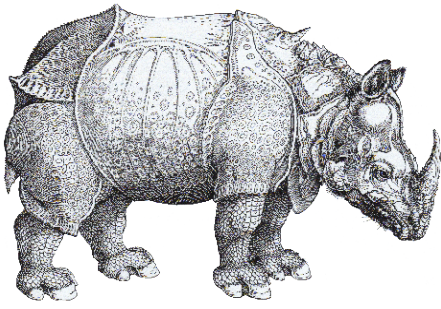


*Non multa, sed multum*



# SECURITY INDEX

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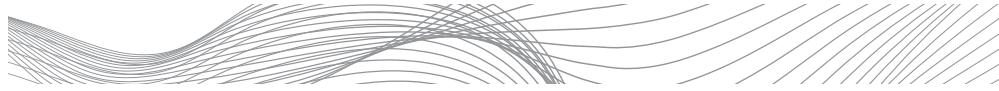
Global Edition

**Dmitry Trenin**

**ON A NEW GLOBAL ORDER AND ITS  
NUCLEAR DIMENSION. AN INTERVIEW**



MOSCOW, 2023



Editor-in-Chief: Vladimir Orlov

Editors: Elena Karnaukhova, Leonid Tsukanov

Dmitry Trenin. On a New Global Order and Its Nuclear Dimension. An Interview / Ed. Elena Karnaukhova, Leonid Tsukanov. M.: PIR Center, 2023. – 20 p. – (*Security Index Occasional Paper Series*).

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Where is the world going? What does it mean the crisis of US-centered world order? How are the nuclear nonproliferation regime and American hegemony interconnected? What is the phenomenon of nuclear multipolarity? Is it worth escalating *the fear of nuclear weapons* and will nuclear testing resumption help this? Are we moving towards the use of nuclear weapons on the battlefield? What role can the crisis in Ukraine play? This research paper was prepared in the format of an interview with Dmitry Trenin, a major Russian specialist in international relations, political scientist and expert, by Elena Karnaukhova, Deputy Director of PIR Center. Together with him, we managed to discuss the establishment of *Pax Americana*, the transformation of the modern world order, the role and specifics of the functioning of the UN, the current Ukrainian crisis, the risks and factors of the erosion of the nuclear nonproliferation regime, the fear of nuclear weapons, nuclear taboo, the concept *escalate to de-escalate* and much more – all the most important, relevant, burning issues at the forefront of the global security agenda. About all of these openly and frankly – on the pages of this paper.

This occasional paper and other materials are available at:  
<https://nonproliferation.world/en/security-index>

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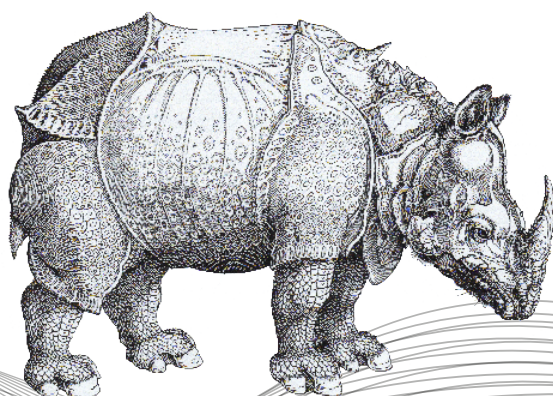
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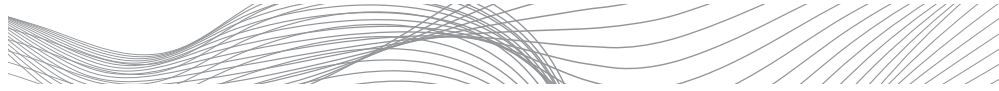
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# “The third decade of the XXI century promises to be very turbulent” interview with Dmitry Trenin about our world order and its nuclear dimension

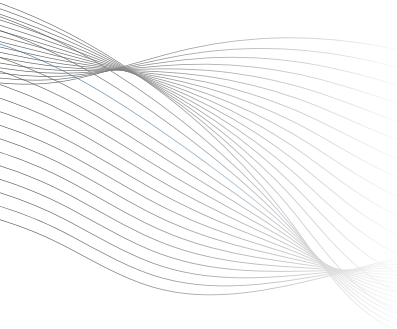
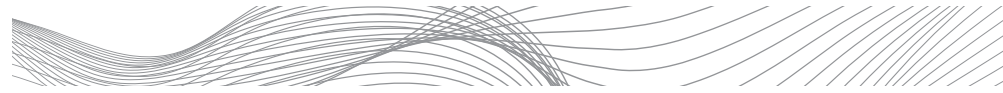
**Elena Karnaukhova:** In the context of the Russian Special Military Operation in Ukraine, there are going so many discussions about the decline of the US-centered world order. But many discussions on this process have already taken place even before, if not for the entire last 30 years since the collapse of the Soviet Union. What is this *US-centered world order* and when was it established? Does it include entire UN system and current international law? Or is it about the system of world economic regulation and military and political alliances of the US? Despite all the long-term *twists and turns*, nothing of this has died, especially American military alliances.

**Dmitry Trenin:** There has been always some confusion about that. The Americans trace the beginning of the existing world order from 1941-1945, when a modern system of international institutions was created and international law was modernized. The foundations of this world order include 1941 Atlantic Charter, decisions of *Great Three* (US, USSR and Great Britain) of 1943-1945, 1944 Bretton Woods Accord, UN Charter, Military Tribunals of Nurnberg and Tokyo, and some other agreements. The Americans have strongly believed that they were the authors of establishing this system. Indeed, many of the initiatives were proposed by the American leaders and personally by the US President Franklin Delano Roosevelt (1933-1945). Ideologically, this system has reflected the ideas of *Pax Americana*, i.e. a world order based on the global hegemony of the United States, or on a specifically American form of leadership.

