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Russia's non-strategic nuclear forces

DAVID S. YOST*

Russia has to a large extent maintained the arsenal of non-strategic nuclear forces (NSNF) it inherited from the Soviet Union, despite drastic reductions in US NSNF. The numbers of Russian NSNF, the variety of their means of delivery, and the levels of readiness and training apparently far exceed those of the United States and its NATO allies. For many of Russia's neighbours in Europe and Asia, certain types of Russian NSNF are seen as 'strategic', in that Moscow could employ them against their national territories. Most Russian NSNF are carried by shorter-range missiles, aircraft and other delivery systems, and are of serious concern to countries in Russia's immediate vicinity. The range and yield of Russian NSNF mounted on air- and sea-launched cruise missiles, however, could in some circumstances give them 'strategic' significance for more distant countries, including the United States.

Through their declarations and actions Russian authorities have revealed that they attach great and possibly increasing importance to their NSNF. Russian views and policies could therefore present obstacles to arms control in addition to the significant numerical asymmetry with US NSNF and the intrinsic difficulties facing any effort to negotiate effective constraints on such forces.

This article provides a brief overview of current debates in Russia on nuclear weapons before examining several factors that suggest that Moscow's interest in arms control arrangements affecting its NSNF is likely to be limited. Indeed, while Moscow has maintained its demands since the 1950s that all US nuclear forces in Europe be removed, its willingness to retain existing arms control

* The views expressed are the author's alone and do not represent those of the Department of the Navy or any US government agency. An earlier version of this article was published as a chapter in Jeffrey A. Larsen and Kurt J. Klingenberg, eds, *Controlling non-strategic nuclear weapons: obstacles and opportunities* (Colorado Springs, CO: US Air Force Institute for National Security Studies, 2001). The book chapter version has more extensive documentation than the present article. Special thanks are owed to those who commented on earlier drafts of this article, though they naturally bear no responsibility for the views expressed: Anne Aldis, Frank Arena, Pieter Cobelens, Jerome Conley, John Culclasure, Frank Dellermann, Thérèse Delpéch, Will Dixon, Isabelle Facon, Kevin Farrell, William C. Green, Bruce Ianacone, Rob Irvine, Kerry Kartchner, Roland Krüger, Stephen Lambert, Jeff Larsen, Willy Meuws, Joseph Pilat, Michael Quinlan, Michael Rühle, Jacques Sapir, Mark Schneider, Paul Schulte, David Shilling, Bill Siegert, Nikolai Sokov, Bruno Tertrais, Françoise Thom, Mikhail Tsypkin, Ted Whiteside and Roberto Zadra.

limits such as the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty and less formal obligations such as the 1991–2 unilateral commitments on NSNF may be in decline. Moreover, Russia's implementation of the latter commitments remains unclear. The prospects for Moscow's endorsing new negotiated constraints on Russian NSNF therefore appear doubtful.

Current debates on nuclear weapons in Russia

At least three debates appear to be under way in Russia today about how much importance—and what roles—to assign to nuclear weapons. The first concerns the revolution in military affairs (RMA). The Russians generally agree that an RMA based on information systems and non-nuclear precision-strike weapons is in progress. Marshal Igor Sergeyev, the defence minister until March 2001 and now an adviser to President Putin, and others have warned that Russia may fall irretrievably behind in this competition. Part of the debate concerns to what extent nuclear weapons allow Russia to buy time, to hold its own while waiting for an economic recovery that would enable it to compete effectively.

The second debate centres on the Kvashnin–Sergeyev struggle over military policy, begun in 1997 and increasingly exposed to public view since July 2000. The Chief of the General Staff, General Anatoly Kvashnin, has been arguing for fairly radical cutbacks in strategic nuclear forces to support conventional force modernization in conjunction with continued reliance on NSNF. Kvashnin's recommendations have been opposed by Marshal Sergeyev, a champion of strategic nuclear forces. While Sergey Ivanov, an intelligence official who previously served as secretary of the Security Council, replaced Sergeyev as defence minister in March 2001, this debate over priorities has not yet been concluded.

The third debate has been characterized as the 'maximalist–minimalist' argument. Nikolai Sokov, one of the leading experts on Russia and nuclear weapons, has used these terms to characterize a divide between the currently predominant support in Russia for high reliance on nuclear weapons, including non-strategic or operational–tactical nuclear weapons, and the minority that appears unenthusiastic about them. In Sokov's words, 'the "minimalists"... seem to avoid public statements on this subject and rarely offer ideas on how exactly they could be used... Caution is easy to explain by the domestic political situation in Russia, as well as the uncertainty in its international situation; the enlargement of NATO has significantly increased the perceived value of tactical nuclear weapons, and arguing against them is "politically incorrect," to use a popular American expression.'¹

Why is arguing against non-strategic nuclear weapons 'politically incorrect' in Russia today? What explains the high level of support for NSNF and the correspondingly limited interest in NSNF arms control?

¹ Nikolai Sokov, *Russian strategic modernization: the past and future* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), p. 180.

Four reasons for limited interest in NSNF arms control

At least four factors explain why Russian interest in arms control for NSNF may be limited in the foreseeable future. The first is Russia's conventional military weakness. This weakness is largely a function of the country's economic problems, which are unlikely to be overcome for many years. Russian authorities have asserted that the military is in a 'transitional' period of high reliance on nuclear forces, pending an economic turnaround that will enable Russia to compete in non-nuclear military capabilities, particularly advanced RMA systems.

The second factor is NATO's conventional military superiority. While Russian analysts include China and other potential non-Western adversaries in their assessments of NSNF requirements,² in Russian eyes the Atlantic alliance's military posture currently towers above other external security threats. As Alexei Arbatov, the vice chairman of the defence committee of the Duma, put it in a July 2000 paper,

During the next 10 years, in addition to holding a conventional superiority in Europe of approximately 2:1, or even 3:1, NATO will also possess a substantial nuclear superiority... However, due to the failures of Russian military reform from 1992–1997 and the chronic underfunding of Russian defence from 1997–1999 (in constant prices, during these 3 years, the military budget has fallen by 50 per cent), qualitative factors (training, combat readiness, command and control, troop morale, and technical sophistication of weapons and equipment, etc.) are presently even more favorable to NATO than pure numerical ratios might indicate.³

The third reason looks beyond NATO's capabilities to its perceived intentions. Russian officials have asserted that their country has grounds to fear NATO. As defence minister Sergeyev put it in December 1999,

The fullest and most graphic significance of these threats to Russia's national security manifested itself in the course of NATO's expansion to the East and their aggression against Yugoslavia... From a military–political point of view, this war signified, in essence, the beginning of a new era of not just military, but also general history. An era of the open, military-force dictate of the US in relation to other countries, to include its allies.⁴

The fourth reason for a low level of interest in NSNF arms control is that Russian military doctrine and policy assign several important functions to

² According to Dmitri Trenin, in the event of conflict with China, 'Moscow will have to rely on its nuclear weapons—both strategic and tactical (mostly air-based)', as well as transcontinental force redeployments. Dmitri Trenin, *Russia's China problem* (Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1999), pp. 41–2.

³ Alexei G. Arbatov, *The transformation of Russian military doctrine: lessons learned from Kosovo and Chechnya*, Marshall Center Paper no. 2 (Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany: George C. Marshall Center, July 2000), pp. 5–6.

⁴ Igor Sergeyev, 'The main factors which determine Russia's military–technical policy on the eve of the 21st century', *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 9 Dec. 1999, in Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS), CEP19991208000053.

