

January 2024

OCCASIONAL  
PAPER

Volume 4, Number 1

# What Do Russia's Nuclear Threats Tell Us About Arms Control Prospects?

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NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC POLICY

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Us About Arms Control Prospects?**

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**National Institute Press®**

Published by  
National Institute Press®  
9302 Lee Highway, Suite 750  
Fairfax, Virginia 22031

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National Institute for Public Policy would like to thank the Sarah Scaife Foundation for the generous support that made this *Occasional Paper* possible.

Cover design by Stephanie Koeshall.

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## Executive Summary

Arms control with the Russian Federation has hit a rough patch due to Russia's essential shut down of the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START), aggressive and expansionist foreign policy, and arms control violations.<sup>1</sup> Russia has been remarkably consistent in issuing nuclear threats against the West and has elevated the role of nuclear weapons in its nuclear strategy. Moscow's unwillingness to limit its nuclear weapons in any meaningful way is apparent, yet the U.S. arms control community appears to discount the importance of Russia's nuclear threats as an obstacle to arms control.<sup>2</sup> Russian nuclear rhetoric illustrates core Russian beliefs – beliefs that are fundamentally at odds with world order, Western survival and the West's arms control approach.

The Appendix to this *Occasional Paper* contains a vast list of threats made by Russian government officials in the past

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<sup>1</sup> This analysis draws on previously published work: Michaela Dodge, "On Arms Control and Why New START's Suspension Does Not Really Matter," *Information Series* No. 557 (Fairfax, VA: National Institute Press, June 19, 2023), available at <https://nipp.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/IS-557.pdf>; Michaela Dodge, "What Do Russia's Nuclear Threats Tell Us About Arms Control Prospects?" *Information Series* No. 564 (Fairfax, VA: National Institute Press, October 2, 2023), available at <https://nipp.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/IS-564.pdf>. The author is grateful to the National Institute for Public Policy for the permission to utilize these works.

<sup>2</sup> For a recent example of endorsing the call to engage in bilateral negotiations with the Russian Federation "without preconditions," see Thomas Countryman, "US-Russia Nuclear Arms Control Talks 'Without Preconditions': Somebody Has to Make the First Move," *Just Security*, September 12, 2023, available at <https://www.justsecurity.org/88159/us-russia-nuclear-arms-control-talks-without-preconditions-somebody-has-to-make-the-first-move/?emci=1b075c76-3c56-ee11-9937-00224832e811&emdi=0b5b9be6-5156-ee11-9937-00224832e811&ceid=9312369>.

20 years. It also contains examples of more contemporary threats from Russian propagandists who are not a part of the government; however, these propagandists maintain their close ties to the Kremlin and their activities are often sanctioned by the regime.<sup>3</sup> The statements reflect Russia's strategic culture, which is unlikely to change anytime soon. The United States and its allies ought to tailor their policies vis-à-vis the Russian Federation accordingly.

U.S. consideration of arms control appears to ignore or discount Moscow's views of nuclear weapons and increasingly explicit nuclear threats. Continuing to do so is unwise. Rather, the United States must approach arms control not as an arena of mutual interest and cooperation, but as another form of competition—which clearly is Moscow's mode of operation. It appears that Russia's aggressive, revisionist policies and a goal of reordering the global order, in league with China, will portend conflict and crises. At this point in history, the United States would be better off preparing to compete rather than accommodate.

Moreover, Russia's escalation of its war in Ukraine appears to have altered, at least temporarily, European NATO member states' perceptions regarding the importance of nuclear deterrence in their security architectures. Allies appear to have rediscovered their appreciation of U.S. forward-deployed nuclear systems. Under these contemporary conditions, U.S. nuclear reductions—near-universally applauded by allies in the past—are more likely to be perceived as undermining allied assurance and damaging to alliance politics and security.

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<sup>3</sup> The list can be found in the Appendix.

## Introduction

Arms control with the Russian Federation has hit a rough patch due to Russia's essential shut down of the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START), aggressive and expansionist foreign policy, and arms control violations.<sup>4</sup> Russia has been remarkably consistent in issuing nuclear threats against the West and has elevated the role of nuclear weapons in its nuclear strategy. Moscow's unwillingness to limit its nuclear weapons in any meaningful way is apparent, yet the U.S. arms control community appears to discount the importance of Russia's nuclear threats as an obstacle to arms control.<sup>5</sup> Russian nuclear rhetoric illustrates core Russian beliefs – beliefs that are fundamentally at odds with world order, Western survival and the West's arms control approach.

This *Occasional Paper* contains a vast list of threats made by Russian government officials in the past 20 years. It also

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contains examples of more contemporary threats from Russian propagandists who are not a part of the government; however, these propagandists maintain their close ties to the Kremlin and their activities are often sanctioned by the regime.<sup>6</sup> These statements reflect Russia's strategic culture; the United States and allies ought to tailor their policies vis-à-vis the Russian Federation accordingly.

Moreover, Russia's escalation of its war in Ukraine appears to have altered, at least temporarily, European NATO member states' perceptions regarding the importance of nuclear deterrence in their security architectures. Allies appear to have rediscovered their appreciation of U.S. forward-deployed nuclear systems. Under these contemporary conditions, U.S. nuclear reductions—near-universally applauded by allies in the past—are more likely to be perceived as undermining allied assurance and damaging to alliance politics and security.

## **Russia's Nuclear Threats: General Themes**

Russia's nuclear threats against the West have been a fairly common occurrence in its public discourse, particularly since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.<sup>7</sup> The threats have been direct and indirect. Different actors within Russia issue them, from presidents and former presidents, to other members of the government, to Kremlin spokespeople, to Russian propagandists. The

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<sup>6</sup> The list can be found in the Appendix.

<sup>7</sup> For an excellent and comprehensive treatment of Russia's nuclear forces and policy, see Mark Schneider, "How Many Nuclear Weapons Does Russia Have? The Size and Characteristics of the Russian Nuclear Stockpile," *Occasional Paper*, Vol. 3, No. 8 (Fairfax, VA: National Institute Press, August 2023), available at <https://nipp.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Vol.-3-No.-8.pdf>.

pattern of nuclear threats is apparent: whenever the United States or NATO pursues a policy that the Russian Federation deems against its interest, the frequency of nuclear threats increases.

The target audiences for public messages differ. Russia issues some threats knowing they will reach foreign audiences, particularly in the West. Such threats are likely aimed at shaping the decision-making environment in Russia's favor; it has been somewhat successful in this regard. For example, Russia's nuclear threats appear to have slowed down and restricted the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO's) military support for Ukraine with respect to providing certain weapon systems, particularly early in the conflict, leading to Ukraine's loss of a number of its most experienced and dedicated fighters. Their lives perhaps could have been spared had the needed weapons been provided and delivered sooner.

Moscow's nuclear threats also appear to have contributed to achieving Russia's political goal—preventing NATO from accepting Ukraine as one of its members for the foreseeable future. As Alexander Vershbow, former Deputy Secretary General of NATO and U.S. Ambassador to Russia and South Korea, pointed out in a recent article, "Putin wouldn't be wrong in concluding that nuclear coercion works."<sup>8</sup> That is also why it is unlikely that Russia's threats will abate anytime soon.

Other nuclear threats appear to be issued to impress, and perhaps to assure, the Russian public. Nuclear weapons are a reminder of Russia's grandeur and an affirmation of its superpower status. The most powerful weapons ever invented demand respect. In a country where many villages

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<sup>8</sup> Alexander Vershbow, "How the United States and NATO can deal with Russian nuclear coercion in Ukraine," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, June 23, 2023, available at <https://thebulletin.org/2023/06/how-the-united-states-and-nato-can-deal-with-russian-nuclear-coercion-in-ukraine/>.

“lack reliable electricity, navigable streets, or even indoor toilets,” and food is scarce, there is “only ambiguous pride of belonging to such a great – and strong – nation,” as chiefs of the Baltic states’ counterintelligence agencies point out.<sup>9</sup> In the context of Russia’s conventional forces’ unexpectedly dismal performance in Ukraine and a strong international reaction and sanctions against the country, nuclear weapons and nuclear threats are one of the visible reminders to its population of Russia’s superpower status and a manifestation of its strength.

Nuclear threats could also be intended to normalize the idea of nuclear weapons employment within the Russian public and prepare the information environment for such an option; however, at present the Russian people do not appear supportive of nuclear weapons use in Ukraine, although whether their opinion matters is questionable.<sup>10</sup> According to Russian political scientist Mikhail Troitsky, “It’s doubtful that major segments of Russian society would put the ‘survival of the state’ (as understood by Moscow) above their own physical survival.”<sup>11</sup> Recently, some members of the Council on Foreign and Defense Policy, a Russian think tank, came out in opposition to normalizing

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<sup>9</sup> Eero Epner, “Human Life Has No Value There: Baltic Counterintelligence Officers Speak Candidly About Russian Cruelty,” *Eesti Ekspress*, October 18, 2022, available at <https://vsquare.org/baltic-counterintelligence-officers-russia-cruelty-war-history/>.

<sup>10</sup> Press Release, “On the Possibility of Using Nuclear Weapons in the Ukrainian Conflict,” *Levada Center*, June 21, 2023, available at <https://www.levada.ru/en/2023/06/21/on-the-possibility-of-using-nuclear-weapons-in-the-ukrainian-conflict/>.

<sup>11</sup> Mikhail Troitsky, “The death of nuclear fear In the wake of Prigozhin’s mutiny, war hawks are once again brandishing Russia’s nuclear potential. Why aren’t their threats working?,” *Meduza*, July 3, 2023, available at <https://meduza.io/en/feature/2023/07/03/the-death-of-nuclear-fear>.

the idea of nuclear weapons employment promoted by the Council's chair and Putin's advisor Sergei Karaganov.<sup>12</sup>

Nevertheless, about a third of those Russians surveyed in a 2022 poll stated it is "highly probable" or "quite probable" that Putin could order the Russian military to launch nuclear weapons first in a war with the West.<sup>13</sup> This is not to say that propaganda could not over time create an environment in which the Russian people *do* equate the survival of the state with their own survival and well-being, which may increase their support for nuclear weapons use. After all, over 50 percent of surveyed Russians demonstrated fear "of the possibility of war between Russia and Ukraine" in early February 2022, but 81 percent supported the action once Russia invaded. Their support has remained consistently high throughout the war, even as evidence of Russia's atrocities and war crimes permeated the information space.<sup>14</sup>

The earliest nuclear threat documented in the Appendix listing examples of Russia's significant nuclear threats in the past two decades, is then President Boris Yeltsin's angry comment to then President Bill Clinton following Clinton's criticism of Russia's war in Chechnya. In response, Yeltsin commented that "Clinton allowed himself to pressurise Russia yesterday. He must have forgotten for a moment

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<sup>12</sup> "О ПРИЗЫВАХ К РАЗВЯЗЫВАНИЮ ЯДЕРНОЙ ВОЙНЫ (On Calls for Nuclear War)," *Council on Foreign and Defense Policy*, July 13, 2023, available at <https://svop.ru/main/48156/>.

<sup>13</sup> Simon Saradzhyan, "Levada: Nearly 1/3 of Russians Are 'Not Very Afraid' Their Country Will Use Nukes," *Russia Matters*, June 10, 2022, available at <https://www.russiamatters.org/blog/levada-nearly-13-russians-are-not-very-afraid-their-country-will-use-nukes>.

<sup>14</sup> Maxim Starchak, "Russians Will Accept Nuclear Doomsday," *Europe's Edge*, August 16, 2023, available at <https://cepa.org/article/russians-will-accept-nuclear-doomsday/>.

what Russia is. We have a full arsenal of nuclear weapons.”<sup>15</sup>

Another surge of nuclear threats from Russian officials came during U.S.-Czech/Polish negotiations in the 2007-2009 timeframe about placing U.S. missile defense components on these countries’ territories.<sup>16</sup> For example, then Chief of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces General Nikolai Makarov threatened a pre-emptive nuclear strike in connection with U.S. missile defense deployments.<sup>17</sup> The Obama Administration cancelled the Bush Administration’s plans and announced its own missile defense plans to deploy a different type of missile defense system to Poland and Romania. These plans, too, met with Russia’s disapproval and nuclear threats.<sup>18</sup> U.S. withdrawal from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty that Russia had been violating for years was another significant event during which Russia increased the number of its nuclear threats.

With Russia’s 2022 invasion of Ukraine, Russia’s threats have reached an unprecedented frequency. Perhaps this is

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<sup>15</sup> John Gittings, “Yeltsin gives US nuclear warning,” *The Guardian*, December 9, 1999, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/1999/dec/10/russia.chechnya>.

<sup>16</sup> Michaela Dodge, *U.S.-Czech Missile Defense Cooperation: Alliance Politics in Action* (Fairfax, VA: National Institute Press, 2020); and, Ian Traynor, Luke Harding, and Helen Womack, “Moscow warns it could strike Poland over US missile shield,” *The Guardian*, August 15, 2008, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/aug/15/russia.poland.nuclear.missiles.threat>.

<sup>17</sup> Andrew Kramer, “Russian General Makes Threat on Missile-Defense Sites,” *The New York Times*, May 3, 2012, available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/04/world/europe/russian-general-threatens-pre-emptive-attacks-on-missile-defense-sites.html>.

<sup>18</sup> Robin Emmott, “U.S. activates Romanian missile defense site, angering Russia,” *Reuters*, May 12, 2016, available at <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-nato-shield/u-s-activates-romanian-missile-defense-site-angering-russia-idUSKCN0Y30JX>.

because while Putin thought the Russian army would be able to capture Kyiv in two days (and that the Ukrainians would welcome the Russians as liberators),<sup>19</sup> the war continues more than 500 days later thanks to Ukraine's heroic resistance and Western support, resulting in large losses of equipment and manpower. For example, Russia's tank losses reportedly surpassed 2,000 by the end of May 2023.<sup>20</sup>

## **Threats Issued by Russian Government Officials**

While nuclear weapons have always been an important feature of Russia's presidential politics, Putin has been more vocal about Russia's nuclear might and what it might mean for NATO and the West since Russia's 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine. For example, he announced that Russia's nuclear forces would be on "special alert" immediately before the February 2022 invasion.<sup>21</sup> (The United States did not observe any changes in Russia's nuclear posture following the announcement.<sup>22</sup>) He also

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<sup>19</sup> Jake Epstein and Charles R. Davis, "Putin thought Russia's military could capture Kyiv in 2 days, but it still hasn't in 20," *Business Insider*, March 15, 2022, available at <https://www.businessinsider.com/vladimir-putin-russian-forces-could-take-kyiv-ukraine-two-days-2022-3>.

<sup>20</sup> "Russia's Tank Losses in Ukraine Surpass 2,000 - OSINT Report," *Moscow Times*, May 31, 2023, available at <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2023/05/31/russias-tank-losses-in-ukraine-surpass-2000-osint-report-a81346>.

<sup>21</sup> "Ukraine invasion: Putin puts Russia's nuclear forces on 'special alert,'" *BBC*, February 28, 2022, available at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-60547473>.

<sup>22</sup> Phil Stewart and Idrees Ali, "No Russian 'muscle movements' after Putin's nuclear readiness alert, U.S. says," *Reuters*, February 28, 2022, available at <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/no-russian->

stated that, “No matter who tries to stand in our way or all the more so create threats for our country and our people, they must know that Russia will respond immediately, and the consequences will be such as you have never seen in your entire history. No matter how the events unfold, we are ready. All the necessary decisions in this regard have been taken.”<sup>23</sup>

A year later, with Russia’s Army still bogged down by Ukraine’s valiant defense and unable to deliver the quick and decisive victory its leaders expected, Putin stated that the “elites of the West do not hide their purpose. But they also cannot fail to realise that it is impossible to defeat Russia on the battlefield.”<sup>24</sup> Putin also stated that the threat of nuclear war “is increasing.”<sup>25</sup> In March 2023, Russia announced it would deploy nuclear weapons to Belarus, in the first deployment beyond the Russian Federation’s borders since the end of the Cold War.<sup>26</sup> The work is to be completed by “the end of the summer, by the end of this year,” according to Putin.<sup>27</sup> “This is an element of

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muscle-movements-after-putins-nuclear-readiness-alert-us-says-2022-02-28/.

