

**CHAPTER 2**

**ASIAN DRIVERS OF  
RUSSIA'S NUCLEAR FORCE POSTURE**

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**OVERVIEW**

This chapter takes issue with the Euro-centric view of Russian nuclear posture based upon Cold War assumptions, which stressed strategic nuclear systems, bipolarity, and Euro-centric military confrontation between the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the Soviet-led Warsaw Treaty Organization. Russia's nuclear arsenal was never so narrowly focused, even during the Cold War. But in the post-Cold War era, it is even less so. Beginning in the mid-1990s, Russia's national security elite began to speak of Russia as a Eurasian power with specific national security interests in the "near abroad." The Russian elite has, since the late 1990s, spoken of NATO and the United States as threats and challenges, depending on the immediate character of U.S.-NATO and Russian relations. The key drivers have been NATO's expansion into Eastern Europe and former Soviet territories, and NATO's out-of-area operations when seen as threatening Russian national interests. However, even this picture misses a key dimension of Russian nuclear policy (i.e., the threats posed to Russian interests in the Caucasus, Central Asia, and the Far East).

This chapter addresses one of those areas in detail: the Russian Far East and Siberia. The Russian government has sought, by political means, to reduce antagonisms, but finds itself an object in a dynamic Asian-

Pacific world, where Russian weakness is evident and where other powers are jockeying for position and advantage. Silence on Asian threats in Moscow's political discourse should not be taken as the final word on the Asian dimensions of Russian nuclear policy – in which demographic crisis, economic weakness, and limited conventional military capabilities create both vulnerability and the incentives to rely on nuclear weapons to de-escalate a potential military conflict. In these calculations, Russia's relative isolation in the region and its inability to control other areas of conflict could draw the Russian Far East into that conflict. Looming large in these calculations is the emergence of the People's Republic of China (PRC) as a major economic power with enhanced conventional military capabilities. This Asian dimension will make bilateral attempts at arms control agreements on nonstrategic nuclear weapons problematic, in the absence of any means to address Russia's Asian threats and challenges, which are only partially military.

## **RUSSIA'S NUCLEAR WEAPONS, ITS NEW LOOK, AND CHINA**

While the signing of the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) by Presidents Barack Obama and Dmitry Medvedev in Prague, Czech Republic, in April 2010, kept the nuclear focus on the Cold War issue of reducing the nuclear strategic forces of the United States and Russia, the profound shift in the nuclear equation over the past 2 decades made this agreement more the harbinger of the end of an era than a vision of things to come for both powers. The language of the treaty stresses measures to ensure strategic stability between the two signatories, even as the

global security environment has moved from bipolar, through unipolar, to an emerging multipolar system. In the case of the United States, which still sees itself as the leading global actor, the Obama administration has an ambitious program to curtail global nuclear proliferation and to seek peace and security in a world without nuclear weapons. This agenda, with its global context, does not provide a regional context to nuclear weapons, which shape Russia's position in Eurasia.

Indeed, U.S. policy has generally framed its approach to Russia in the post-Cold War era in terms of a European security dialogue focused primarily on NATO expansion and NATO-Russian cooperation or conflict, depending upon operational circumstances defined by NATO out-of-area operations in the Balkans and Afghanistan. While new NATO members in Eastern Europe have focused on Russian threats to their territorial integrity and sovereignty in keeping with the notion of collective defense that was the heart of the alliance during the Cold War, NATO, under U.S. leadership, has moved toward collective security with a global focus that treats Russia as another regional actor and not the core threat to international stability. Obama's reset of U.S.-Russian relations seeks mutually advantageous cooperation in support of international stability.<sup>1</sup> In seeking cooperation with other regional actors, the new U.S. National Security Strategy does not take into account the extent to which regional tensions may bring the issue of Russia's nuclear arsenal into play in local crises, which are not necessarily defined by U.S.-Russian relations. The case of Georgia in 2008 should have highlighted the difficulties associated with stability outside of the main European framework, which became even more complex with Russia's Asian frontiers. Nor does it address the

military-technical dynamic associated with advanced conventional weapons, informatization, and network-centric warfare, which is complicating the role of nuclear weapons as an instrument of theater deterrence.

In this context, Russia's nuclear arsenal remains, however, a key variable in Eurasian security. At present, that arsenal is estimated to be significantly smaller than that of the 40,000 at the end of the Cold War, but is certainly in excess of 14,000 weapons (including 3,113 strategic warheads and 2,079 nonstrategic warheads deployed and another 8,000 in storage or waiting dismantling as of 2008.)<sup>2</sup> A significant portion of these are stored east of the Urals and form a major component of Russia's geo-strategic posture in the non-European strategic axes that include the Caucasus, Central Asia, Siberia, the Russian Far East, and the Arctic.<sup>3</sup> With regard to Asian security, the nuclear weapons deployed and stored in the Siberian Federal Okrug and the Far Eastern Federal Okrug form the basis of Russia's theater nuclear forces. These forces include the nuclear weapons of the Russian Pacific Fleet, Air Force, Strategic Rocket Forces, and Army deployed there.<sup>4</sup> The theater role of such forces in case of armed conflict with the PRC has been candidly described by Aleksandr Khramchikhin.<sup>5</sup>