Russia's nuclear weapons and to NSNF in particular. Indeed, depending on how they are counted, as many as nine functions for Russia's nuclear forces, including NSNF, have been discussed in the professional Russian military literature in recent years, and these discussions seem to have become more intense since NATO's intervention in the Kosovo crisis. The next section briefly discusses these nine functions.

The general functions for nuclear weapons in Russian military doctrine are to deter aggression and, if that fails, to repel it. In January 2000 the National Security Concept indicated that 'The Russian Federation envisages the possibility of employing military force to ensure its national security based on the following principles:—use of all available forces and assets, including nuclear weapons, in the event of need to repulse armed aggression, if all other measures of resolving the crisis situation have been exhausted and have proven ineffective.'⁵ In April 2000 the new Military Doctrine stated that 'The Russian Federation reserves the right to use nuclear weapons in response to the use of nuclear and other types of weapons of mass destruction against it and (or) its allies, as well as in response to large-scale aggression utilizing conventional weapons in situations critical to the national security of the Russian Federation.'⁶

Nine functions attributed to Russia's nuclear forces

Various Russian commentators have in recent years attributed nine functions to the country's nuclear forces. Some discussions refer to nuclear weapons in general, while others allude specifically to NSNF. Some of the Russian concepts seem to have no clear analogy to those employed in the West, with nuclear arms assigned merits that are not obvious to Western observers. Certain functions and operational concepts are closely interrelated and overlap with others, but they all specify some type of utility.

The first is to deter external aggression. NATO has been explicitly named as a potential threat with nuclear relevance. 'The presence and high level of combat readiness of nuclear weapons is the best guarantee that the US and NATO will not try to establish their "order" in our country as well, like the way it was done in Yugoslavia.'⁷ Russia is also concerned about deterring countries armed with non-nuclear weapons of mass destruction (WMD). According to Sergey Rogov, Director of the USA and Canada Institute, 'Nuclear weapons also can deter the use of other weapons of mass destruction [WMD], including by nonnuclear-weapon countries.'⁸

⁵ Russia's National Security Concept, *Nezavisimoye Voennoye Obozreniye*, 14 Jan. 2000, in FBIS, FTS20000116000515.

⁶ Russian Federation Military Doctrine, approved by Russian Federation Presidential Edict of 21 April 2000, published in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 22 April 2000, in FBIS, CEP20000424000171, sec. I, para. 8.

⁷ Major General Vladimir Grigoryev, Colonel Nikolay Radayev and Lieutenant Colonel Yuri Protasov, 'An "umbrella" instead of a "shield"—do nuclear weapons have a future?' *Armeyskiy Sbornik*, 1 Feb. 2000, in FBIS, CEP 20000503000116.

⁸ Sergey Rogov, 'How much do lost illusions cost? Russia must not reject nuclear deterrence', *Vek*, 28 July 2000, in FBIS, CEP 20000727000425.

The second function is to serve as an 'equalizer' or 'counterbalance' to the conventional force superiority of potential adversaries. That is, NSNF might compensate for Russia's shortcomings in conventional military capability and thereby enable the country's armed forces to avoid defeat in combat. 'The presence of nonstrategic nuclear means of destruction in the RF [Russian Federation] Armed Forces permits restoring the disturbed balance of general-purpose forces under present conditions.'⁹

Some Russian analysts have acknowledged, however, that the utility of Russia's NSNF could be limited in contests with NATO or China. With regard to NATO, some Russian military experts have concluded that the alliance's conventional military superiority might prove to be insurmountable. With regard to China, Beijing's ability to tolerate losses might neutralize a Russian strategy relying on NSNF: 'If we look at a potential Russian–Chinese conflict from this aspect, we will have to give up the illusion that the threat of employing tactical nuclear weapons definitely is capable of deterring the opponent. A high readiness for sacrifices will allow the Chinese side to raise the stakes in this nuclear poker game.'¹⁰

The third function is to help maintain the 'combat stability' of forces engaged in an operation. According to some Russian military commentators, 'combat stability' enables forces to continue to conduct operations despite enemy actions: 'Combat stability of troops (forces) is usually understood as their ability to accomplish the assigned missions under conditions of the enemy's counteraction.'¹¹ This rather vague concept seems at first glance to be similar to what Americans called 'intra-war deterrence' during the Cold War—that is, relying on nuclear capabilities to deter the enemy from 'escalating' to higher levels of violence in the conduct of military operations. It should be noted, however, that Russian proponents of the concept see nuclear forces as only contributing to 'combat stability', not furnishing it outright, and assign an even greater role in 'combat stability' to conventional forces.

The fourth function of NSNF is to make possible the 'de-escalation' of conventional conflicts. Rather than describing the use of nuclear weapons as a form of 'escalation', the customary metaphor in NATO countries, Russian military theorists suggest that Moscow's use of NSNF could bring about 'de-escalation'—that is, that limited use of nuclear weapons would convince the adversary that he should reconsider his plans and accept an end to the conflict without further combat. 'It is advisable to execute this mission using nonstrategic (above all operational–tactical) nuclear weapons, which can preclude an "avalanching" escalation of the use of nuclear weapons right up to an exchange

⁹ Vladimir Sivolob and Mikhail Sosnovskiy, 'A reality of deterrence: algorithms for nuclear weapon use should become a component part of military doctrine', *Nezavisimoye Voyemoye Obozreniye*, 22 Oct. 1999, in FBIS, CEP 19991029000006.

¹⁰ Andrey Piontkovskiy and Vitaliy Tsygichko, 'A holey nuclear umbrella', *Segodnya*, 31 May 2000, in FBIS, CEP 20000531000257.

¹¹ Colonel S. V. Kreydin, 'Problems of nuclear deterrence: the nuclear potential's combat stability', *Voyennaya Mysl*, July–Aug. 2000, in FBIS, CEP20000816000366.

of massed nuclear strikes delivered by strategic assets. It seems to us that cessation of military operations will be the most acceptable thing for the enemy in this case.¹² The uncertainties regarding escalation control and crisis management that were so prominent in NATO thinking about limited use of nuclear weapons for war-termination during the Cold War are, however, sometimes acknowledged by Russian military authorities.¹³

The closely related fifth function of NSNF is to make it possible for Russia to conduct limited nuclear strikes in a regional (or theatre) war while avoiding an escalation to intercontinental nuclear operations or any other geographical extension of the conflict. Russian analysts have suggested, for example, that NSNF could be used 'in the course of military operations...to compensate for enemy superiority on individual strategic (operational) axes without crossing the "threshold of activation" of strategic nuclear weapons, the massive use of which is fraught with mutual destruction of opposing sides and even with the disappearance of mankind.'¹⁴

The sixth function of Russia's nuclear forces, including NSNF, is to inhibit the intervention of outside powers (such as the United States or NATO) in regional conflicts involving Russia. In a sense, this function amounts to a restatement of the first (deterrence of external aggression). Some Russians have nonetheless highlighted the imperative of ruling out any NATO intervention in the Chechnya conflict analogous to the alliance's actions in the Kosovo conflict: 'Russia would make it clear that no one would be allowed to intervene in Russian domestic affairs. The West would be taught that Russia is not Yugoslavia.'¹⁵

The seventh function of NSNF is to substitute for advanced long-range non-nuclear precision strike systems that, Russian authorities hold, 'have begun to approach the role of nuclear weapons' in their significance.¹⁶ This function can be seen as an RMA-specific extension of the second—offsetting the conventional military superiority of adversaries.

The eighth function of NSNF is to constitute a set of assets for the high command to enable it to change the correlation of forces in specific theatres or sectors of military operations. This also evidently overlaps with the function of compensating for conventional military inferiority. 'The presence of non-strategic nuclear weapons in Russia's Armed Forces provides an offset for the disruption of the balance of general-purpose forces, and their use in the course of military operations will nullify enemy superiority in particular strategic or operational sectors.'¹⁷

¹² Major General V. I. Levshin, Colonel A. V. Nedelin and Colonel M. Ye. Sosnovskiy, 'Use of nuclear weapons to de-escalate military operations', *Voyennaya Mysl*, May–June 1999, in FBIS, FTS19990602001557.

