimes and codes of conduct can be formalized either as legally binding agreements or political declarations.

4.3.10. The rules of conduct in the field of cyber security and cyber weapons can include the following: refusal to engage in malicious cyber activities against satellites used by the ballistic missile early warning systems and governmental communication systems; compilation of a list of critical infrastructure facilities, cyber-attacks against which would be inadmissible; refusal to carry out cyber-attacks against strategic nuclear forces in all of their segments; development of rules of conduct in a situation where a state comes under a cyber-attack with strategic consequences, including immediate contact and negotiations with other nuclear powers, and joint investigations to determine the origin of a cyber-attack; constant consultations on cyber security in bilateral formats, trilateral format between Russia, China, and the U.S., and multilateral formats with the participation of all nuclear states. At the national level, Russia should probably adopt an official strategy regarding the military aspects of information and communication technologies, which would identify the steps Russia would take in the event of a military, left alone military-strategic, cyber-attack against it.

4.3.11. The rules of military conduct in outer space may include: refusal to attack early warning system satellites and highly secure space communication assets; a ban on space testing that can physically destroy spacecraft and create space debris; a ban on the deployment in outer space of weapons designed to destroy targets on the ground; creation of a space-based control system similar to the air control system which covers both military and civilian facilities; rules of conduct at a time

of crisis, including those provoked by third parties and technical failures. Many American experts consider limitation of anti-satellite weapons to be prospective.

4.3.12. It would be advisable to work out rules of conduct in using and deploying weapons capable of delivering surprise counterforce strikes, without trying to limit their number. These include first of all high-precision conventionally-armed systems, medium- and shorter-range missiles, and tactical nuclear weapons. Their uncontrolled deployment, let alone buildup near nuclear states, can provoke a preemptive strike from the latter. Therefore, it would be prudent to negotiate geographical criteria for safe deployment of such weapons (non-deployment near borders), quantitative limitations at a certain distance from the border (but non on their production in principle), and communication algorithms at a time of crisis.

4.3.13. In the future it would be advisable to negotiate the rules of military conduct in regions of direct contact between Russia and NATO, Russia and the U.S., and China and the U.S., primarily in the Asia Pacific region. Such rules exist in Europe and are laid out in the 2011 Vienna Document. In Asia, such rules have yet to be worked out using some of the European regulations even though not all of them have been useful. It would be appropriate to discuss this in preliminary consultations with China. Such rules should, among other things, prohibit dangerous air and sea encounters and flights without transponders, limit electronic warfare, and set up channels of communication in the event of airspace intrusion. Russia should support the initiatives to create security mechanisms in North East, East, and South East Asia. China has lately been putting forth some of these ideas.

4.3.14. In the medium term it will be necessary to work out rules of conduct and common approaches towards the use of artificial intelligence in the military, especially military-strategic, sphere. At a minimum, the sides should understand how other countries address and solve this issue.

4.3.15. Finally, it would be desirable to start working on the principles of nuclear powers' military conduct in regional conflicts which minimize the risk of their direct armed clashes (including accidental and provocative ones, involving irregular armed units or private military companies), as well as create mechanisms of communication and de-escalation if such clashes occur.

4.4. Russia-China, Russia-U.S., and China-U.S. Strategic Dialogues

4.4.1. An important way to strengthen multilateral strategic stability, curb arms race, and reduce hostility between nuclear powers in the long term is comprehensive and conceptual dialogues within the Russia-U.S.-China triangle on fundamental issues of strategic stability in general, which, however, would not seek to achieve quick results. They can assess the current military-strategic situation in the world and its prospects, define strategic stability in the new environment, elucidate its philosophy

and desirable measures to strengthen it, devise mechanisms for strengthening deterrence and trust, preventing military clashes and curbing arms race, discuss nuclear doctrines and priorities in the development of the armed forces.

4.4.2. It would not be probably prudent to start with the Russia-U.S.-China triologue as their conceptual and practical approaches, even those of Russia and China, are still very much different. In addition, there will be no trust in such triologue. This is why it would be desirable to start such consultations on a bilateral basis and gradually move on to the triologue. It would be particularly important to launch a trust-based dialogue between Russia and China on fundamental aspects of multilateral strategic stability in order to harmonize approaches on such issues as transparency and predictability regimes without quantitative limitations, the strengthening of deterrence and measures to be taken for that in the current strategic environment. As these dialogues and eventually triologue help build confidence and gain cooperative experience, a new generation of elites will come into play, which will be interested in building normal, non-confrontational relations between Russia and the U.S., China and the U.S., based on combination of cooperation and competition, rather than solely on confrontation.