At present, the Russian Ministry of Defense and the General Staff are in the process of redefining those strategic axes and of reducing the number of military districts from six to four and creating operational-strategic commands in each. They include: the Western, covering Europe with its headquarters in St. Petersburg; the Southern, covering the Black Sea; the Caucasus and Caspian, with its headquarters in Rostov-on-Don; the Central, covering Central Asia, with its headquarters in Yekaterinburg; and the Eastern, cov-

ering the Far East and Pacific Ocean, with its headquarters in Khabarovsk. This concept is to be tested in conjunction with "Vostok-2010," a major exercise in Siberia and the Russian Far East scheduled for execution in late June and early July.<sup>6</sup> Since 1999, Russia has conducted operational-strategic exercises dealing with its Western strategic direction on a regular basis. Those exercises have included the first use of nuclear weapons to de-escalate and bring about conflict termination in a scenario involving a conventional attack upon Russia from the West by coalition forces enjoying tactical-technical qualitative superiority over Russian conventional forces. The limited nuclear strikes seemed to have been designed to disrupt command, control, communications, computers, and intelligence surveillance and reconnaissance (C4ISR) and precision strike capabilities of the aggressor forces in order to halt the attack.<sup>7</sup> Vostok-2010 is the first to address the Eastern strategic direction and has been associated with the implementation of the "New Look" championed by Minister of Defense Anatoly Serdiukov and Chief of the General Staff General Nikolai Makarov, as part of the transformation of the Russian military into a brigade-centric force capable of conducting advanced conventional operations and network-centric warfare.<sup>8</sup> As one of the Russian reformers described the "New Look," it was a gamble on the nature of the future war the Russian Army would face.<sup>9</sup>

The driver behind this shift in direction is not military-technological development in the West, but a deep reappraisal of the security situation in Russian Siberia and the Far East. In an article devoted to Russia's "Eastern Vector," General Makhmut Gareev pointed to the emergence of NATO as a global security organization, with a footprint in Central Asia as

a result of the Afghan War and predicted rising tensions between a U.S.-led NATO and the PRC. While he focused on NATO's nonmilitary means of exerting influence, particularly on the model of the "color revolutions" in Ukraine and Georgia that had brought regimes hostile to Russia to power, Gareev's primary focus was on the unleashing of armed conflict in regions where Russia was lacking in combat potential and especially combat readiness.<sup>10</sup> Gareev returned to this theme of combat readiness in a follow-on article about lessons learned from the Great Patriotic War. In addition to citing the surprise attack of Nazi Germany in 1941, Gareev pointed to the outbreak of local fighting between the Soviet Union and the PRC along the Amur River in 1969, which forced the mobilization of an entire military district. He also noted the risks involved when national political leadership did not appreciate the military-political situation they were addressing when they ordered the use of force. Gareev here drew attention to the decision to intervene militarily in Afghanistan in 1979 and the decision to intervene in Chechnya in 1994. In both Afghanistan and Chechnya, the governments blundered into wars they did not want because they failed to understand the implied tasks that followed from the initial order and failed in their political guidance to take into account the real situation on the ground. The relevance of these lessons from all four conflicts is the nature of the true connection between politics and strategy.

The final and decisive word belongs to the political leadership, but in the working out of the most important military-political decisions, military professionals and other specialists must take part; otherwise, policy will not apply to real life. The main point is that politicians and diplomats are obliged to create favorable conditions for the actions of the Armed Forces.<sup>11</sup>

On the issue of the “New Look,” Gareev endorsed its content (i.e., the creation of its own precision strike weapons and the necessary technological base to support the conduct of network-centric warfare). At the same time, he called for the working out and implementation of more active and decisive strategies, operational art, and tactics to impose upon the enemy those actions, including contact warfare, which he most seeks to avoid.<sup>12</sup>

Combat readiness becomes in this regard one of the primary concerns of military professionals, since combat potential, when not linked to actual combat readiness, can create a false appreciation of the military power available. Here the nation’s capacity to mobilize additional military power defines its ability to manage the escalation of a local conflict toward a decision in keeping with national interests.<sup>13</sup>

This is supposed to be the exact focus of Vostok-2010.<sup>14</sup> The “New Look” military – which the Ministry of Defense has set out to create via a brigade-base ground force capable of launching precision strikes and conducting network-centric warfare – faces a particular challenge in Siberia and the Far East, where Chinese military modernization has moved the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) from a mass industrial army built to fight the people’s war to a force seeking to rearm as an advanced conventional force and conduct its own version of network-centric warfare. A year ago, informed Russian defense journalists still spoke of the PLA as a mass industrial army seeking niche advanced conventional capabilities. Looking at the threat environment that was assumed to exist under Zapad 2009, defense journalist Dmitri Litovkin spoke of Russian forces confronting three distinct types of military threats:

1. An opponent armed to NATO standards in the Georgian-Russian confrontation over South Ossetia last year.

2. In the Eastern strategic direction, Russian forces would likely face a multi-million-man army with a traditional approach to the conduct of combat: linear deployments with large concentrations of manpower and firepower on a different axis.

