

**Nuclear Russia:  
International and domestic agendas**

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# 1 Building Nuclear Consensus in contemporary Russia: factors and perceptions

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The chapter aims to present and analyze the shared perceptions of nuclear matters that the Russian public has demonstrated since 1991, the year of the USSR's collapse. The range of issues under scrutiny includes nuclear weapons, nuclear disarmament and (non)proliferation, nuclear energy, and nuclear safety and security. Public opinion is regarded as an important source of legitimacy in democracies. Nevertheless, even in countries with well-established democratic institutions, such as the USA, France, the United Kingdom and Germany, it took several decades for activists, concerned scientists and politicians to secure the right of the public to be informed about national nuclear projects and to participate in decision-making concerning nuclear matters. Russia's case is rather special in this regard. The Soviet public was not involved in formulating official policy on nuclear issues through media or public movements, nor were there any open studies of public opinion that would examine and articulate public concerns. The Soviet nuclear effort was driven first by the need to overcome the U.S. atomic monopoly and then to achieve parity. It was shrouded in secrecy throughout the Cold War era, and from 1953 up until 1989, the ministry in charge of nuclear warheads production was called the Ministry of Medium Machine-Building Industry, this unassuming title concealing its actual scope of activities. The general public was unaware of the situation in the nuclear sector, be it nuclear power or nuclear weapons production, and the public debate on the role of nuclear weapons was limited. It is remarkable that not only did the Soviet authorities try to conceal information on the Chernobyl disaster in April 1986, despite the onset of *glasnost* (the Soviet policy of open discussion of political and social issues), but the Russian authorities behaved similarly and tried to hide a smaller-scale accident at the nuclear plant near Tomsk in April 1993.

The Soviet citizens had their share of civil defense drills similar to the American "Duck and Cover," but, unlike average Americans, they did not grow up watching movies with plots revolving around nuclear apocalypse. In fact, there are only two noteworthy Soviet films with a focus on nuclear matters. *Nine Days in One Year* is a 1962 drama about nuclear physicists, and *Dead Man's Letters* is a 1986 award-winning film set in a world after an accidental nuclear exchange. Interestingly, according to the movie trivia on the Kinopoisk website, the latter film was paired with another nuclear apocalypse story – the American-made *The Day After* – for prime-time broadcasting on Soviet television on two consecutive evenings in 1987.<sup>1</sup> The relative scarcity of Soviet nuclear Armageddon stories stands in contrast with the wide variety of nuclear narratives and post-apocalyptic plots in American popular culture. Nuclear shelters at industrial facilities and civil defense training programs starting as early as high school could of course fuel Soviet citizens' concerns

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<sup>1</sup> «На следующий день»: Знаете ли вы, что...» ("The Day After: Did You Know That..."), Kinopoisk, accessed March 24, 2020, <https://www.kinopoisk.ru/film/257368/>.

about the possibility of nuclear war between the USSR and the USA. Nevertheless, possible fears and concerns about a nuclear conflict were not a subject for public discussion, except when officials made public statements to expose the alleged nuclear brinkmanship of Western powers. Soviet citizens were familiar with the tragedies of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, but did not necessarily see the connection between the risk of such events and the nuclear posturing of their own country. In this context, it is noteworthy that the danger of nuclear energy featured in *Nine Days in One Year* had to do with exposure to radiation during experimental research rather than an industrial disaster or military confrontation. Additionally, while *Dead Man's Letters* is an undisguised nuclear apocalypse story, the city is not specified and all the characters' names sound European.

In the post-Cold War period, mass culture and mass media became more exposed to nuclear images. Russian state television keeps its viewers up to date on major developments in the Russian defense complex. Channel 1, the country's primary federal TV channel, offers regular coverage of both Russian missile tests and other military developments and nuclear matters on the diplomatic agenda. Therefore, the general public may not be tech- or politics-savvy, but is kept more or less informed.

Analysis of post-Soviet public opinion provides an interesting picture of the public mood that could be influenced by a combination of events, actual and perceived threats, fears and emotions. The end of the Cold War changed the role that the nuclear weapons play in the international security system and the way they are perceived by nuclear and non-nuclear states. In addition to subtle policy changes that went unnoticed by the public, there were also events and trends that could have affected the public sentiments: large-scale nuclear power plant accidents in Chernobyl (1986) and Fukushima (2011), international debates surrounding Iran's nuclear program, nuclear weapons tests by India (1998), Pakistan (1998) and North Korea (2006, 2009, 2013, 2016, 2017), Russian-U.S. nuclear arms reduction talks and treaties, etc.

To understand Russia's complex relationship with its nuclear weapons, one should, no doubt, examine official statements and documents, and carefully study publications by Russian experts, but an overview of the nuclear weapons coverage by the media can provide additional insights. While many authors in media studies focus on the so-called CNN effect, i.e. the way in which the news can make policy, there also exists the 'manufacturing consent' school of thought, where the focus is on how governments influence the media and prompt them to interpret the news in a certain way.<sup>2</sup> Russia offers a particularly compelling case study for this second approach, given the government control over the key media outlets. Besides, nuclear technology is a complex matter, both when it comes to the technical aspects of nuclear power production and political and military implications of nuclear weapons possession, so it may be relatively easy for governments and non-governmental actors to manipulate the public opinion and manufacture consent using mass media.

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<sup>2</sup> Piers Robinson, "The CNN Effect: Can the News Media Drive Foreign Policy?," *Review of International Studies* 25, no. 2 (April 1999): 301–309.

When it comes to public opinion, there is plenty of data to examine, as several Russian polling agencies and research centers conduct nation-wide surveys on a variety of issues, including nuclear-related matters: WCIOM (All-Russia Centre of Public Opinion Research), ROMIR, Levada-Center and FOM (Public Opinion Foundation). Russian research centers conducted surveys on nuclear-related issues with different frequency over the period under study. Some surveys assessed reactions to nuclear accidents, such as the Chernobyl disaster and its anniversaries or the Fukushima accident of 2011. Such studies measured how those accidents had influenced public perception of nuclear technologies and traced changes in public opinion concerning those events. Other surveys were prompted by instances of increased international tension as a result of military conflicts and actions of great powers possessing nuclear weapons. Nuclear weapons are considered to be one of the attributes of great power status and the inclusion of questions about them in post-Cold War public opinion polls reflected societal perception of Russia's place in world affairs. Surveys are mostly quantitative studies that track fluctuation of public opinion at large. In addition, there have been large-scale studies by think tanks on perceptions of WMD,<sup>3</sup> as well as qualitative studies focusing on nuclear perceptions in the Russian regions heavily affected by developments in the Russian nuclear complex.<sup>4</sup>

Let us outline several distinctive features of the post-Soviet period that are relevant for our line of inquiry. Firstly, policy-makers can draw legitimacy from public opinion and rely on its trends when shaping discourse on major nuclear energy and military policy initiatives. Secondly, public opinion studies identify key areas of concern, which gives policy-makers an opportunity to monitor the sources of possible discontent and adjust policies accordingly. Thirdly, media coverage raises public awareness and contributes towards building public consensus on matters of national importance. Thus, it makes sense to examine the complex interrelationship between the public, the media and official institutions reflected in how they all treat nuclear matters.

Mass policy preferences may be influencing elite preferences and hence public policies, while elites may be using the media to influence the mass preferences, but when it comes specific policy issues, it is difficult to clearly

<sup>3</sup> И.А. Ахтамзян, *Всероссийский социологический опрос. «Россияне об угрозах, связанных с оружием массового уничтожения»*. Доклад ПИР-Центра (Ildar Akhtamzyan, *All-Russian Sociological Survey. "Russians on Threats Associated with Weapons of Mass Destruction."* PIR Center Report). Moscow: Prava cheloveka, 2006; Valentin Tikhonov, *Russia's Nuclear and Missile Complex: The Human Factor in Proliferation*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2001; *Россияне о ядерном оружии и ядерных угрозах (Russians on Nuclear Weapons and Nuclear Threats)*. PIR Center, 2000.

<sup>4</sup> Vitaliy V. Kashpur, Dina O. Afanasieva, Svetlana V. Negrul, and Sergey N. Kirpotin, "Public Attitude to the Development of Nuclear Power Industry and Ecological Risks (The Case of the Tomsk Region)," *International Journal of Environmental Studies* 72, no. 3 (2015): 592–598, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00207233.2015.1012359>; А.Н. Дронишинетц, «Общественное мнение России и Японии о развитии ядерной энергетики: социологический анализ» (Andrey Dronishinets, "Public Opinion in Russia and Japan on Nuclear Energy Development: Sociological Analysis") (diss., Ural State University, 2008); Н.П. Дронишинетц, Н.А. Носырев, «Ядерная безопасность, ядерные угрозы и ядерное нераспространение в структуре ценностей российских студентов» (N.P. Dronishinets and N.A. Nosyrev, "Nuclear Safety, Nuclear Threats and Nuclear Nonproliferation in the Value Structure of Russian Students"), *Fundamentalnye issledovaniia*, no. 2 (2005): 60–63, <http://www.fundamental-research.ru/ru/article/view?id=5738>.

establish these reciprocal influences. Moreover, the period under study is a time when Russia has undergone a major transformation in all aspects of life, including public perceptions, the media landscape and setup of public institutions. This would make establishing causal links an even more challenging task than normally is the case. Instead we intend to examine the results of public opinion surveys that were carried out over the post-Soviet period and that may reveal the factors that affect public sentiments. Doing so, we will pay special attention to the role of the media. We will try to identify key narratives and matching trends in both coverage and perceptions that could make it possible to present a more comprehensive picture of public attitudes towards nuclear technologies at the crossroads of everyday life and high politics.

Therefore, while acknowledging that it is difficult to establish a causal relationship between domestic and international events and media coverage thereof on the one hand and public perceptions on the other, we intend to address the following two major questions:

- What was the Russian public attitude towards nuclear energy use for military and peaceful purposes over the period under study and how did it change?
- What were the key factors that may have shaped the public attitude towards nuclear issues?

We will put Russia's case into perspective by invoking the data from global public opinion studies and comparing Russian public attitudes to those of other major nuclear powers. Our goal is to find out if there is a national consensus in Russia regarding nuclear technologies for peaceful and military use, and if so, what this consensus is like.

## **Chapter structure**

The period we chose to study is of great research interest because it was a time of upheaval, when political, social and economic transition affected every aspect of public and private life in Russia. During that same period, the Russian nuclear sector experienced a dramatic change in size, status, organizational arrangement and public accountability.

First, we will provide a brief overview of the changes and continuity in the nuclear power sector in post-Soviet Russia. Then, we will present and discuss Russian public opinion on nuclear matters during the same period. We will contrast the results of Russian opinion polls with public opinion surveys carried out in other countries. This comparison will help determine the factors that influence public perceptions of nuclear energy. Based on such a comparison, one can draw a conclusion about whether the Russian case stands out or is in line with the general trends.

The second part of the chapter will consider Russian public attitudes to nuclear weapons and their role in national security. We will pay special attention to one specific factor – mass media, which according to many researchers plays a crucial role in shaping public opinion. In order to narrow down the field, we will follow the Russian media presentation of nuclear issues (primarily nuclear weapons and nuclear disarmament) throughout the “reset” of

bilateral relations under Presidents Barack Obama and Dmitry Medvedev to subsequent fallout and then a full-scale crisis in relations between Russia and the West during President Vladimir Putin's third term in office. This period witnessed major developments in international relations and presented the fluctuations of levels of trust between Russia and its Western counterparts – from partnership and profound cooperation manifested in the 1990s and early 2000s to open confrontation and backing of opposing sides in militarized conflicts in the 2000s. We expect that this affects the manner in which the Russian media presents nuclear weapons and consequently the Russian public perceives them.

## **Continuity and change in the Russian nuclear sector**

According to the Survey of Energy Policies of the Russian Federation conducted by OECD's International Energy Agency in 1995, Russia inherited 80% of the Soviet Union's nuclear complex.<sup>5</sup> Russia has all the necessary technological, infrastructural, material and human resources to advance in both military and peaceful uses of nuclear energy. The country is a major actor in the global market of nuclear technologies and materials. Since 1991, the nuclear sector in Russia underwent substantial changes in terms of its property, labor force, management, strategic development and its relations with the state and the public.

In 1989 the Soviet Ministry of Medium Machine-Building Industry was merged with the Ministry of Atomic Energy and in 1992 the Russian part of this new ministry was transformed into the Ministry of Atomic Energy and Industry (Minatom). Minatom inherited nine NPPs (nuclear power plants) with 28 operating nuclear reactors. In 2004, Minatom was reorganized into the Federal Agency on Atomic Energy, which in turn was transformed into the State Atomic Energy Corporation (Rosatom) by presidential decree in December 2007.

