

US POLICY, STRATEGY, AND DOCTRINE FOR DETERRING RUSSIAN NUCLEAR “DE-ESCALATION” STRIKES

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ABSTRACT:

In recent years, there has been a growing concern in the United States about Russia’s increasingly aggressive nuclear posturing, especially Russia’s concept of nuclear “de-escalation” strikes. Analysts have begun to write on aspects of this problem, but there has been insufficient attention to the important issues of how US and NATO nuclear policy, strategy, and doctrine might be adjusted to reliably deter Russian de-escalatory strikes. For example, in response to a Russian nuclear de-escalation strike, should Washington and its allies threaten massive nuclear retaliation, a limited nuclear response, devastating conventional retaliation, or a response in a completely different domain, such as cyberspace? This project will examine this and a host of related questions in a series of workshops in Washington, DC and Europe, drawing on the Atlantic Council’s deep expertise in defense policy and extensive European networks. We will aim to identify the universe of policy, strategy, and doctrinal options and their associated costs and benefits. From this analysis, we will then provide recommendations about the best means of strengthening US and NATO nuclear policy with the goal of more reliably deterring the renewed Russian nuclear threat. Our research will benefit the Department of Defense as well as support a public purpose by disseminating findings broadly through public events and publications in order to inform the policy community, and broader communities of interest, in the United States and around the world, with the goal of modestly contributing to global strategic stability.

Research in Progress describes ongoing PASCC research. For more information please contact INSS@usafa.edu.