

Sleepwalking into a New Arms Race

The West's current hysteria about "Russian aggression" ignores the long history of real Western aggression against Russia, now underscored by plans to sharply increase spending on nuclear weapons, note Chuck Spinney and Pierre Sprey.

By Chuck Spinney and Pierre Sprey

The Nuclear Question is becoming increasingly obfuscated by spin and lobbying as the West sleepwalks into Cold War II – a walk made all the more dangerous when the loose lips of the U.S. tweeter-in-chief announced that another nuclear arms race is a great idea (see [link](#), [link](#), and [link](#)).

Two Cold War II issues are central and almost never addressed: What will be the Russians' understanding of all the propaganda surrounding the Nuclear Question and the looming American defense spend-up? And how might they act on this understanding?

Barack Obama first outlined his vision for nuclear disarmament in a [speech](#) in Prague on April 5, 2009, less than three months after becoming President. This speech became the basis for what eventually became the [New Start](#) nuclear arms limitation treaty.

But Mr. Obama also opened the door for the modernization of our nuclear forces with this pregnant statement: "To put an end to Cold War thinking, we will reduce the role of nuclear weapons in our national security strategy, and urge others to do the same. Make no mistake: As long as these weapons exist, the United States will maintain a safe, secure and effective arsenal to deter any adversary, and guarantee that defense to our allies -- including the Czech Republic."

Why call for nuclear disarmament while opening the door to nuclear rearmament?

Obama's speech [paved the way](#) to his Nobel Peace Prize in October 2009, but he was also trying to manipulate the domestic politics of the Military – Industrial – Congressional Complex (MICC). By Dec. 15, 2009, 41 Senators sent a letter to President Obama saying that further reductions of the nuclear arsenal [would be acceptable only if](#) accompanied by "a significant program to modernize our nuclear deterrent."

Viewed in retrospect, it is clear that the new President – either naively or cynically – acquiesced to that senatorial spending demand in order to keep the powerful nuclear laboratories and their allies in the defense industry and Congress from lobbying against his new arms limitation treaty.

In April 2009, Obama took the first steps that launched a huge spending plan to modernize U.S. nuclear forces across the board. Eight years later, during his first call to President Putin on Jan. 28, 2017, President Trump locked that program in place by denouncing Obama's New START as a "bad deal," saying it favored Russia.

A particularly dangerous component of the Obama nuclear spending plan is the acquisition of low-yield precision-guided nuclear bombs/warheads. These weapons only make sense within a radical strategy for actually fighting a nuclear war – as opposed to the almost universally accepted idea that our nuclear arsenal exists only to *deter* any thought of using these weapons – since actual use is unthinkable, with profoundly unknowable consequences.

Last December, the prestigious Defense Science Board – an organization replete with members closely connected to the nuclear labs and their defense industry allies – added its imprimatur to this radical strategy by resurrecting the old and discredited ideas of limited nuclear options (LNOs). LNOs are based on the unproven – and unprovable – hypothesis that a president could actually detonate a few nukes to control a gradually escalating nuclear bombing campaign, or perhaps to implement a psychological tactic of encouraging deterrence with a few small "preventative" nuclear explosions.

Adding to Obama's expansion of our nuclear posture is President Trump's intention to fulfill his campaign promises to strengthen all nuclear offensive and defensive forces, with particular emphasis on spending a lot more for the ballistic missile defense (BMD) program – which implies expanding the current deployments of BMD weapons in eastern Europe within a few hundred miles of the Russian border.

Early cost estimates – really guesses – for Obama's entire nuclear modernization program are for one trillion dollars over the next 30 years. No missile defense costs are included in this estimate – nor are the costs of Trump's promised expansions.

The components of the currently authorized program – e.g., a new bomber, a new ballistic missile carrying submarine, a new ICBM, a new air-launched cruise missile, a complete remanufacturing upgrade of the existing B-61 dual-a-yield tactical nuclear bomb that also adds a precision guidance kit, a new family of missile warheads, new nuclear warhead production facilities, and a massive array of new large-scale intelligence, surveillance, command and control systems to manage these forces – are all in the early stages of development.

Cost Overruns, Anyone?

Assuming business as usual continues in the Pentagon, the one-trillion dollar estimate is really a typical front-loaded or “buy-in” estimate intended to stick the camel’s nose in the acquisition tent by deliberately understating future costs while over-promising future benefits.

