

Non multa, sed multum

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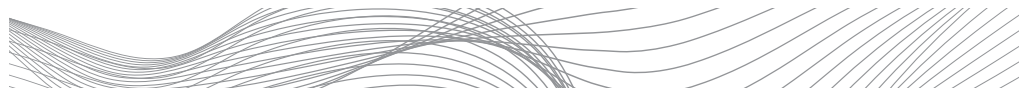
Global Edition

Edward Kendall

A Fortochka In Increasingly Heated Russian-American Relations



MOSCOW, 2022



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At a time of increasing tension, decreasing trust, and rising misunderstanding between the U.S. and Russia, which are continually setting record low marks in bilateral relations, both have alarmingly begun sleep walking with their eyes wide open towards a conflict which at best will result in conventional war between major powers, the likes of which have not been seen for the last 75 years, and at worst will end in global nuclear Armageddon. This research paper analyzes the problems of Russian-American relations in the area of strategic stability and explores ways of establishing an effective dialogue between two countries.

This occasional paper was produced within *The Evstafiev Series* (see page 15).

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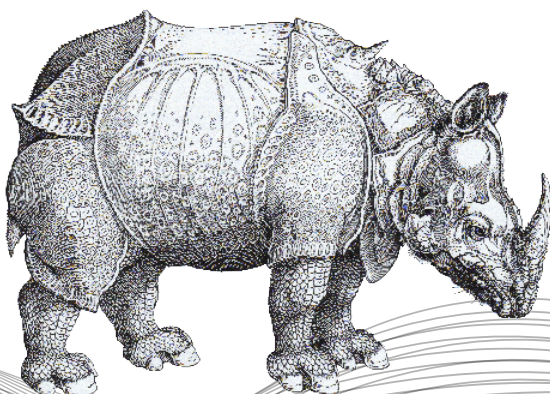
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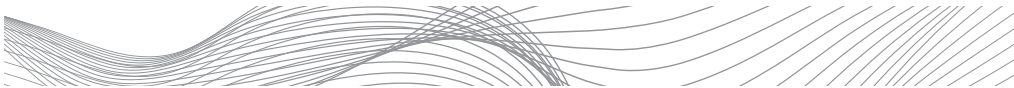
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Highlights

- The current U.S. policy of continuing blindly on the present vector of confrontation considering only inwards looking U.S. interests and Russophobic perceptions is a fundamental failure in statecraft suitable for domestic consumption, but wholly incompatible with productive relations between sovereign states.
- The effectiveness of this shift in U.S. strategic culture towards increasing understanding and respect for Russian positions, which may significantly differ from their own, will largely determine whether Russian-American dialogue will be feasible and fruitful in the important area of strategic stability.
- Four prominent areas have largely shaped the Russian threat perception and security doctrine: unilateral military actions taken by the U.S. and its allies perceived as outside the body of international law, expansion of NATO, the decay of the arms control architecture that set the rules of the road for permissible confrontation between nuclear armed powers, and the rise of conventional weaponry with strategic effects.
- The U.S. and Russia should engage in targeted exchanges that enhance the ability of decision makers to understand that negotiations are less about facts, and more about the perceptions of those at the negotiating table.
- Russia and the U.S. have much to gain from cooperation and shockingly little to gain from the current vector of confrontation.



A *fortochka*¹ in increasingly heated Russian-American relations

Introduction: The Current State of Play

Edward Kendall

The importance of understanding the Russian perspective cannot be understated during the rising tension. The current U.S. policy of continuing blindly on the present vector of confrontation considering only inwards looking U.S. interests and Russophobic perceptions of Russian intentions² is a fundamental failure in statecraft suitable for domestic consumption, but wholly incompatible with productive relations between sovereign states. This policy vector, born from the unipolar moment in international relations which largely shaped U.S. positions since the 1990s, has left U.S. diplomats too accustomed to the practice of dictating their will and dangerously inexperienced in the actual art of diplomacy, or the fine balancing of interests between sovereign powers. As this era of unipolarity gives way to a more diverse multipolar world, the U.S. dictation from above will likewise need to give way to a new form of U.S. foreign relations that considers Russian perspectives on key security issues. Whether diplomatic dialogues with the U.S. will be feasible will increasingly hinge not only on the ability of U.S. diplomats to define their own interests, but additionally on whether the U.S. can understand the threat perception and legitimate security interests of other sovereign powers such as Russia.

