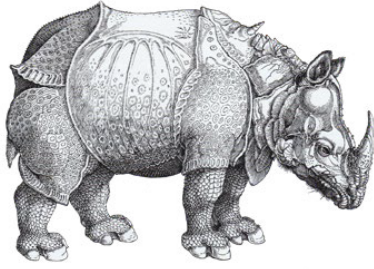


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SECURITY INDEX

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Retaliation Inevitable: Explaining the Updated Russian Nuclear Doctrine

Sergey Semenov

В целях обеспечения реализации государственной политики Российской Федерации в области ядерного сдерживания постановляю:

1. Утвердить прилагаемые Основы государственной политики Российской Федерации в области ядерного сдерживания.
2. Настоящий Указ вступает в силу со дня его подписания.



Президент
Российской Федерации В.Путин

Москва, Кремль
2 июня 2020 года
№ 355

On June 2nd President Putin signed an executive order, which approved the Basic Principles of State Policy of the Russian Federation on Nuclear Deterrence. Even without considering the contents of the "Basic Principles", it would not be an exaggeration to say that it is a development of major importance since it is the first time in Russian history that such a detailed nuclear policy planning document is released publicly. The previous version of the "Basic

Principles” was signed into force in 2010 together with the 2010 Military Doctrine and was classified, which enabled some American experts to speculate on the secret Russian nuclear policy being different from the official doctrine.

The present occasional paper seeks to provide a comprehensive analysis of the key provisions of the documents and put them into perspective.

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Key findings:

- **The “Basic Principles” are a step in the right direction since from now on the expert community has something to proceed from in the debate on the Russian nuclear policy.** The need for such a document codifying the guidelines for nuclear deterrence policy is clearly visible from the portion of the U.S. 2018 Nuclear Posture Review dealing with Russia. Since there was no detailed official nuclear doctrine, the room for misinterpretation was exploited (deliberately or not) by those sticking to the idea of Russian aggressiveness in the nuclear realm.
- **The advocates of the “escalate-to-deescalate” strategy will certainly regard this article as a corroboration of their claims.** The counterargument is the beginning of Article IV positing that “state policy on nuclear deterrence is defensive by nature... guarantees protection of national sovereignty and territorial integrity of the State”. In other words, Russia may indeed consider using nuclear weapons to deescalate the conflict, but only in case it was attacked first, and it is unable to preserve the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country with conventional means.
- Article XV lays forward the principles of nuclear deterrence – first and foremost compliance with international defense and arms control agreements. **It appears that this not just lip service to arms control – the Russian strategists firmly believe that deterrence benefits from predictability.** As one of former heads of the Russian Strategic Missile Forces Staff noted at a PIR Center event speaking of the possible demise of the New START Treaty, the military vividly remembers the hot days of the Cold War when an American pre-emptive strike was expected and does not want this experience to repeat.

- **The unclarities of the document might be mitigated through a series of briefings on the Russian deterrence policy (both nuclear and non-nuclear) as well as through the P-5 dialogue on nuclear doctrines.** Without a substantial discussion within the P-5 framework the document's contribution to the consolidation of strategic stability may be limited.

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About the Author



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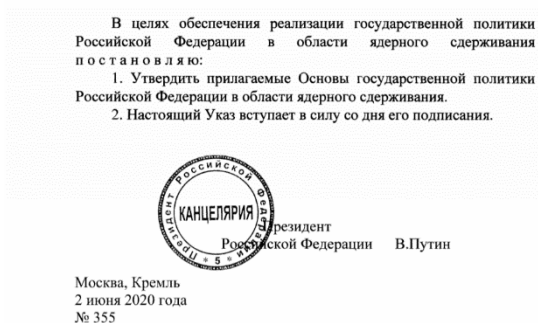
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On June 2nd President Putin signed an executive order, which approved the *Basic Principles of State Policy of the Russian Federation on Nuclear Deterrence*. Even without considering the contents of the “Basic Principles”, it would not be an exaggeration to say that it is a development of major importance since it is the first time in Russian history that such a detailed nuclear policy planning document is released publicly. The previous version of the “Basic

Principles” was signed into force in 2010 together with the 2010 Military Doctrine and was classified, which enabled some American experts to speculate on the secret Russian nuclear policy being different from the official doctrine.

The “Basic Principles” are a step in the right direction since from now on the expert community has something to proceed from in the debate on the Russian nuclear policy. The need for such a document codifying the guidelines for nuclear deterrence policy is clearly visible from the U.S. 2018 Nuclear Posture Review dealing with Russia. Since there was no detailed official nuclear doctrine, the room for misinterpretation was exploited (deliberately or not) by those sticking to the idea of Russian aggressiveness in the nuclear realm.

