

# Nuclear Deterrence & Missile Defense Forum: Dr. Stephen Blan...

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## SPEAKERS

Peter Huessy, Dr. Stephen Blank

- P** Peter Huessy 00:02  
Good morning, ladies and gentlemen, I'm Peter Huessy, and I'm Director of Strategic Deterrence Studies here at the Mitchell Institute. And welcome to the Nuclear Deterrence and Missile Defense Forum series. And we are pleased today to have Dr. Stephen Blank. Dr. Stephen Blank is a senior fellow at the Foreign Policy Research Institute, where he specializes in Russian foreign policy and defense policy issues, as well as European and Asian security. He formerly served as a senior fellow at the American Foreign Policy Council. And prior to that he was professor of Russian national security studies at the U.S. Army War College at their Strategic Studies Institute. I want to welcome you back Dr. Blank, to speak to us once again, thank you for making the time to talk with us. I'd like you to start by giving some remarks to us, opening about 20 minutes, and then we'll go to our audience. To our audience, feel free to raise your hand using the function on the app, or submit a question in the Q&A window anytime during the discussion, and we'll get to it in the second half of our presentation. So over to you, Dr. Blank and welcome again from the Mitchell Institute.
- D** Dr. Stephen Blank 02:08  
Thank you, Peter. It's a great honor to speak again, on behalf of the Mitchell Institute on a day that is full of important international security information and an anniversary. For

those of you who may not have remembered today's the 82nd anniversary of the infamous Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact that basically generated, started World War Two. And when you take that into account with, you know, the Afghanistan story, all the natural disasters that are occurring as a result of climate and environmental change, [inaudible], as well as all the other existing security challenges, it becomes clear that if we neglect these challenges and fail to understand them, we pay a very high price, and a price that gets higher, the more we differ, understanding and reckoning with them. I'm going to be talking today about one of these issues. That is the Russian approach to nuclear weapons. And I'm going to be talking about two different examples. One is situation in Ukraine and around the Black Sea, which as you all know, is a very hot spot these days, The British phone up earlier this year, the Russian build up around Ukraine, and the fact that the Russians actually faked a great Anglo Dutch freedom of navigation operations and make it look like they were under attack indicates the kinds of things that can go wrong. And if they go wrong there, they could well be nuclear because, since the invasion of Crimea, Russia has deployed hundreds of nuclear capable platforms--land, air and sea--into the Black Sea. So we're going to be talking about how Russia views the use of nuclear weapons in its national security strategy. Now, other speakers, I believe Mark Schneider will be telling you exactly what they're building and how much and how that violates previous treaties. I'm going to be talking about the strategy. And nuclear weapons are critical to every aspect of Russian military and national security strategy, including gray area operations, or what is called hybrid warfare, though I don't like that term. The purpose according to the Russian government of nuclear weapons is Homeland Security, which they state is to deter attacks on Russia but in practice, what that means is that it also is an attempt to deter Western responses to the so-called gray area. Operations operations below the threshold of a declared war was NATO. Yeah, where Russia runs the risk that something might happen. Example being the invasion of Crimea. We tend to forget that nuclear weapons were brandished that is deployed and then put in made all kinds of statements about using them during that crisis. And then every exercise that the Russians doing, they're about to do their annual big exercise, which will be the West exercise of Zapad 2021. Nuclear Weapons play a part that is, within the next couple of weeks, we're going to see the entire Russian army in the West, some 200,000 and Belarusian army, some 200,000 people mobilized to do an exercise. And while they're talking about the exercises of the conventional forces, the nuclear forces from the Arctic to the Black Sea will be exercised as well. And not by accident. The purpose of nuclear weapons is to deter NATO from doing anything that the Russians might care to do with conventional weapons in and around the neighborhood, or even beyond the borders of the Russian Federation, for example, their operation in Syria, which has now lasted six years. And although it has won militarily has not gotten anywhere near a political resolution. So they still there. So it allows Russia to threaten its neighbors to undertake military actions with impunity. And it, it gives the lie to the concept that there's no use for