¹³ For background, see David S. Yost, 'The history of NATO theater nuclear force policy: key findings from the Sandia conference', *Journal of Strategic Studies* 15, June 1992.

¹⁴ Sivolob and Sosnovskiy, 'A reality of deterrence'.

¹⁵ Arbatov, *The transformation of Russian military doctrine*, p. 21.

¹⁶ Sergeev, 'The main factors which determine Russia's military-technical policy'.

¹⁷ Colonel C. A. Ivasik, Colonel A. S. Pisyaukov and Colonel A. L. Khryapin, 'Nuclear weapons and Russian military security', *Voyennoye Mysl*, July–Aug. 1999, UKTRANS 00594.

The ninth function of NSNF is to compensate, at least to some extent, for reductions in Russia's strategic nuclear forces. 'Against the background of continuing reductions in strategic nuclear weapons, the role of forces equipped with operational-tactical and tactical nuclear weapons is increasing.'¹⁸ Russians evidently see an overlap between NSNF and strategic nuclear forces for several functions. NSNF reductions could therefore be perceived as diminishing the country's overall strategic posture.

For the United States, the large Russian advantage in NSNF numbers appears increasingly significant with projected lower limits on intercontinental forces under the Strategic Arms Reduction Talks (START) treaties, partly because certain types of Russian NSNF 'have relatively long ranges' and capabilities 'identical or similar' to weapons encompassed by START agreements.¹⁹ Russian officials have referred to the possible reconfiguration of NSNF—particularly cruise missiles—as a means to overcome any missile defences deployed by the United States to protect North America.²⁰ The Backfire bomber, for example, is not constrained by START I, except for a political commitment by Moscow, in a declaration accompanying the treaty, to maintain no more than 500 of these aircraft and not to give them an intercontinental range potential—despite their in-flight refuelling capability. With Russia's development of 3,000 km range Kh-101 and Kh-102 air-launched cruise missiles (ALCMs), the Backfire's potential as a strategic-range bomber has been enhanced.²¹ With regard to 'so-called non-strategic nuclear weapons and the concern over long-range sea-launched cruise missiles', Russian President Vladimir Putin has said, 'the alleged US superiority in this sphere is certainly not obvious', in view of Russia's achievements and potential in this domain.²²

While the deterrence of external aggression stands out as the primary function of Russia's nuclear forces, including NSNF, with 'de-escalation' and other functions gaining greater relevance in war, various political roles have also been apparent. Moscow has relied on nuclear arms to uphold Russia's status in international politics, to draw attention to Russia's continuing importance in Eurasia, and to serve as instruments for diplomatic gesticulation in crises. Russians have at times, for instance, sought to influence the decisions of other powers by pointing out that Moscow could withdraw from legal or political

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Admiral Richard Mies, USN, Commander-in-Chief, US Strategic Command, testimony at the hearing of the Senate Armed Services Committee on US strategic nuclear force requirements, 23 May 2000, Federal News Service transcript, pp. 18–19.

²⁰ General Vladimir Yakovlev, Commander-in-Chief, Strategic Missile Troops, interview in *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 5 July 2000, in FBIS, CEP20000705000396.

²¹ The Tu-22M3 Backfire is being upgraded (mainly via improved avionics) into the Tu-22M5 model capable of carrying the new long-range ALCMs. Nikolai Sokov, 'Developments in Russian nuclear weapons policy', presentation to US Senate Armed Services Committee, 26 Jan. 2001, p. 15. No means of distinguishing the non-nuclear Kh-101 from the nuclear-armed Kh-102 has been identified. Equipping the Backfire with a nuclear-armed long-range ALCM would render it accountable as a heavy bomber under START.

²² Vladimir Putin, President-elect of the Russian Federation, speech at the State Duma, 14 April 2000, in *Kommersant*, 15 April 2000, in FBIS, CEP20000417000148.

commitments affecting nuclear forces, and/or redeploy or reconfigure NSNF and other nuclear forces, or even threaten nuclear strikes.

Other indications of utility for NSNF in Russia

The relevance of published military doctrine and the professional military literature may be limited and scenario-dependent, but there are at least five other forms of evidence that the Russians attach great importance to NSNF.

NATO–Russia Founding Act negotiations

The first resides in the Russian preoccupations during the 1996–7 negotiations over the NATO–Russia Founding Act, which included the alliance’s commitments with regard to military arrangements affecting the new allies. The Russians insisted that NATO’s December 1996 ‘three noes’ commitment about nuclear weapon deployments on the territory of new allies (‘no intention, no plan, and no reason’ for such deployments) be supplemented in the May 1997 NATO–Russia Founding Act by a ‘fourth no’ excluding any NATO use of the former Warsaw Pact nuclear storage sites or any construction of new nuclear weapons storage facilities.²³

The Russian foreign minister during the Founding Act negotiations, Yevgeny Primakov, made clear in his memoirs that these were important points for Moscow. Primakov praised Malcolm Rifkind, the British foreign secretary, for understanding during the negotiations ‘that Russia had a right to be concerned about the prospect of nuclear weapons being located closer to its borders’.²⁴ In other words, despite the complete absence of any discernible interest within NATO in deploying nuclear weapons on the territory of the new allies, Russia considered such NSNF deployments a genuine threat.

Military exercises

The second form of evidence consists of exercises. The Zapad 99 exercise in June 1999 assumed that NATO had attacked the Kaliningrad oblast using forces and operational concepts similar to those employed in Operation Allied Force against Yugoslavia. The Russian troops could not withstand NATO’s offensive thrust with conventional means, so they simulated the employment of nuclear-armed ALCMs on Tu-95 Bear and Tu-160 Blackjack heavy bombers against Poland and the United States.²⁵

²³ Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security between the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the Russian Federation, signed at Paris, 27 May 1997, p. 7.

²⁴ Yevgeny Primakov, *Years in big politics*, trans. and abbr. by J. B. K. Lough, report F70 (Camberley: Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, Conflict Studies Research Centre, June 2000), pp. 4, 13.

²⁵ Sokov, *Russian strategic modernization*, p. 171.

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Subsequent exercises have reportedly also simulated the use of nuclear weapons in the form of nuclear-armed missiles launched from heavy and medium bombers. This circumstance underscores how artificial and arbitrary distinctions between strategic and non-strategic nuclear weapons can be. Although the professional military literature includes elaborate terminological discussions, with some authorities favouring the terms 'theatre' or 'non-strategic' or 'operational-tactical' instead of 'tactical' nuclear weapons, the Russians evidently perceive no doctrinal obstacle to employing a nominally strategic weapon for a non-strategic (or theatre or regional) mission.²⁶

NSNF modernization

The third form of evidence consists of laws and policy decisions relating to nuclear weapons in general and NSNF in particular. As Alexei Arbatov has pointed out, the March 1999 law on financing nuclear forces 'emphasizes tactical nuclear forces as the prime candidate for first use against a large conventional attack. The *Iskander*, a new, tactical ballistic missile...and a new, naval tactical nuclear weapons system were specifically discussed as nuclear options.'²⁷ The next month, on 29 April 1999, the Security Council, chaired by Vladimir Putin, 'decided to extend the service life of nuclear warheads for tactical delivery vehicles and, according to Putin's briefing, discussed the concept for their use. A number of reports indicated that the Security Council decided to develop a new, low-yield nuclear warhead.'²⁸ According to Pavel Felgengauer, a well-informed journalist,

the new nuclear weapons' main 'appeal' will be their ability to explode with an exceptionally low yield—from several tens of tonnes to 100 tonnes of TNT equivalent...It is being proposed to create up to 10,000 new low- and super-low-yield tactical nuclear weapons 'to counter NATO expansion in Europe'...There is every indication that NATO's strikes on Yugoslavia have helped the Ministry of Atomic Energy finally win official authorization to begin the practical implementation of its plans.²⁹

