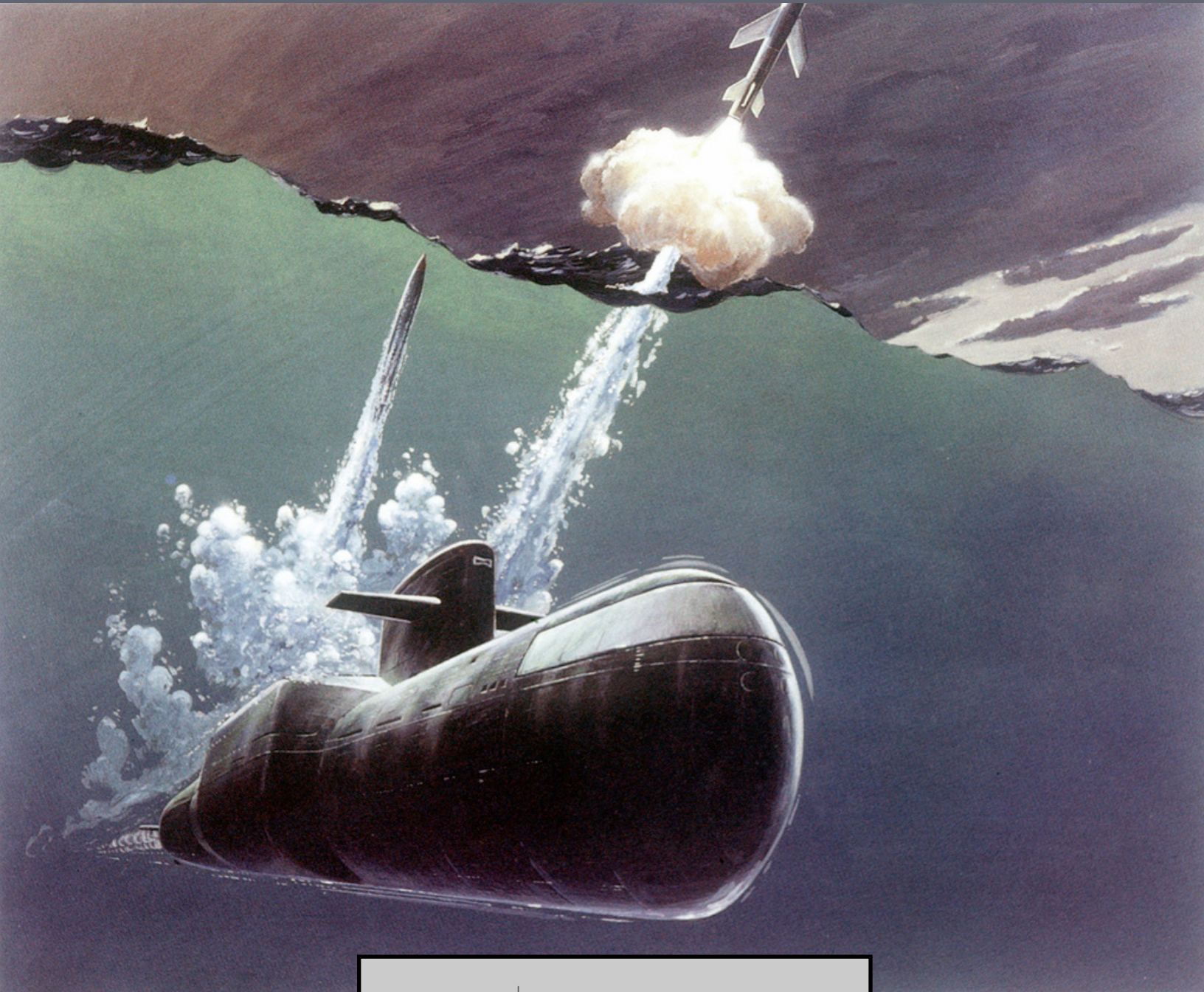


# EVOLUTION OF DETERRENT THINKING IN USSR AND RUSSIA: A LOOK THROUGH MILITARY REPORTS

Research Report | September 2023



**MESA**

THE MEDIA ECOLOGY AND  
STRATEGIC ANALYSIS GROUP

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## **RESEARCH TEAM MEMBERS**

Dr. Asya Cooley, Oklahoma State University  
Dr. Skye Cooley, Oklahoma State University  
Dr. Rosemary Avance, Oklahoma State University  
Dr. Sumin Shin, Oklahoma State University

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This comprehensive qualitative analysis examines the evolution of Russian articulations of deterrence by analyzing over 250 Russian military documents spanning from the Soviet era to the present. The research identifies seven periods that reflect paradigmatic shifts in the intellectual discourse of Russian military strategists regarding deterrence. These periods are not rigidly defined but serve as markers for transformations in military thinking. The analysis is supported by insights from relevant academic literature.

- The first period, from 1954 to 1959, witnessed a transformative phase as the Russian armed forces acquired nuclear weaponry, leading to significant shifts in perspectives on conflicts and military operations.
- The second period, from the 1960s to the 1970s, was characterized by a fervent nuclear arms race and a comprehensive restructuring of the Russian armed forces to balance the role of nuclear missile weaponry.
- The third period, from the 1970s to 1991, focused on attaining nuclear parity with potential adversaries and viewing strategic nuclear weapons primarily as tools for deterrence rather than actual weapons of combat.
- The fourth period, from the 1990s to the 2000s, explored the challenge of deterring conventional threats using nuclear weapons, particularly when Russia's conventional capabilities were significantly inferior. The concept of de-escalation<sup>1</sup> emerged as a strategic approach during this period.
- In the fifth period, from the 2000s to the 2010s, Russian military thinkers shifted their attention to strategic deterrence, which encompassed both nuclear and conventional capabilities to counter threats of various natures.
- The sixth period, from the 2010s to the 2020s, introduced the concept of cross-domain deterrence, recognizing the limitations of nuclear deterrence and exploring a broader framework that includes non-nuclear and informational influence domains.
- The current emerging period, referred to as hybrid strategic deterrence, is characterized by Russia's focus on countering pressure from the US through its military capabilities, collaboration with allies, and anticipation of emerging disruptive technologies. Hybrid strategic deterrence involves a range of implicit coercive measures to counter hybrid warfare, combining both forceful and non-forceful influences.

