

# Tailor-Surgeon, Soviet and *Silovik*: Russian Nuclear Strategy

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**Abstract:** In late 2014, the Russian Federation adopted its fourth and latest Military Doctrine since the collapse of the Soviet Union. The fourth iteration included essentially unchanged nuclear weapons declaratory policy and strategy as in its 2010 doctrine. As a primary task, this paper seeks to clear the air of confusing and less useful roles and even intentions ascribed to Russian nuclear strategy. Western experts have contended for nearly 20 years that if Russia developed relatively precise, long-range conventional weapons Russia would cease “relying” on nuclear options, as if welcoming Russian military power in one sphere mitigates against its nuclear threat in the other. This may not be correct.

## *Observations, Questions and a Contention*

By one very conservative estimate, Russia’s stockpile of nuclear warheads stands at 4,300.<sup>1</sup> Not counting the United States, this total is more than the combined, estimated total for all nuclear warheads in all other states that possess them. The U.S. stockpile stands at 4,018 warheads as of January 2017.<sup>2</sup> Russia’s nuclear numbers remain larger. But Russia also has more variations within its force. Russia’s stockpile of non-strategic nuclear weapons (NSNW) is a large nuclear force unto itself, with estimates of a warhead stockpile solely for its NSNW ranging from 800 to 3,800.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In Hans M. Kristensen and Robert S. Norris, “Russian Nuclear Forces, 2017,” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 73:2, 115-126, at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00963402.2017.1290375>. Kristensen and Norris are likely too conservative, since this figure includes non-strategic nuclear warheads in addition to strategic warheads.

<sup>2</sup> Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, “U.S. Vice President Joe Biden on Nuclear Security,” January 11, 2017, at <http://carnegieendowment.org/2017/01/11/u.s.-vice-president-joe-biden-on-nuclear-security-event-5476>.

<sup>3</sup> These weapons are variously called non-strategic nuclear weapons or NSNW, tactical nuclear weapons, theater nuclear weapons, and in Russia, “operational-tactical nuclear weapons.” For this paper and lecture, the term non-strategic nuclear weapons (NSNW) is used. Jacob Kipp defines them as: “any warhead and delivery system with a range of less than 5,500 kilometers or systems not covered by the existing strategic arms agreements between Russia and the United States....Alexei Arbatov has estimated the size of the Soviet nuclear arsenal in the early 1980s at more than 10,000 strategic warheads and approximately 30,000 tactical warheads (Alexei Arbatov, *The Transformation of Russian Military Doctrine: Lessons Learned from Kosovo and Chechnya*, *The Marshall Center Papers*, No. 2 (Garmisch-Partenkirchen, GE: The George C. Marshall Center, 2000), p. 4.) Estimates of the size of Russia’s contemporary arsenal vary widely....In the absence of official figures on this arsenal, assessments of Russia’s stockpile vary between 2,000 and 18,000 warheads. A more realistic estimate is in the middle: about 8,000 warheads early last year [2000], when implementation of the 1991-92 [Presidential Nuclear Initiatives] was almost complete[.]” See Jacob W. Kipp, “Russia’s Non-Strategic Nuclear Weapons,” *Military Review* May-June (2001): 27-38, and hereinafter “Kipp.” Amy Woolf has critiqued this historically-approached definition of Russian NSNW, noting that the most essential issue with respect to these weapons going forward, rather than what they were called or where they were in the past, is that “The distinction...between a strategic and a nonstrategic nuclear weapons may well reflect the nature of the target, not the yield or delivery vehicle of the attacking warhead.” See Amy F. Woolf, *Nonstrategic Nuclear Weapons* (CRS Report No. RL32572) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2017), p. 8, and hereinafter, “Woolf.” Estimates of the numeric size of the Russian NSNW force range from 800 to over 3,800. See also, Igor Sutyagin, *Atomic Accounting: A New Estimate of Russia’s Non-Strategic Nuclear Forces*, RUSI Occasional Paper (London: Royal United Services Institute, November 2012). Also, a very good table appears in Gudrun Persson, ed., *Russian Military Capability in a Ten-Year Perspective—2016* (Stockholm: FOI) (FOI-R—4326—SE), December 2016, at p. 43, wherein Russian NSNW are broken down by Russian Military Districts.

Beyond warhead estimates, Russia's nuclear delivery capabilities are impressive and largely unique. It maintains the largest inventory of cruise and ballistic missiles in the world, with ranges from tens to hundreds of kilometers to over 5,500 kilometers, including short-, medium-, intermediate-, and intercontinental-range systems, many of which may be dual-capable (able to deploy conventional and nuclear warheads). Russia has the only nuclear-armed, intermediate-range ground-launched cruise missile (GLCM) in Europe, one developed and deployed in violation of a treaty, according to public reports.<sup>4</sup> There is no publicly-available estimate for the number of such banned missiles Russia may have, but as they constitute a violation of a treaty banning all such missiles, even a few are significant for Russian arms control compliance. Putting aside the banned GLCM, Russia's large number of mobile, ground-launched intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) and their launchers, GLCMs (arms control-compliant versions) and their launchers, and ground-launched ballistic missiles (GLBMs) and their launchers, create unique targeting burdens for any potential adversary and constitute a wide range of options for Russian commanders.

Russia has recently deployed a new sea-launched cruise missile (SLCM), one in its Kalibr family of land- and sea-based cruise missiles. The SLCM does not violate any treaty when deployed at sea or if its range is less than 500 kilometers on land. This missile is most likely able to carry nuclear warheads and puts Russia alongside U.S. conventional, longer-range SLCM capability. Russia also has a new air-launched cruise missile (ALCM, the Kh-101/102), a weapon type of which the United States does not expect to have a new version for some years until its Long-Range Standoff weapon (LRSO) replaces its AGM-86B.

Two central questions arise:

- Do Russian nuclear capabilities, numbers, modernization and noncompliance indicate a strategy predicated on large numbers owing to a deficit of Russian conventional strength?
- Or, does Russian strategy simply include a wider role for nuclear weapons, one that will make it difficult for Russia to further reduce them?

Russia places faith in large numbers, as much as for their military options as their effects on the United States and other countries. This is unlikely to change for many years. Even if it did, there is no way to verify it, at least for the present. Also, while nuclear weapons were originally meant to fill a gap in Russian capabilities 20 years ago, they may come to play new roles or maintain existing ones notwithstanding Russian conventional weapons improvements and regardless whether their missions include de-escalation of major conventional war (as further described below). Russia had thousands of NSNW long before it had a doctrine employing them for de-escalation of conventional war or to deter it.

Nothing changes a conflict more than nuclear weapons, either by their use, or otherwise, and no nation on earth appears more amenable to their use than Russia, despite relatively steady progress in declared nuclear reductions. However, those past reductions never required much of

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<sup>4</sup> Michael Gordon, "Russia Deploys Missile, Violating Treaty and Challenging Trump," *The New York Times*, February 14, 2017, at <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/14/world/europe/russia-cruise-missile-arms-control-treaty.html>.

Russia as the end of the Soviet Union triggered massive shortfalls in resources across the Russian force, in both nuclear and conventional forces.

### *Nuclear Strategy Under Arms Control*

All nuclear strategies take note of numbers. Numbers matter in a crisis and in the transition from peacetime to crisis. When nuclear numbers become the subject of debate and intense disagreement, the issues are nearly always peacetime numbers (which are either too high or too low, depending on the argument), and what numbers and capabilities can, in a crisis, provide the United States or Russia militarily significant advantages over each other. These issues do not begin to encompass the much less formal set of arguments around disarmament, adherents of which seek changes without regard to any one strategy or even a coherent one for dealing with the current situation of strategic pessimism in U.S.-Russian relations.

