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Russia prepares nuclear surprise for NATO

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On September 1, 2014 the US State Department published a report, in which it was stated that for first time since the collapse of the USSR, Russia reached parity with the US in the field of strategic nuclear weapons. Thus, Washington admitted that Moscow regained the status that the Soviet Union had obtained by mid-70's of the XX century and then lost.

According to the report from the State Department, Russia has 528 carriers of strategic nuclear weapons that carry 1,643 warheads. The United States has 794 vehicles and 1,652 nuclear warheads.

It just so happens that today, Russia's strategic nuclear forces (SNF) are even more advanced in comparison with those of the US, as they ensure parity on warheads with a significantly smaller number of carriers of strategic nuclear weapons. This gap between Russia and the United States may only grow in the future, given the fact that Russian defense officials promised to rearm Russia's SNF with new generation missiles.

The progress was made possible thanks to the treaty on the limitation of nuclear weapons, also known as START-3. The treaty was signed by Dmitry Medvedev and Barack Obama on 8 April 2010 in Prague (came into force on 5 February 2011). In accordance with the document, nuclear warheads of the parties are to be reduced to 1,550 by 2021. The number of carriers (intercontinental ballistic missiles, submarine-launched ballistic missiles and heavy bombers) is supposed to be cut to 700 units.

It was the first strategic agreement, after the treacherous policy of democrats, in which Russia managed to win significant advantages. In the treaty, the Americans, for the first time in history, undertook to reduce their strategic nuclear potential, while Russia won an opportunity to increase it. Furthermore, the new treaty removed important limitations that existed in the previous START 1 and START 2 treaties. It goes about the size of areas for the deployment of mobile ICBMs, the number of multi charge ICBMs, and the possibility to build railway-based ICBMs. Russia did not make any concessions.

Having written off Moscow as a serious geopolitical rival, flying on the wings of inaccessible military and technological superiority, Washington drove itself into a trap, from which it does not see a way out even in a medium-term perspective.

Recently, a lot has been said about so-called "sixth-generation wars" and high-precision long-range weapons that should ensure victory over enemy without coming into direct contact with its armed forces. This concept is highly questionable (The US failed to achieve victory in such a way both in Iraq and Afghanistan). Yet, this is the point, where Russia enters the parity line as well. The proof is long-range cruise missiles of a new generation that will soon be deployed on submarines of the Black Sea Fleet and missile ships of the Caspian Flotilla.

In today's Russia, many find this hard to believe. This is a common belief for many of those, who still enthusiastically remain in captivity of the myths about the absolute "weakness" of Russia and the absolute "superiority" of the West. The myth was made up in the 90's under the influence

of Boris Yeltsin and his betrayal of Russian national interests. One has to admit that during that time, the myth was real, if one may say so.

Times have changed. One can easily understand the new state of affairs.

For example, let's consider the potential of conventional weapons of Russia and the West in the European Theater of Operations (ETO). In this area, it is generally believed that NATO is a lot stronger than Russia. Yet, a first encounter with reality smashes this misbelief into pieces.

As is known, the main striking force, the core of combat power of the ground forces are tanks. By the time of the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Russian Armed Forces had about 20,000 tanks in the ETO.

The Americans, in turn, deployed 6,000 heavy Abrams tanks on the territory of the allied group. Despite this, the combined potential of NATO forces in Europe was still significantly inferior to the Soviet potential. To compensate this imbalance, NATO strategists were forced to resort to tactical nuclear weapons (TNW).

In the first half of the 1950s, NATO conducted a research about what kind of forces the bloc should have to show reliable resistance to large-scale ground offensive of superior forces of the Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact countries. The calculations showed then that one required at least 96 full-fledged divisions for the purpose. Yet, the cost of armament for one of such divisions exceeded \$1 billion. Plus, one required two or three more billion to maintain such a large group of troops and build appropriate infrastructure. This burden was clearly beyond the power of the economy of the West.

The solution was found in a move to deploy a group of US tactical nuclear weapons on the continent, and that was done soon. By early 1970s, the US arsenal of tactical nuclear weapons counted about 7,000 units of ammunition. The highest achievement in the area was the creation of weapons of selective action - neutron warheads (for guns of 203-mm and 155-mm caliber, and for Lance missiles) with a capacity from 1 to 10 kilotons. The warheads were seen as the key in combating land forces personnel, particularly Soviet tank crews.

Given the nuclear factor, to reflect "Soviet aggression," NATO required to deploy only 30, rather than 96 divisions, and so they were deployed.

How do things work in this area now? In early 2013, the Americans withdrew the last group of heavy Abrams tanks from Europe. In NATO countries, over the last 20 years, one new tank

would replace 10-15 old, yet still capable, tanks. At the same time, Russia was not decommissioning its tanks.

As a result, today Russia is the absolute leader in this regard. In mid-2014, the balance of the Defense Ministry had as many as 18,177 tanks (T-90 - 400 pcs., T-72B - 7,144 pcs., T-80 - 4,744 pcs, T-64 - 4,000 pcs, T-62 - 689 pcs, and T-55 - 1200 pcs.).

Of course, only a few thousand tanks are deployed in permanent readiness units, and most of them remain at storage bases. Yet, NATO has the same picture. Therefore, the decisive superiority of Russian tanks has not gone anywhere since the times of the USSR.

Here is another surprise. As for tactical nuclear weapons, the superiority of modern-day Russia over NATO is even stronger.

The Americans are well aware of this. They were convinced before that Russia would never rise again. Now it's too late.

To date, NATO countries have only 260 tactical nuclear weapons in the ETO. The United States has 200 bombs with a total capacity of 18 megatons. They are located on six air bases in Germany, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands and Turkey. France has 60 more atomic bombs. That is pretty much it. Russia, according to conservative estimates, has 5,000 pieces of different classes of TNW - from Iskander warheads to torpedo, aerial and artillery warheads! The US has 300 tactical B-61 bombs on its own territory, but this does not change the situation against the backdrop of such imbalance. The US is unable to improve it either, as it has destroyed the "Cold War legacy" - tactical nuclear missiles, land-based missiles and nuclear warheads of sea-based Tomahawk cruise missiles.