Rosatom was reported to have 258 thousand employees in 2014, with about 1 million family members and over 2 million people living in municipalities connected to Rosatom's activities – 3.3 million people altogether. Rosatom's territorial presence in Russia includes ten cities that are located near nuclear power plants, more than 70 municipalities, 37 regions and 10 so-called "closed cities" (the Russian abbreviation for them is ZATO).<sup>6</sup> The official July 2018 statistics from Rosatom reports that more than 250 thousand employees work at more than 350 organizations and their subdivisions.<sup>7</sup>

According to official statistics, in 2014 Rosatom had 33 operational energy units/reactors and was constructing 9 reactors in Russia and 11 reactors

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<sup>5</sup> *Energy Policies of the Russian Federation: Survey 1995* (Paris: OECD/IEA, 1995), 241.

<sup>6</sup> *Росатом: Публичный годовой отчет – 2014 год* (*Rosatom: Annual Public Report – 2014*), Rosatom, 194, <https://rosatom.ru/upload/iblock/28e/28e6864617b177fc10b55d1e7e8cf544.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> "Atomic Industry of Russia," Rosatom, accessed March 24, 2020, <http://www.rosatom.ru/about-nuclear-industry/atomnaya-otrasl-rossii/>.

abroad.<sup>8</sup> In 2018 there were 10 operating nuclear power plants (NPPs) in Russia with 35 energy units/operating reactors with overall energy capacity of 27.9 GW, or 18.9% of Russia's total electric energy production. Rosatom is constructing 6 energy units in Russia and 35 abroad, including in such countries as Finland, Hungary, Belarus, Turkey, Egypt, Iran, India, and China.<sup>9</sup> On a global scale, Rosatom ranks second in natural uranium deposits, third in mining volume, and second in terms of nuclear energy production volume. It claims 36% of the world enriched plutonium market and 17% of nuclear fuel production.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, Rosatom is one of the top three global suppliers of natural uranium along with Kazatomprom (Kazakhstan) and Cameco (Canada) and the global leader of nuclear fuel production, also ranking fourth in terms of the number of operating reactors. However, one should keep in mind that Russia's nuclear heritage is diverse. It includes large stockpiles of nuclear weapons and fissile materials, but it also includes liabilities, such as territories that need deactivation and cleanup.

*Perestroika* and *glasnost* changed the status of the nuclear sector in Russia. Since the early 1990s, there have been many publications concerning the Soviet and Russian nuclear industry. Some of them concentrated on the history of the Soviet atomic project, others focused on the present-day environmental problems. In 1989, special bodies were created to facilitate information flow and exchange between executive bodies and the public. The interdepartmental coordination council for information and public relations in the sphere of nuclear energy was created, and the Ministry of Atomic Energy started issuing the periodical *Bulletin of the Centre for Public Information on Atomic Energy*. Since 2001, this periodical has been published under the title *Bulletin on Atomic Energy*.

National and international media, the expert community and governmental and nongovernmental organizations contributed to the rise in the Russian public's awareness about history, the current situation and the possible future of the country's nuclear sector. The policy of *glasnost* allowed the revealing of the previously mostly unknown history of the Soviet nuclear program.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> *Росатом: Публичный годовой отчет – 2014 год (Rosatom: Annual Public Report – 2014)*, Rosatom, 25, <https://rosatom.ru/upload/iblock/28e/28e6864617b177fc10b55d1e7e8cf544.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> "Atomic Industry of Russia," Rosatom, accessed March 24, 2020, <http://www.rosatom.ru/about-nuclear-industry/atomnaya-otrasl-rossii/>.

<sup>10</sup> "History of Russia's Atomic Industry," Rosatom, accessed March 24, 2020, <http://www.rosatom.ru/about-nuclear-industry/history/>.

<sup>11</sup> See, for instance: Boris N. Porfiriev, "Environmental Aftermath of the Radiation Accident at Tomsk-7," *Environmental Management* 20 (1996): 25–33, <https://doi.org/10.1007/PL00006699>; В.И. Булатов, *200 ядерных полигонов СССР: География радиационных катастроф и загрязнений* (V.I. Bulatov, "Two Hundred Nuclear Test Sites of the USSR Geography of Radiation Disasters and Pollution") (Novosibirsk, TSERIS, 1993); Отв. ред. и сост. В.П. Визгин, *История советского атомного проекта: документы, воспоминания, исследования* (V.P. Vizgin, ed., *History of the Soviet Atomic Project: Documents, Memoirs, Research*), Vol. 1 (Moscow: Yanus-K, 1998); Отв. ред. и сост. В.П. Визгин, *История советского атомного проекта: документы, воспоминания, исследования* (V.P. Vizgin, ed., *History of the Soviet Atomic Project: Documents, Memoirs, Research*), Vol. 2 (St. Petersburg: RKhGI, 2002); В.М. Кузнецов, «Становление атомного комплекса Российской Федерации: историко-технический анализ конструкционных, технологических и материаловедческих решений» (V.M. Kuznetsov, "The Making of the Russian Atomic Complex: Analysis of

President Boris Yeltsin's decree of February 1995 launched the publication of official documents on the "Atomic Project of the USSR" which aimed "to reconstruct the objective picture of establishment of the country's atomic industry and history of nuclear weapons creation in the USSR."<sup>12</sup> Twelve massive volumes of documents were published between 1998 and 2010. Later Rosatom launched an impressive Electronic Library of Rosatom History, which is a vast online collection of books, periodicals and archival materials on nuclear physics, the history of the Soviet nuclear project, nuclear non-proliferation, etc., mostly covering the period between 1938 and 2015.<sup>13</sup> Nuclear institutions and closed nuclear cities also have websites that serve as additional sources of unclassified information on the Russian nuclear sector.<sup>14</sup>

Public discussion became an integral part of political life and a lot of debate revolved around public concerns over environmental damage caused by nuclear production, as well as around governmental solutions to inherited and new problems.<sup>15</sup> The Chernobyl legacy became a crucial factor feeding the public concerns. Public discussion became possible because *perestroika* removed an existing taboo on debate. Some political parties included nuclear matters into their agendas and manifestos. For instance, the Yabloko party has addressed this issue since early 1990s, supporting publication and distribution of materials concerning nuclear heritage and urgent problems of the nuclear sector in Russia. Nongovernmental organizations that started to sprout in Russia in the late 1980s also addressed the issue of nuclear safety and nuclear heritage.

In 1994, Russia was among the first countries to sign the IAEA's Convention on Nuclear Safety.<sup>16</sup> The national legislation on nuclear sector operation was influenced by existing international norms and provisions. The federal law *On the Use of Nuclear Energy* adopted in 1995 is very comprehensive and covers all nuclear sector activities, social responsibilities, and environmental liabilities, as well as the international obligations of the Russian Federation to cooperate with the IAEA and to comply with international standards and agreements. One should also mention three other important pieces of legislation: the laws *On Radioactive Safety for the Population* and *On Financing Urgent Radioactively Dangerous and Nuclear Dangerous Productions and Sites* (1996) and federal law *On the Administrative Responsibility of Organizations Violating Legislation in the Sphere of Nuclear Energy* (2000). In 2008, Rosatom developed its Environmental Policy and annually

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Design, Technology and Materials Science Solutions from the Historical and Engineering Standpoints") (diss., S.I. Vavilov Institute for the History of Science and Technology, 2006).

<sup>12</sup> Под общ. ред. Л. Д. Рябева, *Атомный проект СССР: документы и материалы: в 3 т.* (L.D. Riabev, *Atomic Project of the USSR: Documents and Materials: in 3 volumes*), Т. II «Атомная бомба. 1945-1954» (Vol. II "Atomic Bomb. 1945-1954"), Book 6 (Sarov: RFNC-VNIIEF, 2006), 3.

<sup>13</sup> Electronic Library "Rosatom History," accessed March 24, 2020, <http://elib.biblioatom.ru>.

<sup>14</sup> See, for instance: Russian Federal Nuclear Center (RFNC-VNIIEF), accessed March 24, 2020, <http://www.vniief.ru/en/>.

<sup>15</sup> *Атомная энергия, общество, безопасность. Форумы-диалоги 2010. Сборник материалов (Atomic Energy, Society, Safety and Security. Forum Dialogues. 2010. Collection of Writings)* (Moscow, 2011).

<sup>16</sup> "Convention on Nuclear Safety," International Atomic Energy Agency, accessed March 24, 2020, <http://www-ns.iaea.org/conventions/nuclear-safety.asp?s=6&l=41>.

allocates resources to cover possible damage and implement environmental projects.

As official successor to the Soviet Union, Russia inherited its entire nuclear weapons arsenal and the international commitments that come with it. It is one of the five nuclear-weapon states under the terms of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and the United States' counterpart in bilateral nuclear arms reduction talks. Despite its Article VI commitment (under the NPT) to "pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament, and on a treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control,"<sup>17</sup> Russia maintains its reliance on nuclear weapons in its security posture. It reserves the right to use its nuclear weapons "in response to the use of nuclear and other types of weapons of mass destruction against it and/or its allies, as well as in the event of aggression against the Russian Federation with the use of conventional weapons when the very existence of the state is in jeopardy."<sup>18</sup>

According to experts, Russia is relatively transparent when it comes to its strategic forces.<sup>19</sup> The latest bilateral nuclear arms reduction treaty, The Treaty between the United States of America and the Russian Federation on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms, was signed by Russia and the USA in 2010 and entered into force in 2011. It sets a limit of 1,550 nuclear warheads on deployed ICBMs, deployed SLBMs, and deployed heavy bombers for each country, as well as 800 deployed and non-deployed ICBM launchers, SLBM launchers, and heavy bombers equipped for nuclear armaments.<sup>20</sup> According to SIPRI, Russia met the mandated ceiling of deployed warheads in 2012, but temporarily moved back above the ceiling in September 2014. According to the official START declaration by the Russian Federation on February 2018, the Russian nuclear arsenal includes 527 deployed strategic launchers (ballistic missiles (ICBMs), submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs), and heavy bombers); 1,444 deployed nuclear warheads on ICBMs, SLBMs, and heavy bombers; and 779 deployed and non-deployed ICBM launchers, SLBM launchers, and heavy bombers equipped for nuclear armaments.<sup>21</sup> The Russian nuclear arsenal also includes non-strategic weapons, and Hans M. Kristensen and Matt Korda

<sup>17</sup> "The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT)," United Nations, accessed March 24, 2020, <http://www.un.org/en/conf/npt/2005/npttreaty.html>.

<sup>18</sup> "The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation," Embassy of the Russian Federation to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, accessed March 24, 2020, <https://rusemb.org.uk/press/2029>.

<sup>19</sup> А. Арбагов, «Современные арсеналы государств» (Alexey Arbatov, "The Modern Arsenals of Nuclear States") in *Ядерная перезагрузка: сокращение и нераспространение вооружений (Nuclear Reset: Arms Reduction and Nonproliferation)*, ed. Alexey Arbatov and Vladimir Dvorkin (2011), 52–57.

<sup>20</sup> "New START Treaty," U.S. Department of State, accessed March 24, 2020, <http://www.state.gov/t/avc/newstart/index.htm>.

<sup>21</sup> "Foreign Ministry Statement," The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, accessed March 24, 2020, [http://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign\\_policy/news/-/asset\\_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/3054864?p\\_p\\_id=101\\_INSTANCE\\_cKNonkJE02Bw&\\_101\\_INSTANCE\\_cKNonkJE02Bw\\_languageId=en\\_GB](http://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/3054864?p_p_id=101_INSTANCE_cKNonkJE02Bw&_101_INSTANCE_cKNonkJE02Bw_languageId=en_GB).

estimate their number at around 1,830 warheads “assigned for delivery by air, naval, ground, and various defensive forces” as of early 2019.<sup>22</sup>

## Russian public opinion on nuclear power and nuclear energy sector safety

Public attitudes towards nuclear energy reveal the inescapable duality of nuclear power. An advanced nuclear sector is often seen as the ultimate confirmation of a given country’s superiority in science and technology. At the same time, nuclear technology is associated with dangerous accidents, radioactive waste and environmental hazards. Many American and European analysts have studied public attitudes to nuclear power in recent decades, trying to understand public concerns about nuclear power and, in some cases, trying to find ways for meeting and overcoming mass opposition to further development of the nuclear energy sector. It is interesting to examine if the Russian public is different in this regard or shows a similar attitude towards development of the nuclear energy sector and shares fears and concerns about nuclear energy production.