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<sup>1</sup> In Western military literature, this concept has become known as “regional nuclear deterrence” or “escalate to de-escalate.”



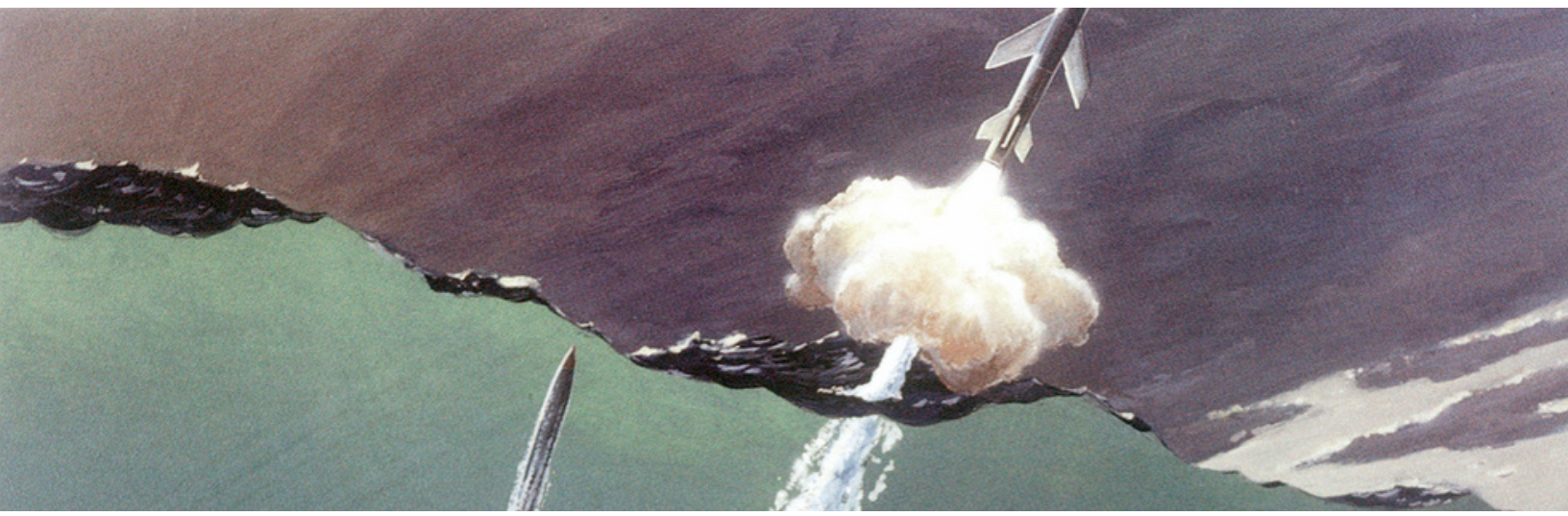


This project also investigates contrasting perspectives between Russia and the United States (and the West) regarding deterrence, according to Russian military documents. The US military organization is portrayed as aggressive and interventionist, while Russia is seen as peaceful. The US aims to maintain global dominance and the ability to launch nuclear strikes against countries that challenge its hegemony. On the other hand, Russian deterrence focuses on protecting national security rather than pursuing expansionist goals. Military theorists argue against large-scale reductions in nuclear weapons, suggesting that they encourage aggressive plans by the US and pose a threat to global security. Another point of contention is the purpose of strategic weapons, with one document asserting that US missile defense systems are not solely defensive but rather are hazardous components of offensive capabilities. Contrasts also arise in understandings of nuclear de-escalation, with the US shown as relying on conventional military superiority and the possibility of nuclear escalation if faced with de-escalation. Additionally, Russian military theorists perceive the deployment of US missile defense systems as encirclement strategies targeting Russia and China, although this does not cause substantial concern in the US.

This research also addresses effective and ineffective deterrence from the Russian perspective. Russian military discussions place great emphasis on the effectiveness of deterrence, with a focus on nuclear status. Effective deterrence, according to texts, requires a clear understanding of red lines, the ability to respond with overwhelming losses to the aggressor, and the persuasiveness of determination to fulfill obligations. The role of nuclear weapons is seen as crucial for Russia, deterring both nuclear and conventional conflicts, preventing large-scale wars, and ensuring international stability. However, the development of precision weapons, information warfare, and new physical principles may reduce the role of nuclear deterrence in the future. Non-nuclear deterrence is also considered effective, with regional commands increasing flexibility, but proper political and diplomatic support is essential. Asymmetric responses are seen as valuable tools for deterrence. Ineffective deterrence challenges include limitations against major geopolitical centers, ineffectiveness in preventing conflicts and addressing new threats, and diminished effectiveness due to the deployment of US missile defense systems, which disrupt the strategic balance and risk catastrophe.

Overall, this analysis demonstrates the evolution of Russian understandings of deterrence and highlights the importance of nuclear and non-nuclear capabilities, as well as information warfare, in shaping Russia's strategic thinking. It underscores the significance of adapting to changing geopolitical dynamics and technological advancements to maintain effective deterrence strategies.





## CHAPTER 1 | RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study aims to analyze the evolution of Russian perspectives on deterrence, particularly in contrast to Western conceptualizations. Deterrence as a strategic concept remains critically important amid ongoing tensions between Russia and the West. A deeper understanding of the Russian viewpoint can inform more effective policy and engagement. The current report will address the following key research questions:

- RQ1: What is the evolutionary trajectory of Russian understandings of deterrence?*
- RQ2: What are the contrasting perspectives between Russia and the United States (and the West) regarding deterrence, according to Russian military documents?*
- RQ3: How do Russian military documents conceptualize effective and ineffective deterrence?*

In summary, this study takes a focused look at Russian deterrence strategy through in-depth analysis of original Russian military documents over time. The research questions outlined above aim to unveil uniquely Russian viewpoints on this critical policy issue and elucidate contrasts with the dominant paradigms in the West. The findings will provide valuable insights into ongoing challenges in Russia-West relations.





