

H.E. Dr. Yegor Gaidar

Dear ladies and gentlemen, dear friends from IIASA,

First of all I have to excuse myself. I will have to leave after my presentation. Frankly, I had thought to address an issue connected with the reform of the financial infrastructure in the conditions of the growing globalization of a few developing economies. But after I heard the extremely interesting speech—from my point of view—about nuclear nonproliferation yesterday, I decided to entirely change the subject.

You see, we know that IIASA was really created as a reaction to the missile crisis in Cuba—to help create channels of expert communication between the two blocs. So we will find another floor to discuss the future of the IMF and World Bank, as I have to share with you some of my worries connected with security problems. Yes, (what was said yesterday) is absolutely true—the fact that for 60 years we have been able to avoid the use of nuclear weapons is an enormous achievement: that the rate of nuclear proliferation in the world today is so low is an enormous achievement. To my knowledge, nobody has ever seriously considered the use of nuclear weapons in any way as a first strike. As my military expert, when I worked in the government, informed me: Well, the United States stopped considering a first strike against the Soviet Union in '54, after they understood that the fuel capacity of a Soviet plane was now such that it could fly one-way and destroy New York. The Americans never informed even their close allies of this, but it was then that they stopped considering a first strike, even in terms of a conventional war in Europe.

So all of this is good. What, here, from my point of view then, is a major problem? The major problem is that we underestimate the danger not of this consistent solution, but of (the possibility of) a mistake. And this is not a field in which we can allow mistakes. I will explain to you why I mention this subject now; but let us for a while think about history.

The most dangerous period of the human history was, of course, the October '62 missile crisis. The Soviet leadership made a terrible mistake, misunderstanding what the American reaction would be to (placing) Soviet missiles in Cuba. Not understanding the real situation, the United States also made terrible mistakes. First of all, they underestimated, approximately fivefold, the number of the Soviet personnel (deployed in Cuba). They thought that there were somewhere around 8–10,000; there were 50,000. And what was also much more important and dangerous, the Americans did not understand that there were 109 Dachsen tactical nuclear weapons in Cuba. All the (American) planning was based on the idea that there were no tactical nuclear weapons there. The Soviet leadership had decided not to use the tactical nuclear weapons in the case of invasion of Cuba by the United States. And generally, the level of control over the Soviet, now Russian, nuclear weapons, I was told by Walter Auer and American specialists, was usually even higher than that of the Americans. But not of all of them, because in Cuba we had weapons that were not technically controlled from Moscow. So, on a technical level, it was the decision of the three-star general Pliev whether to use

them in the case of (an American) invasion or not. You can imagine how dangerous the situation was. Why I am mentioning all of this now?

Today there was information from sources in the ministry of defense in Russia that we are thinking about deploying tactical nuclear weapons in Russia as a response to the American project to build anti-missile weapons in the Czech Republic. I'll just try to explain to you why Moscow's reaction to this project is so nervous. Really, to tell you frankly, I think it's less nervous that I'd expect. It is a field that is closed, so I will be careful about (giving too much) information. In my experience, the military are not prepared to inform even their own ministers of foreign affairs about a lot of important technical details that come up during nuclear planning. At least, this was the case in the Soviet Union and to some degree in Russia, and from my point of view, in many other states too. So when foreign ministers are negotiating something, they are not informed about all the important technical details.

My American friends are, to a very serious degree, surprised about the Russian reaction because they understand perfectly that the project does not create any problems for Russia if it is an anti-missile project. But, there is an important point which should be understood. In the late seventies/early eighties, we elaborated in the Soviet Union, a system that was anti-missile but that had two possible targets: anti-missile and ground-to-ground. I know the name of the institute in which it was elaborated. I know when and where it was tested. I know the results of the tests. Our military—maybe they are wrong—think that they know the name of the similar project, elaborated at approximately the same time period in the United States. At least they think they know the name of the project and the characteristics of the missile. With this type of project you can change the warhead from “anti-missile” to “nuclear” in a period of approximately 20 minutes. You can change the target tasks in approximately a few seconds by computer after the missile has started. Wow! I do understand perfectly. I do not in any way believe that there is the slightest possibility of offensive nuclear weapons being targeted (by America) on Russian nuclear centers. But the problem is not what I think about this; the problem is what the people who are responsible for the security of my country are doing about this. And they have their own mentality, because they are doing their job. They are answerable for the security of a nuclear country, so they are thinking in terms of categories of ground speed, flying time, the capacity of the nuclear control center to withstand the pressure, the preciseness of the missile, etc, etc... (For the Americans) just to say: Well, it is not against you, it is against rogue states—this means more or less nothing. They, because of their job, have to think of the worst-case scenario. Thus for them, they [the US anti-missiles] are potentially offensive; they are very precise nuclear weapons and very close to Russian territory.

The key point, if we are speaking seriously about this matter, in all of the cases connected with nuclear planning, is the flying time. The usual flying time (Cuba to Washington) for many years was approximately 30–35 minutes. This means that in the case of a technical mistake—and technical mistakes happen even in this field as you know—you have to allow time to report to your President, for the President to call the chief of the general staff, and the President of Russia to call the President of the United States, to somehow to

get across that it is a mistake. When we put nuclear weapons on Cuba with that sort of technology, one of the most dangerous things that happened was that that we cut down the flying time to the key decision-making centers in Washington from 35 minutes to 8 minutes. The American rockets in Poland will have approximately the same characteristics. They are now in California, and as we know the ground speed; it is easy to calculate what the flying time will be. The flying time with this kind of rocket will be 4 minutes. And with the new kinds of rockets now being designed, 2 minutes. So: no calls to the President, no calls to the general staff, no discussion between the presidents. You have to delegate power for the decision making about the future of the mankind to the general who is in charge in the staff of the strategic missile forces. And maybe he will make a mistake. Maybe, for instance, he is drunk, and there you are, allowing him to destroy the world.

Yes, I do understand that if we had a joint program where we can elaborate the calculations together, if we create a spirit of trust between our military, that would be splendid; that would move the “world of wars” in a better direction. But this is not so easily done. Our presidents had a very friendly discussion on this issue and our initiatives were good. But that is not only element involved. Generally, both the American and our own military experts do agree about the possible configuration of this system. If I am informed correctly, our presidents told our respective militaries that they should work together. Splendid. But even if you receive an order from your president, it is not so easy, because I know what the reaction of our military was. All of this will end in a situation in which they will try to extract all the information from us, and they will share none of their information with us. I know the reaction of the American military – it was exactly the same. That’s their profession. They are trained not to trust each other too much. So you need a lot of efforts to create this spirit of trust; and if you are doing something together, and still literally saying: Well, whatever you are telling us, you could still do this, then I am afraid we could get a world which is more dangerous than before.

Thank you, dear friends.