

Putin's Plan to Send Russians to Heaven

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In October 2018, Russian President Vladimir Putin spoke about the consequences of a nuclear war. According to Putin, “As martyrs, we will go to heaven.” He added, “And they [the West] will just croak because they won’t even have time to repent.”^[1] The Kremlin changed “croak” to “perish” and “heaven” to “paradise,” but otherwise retained the rest of what Putin said.^[2] President Putin’s statement is not about theology. It represents a flippant attitude toward the consequences of nuclear war and a new form of nuclear threat from a regime that frequently makes them.^[3] Putin has personally made six nuclear missile targeting threats (originally coined by the Commander of the Strategic Missile Force Colonel General Nikolai Solovtsov in 2007 who said, “the Strategic Missile Forces [the nuclear ICBM force] will be capable of carrying out this task [targeting sites in the Czech Republic and Poland].”^[4]). Putin’s threats involved the targeting of missile defense sites in Europe and, most recently, targeting U.S. missile deployments in response to Russian INF Treaty violations.^[5] In 2007, Putin personally announced the start of the provocative Russian nuclear-capable bomber “combat patrols” which are now common.^[6]

Nuclear threats are central to Russia’s strategy for dealing with the West and are sometimes made over trivial issues. Noted Russia expert Dr. Stephen Blank has pointed out that, “When 300 marines came to Norway to help Norway defend its coastline in the Arctic, they [Russia] made nuclear threats against Norway also. This is what they do, because it’s the only way they can intimidate people and force them to take Russia at Russia’s own self-evaluation.”^[7] Notably, the recent Russian threats concerning responses to U.S. withdrawal from the INF Treaty were made during a period in which Russia was trying to downplay nuclear threats as part of a strategy aimed at ending sanctions, terminating the increase in NATO military budgets and ending NATO military exercises directed against a Russian invasion. However, Russia just can’t stop making them. As Alexei Arbatov, former Duma Vice Chairman of the Duma Defense Committee and head of the International Security Center within the Russian Academy of Sciences’ Institute of World Economy and International Relations, Major General (ret.) Vladimir Dvorkin and Petr Topychkanov stated in November 2017, there is “a visceral assumption among contemporary Russian strategists that the decision to use force—including nuclear weapons—would be a rational step.”^[8]

Today, President Putin not only threatens to kill his enemies with nuclear weapons but asserts that he is doing so in a way that results in their eternal damnation. Putin sees the Moscow-based

Russian Orthodox Church as one of the pillars of his claim of the legitimacy of Russian imperial domination.^[9] The Russian Orthodox Church aligns itself with his nuclear policies. It creates Patron Saints for the Strategic Nuclear Forces, blesses Russian nuclear missiles and, “Patriarch Kirill, head of Russian Orthodox Church, endorsed nuclear weapons and nuclear deterrence.”^[10] Indeed, Patriarch Kirill once declared that nuclear weapons “while securely protecting the Fatherland and the nations historically close to us in spirit, at the same time serves the cause of peace, maintaining most important balances, which deny others the right and the opportunity to go unpunished when using lethal nuclear weapons.”^[11] In 1996, Father Konstantin Tatarintsev (a member of the Moscow Patriarchate's department on relations with the military forces and security agencies) said that that “there is an internal falsehood in pacifism” and that nuclear weapons bear the sign of original sin only when they have been manufactured without prayers.^[12]

Russian-American journalist Masha Gessen has pointed out in an article in *The New Yorker* that what Putin said about Russian nuclear weapons first use policy in his October 2018 speech to the Valdai International Discussion Club was factually false about Russian nuclear weapons policy.^[13] Indeed, in his 2015 speech to the same organization, President Putin declared, “Fifty years ago, I learnt one rule in the streets of Leningrad: if the fight is inevitable, be the first to strike.”^[14] Now he has the opportunity to play this out with nuclear weapons.