## CHAPTER 2 | METHODS

A qualitative content analysis was chosen as the preferred method of inquiry due to its ability to analyze and interpret textual data, enabling the identification of patterns, themes, and meanings within the data.

### Data Selection

Multiple sources were utilized for this study. Initially, all available military doctrines from the USSR and Russia were sought. In cases where complete texts were unavailable, secondary sources that provided detailed descriptions of the military doctrines were utilized. Specifically, researchers had difficulty obtaining full primary source documents for several key Soviet military doctrines from 1953-1982. However, by thoroughly reviewing high-quality scholarly commentary and analyses of these doctrines, the team extracted useful insights about their content and significance to complement the available primary sources. A total of 10 military doctrine documents were included in the analysis.

Furthermore, researchers accessed two significant Russian military publications: *Military Thought* (Voennaya Misl') and *Independent Military Review* (Voennoe Obozreniye). *Military Thought* serves as the flagship journal of the Russian General Staff, acting as the primary forum for active and retired senior military personnel. The publication reflects the main questions, critical debates, and intellectual climate of

Russian strategic theory and policy.<sup>i</sup> *Independent Military Review* is a weekly Russian publication that focuses on various military affairs topics, including military posture, science, secret service operations, weapons, technology, and the military history of Russia and other countries. Both publications align with the research questions posed in this study.

To identify relevant articles, several keywords were used to search within these publications: *nuclear deterrence* (yadernoe sderzhivanie), *nuclear coercion* (yadernoe prinuzhdenie), *nuclear threat* (yadernaya ugroza), and *nuclear intimidation* (yadernoe ustrashenie). In *Military Thought*, a total of 118 articles containing at least one of these keywords were identified, while the search within the *Independent Military Review* yielded 240 articles. All identified documents were retrieved in April 2023 and uploaded to NVivo for coding in May and June 2023.

### Coding Procedure

The coding procedure involved the development of a coding framework using a combination of deductive coding (pre-established categories, such as Russian strategic culture and deterrence typology) and inductive coding. This coding framework was systematically applied to the data by assigning relevant codes to specific segments of the text. Themes and codes were then organized and summarized around the three primary research

questions of the study: evolution of deterrence thinking, contrasting perspectives between Russian and the West, and the effectiveness of deterrence. The data analysis was guided by the consolidated criteria for reporting qualitative studies (COREQ) checklist.<sup>ii</sup>

To ensure internal validity, triangulation was employed to examine evidence from multiple sources. Additionally, member checking was conducted through the involvement of multiple researchers in the coding and interpretation of the

data. Detailed descriptions were provided for each code used, further enhancing the internal validity of the research. Reliability was achieved by thoroughly documenting case study procedures, protocols, and the database, thereby ensuring consistency in code definitions. Coordinated communication among coders and cross-checking of codes by multiple researchers on the project further strengthened research reliability. It is worth noting that one researcher on the team was a native Russian speaker, adding an additional layer of expertise to the analysis.





## CHAPTER 3 | FINDINGS

### Understanding Deterrence

#### *RQ1: What is the evolutionary trajectory of Russian understandings of deterrence?*

Through a comprehensive qualitative analysis encompassing more than 250 Russian military documents, we have traced the evolutionary trajectory of Russian understandings of deterrence. Commencing from the Soviet era (starting at approximately year 1954), and culminating with the most recent documents accessible as of April 2023, our research has yielded a timeline comprising seven periods. It is important to note that these periods are not strictly delineated by rigid boundaries, but rather serve as markers denoting the transformations within the intellectual discourse of military strategists regarding deterrence. In this review, we will provide compelling substantiation for these paradigmatic shifts, bolstered by the insights from pertinent academic literature.<sup>iii,iv,v</sup> The appendix includes the outlined periods, together with approximate dates, brief descriptions, and big questions of the periods.

#### *Period 1: Nuclear proliferation (1954-1959)*

During this initial period spanning from 1954 to roughly 1959, the Russian armed forces underwent a transformative phase, marked by the acquisition of nuclear weaponry. This significant development triggered a profound reevaluation of perspectives on the essence, strategies, and tactics involved in

potential conflicts, leading to notable shifts in the approach to military operations and engagements.<sup>vi</sup> As quoted in one document, Marshal Sokolovsky said, “The appearance of nuclear weapons and long-range strategic weapons led to the reasons why modern wars will be carried out by fundamentally different methods compared to previous wars.”<sup>vii</sup>

#### *Period 2: Arms race/absolute weapon (1960s-1970s)*

During the second stage, spanning from the 1960s to the 1970s, a fervent nuclear arms race ensued, characterized by intense competition among nations to acquire and enhance their nuclear capabilities. Simultaneously, a comprehensive restructuring of Russian armed forces took place, guided by more nuanced evaluations of the significance and positioning of nuclear missile weaponry within the broader framework of armed conflict. This period witnessed a deliberate effort to achieve a more balanced understanding of the role and integration of nuclear armaments in the military landscape.<sup>viii</sup>

#### *Period 3: Nuclear parity as a basis of deterrence (1970s-1991)*

During this period, a pivotal focus emerged on resolving the challenge of attaining nuclear parity with potential adversaries. Simultaneously, this period witnessed a notable rise in the likelihood of conventional (non-nuclear) armed conflicts.<sup>ix</sup>

Russian military discourse points out that the opposing parties (US and USSR) reached the potential to repeatedly annihilate one another and pose a significant threat to human civilization. Consequently, the concept of a global thermonuclear war lost its significance, and strategic nuclear weapons gradually transformed from actual weapons of combat into tools for deterring strategic actions.<sup>x</sup>

Reflecting on the period of the 1980s, Russian military theorists write that the primary form of armed conflict shifted towards a limited nuclear war, where various types of weapons, such as tactical and operational-tactical nuclear weapons, were expected to be employed. The intention was to initiate the use of nuclear weapons after a significant duration of conventional warfare, specifically when one of the parties' forces were in a dire situation.<sup>xi</sup>

This period is well described in extant academic literature. In exploring the dynamics of deterrence within strategic policies, it becomes evident that Moscow gradually began to discern its distinct perspective on the role of military power, particularly nuclear capabilities, in preventing war, which differed from its interpretation of the US doctrine of deterrence.<sup>xii</sup> While Soviet leaders acknowledged and accepted the concept of deterrence, they also embarked on contemplating and discussing possibilities that extended beyond its boundaries, envisioning a future marked by peaceful coexistence.