nuclear weapons except to deter other nuclear weapons. Now, there's a lot of talk among many sectors of the disarmament community in this country, that the sole purpose of nuclear weapons should be to deter other nuclear weapons. And there's no doubt that nuclear weapons teacher nuclear attacks, the problem is nobody but the arms control. Proponents of Seoul us believe that the sole use of nuclear weapons is to deter nuclear attacks for Russia, the purpose of nuclear weapons is to deter conventional attacks, and to provide an opportunity for Russia, if need be, to carry out its own conventional operations, as in the case in Ukraine, or Syria, or, if necessary, to strike first and first strike is part of the Russian national doctrine with nuclear weapons against forces threatening and challenging Russia. In the case of the Ukraine in the Black Sea, Moscow believes the Black Sea should be a closed sea, that it dominates. They, as Mr. Putin has said, Ukraine really is part of Russia, it has no business being an independent state. And it has no capacity for or right to self government as a result. And because of these assertions, which drive Russian policy, and because of its actions in Crimea, Moscow has since 2014, deployed hundreds, if not 1000s, of weapons to Crimea, many of which land, sea and air are dual capable. And more of these kinds of dual capable weapons are coming in all the time. For example, they are deploying to you 22 bombers to the Black Sea, or at least moving them in and out. And those are long range bombers that have a nuclear capability, and could target not only all of Ukraine, but all of Europe, much of the Middle East and Africa. And depending on where they're deployed much of the continental United States. I'm going to come back to that because that's a crucial point. So the nuclear weapon creates a screen for Moscow behind which it can act freely with impunity at the conventional level. And therefore, nuclear weapons backup all Russian claims to great power, both rhetorical. And in terms of actual kinetic, or other military operations, we need to keep that in mind. In other words, the whole phenomenon of what is called hybrid war or gray area phenomena would not be possible for Moscow, given its current understandings of these phenomena, unless it had the nuclear weapon to back them up. And as they believe themselves to be inferior conventionally and most experts agree with that assessment. They are going to continue to prioritize the building of nuclear weapons in order to achieve that freedom of maneuver in and around the former Soviet Union and beyond its borders as part of its power projection strategy, for example, and this will be less point I'm making this context. They are now getting a naval base in Sudan. And you may ask yourself, why? Well, among other reasons, they want to be able to strike at American and Western ships in the Indian Ocean, because for the US and navy, the Indian Ocean has long been a potential platform for striking at Russia, with missiles in case it ever comes to that the agreement with Sudan indicates that they want to do this because it says, among other things, that Russia has the right to bring in nuclear powered ships, which means their submarine nuclear powered submarines, which are strike platforms, and which are also anti ship platforms against Western naval vessels. So this is not just a threat within the United within the former Soviet Union, but it is now part of the overall