Russian military analyses during and since NATO's air campaign in the Kosovo conflict (March–June 1999) nonetheless reveal a certain shift in pre-occupations. Prior to NATO's air campaign, as during the negotiation of the

²⁶ For that matter, Western nuclear powers evidently also perceive few doctrinal obstacles in the nominal designations of particular weapons. Britain has assigned 'strategic' and 'sub-strategic' roles to its Trident submarine-launched ballistic missiles. France has since 1991 placed all its nuclear-armed aircraft previously given 'prestrategic' designations under the command of the Strategic Air Forces (*Forces Aériennes Stratégiques*). US B-61 bomb types have been considered both 'strategic' and 'nonstrategic', depending on their mission and configuration.

²⁷ Arbatov, *The transformation of Russian military doctrine*, pp. 17–18.

²⁸ Nikolai Sokov, 'Overview: the April 1999 Russian Federation Security Council meeting on nuclear weapons' (Center for Nonproliferation Studies, Monterey Institute of International Studies NIS Nuclear Profiles Database, 29 June 1999).

²⁹ Pavel Felgengauer, 'Limited nuclear war? Why not! Russia's new defence concept could include precision use of nuclear weapons', *Segodnya*, 6 May 1999, in FBIS, FTS19990506000851.

NATO–Russia Founding Act in 1996–7, the Russians displayed a relatively high level of concern about the hypothetical (and in fact non-existent) prospect of NATO NSNF being deployed on the soil of new NATO allies. Since NATO’s air campaign against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, concern about US and allied long-range non-nuclear precision-strike capabilities has to some extent displaced concern about NATO’s NSNF.

Implementation of NSNF commitments

The fourth form of evidence consists of Russia’s lack of transparency about the implementation of Moscow’s 1991–2 commitments to withdraw and eliminate certain types of NSNF. At the official level, the Russians avoid specifics about numbers and related issues. In April 2000, for example, Igor Ivanov, the Russian foreign minister, said,

Russia also continues to consistently implement its unilateral initiatives related to tactical nuclear weapons. Such weapons have been completely removed from surface ships and multipurpose submarines, as well as from the land-based naval aircraft, and are stored at centralized storage facilities. One third of all nuclear munitions for the sea-based tactical missiles and naval aircraft has been eliminated. We are about to complete the destruction of nuclear warheads from tactical missiles, artillery shells and nuclear mines. We have destroyed half of the nuclear warheads for anti-aircraft missiles and for nuclear gravity bombs.³⁰

This statement, made at the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) review conference in New York, was apparently no more informative than official Russian statements in the NATO–Russia Permanent Joint Council (PJC) and other forums. In May 1998 it was reported that ‘At a recent meeting to exchange information on tactical nuclear weapons, the Russian delegation’s presentation was “extremely fuzzy” and failed to provide any illumination on the fate of some 10,000 to 12,000 of its tactical nuclear weapons, according to NATO participants.’³¹ While the NATO–Russia PJC meeting in October 2000 involved ‘exchanges on nuclear weapons issues, including doctrine and strategy’,³² there are no indications that the Russian delegation was more forthcoming about Russia’s NSNF posture than the country’s foreign minister had been at the United Nations in April 2000.

The estimates of numbers of Russian NSNF vary widely in both Russian and Western published sources. In 1998 experts associated with the Natural Resources Defense Council, a non-governmental organization, estimated that Russia had 4,000 deployed NSNF warheads, plus perhaps 12,000 in reserve or

³⁰ Igor Ivanov, Russian foreign minister, statement at NPT review conference, New York, 25 April 2000, text available at <http://www.basicint.org/nuclear/revcon2000/nuk_0orevcon_gen_russia.htm>.

³¹ William Drozdiak, ‘The next step for NATO: handling Russia’, *Washington Post National Weekly*, 11 May 1998, p. 15.

³² Press statement, PJC ambassadorial meeting, 30 Oct. 2000, available at <www.nato.int>.

awaiting dismantlement.³³ According to a July 2000 paper by Alexei Arbatov, in 'the early 1980s' the Soviet Union had '10,000 strategic and 30,000 tactical nuclear weapons', while currently Russia's 'Nuclear forces consist of 5,000 strategic and approximately 2,000 tactical warheads (which due to serial obsolescence will be reduced to around 1,000–1,500 in the next 10 years).'³⁴ In January 2001 Nikolai Sokov estimated that Russia had 8,000–8,500 NSNF warheads.³⁵

Russia is believed to have made much less headway than the United States in dismantling NSNF in accordance with the 1991–2 commitments, owing in part to resource limitations and probably also in part to convictions about the potential utility of NSNF for Russia. In February 1997 Walter Slocombe, then the US Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, testified as follows: 'While Russia pledged in 1991 to make significant cuts in its non-strategic nuclear forces and has reduced its operational NSNF substantially, it has made far less progress thus far than the US, and the Russian non-strategic arsenal (deployed and stockpiled) is probably about ten times as large as ours.'³⁶ In March 1998 Edward Warner, then US Assistant Secretary of Defense for Strategy and Threat Reduction, repeated this estimate, adding that 'Russian officials recently stated that the 1991–1992 NSNF pledges would be fully implemented by the year 2000, which would reduce the Russian advantage to about three or four to one.'³⁷ In February 1998 Alain Richard, the French minister of defence, said that Russia's 'stockpile of so-called tactical [nuclear] weapons...is estimated to be between 10,000 and 30,000 warheads, and we have only fragmentary information on their control'.³⁸

As Richard's statement suggests, there is little firm evidence about what Russia has done to implement the 1991–2 commitments. According to a 1997 report by the Congressional Research Service,

Russian officials contend that they have begun to dismantle warheads removed from these nonstrategic nuclear weapons and that they can do so at a rate of 2,000 warheads each year. The United States has little direct evidence to support Russia's claims because US officials have not observed the dismantlement process. Nevertheless, some have

³³ W. M. Arkin, R. S. Norris and J. Handler, *Taking stock: world-wide nuclear deployments 1998* (Washington DC: Natural Resources Defence Council, 1998), p. 27, cited in Harald Müller and Annette Schaper, 'Appendix: types, delivery systems and locations of TNWs', in William C. Potter, Nikolai Sokov, Harald Müller and Annette Schaper, *Tactical nuclear weapons: options for control* (Geneva: United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, Dec. 2000), p. 58.

³⁴ Arbatov, *The transformation of Russian military doctrine*, pp. 4–5.

³⁵ Nikolai Sokov, 'Developments in Russian nuclear weapons policy', presentation to US Senate Armed Services Committee, 26 Jan. 2001, p. 9.

³⁶ Walter B. Slocombe, Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, statement before the Senate Governmental Affairs Subcommittee on International Security, Proliferation and Federal Services, hearing on nuclear weapons and deterrence, 12 Feb. 1997, p. 4 of text furnished by the US Department of Defense.

³⁷ Edward L. Warner III, Assistant Secretary of Defense (Strategy and Threat Reduction), statement before the Strategic Forces Subcommittee, Senate Armed Services Committee, hearing on nuclear deterrence, 31 March 1998, p. 4 of the text furnished by the US Department of Defense.

