



OSLO
NUCLEAR
PROJECT

Russian Nuclear Doctrine and Nuclear Use

KRISTIN VEN BRUUSGAARD

POSTDOC (ASSISTANT PROFESSOR)

UNIVERSITY OF OSLO

Russian doctrine

Russian nuclear weapons for deterrent purposes

Will consider nuclear weapons use «when the existence of the state is under threat»

- Detection of incoming attack
- Subject to WMD strikes
- Subject to large-scale conventional strikes

Russia will consider nuclear use in *ongoing military conflict*

..And as runs out of conventional military options



Projected environment for use

Intense and ongoing information warfare efforts

Shaping public opinion

Targeted efforts to influence decision makers

Nonconventional measures to coerce adversary

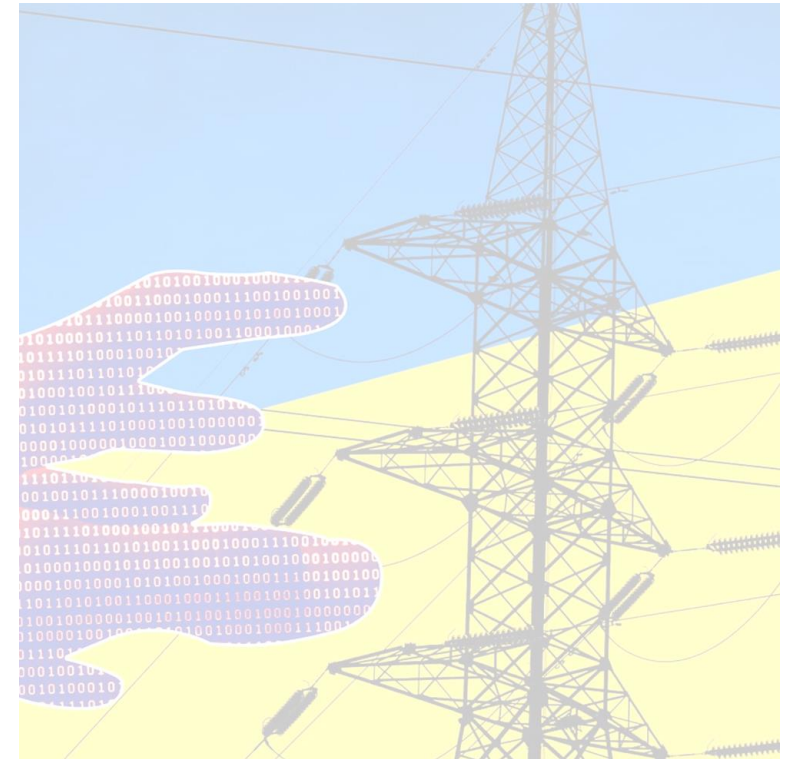
Attacks against critical infrastructure

Attacks against basic state functions

Ongoing conventional military operations

Expect conventional strikes before nuclear strikes

Conventional strikes against critically important targets



Targets for nuclear use

Military targets

Sea-based threats to Russian retaliatory capability (ie carrier groups, main battle ships)