3. In the Southern strategic direction, Russian forces expect to confront irregular forces and sabotage groups fighting a partisan war against “the organs of Federal authority” (i.e., Internal troops, the border patrol, and the Federal Security Service [FSB]).<sup>15</sup>

By spring of this year, a number of those involved in bringing about the “New Look” were speaking of a PLA that was moving rapidly toward a high-tech conventional force with its own understanding of network-centric warfare.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, the PLA conducted a major exercise, “Stride-2009,” which looked like a rehearsal for military intervention against Central Asia and/or Russia to some Russian observers. PLA units engaged in strategic-operational redeployments of units from the Shenyang, Lanzhou, Jinan, and Guangzhou military commands by air and rail movement.<sup>17</sup> Aleksandr Khranchikhin warned in the fall of 2009 that China and its military were well on the way to becoming a real military superpower, combining numbers and advanced technology. The PLA no longer needed to go hat-in-hand to Russian defense industries for advanced weapons, but was set upon building its own in partnership with other powers. Looking at the geo-strategic situation in the Far East and Central Asia, Kramchikhin warned:

In conclusion, I repeat once more: it is possible to assert that the leadership of the PRC and the PLA high-command are seriously considering the possibility of conducting in the foreseeable future offensive actions against Russia and the states of Central Asia. To some degree precisely such a scenario of war is considered the most probable. At the same time operations for the forceful seizure of Taiwan have been removed from the order of the day.<sup>18</sup>

Speaking of the deployment of two newly organized brigades along the Russian-Chinese border on the Irkutsk-Chita Axis, Lieutenant-General Vladimir Valentinovich Chirkin, the recently appointed commander of the Siberian Military District, stated that the brigades were deployed there to counter the presence of five PLA combined-arms armies across the border. From 2003 to 2007, Chirkin commanded an army in the Siberian military district. On the rationale for the deployment, Chirkin stated: "We are obligated to keep troops there because on the other side of the order are five Chinese armies and we cannot ignore that operational direction." He added that the Ministry of Defense intended to develop an army headquarters for command and control of the brigades.<sup>19</sup> In a related report, Chirkin described the PLA forces across the border as composed of three divisions and 10 tank, mechanized, and infantry brigades – which he described as not little but also "not a strike force." As to the role of the new brigades, Chirkin put them as part of a deterrent force aimed as a friendly reminder to the PRC: "... despite the friendly relations with China our army command understands that friendship is possible only with strong countries, that is whose (sic) who can quiet a friend down with a conventional or nuclear club."<sup>20</sup>

The gamble on the nature of future war described by Kondrat'ev in supporting the development of network-centric warfare capabilities comes down to the issue of Russia's capacity to arm, create, train, deploy, and keep combat-ready forces capable of conducting advanced conventional warfare. In the absence of such forces, the deterrence equation is reduced to the credibility of the nuclear option in deterring conventional attacks. Given the economic and demographic realities of Siberia and the Russian Far East, Russia seeks, by nonmilitary means, to preclude the emergence of a Chinese military threat. However, Russian observers also are aware of the fact that an imminent military threat from Beijing can emerge out of regional instability, which is beyond Russia's unilateral means to control. As the most recent Russian Military Doctrine of 2010 states, nuclear weapons remain the primary instrument of deterrence against both nuclear and conventional attacks upon Russia and in defense of Russian interests, territorial integrity, and sovereignty.<sup>21</sup> The doctrine does not explicitly state that Russia will use nuclear weapons in preemptive attacks against such threats, as had been discussed by senior members of the Security Council in the Fall of 2009, but leaves the decision to use such weapons in the hands of the President of the Russian Federation. The context of use, however, is defined by the nature of the challenges and threats that Russia faces across Eurasia.

A second classified document, "The Foundations of State Policy in the Area of Nuclear Deterrence to 2020," issued at the same time as the Military Doctrine, has had portions leaked to the mass media. These describe two types of threats that could lead to the use of nuclear weapons: 1) attacks upon vital economic and political structures, early warning sys-

tems, national command and control, and nuclear weapons systems, which fit a U.S.-led NATO threat involving conventional forces capable of conducting global strikes against such targets; and 2) during an invasion by an enemy's ground units onto its territory if Russia's Armed Forces do not manage to stop their progress deep into the country through conventional means of making war, which fits more closely with an assault by the PLA against the Russian Far East.<sup>22</sup>

The first concept resembles one popularized by General-Major Vladimir Slipchenko in his discussions of sixth-generation warfare and no-contact warfare on the model of NATO's campaign against Kosovo but applied on a global scale.<sup>23</sup> The second concept, which was not contained in the 2000 version of Russian military doctrine, is quite new and reflects what the Russian military recognizes is an emerging threat from the PRC. Relying upon nuclear deterrence in such a conflict with China is not considered by some Russian military observers to be a viable course of action. Khramchikhin has engaged in a debate with Aleksei Arbatov, one of Russia's most respected commentators on nuclear issues and a strong believer in the continued utility of nuclear deterrence—even in the face of the spread of advanced conventional capabilities.

Khramchikhin's answer has been to call nuclear deterrence an illusion. The illusion arises from Russia's general weakness in conventional forces, its limited mobility to support forces in distant frontiers, and the inapplicability of nuclear strikes to resolve limited conflicts over border issues. Advanced conventional capabilities will soon make possible global conventional strikes with the effects of nuclear weapons. In the case of China, Khramchikhin argues that there is a great need to protect Siberia and the Far East as key

sources of critical raw materials and energy for the future development of the country, but demographic weakness, obsolete infrastructure, and weak conventional forces make that task nearly impossible, and nuclear deterrence in this context is a shallow hope. Khramchikhin leaves one with the impression that the situation confronting Russia in the Far East is not too different from that confronting Pakistan in the case of India's development of advanced conventional capabilities to strike toward Islamabad. In neither case does nuclear retaliation become a solution for slowly mobilizing conventional forces in the hands of a more developed and more populous opponent.<sup>24</sup>

## FACING WEST AND EAST

For Russia, which inherited the Soviet nuclear arsenal but has faced a serious change in its international position, the nuclear equation is, in fact, shaped by Russia's status as a regional power in a complex Eurasian security environment. The nuclear issues in that environment are not defined exclusively by the U.S.-Russian strategic nuclear equation but by security dynamics involving interactions with Russia's immediate periphery. On the one hand, Russia's security responses have been shaped by a post-Soviet decade of sharp internal political crises, economic transformation, social instability, demographic decline, and the collapse of conventional military power. The impact of these developments has been uneven across Russia, leading to very distinct security environments that have demanded regional responses. The initial focus of security concerns for both the Soviet Union and the Russian Federation was primarily upon European security. This was the primary focus of the U.S.-Soviet

strategic competition and the place where its militarization was most evident.

