From Russia with Love: Interpreting Russia’s New Nuclear Doctrine

[00:00:00] Speaker 1: Good afternoon. Welcome to the panel on Interpreting Russia's Nuclear Doctrine. My name is Anya Fink, and I was just remembering my first Carnegie Endowment nuclear policy conference in 2007, which was 18 years ago. And this was after the infamous World Free of Nuclear Weapons speech, and there was a panel where Rose Gottemoeller, the winner of this year's award, was moderating a panel on what happens after START-1 and the Moscow Treaty expired. It was a very, very, very different world from today. So let's get on, I guess, with our subject of the day, and we have three great panelists for you. The first is Kristin van Brusgaarde of the Norwegian Intelligence School. We have Lukash Kulesha of RUSI, and Andrei Baklitsky of UNIDIR. And all of them are longtime Russia watchers, and my job today as the moderator is to ensure that we're able to look beyond the declaratory policy, so beyond the noise that we've been discussing, and assess the operational dimensions of Russia's views on nuclear weapons, and how these views have been changing given Russia's experience with signaling in the war in Ukraine, and the potential shifting threat to Russia from a changing NATO posture. And let's start with questions for each of the panelists. To Dr. van Brusgaarde, Russian officials have long maintained that Russia's nuclear doctrine is defensive, yet its conventional military struggles in Ukraine have raised questions about whether Moscow might become more reliant on nuclear signaling or even potentially limited nuclear employment. How has the war in Ukraine affected Russian thinking on the role of nuclear weapons, particularly in bridging the gaps with its conventional capability?

**[00:01:50] Speaker 2:** Thank you, Anja. And first and foremost, I'd like to extend my gratitude for the invitation to be here. It's a great pleasure. It's actually my first time at the conference, which is surprising because there are many familiar faces, and also many nice new acquaintances. Secondly, I have to express a disclaimer that the views that I express are my own and not those of the Norwegian Armed Forces. And having said all of that, let me try and respond to your question. So my first point would be to say that I think that we should be slightly wary about thinking that we can learn what we need to know about Russian nuclear strategy from Ukraine and from the experiences that Russia and we are drawing from Ukraine, and that we should be wary about thinking that Russia will now change everything in the way they think about nuclear weapons and the role they play in producing security for Russia as a result of this war. Evidently, nuclear weapons have played a key role in this conflict, but I think it's important to nuance what the Russians have sought to achieve in the context of the war. And I would summarize the roles or what Russia sought to achieve with nuclear weapons in three key ways. First, I'd say Russia sought to deter Western intervention through strategic nuclear deterrence and that this has worked well. We heard yesterday from Colin Kahl that nuclear weapons have induced caution on both sides, including on the Russian side, and the Russians, too, are worried that this war would escalate to something substantively different, something I think they've made pretty clear since the onset of the war. The second way that Russia has made use of nuclear weapons is that they have sought to manipulate nuclear risks to affect Western behavior in terms of aid and arms supplies to Ukraine, which I would deem moderately successful, and we can of course have a debate about this. And then the third way that Russia has sought to use nuclear weapons is to compel Ukraine through nuclear threats, perhaps more implicitly than explicitly, and one could claim that this has not been very successful. But Russian nuclear strategy debates and outcomes in the post-Cold War period were never

really primarily about producing these types of objectives. Instead, Russian nuclear strategy in that entire period has been about other types of objectives, that is, deterring a large-scale war and deterring or influencing regional wars that have been substantively bigger or larger than this type of war. So I would argue that Russian theorists had not before the war deliberated precisely how it was that nuclear weapons or nuclear coercion should help them produce the political objectives that they seek in Ukraine, because they thought that they would be able to produce those objectives with conventional means only. That's not to say that the Russians are not learning something from Ukraine. We now see evidently and have seen for some time a Russian debate about how nuclear weapons could have helped produce those objectives better, more efficiently, and these debates include explicit debates about nuclear coercion of non-nuclear near peers or peers that are helped by other powers, nuclear powers, and expanded discussion of the stability-instability paradox. So yesterday Colin Kahl said that we need to expand our debate on how much damage you can do below the level of stability at the strategic level. I would argue that that debate is already taking place in the Russian context. The Russians are also debating the cognitive aspects of nuclear deterrence and the effects of nuclear threats versus the effects of nuclear use, and I think you see some evident empirics of that quite clearly in the context of the war. And then the Russian debate on the integration of non-nuclear nuclear deterrence in strategic deterrent operations is continuing as a result of the experience in Ukraine. So to sum up, I would say that Russia is learning, but I'm not sure that they are upending everything they knew about nuclear deterrence as a result of the war. Some aspects of Russian nuclear deterrence still works and have worked throughout the war. Other aspects of Russian deterrence strategy, for example, how nuclear weapons can affect a regional war with NATO, have not necessarily been tried and tested in Ukraine. So I would warn some caution in the extent to which we believe that Russia is now rethinking everything they know about nuclear deterrence and their strategy.