The money for all of these programs is just beginning to flow into hundreds of congressional districts. As the torrent of money builds up over the next decade, the flood of sub-contracting money and jobs in hundreds of congressional districts guarantees the entire nuclear spend-up will acquire a political life of its own – and the taxpayer will be burdened with yet another unstoppable behemoth.

Readers who doubt this outcome need only look at how the problem-plagued F-35 Strike Fighter lives on, resisting reductions in money flows and even receiving congressional add-ons, despite mind-numbing effectiveness shortfalls, technical failures and unending schedule delays (e.g., see this recent [60-page report](#) by the Pentagon’s Director of Operational Test and Evaluation).

Locking hundreds of congressmen and senators into this nuclear modernization program guarantees that the money flow and cost overruns will increase without interference for the next 30 to 50 years. Our many years of observing and analyzing DoD’s largest politically-engineered acquisitions makes it obvious that the initial buy-in guess of a trillion dollar total will turn into at least a three trillion dollar price tag by the end of three decades. In short, the Pentagon is planting the seed money for another F-35-like disaster, only this time on steroids.

But there is more. Once this multi-trillion dollar, self-sustaining money gusher is sluicing steadily into the boiler rooms of the Military – Industrial – Congressional Complex (MICC), U.S. force deployments, alliances, treaties and threat assessments will be shaped even more heavily than now to support the domestic politics of ever-increasing spending for the MICC. Despite this, our nation’s foreign policy mandarins seeking to steer the ship of state from their perch on Mount Olympus will remain oblivious to the fact that their “policy” steering wheel is not connected to the ship’s rudder.

As one perceptive Pentagon wag succinctly observed years ago, “In the real world, foreign policy stops at the water’s edge,” i.e., the domestic politics of the MICC always trump foreign policy. President Eisenhower understood this, though he did nothing about it before leaving office.

As of now, no one in the MICC really gives a damn how the Russians (or the Chinese) might actually react to America’s looming nuclear (and non-nuclear) spending binge. This is clearly seen in the cognitive dissonance of the Obama

Defense Department: It was torn between insisting the Russians are not the target of the nuclear program but at the same time justifying the nuclear build-up as a means to counter Russian conventional aggression.

Equally revealing, a Feb. 8 editorial in the Pentagon's favored house organ, Defense News, described President Trump's upcoming Nuclear Posture Review without once mentioning the Russians or Chinese nor how they might react to the looming American spending spree. On the other hand, the editorial took great pains to explain in detail how the forces of domestic political consensus will ensure steady funding for Obama's nuclear spending plans throughout the Trump Administration years.

Do Actions Trigger Reactions?

So, how might the Russians react to the threat of increased American defense budgets? Let's try to look at the nuclear modernization program – and the looming defense spend-up – from the Russian leadership's point of view.

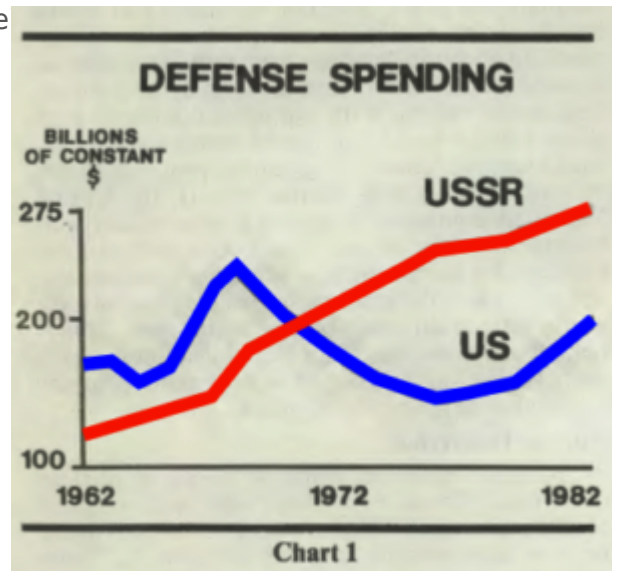
The Russians, particularly those internal political and industrial factions that benefit from Russian defense spending, are very likely to characterize the American spending program as an aggressive sharpening of the U.S. nuclear sword and a strengthening of its nuclear shield, synchronized with a threatening buildup of America's conventional force. And that will be used to argue that Russia is spending far too little on defense because it faces an existential threat due to increased American spending.