**Elena Karnaukhova:** Sure, but the Soviet Union was also engaged in the process of post-war peace settlement. Soviet diplomats were taking part in developing the foundations of the global political and even global economic regulation after the World War II (1939-1945). The British were also involved in this process, and the French and the Chinese at different stages as well. I cannot believe that they, especially the USSR, could, *dance after American whistle*. If we can think so, then the discussions about US-centered world order is a kind of factor of downplaying the diplomacy of other countries. Besides, you begin to look at the phenomenon of bipolarity in the second half of the XX century in a different way.

“The Americans have strongly believed that they were the authors of establishing this system”  
(Dmitry Trenin)





**Dmitry Trenin:** At the same time, the system of global institutions is not the same as the world order. Shortly after the end of World War II, the confrontation of the two ideological and military-political poles, in particular, the United States and the USSR, started. This order was maintained by their mutual nuclear deterrence in a politically and ideologically divided world. As a result of the efforts or with the help of the Soviet Union, in the countries of Eastern Europe, China and several other states, Communists parties came to power, and the global socialist system emerged. In the rest of the world, where the sole political, ideological, military and economic leadership of the United States was established, market relations were being developed, military alliances were being created, norms and rules were being worked out under the leadership of the Americans. Thus, in the context of the Cold War, US-centered system was formed, covering most of the world. At the same time, the United Nations was preserved, but not as a real instrument of global governance, but as a platform for public controversy and not always public contacts between the two camps. Other global or regional (in Europe, for example) international organizations functioned mainly on a parity basis. International law continued to be based on the principle of state sovereignty and represented the complex of agreements from which each of the *high contracting parties* could withdraw at any time. With the end of the Cold War, the collapse of the USSR, the collapse of the world socialist system and China's transition to *a policy of reform and openness*, the sole leadership of the United States became global for the first time in human history. *Pax Americana* system, which covered the Western states and the developing countries for the previous 45 years, has become worldwide.

The countries of Eastern Europe integrated into it, Russia actively tried to become a part of the West, China became *a factory of the world* that attracted so many Western, especially American investments. The US hegemony during this period (from the beginning of 1990s to 2010s) was undeniable. Firstly, China was focused on internal development. Secondly, Russia sought to *get a foot in the Western door*. Thirdly, the entire world has become unipolar in all respects, in particularly economically, politically, militarily, ideologically.

**Elena Karnaukhova:** **That is the most interesting fact, that Russia wanted to get a foot in the Western door, or to be integrated in the Western world. Now it looks controversial a little bit. At the moment we are criticizing a lot this unipolar US-centered world order, but why we really wanted to be a part of it earlier... Is it fair to consider Russia as a current revisionist-power now?**

**Dmitry Trenin:** This unique situation [of American global hegemony] could not persist for a long term. Russia, which failed to integrate into the system of Western institutions on the conditions that could be appropriate for Moscow (i.e. the status of a great power, the decisive voice in making major decisions), began to descend from *the orbit of the West* already from the first half of the 2000s. President Vladimir Putin's Munich Speech of 2007 was a kind of declaration of Russia's geopolitical independence and a public challenge to US hegemony. This challenge from Russia was geopolitical, normative and partly military. At the same time, China's rapid economic and technological growth and Beijing's refusal to accept the American offer to become a junior partner of the United States put American he-

“With the end of the Cold War, the collapse of the USSR, the collapse of the world socialist system and China's transition to *a policy of reform and openness*, the sole leadership of the United States became global for the first time in human history”  
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gemony in front of economic challenges. Since the mid-1990s, two major powers, namely Russia and China, have regularly declared multipolarity as the desired configuration of the world order. For a long time, these statements were mostly the declarations, but the global financial crisis of 2008-2009 and *the geopolitical earthquake in Ukraine* in 2014 marked the beginning of the *Pax Americana* crisis.



**“However, what is a unipolar world? However, one might embellish this term, at the end of the day it refers to one type of situation, namely one centre of author-**

**ity, one centre of force, one centre of decision-making. It is world in which there is one master, one sovereign. ... And this certainly has nothing in common with democracy. Because, as you know, democracy is the power of the majority in light of the interests and opinions of the minority... I consider that the unipolar model is not only unacceptable but also impossible in today’s world. And this is not only because if there was individual leadership in today’s – and precisely in today’s – world, then the military, political and economic resources would not suffice. What is even more important is that the model itself is flawed because at its basis there is and can be no moral foundations for modern civilization”, – from the Russian President Vladimir Putin Speech at the 2007 Munich Conference on Security Policy, February 10, 2007.**

Source: Official website of Kremlin

Further milestones in the development of this crisis have been represented by the start of a trade and economic, and then a technological war and a tough ideological and geopolitical confrontation between the US and China from the second half of the 2010s, as well as the transition in 2022 of Russian-American relations from the stage of confrontation to the sharp rivalry between the two states, including *a proxy war* in Ukraine. Understanding the collapse of its previous calculations on the internal political transformation of the Russian Federation and the People’s Republic of China, as well as the complex of challenges to its global hegemony, during the presidency of Donald Trump (2017-2021) the United States officially adopted the concept of great power rivalry, and accepted the notion – already under the Joe Biden administration from 2021 – that China

“Now it looks controversial a little bit: at the moment we are criticizing a lot this unipolar US-centered world order, but why we really wanted to be a part of it earlier...”  
(Elena Karnaukhova)



and Russia are the main competitors of the United States. Washington's current strategy, officially pursuing the goal of protecting the *rules-based order*, is actually aimed at dealing with the challenges of global American hegemony.