Public opinion studies showed a dramatic change in the attitude of Russians from overall negative in the early 1990s towards support of the nuclear energy sector’s development. Two major public opinion research centers in Russia – WCIOM and Levada-Center – confirm this change. According to a WCIOM study conducted in April 2016, on the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Chernobyl accident, 58% of respondents supported the development of nuclear energy compared to 14% in 1990, while 28% were against it (vs. 56% in 1990).<sup>23</sup>

Even though the Russian public saw nuclear technology as one of the biggest national achievements and symbols of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it also inspired concerns and fears. Surveys by WCIOM regularly revealed public concern over nuclear power plants, as well as transportation and disposal of radioactive waste as extremely dangerous sources of pollution. In 2005 respondents named severe environmental pollution (41%) one of the biggest threats to human life in Russia, after drugs (61%), alcoholism (46%), war in Chechnya (42%), and crime (42%). Disposal of radioactive waste (39%) and nuclear power plants (29%) ranked third and sixth among the most dangerous pollutants.<sup>24</sup> According to the public opinion poll of 2007, environmental problems were evaluated as urgent by 57% of respondents. The following pollutants were named: industry (41%); transportation and disposal of nuclear waste (36%); nuclear power plants (31%).<sup>25</sup> A survey in 2016 showed that radioac-

<sup>22</sup> Hans M. Kristensen and Matt Korda, “Russian nuclear forces, 2019,” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 75, no. 2 (March 2019): 73–84, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00963402.2019.1580891>.

<sup>23</sup> «О Чернобыле: 30 лет спустя» (“On Chernobyl: Thirty Years Later”), WCIOM, April 26, 2016, <https://wciom.ru/index.php?id=236&uid=304>.

<sup>24</sup> Н.А. Тихомирова, «Экологическая обстановка глазами россиян» (N.A. Tikhomirova, “Environmental Situation Through the Eyes of Russians”), *Мониторинг общественного мнения: экономические и социальные проблемы* 76 (*Public Opinion Monitoring: Economic and Social Problems* 76), no. 4 (November–December 2005): 103, 106.

<sup>25</sup> «Экономика против экологии?» (“Economy vs. Ecology?”), WCIOM, April 9, 2007, <https://wciom.ru/index.php?id=236&uid=2499>.

tive waste dropped in its perceived importance as a pollutant: from 30% in 1990 to 6% in 2016.<sup>26</sup>

In the 1990s some experts argued that Russians had radiophobia – unmotivated fear of any nuclear technology. The reason for this phobia could be limited knowledge and understanding of nuclear technologies in a society with such a long tradition of high secrecy surrounding all nuclear facilities and projects, both military and civilian. This tradition persisted in Russia in the 1990s, which was demonstrated by the existence of the closed nuclear cities and protection of information related to nuclear research and even the training of nuclear engineers at civilian universities.

One could take a look at the city of Tomsk as an example. It is located next to the closed nuclear city of Seversk, where there was an accident at the nuclear facility in 1993. The 2003 plan to build a MOX fuel production plant in Seversk was met with protests by environmental activists and concerned citizens and later suspended. Current Rosatom projects in Seversk include the construction of a radioactive waste repository and a BREST-300 nuclear reactor. The debates about these plans were limited to the city of Seversk and did not involve the residents of Tomsk, despite the close proximity of these cities. Secrecy may be a way to protect dangerous facilities, but it is also a feeding ground for public concerns. It reflects the lack of governmental transparency and gives rise to public mistrust. In such situations, rumors rather than knowledge shape public perceptions.<sup>27</sup>

Terrorists were seen as the main threat to nuclear security. 90% of respondents in 2000 and 84% in 2006 feared that terrorists could target nuclear plants and other nuclear facilities in Russia.<sup>28</sup> Later studies showed that citizens now less frequently link terrorism threats and nuclear facilities in their minds. One could argue that this fear in the early 2000s to a large extent reflected the fear of terrorism itself and low public trust towards the authorities that were supposed to provide viable protection from this threat. Studies of 2017 and 2018 showed that a general fear of terrorism in Russia persists, although Russians are now much more confident that authorities can provide the necessary protection in comparison to the early 2000s. According to the studies by WCIOM, the fear of being targeted by terrorists was shared by 78% of respondents in 2002 and by 66% in 2017, while trust in protection by the authorities has increased from 20% in 2002 to 82% in 2017.<sup>29</sup>

Another matter of concern for the public was the safeguarding of nuclear materials. According to polls conducted in 2000, 83% of respondents thought that it was possible to steal nuclear materials from plants, while only 10% considered it impossible and 7% were not sure. Experts offered two possible explanations: 1) these responses reflect the old Soviet habit of smuggling out valuables from one's working place and 2) they reflect the widespread Rus-

<sup>26</sup> «О Чернобыле: 30 лет спустя» (“On Chernobyl: Thirty Years Later”), WCIOM, April 26, 2016, <https://wciom.ru/index.php?id=236&uid=304>.

<sup>27</sup> V.M. Kuznetsov is writing about the Tomsk case as an example of failed public hearings procedure. In 2003-2008, there was a debate in Tomsk, and tempers flared.

<sup>28</sup> И.А. Ахтамзян, *Всероссийский социологический опрос* (Ildar Akhtamzyan, *All-Russian Sociological Survey*), 12.

<sup>29</sup> «Борьба с террором: кто побеждает?» (“The Fights Against Terrorism: Who Is Winning?”), WCIOM, September 5, 2017, <https://wciom.ru/index.php?id=236&uid=3559>.

sian practice of getting around rules and procedures using money.<sup>30</sup> The fear of accidents similar to Chernobyl has been shared by many Russians for a long time. In 1995, 45% of respondents feared the possibility of similar accidents, 36% were uncertain, and only 4% of respondents believed that this could not happen again according to the FOM study.<sup>31</sup> Levada-Center reported that 68% respondents in 2000, 76% in 2001, 59% in 2006 and 56% in 2011 believed that an accident of such a scale could happen again. The situation surprisingly changed in April 2016, when the number of those who thought that such an accident was almost impossible outnumbered those who were concerned about the recurrence of that disaster (46% vs. 33%).<sup>32</sup> The result of the Levada-Center study is confirmed by a WCIOM study in April 2016: 73% of respondents trusted the safety of modern NPPs (9% did not) and 64% believed the probability of another Chernobyl-like accident to be extremely low.<sup>33</sup>

As in many other countries, Russian public opinion was affected by the Fukushima accident, but, according to a WCIOM study conducted in 2012, the Russian public rather quickly recovered from its negative influence. In 2011, right after Fukushima, only 16% of respondents were in favor of increasing the number of nuclear power plants vs. 27% in 2012 (the same number as in 2006). Support for development of the nuclear energy sector is primarily demonstrated by those who are young (32%), have a higher education degree (31%), and live in big cities with a population above one million people and in medium-sized cities (30-33%). Still, more respondents suggested keeping the same number of NPPs: 38% in 2012 and 45% in 2011. The highest support for this option was among residents of Moscow and St. Petersburg (53%). Among those who believed that the number of NPPs should go down (26%), 31-33% had a low education level and 34% were from the rural areas. This study of 2012 confirmed the main concerns regarding the nuclear energy sector. Fifty-seven percent of respondents believed that existing NPPs were not safe/secure enough (vs. 45% in 2011). This opinion prevailed among Russians living in medium-size cities – 69%. Furthermore, the majority of Russians did not like the idea of NPPs being built in their home cities and regions: 82% in 2011 and 74% in 2012 opposed such plans. The most negative attitude was indicated by women and residents of medium-size cities (78%). The lowest degree of support was demonstrated by people living in the Ural (15%) and Siberian (12%) federal districts. Not coincidentally, these are the areas with many sites already contaminated by nuclear production.<sup>34</sup>

Levada-Center studies also confirmed the fast recovery of public support for the nuclear energy sector in Russia after the Fukushima accident in 2011. The

<sup>30</sup> *Россияне о ядерном оружии и ядерных угрозах (Russians on Nuclear Weapons and Nuclear Threats)* (PIR Center, 2000), 42, 45.

<sup>31</sup> «Уверены, что чернобыльская авария не повторится, 4% респондентов, большинство же не разделяют такой уверенности» (“4% of Respondents are Convinced that a Disaster Like Chernobyl Will Never Happen Again, but the Majority of Respondents Do Not Share This Confidence”), FOM, April 28, 1995, [http://bd.fom.ru/report/map/finfo/finfo1995/of1995\\_16/of19951601](http://bd.fom.ru/report/map/finfo/finfo1995/of1995_16/of19951601).

<sup>32</sup> «Чернобыльская катастрофа» (“Chernobyl Disaster”), *Levada-Center*, April 22, 2016, <http://www.levada.ru/2016/04/22/chernobylskaya-katastrofa/>.

<sup>33</sup> «О Чернобыле: 30 лет спустя» (“On Chernobyl Thirty Years Later”), *WCIOM*, April 26, 2016, <https://wciom.ru/index.php?id=236&uid=304>.

<sup>34</sup> «Атомная энергетика: «Развивать нужно, но подальше от нас» (“Atomic Energy: It Needs to Be Developed, but Not in Our Back Yard”), *WCIOM*, April 26, 2012, <https://wciom.ru/index.php?id=236&uid=1432>.

survey conducted in March 2013 showed that 33% of respondents were in favor of active continuation of nuclear energy development and 38.5% approved of keeping the production at current level. Opponents of NPPs constituted about 20%, where 14% of respondents advocated a reduction in the nuclear energy sector and 6% its complete termination.<sup>35</sup> Answering the question about what an alternative source of energy could be, given that Russia would run out of oil and gas in twenty years, more respondents supported the development of the nuclear energy sector (39%) than other commonly used energy resources in Russia, such as coal (10%) or hydropower (21%).<sup>36</sup>

One can provide wider context by contrasting Russian public opinion surveys with opinion polls carried out in other countries. In 2003, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology published an interdisciplinary study devoted to the future of nuclear energy. It stated that one must address four crucial problems to make a large expansion of the nuclear power sector possible: cost, safety, waste and proliferation.<sup>37</sup> A special chapter of the book focuses on public attitudes and public understanding. The study notes the “surprising lack of survey data in the public domain that would allow us to understand why people oppose and support specific power source.” In general the study confirms that the public in the United States and elsewhere is skeptical of nuclear power, and the majority of Americans simultaneously approve of the use of nuclear power, but oppose building additional nuclear plants to meet future energy needs. Researchers stress that incidents similar to what happened at the Three Mile Island power plant in 1979 and the issue of waste loom large in public mind. Statistical analysis of public attitudes identified three major factors that determine support for nuclear power among the public: perceived environmental harm; safety and waste; and perceived costs of nuclear power.<sup>38</sup> Interestingly, political beliefs and demographics, such as age, gender, and income, mattered relatively little, if at all. The general conclusion was as follows: “American public opinion toward energy is not the product of political ideology or party politics. Rather, public opposition to nuclear power in the United States is due primarily to the public reaction to the concrete problems of the technology and the industry, notably concerns over safety, toxic waste, and poor economics. It is not surprising that the public is skeptical about a technology that has over promised”.<sup>39</sup>

Another important study “Public Attitudes to Nuclear Power” was published in 2010 by the OECD Nuclear Energy Agency. It included surveys conducted by Eurobarometer and by the IAEA.<sup>40</sup> According to that study, only a minority of Europeans were in favor of nuclear energy in their country – 20%, with 36% having balanced views, and 37% clearly opposing it.

<sup>35</sup> «Россияне поддерживают развитие атомной энергетики» (“Russians Support the Development of Atomic Energy”), *Levada-Center*, March 29, 2013, <https://www.levada.ru/2013/03/29/rossiyane-podderzhivayut-sohranenie-i-razvitie-atomnoj-energetiki/>.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>37</sup> *The Future of Nuclear Power: An Interdisciplinary MIT Study* (Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2003), IX, <https://web.mit.edu/nuclearpower/>.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 71–72.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>40</sup> *Public Attitudes to Nuclear Power* (Nuclear Energy Agency, Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development, 2010), <https://www.oecd-nea.org/ndd/pubs/2010/6859-public-attitudes.pdf>.