power projection strategy. And in that context, we can turn as well to look at the Arctic. Now, most of the people who are writing about the Arctic today, and about the Russian buildup, many of my colleagues and people I know, have written and it's all over the web, you can easily find these statements, that the prevailing reason for the build up is deterrence, its defensive. Now, admittedly, Russia has a lot of maritime real estate to defend in the Arctic, as well as Russian territory above the Arctic Circle and thus Russian homeland. But the evidence of these deployments is not defensive. The primary purpose of these deployments is increasingly offensive, targeting the United States, both continental US and Alaska, Canada, as a result, as well, and all of our NATO allies in Europe with missile strikes, which could or could conceivably be nuclear, once again, we're talking about dual use capabilities. Now, the main mission of the Russian maritime and air forces and maybe ground forces in the Arctic, may be Homeland Defense. And the building of what is called an anti access area that area denial, anti access Ada to system, land, air and sea. But as Henry Kissinger said, there's nothing as offensive as a Russian on the defensive. And if you look at the strike capabilities that are being placed in the Arctic, they include long range air like the T u 22. t 160. I believe in t u 95. Long Range, strike capable submarine platforms and maritime platforms, including nuclear capable weapons, not just the bombers that is nuclear capable submarines, but also air based missiles, who can Target Canada, continental US or on the other side of the ocean, the Pacific that is Alaska, as well as all of Europe. These weapons are both maritime and aerial. They are counter force and counter value. For example, the Poseidon as it is called the canyon six as it was named the underwater uuv that is under underwater unmanned vehicle that is a massive nuclear weapon that could take out the whole Harbor, Baltimore Harbor at one strike, or other civilian targets, as well. These targeting capabilities are rehearsed in Russian exercises. They are deployed on exercises, for example, into the North Atlantic and beyond. And as I said their mission is to hold the United States, Canada and all of Europe at risk, again, allowing Russia or so Russia hopes to be able to do what it wants to do with impunity elsewhere. Now, you may ask yourself, why are they building this capability when their ICBMs are perfectly capable of striking the United States. There is no missile defense that works against those ICBMs. The missile defense systems we have built are thin. They are small in number relatively speaking, and are targeted on Iran and or Korea, North Korea by the laws of physics and by every briefing known to man that we have given the Russians. Those missile defenses cannot take out the Russian first or second strike ICBM capability which means that The United States, like Russia, is in a state of vulnerability and has been for years. That is the paradigm of what is called Mutual Assured Destruction and strategic stability, that neither side can attempt the first strike, because the other side has a second strike capability. So, first strike will avail you nothing. But it does hold the other side hostage so that it doesn't get the idea to do this, what the Russians are trying to do, I would argue, and several of my colleagues like Mark Schneider and Peter, also argue, is to undermine that strategic stability. And the

reason they're doing that is because they believe today as in the 1980s, that they needed a requirement for either a maritime sea based or an air based capability that can strike the continental United States, and Canada, as well as Europe and Alaska in the Pacific. Because we have built those capabilities, they see our missile defenses as capabilities of offensive missiles to strike Russia. Now, it's physically impossible. This has been briefed over and over again by the bush, Obama and Trump administrations, presumably the Biden administration has said the same thing, nobody in Russia biases they have, for their own reasons, which we can discuss in the q&a bought into the worst possible threat assessment. They also believe that the United States global strike capability, which is a conventional capability is so powerful that it can strike and take out their command control, communications, computers, etc. c four is command control computers, communications, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities. That's not the case, that again, those capabilities just aren't there yet, and are probably never going to be there. Despite all that you read about fancy capabilities. And the Russians have decided therefore, well, if you're going to do that, we're going to have a capability that can strike you as well. So here we are. But as a result, strategic stability is imperiled. Goes back very much to the idea, as I said that Russia is always going to adopt the worst case threat assessment by virtue of its institutional and ideological makeup. It believes that it has been at war with the west for the last 1617 years, if not longer. And since it is conventionally inferior, believes it has to build nuclear weapons, and have a first strike capability that it can and will use first, to hold the United States and the rest of the world at risk. The view that the United States and Russia must remain shackled to each other. Like prisoners in Lego irons, who cannot escape this relationship by the mechanism of Mutual Assured Destruction. That was a hallmark of the Cold War drives Russia's thinking about the United States, in general, and about nuclear weapons in particular, and about the Arctic. And just as they see that we have a capability that could strike them from a long range, either by sea based or air based platforms. That's what they're trying to build as well. This again, underscores the point that sole use of nuclear weapons to deter other nukes doesn't figure into their calculations, because they're afraid as much of conventional missiles as they are of our nuclear capabilities. And furthermore, they believe in redundancy. There, they are building and have built multi mercs, again, multiple independent re entry vehicles which are allowed now under an existing stock Treaty, which is, I think, a terrible step regression from where we were before, and a building as well these air and maritime capabilities to strike at these targets and hold Europe and the United States at risk. Furthermore, they will continue to do so despite the economic stagnation of the Russian economy and all the other terrible socio economic problems, including COVID-19 that now now afflict Russia. That is their priority, and they're going to continue to do so. And therefore, we have to be aware of this threat. We will need to take countermeasures to deal with it. And we will have to understand that the Russian buildup in the Arctic is not primarily defensive, but rather offensive, and is carried out in