³⁸ Alain Richard, minister of defence, speech at the Institut des Hautes Etudes de Défense Nationale, 10 Feb. 1998, p. 5 of text furnished by the French ministry of defence.

stated that Russia's force of nonstrategic nuclear weapons may have declined by more than 25% from its peak of around 25,000 warheads in the late 1980s.³⁹

The wide span in the estimates of Russian NSNF holdings (even allowing for distinctions among warheads deployed, stored, and/or awaiting dismantlement) suggests the difficulties in verification and establishing confidence. While the United States has not disclosed official numbers for US NSNF, unconfirmed published reports have put the number of remaining weapons at between 150 and 700 gravity bombs for US and allied aircraft in Europe.⁴⁰

What do the Russian commitments amount to? In October 1991 Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev declared that

All nuclear artillery munitions and nuclear warheads for tactical missiles shall be eliminated. Nuclear warheads for air defence missiles shall be withdrawn from the troops and concentrated in central bases, and a portion of them shall be eliminated. All nuclear mines shall be eliminated. All tactical nuclear weapons shall be removed from surface ships and multi-purpose submarines. These weapons, as well as nuclear weapons on land-based naval aviation, shall be stored in central storage sites and a portion shall be eliminated.⁴¹

In January 1992 Russian President Boris Yeltsin restated and slightly modified Gorbachev's commitment:

During the recent period, production has been stopped of nuclear warheads for land-based tactical missiles, and also production of nuclear artillery shells and nuclear mines. Stocks of such nuclear devices will be eliminated. Russia is eliminating one-third of sea-based tactical nuclear weapons and one-half of nuclear warheads for anti-aircraft missiles. Measures in this direction have already been taken. We also intend to halve stocks of air-launched tactical nuclear munitions.⁴²

Gorbachev and Yeltsin made similar commitments in that both promised to eliminate all nuclear artillery warheads, all warheads for land-based tactical missiles and all nuclear mines. However, whereas Gorbachev said that 'a portion' of the warheads for anti-aircraft missiles would be eliminated, Yeltsin said that 'one-half' of them would be. Whereas Gorbachev said 'a portion' of the

³⁹ Amy F. Woolf and Kara Wilson, *Russia's nuclear forces: doctrine and force structure issues* (Washington DC: Congressional Research Service, 23 May 1997), p. 9.

⁴⁰ For the lower number (150), see Arkin et al., *Taking stock*, p. 14, cited in Müller and Schaper, 'Appendix', in Potter et al., *Tactical nuclear weapons*, pp. 51–2. For the higher number (700), see Alan Riding, 'NATO will cut atom weapons for aircraft use', *New York Times*, 18 Oct. 1991, p. A1. The US nuclear warheads for artillery, short-range missiles and other NSNF systems were dismantled after their withdrawal in the early 1990s.

⁴¹ Televised announcement by Soviet President Mikhail S. Gorbachev, 5 Oct. 1991, US State Department translation in *SIPRI yearbook 1992: world armaments and disarmament* (London: Oxford University Press for the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 1992), p. 87.

⁴² Televised statement by Russian Federation President Boris N. Yeltsin, 29 Jan. 1992, FBIS translation in *SIPRI yearbook 1992*, p. 90.

warheads 'from surface ships and multi-purpose submarines...as well as nuclear weapons on land-based naval aviation' would be eliminated, Yeltsin said 'one-third of sea-based tactical nuclear weapons' would be eliminated. As well as introducing some imprecise quantification into the reductions promised by Gorbachev in certain weapons categories ('one-half' or 'one-third' instead of 'a portion'), Yeltsin offered an additional commitment that Gorbachev had not made: 'to halve stocks of air-launched tactical nuclear munitions'.

Gorbachev had proposed that 'on the basis of reciprocity, it would be possible to withdraw from combat units on frontal (tactical) aviation, all nuclear weapons (gravity bombs and air-launched missiles) and place them in centralized storage bases'.⁴³ In Yeltsin's version of this proposal, 'The remaining tactical air-launched nuclear armaments could, on a reciprocal basis with the United States, be removed from combat units of the frontline tactical air force and placed in centralized storage bases.'⁴⁴ Both versions of the proposal implied the elimination of the entire remaining US nuclear weapons presence in Europe—that is, the fulfilment of one of Moscow's goals since the 1950s. The United States had ruled out such an arrangement from the outset. In his September 1991 speech that preceded the Soviet and Russian commitments, US President George Bush said, 'We will, of course, ensure that we preserve an effective air-delivered nuclear capability in Europe. That is essential to NATO's security.'⁴⁵

Ivanov's April 2000 statement amounts to an assertion that the commitments, as formulated by Yeltsin, have been almost completely fulfilled. Bruno Tertrais of the French ministry of defence has, however, raised an intriguing question with regard to Ivanov's failure to refer to the status of efforts to fulfil Yeltsin's January 1992 commitment 'to halve stocks of air-launched tactical nuclear munitions'. Ivanov's allusion solely to 'nuclear gravity bombs' implicitly excludes air-to-ground missiles. Was Ivanov's wording in this regard careless or careful? His wording appears consistent with the simulated employment of nuclear-armed air-launched missiles in recent Russian exercises.⁴⁶

The publicly articulated commitments do not, at any rate, include any information exchanges, verification measures, baseline numbers or legally binding deadlines. The deadlines or goals for the completion of the NSNF reductions reside not in the public statements made by Gorbachev and Yeltsin in 1991 and 1992, but in clarifications furnished by Moscow in high-level bilateral and multilateral meetings. This circumstance explains the wording of the communiqué issued in December 2000 by NATO's Defence Planning Committee and Nuclear Planning Group: 'We also recalled the drastic reductions of NATO's nuclear forces in the new security environment, and renewed our call on Russia to complete the reductions in its non-strategic nuclear

⁴³ Televised announcement by Gorbachev, 5 Oct. 1991.

⁴⁴ Televised statement by Yeltsin, 29 Jan. 1992.

⁴⁵ George Bush, 'Address to the nation on reducing United States and Soviet nuclear weapons', 27 Sept. 1991, in *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents* 27: 39, 30 Sept. 1991, pp. 1349–50.

⁴⁶ Author's interview with Bruno Tertrais in Paris, 12 April 2001.

weapons stockpile, as pledged in 1991 and 1992 for implementation by the end of the year 2000.⁴⁷ Russia's NSNF commitments (like those of the United States) remain simply political declarations of intentions, not legally binding treaty commitments.

Arms control agreements

This brings us to the fifth form of evidence: recurrent discussions in Russia about possibly abandoning the 1991–2 commitments, the INF Treaty and START I, because they may conflict with Russia's national security requirements.

Several published examples can be found of Russians suggesting that, under certain threatening international circumstances, Russia might have to abandon, modify or renegotiate the 1991–2 commitments; these include statements by Igor Rodionov when he was defence minister in 1996,⁴⁸ and by Admiral Vladimir Kuroedov, chief of the navy, in 1998.⁴⁹ According to Nikolai Sokov, 'Russia may want to revise the 1991–92 regime by allowing naval tactical nuclear weapons, possibly at the expense of gravity bombs, although no formal proposal to that effect has been made.'⁵⁰ Russian interview sources suggest that there has been a fair amount of unofficial talk behind the scenes about abandoning the 1991–2 commitments, because gravity bombs are considered less useful than ground- and sea-launched missiles, among other non-strategic delivery systems.⁵¹

The Russian armed forces have evidently continued to train, exercise and evaluate units to maintain their readiness to employ NSNF, even when the warheads have been placed in central storage facilities.⁵² According to a Russian naval official interviewed by Rose Gottemoeller, 'Our captains are still judged

⁴⁷ Final communiqué, ministerial meeting of the Defence Planning Committee and the Nuclear Planning Group, 5 Dec. 2000, para. 10.

