

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Nuclear Risks Ambitions vs. Wisdom

**Ali Akbar SALEHI
Hassan BEHESHTIPOUR**

At the outset, allow Mr. Chairman to sincerely thank the organizers of this timely conference. In recent years, relations between Russia and the US have been affected by many difficulties. It is clear that issues such as maintaining and expanding influence in Russia's peripheral regions, geopolitics of oil and gas pipeline transit, the establishment of the US and NATO missile defense system in Eastern Europe, and the nuclear issue of Iran and North Korea have had significant impact on these relations. Among all the developments of the past three decades, the Ukraine crisis can be considered a turning point in the evolution of the relations between Russia and the US. This development represents the peak of geopolitical disputes and competitions between the two sides since the collapse of the Soviet Union in December 1991 until now.

Considering the international nature of the Ukraine crisis and the profound consequences it has had on international relations in the era of globalization, it can be vividly seen that the world already has faced three important security challenges simultaneously: energy security, food security, and nuclear security as a result of Russia-Ukraine war. This situation is so apprehensive that some analysts warn on the possible expansion of the war into a nuclear war, engulfing the entire world with dire consequences.

An essential aspect of the 21st century is that regional and global security are strongly intertwined. A crisis in one region affects the interests of actors in other regions. However, the most dangerous of all is the threat of using nuclear weapons in the war between Russia and Ukraine. This, if it happens increases the threat of starting a nuclear war that would not be limited to only one region. Therefore, People who care about peace and security of the world must try to prevent the start of such a catastrophic war for which one would not see an end.

Why should we worry about a nuclear war?

On February 21st, 2023, President Putin announced that Russia would suspend its participation in the New START Treaty between Russia and the US on nuclear disarmament, and that if the US resumed its nuclear tests, Russia would also resume its nuclear tests (1).

In the case of Russia, since the beginning of the Ukraine war, we have witnessed that the West's claim of not interfering in the war and not sending offensive weapons, gradually came closer to transferring advanced tanks and aircrafts, and even cluster bombs and depleted uranium (2). All the past promises of the West about not supplying offensive weapons (tanks and airplanes) are practically violated, while the hypocritical propaganda still hints at the unwillingness of the US to intervene in the war; and even the Western media from time to time talk about the possibility of Ukraine's failure and the ineffectiveness of war. However, the insinuation of handing over the lands of Ukraine is in reality to soften the heat of the war and adjust the pressure of public opinion about the ending of this useless war. This is in a situation where the US is actually pursuing the continuation of the conflict until the collapse of Russia's power and the destruction of that country (preferably by overthrowing Putin).

The result of the continuation of the current situation of the war in Ukraine is the gradual erosion of the foundations of both Russia and Ukraine. Although this will cost the destruction of Ukraine and eventually levying heavy costs on Europe, the US , nevertheless, hopes that this war will eventually enable Washington to tumble the largest competing military power in the world provided that the situation does not become so critical that it leads to an unexpected reaction (a nuclear threat against the US and Europe). But it must be emphasized that there is no certainty in this regard. If they further narrow the arena on Russia, it is not unlikely that this country will launch an even limited nuclear attack to get rid of the most extensive sanctions in the history of this country. As Putin also said when announcing the partial mobilization of conscripts, that Russia will use all the tools at its disposal to defend the country's territory. He warned that his threat was not a bluff.

Also on March 25th, 2023, after Zelensky stated that his country was awaiting munitions from its partners to launch a counterattack in spring, Putin said he would deploy 10 aircraft capable of carrying tactical nuclear weapons to Belarus. On July 1st, 2023, the construction of a tactical nuclear weapons depot in Belarus is assumed to be completed. Moscow and Minsk agreed to station tactical nuclear weapons without violating START treaty requirements. Of course, Putin declared that he will not transfer his country's nuclear weapons to Belarus, but will take them there to train the Belarusian military, as US has done in Europe (3).

Dmitry Medvedev, the deputy chairman of the Security Council of the Russian Federation, said that the response to a nuclear attack on Russia would be the nuclear bombing of Ukraine and Europe. He demanded to study the scenario of attack on the nuclear facilities of Ukraine and Eastern Europe if the information about the scenario

of attack with NATO weapons on the Smolensk nuclear power plant in Russia is confirmed.

He wrote in his Telegram user account: "If the information about the attempt to attack Smolensk with NATO missiles is confirmed, it is necessary to examine the scenario of a simultaneous attack by Russia on the nuclear power plant in southern Ukraine, Ryuno and Khemianitsky nuclear power plants (4)."