A significant development in Soviet thinking unfolded with regard to the no first use of nuclear weapons. Starting as early as 1970-1973, the Soviets engaged in confidential negotiations aimed at establishing mutual agreements with the United States on refraining from initiating the use of nuclear weapons.<sup>xiii</sup> This culminated in 1982, when the Soviet Union made a unilateral declaration of no-first-use of nuclear weapons, solidifying their commitment to this stance. Despite these developments, Soviet military leaders still believed that possessing the capability for nuclear warfare was necessary to meet deterrence requirements. Moreover, it was argued that the best approach to prevent war and enhance security was to reinforce strategic stability while simultaneously reducing

nuclear arsenals.<sup>xiv</sup> As a result, the Soviet concept of reasonable sufficiency evolved to prioritize reductions consistent with strategic objectives, striving towards achieving an optimal minimal level of nuclear armaments.<sup>xv</sup>

#### ***Period 4: Deterrence as de-escalation (1990s-2000s)***

Russian military theorists have grappled with a critical concern since the 1990s, particularly following the display of US airpower and precision-strike capabilities. Their primary question has been how to effectively deter conventional threats using nuclear weapons.<sup>xvi</sup> This emphasis holds particular significance during a period when Russia's own conventional capabilities significantly trailed behind. The emerging of the theory of de-escalation marks this period, and it is often described as an attempt to optimize the utilization of nuclear capabilities against a conventionally superior adversary.<sup>xvii</sup> As Adamsky writes, “the consensus within the Russian senior brass and defense intellectuals was that although thinking about nonnuclear tools of coercion might be a useful intellectual exercise, in terms of strategy it was unrealistic.”<sup>xviii</sup>

The weakness of conventional forces is well documented in the Russian military discourse. For example, one text writes, “Russia and the United States still maintain atomic parity, which makes it possible to compensate for the huge imbalance in conventional weapons.”<sup>xix</sup> Another text continues,

Undoubtedly, the largest role of nuclear weapons as a means of ensuring national security and state sovereignty is played in Russia, which has weaker general-purpose forces compared to the United States and China. In addition, the Russian Federation lags behind the United States in the field of missile defense and strategic non-nuclear weapons.<sup>xx</sup>

The Russian notion of de-escalation represents a strategic approach that envisions employing the threat of a limited nuclear strike, strategically calculated to compel an adversary to acquiesce to a return to the previous state of affairs.<sup>xxi</sup> This thinking is supported in the official 1993 document titled



“Basic Provisions of the Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation in the Transitional Period,” where nuclear weapons are not regarded as instruments of warfare, but rather as potent political deterrents, serving to safeguard national interests and security.

One document explains the utility of deterrence as an escalation management tool:

One of the tasks of effective deterrence is to prevent the escalatory dominance of the other side in conflict and crisis situations. It should be carried out taking into account the characteristics of each specific potential adversary (opponent) based on a deep study of its characteristics: stereotypes of thinking, strategic culture, identity, decision-making process, personal identity of a particular leader, military leader, his thinking, rational and irrational components, psychological qualities.<sup>xxii</sup>

Some military theorists attempted to construct a deterrence ladder, or the stages of increasing the scale of the use of nuclear weapons: demonstration, deterrence-demonstration, deterrence, deterrence-retaliation, retaliation-intimidation, and retaliation.<sup>xxiii</sup>

Another document presents the matrix of escalation (de-escalation) of impacts which reflects different levels of the threshold of coercion in relation to its goal. This table includes different levels of coercive threshold up to which the coerced party is able to resist: (a) the goal of coercion is achieved by non-military means; (b) coercion requires minor military assets (show of strength); (c) coercion requires substantial military presence; (d) coercion requires use of military force; and (e) not amenable to coercion.<sup>xxiv</sup>

### ***Period 5: Strategic deterrence (2000s-2010s)***

The imperative to address conventional inferiority was recognized as a temporary necessity. As the 2000s unfolded, Russian military theorists shifted their attention towards exploring the synergistic use of both nuclear and conventional capabilities to enhance deterrence against threats of both conventional and nuclear nature.<sup>xxv</sup> It was during this

phase of Russian deterrence thinking that the term “strategic deterrence” gained widespread usage, encapsulating the comprehensive approach encompassing both nuclear and conventional elements.<sup>xxvi</sup>

Our findings support that Russian military theorists have generally agreed on the definition of strategic deterrence, and they state:

Strategic deterrence is achieved by creating three threats, namely, the guaranteed destruction of the share of the economy and population of the country necessary to intimidate the enemy, the main groupings of the armed forces, all or a significant part of the political elite.<sup>xxvii</sup>

The reasoning behind strategic deterrence is the recognition that nuclear deterrence is not effective on its own. As one document reads,

The approach adopted by RF [Russian Federation] is a logical continuation of the Cold War nuclear deterrence strategies, since it became clear that it was impossible to achieve a de-escalation of armed conflicts of a limited scale solely through the threat of the use of nuclear weapons.<sup>xxviii</sup>

The 2010 Military Doctrine supports this shift in deterrence thinking. It focused on strategic deterrence as a means of preventing military conflicts. In modern military conflicts, the doctrine writes, there is a notable emphasis on the early utilization of information confrontation tactics to achieve political objectives without resorting to direct military force. Subsequently, these conflicts aim to shape a favorable response from the international community regarding the use of military force.