⁴⁸ 'Rodionov declared that in the face of NATO enlargement, Russia "might objectively face the task of increasing the number of tactical nuclear weapons at [its] borders": Sokov, *Russian strategic modernization*, p. 180. It is, of course, possible that Rodionov had in mind a geographical redistribution (hence an increase in deployments near certain borders) in NSNF covered by the 1991–2 commitments rather than any deviation from the rather vaguely worded commitments.

⁴⁹ Kuroedov, quoted in *Russki Telegraph*, 11 June 1998, cited in Nikolai Sokov, 'The fate of Russian nuclear weapons: an anticlimax on August 11', 14 Aug. 2000, available at <<http://www.cns.mii.edu/pubs/reports/denuke2.htm>>.

⁵⁰ Nikolai Sokov, 'The tactical nuclear weapons controversy', *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 31 Jan. 2001.

⁵¹ Other examples of Russians talking about possibly abandoning the 1991–2 commitments share two characteristics: the context concerns developments deemed threatening to Russia, such as NATO enlargement or US security cooperation with the Baltic states; and the abandonment of the commitments is usually implicit in the call for a build-up and/or more extensive deployment of NSNF.

⁵² It was reported in January 2001 that Russian NSNF were recently moved to Kaliningrad (see, among other sources, Bill Gertz, 'Russia transfers nuclear arms to Baltics', *Washington Times*, 3 Jan. 2001, p. 1). The Russian government has disputed the accuracy of such reports. However, in March 2001 Sergey Ivanov, then Secretary of the Security Council, stated that Russia 'has not made an agreement with the international community not to deploy tactical [nuclear] weapons in the Kaliningrad region'. In an earlier statement, foreign minister Igor Ivanov said that there was no reason Russia should not deploy nuclear weapons in Kaliningrad (Agence France-Pressé dispatch, 'Russian official says Moscow entitled to deploy nuclear weapons in Kaliningrad', in FBIS, 25 March 2001, EUP20010325000124).

by how well their sailors are trained to handle nuclear weapons, even though nuclear weapons are no longer carried day to day.⁵³

Rather than assuming that the 1991–2 commitments are a binding constraint on Russia's military options, Russian military analysts seem to ignore them. This pattern applies not only to NSNF nominally cut by 'one-half' or 'one-third', but also to the nuclear mines, artillery and tactical missiles that have ostensibly been almost entirely eliminated. According to a 1999 article in *Military Thought*, 'These operations will include nuclear strikes by missile troops, artillery and aviation and the use of nuclear landmines.'⁵⁴

Some Russians have advocated that Russia withdraw from the INF Treaty, or seek its renegotiation, because of Russia's changed geostrategic situation, including NATO enlargement. The INF Treaty, some Russian experts note, 'closes an opportunity for us to have such continental-class nuclear weapons which would reliably perform functions of ensuring Russia's security for the entire Eurasian spectrum of hypothetical continental TVD's [theatres of military operations] (including Japan)'.⁵⁵ It is reasonable to infer that 'the entire Eurasian spectrum' also includes NATO and China. As for START I, this treaty prohibits the deployment of long-range nuclear-armed ALCMs on medium-range bombers.⁵⁶ Some Russian military analysts find this an unwelcome constraint on Russia's operational flexibility, because—to quote Nikolai Sokov's analysis of the Russian military literature on this point—'aircraft are versatile, being able to use both conventional and nuclear short-range missiles and air-launched cruise missiles (ALCMs). Even more important, even in a nuclear role they can be employed for substrategic missions, in line with the latest Military Doctrine, unlike the SRF [Strategic Rocket Forces] and the Navy.'⁵⁷

In short, in the current context some Russians—particularly in military circles—find existing nuclear arms control constraints irksome. It nonetheless seems unlikely that Russia will withdraw from these constraints in the foreseeable future. In the short term at least, Russia is likely to wait to see what decisions the United States makes about the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty and other arms control agreements. Partly because of Russia's limited capacity to pursue new military programmes, owing to its economic weakness, and partly because of the perceived advantages of letting the United States bear the political onus of withdrawing from (or seeking modifications in) the ABM Treaty and/or

⁵³ Rose Gottemoeller, 'Lopsided arms control', *Washington Post*, 7 Dec. 2000, p. 37. In April 2001 Grigori Tomchin, a member of the Russian government's investigating commission, was quoted as having said that the *Kursk*, an *Oscar* II-class nuclear-powered cruise-missile submarine (SSGN), was carrying NSNF when it sank in August 2000. Such statements have been denied by Russian authorities. See, among other sources, the brief reports in the *International Herald Tribune*, 5 and 6 April 2001.

⁵⁴ Levshin et al., 'Use of nuclear weapons to de-escalate military operations'.

⁵⁵ Sergey T. Brezkun, 'Pioneers must be revived: Russia needs a new "European" nuclear weapon', *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye*, 13–19 Aug. 1999, in FBIS, 18 Aug. 1999, FTS19990818001156. 'Pioneer' is a Russian designation for a certain type of intermediate-range ballistic missile (IRBM).

⁵⁶ Under START I a medium-range bomber becomes accountable as a heavy bomber when it is equipped with a long-range nuclear-armed ALCM. For START purposes, a long-range nuclear-armed ALCM has a range in excess of 600 km.

⁵⁷ Nikolai Sokov, 'A new old direction in Russia's nuclear policy', *Disarmament Diplomacy* 50 (Sept. 2000).

other arms control accords, Russia may be influenced to some extent by US choices. In Sokov's judgement, some Russians would nonetheless appreciate US decisions that would enable Moscow to cease compliance with existing arms control constraints: 'From the point of view of the military, expected withdrawal of the United States from the ABM Treaty can provide a welcome pretext, and this is part of the reason why some figures in the military leadership resist a possible deal on ABM amendments.'⁵⁸

In the meantime, the Russians have evidently become cautious about accepting new arms control obligations that could further constrain their NSNF options. Moscow now holds that its obligation to defend its allies under the 1992 Tashkent Treaty of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) entails a potential requirement to deploy nuclear weapons on their soil in certain circumstances. According to William Potter, 'This policy shift, evident after April 1999, is apparent in quiet but effective Russian diplomacy to weaken the Central Asian Nuclear-Weapons-Free Zone Treaty that is currently under negotiation.'⁵⁹

Aside from the 1987 INF Treaty, which concerns ground-based missiles with ranges between 500 and 5,500 km, Moscow and Washington have never placed constraints on their NSNF in treaties. Moscow attempted to include US NSNF (and to exclude its own NSNF) in the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) and START treaties, an approach that the United States and its allies rejected.⁶⁰ However, at the March 1997 US–Russian summit in Helsinki, President Clinton and President Yeltsin 'agreed that in the context of START III negotiations their experts will explore, as separate issues, possible measures relating to nuclear long-range sea-launched cruise missiles and tactical nuclear systems, to include appropriate confidence-building and transparency measures'.⁶¹

Several aspects of this wording are noteworthy. The 'possible measures relating to nuclear long-range sea-launched cruise missiles and tactical nuclear systems' are 'separate issues'—that is, they are evidently separate from each other and possibly also separate from START III. Indeed, it is 'in the context of START III negotiations' that 'experts will explore...possible measures.' The commitment to 'explore' may mean no more than to 'discuss'. The fact that the 'possible measures...include appropriate confidence-building and transparency measures' implies that either Russia or the United States (or both) may not be prepared to accept an intrusive verification regime for such systems.