**“America possesses unmatched political, economic, military, and technological advantages. But to maintain these advantages, build upon our strengths, and unleash the talents of the American people, we must protect four vital national interests in this competitive world... Three main sets of challengers—the revisionist powers of China and Russia, the rogue states of Iran and North Korea, and transnational threat organizations, particularly jihadist terrorist groups—are actively competing against the United States and our allies and partners. Although differing in nature and magnitude, these rivals compete across political, economic, and military arenas, and use technology and information to accelerate these contests in order to shift regional balances of power in their favor. These are fundamentally political contests between those who favor repressive systems and those who favor free societies”,**  
– from the 2017 US National Security Strategy.

Source: Official website of the White House, December 18, 2017

**Elena Karnaukhova:** On the 31st March of 2023 the Russian President Vladimir Putin approved a new Foreign Policy Concept. It provides there that “Humanity is currently going through revolutionary changes. The formation of a more equitable multipolar world order is underway”. According to the document, this multiple world order will be characterized by “rejection of hegemony in international affairs”, and Russia itself will “eliminate the vestiges of domination by the US and other unfriendly states in global affairs, create conditions to enable any state to renounce neo-colonial or hegemonic ambitions”. So many challenging tasks. What prospects do we have in this struggle for a fair world where there is no place for American hegemony?

**Dmitry Trenin:** It is clear that the global hegemony of the United States *has passed its peak* and entered a period of decline. In the medium term, however, the course of the unfolding and escalating struggle for the world order is not predetermined. The American hegemony is defending. It is not only *dying*, but also *shooting*. The strategic successes of Russia, China and other countries in promoting a non-hegemonic model of the world order will not immediately end the hegemony of the United States. In the context of a hybrid war with Russia and China, Washington managed to rally its allies and partners, i.e. about fifty countries, around itself more closely than ever before. The geographical limits of this zone will probably



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narrow over time, but this process portends to be long and uneven. There is the so-called Anglosphere. In addition to the United States, it includes the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, which historically, since the World War II, have been the core of the collective West and today it forms the inner circle of Washington. Most likely, these countries will remain together and will be one of the most important centers of the future world order.

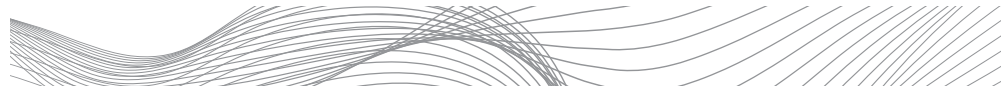
**“Russia does not consider itself to be an enemy of the West, is not isolating itself from the West and has no hostile intentions with regard to it; Russia hopes that in future the states belonging to the Western community will realize that their policy of confrontation and hegemonic ambitions lack prospects, will take into account the complex realities of a multipolar world and will resume pragmatic cooperation with Russia being guided by the principles of sovereign equality and respect for each other’s interests. The Russian Federation is ready for dialogue and cooperation on such a basis”, – from the Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation approved by Decree of the President of the Russian Federation No. 229, March 31, 2023.**

Source: Official website of the Russian Foreign Ministry

**Elena Karnaukhova:** In Russia in recent years, and now especially, two contradictory trends have been observed. On the one hand, the campaign *the UN Charter is our rules* has been spreading at the Russian Foreign Ministry level. On the other hand, so many ideas on the expert levels sound that the UN has been in crisis for a long time, it is not doing anything good, again it is *dancing after the American whistle*. Which point of view is closer to you? Today we say that the UN has no sense, and tomorrow we leave it, if suddenly the opinion that the UN is a *bulwark* of American hegemony will win. But in this case, we will lose the right of veto. That’s all the Americans need, right?

**Dmitry Trenin:** The main value for the foreign policy of the Russian Federation as the successor-state of the USSR is the membership in the UN Security Council. According to the UN Charter, the Security Council has exclusive powers in settling the issues of international security, and the permanent members of the Security Council have a special responsibility in this regard. Along with the other four permanent members of the UN Security Council, Russia enjoys the right of veto over any decisions of the UN Security Council. This gives Moscow the opportunity to consider as legitimate only those decisions with which it agrees or at least does not object to. And vice versa, it lets Moscow consider any actions taken bypassing the UN Security Council, i.e. bypassing the Russian veto, illegal. Decision to refuse such an exceptional position in the international system is madness. As for other UN agencies, for example, UN General Assembly, the United States and its allies have recently managed

**“The strategic successes of Russia, China and other countries in promoting a non-hegemonic model of the world order will not immediately end the hegemony of the United States”  
(Dmitry Trenin)**



to gather an anti-Russian majority (in particular, in relation to the situation in Ukraine). The resolutions of the UN General Assembly, however, do not have the same supreme legal force as the decisions of the UN Security Council. For many years, the United States itself has been constantly criticized within the UN General Assembly, which led Washington to refuse to pay its contribution to the organization's budget.

