

## FOREWORD

*Rose Gottemoeller*

For fifty years non-strategic nuclear weapons (NSNW) have been the main source of the crises, accidents and diplomatic *contretemps* associated with weapons of mass destruction. It was Khrushchev's theater-range nuclear weapons deployed in Cuba that brought the world to the brink of nuclear catastrophe in 1962. In the 1980s, public resistance to the neutron bomb and intermediate-range nuclear forces in Europe tested the mettle of the NATO alliance. Deployments succeeded, but so did an eventual Intermediate- and Shorter-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, which banned an entire class of weapons world-wide. In 2000, the issue sprang to the fore again with concerns that Russia was redeploying non-strategic nuclear weapons in its military enclave in Kaliningrad. In the complex world of the nuclear era, non-strategic nuclear weapons have produced more than their share of difficulty and danger.

There are a number of reasons why this is so. The first is sheer numbers. We have heard from a Minister of Atomic Energy of Russia, Victor Mikhailov, that the Soviets produced some 45,000 nuclear warheads during the course of the Cold War. Since we know that approximately 12,000 of these were strategic nuclear weapons, the vast majority of the Soviet stockpile was obviously built for non-strategic missions.<sup>1</sup>

The second reason has to do with the wide variety of these missions. Many non-strategic nuclear weapons were built for war-fighting on the battlefield; as a result, they were configured to be handled in operational deployments. Small, mobile, and designed to be used by a field commander, their command and control has always been questionable. For example, the Soviets only installed the most primitive of permissive action links (PALs) on their battlefield weapons. Some of their older warheads had no such use control systems at all. The more weapons are moved, deployed, exercised and serviced, the more

opportunities there are for accident, loss, and even, in recent years, theft and illicit use.

The third and perhaps most important reason is the relationship with strategic weapons that geography imposes on their non-strategic kin. The past fifty years are littered with East-West arguments about the relative advantage that two oceans of separation afford the United States. The Cuban Missile Crisis itself sprang from the Soviets' notion that they could even the balance by deploying non-strategic nuclear weapons in Cuba. If the United States could have nuclear weapons deployed on the Soviet doorstep in Europe, went their reasoning, should not the Soviet Union have nuclear weapons on the U.S. doorstep? After all, NATO-deployed "non-strategic" weapons could strike Soviet strategic targets such as Moscow. Why not return the favor?

The United States fortunately won that argument in 1962, but it continued to rankle the Soviet Union and continues to rankle Russia today. The most frequent argument that the Russians advance against Moscow negotiating treaty constraints on its non-strategic nuclear weapons touches this issue: If the United States will not remove its nuclear weapons from Europe, why should the Russian Federation even consider negotiations to constrain its own capabilities in this regard?

These differences over nuclear weapons in the U.S.-Russian relationship have been further complicated by an internal Russian debate about the role of nuclear weapons in Russian military doctrine. General Kvashnin, the Chief of the Russia's General Staff, has recently argued that the Russian Federation needs to de-emphasize nuclear weapons in the interest of achieving a high-quality conventional force structure capable of addressing threats on the Russian periphery such as Chechen separatism and Islamic extremism. Marshal Sergeyev, the Russian Minister of Defense, argues the opposite view, stressing that in a period of profound weakness, nuclear weapons can provide a stable and predictable deterrent against Russia's enemies—including Islamic elements on its periphery, and potential threats in Europe from an expanding NATO.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, an already complicated picture has been further muddied by deep differences among the leadership of the Russian military about the importance of nuclear weapons, and non-strategic nuclear weapons in particular. President Putin has as yet suspended judgment on these questions, and if the experience of the first post-Soviet decade is any guide, then he will not try to force a final resolution of the issue. Instead, both sides of the debate will continue, and eventually one will pull ahead in the battle over scarce budget resources.

This uncertainty will tend to breed Russian inaction regarding proposed bilateral efforts to control non-strategic nuclear weapons. No clear view among the Russian leadership is the recipe for a default to the long-standing Soviet and now Russian approach: “Unless you, the United States and NATO alliance, remove nuclear weapons from Europe, we are not prepared to move forward on any approach you might propose.”

Such a dead-end, however, is by no means decisive, as the experience of the INF Treaty shows. In the 1980s the Soviets walked out of arms control negotiations to protest the deployment of Pershing II and Ground-Launched Cruise Missiles (GLCMs) in Europe, but eventually they returned to the negotiating table and completed the treaty. The factors that led to that reversal are not important to this discussion—some say it was the Reagan administration’s decisive approach, others that it was the advent of Gorbachev and his reform regime. The important point is that Russia at any time may choose to leave a dead-end of its own making.

Foreseeing that time and being ready for it is the purpose of this unique book. It developed out of an intense and detailed two-day conversation among specialists in nuclear weapons and practitioners of nuclear diplomacy, at a time when many in the United States believed that the non-strategic nuclear weapons problem had simply gone away. The end of the Cold War, the U.S. and Russian parallel unilateral reductions known as the Presidential Nuclear Initiatives, and the de-emphasis of nuclear weapons in U.S. operational deployments have led many Americans to forget about the existence of these weapons. They

remain, however, and are already a dangerous irritant in the U.S.-Russian relationship as well as in the Russian relationship with America's allies.

The value of this book is that it goes well beyond stock answers to the policy challenge of non-strategic nuclear weapons to wrestle with some important questions: How do strategic and non-strategic weapons relate? Is there military value to them? Can obstacles to traditional arms control measures be overcome? What new and practical steps should we try, if we choose not to rely on traditional arms control? What is the Russian debate over these weapons, and how does it relate to China's perspective?

We must wrestle with each of these questions if we are to bring non-strategic nuclear weapons out of the policy shadows. This book brings clarity to the issues, and will help readers to understand the complexity, but by no means impossibility, of controlling these weapons.

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## **Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> For more on Soviet warhead numbers see the Natural Resources Defense Council "Archive of Nuclear Data" at <http://www.nrdc.org/nuclear/nudb/datainx.asp>. Minister Mikhailov is quoted in Thomas B. Cochran, Robert S. Norris, and Oleg A. Bukharin, *Making the Russian Bomb: From Stalin to Yeltsin* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995), p. 31.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter 9 by David Yost for an in-depth analysis of this debate at the highest levels of Russia's leadership.