Sergey Lavrov also said in an interview with an international magazine: "Having nuclear weapons is the only possible answer to some important foreign threats against our national security. Developments in and around Ukraine have confirmed that our concerns are quite reasonable. Moscow's nuclear deterrence policy is purely defensive to ensure sovereignty, territorial integrity and deter aggression against Russia and its allies. Lavrov stated that the US and NATO countries are in danger of engaging in a direct armed conflict between nuclear powers, and we think that this process can and should be prevented. Accusing the West of trying to eliminate a serious geopolitical rival, Lavrov announced that Washington and Brussels have waged a combined war against us (5).

Experts say a "limited nuclear war" involving only 250 of the world's 13,000 nuclear weapons could kill 120 million people outright and disrupt the global climate, leading to nuclear famine and putting 2 billion people at risk. A nuclear war between the US and Russia could kill 200 million people or more in the short term and potentially cause a global "nuclear winter" that would put 5 to 6 billion people at risk of inevitable death, thus threatening the survival of humanity (6).

In this regard, Dan Smith, director of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), comments on the world after Russia's war in Ukraine: "We are moving into one of the most dangerous periods in human history. It is imperative that the governments of the world find ways to work together to calm geopolitical tensions, slow down the arms race, and deal with the worsening consequences of environmental devastation and increased world hunger (7)."

It is well understood that nuclear arms control and disarmament diplomacy suffered major setbacks after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. In the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the US suspended its bilateral strategic stability talks with Russia. As it was mentioned, in response to this action, Putin announced in February 2023 that Russia would suspend its participation in the 2010 Treaty on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms (New START)—the last remaining nuclear arms control treaty that restricts the strategic nuclear forces of Russia and the US. Even talks on this Treaty, which expires in 2026, have also been suspended. However, according to SIPRI's assessment, both countries' deployed strategic nuclear forces remained within the New START range as of January 2023 (8). This is while last year a member of the House of Commons of the UK announced that the US is planning to deploy new nuclear weapons on British soil in the Lakenheath area (9), and this shows that the US and the UK are trying to establish a base to deal with possible threats against Russia and China.

The Risk of Re-nuclearization of Ukraine

Ukraine had a significant nuclear legacy which was inherited from its past as part of the Soviet Union. At the time of the collapse of the Soviet Union, this country had the third largest nuclear arsenal in the world. The nuclear arsenal based in Ukraine

included about 130 intercontinental ballistic missiles with a range of 5 to 10,000 kilometers, each missile equipped with 10 nuclear warheads. Totally, according to what Western sources estimated, about 1,700 nuclear warheads and 33 long-range bombers capable of carrying nuclear bombs were stationed on Ukraine soil. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Ukraine voluntarily abandoned its nuclear weapons due to economic reasons and under the pressure of the US and Russia. As a non-nuclear weapon state, it joined the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) (10). Since then, Ukraine has tried to undo its nuclear legacy, ensure the safe management, and decommissioning of nuclear facilities and materials. Ukraine's decision was an important step in international disarmament efforts and was also facilitated by the Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances. The memorandum, signed on December 5, 1994, (11) provided certain security assurances in exchange for the country's decision to abandon its nuclear arsenal and join the NPT as a non-nuclear state. This Memorandum was signed by Ukraine, Russia, US and the UK. China and France, both nuclear-armed states and permanent members of the UN Security Council, also gave separate written assurances to Ukraine. The key points of the Budapest Memorandum include respect for sovereignty. It means that the signatory countries committed to respect the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Ukraine within existing borders. By refraining from resorting to force, the signatory countries promised not to threaten Ukraine. The purpose of this assurance was to prevent any aggression against the territorial integrity of the country. If Ukraine faces an act of aggression or threat of aggression that violates the UN Charter, the signatory states undertake to consult with each other and take the necessary measures to address the issue. But the military invasion of Ukraine practically destroyed this Memorandum (12).

Now it is feared that Ukraine will somehow move towards acquiring nuclear weapons based on the breach of the Budapest Memorandum.

Regarding the importance of Ukraine for the US, the famous American theorist Brzezinski writes in his book "The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives" published in 1997: "Ukraine is one of the geopolitical pivot countries. Geopolitical pivots are the states whose importance is derived not from their power and motivation but rather from their sensitive location and from the consequences of their potentially vulnerable condition for the behavior of geostrategic players. Most often, geopolitical pivots are determined by their geography, which in some cases gives them a special role either in defining access to important areas or in denying resources to a significant player. Accordingly, Ukraine is a new and important space on the Eurasian chessboard and a geopolitical pivot. Because its very existence as an independent country helps to transform Russia. Without Ukraine, Russia ceases to be a Eurasian empire. Russia without Ukraine can still strive for imperial status, but it would then become a predominantly Asian imperial state, more likely to be drawn into debilitating conflicts with aroused Central Asians states" (13). For this important reason, in the last three decades, the US has been trying to finally make Ukraine a member of NATO.