Arms control, on the other hand, seeks to find alerts or signals, even perhaps a language of those different from nuclear signaling carried out in peacetime exercises. Treaty violations can constitute a warning of an approaching crisis, and perhaps give sides time to reduce the risks of major war or, failing, that, undertake breakout from limits. This process is in fact what is taking place with respect to the 1987 Treaty on Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces (INF) and the banned Russian GLCM.<sup>5</sup>

As tensions with Russia rise, the ability to monitor its nuclear forces has also seen renewed interest. Critiques of extant verification could take many, many more pages of analysis.<sup>6</sup> For Russia, in the past at least, arms control played no role in sizing its forces.<sup>7</sup> In the past, U.S. policy embraced what might be called “strategy under arms control.” This is now changing, as well, with the additional testing and evaluation of new types of Russian and American strategic offensive arms not explicitly covered by arms control treaties.

New verification would likely be needed to include Russia’s newer and more exotic nuclear forces in arms control. Additionally, arms control reductions have less value relative to the arms they reduce as those total stockpiles in both the United States and Russia naturally reduce in number while the number of weapons not covered under extant limits and the number of violations of existing ones increases. Arms control has less to do with nuclear strategy today than at any time since its inception in the 1970s.

### *Obstacles for Assessing Russian Nuclear Strategy*

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<sup>5</sup> Since 2014, the U.S. Department of State has determined and reported to Congress that Russia is “in violation of its obligations under the INF Treaty not to possess, produce, or flight-test a ground-launched cruise missile (GLCM) with a range capability of 500 km to 5,500 km, or to possess or produce launchers of such missiles.” At [https://www.state.gov/t/avc/rls/rpt/2016/255651.htm#INF\\_TREATY](https://www.state.gov/t/avc/rls/rpt/2016/255651.htm#INF_TREATY).

<sup>6</sup> The theory of “militarily-significant” breakout, for example, based on National Technical Means and arms control treaty-supplied data.

<sup>7</sup> As Vladimir Dvorkin has said, the reason arms control treaties like START I and New START were politically agreeable for Russia as that “since 1992, no Russian missile or launcher, no submarine missile carrier or heavy bomber has been liquidated due to contractual limitations and will not be liquidated under the terms of the new [START] treaty,” in Vladimir Dvorkin, “Prague’s Frontier Now Passed, What are the Further Goals?,” *Nezavisimoe Voennoye Obozrenie*, February 4, 2011, at [http://nvo.ng.ru/concepts/2011-02-04/1\\_snv.html](http://nvo.ng.ru/concepts/2011-02-04/1_snv.html), and hereinafter “Prague’s Frontier.”

In addition to unique capabilities and numbers, analysis of Russian nuclear strategy contends with obstacles. The first is a general one for the study of strategy itself, namely, distinguishing it from tactics and doctrine and in this case, placing it in a Russian nuclear context. The second is that the Russian nuclear lexicon uses many terms interchangeably, terms and concepts which the West does not use to mean the same thing.<sup>8</sup> Russia also employs its own, unique concepts and historical approaches to modern conflict in the domain of nuclear deterrence. A fourth obstacle is that Russia may not have a nuclear strategy, *per se*.

A search for a way to capture the essence of this period of profound strategic pessimism has left this paper with a poor title. Terms like “tailored damage” and the “nuclear scalpel” can be found in many Russian and American monographs.<sup>9</sup> The nuclear tailor or surgeon derive from what are perhaps over-literary, rhetorical Russian flourishes. The Soviets were never particularly complicated. For them, nuclear weapons deterred major nuclear war. Today’s Russian *Siloviki* (the Russian political leadership developed and maintained under Vladimir Putin who, like him, are mostly former intelligence officers and who now run Russia’s national security and intelligence agencies) largely see nuclear weapons as a tool for international political coercion. Unlike the Soviet, they tend toward more Byzantine nuclear complexity and over nuclear threat making. Among the nuclear *Siloviki*, none is as impudent as Nikolai Patrushev, the current Secretary of the Russian National Security Council (see further on him and the role he plays, one likely characterizing the new Kremlin hardliners).

Soviet conventional military power was so strong during the 1970s that former U.S. Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger later wrote “[i]n the absence of the [NATO] nuclear deterrent, the Eurasian continent would be dominated by the nation with the most powerful conventional forces,” namely the USSR.<sup>10</sup> In that era, conventional force numbers correlated with Soviet nuclear forces to achieve a picture not unlike the one facing NATO today. At present, Russia has more nuclear weapons than all Europe combined and while it no longer has Warsaw Pact forces, it would not need them to attack newer NATO Members. A 2016 Rand study found that the longest it would take for “Russian forces to reach the outskirts of the Estonian and/or Latvian capitals of Tallinn and Riga, respectively, is 60 hours.”<sup>11</sup>

In March 2013, a Russian Tu-22M bomber-fighter with Russian tactical air support aircraft were all able to arrive at the eastern edge of the Stockholm archipelago in Sweden on what NATO later confirmed was a Russian practice air raid at Sweden with nuclear weapons. The NATO Secretary General’s Report noted:

As part of its overall military build-up, the pace of Russia’s military manoeuvres and drills have reached levels unseen since the height of the Cold War. Over the past three years, Russia has conducted at least 18 large-scale snap exercises, some of which have involved more than 100,000 troops. These exercises include simulated nuclear attacks on NATO

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<sup>8</sup> For example, deterrence and compellence are treated as very different in America, but this is not the case in Russia, where *sderzhivaniya* can be used for both.

<sup>9</sup> The Second Cold War in the Second Nuclear Age seems, well, equally ambitious, if maybe better suited to an English-language audience.

<sup>10</sup> James R. Schlesinger, “Nuclear Deterrence: The Ultimate Reality,” *The Washington Post*, October 21, 1986, p. A 17.

<sup>11</sup> Shlapak, David A. and Michael Johnson, *Reinforcing Deterrence on NATO's Eastern Flank: Wargaming the Defense of the Baltics* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2016).

[https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR1253.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1253.html).

Allies (e.g., ZAPAD) and on partners (e.g., March 2013 simulated attacks on Sweden), and have been used to mask massive movements of military forces (February 2014 prior to the illegal annexation of Crimea) and to menace Russia's neighbours.<sup>12</sup>

The Cold War is today often taken for a kind of short-hand nuclear reference to large numbers and big dangers, but it had less to do with nuclear weapons than might be imagined. Surely, in its best meaning, it rather indicated an ideological struggle, with militaries and alliances essentially stalemated on either side of the essential questions regarding the origin of authority and legitimacy of two states' claims that theirs was the better way. Nuclear weapons helped achieve the stalemate, but in Europe, more than other regions, this standoff brought supreme nuclear dangers. Charges of a "Cold War mentality" or posture are common and all commonly wrong, too. Today, the U.S.-NATO position in Europe is decidedly weaker than it was during the Cold War and changes are clearly required.

Russia's 17-year-old doctrine of limited nuclear escalation to de-escalate conventional war (sometimes described as "war termination") is likely the most important question concerning its nuclear doctrine and implicating its NSNW. It corroborates an idea that its nuclear strategy (or at least *that* Russian nuclear strategy) is more coercion than deterrence, or perhaps, even a kind of extreme, coercive-deterrent threat, i.e., something so risky and apparently lacking in military coherence let alone sanity that it must be a threat that will go best unfulfilled. This has become known in the West as "escalate-to-de-escalate strategy" (hereinafter, "EDS"). As this is the most-often discussed Russian nuclear strategy, much of this paper focuses on it.