accordance with the dictates of Russian national security strategy, the newest version of which is now available in English on the web. And from Mr. Putin's website in English language, as are the nuclear weapons statements of June 2020, which I've written about and others have as well, indicating readiness for first strike. Now, that means that we may want to pursue arms control initiatives of one sort or another, and break away from the Cold War paradigm. But Moscow will not allow that to happen. As I said, they believe that the United States and Russia must be shackled together, like prisoners who cannot move far apart from each other. And the two of them must be bound together in this structure of Mutual Assured Destruction based on a priori hostility of the two systems, no matter what American and Western policy is. These principles therefore, negate a lot of the ideas that you are going to hear from the arms control community about so use so that we can dispense with one leg of the die of the Triad and do so safely. That's not the case. And on this silver anniversary of the Mosab Ribbentrop pact, which led to a war, and in the face of all the other natural and international relations catastrophes that are happening, we need to be aware of what really is happening out there, rather than have idealistic rhetoric, which is unfortunately not based in anything more than hope. And as my old boss, when I worked to the army, General Gordon Sullivan wrote, hope is not a strategy. Thank you.

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Peter Huessy 22:15

Thank you, Steve. Thank you, Dr. Blank. Let me go right to some questions that we have April 2021, there was an annual threat assessment by the director of national intelligence. And he emphasized that Russia is building a diverse, large and modern set of non strategic capable nuclear systems capable of delivering nuclear warheads. Could you elaborate a little bit on the purposes for which these Russians new tactical weapons are being produced, and the risks that are they pose to the United States and its allies and partners, especially with respect to the geography of the Arctic.

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Dr. Stephen Blank 22:57

Russia is building somewhere between 20 and 23 different kinds of nuclear weapons at present those different programs and compass short range, in this case, non strategic nuclear weapons and intermediate range also would encompass what are called non strategic nuclear weapons, or tactical nuclear weapons. They also included long range, they also include counter force that has nuclear weapons that target other military targets, or counter value, counter value is that weapons that target civilian targets? Hey, for example, as I gave the example of Baltimore Harbor, before, where power plants we believe that they're building the so called non strategic nuclear weapons to compensate to their conventional inferiority to deny the North Atlantic to NATO, and the Arctic. A lot of these weapons are going to be used to talk as anti ship or anti sub or anti air missiles.

They are also doing that to threaten European installations as well, from the Arctic. If you are based in the Arctic, all of Europe is in within range. All the way to Turkey, or Portugal, or Italy, all of whom are members of NATO. The tactical nuclear weapons are the first strike weapons. If you look at the Russian statements from last year, June, June 2, 2020, again, it' on Putin's website and He tries to say that I mean, typically circus in a circumlocution kind of roundabout way that, you know Russia will strike first, if it's if it thinks that it's being attacked, or if it will launch on warning, it will strike first if it thinks its government is under attack, and so on. Those weapons are there to threaten the United States and its NATO allies, or conceivably its allies in Asia, with the prospect that if something breaks out, and Russia thinks that it might be losing, we will escalate to nuclear weapons and strike first, forcing you because you will not be able to be willing to withstand what the Russians call the calibrated or assigned damage carried out by these nuclear weapons, tactical nukes, and that will force an end to hostilities. Now, this is called escalate to de escalate, it's the wrong term. It's really calling it's calling escalate to win according to General Hyten. Who was a STRATCOM commander now that I think Deputy Chief of Staff of the Joint Chiefs, it's more than even that it is really an attempt by the Russians by building all these nuclear weapons that we've talked about. And for scenarios, ranging from what we've seen in Ukraine, all the way up the line to preserve escalation, control, and dominance throughout all the stages of a crisis in order to subject NATO forces. And the United States to that control, you know, the Russians will retain strategic control of the of the whole crisis. It's basically a crisis management operation. But it's crisis management through the threat of escalation.