<sup>23</sup> Presidential Executive Office, *Address by the President of the Russian Federation*, February 24, 2022, available at <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67843>.

<sup>24</sup> Guy Faulconbridge, “Russia's Putin issues new nuclear warnings to West over Ukraine,” *Reuters*, February 21, 2023, available at <https://www.reuters.com/world/putin-update-russias-elite-ukraine-war-major-speech-2023-02-21/>.

<sup>25</sup> Katharina Krebs, “Putin says threat of nuclear war is increasing,” *CNN*, December 8, 2022, available at [https://edition.cnn.com/europe/live-news/russia-ukraine-war-news-12-07-22/h\\_9e32121e0e11c3aa4b0a708befaf3f30](https://edition.cnn.com/europe/live-news/russia-ukraine-war-news-12-07-22/h_9e32121e0e11c3aa4b0a708befaf3f30).

<sup>26</sup> “Why is Belarus admitting Wagner leader and backing Russia against Ukraine?,” *BBC News*, June 26, 2023, available at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-65964623>.

<sup>27</sup> Vladimir Putin, *Remarks at the Plenary session of the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum*, June 16, 2023, available at

deterrence," he said, "so that everyone who thinks of inflicting a strategic defeat on us should keep this circumstance in mind."<sup>28</sup> Russian nuclear deployments to Belarus introduce new uncertainties in the deterrence calculus, though the geographic equation is not affected much since Russia can already reach all the targets on NATO's territory.

But Putin was no stranger to nuclear threats even prior to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. For example, during his 2018 address to the Federal Assembly, Putin unveiled a suite of new "exotic" nuclear weapon systems such as underwater nuclear drones and said, "In spite of all difficulties over the years, economic and financial problems with our defense industry and Armed Forces, Russia reached nuclear power, but nobody wanted to take us seriously. Nobody listened to us. So listen to us now."<sup>29</sup> The remarkable slide show accompanying his speech ended with what appeared to be a depiction of Russian nuclear warheads headed toward Florida.<sup>30</sup>

Perhaps no Russian government official has issued more nuclear threats during Russia's invasion of Ukraine than Dmitry Medvedev, once the West's hope for Russia's democratization, former stand-in President for Putin, and current Deputy Head of Russia's Security Council.<sup>31</sup> He

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<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/71445> (accessed June 20, 2023).

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Vladimir Putin, "State of the Nation Address 2018," *C-Span*, March 1, 2018, available at <https://www.c-span.org/video/?441907-1/russian-president-vladimir-putin-state-nation-address>.

<sup>30</sup> "Russia's Putin unveils 'invincible' nuclear weapons," *BBC News*, March 1, 2018, available at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-43239331>.

<sup>31</sup> A more complete list of Medvedev's nuclear threats can be found in the Appendix.



threatened a “nuclear apocalypse”<sup>32</sup> in the context of Western weapon supplies for Ukraine on several occasions.<sup>33</sup> He boasted, “And I can tell you something, simply as someone who knows something about this. Let’s be clear: if you have a weapon in your hands, and I know what this is like as a former president, then you should be prepared to use it without qualms in a certain situation, no matter how monstrous and brutal that might sound.”<sup>34</sup> He said, “Britain was, is and will be our eternal enemy. [...] In any case, soon enough their impudent and disgustingly damp island will be sent into the abyss of the sea by waves created by the latest Russian weapons system.”<sup>35</sup> His speeches and articles are often aggressive and insulting toward U.S. and allied government officials.

Russia also appears to consider nuclear weapons use justified in the case of a defeat in a conventional war. For example, Medvedev noted that, “The defeat of a nuclear power in a conventional war may trigger a nuclear war. Nuclear powers have never lost major conflicts on which their fate depends. And this should be obvious to anyone.

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<sup>32</sup> Guy Faulconbridge and Kevin Liffey, “Western arms for Ukraine make ‘nuclear apocalypse’ more likely – Russia’s Medvedev,” *Reuters*, May 23, 2023, available at <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russias-medvedev-western-arms-ukraine-make-nuclear-apocalypse-more-likely-2023-05-23/>.

<sup>33</sup> David Ljunggren, “Russia’s Medvedev says arms supplies to Kyiv threaten global nuclear catastrophe,” *Reuters*, February 27, 2023, available at <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russias-medvedev-says-arms-supplies-kyiv-threaten-global-nuclear-catastrophe-2023-02-27/>.

<sup>34</sup> “Russia may use nuclear weapons in face of threat to its existence,” *Interfax*, April 25, 2023.

<sup>35</sup> Maighna Nanu, “Ukraine-Russia war: Russia ‘will send disgustingly damp Britain into the abyss,’” *The Telegraph*, April 21, 2023, available at <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/world-news/2023/04/21/ukraine-russia-war-latest-news-putin-bakhmut-kyiv-nato/>.

Even a Western politician with any trace of intelligence.”<sup>36</sup> He reiterated that Russia may consider employing nuclear weapons should Ukraine attack Donetsk and Luhansk, illegally annexed territories Russia now considers its own.<sup>37</sup> There are indications that Putin sees war with Ukraine as an existential struggle for Russia.<sup>38</sup>

Russian ambassadors also occasionally engage in public nuclear threats, which begs the question of why Western countries should let them continue to be ambassadors after engaging in nuclear brinkmanship on Russia's behalf.<sup>39</sup> For example, Oleg Stepanov, Russia's Ambassador to Canada, recently stated, “Once again, just to be clear: when you are not in the nuclear bloc [referring to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization], you are safe. When you join it, you become yet another target. We cannot believe that the alliance, including our Finnish neighbors, does not understand this truism. It's as plain as day.”<sup>40</sup> Nuclear

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<sup>36</sup> Tom Watling, Tim McNulty, and Sean Meleady, “Putin ally threatens West with nuclear war if Russia defeated in Ukraine,” *Express*, January 20, 2023, available at

<https://www.express.co.uk/news/world/1723253/Russia-war-Ukraine-tanks-T-14-Ramstein-putin-Volodymyr-Zelensky>.

<sup>37</sup> Caleb Davis, “Russia's Medvedev: new regions can be defended with strategic nuclear weapons,” *Reuters*, September 22, 2022, available at <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russias-medvedev-strategic-nuclear-weapons-can-be-used-defend-new-regions-2022-09-22/>.

<sup>38</sup> Lauren Sforza, “Putin says Ukraine war poses existential threat to ‘Russian people,’” *The Hill*, February 26, 2023, available at <https://thehill.com/policy/international/3874880-putin-says-ukraine-war-poses-existential-threat-to-russian-people/>.

<sup>39</sup> Adam Withnall, “Russia threatens Denmark with nuclear weapons if it tries to join Nato defence shield,” *The Independent*, March 22, 2015, available at

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/russia-threatens-denmark-with-nuclear-weapons-if-it-tries-to-join-nato-defence-shield-10125529.html>.

<sup>40</sup> “Countries Joining NATO Face Security Risks Including Nuclear - Russian Envoy to Canada,” *Sputnik News*, April 20, 2023, available at <https://sputnikglobe.com/20230420/countries-joining-nato-face->

threats across all levels of the Russian government have become a frequent occurrence in Russia's conduct of foreign and defense policy.

In addition to more public nuclear threats, it appears that Russia is threatening other states with nuclear strikes through unofficial channels. For example, following Russia's first invasion of Ukraine in 2014, then Ukrainian Minister of Defense Valeriy Heletey stated that the "Russian side has threatened on several occasions across unofficial channels that, in the case of continued resistance they are ready to use a tactical nuclear weapon against us."<sup>41</sup>

## What Does Moscow's Propaganda Tell the Russians about Nuclear Weapons?

The Russian government maintains a loyal network of propagandists and "journalists." Freedom of speech is extremely limited in the country and divergence from the official line is punishable by high fines and years in prison. The already bad situation got even worse after February 2022. Russia effectively shut down the *BBC*, the *Voice of America*, *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, *Deutsche Welle*, and the independent Russian outlet *Meduza* as retaliation for Western governments cracking down on some of Russia's influence operators in their countries.<sup>42</sup> Russia also banned

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security-risks-including-nuclear---russian-envoy-to-canada-1109713089.html.

<sup>41</sup> Damien Sharkov, "Russia Has Threatened Nuclear Attack, Says Ukraine Defence Minister," *Newsweek*, September 1, 2014, available at <https://www.newsweek.com/russia-has-threatened-nuclear-attack-says-ukraine-defence-minister-267842#:~:text=Kiev%20has%20received%20threats%20of%20nuclear%20retaliation%20from,Heletey%2C%20announced%20on%20his%20Facebook%20page%20on%20Monday>.

<sup>42</sup> James Ellingworth, "Russia cracks down on dissenting media, blocks Facebook," *Associated Press*, March 4, 2022, available at

Twitter and Facebook and passed laws that made any criticism of the “special military operation,” as the Kremlin euphemistically calls the war in Ukraine, punishable by years in prison.

The state's tight control of the media environment makes it incredibly difficult to reach the Russian audience with any content that is not approved by the authorities. This also means that nuclear threats discussed on Russia's popular talk shows have the authorities' approval if not endorsement. As many as 82 million Russians consume media content every day and are exposed to statements that normalize explicit nuclear threats within the public discourse.<sup>43</sup>

For example, Margarita Simonyan, editor-in-chief of *RT* and the media group *Rossiia Segodnya*, stated following the International Criminal Court's (ICC's) issue of an arrest warrant on Putin for unlawful deportation of minors from Ukraine,<sup>44</sup> “I'd like to see the country that arrests Putin according to The Hague's ruling. Eight minutes later. Or whatever the flight time to its capital is.”<sup>45</sup> On another

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<https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-vladimir-putin-business-europe-germany-d15ca4ed450d9ca67f43d3b1ac27294d>.

<sup>43</sup> Anastasia Edel, “A Day Inside Putin's Surreal Television Empire,” *Foreign Policy*, May 28, 2023, available at <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/05/28/russia-ukraine-war-putin-propaganda-news-media-television/>.

<sup>44</sup> The International Criminal Court also issued warrant on Maria Alekseyevna Lvova-Belova, Commissioner for Children's Rights in the Office of the President of the Russian Federation. See, International Criminal Court, “Situation in Ukraine: ICC judges issue arrest warrants against Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin and Maria Alekseyevna Lvova-Belova,” *Press Release*, March 17, 2023, available at <https://www.icc-cpi.int/news/situation-ukraine-icc-judges-issue-arrest-warrants-against-vladimir-vladimirovich-putin-and>.

<sup>45</sup> “Russian propagandists' responses to potential Putin arrest: from nuclear threats to mockery,” *Ukrainska Pravda*, March 17, 2023, available at <https://news.yahoo.com/russian-propagandists-responses-potential-putin-210443675.html>.

occasion she stated that, “Either we lose in Ukraine, or the Third World War starts. I think World War Three is more realistic, knowing us, knowing our leader. The most incredible outcome, that all this will end with a nuclear strike, seems more probable to me than the other course of events.”<sup>46</sup>

Russian propagandists appear to be even more explicit and aggressive than officials in their nuclear threats. For example, Vladimir Solovyov, a prominent radio and television presenter for the state-owned *All-Russia State Television and Radio Broadcasting Company* (VGTRK), stated he would like to see Russia withdraw “from the treaty on moratorium on the testing of nuclear weapons in all environments.”<sup>47</sup> He explained that, “We need to test nuclear weapons so the West can see that they exist and see how powerful they are. And give an ultimatum to the NATO countries by targeting our nuclear strategic forces on the government quarters and on launch sites of those countries that have nuclear capabilities, on the quarters of those countries that support the Nazi regime. And put an ultimatum. If they don’t want to hear it, that means there

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<sup>46</sup> Kate Buck, “Putin would prefer nuclear strike to defeat in Ukraine, says Russian state TV chief,” *Yahoo News*, April 28, 2022, available at [https://news.yahoo.com/putin-rather-press-nuclear-button-lose-ukraine-war-rt-broadcaster-151707840.html?guccounter=1&guce\\_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2x1LmNvbS8&guce\\_referrer\\_sig=AQAAACEIoJGTGQUQdDa0jgNLbOtZgMdvzXXnU0yhwR5d5H0jvzsqd-n\\_MhnMavQPkDiIUgoKzn5Oj3tw4VJZ14bgkHo6iT7gft1OSBDcQcPXbjbb4rJvPRaZLQmHKru0CmcQM5wedp89OhDZAWJuSjCUZyUCnGg-uBllzCOo9rTd5E7p](https://news.yahoo.com/putin-rather-press-nuclear-button-lose-ukraine-war-rt-broadcaster-151707840.html?guccounter=1&guce_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2x1LmNvbS8&guce_referrer_sig=AQAAACEIoJGTGQUQdDa0jgNLbOtZgMdvzXXnU0yhwR5d5H0jvzsqd-n_MhnMavQPkDiIUgoKzn5Oj3tw4VJZ14bgkHo6iT7gft1OSBDcQcPXbjbb4rJvPRaZLQmHKru0CmcQM5wedp89OhDZAWJuSjCUZyUCnGg-uBllzCOo9rTd5E7p).

<sup>47</sup> Anton Gerashchenko [@gerashchenko], “I firmly believe that nuclear war is inevitable,” says Russian propagandist Solovyev, suggesting that Russia start it. He wants to aim Russian nuclear weapons at London, Paris, Berlin and Washington. [Tweet], Twitter, 8:25 AM, May 10, 2023, available at [https://twitter.com/Gerashchenko\\_en/status/1656274238456709121?s=20](https://twitter.com/Gerashchenko_en/status/1656274238456709121?s=20).

will be no more London, no more Berlin, no more Paris, no more Washington, D.C.”<sup>48</sup>

On another occasion, he pondered an attack on the United Kingdom in retaliation for providing Ukraine with long-range missiles:

And why are there still undersea cables leading to Britain? Why are all the pipelines still there? Why aren't we responding in the most brutal way, asymmetrically, to Britain? We are now out of the treaty, which is what we should have done a long time ago. I think we need to abandon a ban on nuclear weapons testing. We should conduct tests, show the nuclear weapons we have, blow something up somewhere, and target our Strategic Missile Forces, first of all targeting Britain. And all those countries that are providing support. And give them an ultimatum: You supply the missiles, we'll bomb.<sup>49</sup>

He also said, “One Sarmat [a new, very large Russian intercontinental-range ballistic missile] means minus one Great Britain.”<sup>50</sup>

Russian propagandists also appear more explicitly apocalyptic than government officials. “I hope they understand that if we lose, we are taking the whole world

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Anton Gerashchenko [@gerashchenko], “Attention, Great Britain! Russian propagandist Solovyev threatens the UK with a nuclear strike and cutting their underwater cables.” [Tweet], Twitter, 12:29 PM, May 11, 2023, available at [https://twitter.com/Gerashchenko\\_en/status/1656697983977545728?s=20](https://twitter.com/Gerashchenko_en/status/1656697983977545728?s=20).

<sup>50</sup> Evan Simko-Bednarski, “Russian state TV threatens to wipe out ‘boorish’ UK with ballistic missile,” *New York Post*, April 27, 2022, available at <https://nypost.com/2022/04/27/russian-state-tv-threatens-to-wipe-out-uk-with-ballistic-missile/>.

with us," Solovyov pointed out on one of his shows.<sup>51</sup> And Dmitry Kiselyov, a Kremlin-backed journalist and *RT*'s general director, pondered, "Why do we need a world if Russia is not in it?"<sup>52</sup> and showed potential nuclear targets in the United States on his TV show in 2019.<sup>53</sup> These kinds of statements are well within acceptable norms in Russia, however extreme those in the West may consider them.