**Elena Karnaukhova:** *How can we determine the crisis of the UN system? Are we really observing it? It is so popular to speak about the crisis of established global organizations like UN both in Russia, and in the West. It seems to me that we have a crisis everywhere, regardless which aspect of international relations we are discussing. Sometimes it looks more like the result of our intellectual construction of reality than the real state of affairs. But we could also say that the UN and all international law have been in crisis since the 1940s.*

**Dmitry Trenin:** It is necessary to understand the implications and opportunities of the UN and its bodies. The UN Security Council is not a global government, and the UN General Assembly is not a world parliament, and they have never had such status. There is no need to talk about the crisis of the UN because the organization has never played the role that is formulated in its Charter. In reality, the UN is a universal meeting place for almost all states of the modern world, this is its uniqueness. This meeting place can be a kind of *theatrical stage* where a polemical drama is played out, but it can also be a global backstage in the literal sense of the word, where numerous and often non-public contacts are carried out. What is more, it is also a huge international bureaucratic apparatus, very well paid, but at the same time clumsy and not very effective, due to the difficult process of personnel recruitment and interstate contradictions. So, the bottom line should be the following: you can scold the UN as much as you like, leave – in no case, reform – only while preserving the current privileges of the Russian Federation.

**Elena Karnaukhova:** *So, many articles and publications have been written and many words have been said about the consequences of the decline of the US-centered world order. It is believed that one of them may be the weakening of the nuclear nonproliferation regime. It is interesting that in the 1990s, when this unipolar world was supposedly flourishing, the situation in the field of nonproliferation was also far from being perfect. Or another interesting point: if our world has become truly hegemonic since the 1990s, how can we explain, for example, the introduction of a moratorium on nuclear tests by China and France in 1995? Do not you think that this linkage between two phenomena is overestimated?*

**Dmitry Trenin:** In fact, the weakening of the nuclear nonproliferation regime was the result of the collapse of the USSR and the inability of the Russian Federation (or some another power) to maintain military and political balance in the world. Thus, nuclear weapons appeared in India, Pakistan, the DPRK; Iran activated its nuclear program; Iraq and Libya carried out some activities in the same direction. In other words, the establishment of the US-centered world order forced countries that had serious ambitions (India, Pakistan) or [political] regimes that the Americans intended to overthrow (Iraq, Iran, North Korea, Libya) to think about creating or acquiring nuclear weapons

“On the one hand, the campaign the UN Charter is our rules has been spreading at the Russian Foreign Ministry level; on the other hand, so many ideas on the expert levels sound that the UN has been in crisis for a long time, it is not doing anything good, again it is dancing after the American whistle”  
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as an instrument of deterring the United States. Sure, during the same period, the withdrawal of nuclear weapons of the former USSR from Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Belarus to the territory of Russia took place, but this was a case of the most active cooperation between Moscow and Washington in the area of nuclear nonproliferation.

American global hegemony is the form of leadership, within which the United States undertakes obligations to protect its allied states, including *through extended deterrence*, or *nuclear umbrella*. In fact, this obligation, which is considered to be absolutely reliable (just pay attention to the mythology around Article V of the 1949 Washington Treaty), is not automatic at all. On the contrary, there are serious reasons to believe that the United States has never thought of exposing its national territory to the danger of nuclear strikes by other powers in response to Washington's defense of its ally. Understanding this reality – for example, in the political circles of South Korea – may push certain American allies to create their own nuclear potential. Israel followed this path a long time ago and acquired an appropriate own nuclear arsenal.

From the world order perspective, it should be noted that political multipolarity is based on nuclear polycentrism. The bipolar system of the Cold War period was based on mutual deterrence and the threat of mutually assured destruction. The split between the USSR and the People's Republic of China [in the late 1950s] logically led to the emergence of China's own nuclear weapons. The claims of Great Britain and France to the status of great powers in the post-war world also expressed in their nuclear programs.

India's rise as a great power also has a nuclear dimension. With the exception of the two European powers that have lost both their real great-power status and geopolitical sovereignty, the main centers of world politics are represented today by nuclear states. It can be assumed that the rising of new global or regional centers in the future will also be accompanied by the creation of their nuclear deterrence capabilities. As this process proceeds, the demand for American security guarantees – increasingly dubious – will decrease, and in this regard, the sphere of US political influence will narrow.

**Elena Karnaukhova: We are expecting that as a result of the crisis of the US-centered world order, the system of American alliances will collapse, the American *nuclear umbrella*, which you mentioned, will cease to exist. But let's imagine that this may really happen, but at the same time also that the former US allies may decide to create their own nuclear weapons to ensure national security. Won't it get any worse? Let's imagine that some extremely Russophobic European country located near our borders may have nuclear weapons. How to deal with the new challenges to national security in this case?**

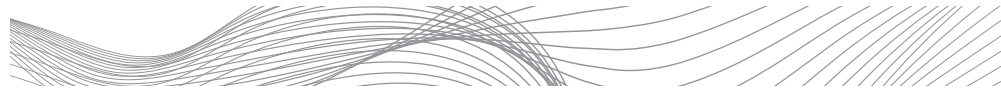
**Dmitry Trenin:** You are asking whether a polycentric nuclear world will be less secure than the current one. Of course, there is no definite answer to this question. We live in conditions of high uncertainty. We are observing the escalation of a *proxy* armed conflict between the two leading nuclear powers, and in the most sensitive geopolitical region of one of them. Until now, I considered such a dangerous development of the situation extremely unlikely, but today it is a reality fraught with a direct military clash between Russia



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School of Economics,  
Vladimir Orlov, Founding  
Director of PIR Center, and  
Dmitry Trenin, a Member  
of PIR Center Advisory  
Board, at the panel discussion  
«Eurasia in the context  
of infogenic threats and  
hybrid wars: where are  
global transformations  
leading us?», XXI PIR Center  
International School  
on Global Security,  
June 19, 2022.