Many of the respondents agreed that nuclear power made their country less dependent on energy imports, ensured lower and more stable energy prices and helped prevent climate change. Nevertheless, they thought that the risks outweighed the benefits (53%). It is noteworthy that respondents perceived the risks as lower if their countries already had existing nuclear power programs.<sup>41</sup> The study concluded that better information on nuclear energy and safety/security would increase public support for nuclear power. The following sources of information were listed among the most trusted ones: scientists – 71%; environmental protection organizations or consumer associations – 64%; national nuclear safety authorities – 51%; energy companies that operate nuclear power plants – 46%; TV, radio, newspapers – 31% and national government – 29%. As one can see, people tend to mistrust the mass media, but they trust their governments even less.<sup>42</sup>

The GlobeScan poll conducted for the IAEA in 18 countries (including Russia and the USA) in 2005 also demonstrated rather low support for nuclear power: 34% of respondents believed that NPPs should be used, but not expanded; 28% believed that nuclear power was a safe and important source of energy and supported the construction of new plants; 25% believed that nuclear power was dangerous; and 59% were not in favor of new NPPs. It is quite interesting that Russian and U.S. respondents' concerns about terror attacks against nuclear weapons or materials was higher than the average figure: 63% and 56% respectively (as opposed to 54%).<sup>43</sup>

A comparison of Russian public attitudes towards nuclear security with other countries showed that Russians had the highest rate of fear (63%) of nuclear terrorist acts after the Japanese (79%), followed by respondents in Indonesia (62%), Germany (60%) and France, Mexico, Morocco (57%), USA (56%) and UK (55%).<sup>44</sup> There was moderate public support for peaceful applications of nuclear technologies, with medical use being in the first place (39%) and generation of electricity ranking second (26%). Here Russian public support was the lowest among 18 countries – 17<sup>th</sup> place with 17% for medical use and 32% for electricity. The public in Mexico, Germany, Australia, Canada, Argentina, France and Japan primarily supported the medical usage of nuclear technologies (between 56% and 48%), while support for generating electricity in these countries varied from 13% in Argentina to 32% in Japan.<sup>45</sup> Support figures for nuclear power as a safe source of energy and for the construction of new NPPs showed that the public was hesitant. Only the American public were overall positive – 40%, while respondents in the UK (33%), France (25%), Germany (22%), Russia (22%) and Japan (21%) were rather skeptical about the safety of NPPs. Public support for keeping the same number of NPPs without building

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<sup>41</sup> *Public Attitudes to Nuclear Power* (Nuclear Energy Agency, Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development, 2010), <https://www.oecd-nea.org/ndd/pubs/2010/6859-public-attitudes.pdf>, 22–26.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>43</sup> *Global Public Opinion on Nuclear Issues and the IAEA: Final Report from 18 Countries* (GlobeScan Incorporated, October 2005), <http://large.stanford.edu/courses/2015/ph241/llanos1/docs/globescan.pdf>.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

new ones was almost twice higher than for building new NPPs in France (50%), Germany (47%), Russia (41%) and almost three times higher in Japan (61%).<sup>46</sup>

The next GlobeScan poll report was published in November 2011, i.e. after the major accident at Fukushima NPP in March 2011. The results of public opinion surveys in 23 countries showed growing opposition to nuclear technology in comparison to the 2005 data with most respondents believing that conservation and renewable energy could meet future energy needs without nuclear power.<sup>47</sup> Below we present the data of GlobeScan polls in 2005 and 2011 focusing on six countries including Russia. Comparison of the figures confirms the impact of major accidents on public opinion in these countries, with the exception of the UK and USA where the public perceptions seem relatively unaffected by the Fukushima disaster.

Table 1. Public attitude towards nuclear power, GlobeScan study, 2005, 2011 (as percentages)

Country/ question	Russia		France		Germany		UK		USA		Japan	
	2005	2011	2005	2011	2005	2011	2005	2011	2005	2011	2005	2011
Support for nuclear power/ nuclear is safe; build more plants	22	9	25	15	22	7	<b>33</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>39</b>	21	6
Support for nuclear power/ use what's there; don't build new plants	41	37	50	58	47	38	<b>37</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>44</b>	61	57

One can conclude that the Russian public is not very different in its concerns about the safety and security of nuclear power. These concerns primarily revolve around the danger of large-scale accidents and terror attacks. Another big concern is associated with the environmental consequences of nuclear energy production and nuclear waste management. Over the past few years, one could observe a decrease in the degree of such concerns in Russia, which could be attributed to the environmental policies pursued by Rosatom in the 2000s and the creation of its informational centers in communities where it has nuclear facilities or plans to build them. Rosatom has been more transparent and open to the public by advertising its projects, resources and oppor-

<sup>46</sup> *Global Public Opinion on Nuclear Issues and the IAEA: Final Report from 18 Countries* (GlobeScan Incorporated, October 2005), <http://large.stanford.edu/courses/2015/ph241/llanos1/docs/globescan.pdf>, 19.

<sup>47</sup> "Opposition to Nuclear Energy Grows: Global Poll," GlobeScan, accessed March 24, 2020, <https://globescan.com/opposition-to-nuclear-energy-grows-global-poll/#methodology>.

tunities for employees. Rosatom acts as a modern, dynamic and profitable company with strategic plans and a conscious public relations policy. Another positive development is that the government invests a lot in the nuclear power sector and creates new jobs and career opportunities for the new generation of nuclear engineers. The corporation attracts ambitious young people and offers appealing career opportunities to skilled personnel. Its network of information centers across Russia serves to educate the public, particularly high school students, about nuclear power, while its other public relations initiatives, such as sponsorship of the popular erudite TV game *Chto? Gde? Kogda?*, have been successful in promoting the corporation's image as a hub of state-of-the-art technology and intellectual excellence.

Yulia Baskakova, a researcher from WCIOM, pointed out the importance of another factor, which was revealed in the MIT study – the cost of energy for public consumption. She believes that the issue of energy is of public concern in Russia because of growing electric energy tariffs and ongoing public debates regarding the ageing infrastructure. In this context, nuclear power, which is presented as a cheaper source of energy, is gaining popularity among Russians. She also argues that fear of accidents inspired by the Chernobyl disaster is gone and that most Russians pragmatically support development of the nuclear energy sector, believing that technologies are now much more advanced.<sup>48</sup> A recent survey by Levada-Center confirms this trend. In July 2019, only 30% of respondents envisaged the possibility of such accidents, while in 2001 this number was 76%. A growing number of respondents believe that such an event is not possible – 64%.<sup>49</sup>

## Russian public opinion on nuclear weapons

One can trace several major trends in public opinion polls throughout the entire period under study and these trends emerged in the context of international events and Russia's relations with other countries.

*Nuclear weapons are considered an attribute of a great power.*

According to a 1996 survey, more Russian respondents saw the Soviet Union as a great power than the Russian Federation (82% of respondents thought that the USSR was a great power and only 21% that modern Russia was one), and they ranked the great power attributes as follows: a strong, modern army – 57%; a high living standard of the population – 52%; authoritative, wise country leaders – 51%; financial wealth – 50%, and developed science and high culture – 49%.<sup>50</sup> And in 2000 those who considered Russia to be a great power mentioned its “vast territory, nuclear weapons and rich

<sup>48</sup> «О Чернобыле: 30 лет спустя» (“On Chernobyl: Thirty Years Later”), WCIOM, April 26, 2016, <https://wciom.ru/index.php?id=236&uid=304>.

<sup>49</sup> «Страх россиян перед новым Чернобылем снизился» (“The Russians’ Fear of a New Chernobyl Has Gone Down”), Levada-Center, July 17, 2019, <https://www.levada.ru/2019/07/17/strah-rossiyan-pered-novym-chernobylem-snizilsya/>.

<sup>50</sup> «Является ли современная Россия в глазах россиян великой державой?» (“Is Today’s Russia a Great Power in the Eyes of Russians?”), FOM, January 16, 1997, <http://bd.fom.ru/report/map/of19970107>.

natural resources.”<sup>51</sup> In 2001, nuclear weapons were considered an attribute of a great power by 17% of respondents, in 2002 – 30%, in 2005 – 22%.<sup>52</sup>

In 2001, respondents ranked the top factors of Russia’s greatness in the following order: rich natural resources (71%), vast territory (56%), military power and nuclear weapons (50%).<sup>53</sup> In 2006 the question “What is the basis for Russia’s membership in the great powers’ club?” prompted the following answers: rich natural resources – 55%, strong military forces, including nuclear weapons – 40%, and 32% named the fact that Russia exerts an influence on world politics and is a permanent member of the UN Security Council.<sup>54</sup> One should stress that over the past years Russians have assigned growing importance to such indicators of a country’s greatness as high living standards, developed industry, high educational level of the population, human rights and freedoms, and great cultural heritage.<sup>55</sup> In fact, by the late 1990s some researchers mentioned with surprise that human rights and high living standards had become more important indicators of a country’s greatness than military strength. Thus, one can conclude that in the 1990s and early 2000s the role of nuclear weapons was not pivotal. However, the crisis in and around Ukraine has changed the situation and prompted sociologists Liubov Borusyak and Alexei Levinson to conclude that Russians now preferred greatness to democracy.<sup>56</sup>

The figure below presents the long-term trends based on Levada-Center polls. One can clearly see that the Russian public has considered nuclear weapons to be an important attribute of a great power throughout the entire period and two visible increases in its perceived importance occurred after the worsening of Russia’s relations with its neighbors and the West in 2008 and 2014.

Fig. 1. What, in your opinion, makes a country a “Great Power”?

<sup>51</sup> «Россия как великая страна» (“Russia as a Great Country”), *Levada-Center*, November 20, 2000, <https://www.levada.ru/2000/11/20/rossiya-kak-velikaya-strana/>.

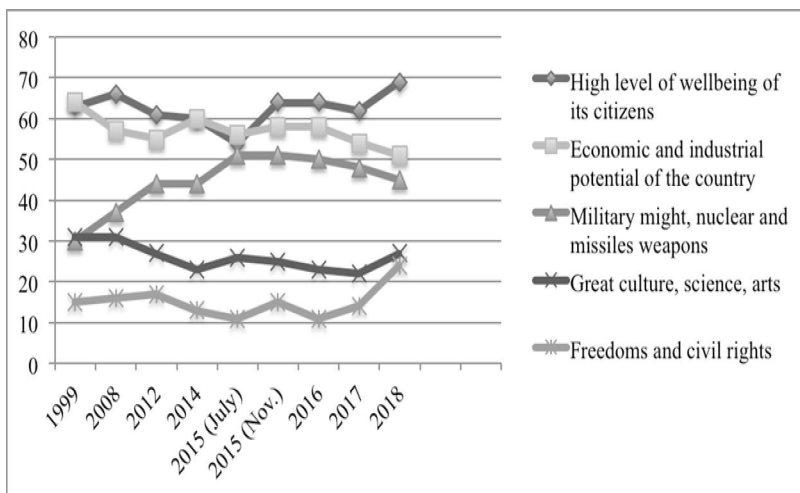
<sup>52</sup> «Атомная бомба – важный атрибут великой державы. Но далеко не единственный» (“Atomic Bomb Is an Important Attribute of a Great Power, but Hardly the Only One”), *WCIOM*, August 5, 2005, <https://wciom.ru/index.php?id=236&uid=3242>.

<sup>53</sup> «Ресурсы и территория – основная гордость россиян» (“Resources and Territory Are the Main Sources of Pride for Russians”), *Levada-Center*, December 1, 2010, <http://www.levada.ru/2010/12/01/resursy-i-territoriya-strany-osnovnaya-gordost-rossiyan/>.

<sup>54</sup> «Россия в восьмерке: равная среди равных – или «младшая сестра»?» (“Russia in G8: An Equal or a Younger Sister?”), *WCIOM*, July 10, 2006, <https://wciom.ru/index.php?id=236&uid=2702>.

<sup>55</sup> «Россия в восьмерке: равная среди равных – или «младшая сестра»?» (“Russia in G8: An Equal or a Younger Sister?”), *WCIOM*, July 10, 2006, <https://wciom.ru/index.php?id=236&uid=2702>; «Атомная бомба – важный атрибут великой державы. Но далеко не единственный» (“Atomic Bomb Is an Important Attribute of a Great Power, but Hardly the Only One”), *WCIOM*, August 5, 2005, <https://wciom.ru/index.php?id=236&uid=3242>.

<sup>56</sup> «Величие вместо демократии: как Россия догнала США в умах своих жителей» (“Greatness Instead of Democracy: How Russia Caught Up with the United States in the Minds of its Residents”), *Levada-Center*, February 4, 2016, <http://www.levada.ru/2016/02/04/velichie-vmesto-demokratii-kak-rossiya-dognala-ssha-v-umah-svoih-zhitelej/>.



Source of information: *Общественное мнение – 2018: Ежегодник (Public Opinion – 2018: Yearbook)* (Moscow: Levada-Center, 2019), 33.