The end of the Cold War began with the attempt to reform the Soviet system under Mikhail Gorbachev by means of Perestroika and Glasnost; this effort embraced the idea of getting time and space for reform by removing the ideological roots of East-West confrontation from Europe. As presented by Aleksandr Yakovlev, one of Gorbachev's key advisors, the policy involved the removal of the primary driver of the East-West conflict—the military confrontation between NATO and the Warsaw Treaty Organization.<sup>25</sup> Demilitarization of the Cold War in Europe and Soviet military disengagement from international conflicts, especially Afghanistan, were part of an effort to save a system that had lost the capacity to innovate and survived on the basis of bureaucratic inertia and coercion. Reform risked both domestic and international complications.<sup>26</sup> In Europe, the first real indicator of successful demilitarization was the Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty of 1987, which abolished entire classes of intermediate-range nuclear forces with operational-strategic impact on the European theater. This treaty was followed by moves under the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) toward greater military transparency, and consummated by the Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty of 1990—setting limits on forward-deployed conventional forces in Central Europe and on its flanks from the Atlantic to the Urals.<sup>27</sup>

Political developments, however, made this security regime obsolete when the Velvet Revolutions of 1989 replaced governments allied with the Soviet Union and led to the abolition of the Warsaw Treaty Organization in December 1991. In the meantime,

political discontent and rising nationalism within the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) undermined Gorbachev's program of gradual reform, and led to a confrontation between hardliners opposed to further reform and nationalists calling for both the abolition of Soviet power and the end of the Soviet Union. Boris Yeltsin, elected President of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR) in June 1991, became the spokesman for national democratic opposition to the existing Soviet order. The attempted coup by hardliners in August 1991 failed, and Yeltsin emerged as leader of a Russian Federation that was willing to see the Soviet Union abolished, which occurred on December 31, 1991. In a matter of months, the Cold War's bilateral international system had shifted to a unipolar order dominated by a U.S.-led Atlantic-European community. The Russian Federation found itself dealing with the dismemberment of the Soviet Union. It also had to deal with the regathering of the Soviet nuclear arsenal under its control and the prevention of the proliferation of nuclear weapons, fissionable materials, and nuclear weapons expertise—a policy supported by the George Bush and Bill Clinton administrations. Hope of a strategic partnership, which flourished in Washington and Moscow in the early 1990s, was cooling by the second half of the decade.

On the other hand, the emergence of the United States as the sole superpower brought about a distinct complication in Russia's responses to these regional issues and led to efforts to cultivate the creation of a multipolar counterbalance to U.S. influence. As framed by Foreign Minister Evgenii Primakov, the new order was supposed to rest on cooperation among Moscow, Beijing, and New Delhi to balance

Washington's global influence. Neither New Delhi nor Beijing endorsed a policy of trilateral balancing, but Moscow and Beijing did move toward a de facto security system with the signing of the five-power Treaty on Deepening Military Trust in Border Regions in 1996. The agreement, a part of the relaxation of tensions associated with the end of the Cold War, was seen in Moscow as the foundation for balancing in a relatively benign environment in Central Asia and the Far East. Russia embraced arms sales to the PRC as a desperate measure to keep its own military-industrial complex from complete collapse. In the absence of domestic orders, foreign sales kept design bureaus and production facilities operational. A case in point was the 1992 sale of Su-27M fighters to the PRC, which kept the design bureau in Moscow and the production plant at Komsomol'sk-na-Amure open.<sup>28</sup> Russia did not see the PRC as an immediate military threat, was interested in reducing its own forces deployed in the Far East, and was most concerned with averting the total collapse of its defense industry. Primakov's vision of a trilateral balancing mechanism among Moscow, Beijing, and New Delhi did not depend upon arms sales but provided geopolitical justification for such sales to China and India. His vision had assumed relatively stable and benign relations among all three actors.<sup>29</sup>

The Vladimir Putin decade of recovery, which began in 1999 and still continues under the Medvedev-Putin Tandem, was marked by a significant economic recovery, internal stability, state recentralization, and, until very recently, only marginal improvements in conventional military power. For much of the decade, favorable oil and gas prices allowed Russia to practice Putin's own brand of energy diplomacy across Eurasia by cultivating supplier-consumer relations with

major powers, while exercising energy discipline on states on its own periphery.<sup>30</sup> The decade began with a fundamental shift in the content of the Russian security relationship in Asia. The point of departure was the disillusionment with Euro-Atlantic engagement after NATO expansion and the NATO-conducted air campaign against Yugoslavia that occurred in the face of Russia's vigorous objections to military actions undertaken without a mandate from the UN Security Council. At the same time, deteriorating security in the Caucasus and Central Asia invoked the need to create a new security regime to cover Asiatic Russia.<sup>31</sup> On the one hand, renewed war in Chechnya raised the prospect of increased involvement by radical Islamic elements there and across the Caucasus. In Central Asia, the spread of Islamic radicalism by the Taliban out of Afghanistan had called into question the existing security structures provided by the Commonwealth of Independent States. Russia, which had intervened in the Tajik civil war of 1992-97 and helped the United States to broker a peace settlement there, now found itself faced by a more general regional Islamic threat that had actually helped to drive the opposing Tajik factions into cooperation.

