

National Institute for Deterrence Studies & Peter Huessy Seminar

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Abstract

The National Institute for Deterrence Studies (NIDS) hosted a Huessy Seminar titled “**Reflections on Russia’s Nuclear Behavior: Doctrine vs. Reality**,” featuring **Dr. Mark Schneider** and **Dr. Stephen Blank**, two leading experts on Russian nuclear strategy and global security. Moderated by **Peter Huessy**, the seminar provided a comprehensive examination of Russia’s accelerating nuclear modernization, its shifting deterrence doctrine, and the implications of these developments for U.S. and allied security.

Dr. Mark Schneider detailed Russia’s extensive strategic and non-strategic nuclear modernization programs, highlighting the deployment of new ICBMs, ballistic missile submarines, and bomber upgrades, coupled with an arsenal that may far exceed publicly cited estimates. He underscored Russia’s asymmetric buildup relative to the United States, the potential erosion of verification due to the collapse of New START inspections, and the growing combined threat presented by parallel Chinese nuclear expansion.

Dr. Stephen Blank explored Russia’s motivations for maintaining and expanding its nuclear forces, emphasizing the country’s enduring belief in nuclear weapons as central to its great-power identity, coercive diplomacy, and ability to control escalation in conventional conflicts. He examined how Moscow uses nuclear signaling to intimidate regional states, deter Western involvement in Ukraine, and reinforce partnerships with China, North Korea, and Iran. Blank further discussed Russia’s violations of nonproliferation norms and its global power-projection ambitions, including efforts to extend nuclear-capable assets abroad.

Together, the speakers illuminated how Russia’s doctrine blends deterrence, coercion, and intimidation; how its nuclear threats in the Ukraine conflict fit into longstanding strategic patterns; and why the United States and its allies face increasing uncertainty—and risk—in an evolving multipolar nuclear environment. The seminar concluded with a discussion of future deterrence requirements and the necessity for renewed U.S. modernization and strategic clarity

Executive Summary

The National Institute for Deterrence Studies hosted a seminar examining Russia’s nuclear modernization, strategic doctrine, and international conduct amid the ongoing war in Ukraine and the erosion of arms-control frameworks.

Dr. Mark Schneider detailed Russia’s extensive nuclear buildup, noting that Moscow claims **92% modernization** of its forces—including new ICBMs, ballistic-missile submarines, and upgraded long-range bombers. He emphasized that Russia’s non-strategic arsenal may number **5,000–10,000 warheads**, far surpassing U.S. estimates, and that the suspension of New START inspections has created significant uncertainty about Russia’s deployed strategic weapons. Schneider argued that Russia’s continuous modernization, combined with China’s rapid expansion, poses growing challenges for U.S. deterrence planning.

Dr. Stephen Blank explained the ideological and strategic drivers behind Russia’s nuclear posture. He described Russia’s worldview as rooted in permanent confrontation with the West and a belief that nuclear weapons are essential to its status as a great power. Blank highlighted how Moscow uses nuclear threats for **coercion, intimidation, and escalation control**, especially in the Ukraine conflict. He also outlined Russia’s expanding military alignment with China, North Korea, and Iran, noting that these partnerships magnify global security risks.

Both speakers stressed that Russia’s nuclear signaling is not merely rhetorical but grounded in doctrine. While nuclear use in Ukraine remains unlikely, the risk is shaped by geopolitical factors including China’s opposition and U.S. deterrent messaging. The seminar concluded that the United States faces a more complex, multipolar nuclear environment and must accelerate modernization, strengthen intelligence, and reinforce deterrence for both European and Indo-Pacific theaters.

Unabridged Transcript

(Note: there will invariably be some word errors in the following AI generated transcript.)

00:00;10:00 - 00:00;40:03
Kimberly Cherington

Welcome, everyone. Good morning. I'm Kimberly Cherington, and on behalf of the National Institute for Deterrence Studies, or NIDS. It's my pleasure to welcome you to today's Huessy Seminar, which is *Reflections on Russia's Nuclear Behavior Doctrine versus reality with Mr. Steven Blank and Doctor Mark Schneider*, both highly regarded nuclear deterrence experts frequently published testifying and speaking on Russian and global Nuclear security.

00:00:40:05 - 00:01:06:22

Kimberly Cherington

If you'd like to explore more of our work here at Nids for upcoming events, publications, reports, the research that we do our podcast, please visit us at Thinkdeterrence.com. We're adding new speakers in content weekly, so be sure to check back often and follow us on social media to stay informed. If you and your colleagues would like to receive future invitations, right to your inbox, just email us at nids@Thinkdeterrence.com and we'll get you on our invite list. Throughout today's presentation, we encourage you to submit your questions in the chat or the Q&A button at the top of your screen. We will address these during the dedicated Q&A portion of our seminar. Now I'm pleased to introduce our host for today's seminar, Mr. Peter Huessy, President of Geo Strategic Analysis and a senior fellow here at NIDS.

00:01:34:25 - 00:01:37:07

Kimberly Cherington

Peter, over to you.

00:01:37:09 - 00:02:16:23

Peter Huessy

Thank you, Kimberly, and I want to welcome our two speakers, Mark Schneider and Steve Blank. I'm going to start I'm going to introduce them a little bit. Steve is a nonresident senior fellow with the Foreign Policy Research Institute, and he went to before that, he went the American Foreign Policy Council from the U.S. Army War College, where he had spent 24 years between 1989 and 2013 as a professor of national security studies at the Strategic Studies Institute of the U.S. Army War College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, which is where I met, Mark Schneider is a senior analyst with the National Institute for Public Policy.