What are the consequences of more pressure on Russia?

In 2019, the RAND Corporation of the US conducted a research on Russia for the US government. After Russia's attack on Ukraine, it became clear that the current policy of President Biden's government regarding Russia's attack mainly emanated from that research. This research titled "Countering Russia's Expansion, Competition from Above" is the joint work of a group of 9 people led by James Dobbins. Based on the findings of this 345 pages study, the US policy towards

Russia should be the same as it was applied to the Soviet Union, that is, to weaken Russia by entering into an arms race and war. In order to implement this policy, the proposals of this research group consisting of numerous intelligence, security and strategist elements to the US government is to organize multilateral programs in the economic, ideological, intelligence, security, geopolitical and military sectors to control the spread of Russian influence. These measures have been examined in several expert groups and the coefficient of their risks in implementation has been determined and the probability of their success has also been determined as a percentage. After Russia's attack on Ukraine, the RAND Institute published a 12 pages summary of the same report, which clearly showed that the US government sought to provoke Russia to go to war with Ukraine and, as a result, weaken Russia's global position (14).

It is widely believed that more pressure on Russia will bring Moscow closer to Beijing and form a new union of countries that criticize or oppose the West in the form of an alliance led by Russia or China. Meanwhile, Beijing is likely to be facing the largest expansion of its nuclear weapons program in history: in 2008, according to estimates by independent experts from the Federation of American Scientists, China had only about 200 warheads, but today it has approximately 350 warheads. Thus, Beijing is in third place after Russia and America (15).

Russia is currently seeking to strengthen its traditional relations with India, and countries such as Iran, North Korea, Cuba, Venezuela, Vietnam, the republics of Central Asia and the Caucasus, African countries and Latin America. Therefore, it is apt and sage for the US and its allies not to put more pressure on Russia. Because more pressure will certainly not lead Russia to surrender, but would rather cause radical and adventurous actions against the West.

The Results of the Crisis Caused by the Threat to Use Nuclear Weapons, Has Its Roots in the Neglect of Nuclear Disarmament

The issue of nuclear threats is directly affected by the non-fulfillment of promises related to the destruction of nuclear weapons. During the post-Cold War era, the world was expected to move rapidly towards nuclear disarmament as the arms race had lost its Cold War-era meaning. However, despite the reduction of nuclear weapons due to the implementation of the START Treaties, the main countries possessing nuclear weapons, especially the United States, moved towards the modernization of nuclear weapons, so that the weapons they produced in recent years are each several times more destructive than decommissioned bombs. In fact, the number of nuclear warheads decreased from about 20,000 units to about 13,000 units in total, but the destructive power of the existing weapons is estimated to be several times more than the destroyed weapons based on the SALT and START Treaties. The main reason for this disarray is the disregard of international treaties related to nuclear disarmament. Due to the influence they have, the nuclear powers are delaying the implementation of the provisions of the NPT and other nuclear arms limitation treaties.

For this very reason, it is clear why the language of threat to use nuclear weapons has become so common and been expressed more explicit than in the past without worrying about its consequences for the peace and security of the people of the world.

Due to this fact, the necessity of basic measures for nuclear disarmament is felt more than ever. The focus of taking such measures could be in regard in more sensitive areas such as Eastern Europe, the Middle East, the Pacific Ocean, and East Asia.

For years, the idea of Middle East, free from nuclear weapons, has remained on the table due to the opposition of the Tel Aviv Regime. With the participation of all countries in the West Asian region, this idea could provide a more suitable environment for security and stability in this most critical strategic region of the world. As the Treaty of Rarotonga on establishing, a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the South Pacific was supposed to create a suitable security environment in that region. Although, this treaty has recently faced a new problem- namely, the AUKUS military initiative- with the actions taken by the US and the UK in arming Australia with submarines that work with nuclear propulsion which can potentially be equipped with nuclear weapons. Another example of a failed successful attempt was the JCPOA. As the US withdrew from the JCPOA in May 2018, the successful experience that for the first time the six major powers of the world and Iran reached an agreement on nuclear non-proliferation, which could be a good start for global and regional cooperation and a guarantee of peace and security, faced a major setback.

Before Trump, who clumsily issued the order to withdraw from the JCPOA, the President of the United States, Obama, had proposed his loose nuclear doctrine on the issue of not using nuclear weapons against countries that do not have nuclear weapons. While, in that same document, ironically Iran was excluded. According to the 15 reports of the Agency's Director General, Iran had fulfilled all its obligations according to the JCPOA until May 2019; that is one year after Trump's withdrawal from the nuclear deal. In this way, Iran proved its willingness to interact, but the pressures of the Zionist Regime and the Trump's withdrawal finally strengthened the suspicion that they can bring Iran to its knees by adopting a policy of maximum pressure. However, Iran showed that as much as it is interested in positive and reasonable interaction, it is also keen in upholding its legitimate nuclear rights. In

the last official document published by the US Department of Defense (Pentagon) in 28 September 2023, the US government conceded that “Iran is not pursuing nuclear weapon”. The bitter lessons learned from these instances is that no super power can be trusted. However, there is still a good chance that the JCPOA is revived if good intentions is prevailed.