That threat was the spread of jihad from Afghanistan into Central Asia. The PRC, which faced its own Islamic separatist threat among the Uyghur population that made up plurality of the population in Xinjiang — China's frontier region with Central Asia — had its own reasons to support collective security arrangements in the late 1990s. In this context, in 2001, Russia joined with four other Central Asian states (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan) and China to form the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), with an expressed mandate to cooperate against "ter-

rorism, separatism and extremism.”<sup>32</sup> In addition to this regional security function, the SCO also became a vehicle for Moscow and Beijing to express their concerns over U.S. hegemony in the international system and to create a counterweight to NATO—as the Alliance moved more actively into out-of-area operations affecting Central Asia, especially after its intervention into Afghanistan and the U.S. development of bases in the region, especially Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. The tensions became particularly acute after the U.S. intervention in Iraq, when it appeared that the United States was planning for a long-term presence in both Iraq and Afghanistan. The acquisitions of nuclear weapons by India and Pakistan in 1998 had intensified the India-Pakistan conflict and brought with it the possibility of a new “great game” in Central and South Asia, played by nuclear-armed states and increasing tensions among Moscow, Beijing, and New Delhi—with the United States and NATO directly engaged in Afghanistan.<sup>33</sup>

For most of the decade, Russian official literature on foreign policy, national security strategy, and military doctrine focused upon the United States and NATO as the chief sources of challenges and threats to Russian national security, with secondary attention given to internal sources of instability (extremism and separatism) and to international terrorism. This official position masked what were developing concerns regarding the security of Russia’s own Eastern Siberian and Far Eastern domains. Those security concerns are rooted in Russia’s historical experience with this distant and relatively isolated territory.

Russian Cossacks pushed across Siberia and into the Far East by the mid-17th century and planted a network of settlements spread across the vast region’s

tundra and taiga. These remote lands were weakly governed into the early-19th century, because the distance from Moscow and St. Petersburg by land and sea was so vast. It fell to the Russian Navy to maintain a nominal presence in the Far East and Alaska (Little Russia) to enforce Russian territorial claims.<sup>34</sup> Imperial retrenchment after the Crimean War led to the sale of Alaska, as Russia pressed its claims on the Asian mainland at the expense of China and Japan.<sup>35</sup> The integration of these regions into Imperial Russia took a quantum leap in the last decade of the 19th century, with the construction of the Trans-Siberian railroad under the leadership of Minister of Finance Sergei Witte. Witte saw the railroad as the key to the Russian development of Siberia and to access to the China market. However, before those benefits could be reaped, Russia found itself drawn into imperial rivalries over Manchuria and Korea, leading to war with Japan and defeat. During the war, the railroad became the chief means of Russian strategic mobility and underscored the need for the development of more infrastructures in Eastern Siberia and the Far East. But the tsarist regime collapsed in the course of another war, and foreign powers (the United States and Japan) found it easy to intervene there during the Russian civil war, which followed the Bolshevik seizure of power and the decision to make peace with the Central Powers. Bolshevik power was slow to consolidate its control in the Far East, which did not come until 1922 – when the Japanese military withdrew, and the Far Eastern Republic, which had served as a buffer between Soviet territory and the Japanese zone of occupation, was abolished. Under Joseph Stalin, there was a major effort at developing the Soviet Far East, which included mobilization of Komsomol (young communist) cadre

to set up new settlements and the creation of vast mining and forestry projects under the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs (NKVD) and composing islands in the Gulag archipelago.<sup>36</sup>

After the Japanese occupation of Manchuria in 1931, intensive efforts were made to strengthen the defenses of the Soviet Far East and the Mongolian People's Republic, an ally of the Soviet Union from its establishment in 1924. Soviet forces fought two limited border engagements with the Japanese Kwantung Army: in 1938, at Lake Khasan, near Vladivostok, and at Khalkhin-Gol in the Manchukou-Mongolian border, in 1939. During World War II, the Soviet Far East was the arrival point for Lend-Lease materials from the United States shipped on Soviet-flagged ships. It served as the staging area for the Soviet offensive of August 1945, which announced the Soviet entry into the war against Japan and led to the Soviet occupation of Manchuria and North Korea and the seizure from Japan of southern Sakhalin and the Kurile Islands. In both Manchuria and North Korea, the Soviet military presence facilitated the establishment of local communist regimes. In the postwar period, the Soviet Far East continued to be a major part of the Gulag until Stalin's death and the dismantling of the camp system. During the Cold War, the Soviet Far East was the staging area for support to North Korean and Chinese Communist forces engaged in the Korean War. With the emergence of the Sino-Soviet conflict, and especially after the border incidents with China in 1969, the Far East became a military bastion, which it remained until the collapse of the USSR.<sup>37</sup>

By the 1980s, Siberia and the Far East suffered from some of the worst environmental pollution in the world. W. Bruce Lincoln described it in the following terms:

Everywhere, Siberia's Soviet masters had transformed the fragile ecology of tundra and taiga that for tens of thousands of years boasted some of the planet's purest water, air and soil into some of the most noxious surroundings on earth.<sup>38</sup>