## European Allies' Views of Russia's Nuclear Policy after the Escalation of Its War in Ukraine

Russia's nuclear threats have not gone unnoticed among citizens of European nations, including in those countries that reportedly host U.S. battlefield (also sometimes called tactical or short-range) nuclear weapons (Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Turkey<sup>54</sup>). The public debates over hosting U.S. nuclear weapons as a part of

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<sup>51</sup> Brendan Cole, "Russian State TV Issues Stark Warning Over Threat of Defeat," *Newsweek*, May 17, 2023, available at <https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/russian-state-tv-issues-stark-warning-over-threat-of-defeat/ar-AA1biFQt?rc=1&ocid=wintp1taskbar&cvid=f27a8f8c98fb4753bd5324d84d12565d&ei=17>.

<sup>52</sup> "Why Do We Need a World if Russia Is Not In It?: State TV Presenter Opens Show With Ominous Address," *Moscow Times*, February 28, 2022, available at <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2022/02/28/russians-race-for-cash-as-ruble-plummets-a76655>.

<sup>53</sup> Andrew Osborn, "After Putin's warning, Russian TV lists nuclear targets in U.S.," *Reuters*, February 25, 2019, available at <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-nuclear-russia-idUSKCN1QE1DM>.

<sup>54</sup> Hans Kristensen, Matt Korda, "Nuclear Notebook: United States nuclear weapons, 2023," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, January 16, 2023, available at <https://thebulletin.org/premium/2023-01/nuclear-notebook-united-states-nuclear-weapons-2023/>.

NATO's nuclear mission in various European states prior to the escalation of Russia's war in Ukraine were generally sporadic and often negative, including in those countries that reportedly host U.S. nuclear weapons.<sup>55</sup> The situation appears to have changed after February 2022.

***Perspectives of Allied States Hosting U.S.  
Nuclear Weapons Prior to Russia's  
Full-Scale Invasion of Ukraine***

Despite some of their citizens' reluctance, NATO member governments have been able to sustain a political consensus on the importance of nuclear weapons for their security. Every *Strategic Concept* since the end of the Cold War, plus the 2012 *Deterrence and Defence Posture Review*, emphasized the importance of nuclear weapons for allied security.<sup>56</sup> Starting in 2010, under the continuing influence of the post-Cold War optimism and President Obama's vision to create the conditions for a world without nuclear weapons,

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<sup>55</sup> Michal Onderco, Michal Smetana, and Tom Etienne, "Hawks in the making? European public views on nuclear weapons post-Ukraine," *Global Policy*, January 5, 2023, available at <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/1758-5899.13179>.

<sup>56</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organization, *The Alliance's Strategic Concept*, April 24, 1999, available at [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_27433.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_27433.htm); North Atlantic Treaty Organization, *Strategic Concept for the Defence and Security of the Members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization*, November 2010, available at [https://www.nato.int/nato\\_static\\_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf\\_publications/20120214\\_strategic-concept-2010-eng.pdf](https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_publications/20120214_strategic-concept-2010-eng.pdf); North Atlantic Treaty Organization, *Deterrence and Defence Posture Review*, May 20, 2012, available at [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_87597.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_87597.htm); and, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, *NATO 2022 Strategic Concept*, June 29, 2022, available at [https://www.nato.int/nato\\_static\\_fl2014/assets/pdf/2022/6/pdf/290622-strategic-concept.pdf](https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2022/6/pdf/290622-strategic-concept.pdf).



NATO's *Strategic Concept* documents committed the Alliance to pursuing a nuclear-free world. They also reiterated the role of nuclear weapons as the "supreme guarantee of the security of the Alliance" and maintained that NATO will remain a nuclear alliance for as long as nuclear weapons exist.<sup>57</sup> Russia's 2014 invasion of Ukraine, and its subsequent belligerent nuclear threats, forced NATO's attention back on the importance of strengthening nuclear deterrence.<sup>58</sup>

The United States is not the only nuclear-armed member of NATO. Two of the European NATO member states, France and the United Kingdom, have nuclear weapons of their own. France reportedly retains fewer than 300 nuclear warheads that can be delivered by submarine-launched ballistic missiles or aircraft.<sup>59</sup> France does not participate in NATO's Nuclear Planning Group, where the other member states discuss nuclear policy issues pertinent to the Alliance. The United Kingdom has no more than 260 warheads in its stockpile and is the only recognized nuclear weapon state that reduced its nuclear weapon capabilities to a single delivery system, submarines that can launch U.S.-made Trident II D5 missiles.<sup>60</sup> The Alliance recognizes that these

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<sup>57</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organization, *The Alliance's Strategic Concept*, op. cit.; North Atlantic Treaty Organization, *Strategic Concept for the Defence and Security of the Members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization*, op. cit. p. 14; and North Atlantic Treaty Organization, *NATO 2022 Strategic Concept*, op. cit., p. 8.

<sup>58</sup> Alexander Vershbow, "Reflections on NATO Deterrence in the 21st Century," *Texas National Security Roundtable*, August 23, 2021, available at <https://tnsr.org/roundtable/policy-roundtable-the-future-of-transatlantic-nuclear-deterrence/>.

<sup>59</sup> Hans Kristensen, Matt Korda, and Eliana Johns, "French nuclear weapons, 2023," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, Vol. 79, No. 4 (2023), pp. 272-273, available at <https://fas.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/French-nuclear-weapons-2023.pdf>.

<sup>60</sup> Claire Mills, "Nuclear weapons at a glance: United Kingdom," House of Commons Library *Research Briefing*, May 3, 2023, p. 4, available at

forces “have a deterrent role of their own and contribute significantly to the overall security of the Alliance.”<sup>61</sup> The “separate centres of decision-making contribute to deterrence by complicating the calculations of potential adversaries.”<sup>62</sup>

Historically, NATO's European member states have been concerned about the credibility of U.S. nuclear guarantees; after all, that is a basic reason for France and the United Kingdom developing their independent nuclear deterrents in the first place. The problem became particularly pronounced when the Soviets reached strategic parity with the United States in the 1970s.<sup>63</sup> It contributed to the development of Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger's Limited Nuclear Options that did not involve a large-scale nuclear attack against Soviet territory in response to a Soviet attack on U.S. allies.<sup>64</sup> Yet, in 1979, President Nixon's Secretary of State and National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger stated at a conference in Brussels, “Don't you Europeans keep asking us to multiply assurances that we cannot possibly mean; and that if we mean them, we should not want to execute; and that if we execute, we'll destroy civilization.”<sup>65</sup>

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<https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-9077/CBP-9077.pdf>.

<sup>61</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organization, *NATO 2022 Strategic Concept*, op. cit., p. 8.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> David J. Trachtenberg, Michaela Dodge and Keith B. Payne, *The “Action-Reaction” Arms Race Narrative vs. Historical Realities* (Fairfax, VA: National Institute Press, 2021), pp. 31-38, available at <https://nipp.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Action-Reaction-pub.pdf>.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> “World: Kissinger on NATO,” *Time*, September 17, 1979, available at <https://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,920653,00.html>.

The collapse of the Soviet Union gave the United States additional time to resolve the difficulties inherent in providing credible extended deterrence and assurances to its allies. But the era of strategic optimism and large-scale nuclear weapon reductions by the United States—in some cases, unilateral—led to an atrophy of U.S. intellectual interest and physical infrastructure supporting the nuclear enterprise. In the wake of the West’s Cold War success, nuclear weapon topics fell off the radar in what has been called an extended “strategic holiday.” The United States and allies have generally stopped investing in the intellectual infrastructure underpinning the nuclear enterprise, and have largely forgotten the important role that the U.S. ability to compete in the nuclear realm had on the Cold War’s successful outcome.

While the European states’ continued hosting of U.S. nuclear weapons is a sign of their political commitment to maintaining a “nuclear Alliance,” their general unwillingness to spend two percent of GDP on defense is yet again a salient problem in the U.S. post-9/11 fiscal environment.<sup>66</sup> In his last speech as a Secretary of Defense, Robert Gates warned:

The blunt reality is that there will be dwindling appetite and patience in the U.S. Congress - and in the American body politic writ large - to expend increasingly precious funds on behalf of nations that are apparently unwilling to devote the necessary resources or make the necessary changes to be serious and capable partners in their own defense. Nations apparently willing and eager for American taxpayers to assume the growing security burden left by reductions in European defense budgets [sic]. Indeed, if current

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<sup>66</sup> The exceptions are the United States, Estonia, Greece, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and the United Kingdom.

trends in the decline of European defense capabilities are not halted and reversed, Future [sic] U.S. political leaders– those for whom the Cold War was not the formative experience that it was for me – may not consider the return on America's investment in NATO worth the cost.<sup>67</sup>

His warning was prescient as President Donald Trump reportedly considered withdrawing the United States from NATO a few years later.<sup>68</sup> The anxiety about a potential change in the U.S. strategic direction and focus on China contributed to some of the earlier debates about an independent European nuclear deterrent, although prospects for one remained distant.<sup>69</sup> In Germany, such a debate was unprecedented,<sup>70</sup> even as prospects for it changing the status quo were extremely low.<sup>71</sup>

A distinct fear in allied states has been related to the effects of potential nuclear weapons use on their own territory and the belief that nuclear weapons have no

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<sup>67</sup> Robert Gates, *Robert Gates' farewell speech on NATO*, June 10, 2011, available at <https://www.voltairenet.org/article170425.html>.

<sup>68</sup> Julian Barnes and Helene Cooper, "Trump Discussed Pulling U.S. From NATO, Aides Say Amid New Concerns Over Russia," *The New York Times*, January 14, 2019, available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/14/us/politics/nato-president-trump.html>.

<sup>69</sup> Michael Rühle, "Daydream Believers," *Berlin Policy Journal*, November 23, 2016, available at <https://berlinpolicyjournal.com/daydream-believers/>.

<sup>70</sup> Ulrich Kühn, "The Sudden German Nuke Flirtation," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, December 6, 2016, available at <https://carnegieendowment.org/2016/12/06/sudden-german-nuke-flirtation-pub-66366>.

<sup>71</sup> Hans Rühle and Michael Rühle, "German Nukes: The Phantom Menace," *Information Series*, No. 419 (Fairfax, VA: National Institute Press, March 22, 2017), available at [https://nipp.org/information\\_series/ruhle-hans-and-michael-ruhle-german-nukes-the-phantom-menace-information-series-no-419/#\\_ednref6](https://nipp.org/information_series/ruhle-hans-and-michael-ruhle-german-nukes-the-phantom-menace-information-series-no-419/#_ednref6).

military utility beyond being an instrument of deterrence and an important sign of a U.S. political commitment to NATO. As recently as 2021, a majority of Germans, private citizens and government officials, strongly disagreed with any U.S. nuclear weapon use in hypothetical scenarios that included Russia's invasion of the Baltic states (NATO members).<sup>72</sup> According to the same survey, the German public was skeptical with regard to the deterrent effect of U.S. nuclear weapons reportedly stationed in Germany (particularly among the younger generation).<sup>73</sup> With Russia's escalation of its war in Ukraine and attendant nuclear threats that sentiment appears to be changing. According to a recent survey, more than half of the German population now believes in the deterrent value of nuclear weapons.<sup>74</sup> This event made clear that the era of strategic optimism and expectations of a benign "new world order" have rightly come to an end.

### *After Russia's February 2022 Invasion*

For the most part, calls for a nuclear-free world have taken a back seat in the mainstream national security discussions after Russia's escalation of its war in Ukraine in February 2022. Russia's brandishing of nuclear threats has spurred renewed interest in matters of deterrence, regional challenges, and the roles of strategic and tactical nuclear weapons in allied assurance and extended deterrence.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Michal Onderco and Michal Smetana, "German views on US nuclear weapons in Europe: public and elite perspectives," *European Security*, Vol. 30, No. 4 (2021), p. 640, available at <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/epdf/10.1080/09662839.2021.1941896?needAccess=true&role=button>.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 641.

<sup>74</sup> Onderco, Smetana, and Etienne, "Hawks in the making? European public views on nuclear weapons post-Ukraine," *op. cit.*, p. 310.

<sup>75</sup> For an excellent and comprehensive treatment of Russia's nuclear forces and policy, see Mark Schneider, "How Many Nuclear Weapons

Research conducted after Russia's February 2022 invasion of Ukraine indicates an allied shift toward acknowledging the importance of nuclear weapons and supporting the host nation's role among the Dutch and German publics.<sup>76</sup> For example, over half of the Dutch population now believes that U.S. nuclear weapons reportedly stationed on their territory deter a nuclear attack against NATO.<sup>77</sup> A recent survey also documented a significant increase in the respondents' willingness to support nuclear weapons use in certain scenarios and fewer respondents support a withdrawal of U.S. nuclear weapons from Europe.<sup>78</sup> It is not clear how lasting this shift will prove, but because Russia is unlikely to stop its nuclear threats anytime soon, the tendency is likely to persist for the foreseeable future.

Yet, Russia's invasion has called into question the wisdom of the near-complete, unilateral U.S. short-range nuclear weapon reductions of the early 1990s, and the pursuit of nuclear enterprise policies that left it unable to rapidly adapt to a deteriorating nuclear environment, despite the commitment expressed in all post-Cold War *Nuclear Posture Reviews* (NPRs) to rectify the problem. The war has exposed the abysmal state of Europe's defense and industrial base to produce conventional weapons on a scale required by a modern large-scale conflict.<sup>79</sup> The U.S.

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Does Russia Have? The Size and Characteristics of the Russian Nuclear Stockpile," *Occasional Paper*, Vol. 3, No. 8 (Fairfax, VA: National Institute Press, August 2023), available at <https://nipp.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Vol.-3-No.-8.pdf>.

<sup>76</sup> Onderco, Smetana, and Etienne, "Hawks in the making? European public views on nuclear weapons post-Ukraine," op. cit., p. 309.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., pp. 311, 313.

<sup>79</sup> Laura Kayali, Lili Bayer, and Joshua Posaner, "Europe's military buildup: More talk than action," *Politico*, June 14, 2023, available at <https://www.politico.eu/article/europe-military-industry-defense-buildup-war/>.

industrial production base has not fared much better, even if the United States has more resources to address the challenge.<sup>80</sup>

The war has also highlighted a general lack of interest, knowledge, and understanding among European publics and governments regarding nuclear weapons policy and strategy issues.<sup>81</sup> The communities interested and knowledgeable in these matters remain very small, particularly in countries that do not have their own nuclear weapons or do not host U.S. nuclear weapons.<sup>82</sup> There remains a segment of allied populations committed to the withdrawal of U.S. nuclear weapons from Europe. How to strengthen the credibility of U.S. nuclear guarantees in the face of Russia's open and somewhat successful attempts to exploit its tactical nuclear superiority in the conduct of its foreign policy has yet again become an important topic of transatlantic discussions.

In this context, signs point to all not being well with the U.S. goal of assuring allies.<sup>83</sup> Polish President Andrzej Duda

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<sup>80</sup> Michael Hirsh, "The Pentagon Is Freaking Out About a Potential War With China," *Politico*, June 9, 2023, available at <https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2023/06/09/america-weapons-china-00100373>.

<sup>81</sup> Liviu Horovitz and Lydia Wachs, "France's Nuclear Weapons and Europe," *German Institute for International and Security Affairs, Comment*, No. 15, March 2023, p. 6, available at [https://www.swp-berlin.org/publications/products/comments/2023C15\\_Frances\\_NuclearWeapons.pdf](https://www.swp-berlin.org/publications/products/comments/2023C15_Frances_NuclearWeapons.pdf).