2018 Nuclear Posture Review on Russia:

“Russia’s belief that limited nuclear first use, potentially including low-yield weapons, can provide an advantage is based, in part, on Moscow’s perception that its greater number and variety of non-strategic nuclear systems provide a coercive advantage in crises and at lower levels of conflict.”

“Russia may also rely on threats of limited nuclear first use, or actual first use, to coerce us, our allies, and partners into terminating a conflict on terms favorable to Russia. Moscow apparently believes that the United States is unwilling to respond to Russian employment of tactical nuclear weapons with strategic nuclear weapons.”

The present article seeks to provide a comprehensive analysis of the key provisions of the documents and put them into perspective.

General provisions emphasize the defensive nature of Russian nuclear strategy

Article II of the “Basic Principles” stipulates that *“deterrence of aggression is ensured by the entire military strength of the Russian Federation, including its nuclear weapons”*. This claim is consistent with the 2014 Military Doctrine envisaging non-nuclear deterrence as a means of preventing armed conflict. Its main idea is to prevent aggression against the Russian Federation and/or its allies.

Article IV was the one that provoked a heated debate in the expert community. At the heart of the discussion is the provision that *“In the event of a military conflict, this Policy provides for the prevention of an escalation of military actions and their termination on conditions that are acceptable for the Russian Federation and/or its allies”*. The advocates of the “escalate-to-

deescalate” strategy will certainly regard this article as a corroboration of their claims. The counterargument is the beginning of Article IV positing that “*state policy on nuclear deterrence is defensive by nature... guarantees protection of national sovereignty and territorial integrity of the State*”. In other words, Russia may indeed consider using nuclear weapons to deescalate the conflict, but only in case it was attacked first, and it is unable to preserve the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country with conventional means.

In brief: escalate-to-deescalate

As discussed in the cited excerpts from the 2018 Nuclear Posture Review, the U.S. alleges that Russia would use nuclear weapons in offensive operations to force NATO to end an armed conflict on terms favorable to Russia if Moscow is losing conventional warfare. The assumption may be predicated on a 1999 article in “Voennaya Mysl” journal positing that the use of nuclear weapons in a heretofore conventional conflict could demonstrate credibility and convince the adversary to stand down for fear of further escalation[1] and mouthpieces by some Russian officials. However, nothing in the 2010 and 2014 Military Doctrine indicated that such a strategy has been adopted. To the contrary, no mention of the concept may mean that while indeed the issue was discussed in the military circles, the advocates of this approach have been outnumbered.

As Dmitri Trenin frames the issue[2], in order to put an end to hostilities Russia relies on the political heft of nuclear weapons rather than its actual use. The very idea of a limited nuclear war has always been alien to Russian strategic thinking as the ramifications of using a nuclear weapon near the Russian borders outweigh the benefits.

The view of nuclear weapons as an ultimate means of defense is reinforced by Article V. “*The Russian Federation considers nuclear weapons exclusively as a means of deterrence, their use being an extreme and compelled measure*”.

Retaliation inevitable: Russian perspective on the essence of nuclear deterrence

Article IX envisages that the objective of the Russian nuclear deterrence policy is to make a potential adversary comprehend that retaliation is inevitable and unacceptable damage will be inflicted on the aggressor under whatever circumstances. This is, indeed, an important statement as the emergence of new technologies enabling conventional offensive capabilities might lead to the impression that the Russian deterrent may be overwhelmed with conventional means. There is nothing more dangerous than such assumptions, as they can crystallize in war-mongering postures. It is good that the objective of the “Basic Principles” is to confront such overly optimistic assumptions.

Article XII specifies the main risks that are to be neutralized by nuclear deterrence. As defined by the 2014 Military Doctrine, military risk is inferior to a “military threat”, which is “*a state of international relations, characterized by a real possibility of a military conflict between the opposing sides, a high degree of readiness of any state (a group of states) to use military force*”. The risks outlined in the document discussed include:

- build-up of the conventional forces groupings that possess nuclear weapons delivery means in the territories of the states contiguous with the Russian Federation and its allies, as well as in adjacent waters;
- deployment by states which regard the Russian Federation as a potential adversary, of missile defense systems and intermediate- and shorter-range cruise and ballistic missiles,

- non-nuclear high-precision and hypersonic weapons, strike unmanned aerial vehicles, and directed energy weapons;
- development and deployment of missile defense assets and strike systems in outer space;
 - uncontrolled proliferation of nuclear weapons, their delivery means, technology and equipment for their manufacture;
 - deployment of nuclear weapons and their delivery means in the territories of non-nuclear weapon states, i.e. NATO nuclear sharing arrangements.