In his 2018 Valdai speech, Putin declared:

“I will remind you of what I have said. I have said that our nuclear weapons doctrine does not provide for a pre-emptive strike.”;

“Our concept is based on a reciprocal counter strike.”;

“I would like to say it again: this means that we are prepared and will use nuclear weapons only when we know for certain that some potential aggressor is attacking Russia, our territory.”^[15]

This is propaganda. These statements contradict the nuclear doctrine he signed into law in December 2014 (which repeated the formulation adopted in 2010 when Medvedev was President) which reads:

The Russian Federation shall reserve the right to use nuclear weapons in response to the use of nuclear and other types of weapons of mass destruction against it and/or its allies, as well as in the event of aggression against the Russian Federation with the use of conventional weapons when the very existence of the state is in jeopardy.^[16]

Since Putin’s 1999-2000 nuclear strategy (he developed it when he was Secretary of the Russian National Security Council and signed it into law as Acting President in 2000).^[17] Russia has reserved the right for the first use of nuclear weapons in conventional war. The only difference between Putin’s 1999-2000 version and the later versions is that the original allowed for the first use of nuclear weapons in conventional wars in “situations critical to the national security of the Russian Federation and its allies.”^[18]

Putin reiterated that Russia reserves the right to use nuclear weapons first in conventional war in his March 1, 2018, annual State of the Nation address to the Russian State Duma. He said Russian strategy allows for the first use of nuclear weapons against “an attack with other weapons of mass destruction against the country or its allies, or an act of aggression against us

with the use of conventional weapons that threaten the very existence of the state.”[19] In November 2018, Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov also stated that Russian policy permitted nuclear weapons use against any form of WMD attack and in response to “*an [act of] aggression against Russia with the use of conventional weapons on such a scale that the very existence of our state is threatened.*”[20] (Emphasis in the original).

We must keep in mind this is a public relations formulation which was adopted in 2010 apparently to look less extreme in relation to President Obama’s advocacy of “nuclear zero” and to make it easier for Russia to attain its New START Treaty agenda. In 2009, the Russian Defense Ministry announced that Russia’s policy on “the use of nuclear weapons as an instrument of strategic deterrence” was going to be put into “closed part” of its military doctrine.[21] One thing we can say with complete confidence – under no legal system can classified and unclassified formulations be the same.

The title of the 2010 document which contains the classified nuclear doctrine (“Fundamentals of the Russian Federation’s Nuclear Deterrence Policy,” which is still in effect[22]) but not its content was released to the public by the Kremlin. Dr. Stephen Blank writes that there are Russian press reports that say that in the classified document Russia reserved the right for a nuclear response to conventional attacks on Russian nuclear forces or a ground invasion of Russian territory.[23] In September 2017, Colonel General (ret.) Viktor Yesin, former Commander of the Strategic Missile Force, also said, “Our military doctrine says that even a conventional attack on our nuclear installation will be considered the start of a nuclear war that will entail a massive nuclear retaliatory strike. That’s why no one will ever risk attacking a nuclear arsenal with conventional weapons.”[24] If these reports are true, a key part Russia’s nuclear doctrine was not made public.

In September 2014, General of the Army (Ret.) Yuriy Baluyevskiy, who developed the 2010 revision of Russia’s nuclear doctrine when he was Deputy Secretary of the Russian National Security Council, stated that the “...conditions for pre-emptive nuclear strikes...is contained in classified policy documents.”[25] In 2008, General Baluyevskiy, then-Chief of the General Staff and First Deputy Defense Minister, threatened preventive nuclear war: “We do not intend to attack anyone, but we consider it necessary for all our partners in that to defend the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Russia and its allies, military forces will be used, including preventively, including with the use of nuclear weapons.”[26] In April 2007, he threatened to target U.S. missile defense facilities in Europe: “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.”[27]

In October 2009, Nikolay Patrushev, the Secretary of the Russian Security Council, revealed, “*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 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.*”[28] (Emphasis in the original). His statement about the first use of nuclear weapons in “local” war had never previously been officially disclosed although it was hinted at in 1999 by the Commander of the Russian Strategic Missile Force.[29] There is substantial evidence in Russian open sources that Russia’s nuclear weapons use threshold is lower than stated in the official documents.