Suggested strategies to come out of the current crisis

One reasonable way to come out of the current very sensitive situation of the threat of nuclear war is to form a multilateral high-level open-ended committee under the aegis of the United Nations in order to find a wise and rational solution to ensure that a nuclear war does not start. This committee can use the experiences of negotiations between the six powers in the JCPOA with Iran to examine the three outstanding issues of the probable nuclear outbreak in Russia- Ukraine crisis, AUKUS and the JCPOA. Immediate solution may be provided to resolve or mitigate the existing serious global concerns in the field of nuclear proliferation and prevention of an unwanted war by creating a conducive international environment.

At the same time, it is necessary for nuclear weapon countries to think of new ways to disarm nuclear weapons to reduce the current inflammation. Because as much as the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons is necessary for world peace and security, the disarmament and destruction of existing nuclear weapons is even more compelling in order to reduce the nuclear threat and build mutual trust at the international level.

“In 2007, the IPPNW¹ launched the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), which grew into a global civil society campaign with hundreds of partner organizations. A pathway to nuclear abolition was created with the adoption of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in 2017, which currently comprises 92 signatories including 68 member states (16). In recognition of its activities, ICAN was awarded the 2017 Nobel Peace Prize. International medical organizations, including the International Committee of the Red Cross, the IPPNW, the World Medical Association, the World Federation of Public Health Associations, and the International Council of Nurses, had key roles in the process leading up to the negotiations and in the negotiations themselves, presenting the scientific evidence about the catastrophic health and environmental consequences of nuclear weapons and nuclear war. Let’s all help these meritorious efforts to bear fruit.

Thank you for your attention.

References

- (1) <https://parsi.euronews.com/2023/02/21/what-is-new-start-the-treaty-from-which-russia-suspends-its-participation>
- (2) <https://www3.nhk.or.jp/news/html/20230907/k10014187081000.html>
- (3) <https://www.avvenire.it/mondo/pagine/putin-porta-le-atomiche-in-bielorussia-giallo-fa>
- (4) <https://spnfa.ir/amp/20230709/%D8%B1%D8%A6%DB%8C%D8%B3-%D8%AC%D9%85%D9%87%D9%88%D8%B1-%D8%B3%D8%A7%D8%A8%D9%82->

¹ . International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (Noble Peace Prize in 1985)

%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B3%DB%8C%D9%87-%D8%AF%D8%B1-
%D8%B5%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%AA-%D8%AD%D9%85%D9%84%D9%87-
%D8%A8%D9%87-
%D9%86%DB%8C%D8%B1%D9%88%DA%AF%D8%A7%D9%87-
%D9%87%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%87-%D8%A7%DB%8C-
%D8%A7%D8%B3%D9%85%D9%88%D9%84%D9%86%D8%B3%DA%A9-
%D8%AC%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%A8-
%D9%85%D8%AA%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%A8%D9%84-%D9%85%DB%8C-
%D8%AF%D9%87%DB%8C%D9%85-16784992.html

- (5) <https://www.khabaronline.ir/news/1804376>
- (6) <https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMp2308547>
- (7) <https://www.sipri.org/media/press-release/2023/states-invest-nuclear-arsenals-geopolitical-relations-deteriorate-new-sipri-yearbook-out-now>
- (8) <https://www.sipri.org/media/press-release/2023/states-invest-nuclear-arsenals-geopolitical-relations-deteriorate-new-sipri-yearbook-out-now>
- (9) <https://morningstaronline.co.uk/article/no-us-nukes-britain>
- (10) <https://treaties.unoda.org/s/UKR>
- (11) <https://web.archive.org/web/20170312052208/http://www.cfr.org/nonproliferation-arms-control-and-disarmament/budapest-memorandums-security-assurances-1994/p32484>
- (12) <https://neweasterneurope.eu/2023/09/14/the-impact-of-the-war-in-ukraine-on-the-future-of-europe-what-if-ukraine-becomes-a-nuclear-state/>
- (13) Brzezinski, Zbigniew. The Grand chessboard. American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives. Basic Books,1997,P:24-25
<https://srv2p.ketabkoo.com/booksources/3C19660F88B4DCA51C4BD4FEF8B11276.pdf?28629>
- (14) https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR3063.html
- (15) <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/china-propaganda-nato-1.6035329>
- (16) <https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMp2308547>