The effectiveness of this shift in U.S. strategic culture towards increasing understanding and respect for Russian positions, which may significantly differ from their own, will largely determine whether Russian-American dialogue will be feasible and fruitful in the important area of strategic stability.

In the following paper, we will firstly, describe the events informing modern Russian threat perception as they relate to the topic of strategic stability. Secondly, we will analyze whether in this threat environment, the security interests of the Russian Federation can be achieved by dialogue with the United States. In this section we will argue that, while Russian-American relations are fraught with tension that increasingly make decoupling issues of shared security interest from broader confrontation increasingly difficult, the issue of strategic stability is so grave and consequences of failure so dire, that security engagement while uncomfortable, is unavoidable based on shared self-interest but will depend largely on the ability of the U.S. to understand the Russian threat perception which informs the logic of Russian positions. Lastly, the paper will provide some

¹ Russian: 'форточка', is a small ventilation window; also see: Russia Confidential Issue № 10 (238), vol.15. 2016

² Guillory "Russophobia in America: A Genealogy" by the Wilson Center, provides an insightful primer on Russia in U.S. domestic political relations and how it affects American decision making

recommendations on how to enhance the likelihood of productive dialogues through confidence building measures including security cooperation on a singular issue basis, professional exchanges at the governmental executive and legislative levels, and educational exchanges. While dialogues occur at the highest (e.g., Strategic Stability Dialogues), the products of such a discussion will only be viable in the long-term if an understanding is constructed in the broader societies of both nations that invokes not just facts, but one another's perceptions of those facts. As temperatures have risen to unbearable levels between the Russian Federation and United States, these measures must serve as a *fortochka* to allow fresh air into the negotiating room or else dialogue will surely suffocate.

Shaping the Russian Threat Perception from the 1990's to Present

From the 1990's to present, four prominent areas have largely shaped the Russian threat perception and security doctrine: unilateral military actions taken by the U.S. and its allies perceived as outside the body of international law, expansion of NATO, the decay of the arms control architecture that set the rules of the road for permissible confrontation between nuclear armed powers, and the rise of conventional weaponry with strategic effects.

Unilateral U.S. Military Actions

Nearly 30 years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Russian reflection on the last decades security experience has been clear. As stated by the Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces, "The collapse of the Soviet Union led to a change in the West's collective view on global security. For it, the formation of the unipolar world, the achievement of military superiority and use of military force to advance its own interests became a priority under the new conditions."³ This new state of inequality in the distribution of global power that emerged in the 1990's untethered the U.S. from the existing body of international law and norms as it began to pursue its objectives outside international mandates throughout the following decades.

In 1999, NATO started a unilateral bombing campaign of Serbia without UN Security Council support and even issuing orders to attack Russian peacekeeping forces at Pristina airport in the conflict's aftermath.⁴ In 2003, the U.S. "Coalition of the Willing" invaded Iraq and overthrew the Iraqi government under the pretense of a covert Iraqi WMD program which never materialized and created the power vacuum and instability nexus necessary for extremist groups such as ISIS to arise. In 2014, the U.S. supported anti-government militants in open warfare against the Syrian government further increasing instability in the region resulting in a devastating civil war and humanitarian crisis which continues to this day.⁵

Against the backdrop of these events, instability in international

The effectiveness of this shift in U.S. strategic culture towards increasing understanding and respect for Russian positions will largely determine whether Russian-American dialogue will be feasible and fruitful in the important area of strategic stability

³ Gerasimov V.V. in plenary remarks to the 2021 Moscow Conference on International Security

⁴ Tran M. reporting for *the Guardian* provides an interesting behind the scenes look at the Pristina Incident

⁵ Torreón B and Plagakis S. for the Congressional Research Service provide an overview of U.S. Armed Forces overseas deployments from 1798 - 2021



affairs increased and the legitimate security organs such as the UNSC became sidelined. From a traditional security perspective, the decrease of strong government controls in countries the U.S. intervened in unleashed violent elements of society and flooded power vacuums with arms, creating ripe opportunities for the rise of violent extremism. For non-traditional security, the disruption to daily life created or exacerbated existing migrant outflows which continue to destabilize the domestic political situation in countries throughout the middle east and Europe.