Even Russian diplomats repeat the high-level nuclear threats made in Moscow. In March 2015, Russia's Ambassador to Denmark Mikhail Vanin made the most explicit of the Russian nuclear targeting threats: "I don't think that [the] Danes fully understand the consequence if Denmark joins the American-led missile defense shield. If they do, then Danish warships will be targets for Russian nuclear missiles."^[30] In 2015, Russia's Ambassador to Sweden quoted Putin as saying that if Sweden joins NATO, "...Russia will have to resort to a response of the military kind and reorientate our troops and missiles."^[31]

When Russia's new military doctrine document was made public in February 2010, Russia's then-First Deputy Prime Minister Colonel General Sergei Ivanov, who had the defense portfolio, said, "In terms of hypothetical use of nuclear weapons by Russia, the new Military Doctrine does not differ from the one that was signed in 2000."^[32] This obviously refers to the closed part of the nuclear doctrine because the public declaratory policy does differ. In late December 2009, *Interfax* reported that General Baluyevsky had told them that in "the new draft military doctrine, Russia could use nuclear weapons in the event of major threats facing the state."^[33]

In October 2009, then-Russian Ambassador to NATO Dmitry Rogozin said, "*Russia's main threat is now coming from territorial and local conflict. So the country is developing a compact, mobile force with state-of-the-art flexible nuclear weaponry.*"^[34] (Emphasis in the original). The Russian emphasis on the use of nuclear weapons in local conflicts is unique in the world among the major nuclear-armed states.

In 2003, Colonel General Ivanov, then-Defense Minister, virtually admitted that Russia has secret plans for pre-emptive nuclear strikes. In response to a question asking why Russia does not have plans for pre-emptive nuclear strikes, he stated:

What we say is one thing. That sounds cynical, but everything that we plan does not necessarily have to be made public. We believe that from the foreign policy viewpoint it is better to say that. But what we actually do is an entirely different matter.^[35]

In December 2009, just two months before the public release of the revised version of Russia's nuclear strategy, Lieutenant General Andrey Shvaychenko, then-Commander of the Strategic Missile Force, outlined the role of the nuclear ICBM force in conventional war as follows: "In a conventional war, [the nuclear ICBMs] 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."^[36] He distinguished the small-scale use of nuclear ICBMs in "conventional war" from "nuclear war" by the fact that, "In a nuclear war, they [the ICBMs] ensure the destruction of facilities of the opponent's military and economic potential by means of an initial massive nuclear missile strike and subsequent multiple and single nuclear missile strikes."^[37] Even today, the Russian Defense Ministry says the mission of the ICBM force is the "defeat of strategic objects located in one or more strategic air-space areas and forming the basis of the enemy's military and military-economic potential by means of large-scale, group or single nuclear missile attacks."^[38]

Prominent Russia journalists have described Russia's 2010 nuclear weapons first use threshold as lower than that contained in the official public documents and have said that it involves pre-emptive nuclear strikes. For example, in February 2015, Ilya Kramnik, who had been the long-time military correspondent for an official Russian news agency *RIA Novosti*, wrote in *Lenta.ru* that the 2010 revision of Russia's military doctrine "further lowered" the threshold of "combat

use” of nuclear weapons.[\[39\]](#) This is consistent with contemporaneous press reports concerning the 2010 revision of Russia’s nuclear doctrine. Well-connected hardline Russian journalist Colonel (ret.) Nikolai Litovkin wrote that the Russian nuclear first use provision would be in the closed part of the new Military Doctrine and further maintained that, “Russia has recognized for itself the right to the preventive employment of nuclear weapons should we be attacked by some military bloc (like NATO).”[\[40\]](#) In late December 2009, someone as well-connected as Alexei Arbatov said, “Russia’s new draft military doctrine drawn up by a Russian Security Council commission contains a preemptive nuclear strike concept...”[\[41\]](#)

In October 2018, state-run *Russia Today* published an article by Colonel (ret.) Mikhail Khodarenok (former editor-in-chief of *Voyenno-Promyshlennyi Kuriyer*, a Russian military journal) on Russian nuclear strike options which, after discussing Russian nuclear retaliatory options, stated, “...the last option envisages a pre-emptive nuclear strike.”[\[42\]](#)

The concept of “de-escalation” of conventional war by nuclear weapons first use emerged in Russia in the 1990s. A now declassified CIA report from August 2000 stated, “Senior Russian military officers have advocated the use of highly accurate, super-low yield nuclear weapons in Russian military journals such as *Military Thought* and *Armeyskiy Shornik*.”[\[43\]](#) It also stated. “Recent statements on Russia’s evolving nuclear weapons doctrine lower the threshold for first use of nuclear weapons and blur the boundary between nuclear and conventional warfare.”[\[44\]](#) The Russian nuclear de-escalation concept was formally announced in October 2003 in a Ministry of Defense document entitled “The Priority Tasks of the Development of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation.” It 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.”[\[45\]](#) The Russian concept of nuclear “de-escalation” of a war is exactly the reverse of Western thinking.