**[00:06:31] Speaker 1:** Thank you. Thank you so much. So the next question is for Dr. Kulisa. Official Russian doctrine outlines strict conditions for nuclear use, emphasizing deterrence and strategic stability, but Russia's actions during the war in Ukraine, its nuclear threats military exercises, potential treaty violations, seem to contradict these stated principles. How much credence do analysts in Poland give to Russia's official nuclear doctrine? And how do you assess it as an indicator of actual decision making?

**[00:07:00] Speaker 3:** I love Dr. Kulisa, and I think that after the third Carnegie conference, I might be awarded the honorary title of PhD, but more seriously, I mean, I'm occupied the space between, I mean, I think there is a space between completely dismissing the Russian nuclear doctrine, including the documents and the latest update of the basic principles and treating them as kind of purely PR exercises. But of course, to the extent that, you know, you are looking at the situation from Warsaw's viewpoint, basically there is a basic assumption that Poland would be included in Russian nuclear planning on account of its role and importance in NATO plans for defense of the alliance. It's also a potential role in supporting any other operations, also in regards to the presence of U.S. facilities, including missile defense space in Rzeczkowo. And then a prominent role of Poland, and I would say also some of the other countries along the flank in Russian nuclear rhetoric. But then there is also the question of the doctrine versus practice. And we already discussed the various strategic signaling or strategic noise with regards to Ukraine, but also yesterday the specific case of fall of 2022, where you can't really say that this was a

situation that was in any way included in the Russian nuclear doctrine as one of the cases in which nuclear weapons can be used. Russian Ukrainian offensive to reclaim the territories in no way threatened the very survival of Russian Federation, that according to that version of the doctrine would be one of the conditions for the use of nuclear weapons. So I think there is an assumption that of course the doctrine and the official documents but also the practice provides certain indications of what would be the options and the scenarios for the use of nuclear weapons, but in no cases it is a very close list. I think you should expect Russia to be able to use nuclear intimidation in a conflict or crisis with NATO in a way that would be different from the way that it tried to use it against Ukraine. So I see the latest developments including the November update of the basic principles as stemming from a couple of points. One is the experiences of the war with Ukraine and certainly this challenge of how do you actually coerce or deal with a non-nuclear state that is refusing to yield to Russian demands and is also conducting attack on the territory of the Russian Federation. But also the updated threat assessment with regards to the United States, so you got the inclusion of the airspace conventional attack as the additional condition for the potential use of nuclear weapons. A relationship with Belarus and explicitly and fully putting Belarus under Russian nuclear umbrella. I see it as a way to tick all the boxes when it comes to the potential situation in which Russian nuclear weapons can be activated as a policy tool. Responding to the challenges that I think the Russian strategists saw in the last couple of years, so one dealing with the possibility of non-nuclear strategic attack by the United States. Second, dealing with various regional contingencies and I would expect that the Russian strategists would put more emphasis of how do they deal with actions by European countries and how do they react and potentially deter operations by France and the United Kingdom. And the third issue, how do they deal with these countries that they treat as proxies of the United States, first and foremost Ukraine. So in all these cases, the challenges and the experiences of last years are analyzed. They are put as the basis for the update of the basic principles and I would assume that the strategic directions that are put in this document would then be translated into operational concepts.

**[00:12:20] Speaker 1:** Thank you. To Dr. Baklitsky, the concept of escalate to de-escalate is used in some Western discussions of Russian nuclear strategy and this implies that Moscow might use limited nuclear strikes to force an opponent into backing down. Do you think this is an accurate characterization of Russian nuclear doctrine or is it a misinterpretation? How do Russian officials and military planners frame the role of limited nuclear use?