00:02:16:25 - 00:02:44:28

Peter Huessy

He joined the staff of the institute in September 2004, and he was providing onsite support to the Defense Policy Analysis Office of the DLR. He specializes in nuclear weapons and nuclear deterrence, missile defense policy, strategic forces and arms control and arms control, verification and compliance issues. He will lead us off today with a overview of Russian strategic and tactical nuclear weapons.

00:02:45:00 - 00:03:15:05

Peter Huessy

And he is, I think, the person in this country that does this better than anybody. And it's an extraordinary

kind of view of what Russia has and what they're building. And Steve then is going to talk to us about Russian behavior. How do these nuclear weapons impact, Russian behavior? Why do they build these things? And so, Mark, I want to welcome you all, longtime contributor to this series, I think probably well over 20 years.

00;03;15;08 - 00;03;20;13

Peter Huessy

But anyway, it's wonderful to see you. Thank you for joining us. And over to you, sir.

00;03;20;15 - 00;04;05;03

Mark Schneider

Thank you. Today I'm going to talk about, Russian, nuclear modernization and how it fits into the, overall, Russian, nuclear deterrent capabilities. Russia clearly, is certainly. And until the, beginning of the war of aggression against Ukraine, nuclear weapons were clearly Russia's highest military priority. And they remain one of its, central pri, priorities, even today, in, December of last year, Putin, indicated that Russia had, modernized, 92% of its, nuclear forces.

00;04;05;03 - 00;04;36;21

Mark Schneider

Now, the comparable U.S number is, since the end of 1997, which was the tail end of the Cold War program is literally zero. So we're dealing with an enormous asymmetry, in modernization, we are still years away, from the first new U.S. strategic, nuclear system, the B-21 bomber, and, that's, a enormous disparity.

00;04;36;24 - 00;05;13;02

Mark Schneider

Right now, Russia is under enormous fiscal constraints, and it's affected everything. They're doing, including, to some degree, nuclear modernization. According to, Russia's defense minister, 70% of current Russian defense spending goes, to the, or, cost of the war against Ukraine and that the non, Russian, non war, parts of of the Russian defense budget, are now only 2.2% of the GNP.

00;05;13;04 - 00;05;43;09

Mark Schneider

This is likely to change drastically, after, the end of the Ukraine war. Our sources on, Russian nuclear, modernization, nuclear weapons capability, unfortunately, are now largely the, Russian Defense Ministry and, and, the Russian press, in particular, the Russian state media. Because, the, there's less and less, press freedom in Russia today.

00;05;43;12 - 00;06;17;00

Mark Schneider

And it's, that's been going on, since the beginning of the Putin era, since, the, 1990s, the U.S government has provided us extensively with very little information about, Russian, nuclear, forces. Since, the end of

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the Cold War, there has literally been only a single Defense Intelligence Agency report on Russian military power.

00;06;17;05 - 00;06;48;03

Mark Schneider

That was in 2017. There have there's been no unclassified reports out of the, Central Intelligence Agency. Director of, National intelligence or or yet is one, statement, it's a global assessment that it says, for the last decade, probably, that Russia has the largest and most diverse, nuclear capability in the world, which is certainly true.

00;06;48;10 - 00;07;16;24

Mark Schneider

The problem is you need a lot more information than that to make any serious assessment of U.S, nuclear deterrence requirements. Russia is continuing the nuclear modernization. 88% of the Russian ICBM force has been modernized. They've completed, the deployment of their mobile RS24 yars. We call it the SS 27 MOD2 ICBM.

00;07;16;24 - 00;07;46;23

Mark Schneider

They are still deploying them, including in 2025, in Russian silos. That's likely to go to go on, for a number of years. Russian, nuclear modernization is literally, never ending. When a new system becomes operational, they're already under way, either with an improved version of it or a, new, follow on system, for it.

00;07;46;28 - 00;08;19;13

Mark Schneider

That's completely different from what goes on, in the West. Russia had planned in 2025 to declare the, Sarmat operational, after a successful launch, that which, which we're very fortunate for us and unfortunately, that happened in November. The missile blew up within a few seconds of, launch. And that's after a, another sample exploded in its, silo, the year before.

00;08;19;20 - 00;08;44;28

Mark Schneider

So they've obviously got a significant, very significant quality control problem with the missile. This should not be happening. And, eventually... I don't think Putin will give up on it. It's too central to his, nuclear intimidation and nuclear warfighting strategies. So he'll continue it if they get it operational, which I assume they will eventually do.

00;08;45;05 - 00;09;23;25

Mark Schneider

It will be the most, powerful, ICBM in the world. It's got a 10,000, kilogram, throw weight, which, is, about 9 or 10 times greater than the U.S, Minuteman, according to the Russian Defense Ministry, carry it

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can carry 20 nuclear warheads. U.S. ICBMs are now deployed, with.... So, the Russians, have under development, a number of ICBMs, that, go beyond, the Sarmat. There's a follow on, to the, Rs24 yars, which they call the Kedr. It's exact status right now is unclear. Other than that the reports are that the program's, is continuing. They have another, improved version of the, Rs 24 called the Ocena. We don't know, much about it other than, it's, presumably better than, the, Rs 24, version, the, called the it's called the S version, which, has much higher yield warheads than the first version of it.