The concept of strategic deterrence includes actions to intimidate, restrict and coerce, as written in one military document.<sup>xxix</sup> It also includes political means that serve as intensifiers:

In the process of deterrence, political means are used in the interests of strengthening this process: statements, declarations, warnings about the possibility of using military force, creating a threat to the vital interests of the country; ultimatums to the aggressor; denunciation and withdrawal from

treaties on military security and arms limitation in the event of gross violations by the other side; application of sanctions against countries pursuing an aggressive and provocative policy, etc.<sup>xxx</sup>

The authors further go into details to explain the related concepts of “deterrent damage” and “unacceptable damage”:

Strategic deterrence is based on the combat capabilities of the Armed Forces (AF) of the Russian Federation to inflict damage on any aggressor incommensurate with the military-political and economic goals of the war set by it - the so-called “deterrent” damage. Its upper limit is “unacceptable” damage, i.e., damage that is absolutely unacceptable for the aggressor, when the aggressor state (states-aggressors) ceases to function as a socio-political system.<sup>xxxi</sup>

Strategic deterrence is applicable in both peace times and war times. As one document reads, “Strategic deterrence is carried out in order to: in peacetime - to prevent forceful pressure and aggression against Russia and its allies; in wartime — de-escalation of aggression and cessation of hostilities on terms acceptable to Russia.”<sup>xxxii</sup>

Additionally, this period is marked with the realization of the utility of asymmetric responses, in our time, when the economic and military power of Russia is incomparable with the capabilities of the USSR and the United States, in order to achieve greater rationality of our actions, it is necessary to respond to emerging threats more flexibly and, if possible, not direct, but asymmetric measures.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

#### ***Period 6: Cross-domain deterrence (2010s-2020s)***

Starting from about the 2010s, Russian military discussions start widely acknowledging that the effectiveness of nuclear weapons in deterring conventional and non-traditional security threats is limited.<sup>xxxiv</sup> These uncertainties surrounding the efficacy of nuclear deterrence have played a role in the development of a broader conceptual framework — cross-domain deterrence.<sup>xxxv,xxxvi</sup> This comprehensive concept aims to provide Russia with

a range of options beyond nuclear capabilities in order to prevent and influence conflicts.

Scholars argue that the *cross-domain deterrence* consists of nuclear, non-nuclear and informational influence domains.<sup>xxxvii</sup> Nuclear domain is still seen as the most effective part of cross-domain deterrence, as it is evident in this quote: “in the context of the multivariance of strategic deterrence, nuclear deterrence has been and will be considered as its basis at the global level, and non-military measures as a supporting tool.”<sup>xxxviii</sup>

One document writes specifically about informational influence, as a part of cross-domain deterrence strategy,

... a unified long-term strategy for the further development of space forces in the interests of the effective implementation of military-technical policy in the field of nuclear and non-nuclear deterrence, with a focus on information confrontation, the formation of such space forces and means that would be capable of solving integrated tasks of strategic deterrence, counteraction to aggression and defense.<sup>xxxix</sup>

As one military analysis states, the accomplishment of defense objectives is pursued through the implementation of military policy, which involves strategic deterrence and the prevention of military conflicts. Significant emphasis is placed on addressing various challenges, such as the development and execution of interconnected political, military, military-technical, diplomatic, economic, informational, and other measures. These efforts are aimed at thwarting any employment of military force against the Russian Federation and ensuring the maintenance of an adequate level of nuclear deterrence capability.<sup>xl</sup>

The 2014 Military Doctrine supports this view. In its text, it establishes a comprehensive framework of non-nuclear deterrence, encompassing foreign policy, military, and military-technical measures. Its primary objective, as stated, is to prevent aggression against the Russian Federation without relying on nuclear capabilities. The Doctrine emphasizes the significance of strategic deterrence, encompassing



both nuclear and non-nuclear means, as a preventive measure against military conflicts. Furthermore, the document highlights the emerging trend of military dangers and threats being increasingly manifested in the information domain and within the internal affairs of the country.

#### ***Period 7: Hybrid strategic deterrence (2020s – present)***

Hybrid strategic deterrence is an emerging and evolving concept in Russian military discourse. It is sometimes referred to as hybrid war, hybrid deterrence, or hybrid strategic deterrence. The underlying principle of the concept is rooted in the fact that Russia is unable to economically compete with the US due to its limitations. Consequently, a military analysis suggests that Russia's primary method of countering pressure from Washington lies in its military capabilities.<sup>xli</sup> Therefore, the current situation necessitates Russia and its allies to collaborate and anticipate the potential utilization of emerging disruptive technologies. This involves devising response measures as part of a unified strategy to effectively counter hybrid warfare.<sup>xlii</sup>

In the context of hybrid warfare, as a new kind of interstate confrontation, deterrence and coercion is seen as an active, offensive strategy designed for a long period of hybrid threats, including political and military pressure, economic sanctions, and ideological subversion.<sup>xliii</sup> One document describes the effectiveness of hybrid deterrence as “a more flexible means of deterrence and coercion than nuclear or precision-guided non-nuclear weapons. This type of interstate confrontation is built on the methods of implicit coercion using adaptive technologies of forceful and non-forceful influence on the enemy or the threat of such influence.”<sup>xliv</sup>

Another document comments on the effectiveness of hybrid strategic deterrence as an effective tool against large states and against countries that, for a number of reasons, do not consider the use of nuclear weapons against them or mass strikes with conventional precision weapons as a real threat.<sup>xlv</sup> As an example, it can be useful against a small and militarily weak state that is trying to harm our

country and is counting on the protection of the international community, allies and partners in the event that military force is used against it.<sup>xlvi</sup>