Whether and how START III negotiations will be pursued remains unclear at present. In April–May 2000 Russia ratified the START II Treaty, but attached conditions to its entry into force relating to US ratification of the 1997

⁵⁸ Sokov, 'Developments in Russian nuclear weapons policy', p. 20.

⁵⁹ William C. Potter, 'Reducing the threat of tactical nuclear weapons', paper presented to the international workshop on nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament, Tokyo, 27–9 Aug. 2000, p. 5.

⁶⁰ Moscow called the US NSNF in Europe 'forward based systems'.

⁶¹ US–Russian Joint Statement on Parameters on Future Reductions in Nuclear Forces, Helsinki, 21 March 1997.

ABM Treaty demarcation and succession agreements that may well be unacceptable to the US Senate.⁶² Owing in part to the long delays in START II ratification and entry into force and the prospects of stalemate in the START process, the new US administration under President George W. Bush has raised the idea of making unilateral reductions in US nuclear forces and pursuing less formal means of arms control. The implications for NSNF of such new approaches to nuclear arms control have yet to be defined.

Russia and NATO's NSNF

It is not clear that the United States and its allies will find a negotiation with Russia on NSNF in their interests. If such a negotiation took place, however, the remaining US nuclear weapons presence in Europe would constitute one of America's most important means of leverage in bargaining for NSNF reductions with Moscow. If the US nuclear presence were withdrawn from Europe unilaterally, the Russians would have fewer incentives to accept any arms control measures, including any verification and transparency regime.⁶³

Proposals for a unilateral withdrawal of the US nuclear forces in Europe are sometimes associated with questionable assumptions. In December 2000, for example, William Potter and Nikolai Sokov argued that

it may be desirable for the United States to declare its intention unilaterally to return to United States territory all of its air-based TNWs [tactical nuclear weapons] currently deployed in Europe. This pronouncement, which would lead to the elimination of all United States TNWs in Europe, could go a long way towards dispelling Russian fears about NATO and could help to revive the spirit of the parallel 1991 initiatives.⁶⁴

The extent to which this initiative would 'go a long way towards dispelling Russian fears about NATO' might be limited, however, for Russia's greatest misgivings about the Western alliance concern its enduring political cohesion; its demographic, economic, and military potential, including the large US and still significant British and French strategic nuclear arsenals; its policies, such as an 'open door' regarding further enlargement; and its advanced non-nuclear

⁶² The US Senate gave its advice and consent to START II ratification in January 1996, but the US President has not yet submitted to the Senate the START II protocols and ABM Treaty agreements concluded with Russia in September 1997. Russia has made START II's entry into force conditional on US ratification of the September 1997 START II protocols and ABM Treaty agreements.

⁶³ This article is focused on Russian attitudes and policies, rather than the intrinsic problems of defining an arms control regime for NSNF, such as the baseline or initialization problem (determining the numbers and locations of Russian NSNF) and the difficulties of verification and geographical scope. Nor does this article examine the considerable damage to US and NATO interests, including with respect to non-proliferation, that could be caused by a unilateral withdrawal of the remaining US nuclear presence in Europe. For discussions of these issues, see David S. Yost, *The US and nuclear deterrence in Europe*, Adelphi Paper no. 326 (London: Oxford University Press for the International Institute for Strategic Studies, March 1999), pp. 25–33, 49–52, 57–61.

⁶⁴ William C. Potter and Nikolai Sokov, 'The nature of the problem', in William C. Potter, Nikolai Sokov, Harald Müller and Annette Schaper, *Tactical nuclear weapons: options for control* (Geneva: United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, Dec. 2000), p. 14.

strike capabilities and demonstrated effectiveness in employing them. Indeed, in an effort to infer a rational basis for such an initiative on NATO's part, Russian analysts might well deem their hypothesis that US and allied non-nuclear precision strike systems are approaching (or exceeding) the effectiveness of nuclear weapons vindicated by US withdrawal of the remaining NSNF in Europe. Russian fears about NATO might, in other words, remain virtually unchanged or perhaps even be deepened.

It is nonetheless plausible that the Russians would be pleased if the United States unilaterally withdrew its remaining NSNF from Europe if they interpreted the move as reflecting a lessening of US will and commitment, a decrease in NATO's political-military capabilities, and the elimination of the 'coupling', 'transatlantic link' and other political-military functions of US NSNF in Europe. The Russians—and key observers in NATO Europe—might consider the withdrawal of the US nuclear presence evidence of America's decreased willingness to defend its allies with nuclear means. Moscow might then expect its European neighbours to become more deferential to Russia, in view of the perceived change in the balance of power and commitments, with unpredictable consequences. The withdrawal of US NSNF could thus have counter-productive and even dangerous geopolitical consequences, because of the conclusions that could well be drawn in Russia and Europe about US security commitments.

The risks and costs associated with a unilateral withdrawal of US NSNF from Europe would therefore outweigh the putative gain of assuaging Russian anxieties and suspicions about NATO. Moscow's expressed fears are at any rate generally based on misperceptions and misrepresentations about NATO.⁶⁵ The withdrawal of the remaining US NSNF could create an unstable situation in Europe by sending a message of US disengagement and encouraging great power aspirations and behaviour on the part of Russia. Unilateral withdrawal of US NSNF would imply that Russian NSNF do not need to be balanced with even a minimum amount of comparable capabilities. This would be a huge misstatement about NATO's security interests and requirements. The alliance would in effect be accepting Russian arguments that (despite NATO's conciliatory policies, non-aggressive record towards Russia and structural need for laboriously achieved unanimity among its 19 members for any operation other than self-defence) NATO is so inherently powerful via other means that it could readily give up the US NSNF in Europe—as if Russian perceptions of NATO as interventionist and hegemonic could be diminished only by this sacrifice of US and alliance capability and the severing of this transatlantic link.

Comparable problems burden other proposals for a withdrawal of US NSNF. Lewis Dunn and Victor Alessi recently proposed that the United States withdraw its remaining NSNF from Europe in return for Moscow's agreement

⁶⁵ Some European experts on Russia judge that Moscow at times overstates its concerns about NATO to advance domestic political purposes and to seek concessions from European and NATO nations.

to 'corral' its NSNF at central storage sites (thereby, it is argued, reducing the risk of diversion and narrowing Russian deployment and use options). Dunn and Alessi called for 'coordinated unilateral actions' by Russia and the United States, rather than the purely unilateral US action proposed by Potter and Sokov. However, one of the results would be the same: the elimination of the US nuclear presence in Europe. Like the Potter–Sokov proposal, the Dunn–Alessi proposal is grounded in hopes that a US NSNF withdrawal would elicit Russian restraint and transparency.⁶⁶ In practical terms, however, the asymmetry in numbers between US and Russian NSNF would probably be magnified; reliable verification of the numbers of Russian NSNF inside (and outside) the 'corrals' might well be impossible, especially when it would matter in a crisis; and NATO would have lost the political–military 'coupling' and other security functions of US NSNF in Europe. These alliance security functions are so significant that the allies have concluded that a minimum level of US nuclear presence must be retained in Europe in the foreseeable future, even in a context of reciprocal reductions.⁶⁷

Nor is it clear that a unilateral withdrawal of the remaining US NSNF in Europe would, in the words of Potter and Sokov, 'help to revive the spirit of the parallel 1991 initiatives'. The spirit of the 1991–2 initiatives was hopeful improvisation during a period of uncertainty and perceived urgency, in view of events in the Soviet Union and the difficulties in devising a formal NSNF arms control regime. In retrospect, Russians generally dismiss the hopefulness of the early 1990s regarding Russian cooperation with the United States and the West as a whole as 'romantic' and 'naïve'. In the intervening period, Russian conventional forces have drastically deteriorated, and the utility of NSNF in Russian eyes has correspondingly mounted. It is therefore doubtful whether a unilateral removal of the remaining US NSNF in Europe would somehow 'jump-start' negotiations with Russia about its NSNF.