In the decade that followed the collapse of the USSR, Siberia and the Russian Far East experienced ecological crisis, demographic decline, and economic collapse, from which it began a slow recovery. The region has faced a persistent energy crisis, and rising criminality and corruption. Tensions between Moscow and the Far East grew sharp, with the global economic downturn and the decline in world energy prices in 2008. Moscow sought to impose a tariff on imported automobiles to increase purchases of domestic products and threatened automobile imports, which had become a thriving business in Vladivostok and the other Far Eastern port cities. In December 2008, local protestors took to the streets under the slogan: "Authorities: Raise the Standard of Living, not the Tariff." They were met by Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) riot police sent from Moscow to restore order by applying their batons to the demonstrators' bodies.<sup>39</sup>

Many of these problems were a legacy of the collapse of the Soviet system, which had treated those regions as colonies for extractive industries and as forward bastions of its security. This had been the case throughout the Stalin era, during the Cold War, and during the decades of Sino-Soviet conflict, especially after the border incidents of 1969 and the deterioration of relations with the PRC. Moscow had invested heavily in maintaining a military presence and infrastructure in the region by intensive investment, including

the Baikal-Amur *Magistral* (Mainline), which was to provide a deeper transportation infrastructure away from the Chinese border to give the region strategic depth for defense but was never completed. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, that military infrastructure was allowed to decay, since Moscow had no resources to fund it and saw conciliation with Beijing to be to its advantage.

In the absence of continuing investment credits, Moscow granted the regions local self-government and looked to economic transformation on the basis of international trade to revive the area. There was much hope expressed in Moscow that Japanese capital, Chinese workers, and Russian raw materials would make the Russian Far East into a part of the dynamic Asia-Pacific economy. Instead, the Far East saw a radical decline in population (7.9 million in 1989) and economic activity, leading to a total population in the Far East of 6.7 million by the 2002 census and making the region one of the most underpopulated regions in the world in terms of persons per square mile. In fact, however, most of the population in the Russian Far East is concentrated in a 90-mile belt of settlement—from Chita in the West to Vladivostok on the Pacific with the Trans-Siberian Railroad providing the single corridor for transregional transportation through it. Russia did move to resolve border disputes with the PRC under President Yeltsin, which led to a general settlement in 1995 but left the settlement of conflicting claims over certain strategic islands in the areas of Chita and Khabarovsk unresolved. In 2005, these issues were resolved, with the transfer of about half the disputed territory to China. In spite of the fact that the islands near Khabarovsk were directly across from this major Russian city and defense center, mili-

tary authorities downplayed any military threat to the city, although the Border Guards did express concern about possible illegal immigration.<sup>40</sup> In the general climate of improved Sino-Russian relations no military threat seemed to exist, and when security concerns did emerge in the last few years, they were not spoken about officially.

There were, of course, all sorts of concerns about illegal Chinese settlers coming into the Far East. Viktor Ishaev, the Governor of Khabarovsk Krai from 1991 to 2009, repeatedly raised the issue of Chinese migration into the region as part of a plan for the “peaceful capture” of the Russian Far East.<sup>41</sup> But, unlike under Yeltsin, a stronger central government was able to keep local problems and perceptions from impacting the conduct of bilateral relations. Likewise, on nuclear issues, if the great concern had been regionalism and the actions of local officials with regard to supporting and protecting the existing nuclear infrastructure from decay, criminal penetration, and incompetent management in the 1990s when the center was weak, under Putin the center re-established control and co-opted local political leaders to its interests—reducing the risks of crisis between the center and the Far Eastern periphery.<sup>42</sup>

Putin’s strategy, which has continued under President Medvedev, was to seek to bring about the economic integration of Russia into the global economic processes that have turned Asia into an engine of globalization. Russia has formally engaged with regional organizations such as the Asia-Pacific Economic Council (APEC), which it joined in 1998, and fostered a partnership relationship with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). In the Far East, Russia’s primary gamble was on the prospect

of good relations with China. Up to 2009, China was consistently described as Russia's strategic partner and the primary engine of Asia's economic transformation and growing global influence. Russia was to serve as a source of advanced military technology and raw materials and provide China with a stable rear supporting its international position.<sup>43</sup> No mention of China as a strategic threat came from official sources, although commentators might worry about a "yellow peril" of Chinese settlers into the Far East or complain of Chinese goods driving out domestic products in local markets. Konstantin Pulikovsky, a former general and President Putin's envoy to the Far Eastern Federal Okrug from 2000 to 2009, spoke of Chinese investment as vital to the future of the region.<sup>44</sup> In 2009, the Russian military still published articles that addressed China's economic progress as a "savior to Russia."<sup>45</sup> This changed shortly thereafter. China's rise as a major military power set off alarms among civilian commentators, who now spoke of Russia's "nearest neighbor" as an emerging military super power.<sup>46</sup>

Russia's residual influence in North Korea had declined rapidly after the collapse of the Soviet Union, as the issue of North Korean nuclear weapons development emerged. In 2000, President Putin invited Kim Jong Il to visit Russia, which he did in the summer of 2000. Pulikovsky, who accompanied Kim on his rail trip to Moscow, became the Russian official with the closest ties to Kim Jong Il and appreciated both the importance of North Korea to Russia's own security interests and China's strongest influence in Pyongyang.<sup>47</sup> After Kim Jong Il's visit to Russia in 2000, some spoke of the personal ties between Kim and President Putin as redefining Russian-North Korean relations, but developments over the rest of the decade con-

firmed China's greater access and influence during the Six Party Talks over North Korea's nuclear program. Russia's approach to that ongoing crisis has been to support its legitimate security interests in Northeast Asia via preserving peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula.<sup>48</sup> In this capacity, Russia has engaged in the Six Party Talks. Russia could and did develop economic ties with South Korea over the last 2 decades while it kept its limited influence in North Korea.

