

The boat we're in

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*On 1 March 2018,
President Putin discussed
Russia's security and
defence in the final part of
his address to the Federal
Assembly, from which
these excerpts are taken.*

... I will speak about the newest systems of Russian strategic weapons that we are creating in response to the unilateral withdrawal of the United States of America from the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty and the practical deployment of their missile defence systems both in the US and beyond their national borders ... Back in 2000, the US announced its withdrawal from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty. Russia was categorically against this. We saw the Soviet-US ABM Treaty, signed in 1972, as the cornerstone of the international security system. Under this treaty, the parties had the right to deploy ballistic missile defence systems only in one of its regions. Russia deployed these systems around Moscow, and the US around its Grand Forks land-based inter-continental Ballistic missile (ICBM) base.

Together with the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START), the ABM Treaty not only created an atmosphere of trust but also prevented either party from recklessly using nuclear weapons, which would have endangered humankind, because the limited number of ballistic missile defence systems made the potential aggressor vulnerable to a response strike. We did our best to dissuade the Americans from withdrawing from the Treaty. All in vain. The US pulled out of the Treaty in 2002. Even after that we tried to develop constructive dialogue with the Americans. We proposed working together in this area to ease concerns and maintain the atmosphere of trust. At one point, I thought that a compromise was possible, but this was not to be. All our proposals, absolutely all of them, were rejected. And then we said that we would have to improve our modern strike

systems to protect our security. In reply, the US said that it is not creating a global Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) system against Russia, which is free to do as it pleases, and that the US will presume that our actions are not spearheaded against the US.

The reasons behind this position are obvious. After the collapse of the USSR, Russia, which was known as the Soviet Union or Soviet Russia abroad, lost 23.8 per cent of its national territory, 48.5 per cent of its population, 41 per cent of its GDP, 39.4 per cent of its industrial potential (nearly half of our potential, I would underscore), as well as 44.6 per cent of its military capability due to the division of the Soviet Armed Forces among the former Soviet republics. The military equipment of the Russian army was becoming obsolete, and the Armed Forces were in a sorry state. A civil war was raging in the Caucasus, and US inspectors oversaw the operation of our leading uranium enrichment plants. For a certain time, the question was not whether we would be able to develop a strategic weapon system – some wondered if our country would even be able to safely store and maintain the nuclear weapons that we inherited after the collapse of the USSR. Russia had outstanding debts, its economy could not function without loans from the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank; the social sphere was impossible to sustain.

Apparently, our partners got the impression that it was impossible in the foreseeable historical perspective for our country to revive its economy, industry, defence industry and Armed Forces to levels supporting the necessary strategic potential. And if that is the case, there is no point in reckoning with Russia's opinion; it is necessary to pursue further the ultimate unilateral military advantage in order to dictate the terms in every sphere in the future. Basically, this position, this logic, judging from the realities of that period, is understandable, and we ourselves are to blame. All these years, the entire 15 years since the withdrawal of the United States from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, we have consistently tried to re-engage the American side in serious discussions, in reaching agreements in the sphere of strategic stability.

We managed to accomplish some of these goals. In 2010, Russia and the US signed the New START Treaty, containing measures for the further reduction and limitation of strategic offensive arms. However, in light of the plans to build a global anti-ballistic missile system, which are still being carried out today, all agreements signed within the framework of New START are now gradually being devalued, because while the number of carriers and weapons is being reduced, one of the parties, namely the US, is permitting constant, uncontrolled growth of the number of anti-ballistic

missiles, improving their quality, and creating new missile launching areas. If we do not do something, eventually this will result in the complete devaluation of Russia's nuclear potential, meaning that all of our missiles could simply be intercepted.

Despite our numerous protests and pleas, the American machine has been set in motion, the conveyer belt moves forward. There are new missile defence systems installed in Alaska and California. As a result of NATO's expansion to the east, two new missile defence areas were created in Western Europe: one has already been established in Romania, while the deployment of the system in Poland is now almost complete. Their range will keep increasing; new launching areas are to be created in Japan and South Korea. The US global missile defence system also includes five cruisers and 30 destroyers, which, as far as we know, have been deployed to regions in close proximity to Russia's borders. I am not exaggerating in the least; and this work proceeds apace.

So, what have we done, apart from protesting and warning? How will Russia respond to this challenge? This is how. During all these years since the unilateral US withdrawal from the ABM Treaty, we have been working intensively on advanced equipment and arms, which allowed us to make a breakthrough in developing new models of strategic weapons. Let me recall that the United States is creating a global missile defence system primarily for countering strategic arms that follow ballistic trajectories. These weapons form the backbone of our nuclear deterrence forces, just like other members of the nuclear club. As such, Russia has developed, and works continuously to perfect, highly effective but modestly priced systems to overcome missile defence. They are installed on all of our intercontinental ballistic missile complexes.

In addition, we have embarked on the development of the next generation of missiles. For example, the Defence Ministry and enterprises of the missile and aerospace industry are in the active phase of testing a new missile system with a heavy intercontinental missile. We called it *Sarmat*, which will replace the *Voevoda* system made in the USSR. Its immense power was universally recognised ... *Voevoda's* range is 11,000 km while *Sarmat* has practically no range restrictions ... *Sarmat* is a formidable missile and, owing to its characteristics, is untroubled by even the most advanced missile defence systems. But we did not stop at that. We started to develop new types of strategic arms that do not use ballistic trajectories at all when moving towards a target and, therefore, missile defence systems are useless against them, absolutely pointless ...

In late 2017, Russia successfully launched its latest nuclear-powered

missile at the central training ground. During its flight, the nuclear-powered engine reached its design capacity and provided the necessary propulsion. Now that the missile launch and ground tests were successful, we can begin developing a completely new type of weapon, a strategic nuclear weapons system with a nuclear-powered missile ... As you no doubt understand, no other country has developed anything like this. There will be something similar one day but by that time our guys will have come up with something even better.