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Peter Huessy 27:01

Understood, we have a series of questions, which I'll get too, but related to what you just said, China and Russia you have written are cooperating militarily together in a number of areas, including the Arctic. What's the are the Russian and Chinese purposes and strategies similar with respect to their nuclear arsenals?

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Dr. Stephen Blank 27:26

Well, that's a huge question. I don't know that we can answer that question in the space of a few minutes. And I'm not an expert on Chinese nuclear weapons. But what we do know is that there is an enormous program of mutual consultation, which I've written about going on. It is also clear that the military dimension of this alliance and I believe it is de facto, an alliance, for many of my colleagues don't that this alliance is growing Russian and Chinese troops are participating in each other's exercises. And now using each other's weapons, the Russians are helping build an early warning missile defense for China, which indicates a very high level of trust and consultation. on Chinese hacking Russia, I mean,

that doesn't stop the Chinese from doing that. But we see more and more deeper cooperation at the military level. We see it in Central Asia now with the Afghanistan crisis, as well at the political level to deal with the ramifications of that issue. We see cooperation on the Korean issue. And we do we see signs of potential cooperation and information warfare as well. So there are reasons to believe that this cooperation might be might extend into some of the nuclear areas certainly early warning, is an example. Furthermore, as we now know, China is feverish Li is that the right word, maybe building nuclear weapons. Last week, it was discovered that there was a third set of silos that China is building about 400 silos, give or take some that are going to be housing nuclear weapons. I it strikes me is unbelievable, though some analysts say this, that essentially China is building these to play three card Monte, with the United States over its nuclear weapons and just move these weapons around and try to discover one in which silo in which mountain, you have nukes. The Defense Intelligence Agency said two years ago, they're on track to double if not triple their nuclear weapons. Generally, the shots statements indicate he's convinced they're building nuclear weapons at a very rapid rate. And these holes in the ground, the silos that are being built, which seemed to corroborate all that. So while it's very unlikely that Russia and China are going to cooperate or target nuclear weapons, collectively at the United States, and share their nuclear plants with each other, is nonetheless clearly a rising threat from both of them in the nuclear sphere and a rising threat of overall military cooperation.

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Peter Huessy 30:29

Steve, Dr. Blank, let me go through to kind of responses the US stuff we're talking about a year in America. One is to go to a diet and get rid of the land based ICBMs. Some the chairman of the House Armed Services Committee has said that he doesn't think we need a land based leg necessarily, and we may have too many nuclear weapons as it is. The other one is, should the United States adopt any additional nuker strategies to deal with the Russian threat? As you have laid it out? So to two part question, what would the Russian response be if we went to a diet? Would they seek a pre-emptive capability against our subs and bombers? Or not? And then second, what should be our response to the threat you laid out in the particularly the Arctic and elsewhere? Any new strategies that the United States should adopt?

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Dr. Stephen Blank 31:24

Well, I would advise the chairman of the House Armed Services Committee to take these ideas to London, Paris, Tokyo, Seoul, Berlin, and so on, and see what the reaction is, I think it might he might learn something, I think our allies would be horrified. Second, if you remove the land based leg of the triad, you have given the Russians, they don't have to

build a pre-emptive capability, they will then have it that needs to be understood that that's true for the Chinese as well, because the Chinese are building a triad themselves. And you know, we are dealing with serious people who but they don't think the way we do. And this mistake that if the United States does something, everybody else will understand it for what it is, and follow suit, because they are model rational creatures is just misplaced. And we don't even have to think that way, you know, in the nuclear sphere. I mean, the Taliban, you know, they have the same physiological capabilities of thinking that we do. They obviously don't think the way we did, and they sat down and negotiated with the Trump administration and violated everything and nothing happened to them. So unilateral disarmament doesn't work. Plain and simple. And on this date, as I said, among all others, that ought to be understood. Let me know. Russians will then you know, it's like, it's like the talks between the allies and Stalin and 39 when Stalin says to the British and French, how many divisions, you know, who's going to fight? And they say, well, we win the Vatican, and Stalin says, aha, the Pope, how many divisions does he have? Well, if you take out the land force based nuclear capability, I mean, how many divisions do we have then? so to speak, in the nuclear arena, you've given the Russians the pre-emptive capability? You don't have they don't have to build anymore? They've got it?