**[00:12:46] Speaker 4:** Thanks Anya and thanks to Carnegie Endowment for inviting me to speak today. I was speaking at Carnegie in 2021 which was, as you all remember, COVID and virtual one so I was like, that's just my luck. Instead of fancy chairs and podium, I got another Zoom call. So thanks for having this opportunity for a physical Carnegie conference and I will also say that the views I represent here are my own, not of the UND or the United Nations. To your question, I think I'll start by taking a moment to appreciate how very little data we have when we talk about nuclear use. We haven't had one since 1945 and everything else we discuss are mostly estimates. They are educated estimates but they're still estimates. So with all of that, getting to the question about escalate to de-escalate, it's kind of hard to engage with this because there is no definition of escalate to de-escalate but generally when people worry about it, it's perceived a use not in existential scenarios but rather deliberate use to get some advantages and it's connected normally to lowered threshold for nuclear use, right? How existential things need to become for

nuclear use and presumption is they shouldn't be that existential for Russia. Because if you don't care about the existential level, then there is no question Russian military doctrines specifically says Russia can use nuclear weapons in response to conventional attack and not only Russia, right? France and other countries have similar provisions. So getting back to our lack of data, Russian invasion of Ukraine actually gave us quite an amount of data on this front. It's negative data, so the things which did not happen but still this is real life information. So what we know is in this rather important military campaign, Russia has not used nuclear weapons up to now. There was no early use to consolidate gains as some people suggested, no use to stop Russian defeat in Kharkiv and Kherson, and there was no use in response to attacks against Russian nuclear facilities and Russian nuclear command and control including early warning radar, including heavy bomber bases, which according to Russian nuclear policy at the time permitted Russia to use its nuclear forces in a little bit answering to what Lukash said, you know, attack against command and control is considered a possible condition for use. So this is kind of what we learned, right? Now you can argue that things would have gone very differently had it been NATO or as a nuclear weapon state, but what we can say I think with kind of certainty now that a nuclear use is not automatic and it's very constant and dependent, that's for sure, there's nothing like we start the war then we use nuclear weapons, that's not how things work. And the second is that Russian leadership is willing to go to great lengths and great pains including to announce mobilization for the first time since Second World War basically instead of using nuclear weapons. So that probably tells us something about the threshold and probably it's not as low as people might think. So I'll end here, but I'll be happy to continue. Okay, wonderful.

**[00:16:38] Speaker 1:** So this actually gives us a great, really interesting thread to pull here. So to Kristen first, what do you attribute Russian non-use of nuclear weapons in Ukraine to? And by non-use I mean non-employment of nuclear weapons.

**[00:16:55] Speaker 2:** So I mean, let me first clarify that as most people in this room, I don't know exactly the answer to this question, but I can hypothesize and speculate. I think that this relates in part to the comments that Andrei has made and that Lukash has made as well, that this is not necessarily a type of conflict where Russia deems that the employment of nuclear weapons will contribute to achieving the political objectives it seeks. And my impression is that Russia's official communication regarding its threshold for nuclear weapons use is linked much more closely to threats that it deems existential. I also believe that the Russian debate about how nuclear weapons produce security has in the entire post-Cold War period revolved around how basically to make nuclear threats credible as they are linked to threats to the existence of the state. Now we have had an evolution of the language in the official doctrine as well, where that language is reflecting states' sovereignty, territorial integrity. But I still believe that what we have seen in the war in Ukraine with regard to Russian nuclear signaling and non-employment reflects the notion that also for the Russian leadership, these are still and remain very particular special weapons that primarily serve a deterrent purpose and that there are graver conditions than this that would need to be met in order for the Russian leadership to consider employing these weapons. Thank you. Lukash?

**[00:18:56] Speaker 3:** And if we rewind to 2022, the Russian assumption was that its conventional forces would defeat Ukraine in a matter of days. So the role for

nuclear signaling and this kind of infamous putting of strategic forces on a higher level of combat alert was to block intervention or significant assistance of US and other Western states to Ukraine. But the assumption was that the conventional forces themselves would be able to defeat Ukraine. And then as the campaign went further, it seems that at no point Russia saw the situation as being ripe or existential enough to move towards the use of nuclear weapons. Based on the information that we have, there was the moment in late 2022 where certain movements and certain preparations were made. But if I can speculate, you would need to have a long logical chain in which the defeat in the north would lead to defeat of the Russian forces in the south and would lead to a route that would also put Crimea under the threat of attack or liberation by Ukraine. And since that didn't happen, Russia did not really see the need to move towards the use of nuclear weapons. And for me, an interesting case and something that I agree with Andrei that we would need to have more data, was the Ukrainian attack and takeover of part of the Kursk Oblast. Because that was the moment that Russia decided not only that it would use its conventional forces to defend and regain the territory, but also that it would mostly refrain from taking nuclear threats, at least at the official level. So again, I think the decision was made that the threat of use of nuclear weapons would not be credible even in that scenario. So for me, that points out, at least in the situation of Russian war against Ukraine, to a different level of a different understanding of the threshold for threatening and using nuclear weapons.