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> For a more detailed analysis of this trend, see Michaela Dodge, *Alliance Politics In a Multipolar World, Occasional Paper*, Vol. 2, No. 10 (Fairfax, VA: National Institute Press, October 2022), available at <https://nipp.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/OP-Vol.-2-No.-10.pdf>; and, Keith B. Payne and Michaela Dodge, "Emerging Challenges to Extended Deterrence, Assurance and the Future of U.S. Alliances," *Information Series*, No. 555 (Fairfax, VA: National Institute Press, June 5, 2023), available at <https://nipp.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/IS-555.pdf>.

stated that, "The problem above all is that we [Poles] don't have nuclear weapons" and that the topic of Polish participation in nuclear sharing is open.<sup>84</sup> Recently, prominent European experts and politicians argued that Germany, France, and the United Kingdom ought to develop their own "European" nuclear deterrent under the Supreme Allied Commander Europe's command in order to strengthen credibility vis-à-vis Russia.<sup>85</sup> (In this particular proposal, the arrangement would require that German aircraft be equipped to carry French nuclear warheads, not that Germany develops nuclear weapons of its own.<sup>86</sup>)

Other experts reminded the audience that some European states, including the relatively small ones, had nuclear weapon programs in the past and that perhaps the time might be ripe to start discussions about potential nuclear-sharing arrangements in which other European states contribute toward the French nuclear deterrent in exchange for a say in nuclear planning and deployment.<sup>87</sup> Since the United Kingdom is not a part of the European Union anymore, the potential contribution of British

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<sup>84</sup> Quoted in, Jo Harper, "Poland in talks to join NATO nuclear sharing program," *Anadolu Agency*, October 5, 2022, available at <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/poland-in-talks-to-join-nato-nuclear-sharing-program/2703041>.

<sup>85</sup> Jacques Lanxade, Denis MacShane, Margarita Mathiopoulos, and Klaus Naumann, "Europe needs a nuclear deterrent of its own," *New Atlanticist*, July 11, 2023, available at <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/europe-needs-a-nuclear-deterrent-of-its-own/>.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> Tomi Huhtanen, "The war in Ukraine is forcing Europe to develop its own nuclear deterrence," *Euractiv*, September 19, 2022, available at <https://www.euractiv.com/section/defence-and-security/opinion/the-war-in-ukraine-is-forcing-europe-to-develop-its-own-nuclear-deterrence/>.



nuclear weapons to this European “independent” nuclear deterrent is usually discussed somewhat tangentially.

A recent article in the popular German magazine *Spiegel International* observed that “Dependence on American nukes could ultimately be more dangerous than dependence on Russian gas.” It cited U.S. unpredictability and the U.S. strategic focus on China as the main arguments for why European states should work toward an independent European nuclear deterrent and not rely on U.S. nuclear guarantees.<sup>88</sup> Such discussions would have been unthinkable even a decade ago. Despite voices in the United States wanting Europe to step up and provide more for its own defense, an indigenous European nuclear deterrent could end up fracturing the Alliance rather than strengthening it.<sup>89</sup>

In short, questions about the future direction of NATO’s nuclear policy remain. Going forward, signs indicate that it might be difficult to work out a common strong position because of differing perceptions and substantive disagreements on the nature of the contemporary security environment and how best to address it. This disagreement includes differing perceptions among allies on what actions are considered escalatory in the context of their support for Ukraine and countering Russia’s belligerence.

For an example of differing perspectives, researchers at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs documented the West’s and Russia’s nuclear rhetoric and escalation management approaches in their September 2022

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<sup>88</sup> René Pfister, Britta Sandberg and Christoph Schult, “Debate over Nuclear Deterrence Heats Up in the EU,” *Spiegel International*, April 14, 2022, available at <https://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/a-european-bomb-debate-over-nuclear-deterrence-heats-up-in-the-eu-a-88ab0869-67c6-4bc9-bdff-75c32340b56c>.

<sup>89</sup> Horowitz and Wachs, “France’s Nuclear Weapons and Europe,” *op. cit.*, p. 2.

report.<sup>90</sup> The study codes the statements as “escalatory,” “warning,” and “de-escalatory.” Generally, the authors coded the West’s statements that were desirable from a Russian policy-perspective as “de-escalatory,” even if following their underlining rationale would contribute to Ukraine’s defeat. It seems highly unlikely that some other NATO members would agree with characterizing the same statements as “de-escalatory” since their perspective of de-escalation and advancing the West’s interest involves Russia leaving Ukraine as soon as possible.<sup>91</sup>

In the same research, between January and August 2022, the West is judged to have made nearly an equivalent number of “escalatory” statements as Russia, the indisputable aggressor in its escalation of the war against Ukraine and the source of explicit and continuing nuclear threats against the West (Russia’s five to the West’s four).<sup>92</sup> This interpretation of what constitutes “escalatory” or “de-escalatory” statements reflects a continuing unwillingness to acknowledge the all-important context in which such statements are made, in this case Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine and its accompanying human rights atrocities and war crimes. This suggests the need to maintain the

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<sup>90</sup> Anna Clara Arndt and Liviu Horovitz, “Nuclear rhetoric and escalation management in Russia’s war against Ukraine: a chronology,” Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, *Working Paper*, No. 3, September 2022, available at [https://www.swp-berlin.org/publications/products/arbeitspapiere/Arndt-Horovitz\\_Working-Paper\\_Nuclear\\_rhetoric\\_and\\_escalation\\_management\\_in\\_Russia\\_s\\_war\\_against\\_Ukraine.pdf](https://www.swp-berlin.org/publications/products/arbeitspapiere/Arndt-Horovitz_Working-Paper_Nuclear_rhetoric_and_escalation_management_in_Russia_s_war_against_Ukraine.pdf).

<sup>91</sup> “Finland’s PM rejects idea Putin needs an ‘off-ramp’ and simply suggests Russia leaves Ukraine,” *Sky News*, October 7, 2022, available at <https://news.sky.com/video/finlands-pm-rejects-idea-putin-needs-an-off-ramp-and-simply-suggests-russia-leaves-ukraine-12714857>.

<sup>92</sup> Arndt and Horovitz, “Nuclear rhetoric and escalation management in Russia’s war against Ukraine: a chronology,” op. cit., p. 8.

pretense of an equivalence between Russia and the West in terms of goals and means when no such equivalence exists.

Researchers also coded U.S. Minuteman ICBM test rescheduling and cancellation as “de-escalatory.”<sup>93</sup> It is highly doubtful that the rescheduling and cancellation of the test was de-escalatory, and it is more likely that the opposite is true because Russia may interpret it as a sign of weakness. The first scheduled test after Russia’s February 2022 invasion had been planned long before Russia invaded Ukraine.<sup>94</sup> The tests are a critical component of U.S. nuclear forces readiness, which contributes to assurance and extended deterrence.<sup>95</sup> Cancelling them for a fear of provoking Russia in the midst of Moscow’s explicit and often crude nuclear threats does not bode well for allied assurance.

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<sup>93</sup> Liviu Horovitz and Martha Stolze, “Nuclear rhetoric and escalation management in Russia’s war against Ukraine: A chronology,” *Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, Working Paper*, No. 2, August 2023, p. 8, available at [https://www.swp-berlin.org/publications/products/arbeitspapiere/Horovitz\\_and\\_Stolze\\_-\\_Nuclear\\_Chrono\\_Final\\_2August2023.pdf](https://www.swp-berlin.org/publications/products/arbeitspapiere/Horovitz_and_Stolze_-_Nuclear_Chrono_Final_2August2023.pdf).

<sup>94</sup> Eric Edelman and Frank Miller, “Understanding That Weakness Is Provocative Is Deterrence 101,” *The Dispatch*, August 8, 2022, available at <https://thedispatch.com/article/understanding-that-weakness-is-provocative/>; and, Tom Rogan, “Biden’s foolish US nuclear missile test cancellation,” *Washington Examiner*, March 3, 2022, available at <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/restoring-america/courage-strength-optimism/bidens-foolish-us-nuclear-missile-test-cancellation>.

<sup>95</sup> Edelman and Miller, “Understanding That Weakness Is Provocative Is Deterrence 101,” *op. cit.*

## **The Ugly Twin Sisters: Russia's Threats and Arms Control Noncompliance**

Despite a history of Russia's nuclear threats against the United States and its allies, and a brutal onslaught against Ukraine, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken stated that the United States remains "ready to talk about strategic arms limitations at any time with Russia irrespective of anything else going on in the world or in our relationship."<sup>96</sup> Perhaps that is why arms control continues to over-promise and under-deliver in U.S. national security; it should be self-evident that Washington must consider "anything else going on in the world or in our relationship" before going down a path toward an agreement, if an agreement is to benefit U.S. national security.

For example, Russia's aggression, nuclear buildup, doctrine, and threats ought to be considered, in addition to Moscow's dismal arms control compliance record. Amazingly, Moscow's blatant treaty violations and evidence of adversarial strategic culture appear rarely to be considered significant by U.S. arms control proponents.<sup>97</sup> They ought to be. Russia's malign intentions are so far removed from the West's cooperative approach to arms control that pursuing it cannot but result in a significant

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<sup>96</sup> U.S. Department of State, "Secretary Antony J. Blinken Remarks to the Press," February 21, 2023, available at <https://www.state.gov/secretary-antony-j-blinken-remarks-to-the-press-7/>.

<sup>97</sup> For an example, see *ibid.*; or, Dana Struckman, "Russia's Suspension of New START Is No Reason for America to Do the Same," *The National Interest*, April 14, 2023, available at <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/russia%E2%80%99s-suspension-new-start-no-reason-america-do-same-206401>.

disadvantage for the United States—and continuing frustration with Moscow’s arms control behavior.

Moscow’s compliance record is abysmal. The Soviet Union signed agreements while preparing to violate them, as was the case with the nuclear testing moratorium. Most recently, Russia decided to “suspend” New START’s implementation, halting required on-site inspections and making it impossible for the State Department to certify that Russia is in compliance with the terms of the treaty.<sup>98</sup> Yet, despite the U.S. inability to certify Russia’s compliance, two leading New START negotiators argued that they “do not see that Russian suspension constitutes an extraordinary event that jeopardizes US supreme interests”<sup>99</sup>—as if nothing short of threatening “US supreme interests” is meaningful for Washington’s continued pursuit of arms control with a treaty partner that appears to have no qualms violating agreements.

For Moscow, treaty violations, noncompliance, and “suspensions,” appear to be a matter of course in the conduct of its foreign and defense policy. As long as a treaty serves Russia’s interest, Russia will observe its terms. When it does not, Russia will stop complying and will even violate it, but may not formally withdraw from it. Why would it, when it can do what it wants while keeping the United States restrained and fully exploiting the asymmetry between the two approaches? When the United States finally withdraws after years of efforts to bring Russia into compliance, Russia gains a valuable talking point about the

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<sup>98</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Report to Congress on Implementation of the New START Treaty*, 2023, p. 5, <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/2022-New-START-Implementation-Report.pdf>.

<sup>99</sup> Rose Gottemoeller and Marshall L. Brown, Jr., “Legal aspects of Russia’s New START suspension provide opportunities for US policy makers,” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, March 2, 2023, available at <https://thebulletin.org/2023/03/legal-aspects-of-russias-new-start-suspension-provide-opportunities-for-us-policy-makers/>.

United States being the one destroying the arms control regime.<sup>100</sup>

Russia's history of Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty violations is instructive. The United States started raising concerns about Russia's compliance in 2013, to no avail.<sup>101</sup> Exhausting other options, the United States found Russia in violation of its obligations under the INF Treaty in its 2014 *Adherence to and Compliance with Arms Control, Nonproliferation, and Disarmament Agreements and Commitments Report*.<sup>102</sup> The 2015 edition of the report stated that "the cruise missile developed by the Russian Federation meets the INF Treaty definition of a ground-launched cruise missile with a range capability of 500 km to 5,500 km, and as such, all missiles of that type, and all launchers of the type used to launch such a missile, are prohibited under the provisions of the INF Treaty."<sup>103</sup>

Russia remained in violation of its INF Treaty obligations according to the 2016, 2017, and 2018 editions of the report.<sup>104</sup> It took the Obama Administration three years

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<sup>100</sup> For an example, see Vladimir Isachenkov, "Russian foreign minister lambasts US over arms control," *Associated Press*, November 8, 2019, available at <https://apnews.com/general-news-82ecbfa679cd4ebb82ef24b9c12b6b39>.

<sup>101</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Adherence to and Compliance with Arms Control, Nonproliferation, and Disarmament Agreements and Commitments Report*, July 31, 2014, available at <https://2009-2017.state.gov/t/avc/rls/rpt/2014/230047.htm#inf2>.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>103</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Adherence to and Compliance with Arms Control, Nonproliferation, and Disarmament Agreements and Commitments Report*, June 5, 2015, available at <https://2009-2017.state.gov/t/avc/rls/rpt/2015/243224.htm#INF2>.

<sup>104</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Adherence to and Compliance with Arms Control, Nonproliferation, and Disarmament Agreements and Commitments Report*, April 11, 2016, available at <https://2009-2017.state.gov/t/avc/rls/rpt/2016/255651.htm#INF%20TREATY>; and, U.S. Department of State, *Adherence to and Compliance with Arms Control*,

after raising the initial compliance concern to convene a Special Verification Commission meeting with Belarus, Kazakhstan, Russia, and Ukraine to discuss Russia's violation within the multilateral format provided by the treaty.<sup>105</sup> At the end of 2018, the United States assessed "that Russia has fielded multiple battalions of SSC-8/9M729 missiles" in violation of the INF Treaty.<sup>106</sup> The report noted that the covert development of the missile may have started as early as the mid-2000s.<sup>107</sup> After extensive efforts to bring Russia back into compliance failed, the United States withdrew from the treaty in 2019.<sup>108</sup>

Over the years, Russia continued to deny any wrongdoing, playing for time while the United States would not violate the INF Treaty with its own version of a ground-launched intermediate-range system. In fact, because intermediate-range systems were banned by the Treaty, the United States was reluctant to spend resources

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*Nonproliferation, and Disarmament*, 2017, available at <https://2017-2021.state.gov/2017-report-on-adherence-to-and-compliance-with-arms-control-nonproliferation-and-disarmament-agreements-and-commitments/>; and U.S. Department of State, *Adherence to and Compliance with Arms Control, Nonproliferation, and Disarmament*, 2018, available at <https://2017-2021.state.gov/2018-report-on-adherence-to-and-compliance-with-arms-control-nonproliferation-and-disarmament-agreements-and-commitments/>.

<sup>105</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Adherence to and Compliance with Arms Control, Nonproliferation, and Disarmament*, 2017, op. cit.

<sup>106</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Adherence to and Compliance with Arms Control, Nonproliferation, and Disarmament*, August 2019, p. 13, available at <https://2017-2021.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Compliance-Report-2019-August-19-Unclassified-Final.pdf>.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>108</sup> C. Todd Lopez, "U.S. Withdraws From Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty," U.S. Department of Defense, August 2, 2019, available at <https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/1924779/us-withdraws-from-intermediate-range-nuclear-forces-treaty/>.

on seriously examining whether it would benefit from these systems, let alone starting any major research effort, until years after it first recognized Russia's violations.