One should pair this indicator with the growing confidence of the majority of Russians that Russia is a great power (31% in 1999 and 75% in 2018).<sup>57</sup> The Russian public has also become more confident in the army's ability to defend the country "in a case of real military threat coming from other countries": 60% in 2000 and 88% in 2018, with the share of "Definitely yes" answers growing from 19% in 2000 to 50% in 2018.<sup>58</sup> Military or officer (15%) was named among the most preferred future professions for one's children and grandchildren in 2018 along with medical doctor (20%), lawyer, economist and financier (15%); businessman and entrepreneur (15%); IT and high technologies specialist (15%).<sup>59</sup>

*Nuclear weapons are viewed as essential for deterrence and national security.*

Although the end of the Cold War brought some expectations about a decrease in the importance of nuclear weapons, public opinion reflects perceptions of threats and dangers beyond official declarations. As Maria Katsva evaluated this trend in 2000, "in contrast to official doctrines that do not propose any adversaries and assign the label of partnership to relations with former opponents, public opinion shows in a straightforward manner what countries or military alliances are considered at least as potential adversaries."<sup>60</sup>

<sup>57</sup> *Общественное мнение – 2018: Ежегодник (Public Opinion – 2018: Yearbook)* (Moscow: Levada-Center, 2019), 33, <https://www.levada.ru/cp/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/OM-2018.pdf>.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>60</sup> М. Кацва, «Роль и место ядерного оружия в контексте взаимодействия России и институтов европейской безопасности» (Maria Katsva, "The Role and Place of Nuclear Weapons in the Context of Russia's Interaction with the European Security Institutions") in *Россия и основные институты безопасности в Европе: вступая в XXI век*, ред. Д.В. Тренин (*Russia and the Main Security Institutions in Europe: Entering the XXI Century*, ed. Dmitry Trenin) (Moscow: Carnegie Moscow Center, 2000).

One can trace the effect of international crises on nuclear weapons perceptions. A sharp increase in positive attitudes towards nuclear weapons was recorded in Russia in 1999 after the NATO campaign against Yugoslavia. Even though the majority of Russian respondents expressed their support for nuclear disarmament in 1998 and 1999, 70% believed that nuclear weapons should be kept as a national security guarantee. In an April 1999 poll by FOM, 78% of respondents said that Russia needed nuclear weapons as a national security guarantee, and 12% believed that Russia should develop new types of nuclear weapons.<sup>61</sup> In 2000, 39% of respondents believed that during the previous 15-20 years the danger of a nuclear war had increased and 33% that the nuclear danger had increased in the last six months. Forty-four percent of respondents said that the threat of a possible nuclear conflict came from the USA (vs. 3% from the UK and 2% from France).<sup>62</sup>

After the NATO campaign of 1999, the perception of the United States as Russia's primary adversary significantly increased. In 1997, only 44% of respondents thought that Russia had enemies and 33% ranked the United States number one among them, while in April 1999, 73% Russians thought that Russia had enemies and almost half of respondents named the USA as enemy number one.<sup>63</sup> Three different polls conducted in April 1999 showed that 70-73% of respondents regarded the NATO campaign as a direct threat to Russia's national security.<sup>64</sup>

Russians have feared NATO countries throughout the entire post-Soviet period. In 2006 respondents ranked the following countries in terms of their WMD threat to Russia: USA (33.2%), Iran (15.2%), China (14.5%), Pakistan (11%), and North Korea (6.8%). The results of this survey concur with a poll conducted by ROMIR in July 2003 on the threat assessment regarding the USA and DPRK, but demonstrate a growing concern over terrorism. The question "What is the primary source of danger of nuclear weapons use today?" had the following answers: USA (32%), international terrorists (32%), North Korea (7%), China (6%), India and Pakistan (4%).<sup>65</sup> In April 2013, 47% of Russians believed that the DPRK had developed nuclear weapons and felt a real threat coming from it, while 39% thought that the DPRK was just bluffing.<sup>66</sup>

In the early 2000s, the main threat of WMD use against Russia was seen as coming from terrorist groups. This observation was confirmed by PIR Center studies in 2000 and 2006: 86% and 83.24% of respondents accordingly. Chechen terrorists (55.11%), Al Qaeda (37.84%) and other terrorist groups

<sup>61</sup> «Как вы думаете, нашей стране нужно или не нужно ядерное оружие?» ("Do You Think Our Country Needs or Does Not Need Nuclear Weapons?"), *FOM*, August, 11, 1999, <http://bd.fom.ru/report/map/t906006>.

<sup>62</sup> *Россияне о ядерном оружии и ядерных угрозах (Russians on Nuclear Weapons and Nuclear Threats)*, 24, 25.

<sup>63</sup> «О врагах России» ("On Russia's Enemies"), *FOM*, April 23, 1999, [https://bd.fom.ru/report/cat/inter\\_pol/\\_west\\_rel/of19991601](https://bd.fom.ru/report/cat/inter_pol/_west_rel/of19991601).

<sup>64</sup> «Россияне опасаются НАТО» ("Russians Are Wary of NATO"), *FOM*, May 28, 1999, <http://bd.fom.ru/report/map/of19992106>.

<sup>65</sup> И.А. Ахтамзян, *Всероссийский социологический опрос (Ildar Akhtamzyan, All-Russian Sociological Survey)*, 31.

<sup>66</sup> «Страх атома: Россияне считают, что Северная Корея может развязать ядерную войну» ("The Fear of Atom: Russians Believe that North Korea May Unleash a Nuclear War"), RBC, April 22, 2013, <http://www.rbc.ru/newspaper/2013/04/22/56c1a9a19a79c47406ea09c9e>.

(33.71%) were listed among those that could threaten Russia with WMD. At the same time, fear of another state's aggression with nuclear weapons went down from 52% to 29% over the course of six years.<sup>67</sup>

The Ukrainian crisis increased the fear of an armed conflict involving nuclear weapons among many Russians (64%). In a July 2014 poll, respondents listed the following countries that pose such a threat to Russia: USA (52%), North Korea (15%), and Pakistan (9%). Sixty-seven percent of respondents expressed a negative attitude to the increases in the number of nuclear weapons states. More than half (53%) believed that the danger of a nuclear conflict had gone up over the past 15-20 years, while 26% believed that it remained at the same level.<sup>68</sup>

An August 2019 survey by WCIOM examines how the Russian public perceives the possibility of a nuclear war. According to the data, 52% of respondents are concerned, to different degrees, about such a possibility, while 46% are not concerned. The highest level of concern is among the elderly and women (68%), while the majority of young people from 18 to 34 are not very concerned – 59% and 58% respectively. However, 79% of respondents are sure that it is impossible to survive in a nuclear conflict and believe that the largest threat to Russia comes from the USA (60%) and China (13%).<sup>69</sup> This threat assessment that places the United States so much ahead of the second potential adversary highlights both the public perception of nuclear weapons matters primarily as part of the Russian-U.S. bilateral dynamic and the currently predominant anti-American sentiment, both of which are in line with the framing of international events by Russian state television.

*Many Russians believe that Russia should have nuclear weapons and even expand its nuclear arsenal.*

In 2006, 76% of respondents were convinced that Russia needed nuclear weapons, while 18% disagreed. About 60% of respondents supported short-term “preservation” of the nuclear arsenal and 44.25% supported it in the long run, while 18.54% and 18.98% were in favor of its “increase” in the short and in the long run accordingly.<sup>70</sup> Public support for nuclear weapons possession almost doubled from the mid to late 1990s. As researchers observed in 2000, 74% of “doves,” 90% of “hawks” and 84% of “alarmists” among respondents – a majority in all the groups – were in favor of nuclear weapons as a national security guarantee.<sup>71</sup> They differed only in degree of such support and attitude to military readiness, non-targeting, no-first-use principle and international negotiations about nuclear disarmament. Meanwhile, 33.1% of respondents supported the idea of aiming nuclear arms at certain countries in peaceful times, while 56.6% were against it. Interestingly,

<sup>67</sup> И.А. Ахтамзян, *Всероссийский социологический опрос* (Ildar Akhtamzyan, *All-Russian Sociological Survey*), 5-6, 31.

<sup>68</sup> «О ядерных державах и ядерной угрозе» (“On Nuclear Powers and the Nuclear Threat”), *FOM*, July 15, 2014, <https://fom.ru/Mir/11608>.

<sup>69</sup> «Ядерная война: реальная угроза или миф?» (“Nuclear War: A Real Threat or a Myth?”), *WCIOM*, August 6, 2019, <https://wciom.ru/index.php?id=236&uid=9837>.

<sup>70</sup> И.А. Ахтамзян, *Всероссийский социологический опрос* (Ildar Akhtamzyan, *All-Russian Sociological Survey*), 16, 18, 19.

<sup>71</sup> *Россияне о ядерном оружии и ядерных угрозах* (*Russians on Nuclear Weapons and Nuclear Threats*) (Moscow: PIR Center, 2000), 64–67.

opinions were the most split in Siberia: 45.3% for aiming nuclear weapons, and 46.8% against.<sup>72</sup>

*Attitudes to nuclear disarmament depend on the international situation and threat perception.*

In the first half of the 1990s, the idea of comprehensive nuclear disarmament seemed to be attractive, but in 2006 it was supported only by a very small fraction of respondents – 2–3.5%.<sup>73</sup> In 2005, only 3% of Russians thought that Russia should completely give up nuclear weapons.<sup>74</sup> In 2006, 1.84% were for the total liquidation and elimination of nuclear weapons in the nearest future (3–5 years) and 3.43% within the next 25–30 years.<sup>75</sup> In contrast, in July 2014 an overwhelming majority expressed the need for comprehensive nuclear disarmament (76%), although 54% believed that it would be impossible within the next 20–30 years.<sup>76</sup> Perceived hostility of the international environment coupled with an understanding that one cannot survive a nuclear war may be behind the increased support for nuclear disarmament, even if only as a long-term goal.

Most respondents (74%) expressed a negative attitude to U.S. ballistic missile defense plans in Poland and the Czech Republic and saw them as anti-Russian, while the rest were split between positive (2%), neutral (15%), and uncertain (9%) attitudes. Open-ended questions prompted the following explanations for these plans: 21% – “to threaten Russia, to weaken Russia, to put pressure on Russia, to prepare for the occupation of Russia,” 11% – “to approach Russian borders, to surround, to control air space around Russia, to control Russia,” 10% – “to expand U.S. influence,” “the desire for world leadership,” 5% – “to attain military superiority,” “demonstration of force,” 3% – “for their own security,” 2% – “to strengthen control over Europe,” 2% – “to defend from Russia,” and 1% – “to defend from Asian countries, Middle East countries, China, Iran, North Korea.”<sup>77</sup>

*Most Russians support the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons and believe that Russia should not facilitate proliferation.*

This attitude is one of the constants present during the entire period, although it is not as simple as it seems. In 2006, 82.4% of respondents thought that the world would not be safer if more countries were to acquire nuclear status.<sup>78</sup> Nevertheless, many Russians demonstrate tolerance towards nuclear

<sup>72</sup> И.А. Ахтамзян, *Всероссийский социологический опрос* (Ildar Akhtamzyan, *All-Russian Sociological Survey*), 21.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>74</sup> «Атомная бомба – важный атрибут великой державы. Но далеко не единственный» (“Atomic Bomb Is an Important Attribute of a Great Power, but Hardly the Only One”), *WCIOM*, August 5, 2005, <https://wciom.ru/index.php?id=236&uid=3242>.

<sup>75</sup> И.А. Ахтамзян, *Всероссийский социологический опрос* (Ildar Akhtamzyan, *All-Russian Sociological Survey*), 18.

<sup>76</sup> «О ядерных державах и ядерной угрозе» (“On Nuclear Powers and the Nuclear Threat”), *FOM*, July 15, 2014, <https://fom.ru/Mir/11608>.

<sup>77</sup> «Планы размещения американских систем ПРО в Восточной Европе» (“Plans to Deploy U.S. Ballistic Missile Defense Systems in Eastern Europe”), *FOM*, May 3, 2007, [https://bd.fom.ru/report/cat/inter\\_pol/pro\\_snv/d071823](https://bd.fom.ru/report/cat/inter_pol/pro_snv/d071823).