**[00:21:42] Speaker 1:** Thank you. So a couple of you have already mentioned the Russian internal debate about the success of signaling, and some in the Russian establishment have advocated much more explicit changes to declaratory policy, to the doctrinal document, which I don't believe we saw in the iteration of the Russian doctrine. But also, some have advocated for preemptive strikes on Europe, et cetera. What do you think is the outcome of that internal Russian debate on nuclear policy? In other words, do the Russians think they've been successful, and is there consensus in Russia on this among civilian and military stakeholders? And then what are the implications for the West?

**[00:22:25] Speaker 4:** I can maybe start. So I think we all followed this discussion pretty closely, and I think the discussion stemmed from the fact that some people in the Russian expert community believe that Russia is not getting what it's supposed to get from its nuclear weapons. Its nuclear weapons are not being leveraged in a way which would help Russia in the moment to get more in Ukraine. And I think that kind of already tells you that official threshold for those people was not low enough, and the threats were not good enough, and this whole military complex was not doing a good enough job, so more should have been done. And response was pretty negative from all sorts and all places of Russian society, from people who you can call liberal, but also from conservative sides, when people are saying, like, why are you even talking about nuclear weapons? We're doing great. We're going to win this conventionally. Why are you panicking? This is only playing into the hands of enemies abroad. So people still continue talking about this, the same people pretty much, but I think there was no huge changes in the ways how nuclear weapons are approached, and as Lukash mentioned, maybe there was even less discussion of nuclear weapons and mentioning of nuclear weapons, because at some point, you just cannot get much of this rhetoric. On several occasions, and that's maybe not directly connected to your question, but I think I'll mention this, so at some point, presumably, there was a discussion and consideration whether nuclear weapons can be used at all in this conflict. We don't know this, but U.S. intelligence suggests that.

And then the decision was that nuclear weapons probably cannot be used. And starting from that, what exactly can you do, right? If you already decided they are not useful, we're not going to use them, then it almost exclusively moves to the space of sending messages and trying to scare people and so on and so forth. So to a certain extent, you can see some of those discussions as a real discussion inside of Russia about the future role of nuclear weapons, but some of this is just messaging and just like, we cannot use them, but let's try to at least project this power of nuclear weapons through our articles, our interviews, our statements, so maybe that will help us somehow even if we cannot use nuclear weapons.

**[00:25:30] Speaker 1:** So then what do you think that means for how the role of nuclear weapons in Russian thinking will change?

**[00:25:36] Speaker 4:** I don't think it will necessarily. It's just, as I said, it's very context dependent. This is the context where you couldn't just find a real role for them, but maybe in other contexts you do, and there clearly are contexts where you would find it.

**[00:25:53] Speaker 2:** Okay. Please. Yeah, so if I can add to that, I would say that, I mean, we already talked about the doctrinal update and sort of the international context in which that update takes place. I think it's also interesting to think about the domestic political context in which that doctrinal update takes place, where this debate is a part of that domestic political context. So I think it's, to some extent, you say, what is the outcome of that debate? To one effect, you could say the doctrinal update is one outcome of that debate. It doesn't mean that the debate has been stifled, that the debate is over, but the doctrinal outcome was also, or the update was one outcome of that debate. If you look at it from that perspective, I would say the doctrinal update was surprisingly consistent with the previous doctrines, because many, I think, would have expected that you would see more radical change and transformation in part, well, as a result of the change in the international environment, and to a greater extent, to reflect the nature of that debate that had been taking place in public, which in turn raises many interesting questions, I think, about the impact of different groups and policy advocates in the domestic Russian context and in this area. Ania, you are as well-versed as any of us up here with regard to discussing what type of impact different groups will have on policy and strategy outcomes in Russia.

**[00:27:41] Speaker 3:** For me, the new reduction was basically, in a sense, filling the gaps of the potential situation or potential scenarios in which nuclear deterrence can come into place, and making sure that no conceivable scenario is left aside. So whether you are part of an alliance and conduct offensive operations against Russia, yes, you might be subject to nuclear retaliation. If you are not in a nuclear weapon state, supported by nuclear weapon states, whatever support it means, you can also be the target for nuclear retaliation. So I think it's much more than just reaction to the discussion that took place inside Russia. Interestingly, at a certain point, Putin intervened directly in this discussion in Valdai, in which he said, you know, thank you very much for raising this issue. I'm just kind of simplifying it massively. Thank you very much for raising this issue, thank you for your concerns, but I think we are more or less fine with our current nuclear thresholds and our nuclear doctrine. And then the update was indeed more kind of filling the gaps than something revolutionary. And of course, if you are part of this debate, and Karaganov or Trenin advocated for a much more radical approach, you can claim victory. You can say that at least we

moved the officials to take our concerns and our assumptions that Russian nuclear weapons are not taken seriously. And that led to an update, but also that this bringing back the fear actually had an impact on the discussion in the Western states and brought some restraint. So in a sense, you can say that all sides of this debate inside Russia could see themselves as winners, because the changes were made, but not as radical as maybe were advocated by some.