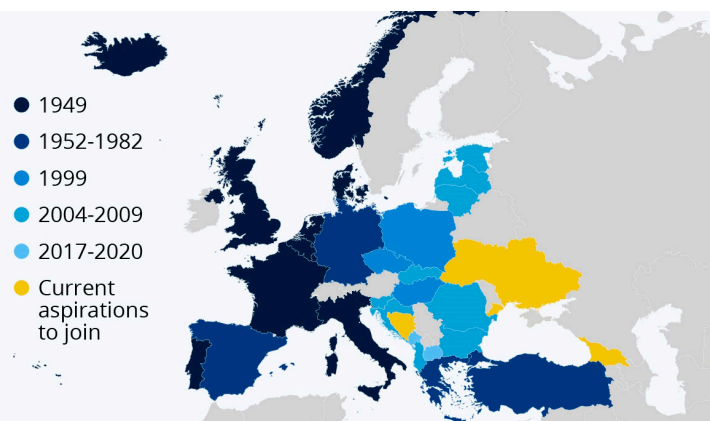
For the Russian Federation, which is geographically closer to regions where those situations unfold, U.S. interventions have made the Russian “near abroad” increasingly unstable.

NATO Expansion

The threat environment Russia must face is not only shaped by distal challenges, but by Russian concerns over the purpose and posturing of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization which is growing increasingly closer to its borders. In the wake of the Cold War the question immediately on the minds of many was what purpose

NATO would serve in the new world, especially as the Warsaw Pact fell apart. As NATO’s Deputy Assistant Secretary General Jamie Shea stated of the era, “like an insurance policy, better to keep it and adapt it, and wait for the new threats and challenges to come along.”⁶ As NATO moves increasingly eastwards decreasing the distance between Russia and NATO, a potential adversary, the chance of conflict has steadily grown as Russian objections have gone unheard. The chance of conflict has grown especially dangerous as NATO has expanded to countries⁷ with strong anti-Russian domestic political sentiments and as the reemergence of “great power competition”

in western strategic discourse⁸ signals the West’s turn in focus away from anti-terrorism operations towards potential inter-state conflict. From the Russian perspective, it has become increasingly clear that NATO is less a regional security organization and increasingly an anti-Russian alliance preparing for a future conflict. This perception is heightened by force deployments within the last decade. Since the 2016 Warsaw Summit decision, NATO has rotated multinational battalions led by the UK, Canada, Germany and the U.S. through Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland.⁹ Ostensibly these forces are meant to provide a deterrent to what the West sees as possible Russian actions against the Baltic states and to a lesser extent, South-East Europe. However, from the Russian perspective the stationing on a rotational basis of multi-national battalions



European countries by year they joined NATO from 1949 to 2020

Source: www.statista.com

⁶ The video lecture by Shea J. Deputy Asst. Secretary General of NATO details in more depth, the internal discussions that occurred within NATO from 1989 to 2003

⁷ NATO currently consists of 30 member countries including former Warsaw states as Poland, Romania and the Czech Republic. In some countries such as the Baltic states, the issue of Russian relations is especially polarizing

⁸ “Great Power Competition” was prominently highlighted in the 2017 U.S. National Security Strategy which even goes so far as to name China and Russia outright as “challengers” and “revisionist states”

⁹ See “Boosting NATO’s presence in the east and southeast” for a more detailed overview of deployed forces

on the Russian border seems suspiciously like theater orientation missions designed to familiarize NATO forces with the battlefield of a future conflict. Even more worrying, the deployment of THAAD and installation of Aegis Ashore first in Romania and now Poland is seen as particularly destabilizing by Russia.¹⁰ These deployments of forces and development of military infrastructure on the doorstep of the Russian Federation is seen with great alarm from Moscow.

Decay of the Arms Control Treaty Architecture

The arms control treaty architecture of the last half of the 20th Century could be described by its own paper, so only a few examples will be provided to highlight how they contributed to strategic stability and how their absence today exacerbates the current conflict between Russia and the United States.