00;10;08;22 - 00;10;42;09

Mark Schneider

They're continuing the modernization, program, for the, for a, class Bulava ballistic missile submarine, which carries the label of, which, like the yars, is a very highly merv missile system in 2025 the eighth an announced, program of 12 and a reported program of 14 Bulava became operational.

00;10;42;10 - 00;11;12;24

Mark Schneider

The two more will be, according to the Russians, will be operational in 2028. Apparently due to the Ukraine war costs, they haven't started, on the construction of submarines beyond number ten. That I think will certainly change, after the Ukraine war Ends.

00;11;12;26 - 00;11;39;21

Mark Schneider

The Russians have been modernizing their, their bomber force, consistently since the end of the Cold War. And they've been multiple modernization programs. A few years ago, they announced, the, that they would be pursuing a new version, a very upgraded version of the T-1 60 supersonic bomber.

00;11;39;23 - 00;12;20;09

Mark Schneider

They began to deploy this, they announced in December that two new T160s had joined the, the, bomber force. A year before they said they were going to add four. So this, I think, is a direct result of, Ukraine war costs. So, we, we are in a situation I think very fortunate for us and unfortunate for them is that the Ukrainians launched a, a, very successful, drone attack.

00;12;20;11 - 00;12;54;01

Mark Schneider

Which was launched by not, not the normal drone type of a but by the Special Forces. And they eliminated at least, 11. Russian, strategic bombers. Some sources report, as many as several more. We don't know exactly because, so, overhead, you know, commercial satellite, photography, won't, won't show you the level detail necessary to determine which additional bombers had been damaged by the, attack.

00;12;54;03 - 00;13;24;08

Mark Schneider

So, they are continuing the bomber modernization program with the... It's their first stealth bomber. It, has, it's a basically a B-2 type, like, flying wing design. And it will be heavily armed with multiple types of standoff missiles when it's, it hasn't flown yet. And it probably won't, fly for another, several years.

00;13;24;08 - 00;14;00;02

Mark Schneider

I think they're going to go ahead with it and, and eventually deploy it. But it's, I think, clearly in the, the, 2030s. The Russians have diverted enormous resources to the production of theater nuclear capable theater missile systems. Right now, these are being exhausted very soon after their, their production against Ukraine.

00;14;00;04 - 00;14;32;11

Mark Schneider

When the war ends, I suspect you're going to see a surge in these advanced types of Russian, non-strategic, nuclear systems. At a minimum, the Russians have about a order of magnitude or a factor of ten advantage in non strategic nuclear weapons, but, almost all Russian sources say that it's much larger than that.

00;14;32;17 - 00;15;02;12

Mark Schneider

That it's not 2000 as the U.S government has said, but, the, closer to either five or even 10,000, non-strategic nuclear weapons. Now the question of how many overall nuclear weapons the Russians have is a very important one for you, for the configuration, the size necessary for U.S. strategic forces.

00;15;02;12 - 00;15;34;01

Mark Schneider

We now face a major threat from, Russia. We face, for the first time, two, either peer or or near peer threats, because the Chinese are massively expanding their nuclear capability. The last official U.S government estimate on the total size of the U.S of the, Russian, nuclear arsenal literally dates from 2011.

00;15;34;01 - 00;16;12;16

Mark Schneider

We have had no, update on the bottom line number since that time. The American media and probably the global media believe that the Federation of American, scientists, analysis, is authoritative...the guide to how many nuclear weapons, the Russians have. Unfortunately, it is not, if you read in detail, the documentation for literally dozens and dozens of numbers they put it in the report you will find that there isn't any.

00;16;12;22 - 00;16;40;29

Mark Schneider

And, I don't believe that literally any, open source evidence of of almost all their numbers, exists. So, yeah, it's based a lot on speculation. In 2023, I did an occasional paper on that. I believe that they

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substantially understate the overall, Russian, nuclear threat, that it could easily be 2 or 3 times greater numbers indicate.

00;16;41;02 - 00;17;18;00

Mark Schneider

There's a lot of, Russian sources which say that that is, the case. So, we're facing a major decision in February. The New Start Treaty expires on on the fifth of February. The Russians have been in violation of the treaty since 2022.

00;17;18;02 - 00;18;04;24

Mark Schneider

In 2023, they announced that they had quote suspended the the treaty which, by the way, is a legally there are a number of State Department reports documenting this that are available on the State Department, website. These are all Biden administration reports, the, certainly. We have a situation where there's a real possibility that Russian strategic nuclear forces have been highly uploaded since March 2020.

00;18;04;26 - 00;18;28;13

Mark Schneider

In that was the last, New Start Treaty inspection and the whole New Start treaty verification regime, such as it is and had a lot of inadequacies but it was, based almost entirely on onsite inspections to count the number of weapons that were deployed on ten Russian missiles a year.

00;18;28;15 - 00;19;02;29

Mark Schneider

This hasn't happened until 2020. Now, what this means is, we certainly don't have any high confidence right now on the number of, of Russian nuclear weapon, are deployed beyond what's allowed the 1550 that was allowed under the New Start treaty. At best, we have I would say moderate confidence.