Don't laugh, this is a mirror image of the argument used successfully by President Ronald Reagan in a televised address to the nation on Nov. 22, 1982. His subject was also nuclear strategy, as well as the need to increase America's entire defense budget.

Reagan said [excerpted from pp. 3-5], "You often hear that the United States and the Soviet Union are in an arms race. The truth is that while the Soviet Union has raced, we have not. As you can see from this blue US line in constant dollars our defense spending in the 1960s went up because of Vietnam and then it went downward through much of the 1970s. Now, follow the red line, which is Soviet spending. It has gone up and up and up. ...

"The combination of the Soviets spending more and the United States spending proportionately less changed the military balance and weakened our deterrent. Today, in virtually every measure of military power, the Soviet Union enjoys a decided advantage. ... If my defense proposals are passed, it will still take five

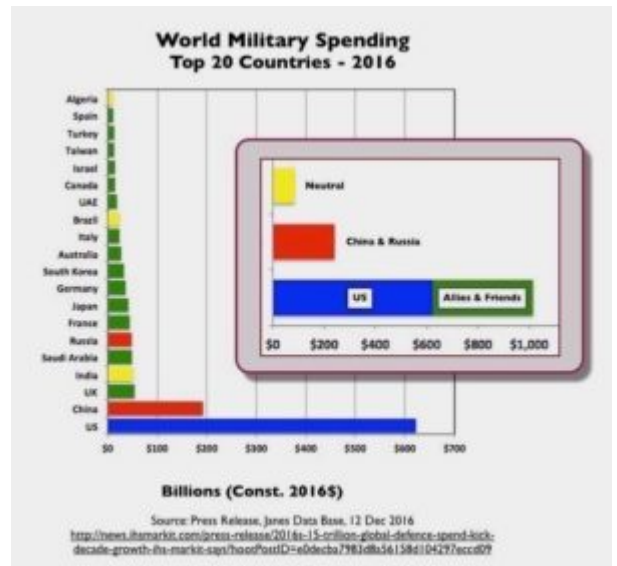
years before we come close to the Soviet level



Mirror imaging Reagan's argument, Russian defense advocates emphasizing the dangers of the U.S. spend-up are likely to point out that the United States and its allies are already spending far more on their military forces than Russia is spending. Moreover, America certainly intends to rapidly increase the size of this spending advantage, because the large new American nuclear modernization program is only part of a yet-larger long term spending buildup.

After all, have not President Trump and Sen. John McCain proposed huge increases to President Obama's defense budget to rebuild what Messrs. Trump and McCain claim is a "depleted" military (see [link 1](#) and [link 2](#) respectively)? Advocates of increased Russian defense budgets might also ask, are not Messrs. Trump and McCain declaring an emergency by calling on Congress to exempt defense spending from the spending restrictions imposed by the [Budget Control Act of 2011](#)?

Indeed, Russian politicians, echoing Mr. Reagan in 1981, might construct a graphic using the [West's own numbers](#) to prove their points, beginning perhaps with something like this:



A Russian defense advocate using the Janes' metric in Chart 2 could argue that (1) Russia is now spending slightly less than Saudi Arabia, less than India, and less than the UK; (2) the size of Russia's budget is only a quarter of China's; and (3) the size of Russia's defense budget is an astonishing one-twelfth of that of the United States!

Add to the U.S. defense budget the contributions of its allies and close friends and the spending balance in favor the U.S. and its allies to that of Russia alone becomes an astounding 21 to 1! Even if Russia could trust China to be a reliable ally – which it can't – the current spending imbalance is over four to one in favor of the U.S. and its allies on the one hand and Russia and China on the other.

Advocates of increased Russian defense spending might even argue their comparison does not suffer from the gross distortions created by Reagan's earlier chart because (1) the Ruble was not convertible into dollars in 1982 (whereas it is today), and Reagan's comparison severely overstated Soviet spending levels using an artificial exchange rate; and (2) the dollar numbers in their Chart 2 comparison start from zero, unlike the deliberately truncated dollar scale (100 to 275) Reagan used in Chart 1 to exaggerate his point.