Writing in 1999 in *Military Thought*, the official journal of the Russian General Staff, Major General V.I. Levshin, Colonel A.V. Nedelin, and Colonel M.E. Sosnovsky said, “Under certain conditions, de-escalation of military operations may require the deployment of single (group) nuclear strikes against enemy targets located outside the zone of direct military operations. At the same time, one should proceed from the objectives pursued: it is preferable to use OTNW [operational tactical nuclear weapons] at the regional level, and on the global level (by intimidating the enemy by our readiness to go right up to mutual destruction), it is possible to use operational-strategic or even strategic nuclear weapons.”[\[46\]](#) In 1999, Russian First Deputy Atomic Energy Minister Viktor Mikhailov said, “a ‘new generation’ of low-yield nuclear weapons ‘can really be used in case of any large-scale military conflict.’”[\[47\]](#)

Also, in 1999, Russian First Deputy Defense Minister Nikolai Mikhailov described in more detail the concept for Russian first use of nuclear weapons and why Russia believed it would not result in a large-scale nuclear war: “This strategy boils down to the threat of using nuclear weapons against any aggressor at a scale ensuring unacceptable damage to such aggressor. The amount of damage should be such as not to provoke the aggressor into escalating the use of nuclear weapons without a justified reason. In other words, the point at issue is a limited use of strategic nuclear forces adequate to the threat.”[\[48\]](#) This is logical but far from certain.

The nuclear “de-escalation” concept was probably an undisclosed part of Putin’s military doctrine which he signed into law as acting President in 2000. There was substantial Russian doctrinal literature on “de-escalation” in the late 1990s.[\[49\]](#) In 1999, Colonel General Vladimir

Muravyev, then-Deputy Commander of the Strategic Missile Force, made a statement with similar language about “de-escalation” to that contained in the October 2003 Russian MoD document. He stated that “...the deterrent actions of strategic forces...[involve] strikes with both conventional and nuclear warheads with the goal of de-escalating the military conflict,” and Russian forces “...should be capable of conducting ‘surgical’ strikes...using both highly accurate, super-low yield nuclear weapons, as well as conventional ones...”[50]

In September 2008, Colonel General Nikolay Solovtsov, then-commander of the Strategic Missile Force, affirmed that Russia’s strategic nuclear forces “...remain a most important tool in the neutralization of such threats [the threats to Russia from Georgia], and to ensure that our state is reliably defended and secure.”[51]

In 2012, the Russian Defense Ministry reiterated the “de-escalation” concept involving “a limited use of weapons, including precision weapons, in order to de-escalate sources of tension and resolve the conflict situation on conditions favorable to Russia”[52] Dave Johnson, now a staff officer in the NATO International Staff Defense Policy and Planning Division, observed that concerning Russia’s precision strike weapons systems “...all... are dual-capable or have nuclear analogs.”[53] The 2018 Nuclear Posture Review confirmed that Russia “is also building a large, diverse, and modern set of non-strategic systems that are dual-capable (may be armed with nuclear or conventional weapons).”[54]

In July 2017, President Putin issued a decree to the Russian Navy which said, “During the escalation of military conflict, demonstration of readiness and determination to employ non-strategic nuclear weapons capabilities is an effective deterrent,”[55] and the “Indicators of the effectiveness of measures undertaken to execute the State Policy on Naval Operations are:...b) the capability of the Navy to damage an enemy’s fleet at a level not lower than critical with the use of non-strategic nuclear weapons.”[56] Note the similarity regarding the importance of the credibility of escalation threats to the 1999 statement by Major General V.I. Levshin, Colonel A.V. Nedelin, and Colonel M.E. Sosnovsky quoted above.