00;19;03;01 - 00;19;44;05

Mark Schneider

Maximum capabilities that can be out there right now. I, I say moderate because there is a real possibility that the Russia maintains a covert force of mobile ICBMs. The size of it could be up to 100 missiles. The commander of the Russian strategic missile, force, General Kyiv, on at least, six different occasions, said they had 400, he had 400 missiles in his force.

00;19;44;05 - 00;20;26;02

Mark Schneider

Problem is under declared Russia numbers, under the New Start treaty, and that ended in 2022, the maximum we can have just over 300. So, I and on another occasion, he made a statement which apply, which implied that Russia had over 3000 deployed strategic nuclear weapons. And that's, certainly possible today. And, unfortunately, while there's a lot of uncertainty, almost 100% of it is on the, on the

other side, so, we, we face, two, potential very serious threats.

00;20;26;02 - 00;21;05;03

Mark Schneider

One is the unquestionably the, the the Russian strategic nuclear force is substantially, or larger than ours, and the, non-strategic is, at least, ten times greater. And I my guess is more like 25 times greater. But, we, we have a, a force which is literally ancient. The U.S ICBM, the Minuteman, literally dates from 1970 and hasn't been significantly improved since that time.

00;21;05;05 - 00;21;41;21

Mark Schneider

The, the Trident missile on our...submarines the Trident D5 dates from 1990. And they're, you know, the modernization of it is scheduled for the 2040s. So, we are way behind, the requirement in that, I mean, the best case is, on the bombers, where we're probably only a few years away from the B-21 becoming operational, which would be a significant improvement.

00;21;41;21 - 00;22;20;11

Mark Schneider

But even then, it would have the nuclear standoff missile until after 2030. So, we're still in a fairly bad situation. And this would be made much worse if the New Start treaty was extended illegally, by the way. Without the verification regime. So, we are in a position where we have to make some serious decisions in the last months of the Biden administration.

00;22;20;13 - 00;22;53;09

Mark Schneider

It's stated that, the U.S may have to increase the number of its strategic nuclear weapons, which went against everything it had previously said, bleed. So there's got to be a reason for that. And I think it's a lot of what I said, about the Russian capability, when you put it in context of, of the massive expansion of Chinese nuclear capability, which is underway right now, and it's going to continue, I think essentially forever.

00;22;53;11 - 00;22;56;01

Mark Schneider

Thank you.

00;22;56;03 - 00;23;37;02

Steve Blank

Thank you for, inviting me to speak today. I find the several motives why Russia is building nuclear weapons, what they hope to achieve by that. And, then we can get into actions, manifestations of their behavior, particularly since the war in Ukraine began. First of all, Russian security and defense policy begins with what the German political philosopher, Carl Smith, called the presupposition of conflict, the Russian starting point in all these discussions that that it has at home among its security leaders, that

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everybody's out to get us permanently.

00;23;37;04 - 00;24;22;12

Steve Blank

We are permanently under threat. What's more. Russia is and always will be a great power. That is an empire. And if it's not an empire, it's nothing. It's the object of other powers. It will probably be broken up. So in other words, if for Russia to retain its territorial expanse, which is enormous and it's probably the largest country in the world that way, it has to be an empire, and an empire has to keep growing because it's a principle of Russian statecraft.

00;24;22;12 - 00;24;53;10

Steve Blank

Since the czars that that which teaches the grow starts the rot. Or as Catherine the Great said, that I have no way to defend my frontiers other than to expand them. Now, given that presupposition of conflict and the obsession, and that's not too strong a word with empire and great power status, the nuclear weapon is the only to the Russian leadership.

00;24;53;12 - 00;25;32;01

Steve Blank

The belief and it enforces. To as a great power and equal. In this case, to both the United States and now China. And you will see that there's an, equal obsession in Russian diplomacy and rhetoric. Propaganda and in nuclear programs to build in order to be equal to what the United States has, which Trump in his memoirs, used to complain that the defense and defense industry would come to him and say, come at his job.

00;25;32;04 - 00;26;22;16

Steve Blank

We have to have what the Americans have, regardless of whether it was justified or not, and they would insist on it and fight for it. And given the power of the defense industrial lobby and the defense lobby and Russian politics, more often than not, they get what they want. Furthermore, if you talk about the nuclear relationship with the United States, and I wrote this years back when I was with the Army, the Russian government believes that it is necessary, and this was my word to be to shackle the United States, to Russia so that the United States could not act unilaterally, and that they were both involved in the mutual assured destruction or bad regime,

00;26;22;18 - 00;27;22;15

Steve Blank

lest the United States have the capability to act unilaterally abroad. Russia would then be defeated. And because it cannot keep up with the United States technologically or any other way for that matter, and as a result, it would be forced to surrender. So it believes in the great power competition. Now, beyond that, the Russian government also believes that nuclear weapons allow it to intimidate the states that a threat might be Iran, its border, and it uses nuclear weapons as a weapon, as an instrument of intimidation,

whereas the fundamental military purpose of nuclear weapons is to deter against conventional attack.

00;27;22;17 - 00;27;51;03

Steve Blank

The Russian concept of deterrence entails coercion. It's not the same as the American concept. There's a lot of good literature on this by people like to me, to meet you, Adam Ski, Kristen Van Bruce, God, and so on, which makes this point that Russian deterrence contains within it large elements of coercion and compel us.