## **Contrasting Perspectives**

### ***RQ2: What are the contrasting perspectives between Russia and the United States (and the West) regarding deterrence, according to Russian military documents?***

When it comes to contrasting perspectives regarding deterrence, one document points to the:

fundamental difference between the essence of the military organization of the United States and Russia. In the first case - aggressive, gendarme, in the second - peaceful. The US military organization must ensure their global presence and the possibility of an impunity strike, even a nuclear one, against those countries of the world whose policies threaten the hegemony and expansionism of the United States.<sup>xlvii</sup>

The strategic deterrence differences, another document posits, are in their purposes: the US national defense strategy sets the task of strategic containment of Russia in order to prevent its economic, political and military revival; and the purpose of Russian strategic deterrence is different - containment of threats to national security.<sup>xlviii</sup>

One document argues that large-scale reductions in nuclear weapons by Russia and the United States do not decrease the risk of war but rather encourage aggressive plans by the United States, posing a threat to global security.<sup>xlix</sup> It suggests that reducing nuclear weapons while having a developed missile defense system benefits only potential aggressors, as it allows them to minimize the nuclear capabilities of their intended victims. The document emphasizes that Russia should prioritize maintaining a strong nuclear arsenal to deter aggression rather than striving for reductions in nuclear weapons.<sup>1</sup>

There is also a difference in understanding of the purpose of strategic weapons. One document argues that strategic weapons should be categorized as either stabilizing or destabilizing, rather than simply

offensive or defensive.<sup>li</sup> By adopting this perspective, the true nature of the US missile defense system is seen as not defensive, but rather as a hazardous and destabilizing component of Washington's offensive capabilities. The primary purpose of the US missile defense system is seen as neutralizing the threat of a retaliatory strike by Russia following an initial American strike, rather than solely focusing on defense.<sup>lii</sup>

Differences also occur in how Westerners and Russians understand nuclear de-escalation. According to Russian sources, Western military strategy institutions reject Russia's concept of nuclear de-escalation as erroneous and ineffective in deterring Western countries, particularly the United States, from launching an offensive against Russia.<sup>liii</sup> The United States, however, believes it is advantageous not to initiate the use of nuclear weapons, relying instead on their conventional military superiority to defeat the enemy. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the American perspective suggests that if faced with nuclear de-escalation, they would respond with nuclear escalation, shifting the conflict into the nuclear realm and persisting with a nuclear approach. The authors conclude that “they won't stop.”<sup>liv</sup>

Finally, there is a distinct difference in the way Russian military theorists perceive the role of missile defense systems in discussions pertaining to deterrence. Specifically, they observe that the US seeks to saturate the global landscape with their own missile defense systems, effectively encircling their primary rivals in terms of nuclear capabilities, namely Russia and China. The fact that such encirclement bears resemblance to an overt aggression against the borders of the aforementioned nations does not evoke substantial concern within the United States.<sup>lv</sup>

## Deterrence Effectiveness

***RQ3: How do Russian military documents conceptualize effective and ineffective deterrence?***

Conversations on the efficacy of deterrence are extremely prominent in Russian military discussions. There is roughly double the amount of effective deterrence codes, compared to ineffective deterrence codes.

Effective deterrence requires three things, according to texts:

a clear understanding by everyone where our red lines are drawn that cannot be crossed, the ability to respond to the aggressor in such a way that its losses outweigh all the expected benefits, and the persuasiveness of our determination to fulfill our obligations.<sup>lvi</sup>

When discussing effective deterrence, one particular code permeates all discussions – the importance of nuclear status for Russia. The 2000 and 2010 Russian military doctrines highlight that nuclear weapons serve to deter both nuclear and conventional conflicts, as well as play an important role in preventing large-scale or regional wars. Russians also view nuclear weapons as a significant factor in international stability and peace. Many documents posit that as long as significant weapons arrays exist worldwide, Russia's nuclear arsenal cannot be substituted, even by high-precision weapons. However, there are indications that the role of nuclear deterrence may decrease in the future due to the development of precision weapons, information warfare, and weapons based on new physical principles. Nonetheless, maintaining and strengthening Russia's strategic nuclear forces is seen as the only guaranteed way to ensure sovereignty at the present stage. Several quotes are exemplary of this notion:

- “Russia must remain nuclear until the world is armed. This must be clearly understood.”<sup>lvii</sup>
- “As long as there are large arrays of weapons in the world, Russia's nuclear weapons as a guarantor of its security cannot be replaced by anything, including high-precision weapons.”<sup>lviii</sup>
- “For the Russian Federation, the preservation and strengthening of strategic nuclear forces at this stage is the only guaranteed way to ensure sovereignty.”<sup>lix</sup>



- “the most effective instrument of deterrence - the Russian nuclear weapons.”<sup>lx</sup>
- “Russia's nuclear two-tier weapons are an everlastingly important and irreplaceable guarantor of Russia's military-political security.”<sup>lxi</sup>
- “... the whole of Russia, of course, understands that it is the nuclear forces that guarantee its security to the greatest extent.”<sup>lxii</sup>

A place is given for strategic non-nuclear deterrence, as an effective deterrence strategy. As one document writes, unlike nuclear deterrence, strategic non-nuclear deterrence can be carried out not from the center, but from regional commands in strategic directions, which increases the flexibility of its application and effectiveness.<sup>lxiii</sup>

In order for non-nuclear deterrence to work against potential aggressors, one document writes, proper political and diplomatic support is required.<sup>lxiv</sup> Certain conditions are to be met:

First, it is necessary to make appropriate changes to the governing documents regulating the organization of the country's defense, to determine the procedure and conditions for preventive strikes. Secondly, to make a political statement in which to declare Russia's determination to deliver such a blow in the event that the fact of the inevitability of military aggression against it or its allies, unleashing a terrorist war, is established. At the same time, clearly formulate the signs and criteria on the basis of which the country's leadership makes an appropriate decision. Thirdly, to achieve the adoption of international legal acts legalizing preventive strikes as a legitimate instrument of defense against inevitable aggression... Fourthly, to conduct a series of demonstrative exercises with the development of preventive strikes.<sup>lxv</sup>

