

'Even a NATO alliance lacking the United States still has considerable advantages against Russia'

Salman Bagirov

December 8, 2016

- Mr. Benjamin H. Friedman, currently the United States does not hide the fact that the US military is able to solve almost any problems that cannot be settled by means of diplomacy. But is this American army really that strong?

- I don't quite understand the question. If the question is about the costs and benefits of military dominance – is there a risk of being too strong –my answer is yes, strength carries the risk of temptation, of trying to do too much, overreaching and generating resentment and counterbalancing.

If the question is about the merits of the army versus other services, my answer is that of course you want a balance, but the United States is best served by being an air and sea power and not behaving like a land power in Eurasia.

- NATO is concerned about Russia's becoming a stronger alliance. For example, the former NATO commander in Europe Philip Breedlove said that the Russian army is developing, learning and adapting to new realities. German general Hans-Lothar Domreze in an interview with the Austrian edition of Contra Magazin said that a high combat capability, maneuverability and power of the Russian armed forces are linked to the constant modernization of military equipment, as well as the achievements of electronics and engineering excellence. Is Russia ready today, together with its allies, to confront NATO?

- No. I don't think Russia's military capability is all that impressive a threat to NATO. Yes, it's a threat to relatively close, small states, in theory including Baltic NATO allies, but its ability to make war on western Europe, if it tried, is limited. Even a NATO alliance lacking the United States still has considerable advantages against Russia.

- North Atlantic alliance, contrary to its obligations under the Founding Act Russia – NATO, expands on Russia’s western borders with large contingents of troops, mostly American, and carries out an unprecedented military activity. What has caused so much concern in Washington?

- I oppose NATO expansion but do not see how the NATO treaty forbids expansion. Western concern about Russia is easy to understand given Russia’s annexation of Crimea. The criminal behavior of the Putin regime within Russia including its assault on human rights is also worrisome to liberal nations who tend to see, correctly or not, illiberal behavior at home as indicative of belligerence abroad.

- The Soviet Union and the United States have repeatedly waged proxy wars, but were not openly at war with each other. If Moscow and Washington meet in open confrontation, who do you think will win?

- No one would win a nuclear war, which is war at any level between the United States and Russia is very unlikely. And it depends on the circumstances of the imagined war. But US conventional superiority vis-à-vis remains substantial.

- China has started construction of the first naval base abroad - in East Africa (Djibouti). This is more than demonstrates the growing geopolitical ambitions of Pekin. Don’t you think that China is determined to become a global power in the ocean and, if necessary, use military means to defend their ever-expanding interests in the world?

- I think the right term might be a “more global power.” I think China wants to be able to defend its trade from possible military interruption and to be the dominant military power in its region.

- And will China be able to challenge the US military power?

- Yes, on its own shores and out a few miles into the ocean. The further away we are talking, the less ability to challenge US power the Chinese military has.