Given the timeframe in which it first appeared (Russia's Military Doctrine issued in the year 2000) most experts assumed that if or when Russia's conventional forces were to mature and multiply, it would not have to "rely" or "depend" on its nuclear forces for missions in purely conventional conflict—i.e., deterring major conventional war. This now seems incorrect as is further argued below. For NATO and the United States, whether Russia opts out of NSNW for conventionally-armed strike is nearly irrelevant, at least for the time being. Certain statements and even official doctrine support the notion that Russia would logically follow in the footsteps of the United States—i.e., that it would move to conventional weapons of sufficient range, speed and power, and reduce "dependence" or "reliance" on nuclear forces. Russia has not yet done so, and there are reasons to think it may not.

### *A Russian Economy and Currency of Risks and Threats*

Thomas Schelling's competitive risk-taking and "manipulation of risk"<sup>13</sup> as a type of strategy may explain some Russian nuclear behavior or how Russia uses its nuclear forces in a broader strategy of coercion. A kind of economy consisting of threats and risks has evolved in Russian nuclear strategy. By taking the danger of nuclear war and seemingly increasing the risk of nuclear use through adoption of doctrines increasing the chances of nuclear use (or behaving aggressively with its nuclear forces, including in exercises) Russian strategy today seems to be a good example of Schelling's "manipulation of costs and risks" in a strategy of competitive risk-taking and threat-making.

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<sup>12</sup> The Secretary General's Annual Report, 2015, p. 19, at [http://www.nato.int/nato\\_static\\_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf\\_2016\\_01/20160128\\_SG\\_AnnualReport\\_2015\\_en.pdf](http://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2016_01/20160128_SG_AnnualReport_2015_en.pdf).

<sup>13</sup> Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966) and as well, *The Strategy of Conflict* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1980).

What such an economy use? Simply put: its nuclear forces, its missiles and warheads, are the currency or barter items in this economy. Most weapons must be visible to the extent the enemy can evaluate them and the media can relay images of them. Russia apparently has taken few actions to restrict rumor and remark over its INF-busting GLCM. Surely it could do so given the near total secrecy it successfully maintains for its NSNW. The more a weapon is for manipulation of the perception of risk, the more it may be kept as a false secret, also—in other words, leaked, as was the case with the Status-6 nuclear torpedo.<sup>14</sup> The torpedo was the perfect example of a weapon that is risky. A submarine-launched, guided, autonomous, nuclear-armed torpedo, it would be used to attack coastal structures, ports and bays to bring about significant, unacceptable economic damage. It would not reduce a city or military base to ashes nor frankly do much harm to any hardened (radiation, blast/heat, pressure, etc.) facility. So why would anyone need it for a military purpose? The answer may be that Russia does not need it for a military purpose, nor even the weapon itself, but rather as more currency in the economy of nuclear threats and risks.

The deterrent effect of doubt or anxiety in the mind of an opponent is the value in this economy, with a kind of exchange rate relating to enemy nuclear forces, if they have any of their own. Americans, while likely the most threatened target next to NATO exchange Russian nuclear weapons, risks and threats via their own force numbers and arrive at determinations about stability, in peacetime and crisis. The more important the weapon is for a purpose of perceived threat and increased risk in this economy, the more it must not be secret so as to obtain the benefits of its value.

Just as a central bank might regulate currencies, Russia's nuclear doctrines attempt regulation of this economy of risks and threats, setting out the four corners of the economy. Or at least, may try. Soviet bomb designer Yuri Trutnev once said "weapons system[s] define the doctrine that exists in reality as opposed to the declared doctrine."<sup>15</sup> Certainly Trutnev's remark was applicable to the Soviet Union. Its declared doctrine of "no first use" was demonstrably false given the preponderance of its forces and their readiness for a first strike.

#### *Russia's Military Doctrine and Its Strategic Debate*

If we measure change as the introduction of something new, for the past 20 years, Russia's doctrine on nuclear weapons has undergone far more change than its nuclear forces. Russia's modernization of its strategic nuclear forces is now well underway, and Russia will have to make choices in force structure to accommodate obligations under the New START Treaty, its budget and its security imperatives. As well, new conventional weapons may begin to replace nuclear forces for some missions to which Russia might have assigned nuclear forces since 2000, when it issued its first Military Doctrine (hereinafter, "MD") containing the EDS.

TABLE 1—TRANSITION FROM SOVIET TO

<sup>14</sup> Thomas Nilson, "Did Russia Test Doomsday Weapon in Arctic Waters?" *The Independent Barents Observer*, December 12, 2016, at <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/security/2016/12/did-russia-test-doomsday-weapon-arctic-waters>.

<sup>15</sup> In Andrei Kokoshin, *Ensuring Strategic Stability in the Past and Present: Theoretical and Applied Questions*, Harvard Kennedy School, Belfer Center, June 2011, p. 4.

	SOVIET UNION AND RUSSIAN 1993 MILITARY DOCTRINE	RUSSIAN DOCTRINES 2000, 2010 AND 2014 (additions in <b><i>bold italics</i></b> )
NATURE OF CONFLICT	-Global War	- <b><i>Regional war</i></b> and Global war
NUCLEAR MISSION	-Deterrence of Global War	- <b><i>De-escalation of regional war</i></b> and -Deterrence of global war
EMPLOYMENT	-No first use -Massive strike on warning, transition to second strike	- <b><i>Regional conflict but limited use on military targets</i></b> - <b><i>First use</i></b> -Massive strike on warning/second strike
SCALE OF USE	Unacceptable damage	- <b><i>Tailored damage for limited use</i></b> -Unacceptable damage for global war

Russia's most recent MD was issued in 2014. Like its three predecessors (issued in 1993, 2000 and 2010), it contains provisions on nuclear weapons. It is worth recalling the history in the period before the 2000 MD was issued because the 2000 MD signaled changes in Russia's approach to strategic deterrence. The 2014 MD may signal a future change in EDS, as well.

#### *Developing the EDS and the 2000 Military Doctrine*

Russia does not have a "no first use" policy. Its 1993 MD did contain one (a provision from Soviet doctrine which was demonstrably false) but changes made in the 2000 MD required its removal. Russia was struggling to meet defense requirements against peers in 1999 at the same time it was about to embark on another war in Chechnya for the political purpose of promoting Vladimir Putin. Its military and strategic policies toward the United States and NATO still depended on the threat of its strategic nuclear forces. After 2000, Russian nuclear forces served also to exclude American intervention against its interests through a change in doctrine. Once Moscow assessed there was a chance the United States and NATO could intervene in its region in conflicts in which Russian interests or forces were present, it undertook several strategic gestures in doctrine to communicate that it would not tolerate Western intervention, reflected in Table 1, above. Threatening the use of strategic nuclear forces over Kosovo—and the annihilation of Russia—self-deterred their use and diminished the credibility of such a threat in Russia.

The Revolution in Military Affairs (or RMA) was a prevalent feature of military thought in Russia at the turn of the century, as it was for all professional militaries. But its roots trace back to the

<sup>16</sup> Table by Nikolai Sokov, Slide Presentation, "Russian Nuclear Strategy," June 27, 2016, at <https://www.csis.org/events/russian-nuclear-strategy>.