4.4.3. In the future, these conceptual and strategic dialogues should also involve other nuclear states (India, Pakistan, France, the U.K., Israel and in the future North Korea).

4.5. The New START Prolongation

4.5.1. Since it may take a long time to work out new rules of conduct and transparency measures as well as create crisis communication systems, it would be desirable in the short term to preserve transparency, predictability and communication measures, as well as limitations that are provided for in the New START. Therefore, it would be appropriate to insist on its extension for another five years (2021-2026) as a temporary measure, while simultaneously starting negotiations and consultations on the development of new communication instruments and transparency measures, the new philosophy of multilateral strategic stability strengthening in the new conditions.

4.5.2. As a compromise, Russia and the U.S. could agree to lift quantitative limitations and extend the confidence-building and transparency measures contained in the treaty for another five-year period.

4.5.3. Even if the treaty is not extended in 2021, experts believe that it would be in the interests of both Russia and the U.S. to make a joint statement reaffirming their free-will commitment to the information and transparency measures provided for in it, including the publication of data on the state of their strategic nuclear forces and the conduct of inspections.

4.6. A Policy Towards Nuclear Arms Proliferation

4.6.1. The non-proliferation issue sparked an interesting dispute during the situational analysis. Some experts said that since the U.S. was inclined to play without rules, Russia should not participate so actively in the anti-proliferation campaign as more nuclear powers will seek to contain the U.S.'s aggressive policy. In addition, the NPT has already been fundamentally undermined by the proliferation of nuclear weapons and aggression against countries that had agreed to abandon their nuclear arms programs.

4.6.2. However, a different opinion prevailed that it would be in the interests of all nuclear powers, including Russia, to keep new countries from acquiring nuclear weapons. So preservation of the NPT should remain among Russia's policy objectives. Although the arms limitation and reduction system has fallen apart, Russia should publicly reaffirm its commitment to Article VI of the NPT and at least raise its voice against attempts to build up strategic nuclear forces and escalate arms race. Since there is no reason for Russian to get drawn into a new arms race and existing systems it possesses can effectively ensure deterrence in the short and medium term, Russia's statements opposing arms race will not be unfounded. In fact, the absence of intentions to build up its nuclear arsenals should be a key point of Russia's position at the upcoming NPT Review Conference in 2020.

4.6.3. It is still necessary to start thinking already now about how to prevent or curb further proliferation of nuclear weapons if the treaty is officially proclaimed dead, the probability of which, as experts agreed, is quite high. This means considering the possibility of giving nuclear guarantees to potential nuclear powers, including cross guarantees, and creating such regional security systems that would make these countries feel safe and allay the need to build nuclear weapons of their own. Naturally, these steps should be combined with international and political pressure to make the leaders and elites of those countries understand that they will face sanctions if they decide to acquire nuclear weapons or threshold status, and that their common security will be impaired.

4.6.4. Finally, since further proliferation of nuclear weapons cannot be ruled out, and some experts actually consider it quite possible, it is necessary get prepared for this scenario and take necessary military, political and diplomatic measures.

4.7. The "Struggle for Peace": A New Quality of Relations between Nuclear Powers

4.7.1. **In a situation of nuclear multipolarity, diversification of strategic weapons and entanglement of nuclear and non-nuclear forces, strategic stability depends on non-military factors just as much, and probably even more, as on military ones. Perhaps the most important factor among them is the quality**

of relations between nuclear powers and the state of their political and foreign policy elites. If these relations are explicitly hostile and confrontational, and elites easily resort to provocations either because of irresponsibility or involvement in the internal political struggle, the world will balance on the brink of war. Building healthy relations of cooperation and competition with a normal and full-fledged architecture of interstate dialogue will provide serious guarantees against inadvertent war, arms race, and conflict.

4.7.2. The implementation of most of the abovementioned military-political measures directly depends on the quality of political relations between states and their political elites. Developing channels of communication, transparency and predictability, and the rules of the game in “gray zones” and areas where the risk of unintended military clash is the highest, let alone full-fledged strategic dialogues, can proceed in the new situation on a voluntary and informal basis, at least in the beginning. Voluntary actions will require political will, responsibility and corresponding quality of interstate relations.

4.7.3. So, one of the key priorities in strengthening multilateral strategic stability is support for efforts to achieve a new quality of political relations between nuclear powers, primarily Russia, the U.S., and China, and overcome the current acute phase of confrontation. Firstly, experts believe that the three countries should explicitly and unequivocally agree that a war with each other, not only nuclear but any armed clash, is absolutely inadmissible, and that such a conflict, if it occurs, must be de-escalated and stopped within the shortest time possible. Besides, these countries should acknowledge that systemic confrontation between them is dangerous for security and harmful for their political interests.