00;27;51;05 - 00;28;19;18

Steve Blank

Furthermore, and we need to understand this because there's an awful lot of mirror imaging that goes on in American discussions of nuclear weapons. American governments and the arms control community believe that the only the only purpose of nuclear weapons is to deter other nuclear weapons. This is not what the Russian government believes, and I think it's fundamentally untrue.

00;28;19;18 - 00;29;09;20

Steve Blank

The purpose of nuclear weapons is to deter conventionally superior states from threatening, not to mention attacking Russia. And one of the reasons there are several why we see the nuclear threat being periodically trotted out in Ukraine is because of Moscow's abiding fear that Ukraine will a join NATO, or that NATO troops will now come to Ukraine. And just yesterday, Lavrov opposed any European forces in Ukraine again, and that those forces will challenge Russia and that therefore the nuclear weapon is brought out as a threat, that if you do this, we are liable to escalate.

00;29;09;20 - 00;29;53;25

Steve Blank

And remember, we have nuclear weapons and we have seen the Russians escalating this way in the war with Ukraine by using so-called hypersonic or dual capable missiles. Most recently, the arrest last year, which is a dual capable hypersonic weapon. It's also a violation of both the IAF and Start treaties. As Mark has pointed out in his work and the Kh-47 Kinzhal, which is also a hypersonic naval based weapon that is trotted out in order to remind people that we have a nuclear weapon at will, we might use it, and we get people who get up there and say that Russia ought to launch a nuclear weapon against Europe in order to sober up the Europeans.

00;29;53;25 - 00;30;20;13

Steve Blank

That's their term. So the nuclear weapon is a weapon of intimidation. It is a weapon of deterrence which entails as well coercion. And it is an instrument by which Russia retains escalation dominance in large scale continental work, conventional was like Ukraine from the beginning of the operation against Ukraine in February 22nd. Putin has gotten up there to that.

00:30;20;13 - 00:30;42;28

Steve Blank

If anybody thinks of intervening in Ukraine, we have nuclear weapons. Now, all the red lines that the Russians have stated since February 22nd have been crossed with impunity, except for the provision of troops to Ukraine.

00:30;43;00 - 00:31;07;26

Steve Blank

At present, we are debating giving the Ukrainians Tomahawk missiles and the Russians have again come out with the usual complaints. But the fact of the matter is that even though we get, the Russians are making these, threats and charges with the nuclear weapon, then the provision of the Tomahawks is not likely to lead Russia to attack with a nuclear weapon in Ukraine for several reasons.

00:31;07;27 - 00:31;33;22

Steve Blank

First of all, there is no military utility to using a nuclear weapon in Ukraine. Experiments going back to Soviet times showed that Russian troops cannot advance through a nuclear or radioactive environment. It's simply not possible. Second, once you use the nuclear weapon, you can't call it back. And then we're in a world war and a world which is completely unpredictable.

00:31;33;24 - 00:32;00;19

Steve Blank

That doesn't suit the Russians any more than it suits anybody else. But it opens the way towards massive retaliation, whether conventional or nuclear, by the West. The Russians are mindful of the fact that we have as many nuclear weapons that we could use and conventional superiority as they can. And what's more, that if they go first, the gloves can well be coming off.

00:32;00;22 - 00:32;38;27

Steve Blank

So I think a lot of these threats are for purposes of intimidation, deterrence, as the Russians understand the term that as we go and third, to dominate the escalation ladder to control it so that the Russian army can fight a conventional war on a large scale in Europe or in Eurasia. Without having to worry about NATO or American or some form of Western intervention in that war, whether it's Ukraine or elsewhere, and they are worried about this.

00:32;38;27 - 00:33;16;21

Steve Blank

I can give you an example. At the end of May 2021, at the beginning of 22, as they were gearing up for the war in Ukraine, Russia basically said its Northern fleet and its Mediterranean fleet and its air force is based in at his Black Sea Fleet, an air force based in southern Russia, to do exercises in the North Atlantic and in the Mediterranean in order to interdict U.S. communication lines with Europe and to threaten NATO or the American forces in the North Atlantic and Mediterranean against retaliating to Russia for

some reason.

00;33;16;23 - 00;33;48;20

Steve Blank

And I'm not going to get into speculation as to why nothing was reported about those, exercises, whether they are a matter of public record, but their intention is quite clear. So two more recently is up to 2025, which clearly had a nuclear dimension to it. And, since the Arctic is in vogue these days, the Arctic, of course, is the headquarters for Russia's second strike.

00;33;48;20 - 00;34;11;26

Steve Blank

It's its borders, which are located up in, Arctic Russia at the at the base in coal up also have the mission, if that serves, sailing out into the high North and the North Atlantic in order to threaten both Europe and or the United States. Finally.

00;34;11;29 - 00;34;34;19

Steve Blank

Another reason for building nuclear weapons is because it provides the image of Russia as a great power to credible, credulous audiences. In the Third world, which is a very important theater for Moscow, Africa, Latin America and Asia. And it impresses audiences there who are subjected to a great deal of Russian information warfare with the fact that Russia is a great power.

00;34;34;19 - 00;35;08;09

Steve Blank

Well, so Moscow believes if they were not a nuclear power, that they would not, in their estimation, be able to pose as such because they have nothing else to offer. In most cases, to these audiences who, benefit much more from what China could give them, because China is a truly great economic power. So we have numerous reasons for Russian investment and utilization of nuclear weapons and threats.