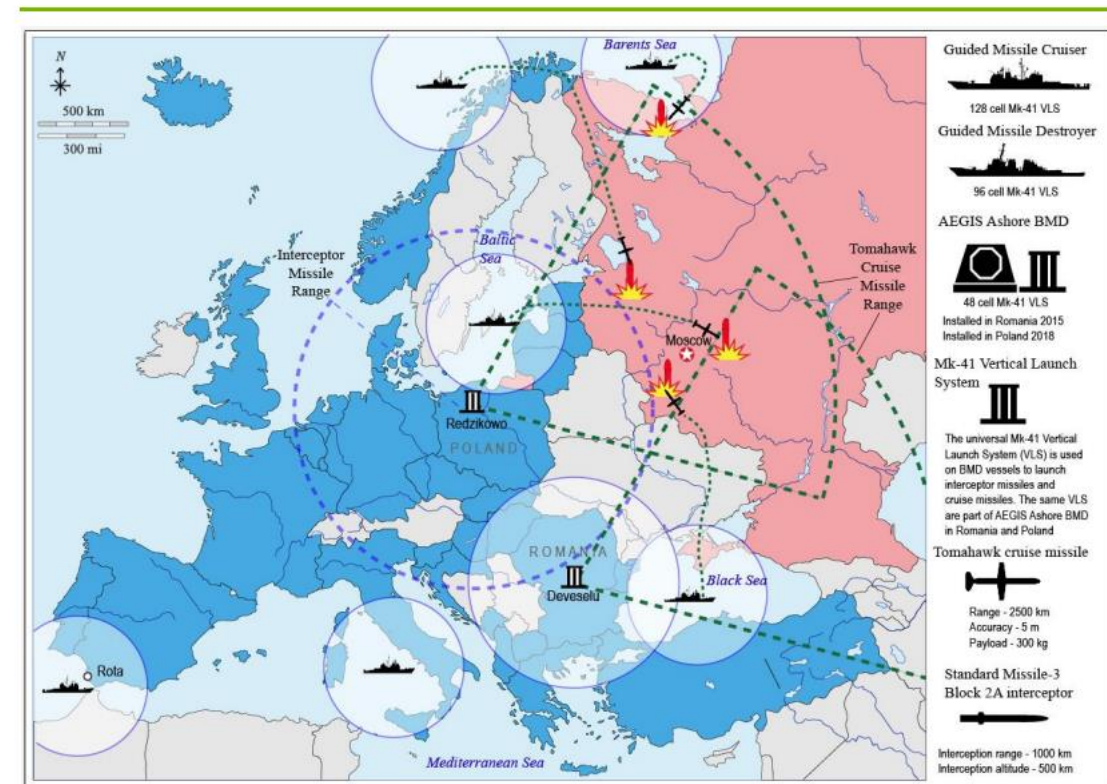
Land-based nodes in adversary operations (ie Communication, EW, C2, defensive systems, offensive capabilities.)

Civilian targets

Critically important targets to sustain state functions (infrastructure, economic, political tgts)

Counter-value targets (cities)

Figure 7. Threat from a maritime direction



Source: CNA translation of General Staff slide presented at Moscow Conference of International Security 2016.

Types of nuclear strikes

1. *Demonstration strikes /warning strikes*
2. *Theater warfighting*
3. *Strategic nuclear retaliation*

Bastion Defence

RUSSIA

ICELAND

FINLAND

Bastion indicates the patrol area of Russian strategic submarines



Types of weapons

Warning strikes

Range of sub-strategic nuclear weapons

Potential for lower yield options

Theater warfighting

Sea-, air-, land-based short and intermediate range weapons

Naval forces with particular role?

Strategic strikes

Strategic nuclear forces



Poseidon

Sarmat

Burevestnik
SKYFALL

Kinzhal
KILLJOY

Avangard

Peresvet

Conclusions

Russian nuclear operations intended to eliminate threats, not to destroy societies

Nuclear weapons is but one of the capabilities Russia may use to coerce adversaries

Increasingly capable in non-nuclear domain

The longer the conflict; the more likely nuclear use may become

If other tools fail, Russia will consider nuclear use to defend state existence

For escalation management

For warfighting

For strategic retaliation

Resources

Kristin Ven Bruusgaard, [Russian Nuclear Strategy and Conventional Inferiority](#), *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 44, No. 1 (2021)

Michael Kofman, Anya Fink, Dmitry Gorenbug, Mary Chestnut, Jeffrey Edmonds, and Julian Waller [“Russian Military Strategy: Core Tenets and Operational Concepts”](#), CNA Corporation, August 2021

Dave Johnson, [“Russia's Conventional Precision Strike Capabilities, Regional Crises, and Nuclear Thresholds”](#), Livermore Papers on Global Security, No. 3, February 2018