Cold War and originally intertwined specifically with nuclear-capable ballistic missiles. For Soviet theoreticians, the RMA was:

[The sum of all] changes in the means of armed struggle, in the methods of conducting combat actions, in the organization of troops, their training and education; changes, which ...are connected...with the creation of nuclear-armed missiles.<sup>17</sup>

The RMA of 1999-2000 described large changes to warfare resulting from highly precise, long-range weapons of tremendous speed coupled with enhanced battle management and information processing informed by overhead, space-based surveillance and communications, all allowing major war to be undertaken without the use of nuclear weapons. It resulted from American offsetting strategy begun in the 1970s. This RMA created a system-of-systems which could enable victory at a safe remove from combat in all conditions, or what Russian and Eastern European experts have since called “contactless warfare.”<sup>18</sup>

Nuclear weapons were no longer *the* key to superpower status after this RMA. The nature of conflict had so fundamentally changed that it undermined strategic nuclear deterrence in Moscow’s eyes due to its significant lag in technology and a lapse in strategy—dependence on strategic forces to prevent Western intervention in Russia’s interests did not work. Until the 1999 Kosovo crisis, it was Russian policy to rely on the power of Moscow’s strategic nuclear forces to achieve deterrence of more than just global nuclear war. Russia had become an almost a totally nuclear state in its deterrence relationship with America, with conventional forces that were barely adequate for national defense. Russia’s first war in Chechnya had also exposed the infirmity of its conventional tactics and forces in dealing with a smaller, more mobile foe, as well.

American offsetting strategy’s technological prowess came into its own in Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm but did not come to Russia’s doorstep until the NATO air campaign (Operation Allied Force) came to Serbia in 1999 as part of its response to the humanitarian crisis in Kosovo. This had a profound effect on Russia’s military and security elite. Before Operation Allied Force, then-Defense Minister Sergeyev, himself a former commander of Russia’s Strategic Rocket Forces (SRF) over sold the benefits of Russia’s strategic nuclear forces to deter aggression in Russia’s sphere of influence.<sup>19</sup> He and other senior Russian defense officials had opted for a strategy and budget that would favor the SRF, as well. When those forces did not prevent NATO from acting against Serbia, Russia changed its public doctrine, using the next best thing it had to compensate for advanced conventional weapons—its NSNW—in a new way, at least publicly.

The loss of Russian confidence in strategic nuclear deterrence caused Russia initially to focus on using NSNW to “prevent the outbreak” of larger-scale conventional wars that would risk the existence of the Russian state itself. As Jacob Kipp noted in 2001:

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<sup>17</sup> Jacob W. Kipp, *Forecasting Future War: Andrei Kokoshin and the Military-Political Debate in Contemporary Russia*, Foreign Military Studies office, Fort Leavenworth Command Staff College, January 1999.

<sup>18</sup> See National Defence Academy of Latvia Center for Security and Strategic Research, *Russia’s Next Generation Warfare in Ukraine: Implications for Latvian Defense Policy*, April 2014, at <http://www.naa.mil.lv/~media/NAA/AZPC/Publikacijas/PP%2002-2014.ashx>.

<sup>19</sup> No other author quite covers this period of change in Russia better than Kipp. This transition to Long-Range Aviation and strategic nuclear war is detailed in Table Two, below.



Strategic nuclear forces [would] remain the main means of deterrence, but the presence of [NSNW] offer[ed] a chance (although fragile) to prevent the avalanche-like transformation of a regional conflict into an unlimited global use of nuclear weapons. In these circumstances, [NSNW] can be employed to destroy military targets in the region. However, if the enemy does not halt aggression, then the target set shifts to counter-value targets to be attacked by long-range aviation of strategic nuclear forces.<sup>20</sup>

Kipp also wrote:

Looming behind...NSNW was the warning of an even more dramatic transformation of warfare with the development of precision-strike weapons; information warfare; and advanced command, control, communications and intelligence. Proponents of this transformation labeled it Sixth-Generation Warfare and associated its appearance with the end of the hegemony of nuclear weapons and deterrence.<sup>21</sup>

Good scholarship supports the contention that Russia adopted a widened nuclear employment policy with a limited scale of use and damage in otherwise conventional war due to conventional force weakness. The political calculation that a nuclear shield was needed to extend nuclear deterrence down the scale of conflict, just as it extended up the scale for strategic nuclear war, resulted in doctrinal changes. Ensuring that Russia's strategic forces remained ready to deter major war remained a main task for the SRF, but other bureaucratic changes and restructuring eventually put the SRF back in command structures and budgets that were not as they had been during Sergeyev's time.

Senior Russian experts assign very little value to the MD and other, official and unclassified Russian documents. Vladimir Dvorkin<sup>22</sup> and Alexei Arbatov<sup>23</sup> complain of the MD's imprecision and its political nature. They appear to conform to the notion expressed by Trutnev—weapons are the basis for all deductions about policy, doctrine and strategy. Others, most notably Andrei Piontkovsky, worry that the MD and other documents do not contain Russia's *real* strategy. They note comments made by officials, particularly by Security Council Secretary Nikolai Patrushev, which contain threats to use nuclear forces in a manner inconsistent with what the MD says in what they call Russia's real strategy— "Nuclear Blackmail."<sup>24</sup> If in fact Russia does have a secret

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<sup>20</sup> Kipp, p. 33.

<sup>21</sup> Kipp, P. 34.

<sup>22</sup> Prague's Frontier.

<sup>23</sup> Alexei Arbatov, "Arbatov on the New Security Doctrine," *Obshchaya Gazeta*, February 10, 2000, at p. 3 (Via FBIS). While an old opinion on the 2000 MD, and Arbatov was then himself a member of an opposition party and in the Duma, his critical remarks remain worthy and of note even today because they reinforce the political-military theory behind the MD and its frank and best use for Putin: "As for the references to a threat from outside, emanating from American hegemony and the new strategy of NATO, the concept of the first use of nuclear weapons, the declaration of the possibility and the lawfulness of the use of armed forces inside the country for the resolution of ethnic problems, and the battle against armed separatism, terrorism, and Islamic fundamentalism—all of that was around before. All of that was first set forth as long ago as the autumn of 1993.... it is not so much the novelty itself that is attracting attention to the doctrine as it is the great amount of sensationalism that is being raised around this doctrine in the press. The sensationalism, without doubt, is being encouraged, through all means possible, by the official organs of power. It cannot be interpreted in any other way than as one more element in the election campaign which has been called upon to strengthen the reputation of the acting president [reference here is to Acting President Putin] as a tough man who is trying to bring about order, who is ready to use force, and who supports the restoration of military power, prestige, and a very hard position of Russia toward the world surrounding it.

<sup>24</sup> Andrei Piontkovsky, "The Kremlin's Nuclear Poker: When Putin Starts to Play, *Novoe Vremya*, March 29, 2016, at <http://nv.ua/opinion/piontkovskiy/jadernyj-poker-kremlja-kogda-putin-zaigraetsja-106388.htm>. Hereinafter, "Nuclear Poker."

nuclear doctrine that would involve nuclear preemption, few experts are willing to contend it would make good on such threats.