The problem of restoring treaty compliance by parties intent on cheating is not new. More than 60 years ago, Fred Iklé, who would later become Director of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, pointed out in his seminal article on challenges related to treaty compliance and enforcement, that "detecting violations is not enough. What counts are the political and military consequences of a violation once it has been detected, since these alone will determine whether or not the violator stands to gain in the end."<sup>109</sup> The United States was unable to impose enough political and military costs following Russia's INF Treaty violations to change Moscow's non-compliance, partly because Washington was constrained by the very treaty Russia was violating, and partly because Russia had too much to gain by violating the treaty. In fact, there are very few examples of the United States being successful in bringing a determined violator back into compliance with an existing arms control agreement absent a significant change in political conditions that improved bilateral relations—e.g., when President Gorbachev confirmed Russia was in violation of the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty after years of Russia's denials. Such a change in Russia today seems unlikely, but it would be imprudent to base U.S. arms control policy on the assumption of such a transition.

The asymmetry between the U.S. and Russian approaches to arms control is striking. While the United States shies away from activities that could be even remotely perceived as contrary to the object and purpose of a treaty, Russia often ignores treaty obligations and plows ahead with programs that violate them, incurring limited costs for its actions. In doing so, Russia relies on

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<sup>109</sup> Fred Iklé, "After Detection: What?" *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 39, No. 2 (January 1961), p. 208.



disinformation and the intricacies of arms control to claim that the United States is to blame for the demise of arms control architectures. When Washington eventually withdraws, Russia blames it, not years of its own noncompliance and violations, for the demise of arms control. It is much easier for Russia to say, “The United States killed a treaty,” than for the United States to explain Russia’s violations and what the United States has done to try to bring it back into compliance, and so the United States is perpetually put on defensive—a position it does not handle adroitly.

For example, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov recently stated that “It is a medical [sic] fact that they [the United States] have destroyed the entire international legal system of deterrence and strategic stability.”<sup>110</sup> He menacingly continued that, “It’s a good thing they do not want a nuclear war, no one wants it. And the system of agreements, which has been destroyed by the United States, exists specifically to reduce its risk and to make this risk negligible at all.”<sup>111</sup> There are many risks to the international system, but they originate with revisionist powers and their armaments, especially Russia and China, rather than with the United States, which has built and maintained a relatively stable international order at great cost in blood and treasure for decades—and has been scrupulous in its treaty compliance.

Yet, some U.S. negotiators would prefer to keep the political context separate from arms control negotiations. For example, Rose Gottemoeller, former Under Secretary for Arms Control and International Security, recently wrote that, “America does not link nuclear arms limits to other issues: they are an existential necessity in their own right,

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<sup>110</sup> “No one wants nuclear war, but US destroyed entire deterrence system – Lavrov,” TASS, June 28, 2023, available at <https://tass.com/politics/1639971>.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

and if Putin cannot recognise that, then it is to his own country's detriment. His nuclear forces lose an important means to predict US behaviour just as America is embarking on a two-decade modernisation of its nuclear triad."<sup>112</sup> The notion that "nuclear arms limits" are "an existential necessity in their own right" is absurd; their value can be judged only in relation to the security environment in which they exist. Arms control should never be separated from the political context in which it is pursued. Under the current conditions, it may not be in the U.S. interest to continue to live under agreements that originated many years ago in a much more benign threat environment – particularly if the United States is the only party adhering to their terms.

Far from failing to see "his own country's detriment," Putin apparently sees benefits in Russia's arms control violations and nuclear weapons superiority. "Just talking about this (the potential use of nuclear weapons) lowers the nuclear threshold. We have more than NATO countries and they want to reduce our numbers. Screw them," he said.<sup>113</sup> Putin's point of view is grounded in the long-term failure of the United States to impose sufficient costs on Russia following its arms control violations to restore the integrity of the agreement.<sup>114</sup> Putin is undoubtedly familiar with effective Soviet-era arms control efforts to restrain the

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<sup>112</sup> Rose Gottemoeller, "The west must act now to break Russia's nuclear fever," *The Financial Times*, June 15, 2023, available at <https://www.ft.com/content/91c51eb9-65df-44f0-977d-db922c3e97e9>.

<sup>113</sup> Andrew Osborn, "Putin says Russia put nuclear bombs in Belarus as warning to West," *Reuters*, June 17, 2023, available at <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/putin-says-russia-positions-nuclear-bombs-belarus-warning-west-2023-06-16/>.

<sup>114</sup> Michaela Dodge, "On Arms Control and Why New START's Suspension Does Not Really Matter," *Information Series* No. 557 (Fairfax, VA: National Institute Press, June 19, 2023), available at [https://nipp.org/information\\_series/michaela-dodge-on-arms-control-and-why-new-starts-suspension-does-not-really-matter-no-557-june-19-2023/](https://nipp.org/information_series/michaela-dodge-on-arms-control-and-why-new-starts-suspension-does-not-really-matter-no-557-june-19-2023/).

United States in areas of U.S. technological advantage and enable the Soviet Union to take advantage of its areas of strength.<sup>115</sup> These efforts were often successful, particularly as they pertained to missile defense.

Through the arms control process, the Soviets managed to impose restrictions on missile defense programs in which the United States was a technological leader. These restraints long outlived even the end of the Cold War, despite the Soviet Union's own violations. When the national security environment and missile proliferation (to which the Russians contributed) necessitated a U.S. withdrawal from the ABM Treaty in 2002, the Russians gained a useful propaganda narrative that the U.S. withdrawal fueled an arms race, a narrative still repeated within the arms control community two decades later.<sup>116</sup> In reality, the United States and Russia went on to sign the Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty (SORT or Moscow Treaty) fewer than six months after the U.S. announcement of the ABM Treaty withdrawal—a Treaty that included unprecedented reductions in the aggregate number of accountable strategic nuclear warheads (down to 1,700-2,200).<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> David Trachtenberg, Michaela Dodge and Keith B. Payne, *The 'Action-Reaction' Arms Race Narrative vs. Historical Realities* (Fairfax, VA: National Institute Press, June 2021), pp. 63-68, available at <https://nipp.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Action-Reaction-pub.pdf>.

<sup>116</sup> For example, James Acton, "The U.S. Exit From the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty Has Fueled a New Arms Race," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, December 13, 2021, available at <https://carnegieendowment.org/2021/12/13/u.s.-exit-from-anti-ballistic-missile-treaty-has-fueled-new-arms-race-pub-85977>.

<sup>117</sup> U.S. Department of State, "Treaty Between the United States of America and the Russian Federation On Strategic Offensive Reductions," May 24, 2002, available at <https://2009-2017.state.gov/t/isn/18016.htm/>.

## For Russia, the Quantity and Quality of Nuclear Weapons Appear to Matter

Washington must account for how adversaries view nuclear weapons and their attributes when developing its own nuclear weapons policy, including arms control policy, even if U.S. officials would like to consider such factors unimportant. As nuclear policy expert Greg Weaver pointed out during recent testimony, “In a deterrence relationship, the adversary doesn’t just have ‘a’ vote, they have *the only vote*.”<sup>118</sup> While some U.S. pundits argue that the United States keeps too many nuclear weapons<sup>119</sup> or that nuclear weapons do not matter,<sup>120</sup> official Russian statements indicate that Moscow values numerical superiority, as well as the increased diversity of its nuclear weapons arsenal. For example, Putin noted, “that we have more such nuclear weapons than NATO countries. They know about it and never stop trying to persuade us to start nuclear reduction talks. Like hell we will, right? A popular phrase. Because, putting it in the dry language of economic

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<sup>118</sup> Testimony by Greg Weaver, Senior Associate (Non-Resident), Project on Nuclear Issues, Center for Strategic and International Studies, before the Senate Armed Services Committee on Regional Nuclear Deterrence, Subcommittee on Strategic Forces, March 28, 2023, p. 3, available at <https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Mr.%20Gregory%20Weaver%20Written%20Statement%20-%20Regional%20Nuclear%20Deterrence%20-%202003.28%20SASC%20FINAL.pdf>. (Emphasis in original).

<sup>119</sup> John Isaacs, “‘Old Think’ Is Driving U.S. Nuclear Weapons Policy,” *The National Interest*, December 17, 2022, available at <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/%E2%80%98old-think%E2%80%99-driving-us-nuclear-weapons-policy-206024>.

<sup>120</sup> John Mueller, “Nuclear Weapons Don’t Matter,” *Foreign Affairs*, October 15, 2018, available at <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/world/nuclear-weapons-dont-matter>.

essays, it is our competitive advantage."<sup>121</sup> In 2013, then Deputy Prime Minister Sergei Ivanov stated: "When I hear our American partners say: 'let's reduce something else,' I would like to say to them: 'excuse me, but what we have is relatively new.' They [the United States] have not conducted any upgrades for a long time. They still use Trident [missiles]."<sup>122</sup> In addition to its nuclear-charged rhetoric, Russia also conducts large-scale military exercises that include simulated nuclear weapons attacks.<sup>123</sup>

Putin appears to value more than just a numerical advantage. Unlike the United States, that has not designed and deployed a new nuclear warhead since the end of the Cold War, Russia rejuvenated its nuclear weapons complex after the 1990s slump and maintained personnel proficient in nuclear weapons building. Consequently, some of Russia's nuclear weapons "are more modern than the weapons NATO countries have," as Putin pointed out.<sup>124</sup> Given the fact that U.S. nuclear weapons in Europe were deployed in the 1960s, the feat is much less impressive than it appears at first. Then-Defense Intelligence Agency Director Robert Ashley stated that the "United States believes that Russia probably is not adhering to the nuclear testing moratorium in a manner consistent with the zero-

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<sup>121</sup> Vladimir Putin, "Remarks at the Plenary session of the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum," June 16, 2023, available at <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/71445> (accessed June 20, 2023).

<sup>122</sup> "Russia today is not interested in U.S.-proposed arms reduction – Sergei Ivanov," *Interfax*, March 5, 2013, quoted in *Russian Strategy: Expansion, Crisis, and Conflict* (Fairfax, VA: National Institute Press, 2016), p. 85, available at <https://nipp.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/FINAL-FOR-WEB-1.12.16.pdf>.

<sup>123</sup> *Russian Strategy: Expansion, Crisis, and Conflict*, op. cit., pp. 69-71.

<sup>124</sup> Vladimir Putin, "Address by the President of the Russian Federation," September 21, 2022, available at <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/69390#sel=8:18:Wvp;8:33:41G>.

yield standard.”<sup>125</sup> More importantly, he added that “Our understanding of nuclear weapon development leads us to believe Russia's testing activities would help it improve its nuclear weapon capabilities.”<sup>126</sup> Russia's quantitative superiority on the tactical nuclear weapons level and belief in the qualitative superiority of its nuclear warheads at the strategic level may be yet again contributing to its foreign policy adventurism, as it did during the Cold War.<sup>127</sup>

## Conclusion

The consistency of Russia's nuclear threats should cause the arms control proponents and national security experts to seriously take into account the Russian strategic culture. Russian government officials, including Putin himself, appear convinced that nuclear superiority serves its expansionist purposes; they continue to brandish nuclear weapon threats, and have been consistent and explicit, particularly since Russia launched its most recent invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. They also appear to believe that the actual employment of nuclear weapons is “thinkable.” Moscow's perceived qualitative and quantitative superiority appears to be influencing its foreign policy to be more belligerent toward Western interests, as it did during the Cold War.

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<sup>125</sup> Lt. Gen. Robert P. Ashley, Jr., “The Arms Control Landscape,” *Remarks at the Hudson Institute*, p. 4, available at <https://s3.amazonaws.com/media.hudson.org/Hudson%20Transcript%20-%20The%20Arms%20Control%20Landscape.pdf>.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>127</sup> Svetlana Savranskaya and David A. Welch, eds., *Global Competition and the Deterioration of U.S.-Soviet Relations, 1977-1980*, transcript from *The Carter-Brezhnev Project* (Washington, D.C.: National Security Archive, 1995), p. 38, available at [https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/carterbrezhnev/docs\\_global\\_competition/part7.PDF](https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/carterbrezhnev/docs_global_competition/part7.PDF).

U.S. consideration of arms control appears to ignore or discount Moscow's views of nuclear weapons and increasingly explicit nuclear threats. Continuing to do so is unwise. Rather, the United States must approach arms control not as an arena of mutual interest and cooperation, but as another form of competition—which clearly is Moscow's mode of operation. It appears that Russia's aggressive, revisionist policies and goal of reordering the global order, in league with China, will portend conflict and crises. At this point in history, the United States would be better off preparing to compete rather than accommodate.

Russia's escalation of its war in Ukraine appears to have altered, at least temporarily, European NATO member states' perceptions regarding the importance of nuclear deterrence in their security architectures. The situation is unlikely to change in the near future due to Russia's imperial ambitions that threaten more recent NATO members and that removes past hopes of incorporating Russia into the modern democratic and security system.

Debates about the potential necessity for the United States to expand its nuclear arsenal are conducted in a pragmatic manner, without the previous—almost unshakeable—dedication to a nuclear-free world. Allies appear to have rediscovered their appreciation of U.S. forward-deployed nuclear systems. Under these contemporary conditions, U.S. nuclear reductions—near-universally applauded by allies in the past—are more likely to be perceived as undermining allied assurance and damaging to alliance politics and security.

# Appendix<sup>128</sup>

## Russia's Nuclear Threats

### Russia's Government Officials

#### Vladimir Putin (President of the Russian Federation)

"Just talking about this (the potential use of nuclear weapons) lowers the nuclear threshold. We have more than NATO countries and they want to reduce our numbers. Screw them."<sup>129</sup>

"The second point is that we have more such nuclear weapons than NATO countries. They know about it and never stop trying to persuade us to start nuclear reduction talks. Like hell we will, right? A popular phrase. (*Laughter.*) Because, putting it in the dry language of economic essays, it is our competitive advantage. As you know, we have been in talks with our partner in the Union State – with President Lukashenko – about deploying some of these tactical nuclear weapons to Belarusian territory. This has happened. The first nuclear warheads have been delivered to Belarus, but only the first batch. There will be more. By the end of the summer, by the end of this year, we will complete this work. This

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<sup>128</sup> The Appendix includes nuclear threats compiled by Dr. Mark Schneider, which can be found in Keith Payne, Testimony before the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development, U.S. Senate, June 25, 2012, pp. A-1-A-5, available at <https://nipp.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/July-25-testimony-for-web.pdf>.

<sup>129</sup> Andrew Osborn, "Putin says Russia put nuclear bombs in Belarus as warning to West," *Reuters*, June 17, 2023, available at <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/putin-says-russia-positions-nuclear-bombs-belarus-warning-west-2023-06-16/>.



is an element of deterrence, so that everyone who thinks of inflicting a strategic defeat on us should keep this circumstance in mind.”<sup>130</sup>

“The elites of the West do not hide their purpose. But they also cannot fail to realise that it is impossible to defeat Russia on the battlefield.”<sup>131</sup>

“In terms of the threat of nuclear war, you are right, such threat is increasing.”<sup>132</sup>

“I would like to remind those who make such statements regarding Russia that our country has different types of weapons as well, and some of them are more modern than the weapons NATO countries have. In the event of a threat to the territorial integrity of our country and to defend Russia and our people, we will certainly make use of all weapon systems available to us. This is not a bluff.”<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Vladimir Putin, “Remarks at the Plenary session of the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum,” June 16, 2023, available at <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/71445> (accessed June 20, 2023).

<sup>131</sup> Guy Faulconbridge, “Russia's Putin issues new nuclear warnings to West over Ukraine,” *Reuters*, February 21, 2023, available at <https://www.reuters.com/world/putin-update-russias-elite-ukraine-war-major-speech-2023-02-21/>.

<sup>132</sup> Katharina Krebs, “Putin says threat of nuclear war is increasing,” *CNN*, December 8, 2022, available at [https://edition.cnn.com/europe/live-news/russia-ukraine-war-news-12-07-22/h\\_9e32121e0e11c3aa4b0a708befaf3f30](https://edition.cnn.com/europe/live-news/russia-ukraine-war-news-12-07-22/h_9e32121e0e11c3aa4b0a708befaf3f30).