<sup>78</sup> И.А. Ахтамзян, *Всероссийский социологический опрос* (Ildar Akhtamzyan, *All-Russian Sociological Survey*), 34.

technology development in new countries, especially in developing countries, based on the principles of equal rights and fairness. One can explain this tendency by the traditions of Soviet anti-Western rhetoric during the Cold War and active use of this posture during the deterioration of Russian-Western relations in the late 1990s and during President Putin's second term. WCIOM polls in July 2005 showed that 51% Russians believed that Iran, Pakistan, North Korea and other countries had the same right to have nuclear weapons as "established" nuclear countries, such as the United States, Russia and China, and thus there should be no punitive policy towards countries pursuing nuclear weapons programs. Yet, 29% respondents agreed that the international community should isolate "new nuclear countries" and apply economic and other sanctions to prevent a new nuclear arms race. Interestingly, the residents of the two capital cities, Moscow and St. Petersburg, showed especially high support (67%) for equal rights to nuclear weapons.<sup>79</sup>

Nuclear proliferation crises related to Iran and DPRK enable the tracking of variations in this public opinion trend. According to Levada-Center polls, when asked to pick the most important events of 2006, respondents selected "nuclear test and missiles launches by North Korea" as the 20<sup>th</sup> and "conflict between Iran and UN about Iran's nuclear program" as the 21<sup>st</sup> most important (8 and 7% respectively). These events ranked lower than "the devaluation of the U.S. dollar" (9%, 18<sup>th</sup> position) and "Dima Bilan's 2<sup>nd</sup> place in the Eurovision contest" (9%, 19<sup>th</sup> position), but scored higher than the screening of the new Russian blockbuster (*Devyataya rota*) – 6% and 22<sup>nd</sup> position.<sup>80</sup> The number of those who thought that Russia should share its nuclear technologies and arms dropped from 14% in 2000 to only 6.29% in 2006.<sup>81</sup>

It seems that the opinions on the Iranian nuclear program depend more on that country's perception as a "friend" of Russia rather than an impartial assessment of the situation. In April 2006, 37% of respondents called Iran a "friendly" and 27% an "unfriendly" country to Russia.<sup>82</sup> Exactly a year later, 45% of respondents said that Iran was friendly to Russia and about 25% disagreed. Fifty percent of respondents thought that Iran was pursuing a military program, and 68% thought that Iran's nuclear weapons would be a threat to other countries, but fewer people (52%) thought they would be a threat to Russia.<sup>83</sup> In April 2006, when asked whether the Iranian nuclear program endangered Russian security, 38% respondents answered "yes" and 39% – "no."<sup>84</sup> By the end of 2006 attitudes to this potential threat continued to be

<sup>79</sup> «Атомная бомба – важный атрибут великой державы. Но далеко не единственный» ("Atomic Bomb Is an Important Attribute of a Great Power, but Hardly the Only One"), WCIOM, August 5, 2005, <https://wciom.ru/index.php?id=236&uid=3242>.

<sup>80</sup> «Важнейшие события 2006 года» ("The Most Important Events of 2006"), Levada-Center, December 24, 2006, <https://www.levada.ru/2006/12/24/vazhnejshie-sobytiya-2006-goda/>.

<sup>81</sup> И.А. Ахтамзян, *Всероссийский социологический опрос* (Ildar Akhtamzyan, *All-Russian Sociological Survey*), 7.

<sup>82</sup> «Иран: ядерная программа» ("Iran: Nuclear Program"), FOM, April 27, 2006, [https://bd.fom.ru/report/cat/count/\\_iran/dd061724/printable/](https://bd.fom.ru/report/cat/count/_iran/dd061724/printable/).

<sup>83</sup> «Ядерная программа Ирана и резолюция Совбеза ООН» ("Iran's Nuclear Program and the Resolution of the UN Security Council"), FOM, April 5, 2007, [https://bd.fom.ru/report/cat/count/\\_iran/d071423](https://bd.fom.ru/report/cat/count/_iran/d071423).

<sup>84</sup> «Иран: ядерная программа» ("Iran: Nuclear Program"), FOM, April 27, 2006, [https://bd.fom.ru/report/cat/count/\\_iran/dd061724/printable/](https://bd.fom.ru/report/cat/count/_iran/dd061724/printable/).

closely split: 42.2% – “yes,” 35.9% – “no.”<sup>85</sup> Thus, it is not surprising that, as of April 2007, almost the same number of respondents (30% and 29% respectively) approved and disapproved of the UN Security Council resolution that tightened economic sanctions against Iran, while 41% were uncertain.<sup>86</sup>

In 2018, when asked by Levada-Center whether there was a threat to Russia coming from other countries, 56% of respondents answered in the affirmative. When asked whether Russia had enemies, 81% said yes.<sup>87</sup> Among those, none specifically named Iran or DPRK as enemies, but there were respondents who named them among Russia’s close friends: 5% and 4% respectively. Not surprisingly, the United States came out as number one both among Russia’s enemies and countries that are hostile to Russia: 70% and 78% respectively.<sup>88</sup>

### Media coverage of nuclear weapons and public discourse

In March 2014, notorious Russian TV anchor Dmitry Kiselyov reminded his viewers that Russia was the only world power capable of turning the United States into “radioactive ash.”<sup>89</sup> Controversial statements like that are part of his signature style and conform with the general anti-American rhetoric that has come to dominate on Russian state television over the last few years. This particular statement became an Internet meme, and some segments of Kiselyov’s audience were probably amused. However, many others were shocked and saw it as yet another sign that Russian public discourse on nuclear issues had become reckless.<sup>90</sup>

As the successor state to the Soviet Union, Russia inherited its entire nuclear arsenal. It is an active member of the nuclear non-proliferation regime and together with the USA proceeds along a more or less steady path of nuclear arms reductions, despite periods of bilateral tension. However, the ongoing crisis in relations between Russia and the West prompted some public figures, including journalists and politicians, to brandish the nuclear sword and express views that are particularly extreme compared to the official Russian position on the nuclear issues. Experts, such as Alexey Arbatov of the Carnegie Moscow Center, voiced concern about these routine appeals to the

<sup>85</sup> И.А. Ахтамзян, *Всероссийский социологический опрос* (Ildar Akhtamzyan, *All-Russian Sociological Survey*), 30.

<sup>86</sup> «Ядерная программа Ирана и резолюция Совбеза ООН» (“Iran’s Nuclear Program and the Resolution of the UN Security Council”), *FOM*, April 5, 2007, [https://bd.fom.ru/report/cat/count/\\_iran/d071423](https://bd.fom.ru/report/cat/count/_iran/d071423).

<sup>87</sup> *Общественное мнение – 2018: Ежегодник (Public Opinion – 2018: Yearbook)* (Moscow: Levada-Center, 2019), 146, <https://www.levada.ru/cp/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/OM-2018.pdf>.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 147–149.

<sup>89</sup> «Киселев: Россия способна превратить США в радиоактивный пепел» (“Kiselyov: Russia Is Capable of Turning the United States into Radioactive Ash”), *Novaya gazeta*, March 17, 2014, <https://novayagazeta.ru/news/2014/03/17/98050-kiselev-rossiya-sposobna-prevratit-ssha-v-radioaktivnyu-pepel>.

<sup>90</sup> Юрий Сапрыкин, «Как мы перестали бояться и полюбили бомбу» (Yury Saprykin, “How We Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb”), *Republic*, January 28, 2015, <http://slon.ru/insights/1209561/>.

country's nuclear arsenal.<sup>91</sup> Some journalists echoed this concern, recalling that such irresponsible rhetoric was unheard of in Soviet times.<sup>92</sup> The problem is that even though federal television journalists in Russia rely overwhelmingly on elite sources when constructing the news and seldom question the official position, they happen to be less reserved in their commentary than public officials and sometimes offer interpretations that are more populist or extreme. Nuclear weapons related topics seem to encourage that, as both journalists and viewers appear to be fascinated and awed by them.

Nuclear weapons hold a special place in the arsenals of the few states that possess them and they clearly warrant special treatment in official and public discourse. Their enormous destructive potential is intertwined with great symbolic power. "No other weapon system is as iconic as nuclear weapons," argues Jarrod Hayes from the Georgia Institute of Technology in his piece "Nuclear Disarmament and Stability in the Logic of Habit."<sup>93</sup> One can hardly disagree. Average Americans have opinions about them, and so do average Russians. These opinions may to some extent be simply passed on from generation to generation, but to some extent they are shaped by the current mass media coverage and public debate.

Generally, Russian citizens do not seem averse to arms control and disarmament initiatives. According to a 2008 global survey, when asked about nuclear disarmament, the Russian public showed very similar attitudes to those of the public in the other four P-5 countries. Large majorities favored complete elimination of nuclear weapons according to a timeline: the United States (77%), Russia (69%), China (83%), France (86%), and Great Britain (81%). Only 20 percent opposed this idea in the United States; 14 percent in Russia and China; 12 percent in France; and 17 percent in Britain. Still, the degree of support varied: in China (60%), France (58%) and Great Britain (55%) the overwhelming majority strongly supported the elimination of nuclear weapons, while in Russia (38%) and the USA (39%) respondents expressing strong support were less numerous.<sup>94</sup>

Russia advocates multilateral disarmament talks, but so far has been quite satisfied with bilateral negotiations, as they are seen as an implicit acknowledgement of its equal status with the USA. As for unilateral nuclear disarmament, one can safely argue that it is out of the question. Complete disarmament would mean giving up the "nuclear shield" and exposing one's vulnerabilities to partners who are not always trustworthy. This could be one of the reasons why in Russia nuclear disarmament as a process is often discussed and reflected upon, but its presumable final stage, complete nuclear disarmament, is rarely mentioned. Let us recall, for instance, that when ICAN (International Cam-

<sup>91</sup> Алексей Арбатов, «Ядерный пояс шахидов» (Alexey Arbatov "Nuclear Suicide Belt"), *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, September 30, 2015, [http://www.ng.ru/ideas/2015-09-30/5\\_nuclear.html](http://www.ng.ru/ideas/2015-09-30/5_nuclear.html).

<sup>92</sup> Юрий Сапрыкин, «Как мы перестали бояться и полюбили бомбу» (Yury Saprykin, "How We Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb"), *Republic*, January 28, 2015, <http://slon.ru/insights/1209561/>.

<sup>93</sup> Jarrod Hayes, "Nuclear Disarmament and Stability in the Logic of Habit," *The Nonproliferation Review* 22 (2015): 505–515, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10736700.2016.1159374>.

<sup>94</sup> "Publics Around the World Favor International Agreement to Eliminate All Nuclear Weapons," WorldPublicOpinion.org, accessed March 24, 2020, <http://worldpublicopinion.net/publics-around-the-world-favor-international-agreement-to-eliminate-all-nuclear-weapons/>.

paign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons) was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2017 and Russian news programs mentioned it, they failed to mention the position of the de jure and de facto nuclear weapons states on the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) and specifically whether Russia was planning to sign it.<sup>95</sup> Let us recall here that, in the words of MFA officials, Russia considers “the development of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons to be a mistake” and argues that it “does not contribute to nuclear disarmament, undermines the NPT and provokes growing contradictions among its Parties.”<sup>96</sup> But Russian television did not go into such detail in its coverage.

In November 2014, Levada-Center carried out a public opinion survey on whether Russia is a great power.<sup>97</sup> It turned out that 44% of respondents saw military might and nuclear missiles among great power attributes (compared to 44% in 2012, 37% in 2008, and 30% in 1999). This attribute ranked lower than the prosperity of citizens (60%) and economic and industrial potential of the country (60%), but higher than great culture, science and arts (23%) or abundant natural resources (20%). It is also noteworthy that 68% of respondents believed that Russia was now a great power (compared to 48% in 2012, 49% in 2008, and 14% in 1994). As one can see from this and other opinion polls, both the sense of national pride and the link between Russia’s international status and nuclear weapons possession have been growing stronger over the past few years, and there are reasons to believe that the mass media played a crucial role in this process.

Nuclear ICBM systems Topol and Yars, and the short-range ballistic missile system Iskander, can be seen at the annual military parades in Moscow on Victory Day and have come to be closely associated with the country’s military might. So it does not come as a complete surprise that two of those weapon systems ended up on anti-Western T-shirts with the following quips: “Sanctions? Don’t make my Iskanders laugh” and “Topol is not afraid of sanctions.”<sup>98</sup> This is not entirely new. Milder versions of such humor were present even before the current rise of anti-Western sentiments. Back in 1999, a popular Russian stand-up TV show featured a song in which the Russian Prime Minister was asking the IMF for money and mentioned missiles in the refrain in an implicit threat.<sup>99</sup> Back then, however, the focus was on the con-

<sup>95</sup> «В Норвегии объявили лауреата Нобелевской премии мира» (“The Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Was Announced in Norway”), *Channel One*, October 6, 2017, [https://www.1tv.ru/news/2017-10-06/333987-v\\_norvegii\\_ob\\_yavili\\_laureata\\_nobelevskoy\\_premii\\_mira](https://www.1tv.ru/news/2017-10-06/333987-v_norvegii_ob_yavili_laureata_nobelevskoy_premii_mira).

<sup>96</sup> “Statement by the Representative of the Russian Federation at the Third Session of the Preparatory Committee for the 2020 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons on the Issues of Nuclear Disarmament (Cluster 1), New York, May 2, 2019,” The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, accessed March 24, 2020, [https://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign\\_policy/news/-/asset\\_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/3631627?p\\_p\\_id=101\\_INSTANCE\\_cKNonkJE02Bw&\\_101\\_INSTANCE\\_cKNonkJE02Bw\\_1\\_languageId=en\\_GB](https://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/3631627?p_p_id=101_INSTANCE_cKNonkJE02Bw&_101_INSTANCE_cKNonkJE02Bw_1_languageId=en_GB).