This balance has been evident in Moscow's approach to the crisis set off by the sinking of the South Korean patrol corvette, the *Cheonan*, by an acoustic torpedo—which an international investigation, carried out by U.S. and Australian experts, concluded was fired by North Korean forces.<sup>49</sup> Moscow most wants to avoid a regional crisis becoming (or escalating into) an armed conflict and inviting the intervention of other powers, especially the United States and the PRC, in support of South and North Korea. What concerns Russian observers is the real cause for the current war scare between North and South Korea. They see the situation as driven by the increasingly desperate situation in the North and its leadership's inclination to use "threats"—including ones that risk creating real *casus belli* by the unprovoked sinking of another nation's warship, even if a de facto state of war has existed for decades between the two states. North Korea depends on the Republic of Korea to feed its own population, and in its isolation strikes out, conveying to the outside world its own inability to deal with its internal crisis. The logic of war exists, but it will not serve the political ends of any power.<sup>50</sup>

Over the last 2 decades, Russia has looked to Japanese investment, even in the face of the lack of progress in resolving the territorial dispute over the

Kurile Islands, which had kept Japanese-Soviet and now Japanese-Russian relations frozen; the Soviet Union and then Russia offered a two-of-four split of the island chain—with Russia retaining the northern and Japan getting the southern half. Japan demanded the return of all four islands, which Russia refused. Russian energy diplomacy under Putin favored Chinese interests over Japanese ones. Realists in Moscow saw no major movement in Tokyo's security regime with Washington and simply gave a lower priority to the improvement of bilateral political relations, even though Moscow continued to court Japanese investors in the Russian Far East. Border incidents and disputes over fishing rights led to periodic flare-ups but no major crisis, so Moscow was willing to keep its policy toward Japan in line with that of Beijing. Moscow supported the Six Party talks, but with the clear understanding that Beijing had the best leverage with Pyongyang. Moscow supported counterproliferation initiatives, but has worried that U.S. impatience and/or North Korea provocations could lead to war and greater instability in Northeast Asia and even risk a Sino-American confrontation. The Russian concern about Sino-American conflict rises in conjunction with the two major points of contention between the two powers: Taiwan and the Korean Peninsula. The concerns have become greater as the conduct of the North Korean regime has become more erratic.

This historical digression, like Leo Tolstoy's comments on the laws of war in *War and Peace*, may try the patience of those readers who see nuclear weapons in isolation from the tensions and contradictions that could lead to their employment. In the case of the Russian Far East, the historical narrative makes manifest the relative isolation of the region from European

Russia, and its relative weakness in the context of a dynamic Asia that is in the process of becoming a global economic and political center of gravity. Russia cannot and has not ignored this development. Post-Cold War development of Russian grand strategy has moved from Euro-centric to Eurasian-centric, with a distinct emphasis upon its “near abroad.” This has brought about a distinct set of adjustments in the nuclear weapons within that strategy.

## **RUSSIA’S AMBIGUOUS ASIAN NUCLEAR FUTURE**

Strategic nuclear weapons loomed very large in the Yeltsin era, when the strategic arsenal was expected to play a major political role in ensuring Russia a strategic partnership with the United States and a major say in the emerging post-Cold War order in Europe. Since 1999, Russia has emphasized the deterrent function of its strategic nuclear forces but has focused its posture on conflict management to discourage military intervention on Russia’s periphery. The Russian military has for 2 decades placed the likelihood of nuclear war at a very low level and even seen the possibility of a general, coalition war at a low probability. That said, the Russian government has also recognized that its immediate periphery is quite unstable, fraught with local conflicts that can turn into local wars and lead to foreign military interventions against the national interests, territorial integrity, and sovereignty of Russia. The question of the “near abroad” – a euphemism for the independent states that emerged on Russia’s periphery with the breakup of the USSR – has been closely tied to Russian national interests, a Russian sphere of influence, and the protection of Russian

minorities living in the successor states. Russian intervention in ethnic conflicts in this region has been seen in the West as one of the central areas of conflict with Russia, especially in the aftermath of the Russo-Georgian War in August 2008.<sup>51</sup> For Russian leaders, the Russo-Georgian conflict revealed a number of problems associated with command and control of modern conventional forces, especially the integration of air-land combat, which became a driver for the Ministry of Defense's "New Look."<sup>52</sup> At the same time, however, Chinese military modernization made the gamble on strategic partnership less inviting, if China was intent upon developing large-scale theater warfare capabilities embracing advanced conventional weapons and network-centric operations. The default military gamble of nonstrategic nuclear forces to deter a remote Chinese threat became less appealing.

Thus, in June and July, the Russian Military Defense and General Staff will conduct Vostok-2010—with the intent of assessing Russia's capacity to mobilize and deploy its "New Look" conventional forces to defeat a military intervention against the Russian Far East—and will test both the combat capabilities and combat readiness of these forces to deal with that threat.<sup>53</sup> The outcome of that exercise will be a major test for the "New Look" and will define the role of theater nuclear forces in the Far East—whether they will remain the response of necessity or become a true second-order response, giving Moscow the capacity to manage such a conflict to a political solution that does not put into risk the territorial integrity of Russia or its survival as a sovereign state.