<sup>133</sup> Vladimir Putin, “Address by the President of the Russian Federation,” September 21, 2022, available at <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/69390#sel=8:18:Wv p,8:33:41G>.

"Western countries aren't only taking unfriendly economic actions against our country, but leaders of major NATO countries are making aggressive statements about our country. So, I order to move Russia's deterrence forces to a special regime of combat duty."<sup>134</sup>

Putin announced that Russia's nuclear forces would be on "special alert" following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.<sup>135</sup>

"No matter who tries to stand in our way or all the more so create threats for our country and our people, they must know that Russia will respond immediately, and the consequences will be such as you have never seen in your entire history. No matter how the events unfold, we are ready. All the necessary decisions in this regard have been taken."<sup>136</sup>

"They [the tensions] are not a reason to ratchet up confrontation to the levels of the Cuban Missile Crisis in the 1960s. In any case that's not what we want," said Putin. "If someone wants that, well OK they are welcome. I have set out today what that

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<sup>134</sup> Shannon Bugos, "Putin Orders Russian Nuclear Weapons on Higher Alert," *Arms Control Association*, March 2022, available at <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2022-03/news/putin-orders-russian-nuclear-weapons-higher-alert>.

<sup>135</sup> "Ukraine invasion: Putin puts Russia's nuclear forces on 'special alert,'" *BBC*, February 28, 2022, available at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-60547473>.

<sup>136</sup> Presidential Executive Office, "Address by the President of the Russian Federation," February 24, 2022, available at <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67843>.

would mean. Let them count [the missile flight times].”<sup>137</sup>

“If the United States does withdraw from the INF treaty, the main question is what they will do with these [intermediate-range] missiles that will once again appear. If they will deliver them to Europe, naturally our response will have to mirror this, and European countries that agree to host them, if things go that far, must understand that they are putting their own territory at risk of a possible counter-strike.”<sup>138</sup>

“But then any aggressor should know that retaliation is inevitable and they will be annihilated. And we as the victims of an aggression, we as martyrs would go to paradise while they will simply perish because they won’t even have time to repent their sins.”<sup>139</sup>

“Certainly, it would be a global disaster for humanity; a disaster for the entire world. As a citizen of Russia and the head of the Russian state I

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<sup>137</sup> Andrew Osborn, “Putin to U.S.: I’m ready for another Cuban Missile-style crisis if you want one,” *Reuters*, February 21, 2019, available at <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-putin-idUSKCN1QA1A3>.

<sup>138</sup> Olesya Astakhova and Andrew Osborn, “Russia will target European countries if they host U.S. nuclear missiles: Putin,” *Reuters*, October 24, 2018, available at <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-nuclear-putin-idUSKCN1MY2FO>.

<sup>139</sup> President of Russia, *Meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club*, Transcript, October 18, 2018, available at <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/58848>.

must ask myself: Why would we want a world without Russia?"<sup>140</sup>

"In spite of all difficulties over the years, economic and financial problems with our defense industry and Armed Forces, Russia reached nuclear power, but nobody wanted to take us seriously. Nobody listened to us. So listen to us now."<sup>141</sup>

"Thank God, I think no one is thinking of unleashing a large-scale conflict with Russia. I want to remind you that Russia is one of the leading nuclear powers."<sup>142</sup>

"Let me remind you that Russia is one of the world's biggest nuclear powers. These are not just words – this is the reality. What's more, we are strengthening our nuclear deterrent capability and developing our armed forces."<sup>143</sup>

"It's horrible to say and even horrible to think that, in response to the deployment of such facilities in

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<sup>140</sup> "Why would we want a world without Russia?' Putin on Moscow's nuclear doctrine," *RT*, March 7, 2018, available at <https://www.rt.com/news/420715-putin-world-russia-nuclear/>.

<sup>141</sup> Vladimir Putin, "State of the Nation Address 2018," *C-Span*, March 1, 2018, available at <https://www.c-span.org/video/?441907-1/russian-president-vladimir-putin-state-nation-address>.

<sup>142</sup> Damien Sharkov, "Russia Has Threatened Nuclear Attack, Says Ukraine Defence Minister," September 1, 2014, available at <https://www.newsweek.com/russia-has-threatened-nuclear-attack-says-ukraine-defence-minister-267842#:~:text=Kiev%20has%20received%20threats%20of%20nuclear%20retaliation%20from,Heleley%2C%20announced%20on%20his%20Face%20page%20on%20Monday>.

<sup>143</sup> Vladimir Putin, Excerpts from Transcript of Meeting with Seliger 2014 Forum Participants, August 29, 2014, available at <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/46507>.

Ukrainian territory, which cannot theoretically be ruled out, Russia could target its missile systems at Ukraine. Imagine this for a second. That is what worries us.”<sup>144</sup>

“This system of missile defence on one side and the absence of this system on the other... increases the possibility of unleashing a nuclear conflict.”<sup>145</sup>

**Dmitry Medvedev (Deputy Chairman of the Security Council of the Russian Federation, Former President of the Russian Federation)**

“Just imagine that the offensive... in tandem with NATO, succeeded and ended up with part of our land being taken away. Then we would have to use nuclear weapons by virtue of the stipulations of the Russian Presidential Decree. There simply wouldn’t be any other solution. Our enemies should pray to our fighters that they do not allow the world to go up in nuclear flames.”<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Luke Harding, “Putin issues nuclear threat to Ukraine over plan to host US shield,” *The Guardian*, February 13, 2008, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/feb/13/russia.putin>.

<sup>145</sup> Adrian Blomfield, “Putin in nuclear threat against Europe,” *The Telegraph*, June 4, 2007, available at <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/1553593/Putin-in-nuclear-threat-against-Europe.html>.

<sup>146</sup> Josh Pennington, Alex Stambaugh, and Brad Lendon, “Medvedev says Russia could use nuclear weapon if Ukraine’s fightback succeeds in latest threat,” *CNN*, July 31, 2023, available at <https://www.cnn.com/2023/07/31/europe/medvedev-russia-nuclear-weapons-intl-hnk/index.html>.

"The completely crazy West could not come up with anything else... In fact, it's a dead end. World War Three is getting closer."<sup>147</sup>

"In general, any war, even a world war, can be ended very quickly. Either if a peace treaty is signed or if you do what the Americans did in 1945 when they used their nuclear weapons and bombed two Japanese cities."<sup>148</sup>

"One way to resolve it is the third world war. But it is obviously bad, because the victors are not at all guaranteed further prosperity, as was the case after previous world wars. Most likely, there will simply be no winners. After all, it is impossible to consider as a victory the world in which nuclear winter has come, million-plus cities lie in ruins, there is no electricity due to the transcendent electromagnetic impulse, and a huge number of people died from the shock wave, light radiation, penetrating radiation and radioactive contamination...such an Apocalypse is not only possible, but also quite probable... The world is in a confrontation much worse than during the Cuban missile crisis, because

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<sup>147</sup> Lidia Kelly, "Russia's Medvedev: NATO's military aid to Ukraine brings World War Three closer," *Reuters*, July 11, 2023, available at <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russias-medvedev-natos-military-aid-ukraine-brings-world-war-three-closer-2023-07-11/>.

<sup>148</sup> "Medvedev names options to stop war: Either negotiations or nuclear strike," *Ukrainska Pravda*, July 5, 2023, available at [https://finance.yahoo.com/news/medvedev-names-options-stop-war-122615769.html?guccounter=1&guce\\_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2xlLmNvbS8&guce\\_referrer\\_sig=AQAAAJs0711oJK8Jm6uqXJ8TdCsHuzra91Z2SfxOP549iL41Y19vVLhDMWoDvCEOXBQcBfSSE0dHAIiTIO\\_wh5zzp3FbQb7lrfFdWUpOWzK\\_iuHOjGDhvIMHbLeprml\\_ALQwCr5td4X2eBQNwz7jvGMG3NN3X7sqq7eLcfZrxoH7q9h9OW](https://finance.yahoo.com/news/medvedev-names-options-stop-war-122615769.html?guccounter=1&guce_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2xlLmNvbS8&guce_referrer_sig=AQAAAJs0711oJK8Jm6uqXJ8TdCsHuzra91Z2SfxOP549iL41Y19vVLhDMWoDvCEOXBQcBfSSE0dHAIiTIO_wh5zzp3FbQb7lrfFdWUpOWzK_iuHOjGDhvIMHbLeprml_ALQwCr5td4X2eBQNwz7jvGMG3NN3X7sqq7eLcfZrxoH7q9h9OW).

our opponents have decided to really defeat the largest nuclear power - Russia."<sup>149</sup>

"There are some irreversible rules of war. If it comes to [deliveries of] nuclear weapons [to Ukraine], a preemptive strike will have to be carried out. [...] It will [happen], under certain circumstances."<sup>150</sup>

"The more weapons are supplied, the more dangerous the world will be. And the more destructive these weapons are, the more likely the scenario becomes of what is commonly called a nuclear apocalypse."<sup>151</sup>

"Britain was, is and will be our eternal enemy. [...] In any case, soon enough their impudent and disgustingly damp island will be sent into the abyss of the sea by waves created by the latest Russian weapons system."<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> Dmitry Medvedev, "Эпоха противостояния (The Era of Confrontation)," *Russian Gazette*, July 2, 2023, available at <https://rg.ru/2023/07/02/epoha-protivostoianii.html>.

<sup>150</sup> "West fails to grasp possibility of preemptive nuclear strike – Medvedev," *TASS*, May 26, 2023, available at <https://tass.com/politics/1623285>.

<sup>151</sup> Guy Faulconbridge and Kevin Liffey, "Western arms for Ukraine make 'nuclear apocalypse' more likely – Russia's Medvedev," *Reuters*, May 23, 2023, available at <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russias-medvedev-western-arms-ukraine-make-nuclear-apocalypse-more-likely-2023-05-23/>.

<sup>152</sup> Maighna Nanu, "Ukraine-Russia war: Russia 'will send disgustingly damp Britain into the abyss,'" *The Telegraph*, April 21, 2023, available at <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/world-news/2023/04/21/ukraine-russia-war-latest-news-putin-bakhmut-kyiv-nato/>.

"No, it hasn't decreased, it has grown. Every day when they provide Ukraine with foreign weapons brings the nuclear apocalypse closer."<sup>153</sup>

"Our enemies are doing just that [supplying weapons to Ukraine], not wanting to understand that their goals will certainly lead to a total fiasco. Loss for everyone. A collapse. Apocalypse. Where you forget for centuries about your former life, until the rubble ceases to emit radiation."<sup>154</sup>

"We don't set ourselves any limits and, depending on the nature of the threats, we're ready to use all types of weapons. In accordance with our doctrinal documents, including the Fundamentals of Nuclear Deterrence."<sup>155</sup>

"The defeat of a nuclear power in a conventional war may trigger a nuclear war. Nuclear powers have never lost major conflicts on which their fate depends. And this should be obvious to anyone. Even a Western politician with any trace of intelligence."<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Vladimir Isachenkov, "Russia's security chief blasts West, dangles nuclear threats," *Associated Press*, March 23, 2023, available at <https://apnews.com/article/medvedev-nuclear-putin-arrest-warrant-germany-ukraine-6dcde92e06f41a7c5cb7386f7939df33>.

<sup>154</sup> David Ljunggren, "Russia's Medvedev says arms supplies to Kyiv threaten global nuclear catastrophe," *Reuters*, February 27, 2023, available at <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russias-medvedev-says-arms-supplies-kyiv-threaten-global-nuclear-catastrophe-2023-02-27/>.

<sup>155</sup> Kevin Liffey, "Russia's Medvedev says more U.S. weapons supplies mean 'all of Ukraine will burn,'" *Reuters*, February 4, 2023, available at <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russias-medvedev-says-more-us-weapons-supplies-mean-all-ukraine-will-burn-2023-02-04/>.

<sup>156</sup> Tom Watling, Tim McNulty and Sean Meleady, "Putin ally threatens West with nuclear war if Russia defeated in Ukraine," *Express*, January



“The only thing that stops our enemies today is the understanding that Russia will be guided by the fundamentals of state policy ... on nuclear deterrence. And in the event that a real threat arises, it will act on them.”<sup>157</sup>

“Let’s imagine that Russia is forced to use the most fearsome weapon against the Ukrainian regime which had committed a large-scale act of aggression that is dangerous for the very existence of our state.”<sup>158</sup>

“The Donbas [Donetsk and Luhansk] republics and other territories will be accepted into Russia. [...] Russia has announced that not only mobilisation capabilities, but also any Russian weapons, including strategic nuclear weapons and weapons based on new principles, could be used for such protection.”<sup>159</sup>

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20, 2023, available at

<https://www.express.co.uk/news/world/1723253/Russia-war-Ukraine-tanks-T-14-Ramstein-putin-Volodymyr-Zelensky>.

<sup>157</sup> “Nuclear deterrence only factor preventing West from waging full-fledged war on Russia: Medvedev,” *PressTV*, December 25, 2022, available at

<https://www.presstv.ir/Detail/2022/12/25/695139/Russia-West-nuclear-war-Medvedev-Ukraine>.

<sup>158</sup> Guy Falconbridge and Caleb Davis, “Medvedev raises spectre of Russian nuclear strike on Ukraine,” *Reuters*, September 27, 2022, available at <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russias-medvedev-warns-west-that-nuclear-threat-is-not-bluff-2022-09-27/#:~:text=LONDON%2C%20Sept%2027%20%28Reuters%29%20-%20An%20ally%20of,apocalypse%27%20to%20directly%20enter%20the%20conflict%20in%20reponse>.

<sup>159</sup> Caleb Davis, “Russia’s Medvedev: new regions can be defended with strategic nuclear weapons,” *Reuters*, September 22, 2022, available at

"Let's not forget that the European Union also has nuclear power plants. And accidents can happen there, too."<sup>160</sup>

"Judgment Day will come very fast and hard. It will be very difficult to hide."<sup>161</sup> [Referring to an attack on Crimea – editorial comment]

"The idea of punishing a country that has one of the largest nuclear potentials is absurd. And potentially poses a threat to the existence of humanity."<sup>162</sup>

"There can be no more talk of any nuclear-free status for the Baltic [referring to Russia's enclave in Kaliningrad – editorial comment] - the balance must be restored."<sup>163</sup>

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<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russias-medvedev-strategic-nuclear-weapons-can-be-used-defend-new-regions-2022-09-22/>.

<sup>160</sup> "Accidents can happen at European nuclear plants too," Russian ex-president says," *Reuters*, August 12, 2022, available at

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/accidents-can-happen-european-nuclear-plants-too-russian-ex-president-says-2022-08-12/>.

<sup>161</sup> Guy Faulconbridge, "Russia's Medvedev: Attack on Crimea will ignite 'Judgement Day' response," *Reuters*, July 17, 2022, available at <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/medvedev-wests-refusal-recognise-crimea-russian-is-threat-2022-07-17/>.

<sup>162</sup> Guy Faulconbridge, "Russia's Medvedev warns United States: messing with a nuclear power is folly," *Reuters*, July 6, 2022, available at <https://www.reuters.com/world/russias-medvedev-warns-united-states-messing-with-nuclear-power-is-folly-2022-07-06/>.

<sup>163</sup> Guy Faulconbridge, "Russia warns of nuclear, hypersonic deployment if Sweden and Finland join NATO," *Reuters*, April 14, 2022, available at <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russia-warns-baltic-nuclear-deployment-if-nato-admits-sweden-finland-2022-04-14/>.

