# Russian Nuclear Strategy: Background, Current Status, Future

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# Transition from Soviet to Russian Nuclear Strategy



1999-2003: new strategy emerges:

• Security Council meeting (March 1999), West-99 maneuvers

• National Security Concept (2000)

• Military Doctrine (2000)

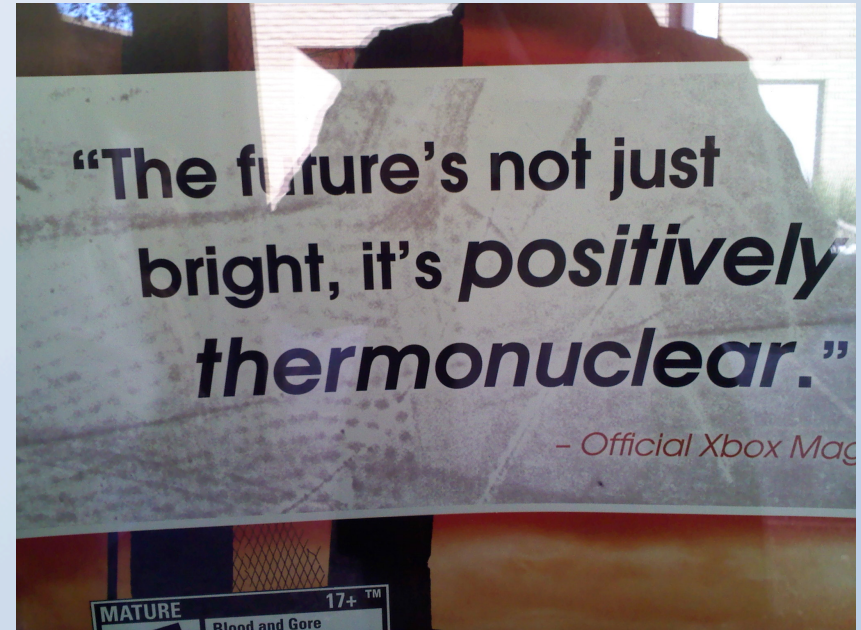• "Immediate Tasks for Development of the Armed Forces" (2003)

2010 – new edition of Military Doctrine; marginal change in nuclear policy

2014 – latest edition of Military Doctrine, no change in nuclear policy

# Nuclear missions in 2000 Military Doctrine

Types of wars:

-- armed conflict

-- local conflict

-- regional conflict

-- global conflict



"The future's not just bright, it's *positively* *thermonuclear*."

– Official Xbox Mag

MATURE 17+ ™
Blood and Gore

The likely escalation path is from the first level directly to the third

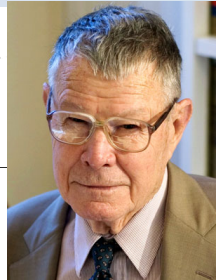V. Prozorov, Nuclear Deterrence in the Theory of SRF Use (Moscow: Academy of Pyotr Veliki, 1999)
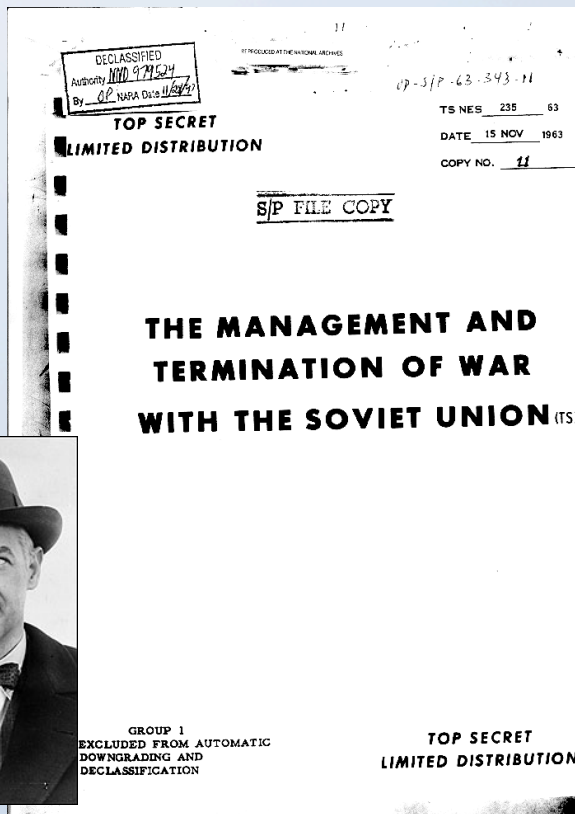
*Began as deterrence of outside interference in Chechnya.*

