



Russian Nuclear Weapons Policy

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Implications for U.S. Nuclear Deterrence and Missile Defense

Unlike the U.S., nuclear forces are Russia's highest military priority. In December 2016, President Putin declared Russia is "stronger than any potential aggressor," has modernized almost 60% of its strategic forces and directed that Russia further strengthen its nuclear Triad.^[1] In March 2017, he said that modernizing Russian military forces "concerns the strategic nuclear forces, above all."^[2] In January 2017, Russian Defense Minister General of the Army Sergei Shoigu stated that development of the strategic nuclear force was Russia's first priority, noting Russia will "continue a massive program of nuclear rearmament, deploying modern ICBMs on land and sea, [and] modernizing the strategic bomber force."^[3]

What is the purpose of this "massive program of nuclear rearmament"? Unfortunately, Russian military programs are focused on fighting the U.S. and NATO. There are three elements of the Russian nuclear threat that impacts the U.S. and our allies. They are: 1) The Russian doctrine concerning the first use of nuclear weapons; 2) Russian modernization programs which are aimed at facilitating first use of nuclear weapons by a combination of precision low-yield and high-yield capabilities; and 3) programs involving active and passive defense. Strategic nuclear forces and what the Russians call "aerospace defense" forces are central to their military strategy. Aerospace Defense involves defenses against missiles, air-breathing craft, and satellites. Now Russia is talking about a massive program involving blast shelter construction for the general population and, reportedly, a large program of command bunker construction is also underway.^[4]

Among Presidents, Putin is unique in that he developed Russia's nuclear strategy when he was Secretary of the Russian National Security Council Staff and signed it into law as Acting President. This strategy allows for the first use of nuclear weapons in limited conventional warfare.^[5] The key concept is "de-escalation" of a conflict by nuclear weapons first use. An October 2003 Russian MoD publication entitled *Urgent Priorities of the Development of the Russian Federation Armed Forces*, known in Russia as the "Ivanov Doctrine," stated, "De-escalation of aggression is forcing the enemy to halt military action by a threat to deliver or by

actual delivery of strikes of varying intensity with reliance on conventional and (or) nuclear weapons.”[6] In June 2015, U.S. Deputy Secretary of Defense Robert Work and then-Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral James Winnefeld observed, “Russian military doctrine includes what some have called an ‘escalate to de-escalate’ strategy—a strategy that purportedly seeks to de-escalate a conventional conflict through coercive threats, including limited nuclear use,” a policy they categorized as “playing with fire.”[7] In March 2017, EUCOM commander General Custis Scaparrotti rightly noted that Russian nuclear doctrine was “just alarming.”[8]

Starting in 1999, Russia began “de-escalating” conflicts by simulated nuclear weapons first use in large theater war exercises which has continued to this day.[9] In 1999, Russian Defense Minister Marshal Igor Sergeev, in a classic statement concerning “de-escalation,” said, “Our Army was forced to launch nuclear strikes first which enabled it to achieve a breakthrough in the theater situation.”[10] In January 2016, NATO revealed that in recent years Russia had simulated nuclear attacks on NATO nations and Sweden.[11] In addition, the large strategic nuclear exercises are personally presided over by Putin.

In October 2016, President Vladimir Putin declared that “brandishing nuclear weapons is the last thing to do.” A month later he made a classic Russian nuclear missile targeting threat, his fourth[12]: “We have to take countermeasures, targeting the facilities that we perceive as a threat with our missile systems.”[13] Putin and his senior officials have made numerous nuclear threats relating to Ukraine.[14] High-level Russian nuclear threats are commonplace. In 2008, General of the Army Yuri Baluyevsky, Chief of the General Staff, stated 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.”[15] In 2009, Secretary of the Russian National Security Council Nikolai Patrushev said that Russian nuclear doctrine allows for the first use of nuclear weapons in “regional or even a local” war and noted, “In situations critical to national security, options including a preventative nuclear strike on the aggressor are not excluded.”[16] In December 2013, Deputy Prime Minister Dmitri Rogozin said if Russia is subject to a conventional attack, “*we will certainly resort to using nuclear weapons in certain situations to defend our territory and state interests.*”[17] (Emphasis in the original.) In March 2015, Russia’s Ambassador to Denmark Mikhail Vanin declared, “I don’t think that Danes fully understand the consequence if Denmark joins the American-led missile defence shield. If they do, then Danish warships will be targets for Russian nuclear missiles.”[18]

In 2014, General Baluyevskiy said, “conditions for pre-emptive nuclear strikes...is contained in classified policy documents.”[19] In February 2015, Ilya Kramnik, the longtime military correspondent for an official Russian news agency, *RIA Novosti*, wrote that the 2010 revision of Russia’s military doctrine “further lowered” the threshold of “combat use” of nuclear weapons.[20]