00;35;08;12 - 00;35;35;17

Steve Blank

Now, their behavior is one that, as I've mentioned, has been one of consistent threat and attempts to use nuclear weapons for purposes of coercion, deterrence and intimidation in regard to the war in Ukraine. It is also now violating the Nonproliferation Treaty. For the first time in 60 years, Russia has moved nuclear weapons to a third party, i.e. Belarus.

00;35;35;20 - 00;36;15;29

Steve Blank

It is basically taking over Belarus. The arresting missiles are located in belt in Belarus, especially to protect Belarus, but basically to threaten not only Ukraine but Germany, Poland, the Baltic states, Finland and Sweden. The Baltic Sea, the NATO navies in the Baltic Sea. Russia is also clearly assisting North Korea. There were reports a couple of years ago about North Korean government receiving satellite

assistance from Russia.

00:36:16:01 - 00:37:00:21

Steve Blank

There are new reports about Russia sending nuclear reactors for submarines to North Korea, which is building a nuclear capable submarine force. And. There are also reports of Russian assistance for Iran. There's an unverified report that Russia helped Iran test an ICBM last week. But since nobody else has reported that, it's probably not likely, but nevertheless, it's very clear that Russia is violating the Nonproliferation Treaty quite openly, certainly in regards to North Korea, if not elsewhere.

00:37:00:24 - 00:37:50:19

Steve Blank

Furthermore, Russia is building with China an early warning system to defend against American missiles. Is clearly a missile defense component. And the Russian assistance to the Chinese military continues at a conventional level as well, where the Russians are helping to train amphibious forces for an operation clearly designated against Taiwan. So we see here a large portfolio of Russian construction threat and deployment of military and of nuclear weapons for multiple purposes.

00:37:50:22 - 00:38:25:24

Steve Blank

These construction and deployment protocols are going to continue, particularly as the, new Start treaty will be history. As of February 5th, there will be no way to constrain Russia from building anything in the nuclear field or to verify what it's doing other than what we call national technical means. That is basically intelligence, capabilities that we have, that the Russians have vis-a-vis on nuclear deployments.

00:38:25:26 - 00:39:10:13

Steve Blank

Therefore, everybody will be able to do what he wants without anybody poking around and seeing what that is. Very dangerous situation. Furthermore, any conclusion Russian power projection abroad also has a nuclear dimension. If you have followed the news about Russia and Sudan once again, the Russians have concluded an agreement to deploy nuclear capable nuclear powered ships, which means slabs, said that, Russian nuclear powered submarines with a nuclear capability at the base in Port Sudan.

00:39:10:15 - 00:39:40:13

Steve Blank

Now, Sudan is in the middle of a civil war, and it's not clear that the Russians will ever be able to actually do this. But that clearly is a marker of their intentions, so that they could use their power projection capabilities at sea, again, to threaten NATO in the Mediterranean. And Western naval forces in the Indian Ocean and deter them from taking up positions there to strike at Russia or at Russian allies.

00:39:40:15 - 00:40:05:14

Steve Blank

So we see a comprehensive use of nuclear weapons by the Russians in order to achieve a great many strategic and geopolitical goals. None of this is going to change until and unless either the system breaks down and is transformed, or at the very least, that they are defeated. In Ukraine. Thank you.

00;40;05;16 - 00;40;35;00

Peter Huessy

Thank you. Stephen, I appreciate your remarks very much. Before we have any questions, I just want to acknowledge some of our friends who are joining us today, including Don Cook, formerly within NSA, and Eric Nelson, who was with Grumman, retired General Fritz Doss, who's one of our friends and supporters, and also, Jim Howe, who's done extraordinary work, particularly on Russian development of battlefield, highly accurate, nuclear weapons.

00;40;35;03 - 00;41;00;28

Peter Huessy

And also Ambassador Courtney is here, among others. And Steve Fedor, I think, from the University of Maryland. Thank you all for joining us. I have a question for Mark that, Steve's addressed a little bit. And that is, do you think the Russian threats to use, nuclear weapons in the European theater are just bluff and it can be safely ignored?

00;41;01;01 - 00;41;49;26

Mark Schneider

They're certainly not bluff. They're an important, actually essential, element of Russian military doctrine. The obviously, there's a lot of deterrence to nuclear first-use because you know, the it could result in a massive nuclear exchange and destruction of, of civilization on a continental level. However, the whole Putin doctrine from the very beginning and this goes back to the 1990s relates to the idea that they can use nuclear weapons, and the West will not respond with nuclear weapons.

00;41;49;29 - 00;42;26;12

Mark Schneider

Now, that's a very dangerous assumption to make, because if you're wrong, some day a things could happen to you in response. But, it's unquestionably the the basic idea, I mean, is enormous literature, Russian military literature, on this, on this subject and this is the basic idea behind there and, you know, quite frankly, there, there are a lot of people inside the, the Beltway, that would, you know, fall on their sword to prevent nuclear retaliation against a Russian nuclear attack.

00;42;26;12 - 00;43;07;18

Mark Schneider

So it's not completely idiotic. It's just dangerous. So this needs to be deterred. The the temptation to use nuclear weapons relates to the fact that the Russians have so many types of nuclear weapons. I mean, dozens and dozens of types of non-strategic nuclear weapons that we or our allies don't have at all. So, I mean, Putin, once stated, that he's not afraid of a Western reaction because he can terminate it with a

smile.