In brief: NATO nuclear sharing arrangements

In Europe, there are about 150 American B61 tactical nuclear bombs deployed at six sites located in five countries: Belgium, Germany, Italy (two air bases), the Netherlands, and Turkey. B61 is intended for delivery only by combat aircraft. During the Cold War, American medium-range ballistic missiles with nuclear warheads were also deployed in Europe. Such combat aircrafts as the American F-15, F-16, as well as the European PA-200 Tornado are capable of carrying B61 bombs on board. The responsibility for maintaining and protecting American nuclear bombs in Europe rests with the US Air Force. It always remains under US command and control. The United States is currently upgrading existing B61 bombs to the 12th modification. The main change is the modernization of the tail section of the bomb, turning the B61-12 into a high-precision weapon (accuracy reaches 30 meters), capable of being equipped with a warhead of lower yield and allowing pilots not to fly directly over the target, which can help avoid enemy air defense system.[3]

As a reflection of the failure to negotiate a moratorium on the deployment of the INF-banned missiles in Europe, Article XIV that *in implementing nuclear deterrence, the Russian Federation takes into account the deployment by a potential adversary, in the territories of other countries, of offensive weapons (cruise and ballistic missiles, hypersonic aerial vehicles, strike unmanned aerial vehicles), directed energy weapons, missile defense assets, early warning systems, nuclear weapons and/or other weapons of mass destruction that may be used against the Russian Federation and/or its allies.* This provision is to be interpreted as a caution to the Eastern European states against deploying destabilizing assets in their respective territories.

Article XV lays forward the principles of nuclear deterrence – first and foremost compliance with international defense and arms control agreements. It appears that this not just lip service to arms control – the Russian strategists firmly believe that deterrence benefits from predictability. As one of former heads of the Russian Strategic Missile Forces Staff noted at a PIR Center event speaking of the possible demise of the New START Treaty, the military vividly remembers the hot days of the Cold War when an American pre-emptive strike was expected and does not want this experience to repeat.

At the same time, the premium is placed on the unpredictability of magnitude, place, and timing of nuclear forces employment. Most likely, such opacity is predicated on a belief that if the threshold is crystal clear, the potential adversary might be tempted to think that everything which is not banned will not elicit a forceful response.

Another principle to highlight is the rationality of the structure and composition of the nuclear deterrent and its maintenance at the minimal level sufficient for implementing the tasks assigned. That further consolidates the Russian stance that the country will not get entangled into a new arms race with the United States or any other strategic competitor in the future. Attempt to “spend Russia into oblivion” will be countered asymmetrically.

Figure 1: Current Russian nuclear arsenal

Delivery system	Number of delivery systems	NW per delivery system, max.	NW total
RS-20 Voevoda	46	10	
UR-100NUTTKh	2 (30)	1/6 [4]	
RS-12M Topol (road-mobile)	45	1	
RS-12M2 Topol-M (silo-based)	60	1	
RS-12M1 Topol-M (road-mobile)	18	1	
RS-24 Yars (road-mobile)	135	4	
RS-24 Yars (silo-based)	14	4	
Total on ICBMs			810
RSM-50	16	7	
RSM-54 Sineva	96	4	
RSM-56 Bulava	64	10	
Total on SLBMs			560
Tu-95MS	21	16 air-launched cruise missiles	
Tu-95MSM	18	14 air-launched cruise missiles	
Tu-160	11	12 air-launched cruise missiles	
Total on HB			200

SNW total			1,426 (1570)
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Sources: New START Treaty Aggregate Numbers Fact Sheet, Bureau of Arms Control, Verification and Compliance, Department of State; U.S. Nuclear Forces 2020; Russian Nuclear Forces 2020; Russian Strategic Nuclear Arms; Yaroslav Vyatkin. Termination of the New START treaty: Who wins? Voyennoye Obozreniye.

Perhaps, the most novel part of the document is related to the conditions under which Russia will use nuclear weapons. Article XVII echoes the relevant clause of the 2014 Military Doctrine stipulating that nuclear weapons will be used as a response to a nuclear or WMD attack against Russia or its allies as well as to conventional aggression against the Russian Federation when the very existence of the state is in jeopardy. Article XIX provides more details as to the conditions for the nuclear option. Hence, arrival of reliable information from the early-warning system on a ballistic missile attack against Russia will be a premise for the use of nuclear weapons. The specific mention of ballistic missiles is important as it may be a caution against attempts to use conventional or low-yield warheads on strategic means of delivery. In this context, the use of W76-2 warhead mounted on Trident-II D5 SLBM will fail to curb the escalation of an armed conflict – just the contrary. Still, it remains unclear whether a massive launch of cruise missiles will elicit the same response.

