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*Professor Sergey Karaganov's "Tough-but-necessary decision" [article](#) – which claims that by using its nuclear weapons, Russia could save humanity from a global catastrophe – has provoked plenty of reaction both at home and abroad. Partly because of the author's status – he has been an advisor to both President Boris Yeltsin and President Vladimir Putin – and also due to the belief that his opinion may possibly be shared by some people in positions of power.*

*Dmitry Trenin, an extremely respected Russian expert who served in the Soviet military gives his response.*

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Professor Sergey Karaganov's recent article brought into public focus the thorny issue of the use of nuclear weapons in the Ukraine conflict. Many reactions to the piece boil down to the well-known reasoning that there can be no winners in a nuclear war and thus it cannot be fought.

Against this background, President Vladimir Putin, responding to a question at the St Petersburg International Economic Forum, said that nuclear weapons are a deterrent and the conditions for their use is defined in a published doctrine. He explained that the theoretical possibility of using these weapons exists, but there is no need to use them now.

In principle, nuclear weapons have been "on the table" for Russia from the very beginning of the Ukrainian conflict precisely as a means of deterring the US and its allies from becoming directly involved. Nevertheless, repeated public reminders from Putin and other officials about Russia's nuclear status have so far not prevented a growing escalation of NATO's participation. As a result, it has become clear that nuclear deterrence, on which many in Moscow have relied as a credible means of securing the country's vital interests, has proven to be a much more limited tool than they expected.

In fact, the US has now set itself the task – unthinkable during the Cold War – of trying to defeat another nuclear superpower in a strategically important region, without resorting to atomic weapons, but instead by arming and controlling a third country. The Americans are proceeding cautiously, testing Moscow's responses and consistently pushing the boundaries of what is possible in terms of arms supplied to Kiev, as well as the choice of targets for them. From starting with anti-tank 'Javelins,' to eventually cajoling allies to send actual tanks, the US is now apparently pondering transferring F-16 fighter jets and long-range missiles.

It is likely that this US strategy is based on the belief that the Russian leadership would not dare use nuclear weapons in the current conflict, and that its references to the nuclear arsenal at its disposal are nothing more than a bluff. The Americans have even been calm – at least outwardly about the deployment of Russian non-strategic nuclear weapons in Belarus. Such "fearlessness" is a direct result of the geopolitical changes of the last three decades and the change of generations in power in the US and the West in general.

The fear of the atomic bomb, present in the second half of the twentieth century, has disappeared. Nuclear weapons have been taken out of the equation. The practical conclusion is clear: there is no need to be afraid of such a Russian response.

This is an extremely dangerous misconception. The trajectory of the Ukrainian war points to an escalation of the conflict both horizontally (by expanding the theater of military action) and vertically (by increasing the power of the weapons used and the intensity of their use). It must be soberly acknowledged that this momentum is heading towards a direct armed confrontation between Russia and NATO. If the accumulated inertia is not stopped, such a clash will take place, and in this case the war, having spread to Western Europe, will almost inevitably become nuclear. And after some time, a nuclear war in Europe will most likely lead to an exchange of blows between Russia and the US.

The Americans and their allies are truly playing Russian roulette. Yes, so far the Russian response to the bombing of Nord Stream, the drone attack on the strategic Engels airbase, the entry of Western-armed saboteurs into the Belgorod region and many other actions by the Washington-backed and controlled side has been relatively restrained.

As Putin recently made clear, there are good reasons for this restraint. Russia, the president said, is capable of destroying any building in Kiev, but will not stoop to the methods of terror used by the enemy. But Putin added that Russia was considering various options for destroying Western warplanes if they are based in NATO countries and directly take part in the war in Ukraine.

So far, Moscow's strategy has been to allow the enemy to take the escalatory initiative. The West has taken advantage of this, trying to wear down Russia on the battlefield and undermine it from within. It makes no sense for the Kremlin to go along with this plan. On the contrary, it's a better idea to clarify and modernize our nuclear deterrence strategy, taking into account the practical experience of the Ukrainian conflict. The existing doctrinal provisions were formulated not only before the start of the current military operation, but also apparently without a precise idea of what might happen in the course of such a situation.

Russia's external strategy includes a basket of foreign diplomacy, information campaigns and other aspects – in addition to the military elements. The main adversary should be given an unambiguous signal that Moscow will not play by the rules set by the other side. Of course, this should be accompanied by a credible dialogue with both our strategic partners and neutral states, explaining the motives and objectives of our actions. The possibility of using nuclear weapons in the current conflict must not be concealed. This real, not just theoretical, prospect should be an incentive to limit and stop the escalation of the war and ultimately pave the way for a satisfactory strategic balance in Europe.

Regarding Russian nuclear strikes against NATO countries, as raised by Professor Karaganov: Hypothetically speaking, Washington would most likely not respond to such an attack with a nuclear response of its own against Russia – for fear of a Russian retaliatory launch against the US itself. This would dispel the mythology that has surrounded Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty for decades and lead to a profound crisis for NATO – possibly even the dissolution of the organization. It is possible that, in such circumstances, the Atlantic elites of NATO and the EU would panic and be swept aside by patriotic forces that would see for themselves that their security does not in fact depend on a non-existent US nuclear umbrella, but on building a balanced relationship with Russia. It is also possible that the Americans could decide to leave Russia alone.

It could well be that the calculation just described would ultimately be correct. But it is unlikely.

Yes, a US nuclear strike on Russia would probably not follow immediately. It is unlikely that the Americans would sacrifice Boston for Poznan, just as they were not going to sacrifice Chicago for Hamburg during the Cold War. But there will probably be some sort of response from Washington. Perhaps of the non-atomic type, which, without speculating too wildly, could be sensitive and painful for us. It is likely that with it, Washington would try to pursue a goal similar to ours: paralyzing the Russian leadership's will to continue the war and creating panic in our society.

Moscow's leadership is unlikely to capitulate after such a blow, since, at this stage, Russia's very existence would be at stake. It is more likely that a retaliatory strike would follow, and this time, one can assume, against the main adversary rather than its satellites.

Let us pause before this point of no return and summarize our analysis tentatively.

Should the nuclear bullet be demonstrably inserted into the cylinder of the revolver that the US leadership is recklessly playing with today? To paraphrase a late American statesman: Why do we need nuclear weapons if we refuse to use them in the face of an existential threat?

On the other hand, there is no need to scare others with words. Instead, we have to prepare practically for any possible turn of events by carefully considering the options and their consequences.

The war in Ukraine has become protracted. As far as we can tell from the actions of the Russian leadership, it expects to achieve strategic success by relying on Russian resources, which are many times greater than those in Ukraine. It also relies on the fact that Moscow has much more at stake in this war than the West. This calculation is probably correct, but it should be taken into account that the opponent assesses Russia's chances differently than we do and may take steps which could lead to a direct armed clash between Russia and the US/NATO.

We must be prepared for such a development. To avoid a general catastrophe, it is necessary to put fear of armageddon back into politics and the public consciousness.

In the nuclear age, it is the only guarantee of preserving humanity.

Fuente:

[https://russiancouncil.ru/en/analytics-and-comments/comments/the-us-and-its-allies-are-playing-russian-roulette-you-d-almost-think-they-want-a-nuclear-war/?bx\\_sender\\_conversion\\_id=9237322](https://russiancouncil.ru/en/analytics-and-comments/comments/the-us-and-its-allies-are-playing-russian-roulette-you-d-almost-think-they-want-a-nuclear-war/?bx_sender_conversion_id=9237322)