In Zapad [West]-1999, which began major Russian theater exercises reportedly against NATO, Russia’s Defense Minister Marshal Igor Sergeev announced that “Our Army was forced to launch nuclear strikes first which enabled it to achieve a breakthrough in the theater situation.”[57] This is perhaps the classic statement of nuclear de-escalation in action. Noted expert on Russian nuclear doctrine, Dr. Jacob Kipp observed, “The exercise employed Russian nuclear forces in a pre-emptive strike against an aggressor using advanced conventional forces...”[58]

Russia reportedly routinely practices nuclear escalation in many military exercises. Since Zapad-1999, there have been Russian press reports of Russian first use of nuclear weapons in exercises in Europe, Asia and the Indian Ocean.[59] Indeed, in 2014, Russian expatriate Nikolai Sokov reported: “...all large-scale military exercises that Russia conducted beginning in 2000 featured simulations of limited nuclear strikes.”[60]

The Vostok-2010 Far East military exercise, reportedly against China, provides evidence that actual Russia nuclear policy involves a much lower nuclear use threshold than what is contained in the public documents. One of a number of reports of Russian nuclear weapons use in Vostok-2010 appeared in the official newspaper of the Far East Military District which said, “To suppress a large center of the separatists’ resistance and to achieve minimal losses of the

attacking troops a low-yield ‘nuclear’ attack was mounted against the enemy.”[61] This is hardly a threat to the very existence of the Russian state. Reportedly during the Vostok-2014 exercise “the Russian Strategic Missile Forces in the Central Military District exercised an escalation from conventional to nuclear war.”[62] The January 2016 report of NATO’s Secretary General reported that Russia “simulated nuclear attacks on NATO Allies (e.g., ZAPAD) and on partners (e.g., March 7, 2013, simulated attacks on Sweden) ...”[63]

Finnish expert on Russian nuclear doctrine Katarzyna Zysk writes that the “...*Kavkaz-2016* exercise in the Southern Military District appeared to simulate repelling a NATO attack on Crimea” and involved “a simulated [cruise missile] attack with NSNW [Non-Strategic Nuclear Weapons].”[64] (Emphasis in the original). She cites Russian press reports and says one of her sources was a “NATO military intelligence officer.”[65]

There were reports of Russian nuclear first use in the Zapad-2017 exercise which supposedly was against terrorists but seems to have been a Russian invasion of NATO states.[66] During the exercise, there were live launches of an ICBM and an Iskander-M missile to just under the INF Treaty prohibited zone.[67] There were also reports of a simulated Russian SLBM launch.[68] Indeed, Ukraine’s National Security and Defense Council Secretary Oleksandr Turchynov said that during Zapad 2017 a Russian missile submarine carried out a simulated nuclear SLBM launch and “six long-range Tu-95MC and Tu-22M3” bombers carried out simulated nuclear strikes.[69] Distinguished Russian journalist Pavel Felgenhauer wrote that the missile launches and the bomber flights “seem to indicate an escalation of the conflict with ‘Western forces,’ as described in the Zapad 2017 scenario, going nuclear, but possibly in a limited fashion, to scare the West into submission and retreat...”[70]

According to then-DIA Director Lt Gen Vincent Stewart in 2017, Russia is “the only country that I know of that has this concept of escalate to terminate or escalate to deescalate but they do have that built into their operational concept, we’ve seen them exercise that idea and it’s really kind of a dangerous idea...”[71] He also said that he had seen no evidence that this policy was changing.[72]

In addition to the theater exercises discussed above, Russia conducts large strategic nuclear exercises that are usually announced as nuclear, involving live ICBM and SLBM launches and often overseen by President Putin. The most recent of these was in October 2018.[73] The announced 2017 level was 150.[74] An unusually large number of ICBM exercises was conducted both before and after the Zapad-2017 theater exercise.[75]

Writing in 2011, James T. Quinlivan and Olga Olikier, in a RAND Corporation report, warned Russia might have, “...to remove what it might interpret as threats to the survival of the state (its own or an ally’s) with small nuclear attacks that promise both definite effects on the battlefield and ‘de-escalation of military actions’.”[76] In 2016, Ambassador Steven Pifer pointed out, “The ‘de-escalation’ doctrine, Putin’s references to nuclear weapons in his public statements and the broad modernization of Russia’s nonstrategic nuclear forces suggest that the classified strategy could envisage use of those weapons in wider circumstances.”[77]

Advocacy of pre-emption against NATO frequently appears in Russian military literature. In March 2018, Alexander Velez-Green of the Harvard Belfer Center wrote, “Military Thought has published at least 18 articles in support of preemption against NATO from 2007 to 2017.”[78]

While the Russian officers didn't usually describe the type of weapons to be used in a pre-emptive attack, this is understandable in light of Russia's official nuclear declaratory policy.