Source: [Nonproliferation.world](http://Nonproliferation.world)





“There are serious reasons to believe that the United States has never thought of exposing its national territory to the danger of nuclear strikes by other powers in response to Washington’s defense of its ally”  
(Dmitry Trenin)

and NATO. But the main thing is that the scenario you are asking about is not a matter of choice. The inability of the United States to achieve Russia’s defeat in Ukraine may create an incentive for one of the American allies to acquire nuclear weapons. At the same time, we have entered a period of a sharp increase in tension not only between Moscow and Washington, but also between Washington and Beijing. The stakes on both sides are exceptionally high, and I consider a strategic compromise – at least in Russian-American relations – as practically impossible.

**Elena Karnaukhova: If we are observing a crisis of the US-centered world order, and the world itself is indeed becoming multipolar, how can this affect the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) and the entire nuclear nonproliferation regime?**

**Dmitry Trenin:** On the one hand, destabilization of the NPT is an important factor undermining American hegemony. On the other, most of the existing and possible new nuclear powers are geographically neighbors of Russia on the Eurasian continent. On the third hand, the states on which the United States is exerting pressure on nuclear nonproliferation, I mean the DPRK and Iran, are political opponents of the United States and at the same time increasingly close partners of Russia. It is unthinkable to cooperate with Washington, which is waging a war with Russia *by the hands* of Ukrainians, against Iran and the DPRK, which somehow help us in this war. This does not mean direct support for the relevant [nuclear and missile] programs of Tehran and Pyongyang, but Moscow’s refusal to participate in the policy of international pressure on them with Washington leading the role is more than logical.

**Elena Karnaukhova: In this context, I would like to touch upon a concept *escalate to de-escalate*. When did it appear and where: is it a legacy from the Kennedy administration with its idea of lowering nuclear threshold and a strategy of a flexible response? Or is it the approaches of Russian military strategists of the 1990s who tried to figure out how to ensure the security of the country when there were continuous armed conflicts along the Russian borders, and the United States arranged armed interference in the internal affairs of other states?**

**Dmitry Trenin:** Today, at the height of the Ukrainian crisis, but before its culmination, this issue has more historical significance. I remember well that during the Cold War, NATO’s strategy provided for nuclear strikes against the forces of Warsaw Pact Organization in order to stop their rapid attack in the direction of the English Channel and to create conditions for negotiations between the United States and the Soviet Union. The post-Soviet Russian strategy in this part has always been somewhat less clear to me, but despite periodic bursts of tension between Moscow and Washington (the Balkans, Iraq, etc.), until very recently, the scenario of a military clash between Russia and NATO was considered unlikely, and the corresponding ideas of using nuclear weapons during local or regional conflicts with the United States they were not detailed, at least not publicly. Today, as it seems to me, the situation offers various scenarios for the possible use of nuclear weapons, but they have little in common with both the clear NATO strategy of the 1960s-1970s and the rather vague ideas of Russian strategists of the 1990s.



**Elena Karnaukhova:** Now there are so many discussions about the use of tactical nuclear weapons (TNW) in Ukraine again in the context of the concept *escalate to de-escalate*. Is this just rhetoric, evidence of speculative *intelligence* data received by Western countries, or the real plans of the Russian military servicemen? Would the use of TNW by Russia in Ukrainian crisis be justified, at least from *the point of view of military-strategic planning*?

**Dmitry Trenin:** I don't see any military or other sense for the use of nuclear weapons by Russia in Ukraine. The rhetoric in this regard that we heard at the beginning of the armed conflict in Ukraine came from the West. On the Russian side, at the expert and unofficial political level, there was talk about the possibility of nuclear weapons strikes against targets on the territory of NATO countries, not Ukraine. Such strikes, as it was discussed, could be inflicted on airfields based on modern Western aircraft transferred to Ukraine, on logistics hubs and [military] facilities.

**Elena Karnaukhova:** The USSR and the PRC entered into a border armed conflict on Damansky Island in 1969. Yes, it is difficult to compare it with the situation in Ukraine, the analogy is rather *rough*. But these were two nuclear powers, both hostile to each other. Was a nuclear collision expected by anyone at that time?

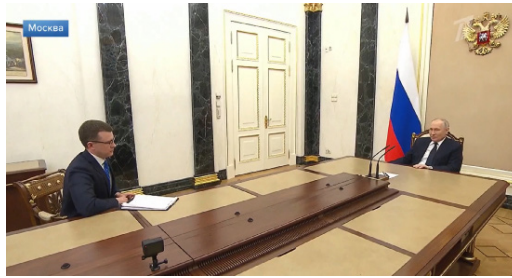
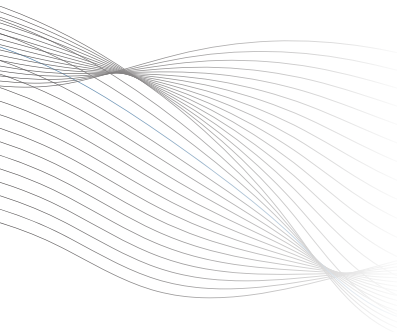
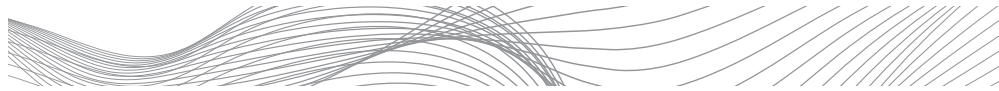
**Dmitry Trenin:** I remember this conflict. It was the bloody clashes on the Ussuri River in March and on the Kazakh part of the Soviet border with China in July of that year. The possibility of war with China was considered quite high in Moscow. The use of nuclear weapons in this case was regarded almost inevitable, while a global nuclear war was not expected as the nuclear potential of China was small at that time. Everyone in the Soviet Union breathed a sigh of relief when, in September 1969, Chairman of the Council of Ministers Alexey Kosygin, as part of a trip to Vietnam, made a stop in Beijing for talks with Zhou Enlai, First Premier of the People's Republic of China. This meeting of the heads of government of the two countries defused a dangerous crisis.