Since the 1950s it has been argued in various quarters that Moscow would be more cooperative in dealings with the West if it were granted its wish that US nuclear weapons in Europe be entirely removed. It is far more likely, however, that the Russians would simply 'pocket' a unilateral withdrawal of the US NSNF as something they had always demanded. Under both Soviet and Russian rule, Moscow has considered the US nuclear presence in Europe not simply threatening to its security, but politically illegitimate, a symbol of US intrusion

⁶⁶ Lewis A. Dunn and Victor Alessi, 'Arms control by other means', *Survival* 42: 4, Winter 2000–01, p. 136.

⁶⁷ 'A credible Alliance nuclear posture and the demonstration of Alliance solidarity and common commitment to war prevention continue to require widespread participation by European Allies involved in collective defence planning in nuclear roles, in peacetime basing of nuclear forces on their territory and in command, control and consultation arrangements. Nuclear forces based in Europe and committed to NATO provide an essential political and military link between the European and the North American members of the Alliance. The Alliance will therefore maintain adequate nuclear forces in Europe': North Atlantic Council, Strategic Concept, 24 April 1999, para. 63. The formula 'European Allies involved in collective defence planning' excludes France, which has chosen not to participate in the Alliance's Nuclear Planning Group since its establishment in 1966–7.

into Moscow's rightful sphere of influence.⁶⁸ From a Russian perspective, a unilateral withdrawal of the US nuclear presence in Europe would be rectifying an old injustice and imposition, rather than offering a signal for Russian NSNF disarmament. For the alliance, even if Russian NSNF numbers could thereby be numerically reduced, there would be little or no strategic gain. Russia would hold a monopoly on NSNF from the Atlantic to the Chinese border. Moscow's NSNF holdings would be unverifiable, but would probably remain in the thousands. If drastic reductions in NATO NSNF since 1991 have not led Moscow to resolve the massive uncertainties in the West about Russia's NSNF, why should it be expected that complete withdrawal (entirely removing the alliance's leverage) would bring about a response that NATO could regard as satisfactory?

In other words, while the remaining US NSNF in Europe constitute some of America's most important means of bargaining leverage, their value in this regard is inescapably limited by Russia's overriding national security priorities. To a significant extent, as indicated earlier, the Russians attribute utility to their NSNF for reasons other than NATO's NSNF.⁶⁹ Russians may in fact attach increased value to their NSNF in the years to come, owing to the country's economic and demographic decline and its inability to invest much in conventional military modernization. Russian interests in using NSNF to deter powers other than NATO (such as China), to substitute for advanced non-nuclear precision-strike systems and to 'de-escalate' regional conflicts (among other functions attributed to NSNF) would not be modified by a unilateral withdrawal of US NSNF from Europe.

Conclusion

At the current juncture, at least in the NSNF domain, the Russians appear to discount the usual theoretical advantages of arms control—transparency, predictability, stability, confidence-building, and so on. The chief Russian motivation for continued interest in arms control for non-strategic nuclear forces nonetheless remains one of the main goals of Moscow's foreign policy since the 1950s—to get US nuclear weapons out of Europe. Under both Soviet

⁶⁸ In this respect the attitudes of many Russians in the country's political elite remain as a renowned British scholar characterized them during the Soviet period: 'The Russians feel themselves to be not only the most numerous but also the greatest of all European peoples. They believe, on these grounds and on ideological grounds, that the Soviet Union has the right to greater influence in all European affairs than she has now': Malcolm Mackintosh, 'Moscow's view of the balance of power', *The World Today* 29, March 1973, p. 111.

⁶⁹ As Nikolai Sokov himself has pointed out, 'The persistence with which Russia continues to adhere to the view that tactical nuclear weapons are important for its security in spite of several years of insistence of the West that these weapons should be reduced, testifies to the relative independence of the country's policy in the area of nuclear weapons': Sokov, *Russian strategic modernization*, p. 200. Indeed, Sokov has commented as follows on proposals to convert the 1991–2 commitments into a formal treaty regime, with verification provisions: 'The task is not easy. Russia values tactical nuclear weapons more than the Soviet Union did in 1991 and its requirements for such a treaty are stiffer': Sokov, 'The tactical nuclear weapons controversy'.

and Russian rule, Moscow has made it clear in various negotiations—SALT, START, INF, etc.—that it regards the US nuclear weapons presence as contrary to its interests. Russia has continued the Soviet tradition of arguing for a unilateral withdrawal of the US non-strategic nuclear force presence in Europe. In November 2000 Yuriy Kapralov, the head of the Russian foreign ministry's department for security and disarmament, told a news conference that 'The Russian initiative to radically reduce nuclear arsenals also stipulates negotiations on a pullout of US non-strategic nuclear weapons from Europe.'⁷⁰

Russian officials have restated Moscow's preference in this regard in various ways (e.g. by demanding the repatriation of all nuclear weapons to national territories). However, some Russian analysts have suggested that, owing in part to the verification problems associated with dual-capable aircraft and other delivery systems, the most attractive solution might be a new formulation of declaratory arrangements, this time with specified numerical ceilings, in contrast with the 1991–2 statements by Moscow and Washington. According to Sergey Rogov,

considering the colossal difficulties of verifying dual-purpose systems, it can be assumed that we will succeed in avoiding the adoption of treaty commitments on tactical nuclear weapons and in retaining a certain quantitative superiority here. In place of this, it is permissible to adopt parallel political statements (of the type of Bush–Gorbachev statements of 1991) about voluntary restrictions on all types of 'nonstrategic' nuclear warheads to a level of 1,500–2,000.⁷¹

The point of this article is not that the Russians have no incentives to pursue arms control for non-strategic nuclear forces, but that they have countervailing incentives to retain and improve weapons in this category. It may therefore be difficult to engage them in successful negotiations affecting their NSNF—whether the goal is formalizing the 1991–2 commitments in a treaty and adding a verification regime,⁷² or seeking further reductions in and/or the elimination of specific types of NSNF. NATO has adopted the most practical objective currently available: pursuing greater transparency regarding NSNF in the NATO–Russia Permanent Joint Council.⁷³

⁷⁰ Kapralov statement of 14 Nov. 2000, quoted in Itar-Tass dispatch, 14 Nov. 2000, in FBIS, CEP20001114000223.

⁷¹ Sergey Mikhaylovich Rogov, 'Reliance on nuclear shield: not unilateral reduction, but a search for compromise solutions with the United States will ensure Russia's national security', *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye*, 4–10 Aug. 2000, in FBIS, CEP20000810000216.

⁷² In December 2000 the North Atlantic Council called for 'an early conclusion of a START III agreement' and stated that, 'Given the need to reduce the uncertainties surrounding substrategic nuclear weapons in Russia, we believe that a reaffirmation—and perhaps codification—of the 1991/92 Presidential Initiatives might be a first, but not exhaustive, step in this direction': final communiqué, ministerial meeting of the North Atlantic Council, Brussels, 15 Dec. 2000, para. 63.

⁷³ The North Atlantic Council in December 2000 approved a proposal for 'a reciprocal data exchange with Russia' in the NATO–Russia Permanent Joint Council 'to enhance transparency and knowledge of the size of the US and Russian stockpiles' of 'sub-strategic nuclear forces'. See the 'Report on Options for Confidence and Security Building Measures (CSBMs), Verification, Non-Proliferation, Arms Control and Disarmament', press communiqué M–NAC–2 (2000) 121 (Brussels, 14 Dec. 2000), para. 95.