Nuclear deterrence is also considered as an effective tool, but only against major geopolitical centers. For example, one text states that “deterrence had become ... an effective remedy for the least likely dangers, which included a deliberate nuclear attack or large-scale aggression using conventional weapons of the

great powers and their alliances against each other.”<sup>lxvi</sup> The same text cites the Ukrainian crisis as an example where nuclear weapons played an effective deterrent role between the great powers. Another argument in support of effective nuclear deterrence rests on the statement that Russian nuclear weapons serve not only to protect the state but also to fulfill an “international” role. Specifically, they act as a tool to preserve global stability by ensuring that any attempts to alter the existing patterns in world geopolitical dynamics through military means are futile.<sup>lxvii</sup>

When giving an example of a successful nuclear deterrence situation, one author highlights the Soviet response to the 1962 Caribbean crisis, as a notable instance of effectively resolving a looming conflict within the framework of nuclear deterrence.<sup>lxviii</sup> According to authors, Soviet Union executed a highly successful operation called “Anadyr,” which involved deploying nuclear-armed missile launchers in Cuba, catching the United States off guard. This event placed the world on the brink of a global nuclear catastrophe. The US leadership demanded the immediate removal of Soviet strategic forces from the island, while the USSR countered with a condition of its own: the withdrawal of American nuclear weapon carriers stationed in Turkey and Italy. Eventually, a compromise was reached, and this case exemplifies the actual capabilities of the nuclear deterrence system and underscores the potential for ensuring Russia's regional security.<sup>lxix</sup>

A prominent position is given to asymmetric responses as effective deterrence tools. As one text posits “asymmetric response in the military-technical sphere, should be considered not only as an effective means of solving combat missions in operations of various scales, but also as a way to deter an aggressor from unleashing large-scale, regional, local wars...”<sup>lxx</sup> One text explains the reasoning for asymmetric deterrence:

The insufficient power of one of the components can be, to a certain extent, compensated by others, for example, conventional deterrence forces - unconventional. And parrying non-military threats may well include forceful responses, an increase in defense preparations at the

corresponding lines. This, in essence, is the principle of “asymmetric deterrence”, which, taking into account numerous external and internal constraints, is today a priority in ensuring the NVB [national and military security] of the Russian Federation.<sup>lxxi</sup>

When discussing ineffective deterrence, Russian military theorists discuss several challenges. First of all, as mentioned earlier, nuclear deterrence only works against major geopolitical centers.<sup>lxxii</sup> Second, nuclear deterrence is not always effective in preventing external armed conflicts and does not work at all in preventing internal ones.<sup>lxxiii</sup> Third, nuclear deterrence is considered “completely useless in the fight against new, real threats, such as the proliferation of nuclear weapons, international terrorism, ethnic and religious conflicts and their consequences, drug flows, cross-border crime, etc.”<sup>lxxiv</sup> Last, but not least, nuclear deterrence is losing its effectiveness with the US deployment of a global missile defense system.<sup>lxxv</sup>

The discourse surrounding deterrence is significantly preoccupied with the subject matter of missile defense systems. As one text puts it,

the basic principle of deterrence — mutually assured destruction of the opposing sides — changes dramatically if one of the sides creates a system of protection against nuclear missile strikes of the country's territory, economic facilities, population and military facilities (especially objects of nuclear missile potential).<sup>lxxvi</sup>

The same text blames the US for disrupting the strategic balance through their missile defense system. Several quotes illustrate this point: “If the United States continues on the path of creating a strategic missile defense system, the result will be irreparable damage to the entire arms control process.”<sup>lxxvii</sup> “With a reliable missile defense system, the United States may be tempted to strike first, which will inevitably lead to a catastrophe on a planetary scale.”<sup>lxxviii</sup>





## CHAPTER 4 | CONCLUSIONS

In summary, our analysis underscores Russia's strong attachment to its nuclear status. Their deficiency in conventional military capabilities has led to the belief that maintaining nuclear prowess is vital to their national significance. This explains their reluctance to decrease nuclear stockpiles. Instead, they are committed to innovating new deterrence strategies that leverage cost-effective tools available beyond traditional weaponry. Notably, this shift is evident in the adoption of cross-domain and hybrid deterrence methodologies.

Russia persists in using nuclear weapons to deter and navigate escalation in regional conflicts that imperil its survival. Russian strategists remain wary of their conventional inferiority in larger-scale confrontations with adversaries like NATO. Nuclear threats or deployment become relevant tools to manage escalation when conventional options are exhausted, and Russia stands firm even in the face of nuclear risks. However, this also indicates a willingness to

embrace heightened escalation, rather than a belief that escalation can be averted.

Furthermore, a clear pattern emerges in Russia's strained relations with the United States and Western powers. Russia portrays the United States as a negative force in the international arena, often vilifying it as an irresponsible actor. The development of defensive missile systems is a source of anxiety for Russia, fostering their argument that the United States could become even more unpredictable and careless in its global role.

These perspectives prompt us to redefine our conception of future deterrence. Mere reliance on nuclear deterrence in isolation is no longer tenable. Rather, it's imperative to approach deterrence as a multifaceted challenge encompassing not just nuclear and conventional armaments, but also a broader discourse involving non-military approaches and emerging technologies like artificial intelligence.