Driven by a desire to enhance its nuclear and military capability, Russia is violating virtually all of the existing arms control treaties and conventions.[21] The report by Michael Gordon in *The New York Times* that [Russia](#) has secretly deployed a new cruise missile that violates the INF Treaty has now been confirmed.[22] It is apparently not the only prohibited cruise missile. An official news agency, *Sputnik News*, says the Bastion anti-ship and land-attack ground-launched

cruise missile system, used in Syria, carries a missile “with an operational range of 600 km.”[\[23\]](#) Any ground-launched cruise missile with a range between 500 and 5,500-km violates the INF Treaty. Russian media, including *RIA Novosti*, have reported that Russia’s new R-500 ground-launched cruise missile, now deployed, has a range of 1,000 to 3,000-km, apparently in two versions.[\[24\]](#)

Russia sees its great power status based on its nuclear capability which probably exceeds the rest of the world combined. In 2009, *ITAR-TASS*, the main official news agency, stated that Russia probably had between 15,000-17,000 nuclear weapons.[\[25\]](#) In late 2010, Russia’s Defense Minister Anatoliy Serdyukov announced Russia was going to increase its nuclear forces.[\[26\]](#) It has moved from below the New START limit of 1,550 deployed warheads to well above it. The April 1, 2017, Russian New START data indicate that on March 1, 2017, one year before the New START legal limits come into effect, Russia had 1,765 warheads, 215 more than the Treaty.[\[27\]](#) Unfortunately, New START data significantly understates actual Russian capability.

A 2016 article by Hans Kristensen and Robert Norris credits Russia with 2,600 actual deployed strategic nuclear warheads, mainly due to the undercounting of bomber weapons under New START.[\[28\]](#) This number will almost certainly increase to over 3,000 and, perhaps, significantly more, with or without New START.[\[29\]](#) In 2017, Kristensen and Norris estimated that the U.S. has 1,590 deployed strategic nuclear weapons.[\[30\]](#)

Russia has announced over 20 new or modernized strategic delivery systems, most of which are clearly new (i.e., post-Cold War designs). They are:[\[31\]](#)

- A new road-mobile and silo-based Topol-M Variant 2 (SS-27 Mod 1) ICBM.
- A new RS-24/Yars/SS-27 Mod 2 derivative with a Multiple Independently-targetable Re-entry Vehicle (MIRV) payload.
- Improved versions of the Soviet legacy SS-N-23 SLBM called the Sineva and the Liner with many more warheads. The Delta-IV submarine that carries it has been life extended.
- A new six-MIRV warhead Bulava-30 SLBM being deployed on two types of the new Borey-class. The eighth of these has just been laid down.
- A program to give the legacy SS-19 ICBM a hypersonic glider vehicle.
- Modernization of Blackjack (Tu-160) and Bear (Tu-95) heavy bombers which are armed with: 1) a new stealthy long-range strategic nuclear cruise missile designated the KH-102; and 2) the long-range KH-101 cruise missile which, in December 2015, President Putin revealed “can be equipped either with conventional or special nuclear warheads.”
- A program to produce at least 50 more of an improved version of the Tu-160 bomber. A recent report says the number will be between 30 and 50.
- Development and deployment in 2023-2025 of a new stealthy heavy bomber, the Pak DA, which will carry cruise missiles and, reportedly, hypersonic missiles.
- Development and deployment of the new Sarmat heavy ICBM with a mammoth 10 tons of throw-weight (which will reportedly carry 10 heavy or 15 medium nuclear warheads and hypersonic gliders) in 2020.
- Development and deployment of the new Barguzin rail-mobile ICBM by 2020.
- Development and deployment of a new “ICBM” called the RS-26 Rubezh, in reality, an intermediate-range missile.

- Development of a “fifth generation” strategic missile submarine, the Husky, carrying ballistic and cruise missiles after 2025.
- Development of the “Maritime Multifunctional System Status-6,” a nuclear-armed, nuclear-powered, 10,000-km range, very fast, drone submarine capable of operating at a depth of 1,000-meters which the Russian press says carries a 100-megaton bomb and, possibly, a cobalt bomb. Bill Gertz reported its first test in late 2016.
- Improved versions of the SS-27 Mod 2/RS-24 ICBM and the Bulava-30 SLBM.

Unofficial Russian reports talk about an air-launched ICBM called the Mark and a nuclear-armed space bomber.[\[32\]](#)

Russia is improving its non-strategic nuclear weapons and delivery systems. It has just said it will complete deployment of its new nuclear-capable Iskander-M missile this year.[\[33\]](#) This will free procurement money that could be used to build the longer range SSC-8 missile that violates the INF Treaty. In December 2016, *Sputnik News* revealed that the Russian Su-34 strike fighter was being equipped with an “a new generation of so-called aeroballistic missiles.”[\[34\]](#) This could be the Iskander-M. In June 2016, *TASS* characterized the Iskander-M as an “aeroballistic” missile.[\[35\]](#) I could find no other Russian tactical missile characterized as “aeroballistic.”

