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RUSSIA FORCED TO DEVELOP GLOBAL PROMPT STRIKE WEAPONS

Global prompt strike weapons (GPSW), or strategic offensive arms in non-nuclear configuration, are emerging as a new factor of strategic stability. Their development and potential deployment are important issues to discuss not only within the framework of Russian–U.S. negotiations, but also in the context of other nuclear weapon countries joining the negotiations on strategic limitations. However, the United States and Russia, which possess the largest strategic potentials, are responsible for starting discussion on the issue of GPSW.

What are the Russian and U.S. approaches to the issue of GPSW? For what purposes are such weapons being developed? What threats and challenges do they bring to international security? How is the GPSW issue connected to problems of missile defense, outer space militarization, or conventional arms? Would it be possible for conventional weapons to replace all nuclear weapons as a means of strategic stability?

We have put these questions to Amb. Anatoly Antonov, the Deputy Minister of Defense of the Russian Federation.¹

SECURITY INDEX: What is the place of the issue of global prompt strike weapons (GPSW) in the relations between the United States and Russia?

ANTONOV: One of the burning issues during the United States and Russian negotiations of the New START treaty was the issue of non-nuclear strategic offensive arms, which we sometimes call strategic offensive arms in non-nuclear configuration. In our work, we are going to adhere to the interpretation of these arms as provided for the new treaty. What does this mean? Any kind of ballistic missile—missiles, ICBMs, submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs)—with non-nuclear warheads. Although considered strategic offensive arms, heavy bombers do not pose such a serious threat in the context of the issues under consideration due to a number of peculiarities in their use.

It would be wrong to say that the issue of GPSW came as a surprise for Russian negotiators during work on the New START treaty, for it had not been there before. It is important to point out that the New START treaty, as well as START I, is a treaty on the reduction and limitation of strategic offensive arms. It is not a coincidence that the word “nuclear” is not here. It is not an omission on the part of the delegations, but the result of an uneasy compromise with the United States that has always tended to have new arrangements which would not relate to so-called conventional arms nor cover GPSW, but would apply only to nuclear weapons.

On the contrary, the Russian side insisted that the new treaty cover all strategic offensive arms. We are constantly emphasizing that it is unacceptable to compensate for nuclear reductions by building up conventional strategic systems. This is not an equal

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exchange. The thing is that the destructive capabilities of GPSW are increasingly getting closer to those of nuclear weapons. The Russian side closely traces plans related to advanced conventional strategic missile technologies. The incoming information unequivocally testifies to the fact that the United States is looking for a considerable new segment of its strategic arsenal capable of solving a wide range of tasks that used to be assigned exclusively to strategic nuclear weapons.

SECURITY INDEX: For what purposes is the United States developing this kind of weapons?

ANTONOV: This work is carried out in the framework of the so-called Prompt Global Strike concept. Let us remember that the United States started to develop this concept in the late 1980s–early 1990s. Its bottom line is the achievement by the United States of America of global full-spectrum dominance, including by designing new, effective, non-nuclear strategic weapons while preserving its nuclear deterrent arsenal.

Should the Prompt Global Strike concept be successfully implemented, the United States will have the power to carry out conventional strikes against targets anywhere in the world within one hour of making the decision. The changing nature of possible threats to the United States coming from not only Russia or, for example, China, but also from so-called rogue states, terrorists, and extremist groups was also taken into account, while the use of nuclear weapons against them was considered counterproductive. In essence, the issue is the transformation of the United States' military potential to better suit future conflicts.

Those who advocate for such plans believe that GPSW will be the best deterrent against aggressive enemies on the regional level, in so far as their use is more probable. It is the suitability of high-precision long-range conventional strikes that makes the potential use of such arms against a possible aggressor more acceptable and thus improves its deterrent effect against state and non-state actors. If the deterrent does not work, targeted long-range non-nuclear strikes may be the only way to prevent an attack with weapons of mass destruction or further attacks after such an act of aggression.

Good range, speed, damage, and efficiency characteristics, together with a prompt reaction capacity, will enable the armed forces to implement virtually the same tasks as with the use of nuclear weapons. The American military men believe that GPSW will help make a swift shift to planning and carrying out strikes against targets thousands of miles away in the case that the United States president makes such a decision based on operational intelligence data. They claim that for a prompt strike to be possible, the data collection, decision-making, and its implementation should be provided in no more than several minutes.

Another advantage of GPSW, according to U.S. experts, is that they are relatively cheap in comparison with the incalculable costs of the use of weapons of mass destruction.