# Transition from Soviet to Russian Nuclear Strategy

| | Soviet Union/Russian 1993 Military Doctrine | Russian 2000 and later Military Doctrines |
|---|---|---|
| **Nature of conflict** | • Global war | • **Regional war**<br>• Global war |
| **Nuclear missions** | • Deterrence of global war | • **De-escalation of regional war**<br>• Deterrence of global war |
| **Employment** | • No first use<br>• Massive strike on warning, transition to second strike | • **Regional conflict: limited use, military targets**<br>• **First use**<br>• Massive strike on warning/second strike |
| **Scale of use** | • Unacceptable damage | • **Tailored damage for limited use**<br>• Unacceptable damage for global war |

## Assumptions behind de-escalation:

1. Large-scale (global) conflict with the US improbable

2. Conventional force could be used against Russia on a limited scale by US and NATO (along the lines of Kosovo war)





THE MANAGEMENT AND TERMINATION OF WAR WITH THE SOVIET UNION (TS)



3. Asymmetry of stakes: U.S. stakes will likely be low, prospect of even very limited nuclear use will deter U.S. from using force against Russia.

4. Credible strategic deterrence serves as stabilizing foundation.

*Logic follows old US/NATO concepts – ladder of escalation, flexible deterrence, NSC-68*

"**Tailored damage**" replaces traditional "unacceptable damage"

(*"Zadannyi Ushcherb" – predetermined, tailored, adequate to the purpose, calibrated*)

Defined in 2003 as "damage subjectively perceived [by the opponent] as unacceptable and exceeding the benefits the opponent expects to yield":

## 2010 Military Doctrine:

In 2009, further mission expansion debated, but rejected.

Types of wars:

*Controversy in 2009*

-- armed conflict

-- local conflict

**-- regional conflict**

**-- global conflict**



"As Putin rears his head and comes into the air space of the United States of America, where do they go? It's Alaska." — Sarah Palin

**Higher threshold for employment of nuclear weapons:**

2000: "in situations critical for national security"

2010: when "the very existence of [Russia] is under threat."

## 2014 Military Doctrine

- NATO openly classified as a threat (instead of a challenge).

- Role of nuclear weapons, missions, circumstances of use remained the same as in 2010.

- Doctrine introduced a new notion – non-nuclear (conventional) deterrence.

**Targets for limited nuclear use in large-scale exercises since 1999 (employing heavy and medium bombers):**

(1) Airbases, command, communications and support centers in European NATO countries and, in at least one case, in Japan. Particularly high attention to Eastern Europe and Baltic states.

(2) Undisclosed targets in the continental United States, probably airbases of B-2s, as well as command and control centers.

(3) Naval targets – aircraft carrier groups in the Pacific Ocean and the Baltic Sea; once in the Indian Ocean, once in the Black Sea-Mediterranean.

(4) In 2003 heavy bombers simulated strikes against Diego Garcia and in 2007 against Guam.

2013 "West-2013" exercises – first large-scale exercises since 1999 that did not feature simulated limited nuclear use. 2014 – return to greater role of nuclear weapons.

## Limitations of nuclear de-escalation:

(1) Self deterrence: norm against nuclear use, "overkill" for low-intensity scenarios.

(2) Threat of nuclear use cannot be employed against non-nuclear states-not allies of nuclear states

(3) Cannot be used for majority of politically tangible missions: need conventional capability.



Can deterrence provide "cover" for low-intensity offensive action? Theoretically, yes, but case of Ukraine inconclusive, at best:
- Any nuclear weapons can have same effect (not just limited use options), US enjoys same benefit.
- Doubtful US/NATO would have used force anyway
- No change in posture, strategy, or R&D; only rhetoric, which was probably intended for domestic audience.

# New variable: conventional long-range strike weapons



Ракетный удар России по ИГ из Каспийского моря

In de-escalation context, conventional weapons *complement*, instead of *replace*, nuclear capability:

- Extra step on the ladder;
- More importantly, can de-escalate conflict without crossing nuclear threshold.

All long-range conventional assets are dual capable.

SLCM ranges from Black and
Caspian Seas

# Prospects for progress on nuclear disarmament remain dim

Main reason – differences in framework:

- US insists on addressing primarily nuclear weapons

- Russia insists on "integrative" approach, which includes conventional, missile defense, space(?).

Issues to resolve for progress:

- Missile defense: deadlock

- Tactical nuclear weapons in Europe: Russia does not want to talk unless US TNW are withdrawn; NATO will not agree to total withdrawal and wants asymmetric reductions instead. NATO reliance on TNW might further increase.

- Conventional high-precision long-range strike assets: US/NATO will not sacrifice existing advantage; if/when Russia completes acquisition of similar capability, it will not yield either.

- **Deadlock existed early 2000s; little has changed as a result of Ukraine crisis except now no one will even pretend to try.**

- **US no longer has monopoly on long-range conventional, Russia catching up on missile defense: unrestricted arms race is likely.**