In November 2018, the Russian Federation Council voted to urge the Kremlin to adopt a pre-emptive nuclear strike strategy against NATO and authorized it.^[79] This was a week after the Center for Strategic and International Studies rather amazingly argued that "current Russian strategy is reducing the emphasis on nuclear weapons and oriented primarily toward deterring rather than fighting nuclear war."^[80]

The danger of Russian first use of nuclear weapons to "de-escalate" a war was recognized by the Obama administration. In 2015, then-Deputy Secretary of Defense Bob Work and then-Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral James Winnefeld told the House Armed Services Committee the Russian view was that "they can control escalation through the use of nuclear weapons is literally playing with fire."^[81] In 2016, Robert Scher, then-Assistant Secretary of Defense for Strategy, Plans and Capabilities, told the Congress that, "Russia's purported doctrine of nuclear escalation to de-escalate a conventional conflict amounts to a reckless gamble for which the odds are incalculable and the outcome could prove catastrophic."^[82] Also in 2016, then-Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter pointed out, "...it's a sobering fact that the most likely use of nuclear weapons is not the massive nuclear exchange of the classic Cold War-type, but rather the unwise resort to smaller but still unprecedentedly terrible attacks, for example, by Russia or North Korea to try to coerce a conventionally superior opponent to back off or abandon an ally during a crisis."^[83] In December 2016, a report by the Defense Science Board observed, "Russian doctrine is publicly stated as 'escalate to de-escalate' based on the assumption that its first use of low yield nuclear weapons against a conventionally superior NATO force would engender a halt to further aggression."^[84] In January 2017, the DNI's National Intelligence Council published a report which stated, "Russian military doctrine purportedly includes the limited use of nuclear weapons in a situation where Russia's vital interests are at stake to 'de-escalate' a conflict by demonstrating that continued conventional conflict risks escalating the crisis to a large-scale nuclear exchange."^[85]

The 2018 Nuclear Posture Review concluded that "Moscow threatens and exercises limited nuclear first use, suggesting a mistaken expectation that coercive nuclear threats or limited first use could paralyze the United States and NATO and thereby end a conflict on terms favorable to Russia. Some in the United States refer to this as Russia's 'escalate to de-escalate' doctrine. 'De-escalation' in this sense follows from Moscow's mistaken assumption of Western capitulation on terms favorable to Moscow."^[86] The November 2018 report of the Commission on the National Defense Strategy for the United States stated that "Russia is also conducting a comprehensive nuclear modernization, including sustainment and modernization of a large number of non-strategic nuclear weapons and the development of a ground-launched cruise missile that violates the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty. These developments are accompanied by Russian doctrinal writings that emphasize the prospect of using limited nuclear escalation to control the trajectory of a potential conflict against the United States and NATO."^[87]

As far back as 2008, Pavel Felgenhauer observed, "...our superiors are potentially ready to burn all of us in nuclear fire because of disputes over ice, rocks or South Ossetia."^[88] Unfortunately, this is not that much of an exaggeration. It's noteworthy that in July 2014 Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov made an implied nuclear threat against NATO relating to a NATO attack on Crimea by referencing their military doctrine.^[89] In March 2015, Putin said that during the

Crimea crisis he would have put Russian nuclear forces on alert if it was necessary.^[90] In April 2015, the London *Times* reported that Russian generals, speaking with “the approval of Mr. Putin,” threatened a “nuclear showdown over [the] Baltics” if NATO were to deploy forces into these states.^[91] In 2017, President Putin declared Russia would defend Crimea “with all means available to us.”^[92] In April 2018, Admiral Vladimir Korolyov, commander of the Russian Navy, linked the Borey class strategic nuclear ballistic missile submarines not only to the defense of the nation but also asserted they were a factor “in Russia’s claim to its continental shelf in the Arctic.”^[93]

Putin’s recklessness regarding nuclear weapons may get a lot of Russians killed. The promise in Putin’s nuclear theology concerning Russian martyrs going to heaven is based on a fundamental distortion, for political reasons, of Russian nuclear first use policy. Under Putin’s nuclear theology, Russians won’t repent because they don’t know about what the Putin regime was doing due to his control of the Russian media. Indeed, the Russian public has displayed a remarkable ability to believe the most ludicrous rantings of Putin’s propaganda machine.