I would like now to critically examine these arguments. The United States continues to state that it is necessary to solve individual tasks in the framework of the war on terrorism. At the same time, when speaking about possible particular cases of the use of such missiles, the United States primarily cites possible strikes against bases, places where terrorists gather or where their leaders meet. However, the indicated type of weapons does not seem to be very effective for such purposes.

First, such gatherings and meetings rarely take place in isolated areas, so the use of such weapons, due their high-damage capabilities, would lead to many victims among civilians.

Second, such targets are quite mobile. The long flight time of ICBMs, as well as the time necessary for the preparation and authorization of similar launches, would hardly guarantee the destruction of moving-point targets. It is enough to look at the situation with the use of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) in Afghanistan against Taliban troops. In spite of their incomparably small size, low management efficiency, and limited firing power, the so-called collateral effects of the use of UAVs including use of weapons among civilians are quite considerable. What would be the consequences of the use of strategic missile systems to carry out targeted lethal strikes? However, the humanitarian aspects of the use of such weapons for targeted destruction of militants and terrorists raises huge doubts. What would be the price of a possible intelligence mistake?

Third, the United States already has its military forces here and Navy close by. This allows them to carry out a powerful strike against the enemy with the use of high-precision weapons in the case of a crisis. Therefore, it can be stated with a high degree of certainty that the probability of a situation in which the United States will have to resort to GPSW is extremely low, especially if compared with possible side effects in terms of strategic stability. The cost efficiency of the development and creation of such expensive weapons systems just to eliminate terrorist leaders raises serious doubts too. Therefore, the United States' arguments in support of the production and deployment of such weapons do not seem convincing.

SECURITY INDEX: What is in reality behind the United States' plans to build GPSW? What is the United States expecting to have?

ANTONOV: It seems evident that in the case of successful Prompt Global Strike implementation, based largely on GPSW, the United States Armed Forces will be strengthened by powerful, modern offensive arms as a solid foundation to enable them to perform global missions at sea, on land, or in space. Due to their good characteristics, such missile systems will be capable of performing tasks that today are supposed to be carried out by strategic nuclear arms.

At the same time, the level of decision-making on the use of GPSW could be lowered significantly in comparison with nuclear deterrent systems. We would like especially to emphasize the fact that in the case that GPSW are accepted, the key factor of the so-called nuclear uncertainty and unpredictability will remain. It is necessary to point out that all the United States' declared global strike-related targets are located in immediate proximity to the Russian and Chinese borders.

This is why any launch of non-nuclear ICBMs and SLBMs in the direction of the territory of the Russian Federation or China might be viewed as a missile attack, thus dramatically raising the risk of the launch of a counterattack strike. We believe that the American military experts understand well that it is impossible to identify the real arming of an ICBM or SLBM, both nuclear and non-nuclear, after launch.

SECURITY INDEX: How will the Russian side act in the case of detection of such a ballistic missile launch?

ANTONOV: The Russian missile warning system is designed in such a way as to ensure maximum decision-making time for the military and governmental authorities. That is why the system facilities are located as close as possible to the national borders, and their zone of action covers the air of several thousand kilometers away from the stand point. Taking into account that most dangerous terrorist regions are adjacent to Russian territory, any end-point launches of missiles in those regions will be detected by Russian means and considered, as a rule, as offensive. This is dictated by the physics and geography of the missile launch detection.

When taking the decision to respond, the Russian military men will act on the assumption that the missile carries a nuclear warhead. Moreover, under the condition of the obvious lack of time to make a comprehensive assessment of the operational situation, the basic response actions will be carried out under the automatic regime. A legitimate question then arises. Does everybody fully understand the disastrous nature of the risk posed by such unidentifiable warheads?

In the context of problems, serious questions remain as to the consequences of partial equipment of launches on American ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs) with non-nuclear SLBMs. In this case, the problem remains of how to prevent accidental and unauthorized launches of SLBMs equipped with nuclear front sections during combat patrolling of SSBNs equipped with missiles of mixed configuration. The repeatedly duplicated launch and launch implementation of authorizations are already needed. Whether this is possible from a technical point of view, frankly, I don't know. It also remains unclear how to notify other states about the launches of ballistic missiles over their territory, as well as about the areas where missile stages drop. This brings excessive conflict potential and tensions in international regulations.



SECURITY INDEX: What are the possible methods of compromise between Russia and the United States concerning the issue of GPSW?