**Boris Yeltsin (then President of the Russian Federation)**

“Clinton allowed himself to pressurise Russia yesterday. He must have forgotten for a moment what Russia is. We have a full arsenal of nuclear weapons.”<sup>164</sup>

**Nikolai Patrushev (Secretary of Russia's Security Council)**

“American politicians trapped by their own propaganda remain confident that, in the event of a direct conflict with Russia, the United States is capable of launching a preventive missile strike, after which Russia will no longer be able to respond. This is short-sighted stupidity, and very dangerous.”<sup>165</sup>

“Russia is patient and does not intimidate anyone with its military advantage. But it has modern unique weapons capable of destroying any adversary, including the United States, in the event of a threat to its existence.”<sup>166</sup>

“We have corrected the conditions for use of nuclear weapons to resist aggression with conventional forces not only in large-scale wars, but also in

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<sup>164</sup> John Gittings, “Yeltsin gives US nuclear warning,” *The Guardian*, December 9, 1999, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/1999/dec/10/russia.chechnya>.

<sup>165</sup> “Putin ally says Russia has weapons to destroy US if its existence is threatened,” *Reuters*, March 27, 2023, available at <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/putin-ally-says-russia-has-weapons-destroy-us-if-its-existence-is-threatened-2023-03-27/>.

<sup>166</sup> “Putin ally says Russia has weapons to destroy US if its existence is threatened,” *Reuters*, March 27, 2023, available at <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/putin-ally-says-russia-has-weapons-destroy-us-if-its-existence-is-threatened-2023-03-27/>.

regional or even a local one.... There is also a multiple-options provision for use of nuclear weapons depending on the situation and intentions of the potential enemy. In a situation critical for national security, we don't exclude a preventive nuclear strike at the aggressor."<sup>167</sup>

**Alexander Venediktov (Deputy Secretary of Russia's Security Council)**

"Kyiv is well aware that such a step [meaning Ukraine's accession to NATO] would mean a guaranteed escalation to World War Three."<sup>168</sup>

**Sergei Ivanov (then Defense Minister)**

"As regard to [the] use of nuclear weapons in case of aggression, of course [it will use them in this case]. What else were they built for?"<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> "Russia to broaden nuclear strike options," *Russia Today*, October 14, 2009, available at <https://www.rt.com/news/russia-broaden-nuclear-strike/>.

<sup>168</sup> Guy Faulconbridge and Lidia Kelly, "Russian official warns of World War Three if Ukraine joins NATO," *Reuters*, October 13, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/admission-ukraine-nato-can-lead-third-world-war-russian-official-2022-10-13/>.

<sup>169</sup> "Russia Reserves Right to Preemptive Strikes," *Moscow Agentstvo Voyennykh Nosostey*, February 7, 2007. Transcribed in Open Source Center, Doc. ID: CEP200707950213; quoted in Keith Payne, Testimony before the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development, U.S. Senate, June 25, 2012, p. A-1, available at <https://nipp.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/July-25-testimony-for-web.pdf>.

## Sergey Lavrov (Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation)

“In the context of deterrence, the possession of nuclear weapons is today the only possible response to some significant external threats to the security of our country.”<sup>170</sup>

“It is a medical [sic] fact that they have destroyed the entire international legal system of deterrence and strategic stability. It’s a good thing they do not want a nuclear war, no one wants it. And the system of agreements, which has been destroyed by the United States, exists specifically to reduce its risk and to make this risk negligible at all.”<sup>171</sup>

“As during the Cold War, we have reached the dangerous, possibly even more dangerous, threshold.”<sup>172</sup>

“We are really in a hot phase of a war because Ukrainian Nazis are fighting mostly with US weapons.”<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> “Russia sees nuclear weapons as only possible response to some threats – Lavrov,” *TASS*, August 18, 2023, available at <https://tass.com/russia/1662459>.

<sup>171</sup> “No one wants nuclear war, but US destroyed entire deterrence system – Lavrov,” *TASS*, June 28, 2023, available at <https://tass.com/politics/1639971>.

<sup>172</sup> Michelle Nichols, “At UN, Russia's Lavrov Warns World at ‘Dangerous Threshold,’” *Reuters*, April 23, 2023, available at <https://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2023-04-24/un-chief-criticizes-russia-at-un-meeting-chaired-by-lavrov>.

<sup>173</sup> “Lavrov says Russia and US are in ‘hot phase of war,’” *The National News*, April 6, 2023, available at <https://www.thenationalnews.com/world/europe/2023/04/06/lavrov-says-russia-and-us-are-in-hot-phase-of-war/>.

"The danger [of nuclear war – editorial comment] is serious, real. It can't be underestimated."<sup>174</sup>

"If it comes to aggression against Russian territory, which Crimea and Sevastopol are parts of, I would not advise anyone to do this. We have the doctrine of national security, and it very clearly regulates the actions, which will be taken in this case."<sup>175</sup>

**Maria Zakharova (Spokesperson of the Russian Foreign Ministry)**

"The greatest danger is that with the aggressive policies of inflicting a strategic defeat on Russia in the Ukrainian conflict they have provoked themselves the United States and NATO continue to raise the stakes and become drawn ever deeper into military confrontation. It is obvious that such a policy, which we qualify as reckless, is capable of leading to a direct armed clash between nuclear powers."<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> "Russia Warns of Nuclear War Risk as Ukraine Talks Go On," *Bloomberg News*, April 26, 2022, available at <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-04-26/russia-warns-of-real-nuclear-war-risk-as-ukraine-talks-go-on?leadSource=verify%20wall>.

<sup>175</sup> Zachary Keck, "Russia Threatens Nuclear Strikes Over Crimea," *The Diplomat*, July 11, 2014, available at <https://thediplomat.com/2014/07/russia-threatens-nuclear-strikes-over-crimea/>.

<sup>176</sup> Vladimir Smirnov, "US, NATO's aggressive policies may result in clash between nuclear powers – Russian MFA," *TASS*, June 21, 2023, available at <https://tass.com/defense/1636187>.

**Sergei Ryabkov (Deputy Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation)**

“Our, as the Russian President put it, ‘competitive advantage’ in this domain is a countermeasure aimed at counterbalancing NATO’s superiority in some other aspects of their aggregate military potential.”<sup>177</sup>

“We are working to prevent relations with the U.S. from plunging into the abyss of an open armed conflict. We are already standing on the edge, on the edge of this precipice.”<sup>178</sup>

“I wouldn’t want to dive into a discussion about whether the likelihood of a nuclear conflict is high today, but it is higher than anything we have had for the past few decades, let’s put it that way.”<sup>179</sup>

**Vladimir Yermakov (Director General of the Department for Non-proliferation and Arms Control of Foreign Ministry of the Russian Federation)**

“If the United States continues to follow its current course of confrontation with Russia, with the stakes

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<sup>177</sup> “NATO attempting to put pressure on Russia, China in quest for nuclear dominance – diplomat,” *TASS*, July 1, 2023, available at <https://tass.com/politics/1641407>.

<sup>178</sup> Helen Regan and Yulia Kesaieva, “US rejects Russia’s ‘ludicrous claim’ it was behind alleged Kremlin attack; Moscow warns of conflict,” *CNN*, May 5, 2023, available at <https://www.cnn.com/2023/05/04/europe/russia-accuses-us-drone-attack-conflict-ukraine-intl-hnk/index.html>.

<sup>179</sup> Caleb Davis, “Russia says risk of nuclear conflict at highest level in decades,” *Reuters*, March 22, 2023, available at <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russia-says-risk-nuclear-conflict-highest-level-decades-2023-03-22/>.

constantly escalating on the verge of sliding into direct armed conflict, then the fate of START (nuclear arms treaty) may be a foregone conclusion."<sup>180</sup>

### **Nikolai Makarov (then Chief of the General Staff)**

"Taking into account a missile-defense system's destabilizing nature, that is, the creation of an illusion that a disarming strike can be launched with impunity, a decision on pre-emptive use of the attack weapons available will be made when the situation worsens."<sup>181</sup>

"The possibility of local armed conflicts virtually along the entire perimeter of the border has grown dramatically. I cannot rule out that, in certain circumstances, local and regional armed conflicts could grow into a large-scale war, possibly even with nuclear weapons."<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> Lidia Kelly, "Russia warns again that risks of nuclear confrontation with US growing – TASS," *Reuters*, April 24, 2023, available at <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russia-warns-again-that-risks-nuclear-confrontation-with-us-growing-tass-2023-04-25/#:~:text=April%20%28Reuters%29%20-%20Risks%20of%20a%20direct,a%20senior%20Russian%20diplomat%20as%20saying%20on%20Tuesday>.

<sup>181</sup> Andrew Kramer, "Russian General Makes Threat on Missile-Defense Sites," *The New York Times*, May 3, 2012, available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/04/world/europe/russian-general-threatens-pre-emptive-attacks-on-missile-defense-sites.html>.

<sup>182</sup> Zachary Keck, "Russia Threatens Nuclear Strikes Over Crimea," *The Diplomat*, July 11, 2014, available at <https://thediplomat.com/2014/07/russia-threatens-nuclear-strikes-over-crimea/>.



**Yury Baluyevskiy (then Chief of the General Staff)**

“If we see that these facilities pose a threat to Russia, these targets will be included in the lists of our planners – strategic, nuclear or others. The latter is a technicality.”<sup>183</sup>

“We do not intend to attack anyone. But all our partners must realize that for the protection of Russia and its allies, if necessary, the Armed Forces will be used, including preventively and with the use of nuclear weapons.”<sup>184</sup>

**Anatoly Nogovitsyn (then-Deputy Chief of General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation)**

“By deploying [components of a U.S. missile defense system], Poland is exposing itself to a strike - 100%.”<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>183</sup> “Baluyevskiy Says US European Missile Defense Poses Threat to Russia,” *InternetWebDigest, RU*, May 3, 2007. Translated in Open Source Center, Doc. ID: CEP20070504358001CEP2007054358001; quoted in Keith Payne, Testimony before the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development, U.S. Senate, June 25, 2012, p. A-1, available at <https://nipp.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/July-25-testimony-for-web.pdf>.

<sup>184</sup> “Russia will use nuclear weapons if necessary - chief of staff,” Moscow *ITAR-TASS*, January 19, 2008. Transcribed in Open Source Center, Doc. ID: CEP20080119950015; quoted in Keith Payne, Testimony before the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development, U.S. Senate, June 25, 2012, p. A-1, available at <https://nipp.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/July-25-testimony-for-web.pdf>.

<sup>185</sup> Ian Traynor, Luke Harding, and Helen Womack, “Moscow warns it could strike Poland over US missile shield,” *The Guardian*, August 15, 2008, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/aug/15/russia.poland.nuclear.missiles.threat>.

**Anatoly Nogovitsyn (then Defense Ministry Spokesman)**

'Poland is making itself a target. This is 100 percent [certain]. It becomes a target for attack. Such targets are destroyed as a first priority.'<sup>186</sup>

**Nikolay Solovtsov (then Commander of the Strategic Missile Troops)**

"[Correspondent] Russia has reacted sharply to the statement by the prime ministers of Poland and the Czech Republic. The commander of Strategic Missile Troops [SMT], Nikolay Solovtsov, said that if need be, our missiles would be targeted on the new ABM facilities, if they are built."<sup>187</sup>

"We have to take measures that will prevent the devaluation of the Russian nuclear deterrence potential. I do not rule out that our political and military administration may target some of our intercontinental ballistic missiles at the aforesaid missile defense facilities in Poland and the Czech Republic."<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> Damien McElroy, "Russian general says Poland a nuclear 'target,'" *Telegraph*, August 15, 2008, available at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/georgia/2564639/Russian-general-says-Poland-a-nuclear-target-as-Condoleezza-Rice-arrives-in-Georgia.html>.

<sup>187</sup> "General says Russia may target missile defence sites in Eastern Europe," *Moscow Channel One Television*, February 19, 2007. Translated in Open Source Center, Doc. ID: CEP20070219950390; quoted in Keith Payne, Testimony before the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development, U.S. Senate, June 25, 2012, p. A-1, available at <https://nipp.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/July-25-testimony-for-web.pdf>.

<sup>188</sup> "Solovtsov: Russian Missiles May Be Targeted At US ABM Sites in Europe," *Moscow, Agentstvo Voyennykh*

“I cannot exclude that, in the event that the country's highest military-political leadership will make the appropriate decision, the indicated missile defense facilities in Poland and the Czech Republic and also other similar facilities in the future could be selected as targets for our intercontinental ballistic missiles,” the general stated. “The RVSN is compelled to take steps, which will not permit the devaluation of the Russian nuclear deterrence potential under any conditions.”<sup>189</sup>

### **Andrey Shvaychenko (then Commander of the Strategic Missile Troops)**

“In peacetime, they are intended to ensure deterrence of large-scale non-nuclear or nuclear aggression against Russia and its allies. In a conventional war, they ensure that the opponent is forced to cease hostilities, on advantageous conditions for Russia, by means of single or multiple preventive strikes against the aggressors' most important facilities. In a nuclear war, they ensure the destruction of facilities of the opponent's military

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*Novostey*, December 17, 2007. Transcribed by Open Source Center Doc. ID: CEP20071217950364; quoted in Keith Payne, Testimony before the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development, U.S. Senate, June 25, 2012, p. A-1, available at <https://nipp.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/July-25-testimony-for-web.pdf>.

<sup>189</sup> Yuriy Gavrilov, “The Nuclear Reaction: Strategic Missile Complexes Could Be Retargeted at Poland and the Czech Republic,” Moscow *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, September 11, 2008. Translated by Open Source Center Doc. ID: CEP20080911358018; quoted in Keith Payne, Testimony before the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development, U.S. Senate, June 25, 2012, p. A-1, available at <https://nipp.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/July-25-testimony-for-web.pdf>.

and economic potential by means of an initial massive nuclear missile strike and subsequent multiple and single nuclear missile strikes.”<sup>190</sup>

**Anatoly Antonov (Russia's Ambassador to the United States)**

“It is time to realize that in the event of a direct armed conflict between Russia and NATO countries, the United States will not be able to hide behind the ocean.”<sup>191</sup>

**Oleg Stepanov (Russia's Ambassador to Canada)**

“Once again, just to be clear: when you are not in the nuclear bloc [referring to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization], you are safe. When you join it, you become yet another target. We cannot believe that the alliance, including our Finnish neighbors, does not understand this truism. It's as plain as day.”<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> “Russia may face large-scale military attack, says Strategic Missile Troops chief,” Moscow *ITAR-TASS*, December 11, 2009. Translated by Open Source Center Doc. ID: CEP20091216950151; quoted in Keith Payne, Testimony before the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development, U.S. Senate, June 25, 2012, p. A-1, available at <https://nipp.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/July-25-testimony-for-web.pdf>.

<sup>191</sup> Tom O'Connor, “Russia Ambassador Warns U.S. Resolution Pushes for Nuclear War Over Ukraine,” *Newsweek*, June 22, 2023, available at <https://www.newsweek.com/russia-ambassador-warns-us-resolution-pushes-nuclear-war-over-ukraine-1808577>.

<sup>192</sup> “Countries Joining NATO Face Security Risks Including Nuclear - Russian Envoy to Canada,” *Sputnik News*, April 20, 2023, available at <https://sputnikglobe.com/20230420/countries-joining-nato-face-security-risks-including-nuclear---russian-envoy-to-canada-1109713089.html>.

**Mikhail Vanin (then Ambassador of the Russian Federation to Denmark)**

“I do not think that the Danes fully understand the consequences if Denmark joins the US-led missile defence shield. If that happens, Danish warships become targets for Russian nuclear missiles.”<sup>193</sup>

**Konstantin Gavrilov (Head of the Russian Delegation in Vienna on Arms Control)**

“After all, in the event of an escalation of the conflict - and this is what Washington's reckless actions are leading to - they will be the first to deal with possible catastrophic consequences.”<sup>194</sup>

**Gen. Andrey Gurulyov (Ret.), Deputy of 8th State Duma**

“We shouldn't be afraid of this! I say, this is the time for drastic decisions! We should strike all of these groupings that the Ukrainians have, 4 shots out of a 152 mm weapon near Robotyne and this issue will be solved for good! Wait a bit until the wind blows it over, come in, take all the equipment that is left and keep going. And that's it! Use normal tactical

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<sup>193</sup> Adam Withnall, “Russia threatens Denmark with nuclear weapons if it tries to join Nato defence shield,” *The Independent*, March 22, 2015, available at

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/russia-threatens-denmark-with-nuclear-weapons-if-it-tries-to-join-nato-defence-shield-10125529.html>.