**[00:30:10] Speaker 1:** So far, we've really been talking about declaratory policy and kind of the declaratory policy part of doctrine. Let's get a little bit more deeper into the operational side. So one of the actual changes in Russian policy and posture has been President Putin's emphasis on the potential placement and transfer of Russian non-strategic nuclear weapons in Belarus. Lukash, how do you assess this change in posture?

**[00:30:34] Speaker 3:** Well, for me, there's a couple of openings there and a couple of confirmations or strengthening of particular policy options. So one, the character of the relationship between Russia and Belarus. So additional element of strengthening the relationship of basically tightening Russian control over Belarus. Second, one of the tools to strengthen and secure position of Lukashenko. And basically, that for me explains also his willingness and his eagerness actually to ask for the deployment of Russian forces, because that's one factor which more or less guarantees Russian support in case of any internal problems. Additionally, you would have additional points for potentially signaling towards NATO, moving warheads, mating them with delivery vehicles. You have additional signaling opportunities connected with exercises. And one of the phases of the non-strategic nuclear forces exercises, I think last year, apparently also involved Belarusian units. And then potentially, you might have some options during crisis and the conflict. And this is very much a question for the alliance, whether potential use of nuclear weapons from the territory of Belarus would be treated differently than something that would originate from the territory of Russia and to what extent it would complicate planning. Of course, there are downsides, including the need of Russia to reverse its opposition to deployment of nuclear weapons outside of the territory. But it seems that they were willing to take that risk, both to, I think, strengthen their relationship and then control of Belarus, but also to create additional operational openings in terms of the options to signal or to use non-strategic weapons. The last point may be a bargaining chip when it comes to any sorts of arms control arrangements with the West and with the United States.

**[00:33:13] Speaker 1:** Thank you. So I actually have a different question for you. So about a year into the war, President Putin announced that Russia would suspend its participation in New START verification and consultation measures. Do you think Russia believes that its strategic arms control with the United States is in Russia's interest? And if New START expires, what do you think is the potential evolution of the trajectory of Russian strategic forces?

**[00:33:37] Speaker 4:** It's a great way for me to answer the thing I wanted to say before. So I agree with most of what Lukash said, including that Lukashenko was very interested and he was pushing for that. It's not like it originated from Russia. Even before this whole thing, he said, yeah, we're sure we're going to host them. But another thing is there was a genuine push to put Russia on the same level of implementation of things as the U.S. is. So the U.S. can deploy its nukes out of its territory, we can deploy nukes out of its territory, and Putin specifically mentioned a

U.S. example when he was discussing deployments to Belarus. But the other thing which happened was also the ratification of CTBT, when he said, like, we are getting to the same level as the U.S. is. U.S. signed but not ratified, we are not going to be the only ratifier. So in that sense, the reason is like, OK, so we're not going to be doing more than others are doing, especially not more than the United States does. So with the new start again, it's pretty clear that it was a response to U.S. support for Ukraine, and Russia has mentioned attacks against its bases from Ukraine as one of the reasons why we don't want to resume inspections, because how can you – like, what exactly are you going to come and inspect how your partner, Ukraine, is attacking those bases? That was, again, specifically mentioned, and Russia has been saying, like, U.S. needs to change its approaches to Russia so we can get back to arms control. Presumably, there was this change, and President Putin said recently that new start expires in 2026. We need to figure out with the U.S. what we're going to do after that. So I think that gives you an opening for resumption of new start or for negotiating something else. But, of course, as we can see, all of those processes are very closely tied to some kind of solution of the Ukraine war, and it's an open question, can it be decoupled if the current negotiations do not reach any conclusion, can U.S. and Russia still do something on arms control? I'm sure there would be willingness on the Russian side to do something bilaterally. I'm sure there's a willingness on the President Trump side to do something with Russia. He really wants to do something with Russia, but then can it then materialize with the whole fallout or whatever follows lack of success of negotiations over Ukraine? That's a different question. I don't think that arms control is impossible between Russia and the United States. It was a function of very specific relations between U.S. and Russia under the Biden presidency. Russia is willing, it seems, to have arms control with the new administration, but then the question is, will any of this materialize if you've seen examples of good intentions which didn't lead anywhere? If new start is not extended, it expires in 2026, there'll be, again, a lot of fallout, including for the NPT review conference, which would happen in the same year. But again, there is a lot that countries can do to continue implementing some kind of limitations. You can come up with all sorts of options and scenarios from having some kind of agreement to just sticking to the limits to exchanges of some sorts of information. I can give you a whole host of options, and there's been a lot of good research on this. There was a lot of good research made, including by Carnegie Endowment, how you can assemble something resembling arms control without legally binding treaties, for example. The question is the political will and willingness to follow through on any of this, which, unfortunately, I do not know. So I can tell you, yeah, everything is possible. We have no idea what's going to happen.