Much will depend upon Russia's capacity to rearm its forces with advanced conventional capabilities—which will depend on the adaptability of its military-

industrial complex and on its capacity to escape its relative geo-strategic isolation in the Far East if relations with China should deteriorate. In recent articles, Aleksandr Khramchikhin raised two issues that make this problem particularly difficult. First, he did a strategic assessment of the threats faced by Russia on all strategic axes and then examined the military capabilities available to deal with them. He noted conventional military deficiencies in the West, the South, and the North, but said that Russia's defenses in the East were clearly the weakest of all. In this, he included the defenses covering Sakhalin and the Kuril Islands, but focused on the Sino-Russian border in Siberia and the Far East. There, Khramchikhin described Russia as effectively defenseless against Chinese aggression. Against a massive array of PLA conventional ground and air forces, the Siberian and Far Eastern military districts contain only one tank; eight motorized rifles; two air-assault, three missile, four artillery, two rocket-artillery, one covering, and four air-defense brigades; and about 300 combat aircraft, with their bases located close to the border. China has a much greater capacity to reinforce its units in the theater by rail movement, while Russia must face the fact that the Trans-Siberian railroad is vulnerable to air interdiction in Siberia and direct attack in the Far East.<sup>54</sup> The second point is concerned with the conduct of Russian policy in the context of military weakness, in which Russia invites confrontations with the United States even as it faces threats on other axes—on which its very weakness provokes the emergence of new threats.<sup>55</sup>

The new tenor of relations between Moscow and Beijing was evident at the recent SCO Summit in Tashkent, where Moscow and Beijing discretely jockeyed for position. Moscow has put greater emphasis on se-

curity in Central Asia and has revived military cooperation with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan under the Cooperative Security Treaty Organization, just as joint military exercises under the SCO have declined since 2007. China has emphasized economic penetration via investment and follows a coherent long-range policy of regional integration with China's economy. James Nixey of Chatham House commented on the recent summit, saying that between the lines Russia now recognizes China as a major security concern but is unwilling to say so openly.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, the threat is not just to Central Asia. Tensions between Russia and China have mounted over the Russian Far East. Press reports, citing sources in the Russian Border Guards, speak of Chinese efforts to dredge the Ussuri near Khabarovsk and change the navigational challenge to China's advantage in order to get additional territory ceded to China.<sup>57</sup>

Such incidents are not the real challenge to Russian sovereignty over its Far Eastern territories. The real challenge is to be found in the very contradictory claims about the Far East coming out of Moscow, where some see the region as the economic engine and source of raw materials to pull Russia into the 21st century, while others see a region as already lost to the country as a de facto part of the Chinese economy. Dr. Viktor Larin, Director of the Institute of History, Archeology, and Ethnography of the Peoples of the Far East, took these conflicting opinions as the point of departure for a major analytical report on "The Asia-Pacific Region in the Early 21st Century: Challenges, Threats, and Chances of Pacific-Ocean Russia." Colleagues saw this piece as an intellectual provocation and an invitation for reflection on the current situation. Larin is skeptical about Russian government declarations regarding

investment in the region and questions its willingness to sustain such investments in the region's oil, gas, and transportation infrastructure. He notes that there is nothing inevitable about a Russian presence in the Far East. Other European colonial powers have failed to keep their Asian empires. Why should Russia be any different? Over the last 2 decades, government programs and foreign investments have not led to improvements in the lives of local population—Larin cites oil and gas development in Sakhalin as an example. Russia is still really on the margins of the emerging Asia-Pacific economy. Larin says that the center talks about investment in the Far East because it fears that it will lose the region. Moscow is motivated by external threats, but the real problem is that the remaining population in the region has no stake in its future with Russia. Looking back 15 years, Russians spoke of a “yellow peril” from Chinese immigration, but that is not the case today. The real Chinese presence today is in the pervasive economic presence across the markets for consumer goods and food stuffs. Russia missed the train to European economic integration and is likely to miss the Asian train as well. If Moscow does not stop thinking of the Far East as a colony to be milked and start thinking about it as a fully integrated part of the Russian and Asian-Pacific economies, it will, at some time in the not-too-distant future, face the real threat of separatism. The Soviet answer of treating the Far East as a military bastion has no prospect of success.<sup>58</sup>

These developments may fundamentally shift the geo-strategic context of President Obama's global zero initiative on nuclear weapons. For the last 2 decades, Russia's nuclear arsenal in Asia was seen internationally as a problem of management and control as it declined in size and operational readiness. Operation-

ally, even in its reduced capacity, this arsenal was for Russia the only military option open in case of attack in a region effectively denuded of conventional military power. China's relative military inferiority made that prospect remote. Both Moscow and Beijing could look to strategic partnership without the prospect of an emerging military threat. Chinese military modernization has in the last year changed that perception in Moscow. Now, with the emergence of a potential conventional threat from its former strategic partner, Russia is in the process of evaluating whether its reformed conventional forces might achieve a viable deterrence in case of attack from a modernized Chinese military. In the absence of such a capability, Russia will be forced to gamble even more on theater nuclear forces and be even less willing to consider reductions in its nonstrategic nuclear forces. In the context of an increasing military confrontation on the Korean peninsula and periodic tensions between Washington and Beijing over Taiwan, Russia's increased fears of China's growing power and its military response add one further complication to Eurasian security for all parties and make Asian nuclear force reductions an even more complex problem for Washington to manage.

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