Now, we all know that the design and development of unmanned weapon systems is another common trend in the world. As concerns Russia, we have developed unmanned submersible vehicles that can move at great depths (I would say extreme depths) inter-continentially, at a speed multiple times higher than the speed of submarines ... Unmanned underwater vehicles can carry either conventional or nuclear warheads, which enables them to engage various targets, including aircraft groups, coastal fortifications and infrastructure ...

Countries with high research potential and advanced technology are known to be actively developing so-called hypersonic weapons ... Russia already has such a weapon. The most important stage in the development of modern weapons systems was the creation of a high-precision hypersonic aircraft missile system; as you already know for sure, it is the only one of its kind in the world ...

I will say once again what we have repeatedly told our American and European partners who are NATO members: we will make the necessary efforts to neutralise the threats posed by the deployment of the US global missile defence system. We mentioned this during talks, and even said it publicly. Back in 2004, after the exercises of the strategic nuclear forces when the system was tested for the first time, I said the following at a meeting with the press ...

‘As other countries increase the number and quality of their arms and military potential, Russia will also need to ensure it has new generation weapons and technology. In this respect, I am pleased to inform you that successfully completed experiments during these exercises enable us to confirm that, in the near future, the Russian Armed Forces, the Strategic Missile Forces, will receive new hypersonic-speed, high-precision weapons systems that can hit targets at inter-continental distance and can adjust their altitude and course as they travel. This is a very significant statement because no country in the world as of now has such arms in their military arsenal.’

Of course, every word has a meaning because we are talking about the

possibility of bypassing interception boundaries. Why did we do all this? Why did we talk about it? As you can see, we made no secret of our plans and spoke openly about them, primarily to encourage our partners to hold talks. Let me repeat, this was in 2004. It is actually surprising that, despite all the problems with the economy, finances and the defence industry, Russia has remained a major nuclear power. No, nobody really wanted to talk to us about the core of the problem, and nobody wanted to listen to us. So listen now ...

I want to emphasise specifically that the newly developed strategic arms – in fact, new types of strategic weapons – are not the result of something left over from the Soviet Union. Of course, we relied on some ideas from our ingenious predecessors. But everything I have described today is the result of the last several years, the product of dozens of research organisations, design bureaus and institutes ...

I hope that everything that was said today would make any potential aggressor think twice, since unfriendly steps against Russia, such as deploying missile defences and bringing NATO infrastructure closer to the Russian border, become ineffective in military terms and entail unjustified costs, making them useless for those promoting these initiatives.

It was our duty to inform our partners of what I said here today under the international commitments Russia had subscribed to. When the time comes, foreign and defence ministry experts will have many opportunities to discuss all these matters with them, if of course our partners so desire.

For my part, I should note that we have conducted the work to reinforce Russia's defence capability within the current arms control agreements; we are not violating anything. I should specifically say that Russia's growing military strength is not a threat to anyone; we have never had any plans to use this potential for offensive, let alone aggressive goals. We are not threatening anyone, not going to attack anyone, or take away anything from anyone with the threat of weapons. We do not need anything; just the opposite. I deem it necessary to emphasise (and it is very important) that Russia's growing military power is a solid guarantee of global peace, as this power preserves and will preserve strategic parity and the balance of forces in the world, which, as is known, have been and remain a key factor of international security after World War Two and up to the present day.

And to those who, in the past 15 years, have tried to accelerate an arms race and seek unilateral advantage against Russia, have introduced restrictions and sanctions that are illegal from the standpoint of international law aiming to restrain our nation's development, including in the military area, I will say this: everything you have tried to prevent through such a

policy has already happened. No one has managed to restrain Russia.

Now we have to be aware of this reality and be sure that everything I have said today is not a bluff – and it is not a bluff, believe me – and to give it a thought, and dismiss those who live in the past and are unable to look into the future, to stop rocking the boat we are all in, which is called the Earth.

In this connection, I would like to note the following. We are greatly concerned by certain provisions of the revised nuclear posture review, which expand the opportunities for reducing, and reduce, the threshold for the use of nuclear arms. Behind closed doors, one may say anything to calm down anyone, but we read what is written. And what is written is that this strategy can be put into action in response to conventional arms attacks and even to a cyber-threat.

I should note that our military doctrine says Russia reserves the right to use nuclear weapons solely in response to a nuclear attack, or an attack with other weapons of mass destruction against the country or its allies, or an act of aggression against us with the use of conventional weapons that threaten the very existence of the state. This all is very clear and specific.

As such, I see it is my duty to announce the following. Any use of nuclear weapons against Russia or its allies, weapons of short, medium or any range at all, will be considered as a nuclear attack on this country. Retaliation will be immediate, with all the attendant consequences. There should be no doubt about this whatsoever. There is no need to create more threats to the world. Instead, let us sit down at the negotiating table and devise together a new and relevant system of international security and sustainable development for human civilisation. We have been saying this all along. All these proposals are still valid. Russia is ready for this.

Our policies will never be based on claims to ‘exceptionalism’. We protect our interests and respect the interests of other countries. We observe international law and believe in the inviolable central role of the UN. These are the principles and approaches that allow us to build strong, friendly and equal relations with the absolute majority of countries. Our comprehensive strategic partnership with the People’s Republic of China is one example. Russia and India also enjoy a special privileged strategic relationship. Our relations with many other countries in the world are entering a new dynamic stage ...

This is a turning period for the entire world and those who are willing and able to change, those who are taking action and moving forward, will take the lead. Russia and its people have expressed this will at every defining moment in our history. In just 30 years, we have undergone changes that took centuries in other countries ...