**[00:38:24] Speaker 1:** All right. So we'll transition to audience questions. So there's a variety of questions here. So how about this one? Jeff Brumfield asks, what do the panelists think about the use of the conventionally armed RS-26 in Dnipro last fall? What was the message they wanted to convey? Kristin.

**[00:38:44] Speaker 2:** Yeah, so let me put it this way. I guess in the initial sort of phase or even the first couple of years of the war, I guess most students of Russian strategy and military affairs would surmise that the Russian concept of non-nuclear deterrence did not necessarily seem to work as intended in sort of as a reflection of the way in which Russia used several dual-capable systems to attack targets in Ukraine without any apparent sort of deterrent effect in the way described by Russian theorists where there should be some kind of interface between non-nuclear and nuclear deterrent effect and that nuclear weapons should somehow lend

credibility, lend deterrent credibility to the effect of non-nuclear deterrent operations. And my impression would be that this incident then sort of conveyed something substantively quite different and was sort of a first example of Russian communication of that type of concept in play and the timing, of course, also not being coincidental, including the associated announcements of the new system and the announcement that this would prospectively be a part of the strategic rocket forces, etc. So I think I would answer the question by saying that the news of the death of the non-nuclear deterrence concept in the Russian context are strongly exaggerated and I think it is a concept that will continue to evolve in the years ahead.

**[00:40:54] Speaker 1:** Question for Lukash. In many war game scenarios, we see a pattern where Russian tactical nuclear weapons use on NATO territory is not met with a nuclear response, but rather with overwhelming conventional retaliation. Of course, these are simulations and not predictions, but they do seem to suggest a certain mindset among participants. Could you speak about NATO's current thinking on escalation management and the role of nuclear deterrence in that calculus?

**[00:41:21] Speaker 3:** Well, if I can just kind of add to the Oreshnik thing, because I think it's related because I think it also tells us something about the NATO countries and especially countries which are situated further from the flank area are the intended recipients of that message. But that may also point out to a potential operational concept in which Russia would use a range of intermediate range systems to basically deter, intimidate, but if necessary conduct early strike in a war with NATO against military targets in an effort to paralyze and beat NATO into submission. If that's the case, if we're talking about the potential to use non-nuclear intermediate range systems, some of which actually can be sea-based or air-launched, then the potential or the need to use nuclear weapons early in a conflict with NATO may be lesser than we think. And some of the war games should take it also into account. I think faced with the potential of Russian nuclear use, NATO approach would be to basically point to a number of potential responses up to the level and potentially including nuclear responses but without necessarily pointing to a particular one as a preferred one. Just to maintain a level of freedom of maneuver for the leadership of the alliance to respond. Obviously NATO's nuclear option would need to be credible. That's why we are talking about the options to increase the survivability and also the operational value of forward deployed US nuclear weapons and the ability of NATO to conduct nuclear missions, linking a little bit to the previous discussions. You might also think about the links with the lack of the French nuclear forces. So basically putting towards Russia a credible options of meeting the response, the Russian nuclear use or at the nuclear level but also potentially being able to respond in a non-nuclear way. So I don't think that there is a preferred course of action but basically pointing to the possibility of retaliation or reaction at different levels.

**[00:44:27] Speaker 1:** That makes sense. So Andrei, question from Nicole Grzewski, what is Russian thinking on opportunistic aggression in the context of a US-China conflict? There seems to be an assumption by some that Russia would capitalize on a distracted United States. Is there actually any evidence that Russia has considered this? Is it consistent with Russian military writings?