**Elena Karnaukhova:** Russia is going to deploy its TNW on the Belarusian territory. Which significance would it have – political or military? How will it change the balance of power with the Americans and what countermeasures can it provoke?

**Dmitry Trenin:** Today, in the context of a *proxy war* between Russia and the West, it is difficult to separate the political aspects from the military. The escalation of the Ukrainian conflict continues. We cannot rule out a possibility of a direct clash with NATO. The political side of this step is to strengthen the deterrence potential of the enemy as missiles and aircraft from the territory of Belarus are capable of striking to a greater depth of the territory of NATO countries than the means deployed or based on the main part of the territory of the Russian Federation. Unlike the Kaliningrad exclave geographically separated from the main Russian land, these weapons are located on the territory of a neighboring state allied with Russia. Regarding military implications, I don't think that this decision will change the balance of power with the United States. The main point is to change the deployment of Russian forces, bringing them forward, and such a measure signals to the enemy that Moscow is ready for active and decisive action.

“I consider a strategic compromise – at least in Russian-American relations – as practically impossible”  
(Dmitry Trenin)

“On the one hand, destabilization of the NPT is an important factor undermining American hegemony; on the other, most of the existing and possible new nuclear powers are geographically neighbors of Russia on the Eurasian continent”  
(Dmitry Trenin)



“As for our talks with Alexander Lukashenko, this decision was motivated by the statement of the British Deputy Defense Minister that Great

Britain is going to supply depleted uranium munition to Ukraine, this is somehow connected with nuclear technologies”. “We do not transfer [nuclear weapons]. And the United States does not transfer them to its allies. We are basically doing the same things that the US has been doing for decades. They have allies in certain countries, the US prepare their means of delivery and their crews. We are going to do the same. This is exactly what Alexander Grigoryevich [Lukashenko] asked us for”, – excerpts from the interview of the President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin to Pavel Zarubin, who is the author of the TV-program *Moscow. Kremlin. Putin* (unofficial translation).

Source: Official website of TV Channel Russia-1

“I don’t see any military or other sense for the use of nuclear weapons by Russia in Ukraine”  
(Dmitry Trenin)

**Elena Karnaukhova:** Russian Special Military Operation in Ukraine has boosted a discussion about whether the fear of nuclear weapons has been lost or not. On the one hand, this *fear* still exists. Do not you think that the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) does really prove it? On the other hand, TPNW itself makes you think better on this matter. The Treaty contains provisions on assistance to victims of the nuclear conflict. But where will they come from if the whole of humanity dies, we always proceeded from this scenario. So, is someone stays alive, that will mean that *the devil is not as scary as he is painted*, right? It is also interesting that the military and political elites of the main global powers are represented after all by those who grew up, lived and self-formed in the context of the Cold War. But at that time everyone was afraid that somewhere would crash. So, what do we really have with these *fears of nuclear weapons*?

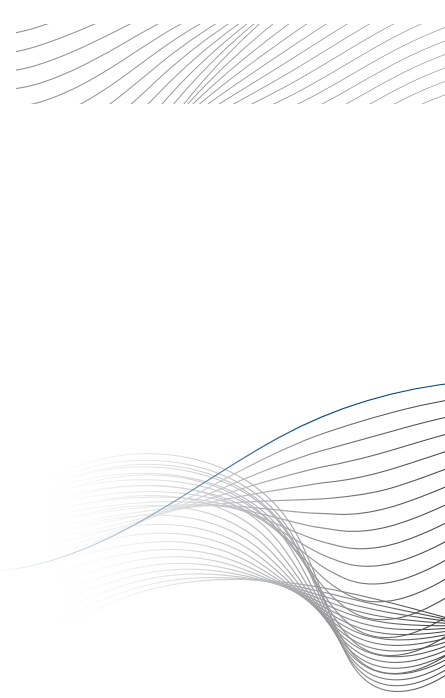
**Dmitry Trenin:** The fear of nuclear weapons has greatly *dulled* over the past three decades. This has happened almost everywhere. There are several reasons. Firstly, in the West, where this fear last peaked in the first half and mid-1980s, generations have grown up who perceive the Cold War and the Soviet-American confrontation [fraught with nuclear conflict] as a distant history. It is believed that in the modern globalized world there are simply no states whose leadership would be ready to commit suicide. Secondly, over the decades of its global hegemony, the United States has ceased to reckon with other major powers. For the current American politicians, if

we speak metaphorically by the worlds of the Senator John McCain, Russia is “a gas station pretending to be a state”, and not “the only country capable of completely destroying the United States”, as they said during the Cold War and for some time after its end. Thus, Russia’s nuclear potential is bracketed out based on the assumption that it cannot and will not be used in modern conditions. Thirdly, the global (especially Western) agenda in the context of globalization has moved far away from the problems of war and peace. Now [for Western societies] the main concerns are concentrated on climate, gender and something of that kind. Nuclear topics in this regard are perceived as archaic.

