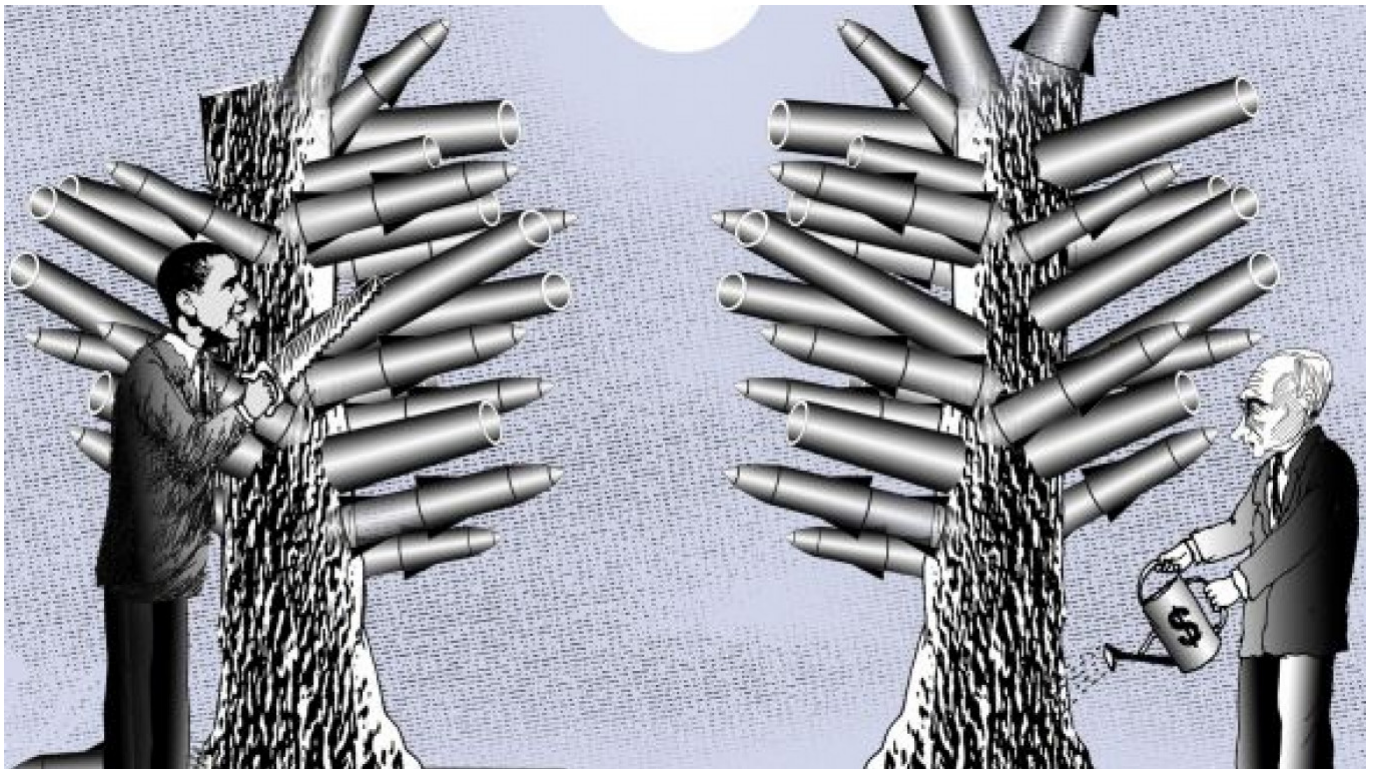


A U.S. Defense Strategy for Russia to Emulate

By [Alexander Golts](#)

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U.S. President Barack Obama caused considerable damage to the Kremlin during a visit to the Pentagon last week when he announced a decisive reduction in the military ambitions of the United States. This was a serious blow to Russia's propagandistic stereotype that Washington is still determined to dominate the world, with Russia being at the top of the U.S. list of targets.

The U.S. administration really is facing a serious challenge. It must cut the military budget by \$489 billion, or 8 percent per year over the next 10 years. Obama has met a dozen times with his generals over the past six months to find ways to meet defense and security demands within the reduced financial capacity. The result of that effort is the Defense Strategy Guidance.

Since the review was published in an election year, there are countless disclaimers assuring that any decrease in military spending will in no way limit the ability of the United States to win any war anywhere in the world. Of course, that will allow Kremlin propagandists

to interpret such phrasing as showing the "aggressive nature" of the new U.S. military doctrine. Kremlin spin doctors will surely latch onto the document's references to developing missile defense as clear evidence that Washington wants to undermine Moscow's nuclear deterrence capabilities.

The most important aspect of the new U.S. strategy is its clear rejection of the approach taken by the administration of former U.S. President George W. Bush to export democracy by all means, including at gunpoint, if necessary.

Meanwhile, Moscow is trying to establish its right to intervene in potential internal conflicts in Central Asian states. But in this case, Russia has no other choice. Once the United States and its allies withdraw from Afghanistan, Russia will have to counter the Taliban largely on its own.

But rather than support a continued U.S. military presence in the region, Moscow is doing everything it can to promote its departure. At the Collective Security Treaty Organization summit in December, it was decided that there must be full consensus among all CSTO members before permitting a military base from an outside government on any member's territory. This measure will help give Russia de facto veto power to prevent the United States from establishing bases in Central Asia. But this stubbornness is bound to backfire against the Kremlin. Russia will have difficulty averting a Taliban expansion into Central Asia, which is likely once the Americans leave Afghanistan.

The second major provision of the new U.S. military strategy is the focus on Eastern Asia and the Middle East — in particular, China, North Korea and Iran. The newer members of NATO, such as Poland and the Baltic states, will not be pleased with the new strategy. They have always lobbied the notion that they are the West's first line of defense against an aggressive and unpredictable Russia, but Washington has effectively confirmed once again in its military doctrine that there is no real threat coming from Russia.

In fact, the document's single sentence concerning Russia reads, "Our engagement with Russia remains important, and we will continue to build a closer relationship in areas of mutual interest and encourage it to be a contributor across a broad range of issues."

Russia's relies on exaggerated, unrealistic security goals to maintain the illusion of being a superpower. Meanwhile, this approach impedes Russia's ability to pursue a more rational military policy. The problem is not only with the enormous resources Moscow wastes perpetuating the myth that Washington's missile defense plans pose a threat to Russia, but also the way it pretends that this country can maintain a million-man army. Even now, no more than 800,000 military personnel are in active service, and that number will decrease further over decades as the number of draft-eligible men in the age range of 18 to 27 is expected to decline.

Obama's defense review underscores how far Russia is off the mark in terms of meeting 21st-century security challenges. The U.S. strategy begins with the constraints of military funding and determines priorities and principles to meet modern-day threats. By contrast, Russian military reviews have no connection whatsoever to reality.

The reason behind Russia's military reforms is exactly the same as in the United States — a lack of resources. But at the same time, Russian military and political leaders insist that the country can only be considered a superpower if it has a million-man army and a huge nuclear arsenal. In addition, Russia's military doctrine from February 2010 placed NATO expansion as its top "military danger."

The Obama administration has offered a sound, concrete and rational strategy to make the U.S. military leaner and more effective to meet 21st-century dangers and threats. While the United States is moving forward in reorienting and restructuring its military strategy, Russia is showing once again how far it is moving backward by focusing so much of its strategy on maintaining strong nuclear forces and a million-man army to protect against a mythical U.S. and NATO enemy.

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