### *The Patrushev Doctrine and a Nuclear Narva*

In 2009 and again in 2014, Patrushev played a major role in the interagency debate in Russia on the nuclear portions of the MD. Patrushev made public remarks in 2009, ones that included is statement that both “preventive” nuclear strikes would be included in the new MD his agency was then charged with drafting. As Mikhail Tsypkin encapsulated:

Nikolai Patrushev (the Security Council was charged with preparing the draft doctrine) suggested that the new doctrine “would not exclude preventive” nuclear strikes in situations “critical” to Russian national security, even in small-scale, local wars. (The August 2008 war with Georgia was a small-scale war [per the definitions of one in the 2000 MD].) The 2000 military doctrine assigned first use of nuclear weapons only to large-scale (in fact, global) wars, in situations critical to Russian national security. Once the 2010 doctrine was released, however, the formula of first use dropped any reference to the scale of war and somewhat tightened the main condition for such use to a “threat to the existence of the state itself.”<sup>25</sup>

Such strikes were not included in the final MD, and again in 2014, Patrushev made more statements as to the content of the MD being prepared and again, there were no pre-emptive or preventive nuclear strikes. Andrei Piontkovsky and a large group of Russian intellectuals, and defense and security experts, have termed these views the “Patrushev doctrine.” They have called both Putin and Patrushev “nuclear blackmailers”:

A nuclear blackmailer is a terrorist who is not going to die. The blackmailer threatens to use nuclear weapons, hoping that the other side, even possessing no less nuclear arsenal, will be horrified at the prospect of the death of millions of people, will yield in a concrete conflict and pay him the required political price. In any case, this is absolutely irresponsible behavior, evidencing the deviant consciousness of a type of character. Such a person, in the one-step vicinity of a nuclear button, is very dangerous both for his country and for all mankind.<sup>26</sup>

Piontkovsky has coined a concept particularly useful for this paper, that of a “Nuclear Narva,” one which is further developed, here. It is a scenario wherein Narva, a city in Estonia that is 90 percent ethnically Russian, wants to more closely align with Russia as it has many Russian-speaking residents who feel Tallinn is restricting their rights to speak Russian. As in the Crimea, Putin is enjoined to defend them and his “little green men” arrive. But NATO extends its nuclear umbrella to Estonia under Article V of the 1949 North Atlantic Treaty. Estonia, now a NATO Member, is the testing ground for Putin’s Nuclear Narva. This may not include any use of nuclear weapons, but it will include many threats and risks run, in effect, competing Russia’s nuclear economy against NATO’s and in a NATO member without its own nuclear forces.

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<sup>25</sup> Mikhail Tsypkin, “What’s New in Russia’s New Military Doctrine,” Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, February 27, 2010, at [http://calhoun.nps.edu/bitstream/handle/10945/38809/inc\\_Tsypkin\\_What's\\_New2010.pdf](http://calhoun.nps.edu/bitstream/handle/10945/38809/inc_Tsypkin_What's_New2010.pdf).

<sup>26</sup> Nuclear Poker.

The question Putin clearly would want to put to NATO is the most basic and oldest since 1949—Do you want to risk global nuclear war simply because some ethnic Russians want to speak their own language, freely? That Estonia was the first Soviet republic to declare its effective independence from the old Union in 1988 should also add more clarity and gravity to this scenario.

### *Is Russia Now Offsetting NATO?*

In remarks during the Russian Defense Ministry's 2016 Collegium, Vladimir Putin placed Russia's nuclear forces at the top of his speech, noting that "the share of modern armaments in the nuclear forces is almost 60 percent."<sup>27</sup> But he additionally stated that "strategic non-nuclear forces also need to be brought to a qualitatively new level, allowing them to neutralize any military threats to Russia."<sup>28</sup> Months later, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu appeared to go even further when he said, "in the future, the role of nuclear weapons in deterring a potential aggressor will decrease [and] this is primarily due to the development of [Russia's] high-precision weapons."<sup>29</sup>

Both statements are consistent with Russia's 2014 MD, which provides that a main task for Russia's armed forces is "strategic (nuclear and non-nuclear) deterrence."<sup>30</sup> These statements are important since one of the chief analytic judgements regarding Russian nuclear strategy has been that it increased the role of its nuclear forces in conventional conflict and became more dependent on them because of its conventional (i.e., non-nuclear) weaknesses. But do these statements mean Russia might be on the verge of making changes in its nuclear doctrine and strategy, i.e., away from near total application of nuclear weapons in conflict? Even if Russia did qualitatively adjust the capability of its conventional forces, no official Russian statement exists saying at which

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<sup>27</sup> For a complete translation of Putin's remarks, see the blog Russia Defense Policy, "Today We Are Stronger," December 29, 2016, at <https://russiandefpolicy.blog/2016/12/29/today-we-are-stronger/>.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> TASS, "Shoigu: Western attempts to obstruct the establishment of a more equitable world order lead to chaos," February 21, 2017, at <http://tass.ru/armiya-i-opk/4041766>.

<sup>30</sup> President of the Russian Federation, *Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation*, signed December 25, 2014 and published on December 30, 2014, at <https://rg.ru/2014/12/30/doktrina-dok.html> (in Russian), at paragraph 16, and hereinafter, "2014 Doctrine." For a good English translation, see <https://www.offiziere.ch/wp-content/uploads-001/2015/08/Russia-s-2014-Military-Doctrine.pdf>.

level or capability Russia would achieve what it would need in order to no longer rely on nuclear weapons. Similarly, there is no statement that Russia will not still retain its vast stockpile of NSNW, even if they were no longer assigned to EDS. Russians may have said in 2000 that the use of nuclear weapons to deter large-scale conventional conflict was temporary, but they have not said that again, either.

In Russia's 2000 MD, it broadened the role of nuclear weapons to include their use in conventional war. For most experts, Russia's extension of nuclear weapons to conventional conflict was logical, if risky, since it was due to conventional weakness. The Nuclear Threat Initiative (NTI) noted in 2004 that Russia's "main innovation was a new mission assigned to nuclear weapons, that of deterrence of limited conventional wars" and that "reliance on nuclear weapons is seen as a temporary 'fix' intended to provide for security until conventional forces are sufficiently modernized and strengthened."<sup>31</sup> That was not entirely well written or well considered since Russian nuclear forces had for a long time also been thought to deter massive conventional attacks; what was new, and what NTI missed, was that now, under the 2000 MD, nuclear forces could be used to end a conventional, not just deter one. For other experts, arms control reductions mitigated risks and eliminated concerns. As Rose Gottemoeller wrote in 2004, "[a]s long as the Russians remain committed to reductions [of nuclear weapons], their continuing dependence on nuclear forces is not a problem."<sup>32</sup>

*Table 2—Original De-Escalation of Armed Conflicts (EDS) Concept*

BY LEVSHIN, NEDELIN AND SOSNOVSKY<sup>33</sup>

Type of Strike	Levshin-Nedelin-Sosnovsky's Nuclear De-escalation
	Target Type
Demonstration	Single strike in area with no personnel, or very few
Intimidation-Demonstration	Single strike at logistics, engineering, reduction of invading force/enemy efficiency
Intimidation	More than one strike aimed at a sector of the conflict to alter the balance and/or to eliminate breakthrough
Intimidation-Retaliatio	Multiple strikes on enemy's theater of operation's force groups, to fundamentally or resolutely alter the balance and prevent breakthrough of a defensive line
Retaliatio-Intimidation	Mass strikes on enemy armed forces to rout and destroy—a radical change is the goal

<sup>31</sup> Nuclear Threat Initiative, "Russia's Nuclear Doctrine," August 1, 2004, at <http://www.nti.org/analysis/articles/russias-nuclear-doctrine/>.

<sup>32</sup> Rose Gottemoeller, "Nuclear Necessity in Putin's Russia," *Arms Control Today*, April 1, 2004, at [https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2004\\_04/Gottemoeller](https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2004_04/Gottemoeller).

<sup>33</sup> V.I. Levshin, A.V. Nedelin and M.E. Sosnovsky, "On Employing Nuclear Weapons to De-Escalate Military Operations," *Military Thought*, May-June 1999, 34-37. Table taken largely from James T. Quinlivan and Olga Oliker, *Nuclear Deterrence in Europe: Russian Approaches to a New Environment and Implications for the United States*, (Washington, DC: Rand Corporation, 2011), p. 30, hereinafter "Russian Approaches."