00:43:07:21 - 00:43:32:19

Mark Schneider

And by that he, he means making, some, some conciliatory statement. And he's probably right about that. But the problem is that if he's wrong about it, he could blow up the world. So this guy's got to be deterred. And, yeah, the requirements for deterrence are not what would, deter an inside the the Beltway liberal.

00:43:32:19 - 00:43:46:20

Mark Schneider

But what would deter, the, the Russian, you know, military and, and national security, establishment, which are likely to be very different.

00:43:46:22 - 00:44:11:05

Peter Huessy

My next question has to do with a question from the chat is that what are the strategic implications of, Russian military cooperation with China, particularly with the Chinese, the Chinese military, which, Steve, you alluded to because recently I think there was a Chinese and Russian bombers who were flying together, somewhere over the western Pacific near American territory in Alaska.

00:44:11:05 - 00:44:25:05

Peter Huessy

So I'm curious, what your sense of the implications of this is this just, to to, friendly countries, trying to intimidate others or is this something more serious now?

00:44:25:05 - 00:44:45:06

Steve Blank

It's much more serious than that. Actually, I I'm going to be writing about this, for a book that on Russia, Chinese relations. I, I suspect your, the question is, has to do with, exercises near Alaska, but they also were recently flying to Japan. That may be the, the other case.

00:44:45:06 - 00:44:47:12

Peter Huessy

Yes.

00:44:47:14 - 00:45:20:29

Steve Blank

First of all, both sides need each other militarily. Russia needs an alliance. Well, at least good relations with China in order to protect its Asian, boundaries. Territories which border with China, because otherwise, there's no defense, basically, other than nukes. And they don't want to have to go there. China needs Russia to win in Ukraine, because if Russia does not win in Ukraine, then the full force of Western

attention in China is view will be directed against China.

00:45:21:07 - 00:45:53:06

Steve Blank

That's what the Chinese foreign minister said six months ago to a European audience. Russian war in Ukraine could not take place without Chinese assistance. In the Biden administration, Secretary State Blinken estimated that I think that 80% of Russian components for a lot of weapons were coming from China. We know that, China is the biggest buyer of Russian energy.

00:45:53:09 - 00:46:14:20

Steve Blank

China is financing the war. They're also buying Russian bonds, which is a way of lending money to Russia. And that's a quite a recent development as well. So there's that. Previously, there was a lot of Russian technology transfer to China by hook or by crook. A lot of it, like, may have been stolen as well.

00:46:14:23 - 00:46:38:12

Steve Blank

The. Russian military is educating Chinese officers. The, Russian military, as I said, is training Chinese amphibious forces for the Taiwan operation. They're building an early warning missile defense system for China. They are now both supporting North Korea.

00:46:38:15 - 00:47:05:10

Steve Blank

Russia actually has a treaty of alliance with North Korea that obliges it to come to North Korea's defense if its government decides to do so and North Korea is attacked and they are threatening Alaska in the Arctic. I happened to his Senator Markowski speak yesterday about this, and she was quite direct about that threat. It's not just in Europe with Greenland.

00:47:05:10 - 00:47:48:01

Steve Blank

It's actually probably more intense. Threat to Alaska in the Pacific. They are threatening South Korea, Japan and our allies in Southeast Asia, for example, the Philippines, China is clearly threatening India. Russia obviously is connected to India, but the Indians, feel that they're obliged to make a rapprochement with China. So as a result, the Russell Chinese Alliance, which is what I think it is, although it's not an alliance like NATO, it's the de facto.

00:47:48:01 - 00:48:22:00

Steve Blank

It is, I believe it is, a major source of threat to both Asian and European countries. The Chinese cooperated in cutting cables of ships in the Baltic Sea in late 2024. They are clearly supporting the Russian war effort against, Europe and, they are also collaborating with Russia in rehearsal for potential

operations in Asia and the Asia Pacific.

00:48:22:02 - 00:48:29:00

Steve Blank

So, in a nutshell, that's the, significance of this relationship.

00:48:29:03 - 00:48:52:05

Peter Huessy

Let me, follow that up with that. I'd like to have Mark comment, but would you both also address this? As you know, in my weekly report last week, I talked about, I believe, George Perkovich said that they believe it or not, the 128 times Putin or his colleagues have threatened the use of nuclear weapons against unknown people in the Ukraine theater.

00:48:52:08 - 00:49:15:08

Peter Huessy

Don't worry about them. They're all bluff. But he said only one was important, and that was they call the fall crisis of 2022. And we have a question is why did Russia not use nuclear arms? Because that's the one time which people from different parts of the political spectrum think that he was serious. And I think it's because they moved some their nuclear weapons out of storage, but I'm not sure.

00:49:15:08 - 00:49:32:19

Peter Huessy

So, Mark, would you address the question about the relationship, cooperation between China and Russia? And then would you address George's point where we don't have to worry about most of these threats? Because the only one that was serious was 2022, when the Russians didn't use nuclear weapons. Anyway.

00:49:32:22 - 00:50:11:05

Mark Schneider

Well, it's some degree of speculation why Russia didn't use nuclear weapons in 2022 or at any other time. My guess on this, is that, there were two major reasons involved. Maybe three one, was the fact that China strongly opposed it and that Putin has turned Russia almost into, a, an appendage of, China.