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Notes:

[1] [Masha Gessen](#), “Putin Lied About His Nuclear Doctrine and Promised Russians That They Would Go to Heaven,” *The New Yorker*, October 19, 2018, available at <https://www.newyorker.com/news/our-columnists/putin-lied-about-his-nuclear-doctrine-and-promised-russians-that-they-would-go-to-heaven>.

[2] Ibid.

[3] “United States Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development July 25, 2012 Testimony Prepared By: Dr. Keith B. Payne Professor and Head, Graduate Department of Defense and Strategic Studies Missouri State University Commissioner, Congressional Strategic Posture Commission,” available at <http://www.appropriations.senate.gov/ht-energy.cfm> method hearings....

[4] [Claire Bigg](#), “Russia Warns Czech Republic, Poland On Missile Defense,” *Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty*, February 20, 2007. Available at <https://www.rferl.org/a/1074816.htm>.<https://www.rferl.org/a/1074816.htm>

[5] “United States Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development July 25, 2012 Testimony Prepared By: Dr. Keith B. Payne Professor and Head, Graduate Department of Defense and Strategic Studies Missouri State University Commissioner, Congressional Strategic Posture Commission,” op. cit.: Vladimir Isachenkov, “Russia rejects Western criticism of Baltic missile buildup,” *AP English Language News*, November 22, 2016, available at <http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/nato-criticizes-russian-missilepoland>.; “Meeting with permanent Security Council members,” The Kremlin, October 25, 2018, available at <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/58889>.

[6] [Luke Harding](#) and [Ewen MacAskill](#), “Putin revives long-range bomber patrols,” *The Guardian*, August 17, 2008, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2007/aug/18/russia.ewenmacaskill>.; Jens Stoltenberg, “Adapting to a Changed Security Environment,” Speech, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, DC, May 27, 2015, available at http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_120166.htm.

- [7] “042418 Air Force Association, Reserve Officers Association, and National Defense Industrial Association Capitol Hill Seminar with Mark Schneider, Senior Analyst at the National Institute for Public Policy; and Steve Blank, Senior Fellow at the American Foreign Policy Council, on “The Nuclear and Missile Defense Dimension,” April 24, 2018, available at <http://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/a2dd917be19b40f1a14dcfbb66af4be86c1fda.pdf>.
- [8] Alexey Arbatov, Vladimir Dvorkin, Petr Topychkanov, *Entanglement as a New Security Threat: A Russian Perspective*, Washington D.C.: Carnegie Institute, November 8, 2017, available at <https://carnegieendowment.org/2017/11/08/entanglement-as-newsecurity-threat-russian-perspective-pub-73163>.
- [9] Paul Goble, “Putin May Try to Launch New Offensive in Ukraine and Absorb Belarus to Stop Autocephaly,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Volume: 15 Issue: 146, October 16, 2018, available at <https://jamestown.org/program/putin-may-try-to-launch-new-offensive-in-ukraine-and-absorb-belarus-to-stop-autocephaly/>.
- [10] “Russian Admiral Named Patron Saint of the Nuclear Bomber Force,” *Yahoo.com*, September 26, 2005, available at http://news.yahoo.com/s/afp/20050926/od_afp/russiareligionmilitaryoffbeat_050926150901.: Nikolai Sokov, “NUCLEAR WEAPONS IN RUSSIAN NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY,” in Stephen J. Blank, “Russian Nuclear Weapons, Past Present and Future,” (Carlisle Pa.: U.S. Army Strategic Studies Center, 2009), available at <https://ssi.armywarcollege.edu/pdffiles/PUB1087.pdf>.
- [11] “Our sovereignty, world peace depend on our nuclear shield - Russian patriarch,” *BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union*, April 16, 2012, available at <https://dialog.proquest.com/professional/docview/1000433160?Accounted=155509>.
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- [13] Gessen, “Putin Lied About His Nuclear Doctrine and Promised Russians That They Would Go to Heaven,” op. cit.
- [14] “Meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club,” Kremlin, October 23, 2015, available at <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/50548>.
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