Type of Strike	Levshin-Nedelin-Sosnovsky's Nuclear De-escalation
	Target Type
Demonstration	Single strike in area with no personnel, or very few
Intimidation-Demonstration	Single strike at logistics, engineering, reduction of invading force/enemy efficiency
Intimidation	More than one strike aimed at a sector of the conflict to alter the balance and/or to eliminate breakthrough
Retaliation	Mass strikes all over the theater of operations, maximum use of force coordinated with strategic nuclear forces

The progenitors Russian EDS discussed it in the open in the late 1990s. Levshin et al. wrote what is the only unclassified guide to what Russian nuclear escalation (de-escalation) strategy may look like, even today. It is the only Russian monograph that specifies the tricky pieces of nuclear escalation from theater to global nuclear war, or rather, in their view, how to de-escalate conventional war using a series of measured nuclear escalations, from a Russian perspective. It does not have tremendous precision but it was written as more advocacy than analysis. As such, it also could be said to show how Russians view conflict, generally, when nuclear forces are implicated. Their work leaves most details aside, quite naturally, given its speculative advocacy. They were motivated by the changes affecting Russia in 1999, and as detailed above—the issues surrounding American offsetting power and Russian conventional weakness at a time when strategic nuclear deterrence appeared to have failed.

Note that in the table above, nothing in it concerns conventional weakness, or even conventional forces, but does provide a direct reference to strategic nuclear forces. It makes no quantitative assessment of how few or how many conventional forces would be left when the scale of EDS reflected in the table is triggered, at each stage or type of strike along its continuum. But to be frank, any Russian weapon of either the nuclear or conventional kind that struck at a NATO target crosses a threshold that cannot be uncrossed. Levshin et al. were highly concerned about initiating strategic war on one end, but not so much at the other. This makes EDS highly vulnerable to criticism, on many scores.

How would NATO know a single nuclear strike did not stand for escalation, but rather de-escalation? The balance of forces and the relevant state of the conflict in question play a role, and the target Russia strikes would, as well. But the real answer is that NATO could not know it was anything other than escalation. If Russia were on verge of defeat, with loss of more conventional forces critical to protection of the City of Moscow itself likely, and then a nuclear detonation occurred over an unmanned maintenance depot in Poland, there is no way to know Russia means simply to withdraw its forces and NATO is not to give chase, or for that matter make good on the explicit threat of significant, nuclear retaliation, i.e., punishment. Perhaps Russia could conceivably accept losses in response, but that is hardly plausible if it were on the brink of a major theater defeat with strategic consequences and it was using nuclear weapons to get out of a crisis, not enlarge it.

Communication in crisis is a yet unknown language for nuclear war—hotlines and the like exist for the transition to nuclear crisis, but in an extreme crisis involving the use of nuclear weapons, it is hard to think such communication would be possible without political-military consequences, to say nothing of the progress of war. Maybe Russia could issue stand-down orders following its first, de-escalatory strike. However, nothing in the original Levshin et al. concept speaks to this. While tight, supreme command and control is critical to their idea of maintaining control and de-escalation, they completely neglect to note that in such a crisis, NATO employment of its conventional power and then its nuclear power could critically if not completely break the chain of Russian command. Were that to be the case, and battlefield strikes initiated, it does not take much imagination to see that the crisis would only spiral, rather than de-escalate.

While Levshin et al. do speculate about the types of weapons best suited to de-escalation, there is nothing particularly clear in their concept, again, consistent with the rather speculative nature of their work. In their original article, ground-based artillery and mines could be fired, and units of Russian frontal aviation would be employed to drop or launch shorter-range, lower-yield nuclear weapons (aircraft for Russian strategic nuclear missions are called “Long-Range Aviation,” and consist of heavy bombers, the Tu-95 (now sometimes including the fully upgraded Tu-95MS) and Tu-160, while Frontal Aviation Units use the Tu-22M for nuclear-capable munitions, per open sources).<sup>34</sup> But they do note that sea-launched cruise missiles (SLCMs) appear best for certain scenarios as they can be distinguished from strategic attack (or at least they suppose them to be). Russia probably had several nuclear SLCMs in 1999, despite whatever it may have voluntarily reported under informal arms control understandings done with the START I Treaty, and even if none were deployed.<sup>35</sup>

### *How Unique is Russian EDS?*

If we compare the Levshin et al. theory of de-escalation of war with limited employment of Russian nuclear weapons and modern critiques of it from outside Russia, like those of Dima Adamsky in his work on Russian “cross-domain coercion”—wherein nuclear threats join up with cyber capabilities, information warfare and the all-too-large concept of “hybrid warfare” in an overall Russian coercive strategy—we may actually end up with what Americans first conceived of as “shock and awe” in the mid to late 1990s. This is to say that even if nuclear weapons originally filled a gap in Russian capabilities in the last century, they may come to play a growing role as battlefield weapons well into this one, even if Russian conventional weapons technology matures and regardless of whether they would or would not be used for de-escalation. After all, regardless of military necessity, nuclear detonations are an event set apart from even equivalent conventional events in explosive power.

There are many similarities between two theoretical communities—one, in the late Soviet period and the other in late 20th century America. They both elevated cost and a strong desire for efficient war operations minimizing contact but maximizing effects to the top of strategic policy. Andrei Kokoshin’s seminal work on the battle of Kursk and the relationship between general

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<sup>34</sup>Quinlivan and Oliker do a superb job of stacking Levshin et al. against Russian exercises involving nuclear forces over the last 20 years in another excellent table that space and time did not accommodate here, see Russian Approaches, p. 60.

<sup>35</sup> See “START I: Declaration of the USSR Regarding Nuclear SLCMs,” July 31, 1991, at [http://www.acq.osd.mil/TC/treaties/start1/other/dec\\_ussr\\_slcm.htm](http://www.acq.osd.mil/TC/treaties/start1/other/dec_ussr_slcm.htm). Russia declared through 2009 it had zero deployed nuclear SLCMs.

purpose forces and strategic stability did not appear until 1988.<sup>36</sup> Kokoshin also advocated a defensive strategy and posture that met the enemy with “sufficient” defenses (not counter-offensives) using forces that are intentionally limited to defensive operations—a near-truism in Soviet strategy that came to be called “non-offensive defense.” Nuclear weapons were never excluded from this type of efficiency.

This thinking sounds very much like the way Lawrence Freedman has described U.S. strategic thinking in the middle 1990s: “warfare could move away from high-intensity combat to something more contained and discriminate, geared to disabling an enemy’s military establishment with the minimum force necessary. No more resources should be expended, assets ruined, or blood shed than absolutely necessary to achieve specified political goals.”<sup>37</sup> The key to unlocking that dynamic for the American theorists was the ability to take control over “shock and awe,” as Freedman further writes:

The basic message was that all efforts should be focused on overwhelming the enemy physically and mentally as quickly as possible before there was a chance to react. “Shock and awe” would mean that the enemy’s perceptions and grasp of events would be overloaded, leaving him paralyzed. The ultimate example of this effect were the nuclear strikes of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, which the authors refused to rule out as a theoretical possibility, though they were more intrigued by the possibility of disinformation, misinformation, and deception.”<sup>38</sup>

Shock and awe accompanied the American pursuit of its Second Offset capability. Speed and precision at the aim point gave commanders the ability to achieve effects that would be very overwhelming. But this capability was generated by a fact: In Europe, America needed a capability that was not nuclear to fill a gap in means that developed relative to the Warsaw Pact’s conventional echelons and Soviet nuclear forces—the “correlation” of which was a matter of doctrine for Moscow. With forces in tight formations, moving very fast across the map and heavy bombardment from the land and air forces of the Warsaw Pact, American and NATO nuclear capabilities were not sufficient on the continent without escalation to strategic war and/or use

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<sup>36</sup> See A. Kokoshin and V. Larionov, “The Kursk Battle in Light of Contemporary Defensive Doctrine,” *World Economy and International Relations* No. 8 (August 1987): 32-40

See also A. Kokoshin and V. Larionov, “The Confrontation of General Purpose Forces in the Context of Ensuring Strategic Stability,” *World Economy and International Relations* No. 6 (June 1988): 23-31. See also an excellent Rand study done for the Secretary of the U.S. Air Force on the change represented by Kokoshin and Larionov-- Benjamin Lambeth, *Is Soviet Defense Policy Becoming Civilized?* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, 1990).