**[00:44:53] Speaker 4:** And one point on Oreshnik before that. So just to clarify, the use of Oreshnik, which a lot of people believe is RS-26 resurrected, was explained as a response to attack against Russian territory with long-range Western weapons,

which didn't happen before. So Russia said if that happens, we'll have to retaliate. And it was clear that the retaliation had to be somewhat different from what Russia has been doing before that, because then what would be your response? So in that sense, using Oreshnik, which was new, which hadn't been used before but wasn't nuclear, was somewhere in between with this new, maybe also scary, because it was at first announced as an ICBM, which caused a little bit of a stir, was maybe middle ground. And we haven't heard much of testing or any uses or anything since. So it's still maybe in the public consciousness, but it hasn't been used since. On the opportunistic aggression, I think I will quote one Russian official, which in a discussion said, wouldn't it be great if we could do opportunistic aggression with the Chinese? But I don't think Russia believes that that's a real thing. Russia and China would not coordinate on those things. And Russia and China decision-making and policies and goals and strategies are different. They have different interests. They pursue different policies. So in that sense, it's not obvious that that's even a real concern. Yes, if U.S. is tied or the West is tied somewhere, you can kind of think that it would be a right time to do something, which you always wanted. But again, looking at China, it's not like China is exploring this vulnerability. So I think that certainly could happen at some point, but I don't think that the level of coordination or cooperation in the near future or ever between Russia and China would be at the level that something like that would be a big concern for the West.

**[00:47:39] Speaker 1:** So there's a question here from Todd Zexher, and it's, to what extent do Russian debates express a concern that its repeated nuclear threats could motivate members of NATO to reconsider their nuclear status? And to this, I would sort of want to add the question, what have the Russian reactions been to this ongoing European debate about a European nuclear deterrent? What have you heard? How might that change Russian thinking about nuclear weapons, if at all? Kristian?

**[00:48:11] Speaker 2:** I don't know if I'm the best person to answer this question. I mean, I think there are interesting deliberations to be had with regard to how, including in the current context, with regard to how Russia perceives of the British and the French nuclear deterrent as something independent of the U.S. nuclear deterrent, as something distinct perhaps from the NATO nuclear deterrent, and I mean, I'm sure the Russian observers are watching these debates that are taking place in numerous European capitals quite closely, including even in Norway, there are public debates about the prospect of Nordic nuclear capabilities, which is something I never would have thought I would see, and these types of debates are evidently taking place across the European continent. I'm sure in the Russian context and in the Russian mindset, there would need to be recalibration with regard to what type of deterrent problem sets Russia would be facing, given a prospective sort of reshuffling of the transatlantic relationship, given a reshuffling of the nuclear realities of the European continent, but I defer to other panelists to provide more detail on the content of that Russian debate.

**[00:49:55] Speaker 3:** Lukash? It's interesting, actually, there was a Russian reaction to President Macron's statement about opening the debate about extending French nuclear guarantees, and it was a very vocal and negative one, how destabilizing that would be for European security and how irresponsible the French are, which at least for me points to some degree of concern that actually the Russian approach would need to be indeed adopted to take into account the new situation. So I would expect even more signaling directors towards European allies and

undermining the value of the French and British nuclear deterrent, perhaps trying to also undermine their credibility as extended nuclear deterrence provider, and also perhaps preparing for a situation in which some of the deterrence messages that traditionally has been rather directed towards the United States and NATO as a whole would need to be directed towards the UK and France. And we got, I think, some statements which were kind of directed towards the UK, specifically pointing out to the might of the Russian arsenal and the ability to inflict damage on the UK that for me points to Russians starting to take this option more seriously, perhaps, than in the past.

**[00:51:48] Speaker 4:** I would add that overall it seems that, for anybody who has been observing, Ukraine burns up all the oxygen, pretty much, in Russian foreign policy, planning, thinking. You know, if you consider Finland and Sweden joining NATO, that would be an impossibly huge event for Russia, groundbreaking changes, NATO border increased very significantly. That went very smoothly, there was no big deal about that, which would tell you that the focus is still there, and in that sense the focus continues to be there. So discussions about what NATO might consider doing and how this influences are still subjugated to the whole main goal, which is Ukraine. All of the other things will have to be dealt with later. The question when later comes is an open one, it's been three plus years, so at some point those things have to be dealt with. Actually, the statement about French initiatives was very surprising to me, because Russian foreign ministry went out and said, oh yeah, French nuclear arsenal is X amount of megatons, which is very small, and cannot substitute US, which is X amount of megatons, much higher. And I'm like, this is the first time I see Russia considering deterrence value in terms of megatons, like how do you process that? Is this amount of megatons fine for you? So that was an interesting thing, and yeah, obviously every time when the NATO countries start thinking about, or talking about, sorry, nuclear weapons, or deploying nuclear weapons to their territory, or even certifying their aircraft for all these things, Russia would come out and say, well, it will make you a target if you host them on your territory. So you have to do the calculus of the cost-benefit analysis, but I think, and that will continue every time when NATO countries will try to do that, that will continue. But for the moment, yeah, I don't see like huge concern and huge focus, because as maybe this response to French statement shows, Russia has always been concerned by the United States. And when Russia's concerned about NATO, it's extension of the United States in Europe. So if United States is not a problem anymore, at least less of a problem anymore, then everything else is like, yeah, we can deal with that, we can live with that. It's whatever, as long as we don't facing United States coming and fighting a huge war with us, yeah, we can live with that.