In this regard to strengthen strategic stability, it is imperative to preserve some of the confidence-building mechanisms Russia and the U.S have in place today. Those include, but are not limited to the 1987 Agreement Between The United States of America and The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on the Establishment of Nuclear Risk Reduction Centers and the 1988 Ballistic Missile Launch Notification Agreement, Nuclear Threat Reduction Centers.

An attack by an adversary against critical governmental or military sites of the Russian Federation, disruption of which would undermine nuclear forces response actions is another new premise for the use of nuclear weapons. Although it is unclear from the “Basic Principles” what are the specific elements of this critical infrastructure, the 2014 Military Doctrine may give some insights to the thinking of Russian nuclear strategists. According to Article XIV (b) of the Doctrine, interference with the public and military C2 systems of the Russian Federation, its strategic nuclear forces, early-warning systems, space control systems, nuclear munitions storage facilities, nuclear energy, Atomic, chemical, pharmaceutical and medical industry and other potentially dangerous objects is a major military risk. This should be viewed as a sort of response to the American concept of “left-of launch interception” and plans of cyberwarfare against Russian nuclear facilities.

In brief: left-of -launch interception

Left-of-launch missile defense is a strategy enshrined in the 2017 National Defense Authorization Act envisaging that the U.S. should respond to the threat posed by increasingly complex adversarial missile systems with pre-emptive attacks against enemy missile infrastructure, including missile launchers, munitions depositories, and command and control infrastructure. Tactically, the strategy will rely heavily on cyber operations and electronic warfare as well as on big data and intelligence battlefield preparation capabilities are to be employed.[5]

Although the strategy is designed to counter primarily theatre-level threats, it cannot be excluded that it will also be applied to adversarial strategic nuclear forces. According to a

document[6] explaining the concept to the Congress, left-of-launch actions may be undertaken in the pre-conflict period and will require presidential approval.

Bottom line: P-5 Dialogue is more relevant than ever

Since the adoption of the previous edition of “The Basic Principles of State Policy of the Russian Federation on Nuclear Deterrence” accompanied the adoption of the Military Doctrine, it might be inferred that whereas the current Military Doctrine remains relevant, the Russian leadership thought that only the nuclear deterrence matters needed some clarification. This is understandable since the very architecture of arms control and strategic stability is in jeopardy and most probably it will be deterrence rather than arms control agreement that will shape the great power competition in the near term.

The public release of such a document should be applauded as now the nuclear policy community has something more veracious than separate mouthpieces, which can be interpreted to the disadvantage of Russia. Of particular significance is the enumeration of all relevant military risks, which should caution the European states against deploying destabilizing assets on their territory. The document’s making no mention of non-strategic or tactical nuclear weapons may mean that in the view of the Russian leadership every nuclear weapon is strategic.

The bad news in this regard is that there is still room for (mis)interpretation – especially regarding Article IV, which might be unable to disavow the “escalate-to-deescalate” narrative. This shortcoming might be mitigated through a series of briefings on the Russian deterrence policy (both nuclear and non-nuclear) as well as through the P-5 dialogue on nuclear doctrines. Without a substantial discussion within the P-5 framework the document’s contribution to the consolidation of strategic stability may be limited.

[1] Andrey Baklitskiy, Olga Olikier. The Nuclear Posture Review And Russian ‘De-Escalation:’ A Dangerous Solution To A Nonexistent Problem. War on the Rocks.
URL: <https://warontherocks.com/2018/02/nuclear-posture-review-russian-de-escalation-dangerous-solution-nonexistent-problem/>

[2] Dmitri Trenin. Decoding Russia’s Official Nuclear Deterrence Paper. Carnegie Moscow Center. URL: <https://carnegie.ru/commentary/81983>

[3] The section is the courtesy of Mr. Nikita Degtyarev, Information Program Coordinator, PIR Center

[4] Using only Avangard warheads / using MIRV warheads

[5] Current U.S. Missile Defense Programs at a Glance. Arms Control Association.
URL: <https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/usmissiledefense>

[6] Report to Congress. Declaratory Policy, Concept of Operations, and Employment Guidelines for Left-of-Launch Capability. Federation of American Scientists.
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