**Elena Karnaukhova:** Well, let’s imagine the Americans have lost any fear in general and of our nuclear potential in particular. But, firstly, how and why did this happen if Russia retained its nuclear arsenal and that only Russian nuclear arsenal is still capable of destroying the United States? Moreover, *nuclear threshold* has dropped in both countries. Secondly, okay, the Americans are not afraid of us even now, but at the same time they are afraid of the DPRK, whose nuclear arsenal is incomparably smaller than ours. How can all this be rationally explained?

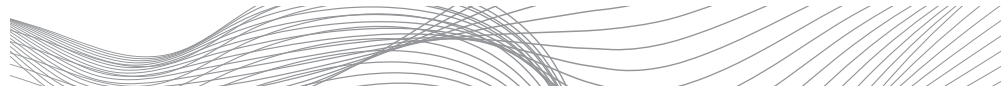
**Dmitry Trenin:** Fears of the DPRK’s nuclear missile program have significantly *subsided* today. There are 2 reasons. Firstly, the regime in Pyongyang and its head are seen as more rational actors than their caricatures, which were distributed in the United States in the years preceding the beginning of the era of great power rivalry. Secondly, these fears themselves were a convenient veil behind which the United States strengthened its military potential aimed at China. The main thing is that now Washington has opponents much more powerful and serious than North Korea. Finally, a general consideration is the following. Both to gloss over Russia’s strategic capabilities and to promote hysteria about the growing arsenal of the DPRK are the results of the work of the media, which in the United States do not primarily ensure informational coverage for society but act as a political player with their own interests and agenda.

When we say that someone has *lost fear*, we mean public opinion. It is formed largely by the mass media. In most Western countries, which have completely delegated their security to Washington, both political circles and governments have lost their fear. Having shifted all responsibility to the senior ally, they themselves became irresponsible. Washington is another story. In the US we still see the elements of realism at the level of the government and the military elite. Yes, US officials have stated the goal of inflicting a strategic defeat on Russia in Ukraine. This goal involves an extremely risky strategy. At the same time, the United States is obviously afraid of two things. First one is the direct participation of its troops and forces in the war in Ukraine, and second one is the escalation of the conflict to the level of strikes with the use of strategic nuclear forces. Hence their *tactics of small steps*, with constant testing of how far one can go on the path of involvement in the war but without exposing oneself to unacceptable risks. So far, the conflict continues to escalate, and the growing likelihood of attacks by Russian armed forces on NATO countries puts the United States in front of a very difficult choice whether to ensure its own security at the cost of refusing assistance, which the allies count on, or to be fully



“We cannot rule out a possibility of a direct clash with NATO”  
(Dmitry Trenin)

“The fear of nuclear weapons has greatly *dulled* over the past three decades”  
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“Russia retained its nuclear arsenal and that only Russian nuclear arsenal is still capable of destroying the United States”  
(Elena Karnaukhova)

involved in the conflict, but that will lead to the death of most of humanity, including the United States themselves.

**Elena Karnaukhova:** I would like to touch upon TPNW again. How it would be right to consider this Treaty as the result of frustration of nonnuclear weapons states and their resentment that there have been few progresses in nuclear disarmament, or as an initiative promoted by the US themselves in order to achieve disarmament of other states on a global scale? It is rather interesting that the US officially rejects the TPNW but many American non-governmental organizations or foundations are actively supporting this Treaty. When you study their websites, you can see that they widely finance projects related to the stigmatization of nuclear weapons.

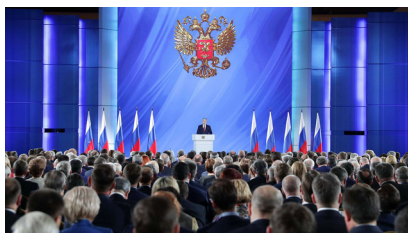
**Dmitry Trenin:** The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons is largely generated by the frustrations of nonnuclear weapons countries due to the fact that the nuclear powers, who have committed themselves in accordance with the NPT to eventually abandon nuclear weapons, are in no hurry to do so. This disappointment is understandable. But it is unclear for me what can replace nuclear deterrence, i.e. the threat of mutually assured destruction, as a factor that dramatically reduces the likelihood of a direct military clash between the states with the largest nuclear arsenals. However, from the point of view of some American experts, a nuclear-free world (which the Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev actively promoted in 1986) is a world of the military dominance of the United States, whose military budget exceeds the total military expenditures of a dozen of the world's leading military powers. The American government, however, is being cautious: after all, it cannot be completely excluded that someone somewhere will save nuclear weapons and will be able to blackmail the rest of the world with them, including the United States themselves.

**Elena Karnaukhova:** Can we restore the fear of the Russian nuclear weapons by returning to nuclear testing?

**Dmitry Trenin:** I don't think it's necessary to deliberately escalate this fear. The most dangerous thing that can happen is that your counterpart feels that you are bluffing. Then the situation can become uncontrollable, and a catastrophe is inevitable. There is a certain set of signals that is designed to warn the enemy about the impending danger. There are emergency hotlines. The main thing is to convince the enemy that you are not scaring him but are really determined to defend certain positions with all the means at your disposal. But you cannot deceive yourself: if the enemy does not believe you, you will have to hit.