ANTONOV: One of the potential options to reduce Russian concerns with regard to GPSW for the Americans is to consider the possibility of basing ICBMs in non-nuclear configuration in places located away from the nuclear bases of such missiles. For example, Vandenberg or Cape Canaveral, or maybe another place.

It goes without saying that non-nuclear ICBMs should have a distinctive feature to distinguish them from their nuclear brothers and be subject to inspection or demonstrations. However, such verification procedures do not give a full guarantee that under certain circumstances these non-nuclear ICBMs will not be reconverted to carry nuclear warheads.

Besides, there is an impression that no transparency measures will be sufficient in the case of very limited timelines, or lack of comprehensive information in the case of conflict when the United States makes the political decision to deliver a non-nuclear strike using GPSW.

Many ways of advancing the Russian side's concerns relating to non-nuclear ICBMs are not applicable to SLBMs. For example, non-nuclear SLBMs are supposed to be mounted on SSBNs carrying nuclear missiles. Therefore, the possibility of separate basing, as in the case of ICBMs, gets lost.

SECURITY INDEX: So, the strategic stability situation at any case changes with the emergence of GPSW. Is that correct?

ANTONOV: If we have a broader look at the situation regarding strategic stability, a rather unfavorable picture emerges from the point of view of Russian security. The implementation of global BMD-related plans, outstanding CFE programs and obvious imbalance in relation to conventional arms within NATO and Russia, the ambiguous intentions of the United States in relation to placement of an arms race in outer space, the dramatic take-off in the development of military information technologies, the prospects of implementation of the Prompt Global Strike with the use of GPSW, with further reductions of Russia's and the United States' nuclear arsenals, can undercut strategic stability and can make Russian defensive capabilities vulnerable. Such an evolution does not correspond, of course, to Russian national interests.

The reference by the United States to the new quality of bilateral relations that do not suppose military conflict between our countries cannot address our concerns either. The Russian side has repeatedly noted that the military arts should take into account first and foremost the real potential and not the intentions of the parties that can change over time, including depending on existing military capabilities.

The U.S. plans to create GPSW can serve as a serious impetus to missile proliferation. What if other missile countries are tempted to move forward and develop and improve their strategic missile armaments? We know the missile proliferation situation, we know of some countries that are capable of producing such missiles. For example, on the territory of the former Soviet Union, I can name Belarus, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan. You can look at a map and see how many other countries can develop such armaments. Therefore, we are talking about the possible launch of a dangerous new turn in the arms race based on the most advanced technologies. At the same time, there are no internationally recognized restrictions on such weapons. It is not hard either to imagine how such plans of the United States can affect missile programs of the countries that possess military and space capabilities.

Taking into account the above-stated, we believe it is absolutely possible to consider as reasonable all the concerns of reliable experts in relation to the development and improvement of conventional high-precision strategic missile systems, which, especially along with the improvement of ballistic missile defense systems, can not only freeze the reduction of nuclear armaments, but reverse it. It's hardly possible that such a scenario corresponds to the interests of the international community.

The development of GPSW can give a start to the strategic arms race on parallel tracks, that is, nuclear and non-nuclear. Moreover, the research and development efforts in both directions can be mutually complemented and fuelled. It is illustrative that the United States builds scientific and

technical capacities related to the design of high-precision missile systems for delivery of conventional military equipment to the intercontinental range, which can also be used to develop high-precision nuclear combat blocks, or ICBMs and SLBMs.

It can be stated that strategic missile systems in non-nuclear configuration are capable of having a serious negative impact on international security and can really undermine strategic stability. Their use can not only impede the soonest conflict resolution the American developers are thinking about so much, but vice versa can aggravate the international situation by increasing the possibility of the use of weapons of mass destruction due to the incorrect perception by Russia or China of the objectives of the launch of GPSW.

SECURITY INDEX: Does Russia currently invest in non-nuclear strategic weapons? Were the United States and Russia to decide that it would make sense to limit developments, what types of arms control approaches might be suitable?

ANTONOV: The initial position of Russia on this issue was prohibition of such weapons, because we don't want to start an arms race. The United States pushed us, and we are forced to start such an arms race in the future. I don't know what kind of agreement on this type of missiles would be possible. But the best way of course is to prohibit such types of weapons.

We offered to the United States to fix this idea in our agreement, but the United States refused. And then we decided to use the experience which we got from START-I, where we consider all launchers as launchers that could carry nuclear weapons. So, they are included in the ceilings of the new treaty. I don't know when the next treaty will be, but I would like to make it clear that for us there is no option. One of our demands will be that all such weapons are included in future ceilings.

