



**PROGRAM ON STRATEGIC STABILITY EVALUATION (POSSE)**

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## **Cooperative Strategic Stability and Strategic Culture (Case of Russia)**

### **Policy Memo for POSSE**

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Strategic stability concept in its classical format inherently linked to nuclear deterrence was developed in times of global confrontation between the United States and former Soviet Union having its main purpose in preventing a large-scale nuclear conflict between the two antagonists (Cold war residual *containing* type of strategic stability). In the post-Cold war environment with its new security threats including BMD and ballistic missile proliferation, there is a need for strategic stability to be refocused from maintaining mutual nuclear deterrence to mutual nuclear security which can only be reached through broad cooperation of major powers (prospective *cooperative* type of strategic stability). Such a model would be consolidating rather than antagonizing and would produce cooperative partners rather than adversaries / competitors. Developing a new sense of strategic stability should foresee states sharing responsibility for combating real security threats in a cooperative manner instead of reproducing inertia of old confrontational thinking.

The state of bilateral strategic dialogue of Russia and the United States as two biggest nuclear powers is a necessary starting point to consider when assessing the prospects for the system transformation. Among sources of difficulties in building cooperative model of strategic stability between Russia and the US there are several strategic cultural factors largely affecting their strategic interactions.

It is universally believed that in Russia's case, there exists especially strong link between the country's culture, mentality, historical legacy and its strategic thinking / behavior / ambitions. Therefore, it is advisable not to underestimate the importance of Russia's strategic cultural context for shaping the country's strategic dialogue with the United States.

To name just some of the powerful continuities in Russian strategic culture: it's foremost the perception of Russia as a great power; the key role of military establishment in Russian foreign policy; perception of high vulnerability on the country's borders (due to exposed geostrategic position); tendency to distrust even close partners / allies and preference for self-reliance as the only proven strategies of survival for Russia throughout the history (due to historical memory of 'broken promises' and foreign invasions that Russia has suffered).

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, re-establishing great power status of Russia has become a constant motive of its foreign policy. In this connection, the so called 'complex of resentment' often comes into play: while perceiving itself as a great power, Russia feels like treated without due respect and disappointed by the United States reluctance to take into account its concerns over regional and global security, be it NATO enlargement to the East, missile defense, high precision weapons, assessments of what was/is going on in the Middle East or anything else.

In Kremlin's view, NATO enlargement towards Russia's borders was in contradiction with assurances that Russia was no longer perceived as an adversary, with the Alliance's activities (including plans for placing the elements of the BMD system in Europe) possibly directed against re-emergence of threat emanating from Russia. Distrust is logically met with distrust, and Russia – many times in history a victim of foreign invasions – feels like surrounded by potential enemies.

American plans to deploy ballistic missile defense in Eastern and Northern Europe hit on Russia's traditionally deep insecurities. With the country's exposed vulnerable position, certain regions in Europe have always been perceived as of special sensitivity for Russia which explains Russia's permanent focus upon the Black sea area, the Transcaucasia, and the Baltic sea area.

Strategic importance of these areas continues to be considerable in the light of Russia's renewed emphasis on its great power status and in view of Russia's reliance on strategic nuclear weapons based in the Barents sea area.

That is why Russia is extremely sensitive to anything it consider to be an unfavorable alteration of strategic balance in these areas, which already happened once by the Baltic states joining NATO and is expected to happen again, given the current NATO plans to deploy the elements of its BMD system in the Baltic Sea and to the north of Russian territory envisaged by the Phase IV of its Phased Adaptive Approach. This prospect naturally appears troubling to Moscow since the projected system might acquire the capability of intercepting Russian strategic missiles.

Therefore, in the logic of (containing) strategic stability which rests upon the principle of mutually assured destruction, the planned BMD system has a potential to undermine the mutual nuclear deterrence between Russia und the US.

There are also some psychological phenomena that can be helpful to explain Russia's nervous reaction to the US/NATO BMD plans. For hundreds of years, the Russian strategic cultural tradition has said that the Russian military (and hence, the state's image in the international arena) have been successful and deserving of respect. In this context, it is rather natural for Russian military elites and state leadership to feel irritation with respect to those who have been more successful in terms of military development and who in fact have abandoned Russia as an ally: Russia's involvement in the process of NATO enlargement is not considered even as a hypothesis, neither is accepted the idea of a joint missile defense system with participation of Russia on the European continent.

It seems that the vital question for Kremlin's leadership is essentially about whether the country's concerns are listened to or disregarded. On missile defense specifically, the US could give more clear indications to the Russian side of its readiness to listen to and accommodate reasonable Russian suggestions on the issue in order to make it easier for Moscow to agree to some kind of a cooperative missile defense arrangement instead of demanded legally binding treaty.

Short of a treaty, experts cite many ways to possibly reassure Moscow about the capabilities of the planned system and the inherent limits of those capabilities. For instance, the Russian side could observe SM-3 interceptor tests to confirm that the velocity and range of the missile would not allow it to engage Russian strategic missiles. The U.S. government could also offer an annual declaration concerning the current and planned numbers of key elements of the BMD system – interceptor missiles, silos and land-based launchers, associated radars and missile-defense capable ships – and commit to provide advance notice of changes in the planned numbers. This would allow Moscow to gauge whether the sum of U.S. capabilities seriously challenged its strategic deterrent.

Offering a package of such and other possible measures for encouraging Russia to join in a cooperative missile defense would be in the U.S. interest, making missile defense an asset on the agenda of the U.S.-Russian strategic relations and perhaps proving a 'game-changer' in their broader security dialogue. And on the contrary, a unilaterally deployed missile defense system will inevitably increase mistrust and tensions between Russia and the US and hinder further disarmament and cooperation on security issues.

Involving Russia in the missile defense systems development does not mean that Russia should have a right of veto over the decisions taken by the US and NATO, it however should imply Russia's right to stipulate terms within negotiated agreements, joint programs and actions. That would reflect genuine interest in involving Russia in a cooperative defense policy and promote highly favorable environment for gradual transformation of strategic stability *from containing to cooperative model*.

It is true that today's Russia with its 'difficult' strategic cultural heritage and great power aspirations is not an easy partner to cooperate with, and yet, it is a big nuclear power and a pivotal player on global security issues, therefore, the US is simply bound to cooperate with Russia. Due to the predominant feeling in the country that Russia was many times treated unfairly by the US, addresses and rhetoric declarations by the US government officials are not enough to change Russia's 'recalcitrance'. Only a persistent policy of agreements, practical security cooperation, and removing Russia's concerns by tangible measures may gradually restore confidence. Substantive consultations are needed not only on the issue of missile defense but also on placing arms in space and high precision weapons.

Arguably, for gradually overcoming the Cold War residual containing type of strategic stability and developing a full-fledged cooperative model of the US-Russian relations, the most important task to start with is trust-building which must become an articulated policy objective above cooperation – because one can still cooperate with someone without necessarily trusting them fundamentally. Trust-building, in its turn, necessitates constantly showing respect for the counterpart's legitimate interests and concerns, not disregarding them. Else, Washington can from time to time 'cooperate' with Moscow on this or that front, but without a systemic change there will be no qualitative shift in the long-term perspective, with gradually overcoming major

strategic cultural constraints and possibly building a new, cooperative type of strategic stability where the cornerstone would be the mutually assured security and not the mutually assured destruction.