

# Conventional Modernization and Nuclear Disarmament

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## Two perspectives on nuclear disarmament:

- Elimination of nuclear weapons will make the world safer
- Elimination of nuclear weapons will make large-scale conventional war possible and likely

Both perspectives are valid, but emphasize different angles of the same problem. Conclusions (implications) are questionable, though.

The first perspective de facto downplays the risk of war as long as it is not nuclear.

The second perspective leverages fear of large-scale conventional war to avoid nuclear disarmament.

Both perspectives reject middle ground. The task is precisely about finding middle ground: achieve nuclear disarmament without excessively increasing the threat of large-scale conventional war.

**Reason to seriously consider conventional forces – their ability to support proactive foreign policy of (very few) advanced states.**

Advanced conventional long-range strike assets brought military power back into international relations in 1991:

- Nuclear weapons are good for deterrence, but not for proactive foreign policy
- Traditional armed forces involve high costs, high casualties, high collateral damage, yield few tangible results.



Short period of “peaceful” foreign policy, but Gulf I brought military power back into international relations. Used with tangible success in the Balkans mid-1990s, Kosovo 1999, Gulf II 2003, Libya 2011, other places.

**US and allied monopoly lasted 25 years, but is ending. In 2015, Russia became the second country with similar capability. China and India are close behind.**

End of US monopoly will profoundly change the nature of international politics – in the near future, but more so in the longer term.

Not threat, not challenge: new shape of the international system.



## Capacity factor

- In the foreseeable future, modern conventional capability will likely remain in possession of few countries: it requires large-scale technological, industrial, and financial investment in many areas simultaneously.
- This feature will give them capability to use force in support of foreign policy vis-à-vis the majority of countries/regions.
- The majority of possessors of modern conventional capability are also nuclear states; the impact of that capability on nuclear balance(s) is not obvious: it can reduce the value of nuclear weapons or, alternatively, can increase the risk of nuclear war.

## Geography factor:

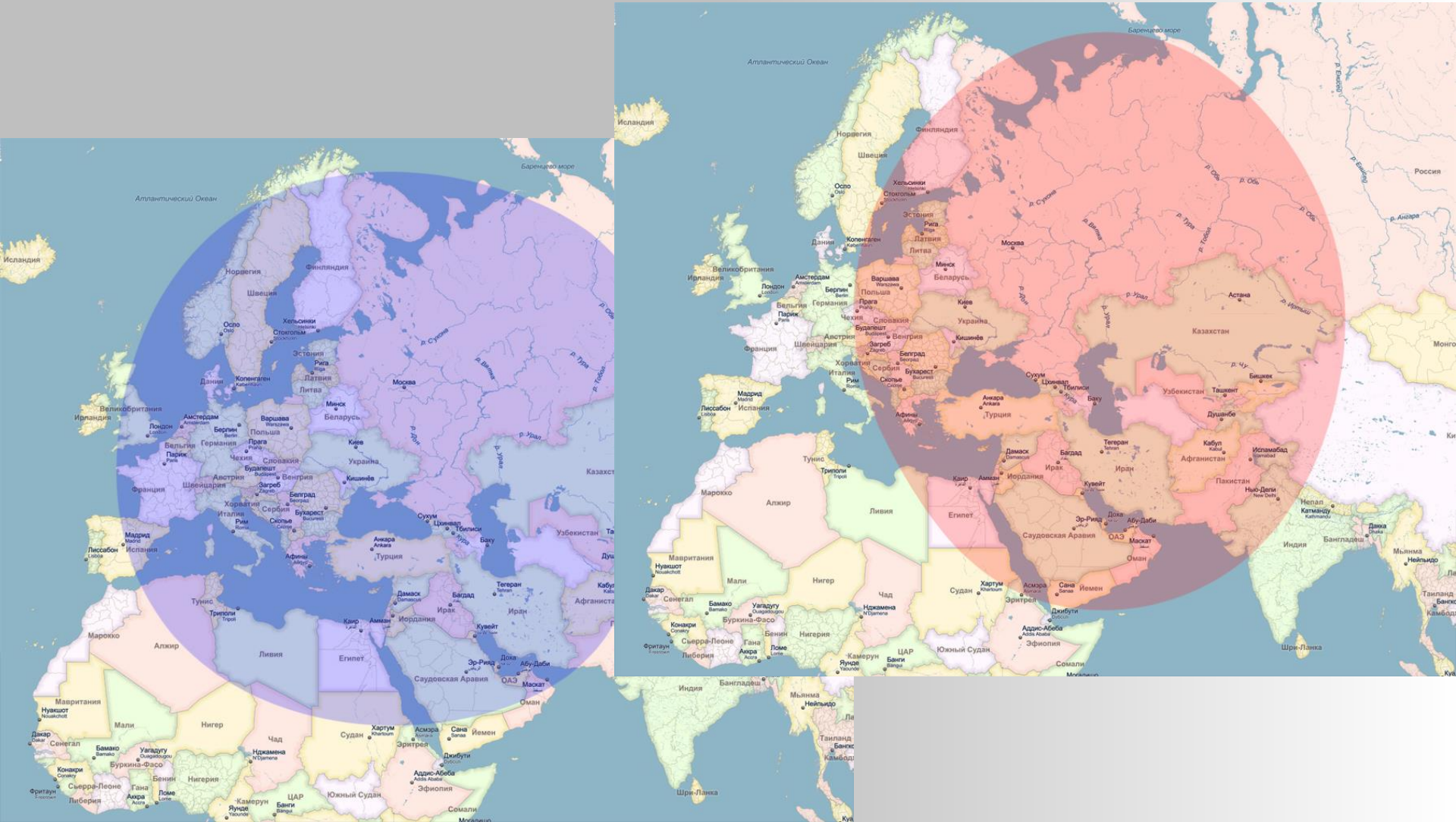
Today, mostly intermediate-range capability. For all countries that possess advanced conventional capability or are likely to acquire it, the main sets of targets are in Eurasia.

