

Post Cold War Threats and US Nuclear Primacy: Russian Nuclear Weapons Expert Responds

By [Global Research](#)

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March 22 (Interfax-AVN) – The Russian strategic nuclear forces will remain able to ensure nuclear deterrence in future, thinks Vladimir Dvorkin, a leading scientist at the Global Economy and International Relations Institute under the Russian Academy of Sciences, and an ex-head of the Defense Ministry’s 4th central research and development institute, involved in strategic weapon studies.

“Russia’s nuclear deterrence potential will not reduce significantly until at least 2015, because the Strategic Missile Forces alone will still have lots of highly survivable launchers, capable of effective retaliation,” Dvorkin told Interfax-Military News Agency on Wednesday.

He was asked to comment on the article published in the U.S. Foreign Affairs magazine claiming that the USA has regained the world monopoly on nuclear weapons, which was lost in 1940s, and if Washington strikes first in the nuclear war Russia will have no chances to retaliate.

According to Dvorkin, the authors of the article are exaggerating the Russian nuclear forces’ incapability to ensure nuclear deterrence.

Speaking about the fact that the U.S. has more nuclear warheads and carrier means for them than Russia, he emphasized that in compliance with the Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty not only Russia, but also the U.S. are to significantly reduce the nuclear forces by 2012, with 1,700-2,200 nuclear warheads available on each side.

At the same time, Dvorkin noted that the claims that Russian strategic bombers and submarines are not quite effective and the country’s early warning capabilities are limited are not so untrue.

“The description of the degrading tendency of the Russian nuclear forces with the account of the present state of affairs in the national defense industry is quite reasonable,” he said.

The Rise of U.S. Nuclear Primacy

By Keir A. Lieber and Daryl G. Press

From ***Foreign Affairs***, March/April 2006

Summary:

For four decades, relations among the major nuclear powers have been shaped by their common vulnerability, a condition known as mutual assured destruction. But with the U.S.

arsenal growing rapidly while Russia's decays and China's stays small, the era of MAD is ending — and the era of U.S. nuclear primacy has begun.

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PRESENT AT THE DESTRUCTION

For almost half a century, the world's most powerful nuclear states have been locked in a military stalemate known as mutual assured destruction (MAD). By the early 1960s, the nuclear arsenals of the United States and the Soviet Union had grown so large and sophisticated that neither country could entirely destroy the other's retaliatory force by launching first, even with a surprise attack. Starting a nuclear war was therefore tantamount to committing suicide.

During the Cold War, many scholars and policy analysts believed that MAD made the world relatively stable and peaceful because it induced great caution in international politics, discouraged the use of nuclear threats to resolve disputes, and generally restrained the superpowers' behavior. (Revealingly, the last intense nuclear standoff, the 1962 Cuban missile crisis, occurred at the dawn of the era of MAD.) Because of the nuclear stalemate, the optimists argued, the era of intentional great-power wars had ended. Critics of MAD, however, argued that it prevented not great-power war but the rolling back of the power and influence of a dangerously expansionist and totalitarian Soviet Union. From that perspective, MAD prolonged the life of an evil empire.

This debate may now seem like ancient history, but it is actually more relevant than ever — because the age of MAD is nearing an end. Today, for the first time in almost 50 years, the United States stands on the verge of attaining nuclear primacy. It will probably soon be possible for the United States to destroy the long-range nuclear arsenals of Russia or China with a first strike. This dramatic shift in the nuclear balance of power stems from a series of improvements in the United States' nuclear systems, the precipitous decline of Russia's arsenal, and the glacial pace of modernization of China's nuclear forces. Unless Washington's policies change or Moscow and Beijing take steps to increase the size and readiness of their forces, Russia and China — and the rest of the world — will live in the shadow of U.S. nuclear primacy for many years to come.

One's views on the implications of this change will depend on one's theoretical perspective. Hawks, who believe that the United States is a benevolent force in the world, will welcome the new nuclear era because they trust that U.S. dominance in both conventional and nuclear weapons will help deter aggression by other countries. For example, as U.S. nuclear primacy grows, China's leaders may act more cautiously on issues such as Taiwan, realizing that their vulnerable nuclear forces will not deter U.S. intervention — and that Chinese nuclear threats could invite a U.S. strike on Beijing's arsenal. But doves, who oppose using nuclear threats to coerce other states and fear an emboldened and unconstrained United States, will worry. Nuclear primacy might lure Washington into more aggressive behavior, they argue, especially when combined with U.S. dominance in so many other dimensions of national power. Finally, a third group — owls, who worry about the possibility of inadvertent conflict — will fret that U.S. nuclear primacy could prompt other nuclear powers to adopt

strategic postures, such as by giving control of nuclear weapons to lower-level commanders, that would make an unauthorized nuclear strike more likely — thereby creating what strategic theorists call “crisis instability.”

ARSENAL OF A DEMOCRACY

For 50 years, the Pentagon’s war planners have structured the U.S. nuclear arsenal according to the goal of deterring a nuclear attack on the United States and, if necessary, winning a nuclear war by launching a preemptive strike that would destroy an enemy’s nuclear forces. For these purposes, the United States relies on a nuclear triad comprising strategic bombers, intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), and ballistic-missile-launching submarines (known as SSBNs). The triad reduces the odds that an enemy could destroy all U.S. nuclear forces in a single strike, even in a surprise attack, ensuring that the United States would be able to launch a devastating response. Such retaliation would only have to be able to destroy a large enough portion of the attacker’s cities and industry to...

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