In 2011, the Obama administration said the U.S. had “hundreds, ” and Russia had “thousands” of tactical nuclear weapons.[\[36\]](#) In 2012, it estimated Russia had 4,000-6,500 nuclear weapons, 2,000-4,000 of which were tactical nuclear weapons.[\[37\]](#) Based upon Russian claims for the scope of their reductions in tactical nuclear weapons and Russian numbers of for the size of the Soviet arsenal, the actual Russian numerical advantage could be twice the usually estimated 10-to-1.

Russia has been developing new types of nuclear weapons to implement nuclear “de-escalation” of a conflict. A now declassified CIA report from 2000 states, “Moscow’s military doctrine on the use of nuclear weapons has been evolving and probably has served as the justification for the development of very low-yield, high-precision nuclear weapons.”[\[38\]](#) According to General Paul Selva, Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Russia is “developing new nonstrategic nuclear weapons...”[\[39\]](#) Russian press reports say it has deployed strategic nuclear weapons with yields from tens to 200-ton range on its SLBMs.[\[40\]](#) Russia reportedly has developed a variety of low collateral damage nuclear weapons. Vice Admiral (ret.) Robert Monroe, former Director of the Defense Nuclear Agency, has recently stated that Russia is now 20 years ahead of the U.S. in these weapons.[\[41\]](#) Russia hopes that the threat of a massively destructive nuclear strike will deter a nuclear response to Russia’s initial small-scale use of nuclear weapons and, hence, result in a Russian victory.

Today, Russia is building what it calls an “aerospace defense” system designed to defend against all types of U.S. and NATO airborne and missile weapons. Russia will soon have two new systems that can intercept ICBMs and SLBMs – the improved Moscow ABM system and the S-500. The new Moscow ABM is called the A-235 configuration.[\[42\]](#) In 2012, then-Lieutenant General Oleg Ostapenko, then-Aerospace Defense Troops commander, lists one of the main functions of the Aerospace Defense Forces as: “Destroying ICBM and SLBM warheads and destroying or functionally suppressing enemy military spacecraft.”[\[43\]](#) More recently, he said

that the S-500 can intercept “low-orbital satellites and space weapons” and “intercontinental ballistic missiles in the terminal phase of the trajectory and, within definite limits, in the midcourse sector.”[\[44\]](#) Deputy Defense Minister Yuri Borisov said the S-500 “can destroy aerodynamic and ballistic targets of all types...”[\[45\]](#)

The S-500 has the potential to degrade both the U.S. nuclear deterrent and the ability of NATO to defend conventionally the weaker treaty members bordering Russia. It will obviously be more capable than the new Russian S-400 against stealth aircraft and other types of air-breathing targets. The delivery of the S-500 system to the troops is supposed to begin in 2018.[\[46\]](#) Russia has recently said that five units (presumably battalions) would be deployed by 2020. Previously, they said ten.[\[47\]](#)

In December 2015, Russia announced that it was reviving the Cold War program to provide the general population hardened shelters against nuclear attack.[\[48\]](#) In August 2016, Bill Gertz reported, “Russia is building large numbers of underground nuclear command bunkers in the latest sign Moscow is moving ahead with a major strategic forces modernization program. U.S. intelligence officials said construction has been underway for several years on ‘dozens’ of underground bunkers in Moscow and around the country.”[\[49\]](#) Significantly, the Obama administration diminished our ability to threaten very hard and deeply buried facilities by adopting a life extension program that would eliminate all of our high yield bombs.[\[50\]](#)

Putin’s splendid future for Russia was summed up by the Governor of St. Petersburg Georgy Poltavchenko who recently said. “He has obliged his subordinates to keep sufficient rye and wheat to provide every one of St Petersburg’s 5 million residents with 300 grammes of bread for 20 days. That is more than twice as much as the ration during the Siege [of Leningrad]. Let somebody dare to say that the city authorities do not show concern for their fellow citizens.” I am sure everything will be just great when they leave the bomb shelters.

Twenty-four years of flawed nuclear deterrence policy, arms control, and compliance policy have apparently created an enhanced risk of war, including nuclear war, in both Europe and Asia. Russia has been given a near monopoly on tactical nuclear weapons in Europe, a monopoly on naval tactical nuclear weapons and on chemical and biological weapons in Europe. In the Asia-Pacific, Russia, China, and North Korea were granted a monopoly on deployed nuclear, chemical and biological weapons.

Last year, then-President-elect Donald Trump tweeted, “The United States must greatly strengthen and expand its nuclear capability until such time as the world comes to its senses regarding nukes.”[\[51\]](#) As a result of U.S. policy, President Putin and the men around him, who are aggressive, have little understanding of the world and are paranoid, have nuclear superiority. These foolish U.S. policies do not even save much money. The elimination by the Obama administration of the requirement to maintain nuclear parity should be seriously reviewed in the 2017 Nuclear Posture Review.

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