<sup>37</sup> Lawrence Freedman, *Strategy: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 411-412 (ibooks version, mid-2014).

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p.412. The study on the subject is available online, see Harlan Ullman et al., *Shock and Awe: Achieving Rapid Dominance* (Washington, DC: The National Defense University, October 1996), at [http://www.dodccrp.org/files/Ullman\\_Shock.pdf](http://www.dodccrp.org/files/Ullman_Shock.pdf).

of NATO-assigned NSNW that were not plentiful enough and use of conventional forces that may have been rapidly expended.

Before offsetting became the down-select for a strategy to counter growing NATO weaknesses relative to Warsaw Pact and Soviet forces in the 1970s, there is anecdotal evidence that the United States also considered using nuclear weapons to de-escalate a conventional crisis, apparently believing it possible to terminate a conflict with limited nuclear use. A recently declassified document from 1974 indicates that during an “interagency politico-military simulation” called SCYLLA-73 U.S. military and civilian officials considered the use of U.S. theater nuclear forces to de-escalate a conventional war with the Soviet Union in the Middle East, and after a set of moves, U.S. nuclear forces were used, though the document is not very specific.<sup>39</sup> The simulation was a scenario wherein the Soviets came to the aid of Iraq against then-U.S. ally Iran. The situation deteriorates and then “US intervention considered vital to save Teheran, but insufficient conventional strength immediately available...[The] President directs options be prepared for use of tactical nuclear weapons in Iran.”<sup>40</sup>

It is risky to base much on the existence of one, declassified document. At best, this shows that nuclear thinking on different sides of what might be called a scatter-plot of strategy is often consistent, given the ability to employ nuclear weapons and the absence of sufficient conventional strength, speed and precision. In the real world as opposed to war games, the challenge in NATO became how to hit precisely and quickly Warsaw Pact and Soviet formations without using nuclear forces, the use of which carried high premiums of risk and frank value—there were too few of them, thus the need for offsetting. As U.S. Deputy Secretary of Defense Robert Work framed it in 2015:

[H]ow do you do that without resorting to nuclear weapons? So, in the summer of 1973 [we launched] a project called the Long-Range Research and Development Planning Program. And it was to provide the president and the joint force with better tools to respond to a Warsaw Pact attack. It recommended going after conventional weapons with near-zero miss, a very simple idea that had profound implications throughout the entire defense program. In 1977, Defense Secretary Harold Brown and William Perry...set about developing this next offset strategy...integrating all of these promising military technologies into a system of systems for deep attack, which they called “assault breaker.” It called for aircraft with light area sensor cueing, [and] surface-to-surface ballistic missiles that could dispense a blanket of anti-armor sub-munitions.<sup>41</sup>

In Russia, these developments did give the Soviets pause, and more than that when it 1983 NATO appeared to come close to striking out against Moscow in its exercise called ABLE ARCHER 83.<sup>42</sup> This “last paroxysm” of the Cold War is highlighted for the purposes of this paper to show that because conventional power is developing never gives any opponent the ability to rest easy when substantial nuclear forces begin moving. This is owing to presence of so many in Russia’s case today, but also for another reason. There will be no ability to distinguish nuclear and non-

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<sup>39</sup> “SCYLLA III-73 Simulation Quick Look Memorandum to the Secretary of Defense,” January 2, 1974, at <https://nsarchive.files.wordpress.com/2015/12/pages-from-19740102-scylla-report-1.pdf>.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, at p. 2.

<sup>41</sup> United States Department of Defense, “Deputy Secretary of Defense Speech: The Third U.S. Offset Strategy and its Implications for Partners and Allies,” as delivered by Deputy Secretary of Defense Bob Work, Willard Hotel, Washington, DC, January 28, 2015, at <https://www.defense.gov/News/Speeches/Article/606641>.

<sup>42</sup> See the National Security Archive’s extensive site, “The Able Archer 83 Sourcebook,” at <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/nukevault/ablearcher/>.



nuclear systems, and even less for strategic and non-strategic systems in the future. As Amy Woolf has clarified:

During the Cold War, it was relatively easy to distinguish between strategic and nonstrategic nuclear weapons because each type had different capabilities that were better suited to the different missions [but] [t]he observable capabilities that allowed analysts to distinguish between strategic and nonstrategic nuclear weapons during the Cold War have not always been precise, and may not prove to be relevant or appropriate in the future.<sup>43</sup>

Woolf's analysis means that things will blur even more so than in the history of all previous wars in Europe. Russia's NSNW are not distinguishable from conventional forces and may often use the same delivery vehicles and launchers. A blurring of this kind may suit Russian strategy quite well as it does increase the risk of nuclear war. Allied planning must consider the presence of so many potential nuclear forces in Russia. And the probabilities of misinterpretation and accident increase when there are so many targets. In this regard, of course Russia could decide to identify its NSNW, providing them with observable differences based on function or otherwise, but this is very unlikely. As Dima Adamsky notes, "The size and status of the [Russian] NSNW stockpile as well as yields and ranges is one of Russia's most tightly kept secrets."<sup>44</sup> Russia has resisted all attempts to negotiate let alone discuss its NSNW in the context of arms control. Russia's NSNW appear to have a very high value to it in its economy of threats and risks—that is, they are most certainly not another Status-6-like threat.

Note very well the reasons Russia pursues better conventional power have very little to do with its views on nuclear weapons as embodied in its own national doctrine and for that matter the rhetoric of its leadership: Nuclear threats are meant to deter the United States, to confuse and bewilder it and make NATO allies wonder if Americans remain worth the trouble of a single nuclear detonation and threaten small states with massive power. The Nuclear Narva scenario's victory condition(s) may include NATO backing down and Russia declaring Article V dead. But Russian officials seldom wonder aloud about starting a purely conventional war with Washington or Brussels; rather, they assume such a war would be initiated by NATO in response to Russia's national interests being pursued in its region.

Even if Russia announced tomorrow it no longer had any need for its NSNW, and that it would begin to rely solely on conventional forces in missions to which its NSNW were assigned in the past, there are no means to verify what it says. Further, there are none to verify what it says is or is not a nuclear-capable missile. Its noncompliance with the INF, which bans all ground-launched cruise and ballistic missile with ranges between 500 and 5500 kilometers, throws into doubt any progress on arms control down the scale of Russia nuclear weapons and ranges, let alone ability to credit Russian arms control obligations of the future of plain statements in the present.

*EDS: Confusing Russian Nuclear Values with Nuclear Strategies*

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<sup>43</sup> Woolf, pp. 7-8.