SECURITY INDEX: How many launchers and warheads would be enough to guarantee Russia's security, even in the context of the GPSW development by the United States?

ANTONOV: At this stage, Russia needs 1550 warheads plus 700 deployed launchers. At the next round of discussions and conversations with our American friends, and with other P5 members, we will sit together and we will look at the situation and our military experts will say how many warheads they need. Don't forget that we just celebrated the third anniversary of the New START. We have seven more years, and our task with the United States is to honestly fulfill our obligations under this treaty.

It's not possible today to realize what kind of situation there should be in the future, taking into account just one parameter—the nuclear balance between the United States and Russia. Our life is richer; we have some other problems on which to take up discussion. For example, the United States as well as other countries such as Germany is raising the question of non-strategic nuclear weapons, and non-deployed warheads.

SECURITY INDEX: What problems are to be solved at first to make our positions close and to start the next round of Russian–U.S. negotiations on strategic arms?

ANTONOV: First of all, it's missile defense. If you look, for example, at our treaty, you will see how many times we made reference to missile defense. In the preamble, we agreed that the current status of missile defense does not create any problems for Russian nuclear deterrence. In the body of the treaty, we mention that all missiles at Vandenberg, which were converted to implement non-nuclear missions, were under strict control, and at the end of our treaty, the Russian side made a statement—if in the future there are some changes regarding missile defense and we understand that these changes could undercut Russian deterrence capability, then we will have the right to withdraw from the treaty.

Second is strategic stability in the context of GPSW. If you look at the bilateral document from 2009 signed by our two presidents, you will find this problem in one sentence. GPSW is a problem which we had to solve. There was no reference to what kind of effect for strategic stability we see from these arms.



Third is the situation with France and the UK regarding their nuclear arsenals. Of course, my colleagues can say that they possess only a few hundred warheads and delivery systems. But the reality is that there is a lack of confidence and trust between us, between NATO countries and the Russian Federation. We have a lot to do to become real partners in various spheres. That's why we are looking at the potential capability of France and the UK from the point of view that they are in one alliance. And that's why we are insisting that the next round of negotiations should be multilateral; at least we have to take into account the capabilities of the UK and France. The problem is an imbalance in conventional arms. We must also take these elements into account for future negotiations.

The fifth problem is outer space. Now it is not clear whether the United States is thinking about the possibility of deploying weapons, or has decided not to do it for a civil future. There is a lack of predictability here. Mostly all decisions taken by the United States depend on who leads the White House. That is why Russia needs legally binding assurances.

I hope that very soon we can return to the discussion table. But a lot of work has to be done before the next round of negotiations. During the New START negotiations I offered to the United States team to continue our discussions on real problems, and not to stop our negotiations. At that time, the United States didn't support me. I hope that the United States will support me now.

SECURITY INDEX: What is the potential for greater threat assessment, or at least an exchange of views on the current threats that Russia and the NATO countries face together?

ANTONOV: I remember some bilateral documents within the United States and Russia on threat assessment. In 2009, the two presidents signed a bilateral statement. There are three parts. First message—the United States and other NATO countries plus Russia have to sit at the table to make a threat assessment. Second—experts must review what kind of tools we have to tackle this problem. Third—experts have to provide other means and tools to deal with this issue. Excellent statement!

If we look at the UN SC Resolution 1540, we can find the main threat to NATO and to Russia. It's a nexus between terrorism and weapons of mass destruction. Together with NATO countries, and together with non-aligned countries, we must do a lot to protect ourselves. Nevertheless, it's impossible to strengthen my security at the expense of UK security, for instance. Everything has to be done taking into account principle of indivisible security.

Another forthcoming threat (or challenge) is the situation on the territory of Afghanistan. Our colleagues from NATO are looking at the situation in Afghanistan from the south. We offered to look at the situation from the north, from Tajikistan, from Kyrgyzstan, from the point of view of our allies. If we combine our capabilities and our efforts, especially after 2014, it will be in the interests of the security of all European countries, as well as the Russian Federation.

As to the proliferation of missiles, of course all the parties are very concerned. Russia prefers political, diplomatic means and tools to deal with this issue. I am against the creation of such a defense that could create a problem for the United States. And I know how difficult it is to find a consensus in NATO on this issue. However, we have to forget that we were enemies in the past. Today we are partners.



NOTE

¹ The interview is based on Amb. Anatoly Antonov's speech at a joint meeting of members of the *Centre russe d'études politiques* and the *Trialogue Club International* organized by the PIR Center in Geneva, on April 24, 2013.