



Russian President delivers strategic reality shock

By Rachel Douglas

A US and NATO strategic posture that casts Russia and China as adversaries to be constantly confronted, “contained”, and cut down to minor-power status was exposed as lunacy, by the Message to the Federal Assembly delivered by Russian President Vladimir Putin on 1 March. One-third of the two-hour speech was a description of new strategic weapons systems, under development or already deployed with the Russian Armed Forces, which Putin illustrated with video graphics. Included were hypersonic delivery systems for nuclear warheads, and weapons based on “new physical principles”, such as laser weapons.

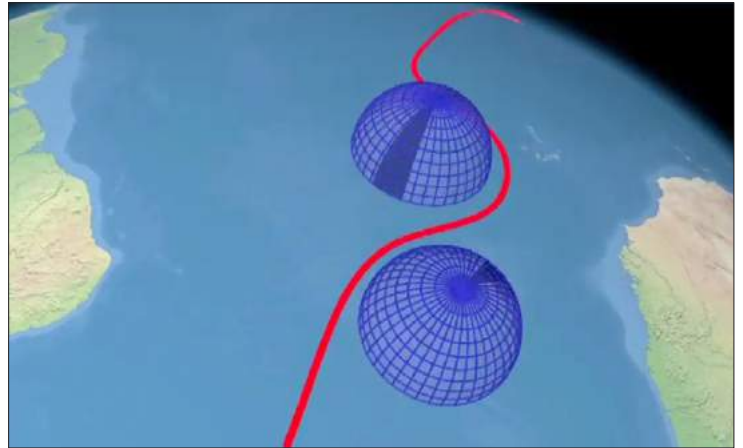
The package Putin laid out is the asymmetrical response, long promised by himself and by high-ranking Russian military officers, to the US-NATO attempt to enforce a one-empire world by negating the military capabilities of Russia and China. It is “asymmetrical”, in not trying to match dollar-for-dollar or weapon-for-weapon, but rather using technological innovation for unconventional solutions. In particular, the new military technologies Putin presented are designed to counter the US global Ballistic Missile Defence System (BMDS).

The CEC’s *New Citizen* issue of June/July 2012 documented that the BMDS is not purely a defensive system, but is understood by Russian strategists as a threat to their own strategic deterrent—to their ability to prevent a nuclear-weapons attack on Russia by having the means to retaliate against the attacker—and thus as part of an offensive, attack capability. The BMDS could potentially shoot down Russian retaliatory missiles soon after launch. A printable version of that detailed *New Citizen* feature is available at http://cecaust.com.au/pubs/pdfs/Global_Show_Down.pdf.

Putin traced the new weapons programs to 2002, when the George W. Bush-Dick Cheney Administration withdrew the United States from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty of 1972, clearing the way to proceed with the BMDS. Recalling Russia’s unsuccessful attempts in the 2000s to renew a constructive dialogue, and even launch joint work on missile defence (as US President Ronald Reagan had proposed two decades earlier with his Strategic Defence Initiative, rejected by the Soviet Union), Putin recalled: “We stated then, that to ensure our own security, we would be forced to perfect modern strike systems.”

He then described five new weapons systems, designed to overcome any missile defences:

- the “Sarmat” heavy intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM), successor to the Soviet-era Voyevoda (NATO designation SS-18 “Satan”), which was the largest ICBM ever built;
- a nuclear-powered cruise missile, tested at the end of last year, with a “virtually unlimited” flight range, and manoeuvrability to avoid anti-missile systems;
- nuclear-powered underwater drones, capable of speeds faster than any existing submarine’s;
- the hypersonic air-launched cruise missile “Kinzhal” (“Dagger”), capable of speeds greater than Mach 5 (five times the speed of sound) with extensive manoeuvrability;
- the hypersonic glide vehicle “Avangard”, initially designed as a manoeuvrable warhead for the Sarmat and able to travel at Mach 20.



This graphic, shown by President Putin, depicts a nuclear-powered cruise missile evading sea-based Ballistic Missile Defence systems. Source: kremlin.ru

Whence the threat of war?

Reactions to Putin’s Message ran the gamut from irresponsible speculation, to strategic miscalculation. “Mr Putin could be bluffing”, pronounced the US Establishment newspaper of record, the *New York Times*. Others chalked up the speech to Putin’s current re-election campaign (the Presidential election takes place 18 March), or called it a sign of Russian bellicosity, or of weakness.

The danger of nuclear war is heightened by that kind of failure to recognise what Putin is saying. The danger of war comes not merely from particular clashes, whether in Syria or the South China Sea, but from the attempt to deny Russia or China the status of great and sovereign nations—even in the face of the reality that China, especially, is leading the way into a new paradigm of economic development and mutually beneficial cooperation. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, this was called the Wolfowitz Doctrine, for Bush-Cheney ally Paul Wolfowitz: that no country should ever again achieve as much power as the USSR. Putin, talking about the US withdrawal from the ABM Treaty and refusal to engage in strategic cooperation in the 2000s, summarised it: “Evidently our partners became stubbornly convinced, that a rebirth of our country’s economy, industry, military-industrial complex, and Armed Forces to a level providing us with the strategic potential we need, was impossible in the foreseeable historical future. And thus there was no reason to pay attention to Russia’s opinion; rather, they should forge ahead and seek final unilateral military superiority, then dictate their policies in all other areas.”

Igor Ivanov, Russia’s Minister of Foreign Affairs at the time of US termination of the ABM Treaty, urged 6 March against any “hasty and pessimistic conclusion” that East-West cooperation is now excluded. “Russia is offering an olive branch, not nuclear war”, he titled his column in the *Moscow Times*. Some level-headed experts in the West agree, including Mary Dejevsky, who wrote in the *London Independent* 1 March, “Putin’s speech wasn’t aggressive—it was a plea to the US to start talking again”, and former CIA analyst Ray McGovern of Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity, who on 3 March issued a statement titled “Putin wants arms control; we should agree to talk”.