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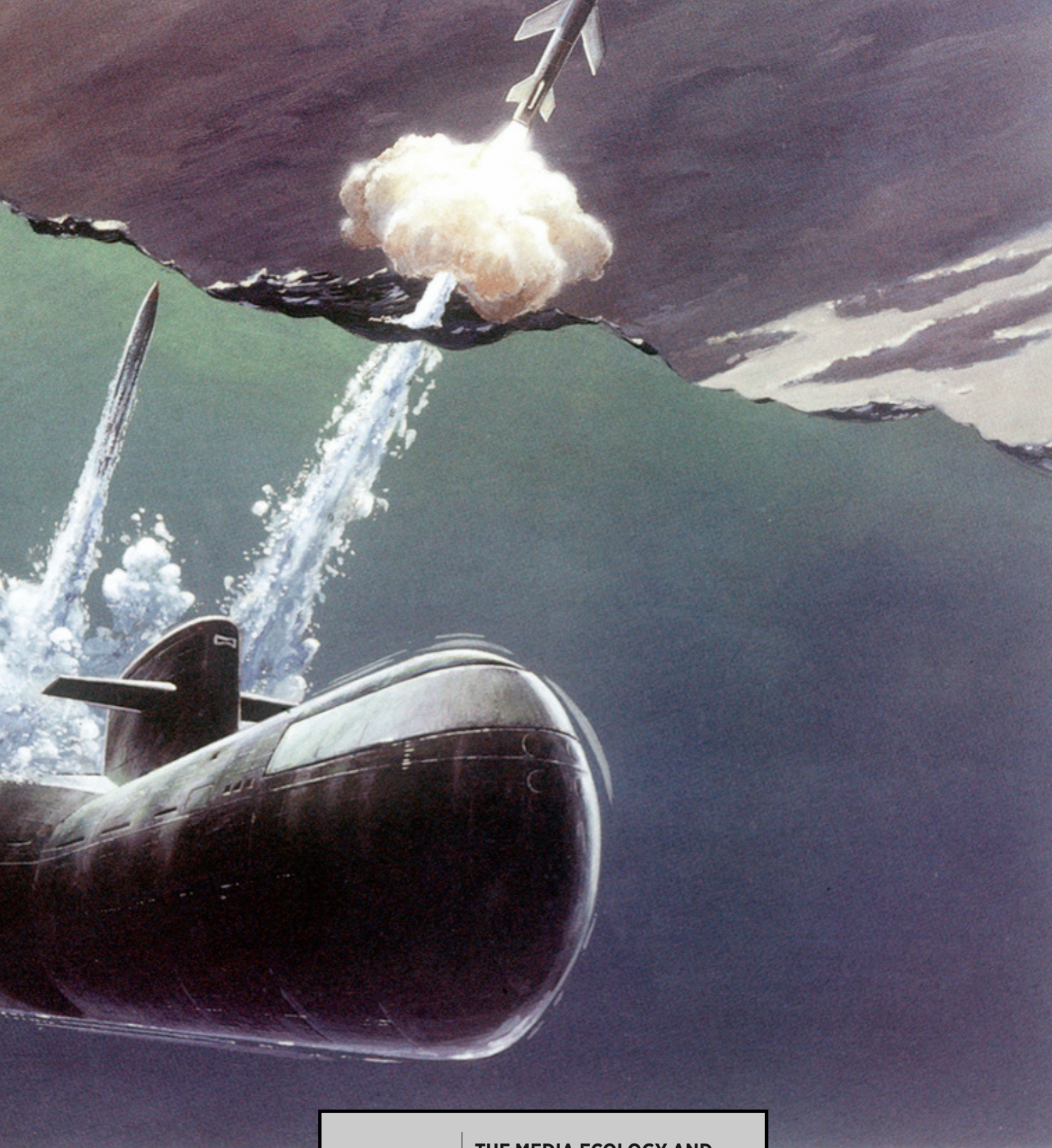
## APPENDIX

### Periods in Deterrent Thinking in USSR and Russia

	<b>Period</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Brief Description</b>	<b>Big Question(s)</b>
P1	Nuclear proliferation	Soviet (1954-1959)	Period of equipping the armed forces with nuclear weapons. Radical revision of views on the nature, methods and forms of waging a possible war, operations and battles.	How to provide adequate deterrence with limited nuclear arsenal?
P2	Arms race/absolute weapon	Soviet (1960s-1970s)	Period of nuclear arms race. Creation of the nuclear weapons and an “absolute weapon.” Organizational restructuring of the armed forces. Assessments of the role and place of nuclear missile weapons in the system of armed struggle. Absolutization of the possibilities of nuclear weapons in offensive actions.	What role and place do nuclear weapons have in the system of armed struggle?
P3	Nuclear parity as a basis for deterrence	Soviet (1970s-1991)	Establishing nuclear parity with potential adversaries. An increasing likelihood of armed struggle using conventional (non-nuclear) weapons. Strategic nuclear weapons lose the status of a real combat weapon. Strategic nuclear weapons turn into a means of strategic deterrence. Limited nuclear war as the main option of armed confrontation.	What is the critical point when non-nuclear arms conflict turns into a nuclear arms conflict? What are the red lines for nuclear use? What is the probability of the military conflict escalating into a general nuclear war? What constitutes “minimum deterrence?”
P4	Deterrence as de-escalation	Russian (1990s – 2000s)	Russia’s conventional weapons capabilities are lagging. The need to compensate for conventional inferiority. Symbiosis of strategies of deterrence and coercion.	How to deter conventional threats with nuclear weapons?
P5	Strategic deterrence	Russian (2000s – 2010s)	Focus on combining of nuclear and conventional (non-nuclear) capabilities. Marked by the publication of the 2010 Military Doctrine.	How can nuclear and conventional capabilities could be used in combination – to more effectively deter both conventional and nuclear threats?

P6	Cross-domain deterrence	Russian (2010s – 2020s)	Driven by the thinking about the limited efficiency of nuclear weapons in deterring conventional and non-traditional security threats. Expansion of strategic deterrence to include non-nuclear and non-military components.	How can cross-domain deterrence prevent and shape conflict? How can non-nuclear and non-military components contribute to deterrence efforts?
P7	Hybrid strategic deterrence	Russian (2020s – present)	The need for hybrid strategic deterrence due to the weak conventional forces and weak economic situation. Hybrid war as a more effective deterrence than nuclear weapons or non-nuclear high precision weapons.	What are the necessary components for fighting a hybrid war?





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