<sup>97</sup> «68% россиян считают Россию великой державой» (“68% of Russians Consider Russia a Great Power”), *Levada-Center*, December 11, 2014, <https://www.levada.ru/2014/12/11/68-rossiyan-schitayut-rossiyu-velikoj-derzhavoj/>.

<sup>98</sup> See: “Russians Hand In Western T-shirts in Patriotic Fashion Drive,” *The Moscow Times*, September 25, 2014, <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2014/09/25/russians-hand-in-western-t-shirts-in-patriotic-fashion-drive-a39800>.

<sup>99</sup> See: «Дай нам денег, Камдессю» (“Give Us Money, Camdessus”), accessed March 24, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i5gYiNSA2m0>.

trast between Russia's technological and military power and its economic weakness. Today's message is not about weakness, it is about strength.

One can claim that there is a shared perception in Russia that Russian-U.S. nuclear disarmament talks constitute an implicit acknowledgement of Russia's special status in the international arena. This perception is reinforced by mass media. "On new principles of equal security of two great powers" – these were the words with which a TV anchor introduced an almost 13-minute Channel One report on the new START entitled "A Farewell to Arms" back in April 2010.<sup>100</sup> By the way, the new START was extensively covered by Russian television and its value for Russia and the world was carefully explained. Journalists and commentators drew particular attention to the balance of the two parties' rights and obligations and the treaty's economizing effect. According to the Channel One reporter, there were three main indicators of that treaty's importance: mutual trust, commitment to NPT and saving of money.<sup>101</sup> The viewers see Russian missile tests and new weapons complexes on the TV screen and should feel protected, but they should not think that protection comes at an excessively high cost to them.

However, the public does not seem to pay too much attention to details when it comes to international agreements, even those dealing with nuclear weapons. Despite extensive coverage of the new START, in May 2010, more than half of respondents (52%) did not know about the treaty, and only 8% of respondents clearly knew what the treaty was about.<sup>102</sup> These figures did not improve after ratification: in summer 2011, 45% of Russian respondents knew about this treaty, but of those, 43% were not sure what the treaty was about.<sup>103</sup> A survey carried out by Gallup in December 2010 revealed: if it were up to them, "51% of Americans would ratify the START nuclear arms agreement with Russia and 30% would vote against it, while 19% were undecided."<sup>104</sup> Alas, the survey did not examine how familiar the respondents were with the details of this international agreement.

It is noteworthy that Russian initiative is always emphasized when it comes to progress in nuclear disarmament. In a lengthy report on President Medvedev's participation in the 2010 Nuclear Summit the point was made that the very first "nuclear security summit" after the end of the Cold War had taken place in Moscow.<sup>105</sup> According to the special Channel One report on

<sup>100</sup> «Россия и США договорились о сокращении стратегических наступательных вооружений» ("Russia and the United States Agreed to Reduce Strategic Offensive Weapons"), *Channel One*, April 11, 2010, <http://www.1tv.ru/news/polit/152116>.

<sup>101</sup> «Дмитрий Медведев и Барак Обама 8 апреля в Праге подпишут новое соглашение по СНВ» ("Dmitry Medvedev and Barack Obama Will Sign the New START Agreement in Prague on April 8"), *Channel One*, March 26, 2010, <http://www.1tv.ru/news/polit/151135>.

<sup>102</sup> «Договор «СНВ-3»: выгодно, но малопонятно» ("START-3 Treaty: Advantageous, but Difficult to Understand"), *WCIOM*, May 12, 2010, <http://wciom.ru/index.php?id=515&uid=13478>.

<sup>103</sup> «Ядерное разоружение: кому выгодно?» ("Nuclear Disarmament: Who Benefits?"), *WCIOM*, July 4, 2011, <https://wciom.ru/index.php?id=236&uid=1635>.

<sup>104</sup> Frank Newport, "In U.S., Majority Supports Ratification of START Treaty," *Gallup*, December 10, 2010, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/145184/majority-supports-ratification-start-treaty.aspx>.

<sup>105</sup> «Итоги визита Президента РФ Дмитрия Медведева на саммит в Вашингтон и его поездки по Южной Америке» («The Results of Russian President Dmitry Medvedev's Visit to

the signing of START, Russia had suggested drafting a new nuclear reductions treaty back in 2006, but then this initiative had been rejected by American counterparts.<sup>106</sup> All in all, the issue of nuclear disarmament is primarily presented as a bilateral one, and after the hopes of “reset” faded away, images of America as a reliable and pragmatic partner gave way to discussions of alleged U.S. violations in the arms control field. The main claims and accusations are as follows: nuclear sharing and joint military exercises with non-nuclear-weapon states, problems with fulfilling obligations under the Biological Weapons Convention, upload potential, U.S. nuclear bombs in Germany that are a provocation against neighbors<sup>107</sup> and so on.

As mentioned earlier, the United States is not just the primary potential partner for Russia (in the nuclear field and beyond), but also the primary potential opponent. One can argue that at the height of the Cold War the United States needed nuclear weapons, especially nuclear weapons stationed in Europe, to bridge the power gap created by the USSR’s conventional superiority. The tables were reversed after the Cold War, and it is believed that the Russian elite now sees nuclear weapons as a way to compensate for the country’s conventional inferiority compared to the USA and its NATO allies. The question is whether the public has noticed that change. However, even if average Russians do not realize that Russia is weaker in conventional terms than the USA, they do know that the U.S. is a much stronger economy and they see nuclear weapons not just as one of the sources of national power in general, but as the primary source of power vis-à-vis the USA.

Talking about other countries’ nuclear weapons, one should not forget about delivery systems, particularly nuclear-capable ballistic missiles, as both a potential way to attack Russia and as a factor in U.S. missile defense planning. The missile endeavors of other countries (e.g., India, DPRK, and Iran) are sometimes covered by the media, but not framed as a threat to Russia. For instance, a Channel One report on a successful Indian missile launch mentioned that the Indian missiles could reach China and Europe<sup>108</sup> and another report claimed that North Korean missiles could reach the USA.<sup>109</sup> Neither presented those missiles as a threat to Russian security. On the other hand, the U.S. ballistic missile defense program gets a lot of coverage during both rosy and thorny periods of bilateral relations, and it is emphasized that the missile defense is capable of undermining strategic stability. A lot of attention was paid to the North Korean nuclear test of 2017 and the subsequent reaction of

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Washington and His Trip to South America»), *Channel One*, April 18, 2010, <http://www.1tv.ru/news/polit/152534>.

<sup>106</sup> «В Праге начинается церемония подписания нового Договора по СНВ между Россией и США» (“The Signing of the New START Treaty between Russia and the USA Is Starting in Prague”), *Channel One*, April 8, 2010, <http://www.1tv.ru/news/polit/151925>.

<sup>107</sup> «Немецкие журналисты: Американцы готовы разместить в Германии новые атомные бомбы» (“German Journalists: Americans Are Ready to Deploy New Atomic Bombs in Germany”), *Channel One*, September 23, 2015, [https://www.1tv.ru/news/2015-09-23/10609-nemetskie\\_zhurnalisty\\_amerikantsy\\_gotovy\\_razmestit\\_v\\_germanii\\_novye\\_atomnye\\_bomby](https://www.1tv.ru/news/2015-09-23/10609-nemetskie_zhurnalisty_amerikantsy_gotovy_razmestit_v_germanii_novye_atomnye_bomby).

<sup>108</sup> «Индия испытала новое мощное оружие» (“India Tested a Power New Weapon”), *Channel One*, April 19, 2012, <http://www.1tv.ru/news/world/204899>.

<sup>109</sup> «Северная Корея обладает баллистическими ракетами, которые способны достичь территории США» (“North Korea Has Ballistic Missiles that Are Capable of Reaching the U.S. Territory”), *Channel One*, October 9, 2012, <http://www.1tv.ru/news/world/217213>.

the international community, particularly the United States. In the Russian coverage, geographic proximity was overshadowed by political rationale: arguably, there are no reasons for the DPRK to attack Russia, hence its nuclear program is not seen as even an accidental threat. The focus was on whether a North Korean missile could reach Alaska, even though TV reports did show the residents of Vladivostok who had felt the aftershocks of the nuclear test (but did not ask for their opinion about the test itself).<sup>110</sup>

Russian media offered plenty of positive coverage of “reset” and START negotiations in 2009 and 2010. Not surprisingly, the public attitude to the United States, which was very negative right after the Russian conflict with Georgia in 2008, significantly improved by 2011.<sup>111</sup> Then the “reset” gave way to disagreements followed by a full-scale crisis in relations between Russia and the West, which caused positive attitudes towards the United States in general and President Obama in particular to be forgotten.<sup>112</sup> However, that does not mean that future talks on further nuclear reductions will be met with public disapproval. Over the past several years, Russian mass media proved capable of manufacturing exactly the kind of public consensus that is needed for pursuit of any agenda desired by policy-makers. Today’s TV news bulletins, newspaper articles and even press releases of the Russian Foreign Ministry are filled with Brezhnev era stylistic clichés, but this can change overnight.

A variety of metaphors are used for the Russian nuclear arsenal in the media and in official rhetoric, but Russian nuclear forces have traditionally been presented as primarily defensive in nature, so the most widely used term is “nuclear shield” inherited from the Soviet era. Therefore, missile launches are presented as “successful tests of the Russian nuclear shield,” even though missiles could also be seen as “swords.” Channel One reports on such tests on a regular basis, and the viewers are probably expected not just to feel safe, but also to feel proud. For that reason it is emphasized that *Topol* is a purely Russian creation with no foreign components<sup>113</sup> (probably to contrast it with many other products of Russian industries in the post-Soviet period that came to rely on overseas parts or production technologies) and the most reliable weapon system in the world that is gradually being replaced by an even better

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<sup>110</sup> «Испытания водородной бомбы в КНДР вызвали землетрясение, отголоски которого дошли до Владивостока» («Hydrogen Bomb Testing in DPRK Caused an Earthquake the Aftershocks of Which Reached Vladivostok»), *Channel One*, September 3, 2017, [https://www.1tv.ru/news/2017-09-03/331912-istry-taniya\\_vodorodnoy\\_bomby\\_v\\_kndr\\_vyzvali\\_zemletryasenie\\_otgoloski\\_kotorogo\\_doshli\\_do\\_vladivostoka](https://www.1tv.ru/news/2017-09-03/331912-istry-taniya_vodorodnoy_bomby_v_kndr_vyzvali_zemletryasenie_otgoloski_kotorogo_doshli_do_vladivostoka).

<sup>111</sup> «Россия-США: «перезагрузка» набирает ход» (“Russia and the United States: the Reset Is Gaining Momentum”), *WCIOM*, June 28, 2010; «Россия-США: спустя два с половиной года после «перезагрузки» (“Russia and the United States: Two and a Half Years after the Reset”), *WCIOM*, September 13, 2011, <https://wciom.ru/index.php?id=236&uid=1580>.

<sup>112</sup> «Американский президент в представлениях россиян» (“American President in the Eyes of Russians”), *WCIOM*, December 23, 2014, <https://wciom.ru/index.php?id=236&uid=642>.

<sup>113</sup> «С космодрома «Плесецк» этим утром произведён пуск МБР «Тополь-М» шахтного базирования» (“Silo-Based ICBM Topol-M Was Launched This Morning from Plesetsk Launch Site”), *Channel One*, November 1, 2014, <http://www.1tv.ru/news/techno/270991>.

system – *Yars* – that is referred to as a “truly Russian weapon.”<sup>114</sup> Regular military exercises improve the efficiency of interaction between different agencies dealing with military aspects of nuclear technology and President Putin has been personally involved in practical testing of the Russian nuclear triad.<sup>115</sup> And when the term “arms race” is invoked, it is usually to state that Russia will not let itself be drawn into it.

Television reports on the exhibition celebrating 60 years of the Soviet atomic project<sup>116</sup> or the anniversary of serial bomb production in the city of Sarov<sup>117</sup> convey a complex message. Today’s nuclear arsenal is part of the country’s historical heritage. It is a symbol of both military might and technological breakthrough. Nuclear energy is not something to be feared, because humankind has tamed it. The Soviet nuclear project was a great endeavor undertaken by truly dedicated scientists and engineers, and Russia is grateful for their effort. What they had created helped prevent otherwise inevitable global conflict and continues to fulfil its deterrent function today. Nuclear research centers remain cradles of innovative technologies, and military factories continue producing state-of-the-art military complexes, so Russia is safe.