<sup>44</sup> Dmitry (Dima) Adamsky, *Cross-Domain Coercion: The Current Russian Art of Strategy*, IFRI Security Studies Center, November 2015, at <http://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/pp54adamsky.pdf>. Hereinafter "Cross-Domain."

Adamsky and many others are highly circumspect about Russian NSNW, on one hand, noting the secrecy surrounding them. But Adamsky goes on to critique EDS in a manner that presumes there is none or that it would not make sense. For example, Adamsky writes that “Russian NSNW have no meaningfully defined mission and no deterrence framework. Contrary to expectations, nuclear reality in Russia is a constellation of contradictory trends and narratives unlinked by either unifying logic or official policy” but he does so to promote his own concept of “regional nuclear deterrence” or “RND.”<sup>45</sup> RND contrasts with “global nuclear deterrence” of large-scale nuclear war. Oddly, he presumes despite what he admits elsewhere that because less is intelligible based on what is not public then it does not work or would not work even if Russians believe it does, or consider that Russia attaches value to its NSNW *beyond any military value*.

Adamsky is no stranger to Russian nuclear forces. He is a very gifted, young academic. But his work contains an error of some importance. The power of his position is that it could serve as an explanation for why Russia would be willing to adopt high-risk strategies of limited nuclear use that could incur an annihilating counterstrike and clearly unacceptable damage. However, if risk inflation is key to Russian strategy, then NSNW appear very valuable. Because so little is known about Russian NSNW, these weapons may serve either as a reserve currency in the Russian economy of nuclear threats and risks, or, in fact, have roles and missions that are very detailed but frankly secret. What is incoherent in public may remain so if it is classified; however, we cannot know until many years from now when secrets are revealed. Truly, Adamsky does not question the existence of Russian NSNW, only the theory of doctrine surrounding them.

Adamsky’s “regional nuclear deterrence (RND)” draws distinctions with global nuclear deterrence. “Implicitly, it is based on a threat to strike with a non-strategic nuclear arsenal.”<sup>46</sup> While that is not clearly true, it nonetheless provides a basis for further insight when certain exercises are evaluated, ones where a conventional war escalates to nuclear use. These exercises do not show nuclear weapons or even NSNW being used for de-escalation. Olga Oliker has noted only one such exercise may exist where this was the case is identifiable, that is the Zapad-99 exercise:

[N]uclear exercises that are based on a discernable scenario generally exercise some sort of escalation, a pathway in which conflict culminates in nuclear use. This escalation is not, in and of itself, “escalating to de-escalate.” [To] find evidence of that strategy, we would need to see what we saw in Zapad-99: reliance on nuclear use in a heretofore-conventional context not for military effects, and not to preserve the state or an ally, but to stop the conflict in an advantageous way. (Use of nuclear weapons to preserve the state would, of course, be an example of using nuclear weapons in the face of an existential threat.)<sup>47</sup>

Oliker’s insight lends credence to Adamsky’s view of incoherence, or the more extreme view that there is no EDS, or at least a coherent one, at all. Adamsky’s point is a much harsher one, i.e., that “the nuclear component is an inseparable part of Russian operational art that cannot be analyzed as a stand-alone issue and thus could be understood only in the context of a holistic

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<sup>45</sup> Dmitry (Dima) Adamsky (2014) Nuclear Incoherence: Deterrence Theory and Non-Strategic Nuclear Weapons in Russia, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 37:1, 91-134, at p. DOI: 10.1080/01402390.2013.798583. Hereinafter, “Incoherence.”

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 92.

<sup>47</sup> Olga Oliker, *Russia’s Nuclear Doctrine: What We Know, What We Don’t Know, and What That Means*, May 2016, p. 6, at <https://www.csis.org/analysis/russia’s-nuclear-doctrine>.

coercion campaign.”<sup>48</sup> Even if they are, they are frankly the most powerful element of coercion, kiloton per kiloton. Adamsky’s harsh relegation of Russian nuclear weapons to something in service of its overall strategy of coercion may discount any reality of the Russian threat to use these weapons. EDS is a coercive element upon which others rely *to ignite escalation that Russia would be able to control*, i.e., no matter how war starts, Russia will end it with nuclear warfare or win with it. Who is to say this hierarchy of threat to the West does not constitute nuclear strategy, extension of nuclear deterrence to conventional conflict, and thus, in fact, nuclear strategy? This tautology results from the superimposition of theoretical desire on top of practical military art. Moreover, as Nikolai Sokov has noted:

Common sense might suggest that any limited use of nuclear weapons for de-escalation purposes would involve non-strategic (shorter-range) weapons. But this does not appear to be the thinking. In 2003, the Ministry of Defense issued a white paper that....emphasized...that because the United States could use its precision-guided conventional assets over significant distances, Russia needed the ability to deter the use of those assets with its own long-range capabilities.”<sup>49</sup>

## Conclusions

At the outset of this paper, two questions were raised:

- Do Russian nuclear capabilities, numbers, modernization and noncompliance indicate a strategy predicated on large numbers owing to a deficit of Russian conventional strength?
- Or, does Russian strategy simply include a wider role for nuclear weapons, one fundamentally different from the West, and one that will make it difficult for it to further reduce them in the future?

Perhaps anticlimactically, the conclusion here is that both numbers and roles of nuclear weapons in Russia demonstrate strategy, and that it is a coercive one. This role would not change even if advanced conventional weapons were to appear in Russia that could take on missions to which nuclear forces were assigned—but this is generally irrelevant since Russia has taken its opportunities to intersperse nuclear and non-nuclear weapons. Arguments against American arming of submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs) or ICBMs with conventional munitions made in the last decade would apply to Russian strategy today in that there is no way for NATO to distinguish nuclear and conventional attacks from Russia. They are all Russian attacks on NATO.

Russia started the 21<sup>st</sup> century relatively well. Its debts were resolved, and it recovered in part from its 1998 market crisis. While Russia’s relationships with Europe and the United States were good, *whatever its nuclear forces did* as long they kept declining was nearly always excused or even accepted in the West. The tendency to view the present through the lens of the Cold War distorts things to a considerable degree. Russian nuclear and conventional forces are nowhere

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<sup>48</sup> Cross-Domaine, p. 9.

<sup>49</sup> Nikolai N. Sokov, “Why Russia Calls a Limited Nuclear Strike ‘De-escalation,’” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, March 13, 2014, at <http://thebulletin.org/why-russia-calls-limited-nuclear-strike-de-escalation>.

near as large as Soviet and Warsaw Pact forces were. This is because they do not need to be to achieve Russian goals.

Without regard to a specific country, timeframe or crisis, new political science suggests a “theory of nuclear crisis outcomes” linking numeric “nuclear superiority to victory.”<sup>50</sup> Stepping away from the tyranny of quantities and data, military science suggests there is more in a nuclear strategy than any number or set of them. Operational art, the history of armed conflict and the nature of nuclear deterrence itself suggest subtleties mere numbers miss. Another school has emerged, one suggesting that nuclear weapons have no deterrent value and as an effective adjunct to that, they have no effective coercive role in foreign affairs.<sup>51</sup> Russia appears willing to test such Western thinking, again.

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<sup>50</sup> Matthew Kroenig, “Nuclear Superiority and the Balance of Resolve: Explaining Nuclear Crisis Outcomes,” *International Organization* 67/1 (January 2013), pp. 141-171, doi:10.1017/S0020818312000367.

<sup>51</sup> See Todd S. Sechser and Matthew Fuhrmann, *Nuclear Weapons and Coercive Diplomacy*, (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2017).