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Peter Huessy 33:34

Yeah, we have a question on the arms control area. And this is a question of, do arms control agreements or negotiations fundamentally alter? Or can they fundamentally alter the character of the Russian strategic objectives that are reflected forces? Because that's always been an issue with in this start to treaty, we did propose to ban multiple warhead land based missiles. Problem is the Duma didn't agree to it. And so it never went into force. I think that would have significantly changed the strategic balance. But the question here is, do you think arms control can significantly change this Russian strategic objectives insofar as they're building and deploying of nuclear weapons,

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Dr. Stephen Blank 34:24

arms control, changes their capabilities. So indirectly, if an arms control treaty is negotiated and ratified by both sides, well by by one side, it can change capabilities. And then indirectly change objectives because some objectives become no longer feasible. At least, in principle, that could be the case. That can also lead to change in behavior. But as far as this goes, I happen to agree with Colin Gray, that arms control agreements are the result of a desire to change behavior that precedes the actual negotiation of the arms control treaty or is coincidental with it, as was the case we've got a bunch of 35 years ago. Furthermore, an arms control treaty has to be enforced. And again, this does not have to be only with regard to nuclear weapons. Nobody enforced the Versailles Treaty, his arms

control provisions. You know, we know the British and French were well aware of the German Soviet cooperation in the 20s and up through the middle 30s. to evade the agreements in by military training, they did nothing about it. The point of an arms control treaty is that it be verified and maintained. And when somebody steps out of line that he'd be made to pay for it. I'm not happy with the fact that the Russians violated the INF Treaty, and nothing has happened. Now I can make the argument and the argument has been made that we when we left the INF Treaty, because I made a treaty with one signatories meaningless when we left the INF Treaty that that we didn't need to put inf missiles in Europe, I would have argued that it would, because if you want to bring the Russians back to the nuclear table, the only way to do it is to make them feel that if they are not negotiating, they are going to be under genuine threat. I emphasize genuine, because the threats that they purport to see now from missile defense and global strike, despite the fact that they have fallen completely under the sway of their propoganda are rather more exaggerated than is actually the case. But if you put intermediate range, missiles, even precision strike in Europe, and they have a flight time of 810 15 minutes to Russian territory, because Moscow violated the INF Treaty, for whatever reason, that might sober up some of the thinking in Moscow.

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Peter Huessy 37:23

Interesting. My last question that I've put down that we have nine questions that I've gotten from our audience, you have once said that Captain the greatest credit in the same that the best way to secure Russians borders are to simply expand them.

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Dr. Stephen Blank 37:37

Now the only way, the only way I can defend my frontiers is to expand them.

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Peter Huessy 37:42

Well, would you elaborate? How is this affected? Mr. Poon? Does he have the same philosophy?

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Dr. Stephen Blank 37:49

Okay. Yes, he does. And their ambitions. I like Catherine's to be the strongest power in Europe. I mean, sekret and Foreign Minister Lavrov is quoted one of Catherine's advisors, approvingly when he said that, you know, without that, no, not a cannon can be fired in Europe without on on knowledge of the 18th century, of course, you have to understand Putin is the current day incarnation of a Russian SAR. And the Russian political system