The previous arms control architecture resulted from a recognition that conflicts between nuclear armed powers should be managed to increase global stability and predictability. Bilateral and multilateral treaties decreased suspicion by increasing transparency¹¹, limited arms buildups of weapons and delivery vehicles¹² and maintained MAD by limiting strategic defensive weapons development.¹³ The body of treaties which managed great power conflict decayed throughout the 21st Century, with the U.S. withdrawing from the ABM Treaty in 2002, INF Treaty in 2019, Open Skies Treaty in 2020, near collapse of the only remaining New START treaty in 2021, and historic treaties such as CTBT still awaiting ratification by Annex 2 countries including the U.S. after almost 25 years. The U.S. withdrawal from these treaties has significant and severe consequences for strategic stability. The collapse of the INF treaty means intermediate range missile systems may be placed in Europe once again. The end of Open Skies decreases the situational awareness and increases suspicion of European countries that no longer have direct access to overflight data, even if larger powers like the U.S. and Russia still have access to relevant data through sophisticated space capabilities. Most concerning, the U.S. obsession with ballistic missile defense development ignores the interrelationship between strategic defensive and offensive arms development. The U.S. accuses Russia of aggressive actions for developing new strategic offensive weapons systems, often without recognizing that defensive systems under U.S. development are the root cause for these Russian developments.

For the Russian Federation, the decay of this treaty architecture is a worrying sign that the world is less stable, and the U.S. has played an active role in making it that way. It is a worrying pattern that causes Russia to question whether the U.S. is actively trying to disrupt the strategic balance through the pursuit of clearly destabilizing technologies such as BMD, or simply acting irrationally, as in the case of its refusal to ratify the CTBT. In either case, the outcomes are a serious challenge to Russian security and broader strategic stability.

From the Russian perspective the stationing on a rotational basis of multi-national battalions on the Russian border seems suspiciously like theater orientation missions designed to familiarize NATO forces with the battlefield of a future conflict

¹⁰ An Aegis Ashore Missile Defense System is operational in Deveselu, Romania and a second facility is slated for completion within Poland by the end of 2022

¹¹ See the Open Skies Treaty of 1992 (IOSH)

¹² Numerous treaties covered this topic, the most recent being NEW START of 2010 (CHB-III)

¹³ See the Antiballistic Missile Treaty of 1972 (IIPO)



The ambiguity of these new and emerging weapons combined with uncertain delineations on when their use may rise to the level of triggering a nuclear response is further concerning for strategic stability and heightens the threat perception of Russia

Rise of Conventional Weaponry with Strategic Effects

A final critical area of development shaping the current Russian threat perception is the rise of non-contact warfare with kinetic and non-kinetic precision strike weaponry capable of achieving national strategic objectives.

This trend was described by theoretician Vladimir Slipchenko and former President of the Russian Academy of Military Sciences, General of the Army Makhmut Gareev in their 2007 book “Future War” (Будущая Война) as the future of modern warfare where objectives of national strategic importance would be obtained through the use of high precision long-distance weapons.¹⁴ In their predictions of the means that would be used in future wars, the authors predicted weapons used by belligerents would involve increasing stand-off distances and a shortened decision cycle with decreasing time to target, such as exhibited in current hypersonic weapons development. The author’s termed these developments as the emergence of “non-contact warfare”. In more recent years, this concept of conventional “non-contact warfare” carried out over extreme distances has grown to include not just kinetic means of attack, such as hypersonic weaponry, but increasingly includes non-kinetic attacks such as information-technical and information-psychological operations meant to destabilize and disarm the enemy. The growing acceptance that conventional kinetic and non-kinetic weaponry is ever more potent in achieving strategic national objectives has widely penetrated official circles in Russian leadership, with current Chief of the General Staff Valery Gerasimov even stating “In the future, the accumulated dynamics of the development of high-precision weapons and the ongoing development of hypersonic missiles will make it possible to transfer the bulk of the tasks of strategic deterrence from the nuclear to the non-nuclear sphere.”¹⁵ Russia sees these developments both as a new field to be mastered for their own use, and one used against them and their allies (such as the information-psychological operations Russian leadership sees within the Color Revolutions and Maidans). This has a critical impact on Russian threat perception and actions for strategic stability.