- For the United States, platforms need to be moved to the region of use. This gives several weeks' worth warning.
- In contrast, this is not a challenge for the emerging Russian capability – can implement strikes from within its own territory or waters (the only real-life target so far (Syria) and likely future targets).
- The same will likely be true for China and India.
- At the same time, both Russia and the United States have at the moment few modern conventional assets that can reach the territory of the other with short warning.

Differences in geography will eventually decline as the United States continues to work on Prompt Global Strike and Russia (as well as at least China) on similar programs.



The focus on Russian conventional capability vs. US and NATO may be misleading. The likely area of interest is probably greater Middle East.



## **Time factor and impact on nuclear strategy perceived (value of nuclear weapons)**

Different states acquire modern conventional capability at different times. This affects relationship between nuclear and conventional weapons.

United States – late 1980s-early 1990s

Russia – initial capability since 2015, full capacity will likely be acquired by 2022-2025

China and India – have elements of conventional capability, full capability will emerge probably in 10 or so years.

Russia reacted to US conventional capability by increasing reliance on nuclear weapons.



# Russian Nuclear Strategy:

## Stages of Evolution

1999-2003: new strategy emerges:

- Security Council meeting (March 1999)
- National Security Concept (2000)
- Military Doctrine (2000)
- “Immediate Tasks of Development of the Armed Forces” (2003)

2010 – new edition of Military Doctrine: same strategy, higher nuclear threshold

2014 – latest edition of Military Doctrine, no change in nuclear policy

**Still unclear whether Russia will reduce reliance on nuclear weapons once it acquires full conventional capability. As of today – only added one more stage to the ladder of escalation.**

## Transition from Soviet to Russian Nuclear Strategy

	<i>Soviet Union/Russian 1993 Military Doctrine</i>	<i>Russian 2000 and later Military Doctrines</i>
<i>Nature of conflict</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Global war</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Regional war</b></li><li>• Global war</li></ul>
<i>Nuclear missions</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Deterrence of global war</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>De-escalation of regional war</b></li><li>• Deterrence of global war</li></ul>
<i>Employment</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• No first use</li><li>• Massive strike on warning, transition to second strike</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Regional conflict: limited use, military targets</b></li><li>• <b>First use</b></li><li>• Massive strike on warning/second strike</li></ul>
<i>Scale of use</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Unacceptable damage</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Tailored damage for limited use</b></li><li>• Unacceptable damage for global war</li></ul>

# The United States has Reduced Reliance on Nuclear Weapons since the End of Cold War

## Nuclear Posture Review, April 2010:

- Main mission – “deter nuclear attack on the United States, our allies, and partners”
- Will use nuclear weapons “in extreme circumstances.”
- “As the role of nuclear weapons is reduced ... non-nuclear elements will take on a greater share of the deterrence burden.”
- Role vis-à-vis conventional, chemical or biological attack has declined “significantly” and will continue to decline.
- U.S. “will not use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapons states that are party to the NPT and in compliance with their nuclear non-proliferation obligations.” Nuclear weapons will not be used in response to chemical or biological attack from a state in good standing with the NPT.