Thus, for many Russians, nuclear weapons constitute an important part of national identity to which they appeal in times of crisis (for instance, when facing economic sanctions imposed by the West). This perception was to some extent inherited from Soviet times and is deeply entrenched, but it is also actively reinforced by official discourse and media framing. According to a poll carried out in August 2009 (60 years after the first Soviet nuclear test), 60% of Russians believed that the development of atomic weapons had helped restore military parity and ensure peaceful coexistence of the USSR and the USA. What is even more important, 53% of respondents thought that nuclear weapons remained the main guarantee of Russian security (27% shared the view that nuclear weapons played an important, but not a decisive role).<sup>118</sup>

In the course of the past several years, Russian state-aligned TV channels backed tough official statements addressed to NATO and the USA with images of missile launches and military exercises, in order to reassure their viewers and convey the message of a strong country. They repeated that Russia was doing its best to avoid a new arms race and a new Cold War, but all those numerous references to nuclear deterrence and retaliation might have created a feeling of danger and vulnerability in the minds of TV viewers. Ac-

<sup>114</sup> «РВСН представили уникальное оружие – передвижной комплекс «Ярс» (“Russian Strategic Missile Forces Presented a Unique Weapon – Mobile Complex Yars”), *Channel One*, September 23, 2011, <http://www.1tv.ru/news/techno/186236>.

<sup>115</sup> «Масштабные армейские маневры прошли ночью по всей России, участие в которых принял Владимир Путин» (“Large-Scale Military Maneuvers Were Held All Over Russia During the Night, and Vladimir Putin Took Part in Them”), *Channel One*, October 27, 2017, [https://www.1tv.ru/news/2017-10-27/335220-masshtabnye\\_armeyskie\\_manevry\\_proshli\\_nochyu\\_po\\_vsey\\_rossii\\_uchastie\\_v\\_kotoryh\\_prinyal\\_vladimir\\_putin](https://www.1tv.ru/news/2017-10-27/335220-masshtabnye_armeyskie_manevry_proshli_nochyu_po_vsey_rossii_uchastie_v_kotoryh_prinyal_vladimir_putin).

<sup>116</sup> «Вся правда об атомном проекте СССР» (“The Whole Truth about the Soviet Atomic Project”), *NTV*, July 24, 2009, <http://www.ntv.ru/novosti/169824>.

<sup>117</sup> «Шестьдесят лет за ядерным щитом» (Sixty Years Behind the Nuclear Shield), *NTV*, December 2, 2011, <http://www.ntv.ru/novosti/247372>.

<sup>118</sup> «1949: как атомная бомба спасла мир» (“1949: How the Atomic Bomb Saved the World”), *WCIOM*, August 27, 2009, <https://wciom.ru/index.php?id=236&uid=2192>.

ording to a November 2014 public opinion survey, many felt that the threat of a new Cold War was more real now than in the course of the past seven years, and 25% of respondents believed that it already existed.<sup>119</sup> Ironically, in praising nuclear deterrence and Russia's ability to turn America into radioactive ash, Russian media talked so much about nuclear weapons over the past few years, that nuclear conflict started to seem real to at least some of the TV viewers. When asked to select up to five things that scared them most of all, 17% of respondents stated in January 2015 that they were concerned about the possibility of a nuclear war, while two years earlier this figure had been only 8%.<sup>120</sup>

In 2010, a Communist Party MP demanded the dismissal of renowned Russian TV journalist Vladimir Pozner from Channel One, offering the following justification: television is a "nuclear weapon" and cannot be entrusted to a person "who does not love their country."<sup>121</sup> This metaphor seems especially appropriate in the context of this chapter. Just like nuclear weapons, television is a powerful tool with great destructive potential that should not be underestimated.

Russian mass media managed to convince the audience that the main threat to the country was coming from the West. This can be to a large extent explained by the fact that threats associated with NATO and the USA were emphasized, while potential threats posed by nuclear weapons and missiles in the hands of other countries (be it China, North Korea, India or Iran) were downplayed. The crisis in Ukraine overshadowed most other international topics in media coverage, and nuclear weapons issues became intertwined with Ukrainian events, partly because all roads in the current Russian media discourse lead to the USA. The post-Maidan Ukrainian leadership that came to power in 2014 was presented as a potential problem for the nuclear non-proliferation regime, because of Ukraine's alleged intention to withdraw from the NPT and because of alleged risks associated with illicit trafficking of Ukrainian nuclear materials and technologies. Meanwhile, hints were also made relating to the nefarious plans that the U.S. allegedly had for the Ukrainian nuclear industry.

Out of the five filters that shape the news media output, according to Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky,<sup>122</sup> two are especially relevant in the Russian case.<sup>123</sup> One is the news journalists' overwhelming reliance on elite

<sup>119</sup> «Холодная война – вскоре начнется или уже идет?» ("The Cold War – Starting Soon or Already Underway?"), *WCIOM*, December 1, 2014, <https://wciom.ru/index.php?id=236&uid=659>.

<sup>120</sup> «Чего боится Россия?» ("What Is Russia Afraid of?"), *WCIOM*, January 29, 2015, <https://wciom.ru/index.php?id=236&uid=619>.

<sup>121</sup> See: «Депутат-коммунист потребовал отстранить Познера от «ядерного оружия» ("A Communist MP Demanded That Pozner Be Kept Away from the 'Nuclear Weapon'"), *TeleVesti.ru*, May 6, 2010, <http://www.televesti.ru/tvnews/2186-deputat-kommunist-potreboval-otstranit-poznera-ot.html>.

<sup>122</sup> Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988).

<sup>123</sup> Eric Herring and Piers Robinson label the filters suggested by Herman and Chomsky "corporate, advertising, sourcing, flak and ideological": interests of corporate conglomerates, media reliance on advertising revenue, media reliance on elite sources, attacks against controversial stories, and the prism of anti-communism. For more details, see Eric Herring and Piers Rob-

sources, and the other is the importance of ideology as a prism. Herman and Chomsky talk about anti-communism that provided American journalists with “a readymade template with which to ‘understand’ global events” during the Cold War, while in Russia, arguably, such a template is currently that of anti-Americanism, which one can clearly discern in the media coverage of nuclear weapons matters.

Russian television’s (other mass media share the blame, though) routine appeals to the country’s nuclear arsenal, such as speculation about the possibility of nuclear retaliation for Western sanctions, represent a very reckless attitude towards nuclear weapons – much more careless than attitudes ever demonstrated by the Soviet leadership or citizens.<sup>124</sup> Such carelessness may become an obstacle in the pursuit of the international nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament agenda. Such bold statements by Russian politicians and media figures send a signal to the international community. For instance, American “hawks” may use them to justify greater military expenditure and expansion of the missile defense plans, while proponents of reviving Ukraine’s nuclear program may see this inflammatory rhetoric as an argument in favor of nuclear rearmament. And while public opinion does not directly affect Russia’s official position on nuclear matters, brandishing a nuclear sword now may make it more difficult to “sell” nuclear disarmament deals to the domestic audience in the future.

## Conclusion

Some of the ambiguity of public opinion on nuclear matters comes from the inherent duality of nuclear technology as a source of military power and a source of energy. Degrees of “accessibility” are different in both cases. In today’s Russia, there is more information in the public domain on the nuclear energy projects than on the nuclear weapons program. Citizens, primarily in those areas where NPPs satisfy some of the energy needs, are in more direct contact with the nuclear energy sector and they can draw information from different sources to weigh the pros and cons of nuclear power on the national or global scale. In the meantime, all aspects of military nuclear technology remain highly classified and government agencies have a monopoly on formulating the role of nuclear weapons and shaping the public discourse around them. The international/diplomatic dimension of this subject area also contributes to greater dependence of members of the general public on the government narrative and media framing, when forming their opinion about nuclear weapons in general and the Russian nuclear arsenal in particular.

The Russian public’s understanding of nuclear energy was affected by nuclear disasters in Chernobyl and Fukushima, but according to opinion polls, those effects were more short-lived than one might expect. Perceived environmental harm, the problem of safety and waste, and perceived costs of nuclear power are the three key factors that determine support for nuclear en-

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inson, “Too Polemical or Too Critical? Chomsky on the Study of the News Media and US Foreign Policy,” *Review of International Studies* 29, no. 4 (October 2003): 553–568.

<sup>124</sup> Юрий Сапрыкин, «Как мы перестали бояться и полюбили бомбу» (Yury Saprykin, “How We Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb”), *Republic*, January 28, 2015, <http://slon.ru/insights/1209561/>.

ergy, according to the above-mentioned MIT study, and they all are relevant in the Russian case. Lack of governmental transparency and the Soviet/Russian track record of concealing information from citizens explain the general mistrust and suspicion when it comes to nuclear energy and its perceived dangers. The Russian public, similarly to the public in other nuclear countries, realizes the benefits associated with peaceful use of nuclear technologies, but at the same time Russians are concerned about the safety of nuclear facilities and the need to find a long-term solution for nuclear waste disposal. The attitudes towards peaceful use of nuclear technologies show that the Russian society is split: there are people who support further development of the nuclear energy sector and those who have reservations about it because of the potential risks and long-term effects.

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the topic of nuclear technology became open to public debate and this resulted in the sprouting of environmental movements and organizations in the 1990s. Despite their efforts, there remains a need for a more open public discussion of both opportunities and risks associated with nuclear energy in order for Russian society to be more aware of government plans in that field and be able to express its concern and voice its reservations. Those reservations did result in the adjustment of NPP construction plans in Voronezh, Seversk, Tatarstan and Bashkortostan. Cases where major nuclear power projects are launched without sufficient public scrutiny become the feeding ground for rumors. Unfortunately, the 2000s saw a reverse trend towards the tightening of government control over independent environmental expertise and the environmental agenda in Russia.<sup>125</sup> At the same time, Rosatom's efforts to publicize its international projects, promote its image as a high-tech hub and present attractive career opportunities have paid off and helped somewhat alleviate the alarmist sentiments among the Russian public.

Russians see Russia's nuclear weapons as a way to deter aggression and ensure national security, but they also assign them special meaning as a great power attribute and a source of national pride. The idea of complete nuclear disarmament meets their approval as a long-term objective, but Russian unilateral nuclear disarmament is out of the question, and the issue of nuclear arms control is presented by the media and perceived by the public in close connection with the bilateral dynamic of Russian-U.S. relations. Russian attitudes to defectors in the nuclear non-proliferation regime and their nuclear threat perceptions correlate with what Russia's relations with a particular country look like at a given moment. Importance assigned to nuclear weapons and concerns over a possible nuclear conflict are linked to international crises, particularly those that pit Russia against the West. Many Russian media outlets currently employ the template of anti-Americanism to cover international and domestic news, and this template's effects can be seen in the coverage of nuclear weapons issues too. In the context of Russia's confrontation with the West, the general public cannot help but feel worried about the pos-

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<sup>125</sup> А. Жермон, «Ядерная энергия и гражданское общество в России: опыт Томска через призму европейской модели» (Alexis Germon, "Nuclear Energy and Civil Society in Russia: Tomsk Experience Through the Prism of the European Model") in *Ядерный мир: новые вызовы режиму нераспространения (Nuclear World: New Challenges to the Nonproliferation Regime)*, ed. Ekaterina Mikhailenko (Yekaterinburg: Ural University Press, 2017), 320–343.

sibility of a nuclear conflict. This worry coupled with understanding that one cannot survive in a nuclear war encourages support for comprehensive nuclear disarmament, albeit as a long-term objective.

It is difficult to establish a causal link between media coverage and public perceptions on specific issues. Besides, surveys indicate that Russian citizens show low levels of trust in mass media. On the other hand, Russia does present a compelling case for the “manufacturing consent” approach, given that a handful of state-affiliated television channels reach a huge audience and broadcast government-approved narratives. One can expect that a nuclear accident in Russia or another country would fuel a temporary increase in concerns about nuclear technology, provided that it gets wide media coverage. It remains to be seen if the August 2019 incident in Severodvinsk will have a long-term effect. On the other hand, improvements in Russia’s relations with the West are likely to partially alleviate the fear of an imminent nuclear war. They may even shift some of the emphasis on nuclear threat perception from the United States as a potential opponent in a nuclear exchange to, for instance, North Korea as a country destabilizing the international nuclear non-proliferation regime.

Frames and filters offered by the media blend with deeply ingrained perceptions to form a complex consensus. When it comes to a national consensus about nuclear energy, one can see that the Russian case is mostly in line with the cases of other major nuclear powers and the Russian public shares the same concerns about nuclear safety. Given the government control over the main television channels, these concerns mainly stem from recent international incidents, traditional radiophobia and longstanding mistrust in government transparency rather than from an open public debate on the pros and cons of nuclear energy. When it comes to nuclear weapons, changes in the international environment and in media framing (e.g., a focus on the shared disarmament agenda and cooperation instead of the current anti-American prism) may bring about corresponding changes in the national consensus. However, the core perception of the nuclear weapons as a source of national pride and Russia’s great power status dates back to Soviet times and may prove to be quite stable.