ON A NEW GLOBAL ORDER AND ITS NUCLEAR DIMENSION.  
AN INTERVIEW WITH DMITRY TRENIN



**“Given these circumstances, the Defence Ministry and Rosatom must make everything ready for Russia to conduct nuclear tests. We will not be the first to proceed with these tests, but if the United States goes ahead with them, we will as well. No one should harbour dangerous illusions that global strategic parity can be disrupted”, – from the Presidential Address to Federal Assembly, February 21, 2023.**

Source: Official website of Kremlin

**Elena Karnaukhova:** It is a widespread opinion in Western academic literature that we risk facing the erosion of the nuclear taboo, or the taboo on the use of nuclear weapons. But after all, the military and political establishment of all nuclear countries, the US and the Soviet Union and then Russia for sure, from the first days of the atomic bomb have designed the conditions for the use of nuclear weapons. Why did such a nuclear taboo established and is it really being eroded now?

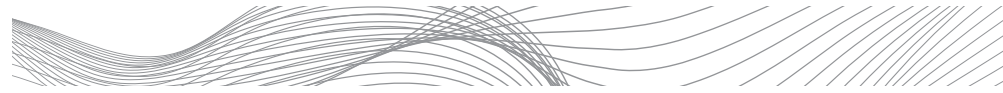
**Dmitry Trenin:** In case of the United States, nuclear weapons were even used, and twice (*taking into account the bombing of the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki by the United States in August 1945 – editor’s note*)! However, the evolution of nuclear technologies and means of delivery of nuclear weapons, the buildup of nuclear arsenals during a few years made the leaders of the Soviet Union and the United States understand that a nuclear war would lead to the destruction of their countries. In the Soviet Union, the Chairman of the Council of Ministers Georgy Malenkov was the first to say this, notably soon after the death of Joseph Stalin. In 1951, US President Harry Truman relieved General of the Army Douglas MacArthur of his commands partially because MacArthur persistently sought permission to use [tactical] nuclear weapons against Sino-North Korean forces during the Korean War (1950-1953). In 1954, President Dwight D. Eisenhower, who succeeded Truman, rejected Paris’ request to strike at the Vietnamese guerrilla army that had besieged French colonial troops near Dien Bien Phu, who were defeated and were forced to leave Indochina.

**Elena Karnaukhova:** Sure, but still, in the case of France, the United States had been interested in dismantling colonial empires since *the Wilsonian moment*, if not earlier.

**Dmitry Trenin:** We should take into account also that during *the Cold War*, the most important region of the world of that time, namely Europe, was clearly divided into spheres of influence and buffer zones. Both the US and the USSR cared primarily about the stability of control over its part of the continent. The peripheral regions, i.e. Asia, Africa, Latin America, were, of course, an open field for rivalry, but *the stakes* in these regions were not so large as to

“The US officially rejects the TPNW but many American non-governmental organizations or foundations are actively supporting this Treaty”  
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justify the use of nuclear weapons. Finally, the Cuban Missile crisis of 1962 forced the USSR and the USA to take steps to regulate the confrontation, to begin the negotiation process, which led to the phenomenon of arms control.

**Elena Karnaukhova:** Once I heard that some pundits have learned how to make such nuclear warheads that do not lead to radiation contamination of the area. In one of the interviews, you personally mentioned the process of miniaturization of nuclear weapons, which, as you said at the time, can now be used in a very different volume<sup>1</sup>. Do we understand correctly that the world is objectively moving towards the use of nuclear weapons in the battlefield? And in Ukraine it will happen for the first time after Hiroshima and Nagasaki, or somewhere else, it is not important at all...

**Dmitry Trenin:** All questions concerning the political and psychological consequences of the use of nuclear weapons can be discussed only hypothetically. God, grant that it will remain so. There is a point of view that low-yield nuclear weapons are quite capable of solving tasks on the battlefield without jeopardizing the survival of mankind. There is also an opposite opinion that a nuclear war, once it has begun, will inevitably strive for the highest level of intensity, thus, it will lead, as they say, to universal guaranteed destruction. The war in Ukraine, in which both major nuclear powers are being involved, has already forced many ideas about the scope of deterrence and its reliability to be corrected. We should understand that Ukraine is the first, but not the last conflict between the defenders of hegemony and the coalition of states supporting multipolarity. The third decade of the XXI century promises to be very turbulent. ■

<sup>1</sup> «The real fear of nuclear weapons really appeared» // Interview with Dmitry Trenin for the telecast «International Review» (Russia 24 Channel), May 05, 2022 r. URL: <https://globalaffairs.ru/articles/strah-pered-yadernym-oruzhiem/?ysclid=lg8g1w41v7394163804>

ON A NEW GLOBAL ORDER AND ITS NUCLEAR DIMENSION.  
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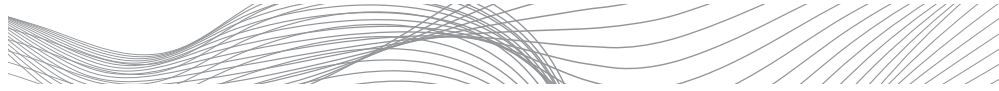
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## GLOBAL SECURITY: NEW IDEAS FOR RUSSIAN FOREIGN & SECURITY POLICY

This occasional paper was made within the framework of the project *Global Security: New Ideas for Russian Foreign & Security Policy*, which is part of the *Global & Regional Security: New Ideas for Russia* Program.

The project is aimed to developing of non-trivial and practically realizable recommendations for Russian foreign policy, improving of strategic, conceptual approaches to assessing challenges and threats at the global level, assisting in the formation of a polycentric, more democratic world order based on the principles of equality and balance of interests, promoting of Russian approaches to security problems and Russian science.