Budget Asymmetries

Of course, from a Russian leader's point of view, the strategic threat goes well beyond the madness implied by the asymmetries in defense budgets. They might see the Trumpian expansion of both nuclear offense and missile defense as evidence the U.S. is planning to dominate Russia by preparing to fight and win a nuclear war – a radical shift from America's 50+ years of building nuclear forces only for deterrence (often referred to as Mutually Assured Destruction or MAD). Faced with such a threat, militarist factions inside Russia are likely to insist on a

rational application of the precautionary principle by the Russian nation.

That principle will dictate a response, presumably a massive Russian nuclear arms race with the United States. The obvious fact that the politically engineered U.S. nuclear program cannot be reined in or terminated by politicians in the U.S. is almost certainly understood by the Russians. But that appreciation would serve merely to magnify the sense of *menace* perceived by patriotic Russian leaders.

Bear in mind, the Russians are unlikely to view the emerging nuclear menace in isolation. For one thing, there is the toxic question of NATO's expansion and the mistrust it created. The vast majority of Russians, including former President Gorbachev, President Putin, and Prime Minister Medvedev, believe strongly that the U.S. and the West violated their verbal promises not to expand NATO eastward in return for the Soviet Union's acquiescence to the unification of Germany as a member of NATO.

Many leaders of the West have either denied any promises were made or downplayed the import of any such understandings. But reporters from the German weekly Der Spiegel discovered documents in Western archives that supported the Russian point of view, and on Nov. 26, 2009, published an investigative report concluding:

"After speaking with many of those involved and examining previously classified British and German documents in detail, SPIEGEL has concluded that there was no doubt that the West did everything it could to give the Soviets the impression that NATO membership was out of the question for countries like Poland, Hungary or Czechoslovakia."

One thing is beyond dispute: The impression or understanding or promise not to expand NATO was broken by President Bill Clinton – *largely for domestic political reasons* – making a mockery of President Gorbachev's hopeful vision of a greater European home.

Clinton announced support for NATO expansion in October of 1996, just before the November election, to garner conservative and hawk votes, the votes of Americans of Eastern European descent, and in response to an intense NATO expansion lobbying campaign mounted by the MICC – and to steal the issue from his conservative opponent Senator Robert Dole.

The expansion of NATO eastwards combined with President Bush's unilateral withdrawal from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty in June 2002, followed by the deployment of ABM systems to Eastern Europe certainly increased the Russians' sense of *mistrust* and *menace* regarding U.S. intentions. To this day, Putin's

speeches repeatedly refer to the broken American promises.

There is more to an appreciation of the Russian point of view. In parallel with the NATO expansion, the European Union (E.U.) expanded eastward, precipitously like an expanding cancer, beginning in 1995 and continuing to 2013. The E.U.'s exclusion of Russia from the "greater European home" further fueled an atmosphere of mistrust and menace.

A Russian Perspective

From a Russian perspective, the NATO and E.U. expansions worked to deliberately isolate and impoverish Russia – and the potential (though to date frustrated) expansion by the West into Ukraine and Georgia intensified the sense that Russia had been hoodwinked by the West.

The perception of a deliberate U.S. and E.U. campaign to cripple Russia has a history dating back to the end of the First Cold War in 1991: Russian leaders, for example, are unlikely to forget how, during the Clinton Administration, U.S. NGOs combined with American pressure, supported the extraordinarily corrupt privatization of the former Soviet state enterprises in the 1990s (aka "Shock Therapy").

In the words of the Nobel Prize winning economist, Joseph Stiglitz (June 16, 2000): "In the early 1990s, there was a debate among economists over shock therapy versus a gradualist strategy for Russia. But Larry Summers [Under Secretary of the Treasury for International Affairs, then Deputy Secretary of the Treasury, now Secretary] took control of the economic policy, and there was a lot of discontent with the way he was driving the policy.

"The people in Russia who believed in shock therapy were Bolsheviks—a few people at the top that rammed it down everybody's throat. They viewed the democratic process as a real impediment to reform. The grand larceny that occurred in Russia, the corruption that resulted in nine or ten people getting enormous wealth through loans-for-shares, was condoned because it allowed the reelection of Yeltsin."

And in a touch of irony, given the current hysteria over President Putin's alleged meddling in the U.S. presidential election, it gets worse. Russian leaders are also unlikely to forget American intervention on behalf of Boris Yeltsin in the Russian elections of 1996, including using American control of the International Monetary Fund to float a \$10.2 billion loan in March to 1996 to help the corrupt and malleable Boris Yeltsin to win the election in June.