<sup>194</sup> Konstantin Gavrilov, “НАТО будет провоцировать нас и проверять на прочность (NATO will provoke us and test our strength),” *Ria Novosti*, July 11, 2023, available at <https://ria.ru/20230711/gavrilov-1883438436.html>.

nuclear munitions! Without a second thought! Because this is our heritage!"<sup>195</sup>

"When we say that certain things aren't permitted, today is the moment when everything is permitted. For the 15<sup>th</sup> or the 25<sup>th</sup> time we say that only the strikes with tactical nuclear weapons against critically important objects, command centers, airfields, etc. will completely paralyze Ukraine. We shouldn't be afraid of this. With that, everything will suddenly end. First, there will be screaming and then a totally different conversation will start because the European countries will be next. I doubt they want their heads bashed with a nuclear bat. ... Here is a key issue: we need a threat directly to the territory of the US. Alaska is the closet US territory to Russia. We can target Alaska with everything imaginable having increased our tactical nuclear potential, without involving strategic nuclear forces from the areas that can reach every part of Alaska. There will be nothing left of Alaska."<sup>196</sup>

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<sup>195</sup> Julia Davis [@juliadavisnews], Meanwhile in Russia: Vladimir Solovyov raged against Russian oligarchs who denounced Putin's invasion and endorsed the proposal by State Duma deputy Andrey Gurulyov to strike Robotyne with tactical nuclear weapons. [Tweet], Twitter, 12:33 AM, August 30, 2023, available at <https://twitter.com/JuliaDavisNews/status/1696742824899711291>.

<sup>196</sup> Julia Davis [@juliadavisnews], Vladimir Solovyov and his fellow propagandists bemoaned the situation in Belgorod, Russia's lack of potential recruits and allies. They proposed nuking Alaska and sending imprisoned women to the frontlines. Weatherman advocated the use of climate weapons. [Tweet], Twitter, :54 PM, May 23, 2023, available at <https://twitter.com/JuliaDavisNews/status/1661188817078874112>.

**Oleg Nilov (Member of the State Duma)**

“I do not rule out that this Ukroreich could turn Ukraine into a Ukropolis, God forbid, of course, but the situation is not stopping, it is developing, and [sic] unfortunately, there might be an answer, including with all available means of the Russian Armed Forces. Tactical nuclear weapon[s] will not be sheathed for a long time.”<sup>197</sup>

**Ramzan Kadyrov (Head of Russia’s region of Chechnya)**

“In my personal opinion, more drastic measures should be taken, right up to the declaration of martial law in the border areas and the use of low-yield nuclear weapons.”<sup>198</sup>

**Dmitry Rogozin (Former Deputy Prime Minister of the Russian Federation, Former Director General of Roscosmos)**

“Well on the whole it needs to be said that in accordance with our doctrine we are fully entitled to use tactical nuclear weapons because that’s exactly why they exist. They’re a great leveller for the moment when there is a clear disparity in conventional forces and hardware in the enemy’s

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<sup>197</sup> Dmitry [@wartranslated], A deputy of the State Duma Nylov is reading from a paper the new threats of using nuclear weapons that would turn the “fuhrers of the Ukroreich” into “Ukropolis.” Language worth a Russian politician. [Tweet], Twitter, 6:16 AM, May 30, 2023, available at

<https://twitter.com/wartranslated/status/1663489437249032194?s=20>.

<sup>198</sup> Felix Light, “Kadyrov says Russia should use low-yield nuclear weapon,” *Reuters*, October 1, 2022, available at <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russia-says-its-troops-left-lyman-avoid-encirclement-2022-10-01/>.

favour. So the best methods for destroying their [meaning Ukrainian – author comment] offensive is to use tactical nuclear weapons, with clear consequences of course. But at the present time I don't think there's any other option."<sup>199</sup>

## **Media Personalities and Think-Tank Experts**

**Sergei Karaganov (Chair of the Council on Foreign and Defence Policy, Adviser to Vladimir Putin)**

“What is being decided on the battlefields in Ukraine is not only, and not so much, what Russia and the future world order will look like, but mainly whether there will be any world at all or the planet will turn into radioactive ruins poisoning the remains of humanity.”<sup>200</sup>

“I have said and written many times that if we correctly build a strategy of intimidation and deterrence and even use of nuclear weapons, the risk of a “retaliatory” nuclear or any other strike on our territory can be reduced to an absolute minimum. Only a madman, who, above all, hates America, will have the guts to strike back in

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<sup>199</sup> Francis Scarr [@francis\_scarr], Former deputy prime minister and Roscosmos state space agency director Dmitry Rogozin says Russia should use tactical nukes to “destroy” Ukraine’s counter-offensive because “at the present moment there is no other option,” [Tweet], Twitter, 7:45 AM, May 4, 2023, available at [https://twitter.com/francis\\_scarr/status/1654089966836695043?s=20](https://twitter.com/francis_scarr/status/1654089966836695043?s=20).

<sup>200</sup> Sergey Karaganov, “A Difficult but Necessary Decision,” *Russia in Global Affairs*, June 13, 2023, available at <https://eng.globalaffairs.ru/articles/a-difficult-but-necessary-decision/>.



“defense” of Europeans, thus putting his own country at risk and sacrificing conditional Boston for conditional Poznan. Both the U.S. and Europe know this very well, but they just prefer not to think about it.”<sup>201</sup>

“But what if they do not back down? What if they have lost the instinct of self-preservation completely? In this case we will have to hit a bunch of targets in a number of countries in order to bring those who have lost their mind to reason.”<sup>202</sup>

**Margarita Simonyan (Editor-In-Chief, RT and Rossiya Segodnya)**

“I’d like to see the country that arrests Putin according to The Hague’s ruling. Eight minutes later. Or whatever the flight time to its capital is.”<sup>203</sup>

“The Western media is writing about that too, one strike of Sarmat is enough to destroy the coast let’s just watch it. This missile can destroy half the coast of some large continent, which we may not like due to its aggressive politics.”<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

<sup>203</sup> “Russian propagandists’ responses to potential Putin arrest: from nuclear threats to mockery,” *Ukrainska Pravda*, March 17, 2023, available at <https://news.yahoo.com/russian-propagandists-responses-potential-putin-210443675.html>.

<sup>204</sup> Eburn Hargrave, “Russian pundit reveals why Putin holding back on nuclear weapons ‘We pity all of them,’” *Express*, May 25, 2022, available at <https://www.express.co.uk/news/world/1615134/Putin-Nuclear-Weapons-War-Ukraine-RT-Margarita-Simonyan-Kharkiv-Military-Army-VN>.

“Either we lose in Ukraine, or the Third World War starts. I think World War Three is more realistic, knowing us, knowing our leader. The most incredible outcome, that all this will end with a nuclear strike, seems more probable to me than the other course of events.”<sup>205</sup>

### Vladimir Solovyov (Russia's Chief Propagandist)

“Why are we still dancing around? I think we should strike. As soon as they officially deliver [F-16s], we conduct a strike with tactical nuclear weapons. They're convinced we won't do it. This is why it should be done.”<sup>206</sup>

“The Americans say they won't supply long-range missiles, the British say 'We will! We will!' And why are there still undersea cables leading to Britain? Why are all the pipelines still there? Why aren't we responding in the most brutal way, asymmetrically, to Britain? We are now out of the treaty, which is what we should have done a long time ago. I think we need to abandon a ban on nuclear weapons testing. We should conduct tests, show the nuclear

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<sup>205</sup> Kate Buck, “Putin would prefer nuclear strike to defeat in Ukraine, says Russian state TV chief,” *Yahoo News*, April 28, 2022, available at [https://news.yahoo.com/putin-rather-press-nuclear-button-lose-ukraine-war-rt-broadcaster-151707840.html?guccounter=1&guce\\_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2xlMnVbS8&guce\\_referrer\\_sig=AQAAACEIoJGTGQUQdDa0jgNLbOtZgMdvzXXnU0yhwR5d5H0jvzsqd-n\\_MhnMavQPkdiiUgoKzn5Oj3tw4VJZ14bgkHo6iT7gft1OSBDCQcPXbjbb4rJvPRaZLQmHKru0CmcQM5wedp89OhDZAWJuSjCUZYUCnGg-uBIIzCOo9rTd5E7p](https://news.yahoo.com/putin-rather-press-nuclear-button-lose-ukraine-war-rt-broadcaster-151707840.html?guccounter=1&guce_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2xlMnVbS8&guce_referrer_sig=AQAAACEIoJGTGQUQdDa0jgNLbOtZgMdvzXXnU0yhwR5d5H0jvzsqd-n_MhnMavQPkdiiUgoKzn5Oj3tw4VJZ14bgkHo6iT7gft1OSBDCQcPXbjbb4rJvPRaZLQmHKru0CmcQM5wedp89OhDZAWJuSjCUZYUCnGg-uBIIzCOo9rTd5E7p).

<sup>206</sup> Isabel van Brugen, “Putin's Cheerleaders Argue Over Nuclear Strikes on Ukraine,” *Newsweek*, August 22, 2023, available at <https://www.newsweek.com/putin-state-tv-host-russia-ukraine-nuclear-weapons-1821567>.

weapons we have, blow something up somewhere, and target our Strategic Missile Forces, first of all targeting Britain. And all those countries that are providing support. And give them an ultimatum: You supply the missiles, we'll bomb."<sup>207</sup>

"I hope they understand that if we lose, we are taking the whole world with us."<sup>208</sup>

"I believe that we should withdraw from the treaty on moratorium on the testing of nuclear weapons in all environments. We need to test nuclear weapons so the West can see that they exist and see how powerful they are. And give an ultimatum to the NATO countries by targeting our nuclear strategic forces on the government quarters and on launch sites of those countries that have nuclear capabilities, on the quarters of those countries that support the Nazi regime. And put an ultimatum. If they don't want to hear it, that means there will be no more London, no more Berlin, no more Paris, no more Washington, D.C."<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>207</sup> Anton Gerashchenko [@gerashchenko], Attention, Great Britain! Russian propagandist Solovyev threatens the UK with a nuclear strike and cutting their underwater cables. [Tweet], Twitter, 12:29 PM, May 11, 2023, available at [https://twitter.com/Gerashchenko\\_en/status/1656697983977545728?s=20](https://twitter.com/Gerashchenko_en/status/1656697983977545728?s=20).

<sup>208</sup> Brendan Cole, "Russian State TV Issues Stark Warning Over Threat of Defeat," *Newsweek*, May 17, 2023, available at <https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/russian-state-tv-issues-stark-warning-over-threat-of-defeat/ar-AA1biFQt?rc=1&ocid=winp1taskbar&cvid=f27a8f8c98fb4753bd5324d84d12565d&ei=17>.

<sup>209</sup> Anton Gerashchenko [@gerashchenko], "I firmly believe that nuclear war is inevitable," says Russian propagandist Solovyev, suggesting that Russia start it. He wants to aim Russian nuclear weapons at London, Paris, Berlin and Washington. [Tweet], Twitter, 8:25 AM, May 10, 2023,

"One Sarmat means minus one Great Britain."<sup>210</sup>

**Dmitry Kiselyov (General Director, RT, Kremlin-backed journalist)**

"Why do we need a world if Russia is not in it?"<sup>211</sup>

In 2019, Dmitry Kiselyov showed potential nuclear targets in the United States on his TV show.<sup>212</sup>

"Russia is the only country in the world that is realistically capable of turning the United States into radioactive ash."<sup>213</sup>

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available at

[https://twitter.com/Gerashchenko\\_en/status/1656274238456709121?s=20](https://twitter.com/Gerashchenko_en/status/1656274238456709121?s=20).

<sup>210</sup> Evan Simko-Bednarski, "Russian state TV threatens to wipe out 'boorish' UK with ballistic missile," *New York Post*, April 27, 2022, available at <https://nypost.com/2022/04/27/russian-state-tv-threatens-to-wipe-out-uk-with-ballistic-missile/>.

<sup>211</sup> "'Why Do We Need a World if Russia Is Not In It?': State TV Presenter Opens Show With Ominous Address," *Moscow Times*, February 28, 2022, available at <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2022/02/28/russians-race-for-cash-as-ruble-plummets-a76655>.

<sup>212</sup> Andrew Osborn, "After Putin's warning, Russian TV lists nuclear targets in U.S.," *Reuters*, February 25, 2019, available at <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-nuclear-russia-idUSKCN1QE1DM>.

<sup>213</sup> Lidia Kelly, "Russia can turn US to radioactive ash - Kremlin-backed journalist," *Reuters*, March 16, 2014, available at <https://www.reuters.com/article/ukraine-crisis-russia-kiselyov-idUSL6N0MD0P920140316>.

**Igor Korotchenko (Editor, *National Defense Newspaper*)**

“In response to your attacks on Russian military or civilian facilities, the first strike will be a preventative limited strike against targets on the territory of the United States of America.”<sup>214</sup>

**Yevgeny Satanovsky (Political Commentator)**

“The question is, will it all reach the nuclear phase or not? Because if it keeps going like this, it will definitely happen. And it won't be tactical [but strategic] nuclear weapons that we'll be striking at Ukraine, believe me, the United States of America, and all the targets that need to be in the crosshairs. They have been there since Soviet times and those in the U.S., and those in Europe, and those in other places where American nuclear weapons are concentrated, where there are American military bases. So I wish that on the way to the nuclear phase we could finish off the enemy without crossing the Rubicon. But if we have to, what can we do?”<sup>215</sup>

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<sup>214</sup> Brendan Cole, “Russian State TV Threatens Nuclear Strike on US,” *Newsweek*, September 4, 2023, available at <https://www.newsweek.com/kremlin-nuclear-strike-us-popov-korotchenko-1824285?amp=1>.

<sup>215</sup> Gerard Kaonga, “Russia State TV Warns U.S. a Nuclear Strike Will Happen—‘In the Crosshairs,’” *Newsweek*, June 13, 2023, available at <https://www.newsweek.com/russia-state-tv-us-nuclear-strike-happen-ukraine-war-1806315>.

## *About the Author*

Dr. Michaela Dodge is a Research Scholar at the National Institute for Public Policy. Before joining the National Institute, Dr. Dodge worked at The Heritage Foundation from 2010 to 2019. She took a leave of absence from Heritage to serve as Senator Jon Kyl's Senior Defense Policy Advisor from October to December 2018. Her last position at Heritage was as Research Fellow for Missile Defense and Nuclear Deterrence.

Dr. Dodge's work focuses on U.S. nuclear weapons and missile defense policy, nuclear forces modernization, deterrence and assurance, and arms control. She was a Publius Fellow at the Claremont Institute in 2011 and participated in the Center for Strategic and International Studies' PONI Nuclear Scholars Initiative. Her 2020 book, *U.S.-Czech Missile Defense Cooperation: Alliance Politics in Action*, details factors that contribute to ballistic missile defense cooperation between two states in the context of alliance cooperation, as well as Russia's influence operations.

Dr. Dodge received her Ph.D. from George Mason University, and earned a Master of Science in Defense and Strategic Studies from Missouri State University. At Missouri State, she was awarded the Ulrike Schumacher Memorial Scholarship for two years. She received a bachelor's degree in international relations and defense and strategic studies from Masaryk University, the Czech Republic.



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