If in the future, information psychological operations could overthrow governments, information technical attacks could cripple a nation’s critical infrastructure, and hypersonic weapons could quickly decapitate a nation’s leadership, the scenarios in which nuclear weapons may be used to defend core state interests against non-nuclear attacks will expand and the lines delineating those scenarios are currently less than clear. This ambiguity is even encoded into the declaratory nuclear policies of both the U.S. and Russian Federation, neither of which currently has a sole purpose policy, reserving the use of nuclear weapons additionally for non-nuclear threats threatening the existence of the state.¹⁶ The ambiguity of these new and

¹⁴ Гареев М.А. и Слипченко В.Н. Будущая Война (2007) translated versions in English can be obtained from the Foreign Military Studies Office at Fort Leavenworth, KS and a copy is available at the Naval Postgraduate School library in Monterey, CA Due to Gareev’s prominent position in the Russian Academy of Military Science, much of his theory has been incorporated in official doctrine and often reflected in speeches by Shoigu and Gerasimov

¹⁵ In comments to the Collegium of the Russian Ministry of Defense in 2017

¹⁶ Указ Президента Российской Федерации от 02.06.2020 № 355 and 2018 U.S. NPR, note however current media reports state the U.S. may be considering such a sole use policy in SSD negotiations

emerging weapons combined with uncertain delineations on when their use may rise to the level of triggering a nuclear response is further concerning for strategic stability and heightens the threat perception of Russia.

Is Russia Open to Dialogue and Would the U.S. Listen?

Russian Policy on Strategic Stability

As stated above, it is clear from the Russian threat perception that Russia believes strategic stability is decreasing and the international environment is becoming ever more toxic. The potential for armed conflict between nuclear powers is at its highest since the end of the Cold War, which is contrary to Russia's objectives of securing economic growth and domestic and international stability in a multipolar global security architecture. This is stated in Russia's new National Security Strategy: "The redistribution of the global development potential, the formation of new architecture, rules and principles of the world order are accompanied by the growth of geopolitical instability, aggravation of interstate contradictions and conflicts." The document additionally calls out the U.S. as a prime driver of said instability: "Countries losing unconditional leadership try to dictate their rules to other members of the international community, use means of unfair competition, apply unilaterally restrictive measures (sanctions), openly interfere in the internal affairs of sovereign states. Such actions lead to the undermining of the generally recognized principles and norms of international law, the weakening and destruction of existing institutions and regimes of international legal regulation, the aggravation of the military-political situation, a decrease in predictability and a weakening of trust in relations between states."¹⁷

While the outlook is bleak, Russia is open to negotiations on strategic stability and even states so dedicating a whole section to strategic stability within the document. "The Russian Federation seeks to increase predictability in relations between states, to strengthen confidence and security in the international sphere. To reduce the threat of unleashing a new global war, prevent an arms race and prevent its transfer to new environments, it is necessary to improve the mechanisms for maintaining strategic stability, arms control, preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their delivery vehicles, and observing confidence-building measures." Russia has not just demonstrated that in declaratory policy but has taken firm measures towards mediating an improved strategic stability environment through the establishment of the Strategic Stability Dialogue and January 2022 negotiations with the U.S. and NATO on security guarantees.¹⁸



Then-Vice President Joe Biden and Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin in Moscow, Russia, in 2012

Source: www.politico.com

¹⁷ Указ Президента Российской Федерации от 02.07.2021 № 400 «О Стратегии национальной безопасности Российской Федерации»

¹⁸ Russia has proposed legally binding security guarantees to enhance strategic stability to both NATO and the U.S. while containing some non-starters, the U.S. has indicated its interest in discussing the Russian model on specific areas of shared interest, e.g. rules on military exercises



Will the U.S. Listen?

The U.S. has until recently been hesitant to engage in discussions on creating a more inclusive security architecture in Europe that addresses the legitimate security interests of the Russian Federation, thus increasing strategic instability. To encourage the U.S., Russia has been effective in increasing the pressure on the U.S. to demonstrate that the Russian threat perception must be factored into U.S. security calculus. Russian development of new strategic offensive arms demonstrates that U.S. withdrawal from the ABMT and developments to disrupt mutual vulnerability will come at a steep cost, Russia has moved troops within its own borders to show that military posturing will not be a one-way street, and Russia has provided draft agreements to show that it prefers a diplomatic way forward. For the U.S. this pressure has begun to show that the U.S. has a self-interest in cooperating with Russia to help reduce the threat perception of both sides. This is evident through the U.S. response to the recent security guarantees discussion: while the U.S. rejected conditioning NATO membership, Washington remained open to agreements on military exercise and seemed to at least entertain the idea of discussing deployment of long-range precision strike weaponry.¹⁹ While the talks ended acrimoniously with Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov stating “We do not see that the US understands that it is crucial to make decisions we are satisfied with,”²⁰ failed talks are talks. The fates of the U.S. and Russia are inextricably intertwined, connected not through a partnership of choice but necessity. At some point pressure will rise enough to force the U.S. to recognize the importance of bolstering strategic stability by alleviating Russian security concerns presented in the above threat perceptions portion of the paper. Dialogue, a balance of interests will be possible, but it is likely the situation will get dangerously worse before it improves.