00:50:11:07 - 00:50:42:29

Mark Schneider

He's made it critically dependent upon China as as Steve pointed out, there's no way they could wage the war. If, if that, if that support ended, the another factor I think here is it would be extremely embarrassing for a country that declares itself to be a superpower and claims that can, defeat all NATO to have to use nuclear weapons against the country.

00:50:43:01 - 00:51:10:01

Mark Schneider

That is, at best, third or so that's economy and population. And is, you know, a country without nuclear weapons, without any, any, type of, of, you know, weapons of mass destruction. And the third factor is, there were some threats that were made by the Biden administration.

00:51:10:01 - 00:51:35:11

Mark Schneider

I don't know exactly what they are. They've never, never been made public. And I haven't seen anything. Which detailed them. But they have to take into account, as Steve pointed out, that they they would be a significant, response. I doubt it would have been nuclear, but, it certainly would have been a lot more than, what we would have, done.

00:51:35:14 - 00:52:26:29

Mark Schneider

Otherwise. So I think all of those, factors together, explain why they haven't done it, in, in Ukraine, there's another factor as well. If you, if, if you, if you believe the, the content of their policy documents and this is what all their, military reads, the with the exception of the, the people, who have, access to the very highly classified strategic nuclear stuff, most Russian, generals, you know, read the, the, the published, policy documents if you take them, seriously, and you believe that has vast amounts of Russian, military literature have, stated, you know,

00:52:26:29 - 00:53:09:17

Mark Schneider

for over 25 years, that, they win because they use them. Yeah. You don't use them. You don't win the, the, you know, in a minor league, ball game. I mean, as important as Ukraine, is, it's not remotely comparable, to what the Russians would gain from a successful attack against NATO. So they, they, they I think they would be reluctant to, to, use nuclear weapons against Ukraine, in circumstances that I think it's it's it's very likely that they would actually escalate to a limited nuclear strike, against Ukraine.

00:53:09:19 - 00:53:38:21

Mark Schneider

Now, when you take a look at the, the effect of nuclear weapons use, you've got to take into account that, in the Cold War, the Soviet strategy involved massive strikes, very high yield, nuclear weapons. Some of this, actually a fair amount of it's been declassified by former Warsaw Pact states. So you're talking about using weapons of up to a half million tons of TNT and in large numbers.

00:53:38:23 - 00:54:02:05

Mark Schneider

That's not what Putin's talking about today. He's talking about using low sub kiloton nuclear weapons, against, targets, in a manner to one achieve military advantage as a result of the strikes and to, minimize the, chance of a of a massive escalation. And that's what I think they would, try against NATO.

00:54:02:05 - 00:54:25:24

Mark Schneider

If they go nuclear, they're not going to blow up London or Paris or Brussels. They're going, to launch a very low sub kiloton nuclear weapon, which will be orders of magnitude more effective than any conventional weapon that exists. And they will get a military advantage. Out of it. And at the same time, they will scare, a lot of people, in the United States and NATO.

00:54:25:24 - 00:54:51:10

Mark Schneider

And that's the whole idea behind the nuclear escalation strategy. As I said, it's very dangerous, because the results are unpredictable. But one of the possible results from the first use of nuclear weapons since the Second World War is a, gigantic victory. And that's what, they're hoping for. And that's the temptation, of of nuclear escalation.

00:54:51:10 - 00:55:00:22

Mark Schneider

And the reason we've got a deterrent and we've got to deter it by having capabilities that would prevent these things from happening.

00:55:00:24 - 00:55:02:23

Peter Huessy

Thank you very much, Mark.

00:55:02:25 - 00:55:23:16

Kimberly Cherrington

Okay. I just wanted to extend our appreciation to Mr. Stephen Blank and Dr. Schneider for today's presentation. I'm going to make sure that this recording gets out on YouTube for us so that we can, view it again.

00:55:23:19 - 00:55:55:16

Kimberly Cherrington

And I wanted to tell you how excited we are for our next event, which is February 20th. Will welcome Ms. Laura McGill, the director of Sandia National Laboratories, where she's going to explore the engineering challenges that are shaping the next generation of deterrence capabilities. Now, if you are new to NIDS, we are 501 C3 nonprofit, organization dedicated to advancing peace and promoting stability through a strong national security and nuclear deterrent.

00:55:55:19 - 00:56:16:25

Kimberly Cherrington

We do this by offering a wide range of deterrence education, from live and virtual events like this one to podcasts, publications, workshops, and courses. Through our academy, we have a full line of of events and speakers, usually on Friday mornings. So make sure you and your colleagues are on the invitation

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list. We thank you for being part of that.

00;56;16;25 - 00;56;41;05

Kimberly Cherington

Your, our growing community. Be sure to follow us on LinkedIn and share our content with your network to help us spread the word. I also wanted to mention that Peter Hussey does his weekly report. It's invaluable information on all the things happening over the last week. It'll keep you informed and you can find these reports on our website at Thinkdeterrence.com.

00;56;41;10 - 00;56;56;03

Kimberly Cherington

If you scroll down on the home page down to the Huessy's Corner, you can view those weekly reports there. We hope you have a peaceful day. And thank you for joining us.

00;56;56;05 - 00;56;58;11

Peter Huessy

Yes. And stay out of the snow.

00;56;58;14 - 00;57;00;03

Kimberly Cherington

Yes. They warn.

00;57;00;06 - 00;57;00;18

Steve Blank

Yes.