**Will reliance on nuclear weapons increase once monopoly on conventional capability ends? Same applies to NATO’s “appropriate mix” of assets.**

## Key risks associated with modern conventional capability:

- Powers with modern conventional capability can support their foreign policy with military power (war is again continuation of policy by other means). Applies mostly to states outside the club.
  - Imbalance of military capability increases proliferation risks
- Among powers with modern conventional capability – risk of escalation to nuclear use in case of direct conflict.
  - The risk is greater while there is imbalance of conventional capability (cf. Russia's reliance on nuclear weapons).
  - When rough balance of conventional capability is achieved, nuclear weapons will be seen as a means to prevent escalation – enhanced deterrence value will undermine efforts to eliminate nuclear weapons;
  - If nuclear weapons are eliminated, high risk of high-intensity conventional war, perhaps more deadly than World War II.

Risk of conflict with potential for escalation present today in Syria where direct clash between US and Russia appears likely. A brinksmanship situation may be in the interest of both parties.

- Trump and Putin are not Kennedy and Khrushchev, outcome may not be the same as in 1962.
- Usability of conventional weapons makes escalation psychologically easier.
- Given the imbalance of conventional capability, US is likely to pursue escalation more resolutely while Russia is likely to invoke nuclear weapons earlier in the game.

Situations like that will likely repeat in the future more often.

**Key conclusion: Advanced conventional weapons need to be addressed through arms control mechanisms along with nuclear weapons.**

If not –

- NWS will resist nuclear disarmament viewing nuclear weapons as means to prevent large-scale conventional war
- Some NNWS might consider nuclear capability to offset conventional might of a few great powers

On the positive side – no need to address conventional weapons with the same level of detail as nuclear: one nuclear warhead is deadly and dangerous, but one conventional warhead is relatively insignificant. Thus, achieving tangible result will be easier.

## Compatibility of nuclear disarmament and conventional arms control:

- Nuclear disarmament needs to shift focus from delivery vehicles (the principle of SALT-START series of treaties) to nuclear stockpile (physical warheads) – the only framework that can work for the task of eliminating nuclear weapons.
- That shift in framework, which is desirable and necessary in any event, will solve the challenge of dual-capable delivery vehicles. All of them will count by default as equipped with conventional warheads unless proven otherwise.



**Existing US/NATO and emerging Russian capability are not subject to any arms control regime, past or present, except marginally:**

- conventional ALCMs indirectly subject to New START through aggregate limit on delivery vehicles, including strategic bombers;
- CFE Treaty contains a very high limit for combat aircraft (6,800), excluding naval aircraft; treaty has been “frozen” by Russia
- Conventional sea-launched cruise missiles are not limited.

Russia links long-range conventional strike assets to further reduction of nuclear weapons; Congress in New START ratification resolution banned discussion of conventional capability at future talks. **This gives Moscow free hand as it develops and deploys any long-range conventional strike assets its defense industry might come up with.** China and India will enjoy the same level of freedom.

## Options for conventional arms control:

**At the initial stage**, expansion of the Vienna Document to include a set of transparency and confidence building measures, including:

- Exchange of data on aircraft capable of carrying precision-guided weapons as well as submarines and surface ships capable of carrying SLCMs, including types and locations;
- Exchange of data on other long-range delivery vehicles and platforms capable of carrying conventional weapons (future strategic range vehicles);
- Notifications about planned concentration of relevant delivery vehicles and weapons in a particular area, whether on land- or sea-based (including movement of aircraft to bases and airfields in a particular area).
- Perhaps also visits to or overflights (under the Open Skies regime) of the areas where such concentration has occurred.
- Provision of information about the reasons for such concentration.

## Options for conventional arms control:

**At a later stage**, add limits on the overall number and types of long-range precision-guided weapons. Such limits could be established as politically binding unilateral parallel obligations roughly along the lines of the 1991 Presidential Nuclear Initiatives. That approach will allow to avoid complicated and excessively burdensome verification requirements, but at the same time help reduce the risk of uncertainty that could emerge from an unexplained and suspicious concentration of weapons as well as the risk of conflict stemming from uncertainty.