Recommendations

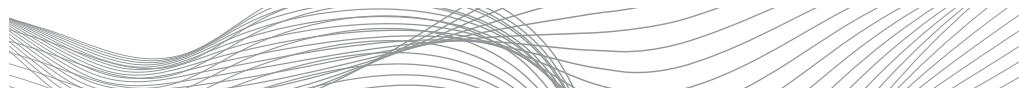
In this environment, the best that can be done is to develop confidence building measures which will act as a *fortochka* to bring fresh air into this souring relationship. The U.S. and Russia should engage in targeted exchanges that enhance the ability of decision makers to understand that negotiations are less about facts, and more about the perceptions of those at the negotiating table.

To that end, exchanges of government officials in the executive and legislative arms of both countries should be organized so that decisionmakers may be familiarized with the sincere threat perceptions of their counterparts, even if they differ radically from their own beliefs. Additionally, the broader society should be engaged in such exchange within the other country as the decision of politicians cannot be supported if the public still maintains deep-seated distrust, such as the rampant Russophobia within internal American politics. By enhancing and protecting academic exchange and even cultural exchange, these programs between the two countries will ensure the internal dialogues within each country do not simply become echo chambers for our perceived fears and tools of domestic political war-

¹⁹ Initial reporting on briefing of reporters by U.S. officials before the 10.01.2022 talks

²⁰ Talks ended rather poorly and will likely be followed with an escalation, and posturing until efforts continue again

fare at the expense of global security and strategic stability. Having lived in Russia, it is in some regards striking that the U.S. and Russia are not better partners if not even allies. Russia and the U.S. have much to gain from cooperation and shockingly little to gain from the current vector of confrontation. ■



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SECURITY INDEX

Security Index Occasional Paper Series Global Edition - reports, analytical articles, comments and interviews that reflect the positions of Russian and foreign experts on the current challenges to global security and Russia's policy in this area. The aim of the series is to provide a clear analysis of international security problems and to offer specific and realistic solutions for them. The series replaced the *Security Index* journal published by PIR Center in 1994-2016.

The authors and editors of the series welcome comments, questions and suggestions, which readers can email: inform@pircenter.org

REBUILDING THE RUSSIAN-AMERICAN DIALOGUE ON GLOBAL SECURITY

This occasional paper was made within the framework of the project Rebuilding the Russian-American Dialogue on Global Security, which is part of the Nuclear Nonproliferation & Russia Program. Russian-American dialogue on global security issues has been among PIR Center's priorities for many years. With the current deteriorating state of the bilateral relations, the importance of such dialogue between the two countries has been increasingly growing over the past few years, a tendency that will expectedly remain valid for many years ahead.

THE EVSTAFIEV SERIES

This occasional paper was produced within *The Evstafiev Series*. This is a series of research and analytical publications written by young, aspiring authors (primarily, MA graduates and post-graduates) from Russia and around the globe in the area of global security. For many, this is their first or one of the first peer-reviewed publications. All drafts are subjects to external evaluation by a panel at expert-level or educational seminars by PIR Center or in similar formats. Only drafts accepted by the expert panel are submitted for peer review and, if positive, for publication in the Series.

Annually, on November 15, *The Evstafiev Series* Selection Committee announces its decision on the Evstafiev Award.

Gennady Mikhailovich Evstafiev (1938 - 2013) is an outstanding Soviet and Russian WMD nonproliferation and global security expert. He devoted the last ten years of his life to PIR Center, where he worked as a Senior Advisor and Senior Vice President. Gennady Evstafiev paid special attention to the progress in creativity and analytical skills of young generation, considering this to be PIR Center's - and his own - most important mission.

To visit Gennady Evstafiev's memory gallery, please, go to: <https://pircenter.org/experts/194-gennady-evstafiev>

The Gennady Evstafiev Award was established in 2021. The Award winners list:

- Sergey Semenov (2021).