So, from a Russian perspective, the recent increasingly severe U.S. sanctions are not only hypocritical, they certainly reinforce the view that the U.S.-led

campaign to cripple the Russian economy is ongoing and perhaps endless.

Moreover, the rapid, opportunistic expansion of NATO and the E.U. created a kaleidoscope of internal frictions. Now both institutions are in trouble, riven by contradictions and disharmonies. Great Britain is leaving the E.U. but will remain in NATO. Northern Europe and the E.U. bankers are imposing draconian austerity measures on Southern Europe, particularly Greece. Turkey, long a key NATO ally, is turning to Russia while being rejected by the E.U.

The destruction of Libya, Iraq and Syria, under U.S. leadership with European participation, has created an unprecedented flood of refugees into the E.U., deeply threatening the E.U.'s organizing principle of open borders. The increasing tide of European instability and chaos, accompanied by the looming specter of growing Fascist movements from Spain to Ukraine, inevitably add to the traditional Russian sense of being endangered and encircled.

That sense of endangerment is certainly heightened by a recent creepy piece of nuttiness coming out of Poland, perhaps the most Russophobic member of the E.U. and NATO. The German daily DW says Jaroslaw Kaczynski, a very conservative former prime minister of Poland, chairman of the ruling nationalist-conservative Law and Justice party (PiS), has called for a massive E.U. nuclear force – trading on Polish fears that the United States will not sacrifice Chicago to save Warsaw. That France and Britain already have nuclear weapons and are members of NATO is, of course, left unsaid in Kaczynski's demagoguery.

Russian leaders cannot ignore the fact that Kaczynski called for a nuclear E.U. shortly after the U.S. 3rd Armored Brigade Combat Team of the 4th Infantry Division (3,500 troops and 2,500 vehicles) deployed to Poland. Even worse, the commanding officer promptly declared the brigade is “ready to fight,” though it is intended to “deter” any threat to Poland. One brigade is a trip wire ... or a kind of blank check that might be exploited for nutty reasons to trigger a shooting war – and as Kaczynski just demonstrated, nuttiness is afoot in that part of the world.

Past Aggressions

Now, if you were a Russian; and (1) you remembered the West's destruction to your homeland beginning in 1812, 1914, and 1941 together with the recent string of broken promises, economic exclusion, and destructive meddling in Russian internal affairs that made a mockery of the ideal of a post-Cold War common European home; and ...

(2) you faced a country that excluded you from Europe, suborned your election and is intent on crippling your economy, a country already outspending you on

defense by a factor of twelve to one while expressing an intent to increase that lopsided ratio in a major way; and ...

(3) that country has already started a nuclear arms race with a hugely expensive across-the-board modernization program to buy atomic weapons some of which can be justified only in terms of fighting and winning nuclear wars;

What would you do? To ask such a question is to answer it. For patriotic Americans interested in increasing their real national security (rather than their national security *budget*), the nuclear issue boils down to a question of understanding the powerful impact of America's spending decisions and actions on patriotic Russians. In other words, it is a question of reasoned empathy and pragmatic self-interest.

Yet the mainstream media and the politicians of both parties in thrall to our MICC are working day and night to pump up anti-Russian hysteria and hype fear to ensure Americans remain completely oblivious to the powerful, dangerous impact of our senseless Obama-Trump nuclear spend-up on the Russians – or on anyone else, for that matter.

Chuck Spinney and Pierre Sprey, between them, have over 75 years of Pentagon and industry experience in engineering weapons as well as in analyzing military systems effectiveness and defense budgets. Sprey was one of the early whiz kids in the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) in the 1960s. He led the Air Force's concept design team for the legendary A-10 attack aircraft and, together with colonels Boyd and Riccioni, fathered the enormously successful F-16 fighter. Working in OSD in the 1980s, Spinney's critical analyses of the Pentagon's defective planning and budgeting landed him on the March 1983 cover of Time. Leaving the Pentagon in 2003, he did an in-depth interview on the military-industrial-congressional complex with Bill Moyers which resulted in a special Emmy Award winning edition of Bill Moyers' *Now* that aired on 1 August 2003. Sprey and Spinney have testified before Congress on many occasions and were founding members of the Military Reform Movement led by their close colleague, the renowned American fighter pilot and strategist, Colonel John Boyd. [This story previously appeared at

chuckspinney.blogspot.com/2017/02/sleepwalking-into-nuclear-arms-race.html
