



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra



NEW ZEALAND

Crossing Obstacles and Implementation of De-alert Approach*

By *General Viktor Esin (Ret.)*

Comments prepared for the seminar on “Re-framing De-Alert: Decreasing the Operational Readiness of Nuclear Weapons Systems in the U.S.-Russia Context” in Yverdon, Switzerland, 21-23 June 2009.

Re-framing De-Alert:
Decreasing the Operational Readiness of Nuclear Weapons Systems in the U.S.-Russia Context
21-23 June 2009
Hotel La Prairie
1400 Yverdon-les-Bains, Switzerland

**The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the conference sponsors.*

“Crossing Obstacles and Implementation of De-alert Approach”

By General Victor ESIN (Ret.)

I believe that the central objective of implementing de-alert (that is states possessing nuclear weapons lowering their nuclear forces operational readiness) should be to strengthening strategic balance at the cost of elimination, or at least essential lowering of risks associated with unintended nuclear war unleashed by negative factors that we discussed yesterday. I will not dwell on these factors, but I'd like to mention that the factor of prevention of accidental or unauthorized launch of ballistic land-based or sea-based missiles should not be equated with the factor of necessity to lower ballistic missiles operational readiness. These are completely different things. However they do not thwart one another (although such point of view was yesterday expressed by some seminar attendees) – on the contrary – they complement each other if we are talking about the prevention of nuclear war. In order to avoid the duality of interpretation of my yesterday's statements on this point, I'd like to point up again: even if Russia, USA and other nuclear weapon states would have in possession reliable systems of prevention of accidental or unauthorized launch of ballistic missiles, this would not make unnecessary the procedures on lowering the ballistic missiles operational readiness.

So, what are the obstacles on the way to implementation of de-alert idea as I see it? I would divide them into three types.

First type embraces politico-military relations between nuclear states which characterize the confidence level with regard to the parties' intentions. As for now the required confidence level in this field exists in the triangle of USA – UK – France (NATO allied members) only. Confidence level is highly unsatisfactory in the relations between this triangle and Russia and China. This results in essential differences in nuclear policies of these nuclear states.

Second type of the obstacles pertains to provision of military security of nuclear states. At the time when USA and NATO alliance headed by USA absolutely predominate in general purpose forces it is impossible to expect from Russia or China the steps that would lead to limitation of capabilities of their nuclear deterrence potential. The same approach is intrinsic to Pakistan that would hardly lower capabilities of its nuclear deterrence potential when India possesses overwhelming superiority in conventional forces. It is also impossible to imagine that Israel would be agreeable to lowering its nuclear forces potential until the peaceable agreement on the Middle East is concluded and the Arab states provide Israel with credible security guarantees.

Third type of the obstacles arises from the fact that previously built intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBM) and those being currently built initially meant to be deployed ready to launch. This is the purpose why engineers diligently work to make the technical time required to launch ICBM not exceeding 1-2 minutes, or even less. As a result the

change-over of deployed ICBM into lower operational readiness is connected with the necessity of realization of a number of additional cash-consuming measures. These measures are often accompanied by losses in provision of nuclear security of the deployed ICBM that is hardly acceptable. The only measure that is released from the above mentioned negative is undocking of re-entry vehicle of ICBM with installation of electric equivalent instead. Without the electric equivalent imitating the electric chains of the re-entry vehicle it is impossible to control the technical condition of ICBM which is a high-risk object being fueled with propellant components. Furthermore additional expenditures would be required to elaborate measures and construct production equipment that would make it possible to reconstitute operational readiness of ICBM (kept in lower operational readiness) in acceptable time frame.

I revealed the character and the essence of problems that stand in the way of implementation of the idea of de-alert not because I'd like to renounce this idea. In my opinion the idea is long overdue, and is supported by the corresponding resolution of the UN. But the difficulties in implementation of the de-alert idea should be discerned, as well as the fact that it would require system approach, as my colleague Grigory Chernyavsky noted yesterday.

This approach should be based on the *nuclear posture* principle. This American term is hard to be translated into Russian, but it is succinct, as it covers nuclear policy of the state including doctrinal settings, as well as systems of political and tactical control of nuclear forces, configuration of nuclear forces, their structure and operational readiness (including procedures on nuclear forces conversion from one operational readiness rate to another, which was a matter of General Eugene Habiger report), variants of possible use of nuclear weapons, and also measures on holding scientific and production potential of nuclear arms network on adequate level. All this must undergo essential transformation if nuclear states resolve to implement the idea of de-alert.

This process should undoubtedly be implemented phase-by-phase, and switching to each following phase would depend mostly on observance of the principles of equal military security, beginning with USA and Russia, then incorporating all "nuclear five", and finally embracing all "nuclear club". So we can see the inextricable connection of this process and creating the territory of equal security from Vancouver to Vladivostok, and eventually covering the whole Earth.

At the same time, as I told yesterday, the dynamics of the de-alert idea implementation is primarily based on the insistence of the states not possessing nuclear weapons. We should also take into account the fact that the idea of de-alert faces strong opposition inside nuclear weapon states, which would be hard to overcome. This would require collective political will of the world community.

And the last thing. The process of nuclear disarmament is strongly interrelated with universal and over-all disarmament. This interrelation was clearly understood by the creators of the Nuclear Weapons Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). This is why they have written in the article VI of NPT "Each of the Parties to the Treaty (I emphasize, each

party regardless of nuclear status of the state) undertakes to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament, and on a treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control.” And here we come to pointlessness of the eternal scholastic argument on who was the first – a hen or an egg. The processes of nuclear disarmament and universal and over-all disarmament should develop along and simultaneously to some extent. I believe that without firm restrictions on conventional weapons, first on high-accuracy strategic systems with conventional warheads and ballistic missile defense systems, it is hard to recon on breakthrough achievements in the field of de-alert and generally in nuclear disarmament.