4.7.4. It would be desirable for the Russian top leadership to openly proclaim the “struggle for peace” — prevention of war between nuclear powers — an important objective of Russian foreign policy and back it up with “peace initiatives” designed not so much to facilitate disarmament and arms reduction as normalize and improve political relations between them. This step will fill one of the gaps in the Russian foreign policy, which is most often cited by experts, namely, its reactivity, lack of outstanding initiatives and insufficient public support for the country’s essentially sensible foreign policy course.

4.7.5. The “struggle for peace” should include both positive initiatives aimed at strengthening dialogues, interaction with other nuclear powers and promoting Russia’s image as a responsible great power, and reviving a rational fear of war with other nuclear states among the elites and the general public in nuclear powers, overcoming “strategic parasitism.” Beijing has already put forth a number of peace initiatives. It is necessary to facilitate positive competition in this field, engaging as many countries and different segments of society in this process as possible.

4.7.6. Reviving the fear of war would be a priority measure designed to normalize relations between nuclear powers in the short term and strengthen multilateral strategic stability. This will require, first, clarifying the Russian nuclear doctrine and other military-strategic documents, and making several statements at the top and high political levels to name the steps Russia would take if it comes under military attack, making it clear that these steps may include even the use of nuclear weapons. It should also be stated clearly that Moscow would not distinguish between a nuclear and non-nuclear counterforce strikes or between strategic and non-strategic nuclear strikes against its territory. Second, the cost and consequences of nuclear war must be regularly mentioned in mass media and public statements. Third, it would be desirable for Moscow to contribute to a series of alarmist peace conferences in order to emphasize the high risk of inadvertent non-nuclear military clashes between nuclear powers and possible arms race between the U.S. and China, and assess their consequences.

4.7.7. A positive element of the “struggle for peace” means, first, a qualitative intensification of dialogues with European and Asian countries (China, India, Vietnam, and other ASEAN countries, as well as U.S. allies—Japan, South Korea, and European states) to discuss the danger of military clashes between nuclear powers, impossibility to control nuclear escalation, and the need to strengthen in every way communication systems, transparency and predictability, as well as the rules of military conduct. These dialogues should be conducted primarily among experts and through backchannel diplomacy. Second, it would be desirable to strengthen the relevant expert dialogue with the U.S. and build interaction with that part of the American elite, including Democrats, that opposes arms race and attempts to lower the threshold for the use of nuclear weapons and scrap military-strategic rules and regimes. Third, it is necessary to step up public diplomacy targeting civil society in the U.S., European and Asian countries, and make it aware of the danger of confrontational relations between nuclear powers, “strategic frivolity” and demolition of all regimes and rules of the game. **It would also be advisable for Russia to initiate a global peace conference where the president could make a keynote statement on the importance of avoiding any war between nuclear powers, including non-nuclear war.**

4.8. From Overcoming Deterrence to Effective Multilateral Nuclear Deterrence

4.8.1. Changes in the politico-psychological and military-technical spheres mentioned above objectively increase the risk of war, and this risk will tend to grow further in the short and medium terms.

4.8.2. In order to overcome it and save mankind from a catastrophe, a new policy will be needed. Some of its elements were described above. **But there should also**

be a new philosophy of strategic stability policy. In the past this policy rested on three key pillars: unilateral measures to strengthen deterrence (the U.S. tried and apparently continues to try to restore its supremacy); measures to strengthen channels of communication; and measures to limit (and reduce) nuclear weapons. The latter was based on the postulated need to build a nuclear-free world and overcome nuclear deterrence. However, this philosophy, even if it was appropriate in the past, will apparently become obsolete in the new and future world. As the overcoming competition between great powers within the “liberal international order” (which in reality was nothing but the U.S. hegemony) utopia failed and this competition returned as a normal state of international relations, overcoming nuclear deterrence would strengthen, not weaken the threat of great power war, and even make it inevitable.

4.8.3. In this situation, it would be advisable to give up the previous, largely hypocritical, approach adopted by the nuclear powers and **shift the emphasis in common policy towards the strengthening of mutual nuclear strategic deterrence, which, regardless of its flaws, was the main factor of peace in the past and will be even more so in the foreseeable future. Future joint actions of nuclear powers should seek to enhance multilateral mutual deterrence as the main foundation upon which multilateral strategic stability could be built.**

Appendix 1

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