**[00:54:58] Speaker 2:** Maybe I can just add one thing that I thought of as Andrei was speaking. So I guess, well, I would slightly disagree that the NATO expansion to include Sweden and Finland produced no reactions whatsoever. In the Russian context, I mean, there were some reactions and there have been some statements with regard to what kind of repercussions this will have in the military domain, in the conventional military domain, and there were also some reactions to the Swedish and Finnish statements that they would enter NATO with no reservations whatsoever on ceding all parts of NATO policy, including the nuclear aspect of it. But to end on a slightly more positive note, I would surmise that as NATO is now developing its capabilities, including its European leg, and as several European countries are now developing their capabilities, both in the conventional domain and as NATO is also continuing to develop the credibility of its nuclear deterrence, I would think that the

Russians will be paying quite close attention and that this, even given the very dire security policy environment in Europe, in fact, one could imagine that this would produce some new opportunities for confidence-building measures or other types of prospective future arms control measures to the extent that the current dire situation produces a different type of security dynamic in Europe.

**[00:56:34] Speaker 1:** Interesting, okay. So we have two minutes remaining and we have a question on trilateral arms control from Maxim Julius. How realistic is it to expect the renewal of New START to be in a trilateral format with the inclusion of China amidst calls of a total denuclearization by the Trump administration?

**[00:56:54] Speaker 3:** I would go unrealistic. I would go for unrealistic.

**[00:56:58] Speaker 4:** At this point, it's up to China. If China agrees, Russia would be fine with it.

**[00:57:04] Speaker 2:** It's unanimous.

**[00:57:05] Speaker 1:** All right. So if we were to leave our audience with one thing they need to know about the ongoing changes in Russian thinking about the role of nuclear weapons, what would it be? Andrei, to start with you.

**[00:57:24] Speaker 4:** So I would say that when you read nuclear doctrine, you have to understand that conditions for nuclear use in nuclear doctrine do not mean that the country will use nuclear weapons if those conditions are met. It also doesn't mean that if those conditions are met, country will not use nuclear weapons. So then the question, like, why do we even have nuclear doctrines and why should we care about them? Nuclear doctrines is the best way we can understand the thinking of country about how it thinks about nuclear weapons and how it can consider using them. And especially if you look at them in development, if you read doctrine after doctrine after doctrine, you can see where the general sense about nuclear weapons in a certain country goes. And I think that's important. I think that's useful. And I think that's the right way to think about doctrines and analyze them instead of looking of is it a true doctrine and is there another doctrine beneath this doctrine. It's an important document, but that's it.

**[00:58:34] Speaker 1:** Lukasz, one minute.

**[00:58:36] Speaker 3:** Yeah, agreeing with Andrei, that the doctrinal documents are not holy scripture, but they provide a certain understanding of the thinking and also strategic assumptions. I think beyond that, Russia would have a major challenge of how to further adjust its nuclear doctrine to the situation in which it would have Ukraine as an opponent. But it would also have NATO, hopefully, with the United States on board, or a number of European countries which would develop also a range of conventional weapons that may have a strategic effect and may also contribute, have a deterrent function. So there's a number of challenges for the Russian nuclear doctrine to solve. So we should watch this space.

**[00:59:40] Speaker 2:** Kristen? Yeah, for me, I guess a general appeal to avoid mirror imaging as a perennial challenge, I guess, when it comes to nuclear deterrence and understanding nuclear strategies. As I indicated, I think that the lessons we and the Russians may be drawing from the Ukraine war may be different.

And I'm not sure it provides an instructive context for us to learn and continue to understand what we need to understand to avoid a nuclear confrontation with Russia in the future.

**[01:00:17] Speaker 1:** Thank you so much to all of you. Thanks to our audience. Ladies and gentlemen, we will now take a quick break. Please remain in the ballroom as our program will begin in five minutes.