since its founding in the 15th century, has been and remains today. And this is true for the Soviet period, although it was disguised by the structure of Soviet power and socialist rule in the Communist Party. A patrimonial autocracy with Azhar owns the state and we're Empire is the only conceivable form of state that they know. Putin has gone on record. And I advise your audience to read it again. It's out there you can. He wrote this long essay. He's working on a couple of long essays, he wrote another one, basically, denying the multiple women drop a great agreement, even though they the papers are out there. And we all know, and again, calling for an alliance with Germany, which is what they've wanted for 250 years. But the new one, the new SA states, Ukraine is, as he said, the bush, Ukraine George Ukraine is not a state. He claimed the bush that the territory that they got was a gift. Now he says we were robbed. significant difference. But if Ukraine is not a state, and really they are misguided Russians, who for whatever reason, I've been stolen away from the motherland and that the nobody is safe there. The only thing restraining Russian power is expediency and counter power on the part of the West. This is a doctrine of war and Empire because nobody in Europe one Seems to be ruled by Russia anymore. You know it the bolts, the poles, the checks the Slovaks, Hungarians, Romania, Bulgaria, they do not accept that they are part of Russia, that they are going to be ruled from Moscow as they were during the Cold War. Yet Putin insists that Russia is legitimately entitled to and needs to have an empire. And this is shown up in their policies, for example, they stated that they closing the Black Sea from a certain point in time until October 31 of this year to do exercise. In other words, this is our C get out. And doing the same in the Baltic, that they would like to do the same in the Arctic, they've done the same at the sea of a husk once the UN grant their proposal that the sea of efforts be included as Russian territorial waters. So we are dealing with out of his stick even, but certainly Imperial mindset. And when you hear this, that Russia must be a great power, it what it really means is that Russia can only be an empire. And if it's no longer an empire, it's nothing. And there's no i'm not saying that myself. That's what they said. Understood.

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Peter Huessy 41:19

Oh, a related question. We had a very interesting question from one of our their argument in this is that because Russia only conducted gray area zone attacks, so that it's somewhat disputable, who is invading Ukraine or Moldova, Georgia, that therefore deterrence actually works, that they're not doing an overt invasion invasion, they're doing it so they can still deny it. So deterrence doesn't come into effect. So that, in a sense, the only way they can operate with impunity is in the gray zone. Because if they go in with it, more heavier forces are more obvious attacks, then deterrence would come in, how would you respond to that?

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Dr. Stephen Blank 42:07

Well, the evidence is against it. The initial seizure of Crimea. They didn't bother to deny that they were Russian forces. I mean, they did, but nobody believed it. And it was pretty transparent. And observers. I work with predicting this. I mean, I predicted in October 2013, I told the Ukrainian parliament, then members of the Parliament, that if you signed the agreement with the European Union, Putin will invade. And one of them told me that's what he told me Ukrainian government saw, but when they put when Ukrainians fought back in August, they committed Russian troops openly. The war against Georgia. Again, let's just now if they had gone in with, you know, massive tank armies, which they didn't have in nine in 2014. And in divisions, they would have perhaps precipitated a longer war. But the original plan in 2014 was to seize the entire Ukrainian coastline. Because they are troops in Special Forces troops in Moldova were prepared to march to a desert, if they're inciting riots that the riots were snuffed out in the desert, and the troops never left. But the idea was to collapse Ukraine as a state, and they thought they could do it that now that again, because they had bad intelligence to a certain degree. But gray area phenomenon does not only mean, you know, the vagner group or deniable elements, it means operations that are short of what NATO will respond to. And nobody in NATO was prepared to respond to Ukraine or to Georgia. So I don't think that argument holds no deterrence holds. We're not seeing an invasion, let's say of the Baltic states or of Poland. But we are seeing constant pressure on all these states, including nuclear threats. And it is clear that no Soviet no Russian leader believes that the territorial boundaries of any state east of Germany are sacrosanct, despite the agreements that were signed at the end of the Cold War, and that none of the boundaries in the former Soviet Union are sacrosanct. Despite the several treaties signed among Belarus, the Central Asian states, the Caucasus states and so on, and now we see wars all over all over there also.

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Peter Huessy 44:50

I also want to just let our listeners know that on Thursday, August 26, we will be hosting our next aerospace event on the new OSD Ms. One plan. And we hope everybody will be able to join us in person and watch our live stream. Our next question had to do with our we, one of the Russians attitudes about using nuclear weapons against a non nuclear state. Because one of the principles The United States has often reiterated is that we would not use nuclear weapons except for or against a nuclear power. And that's not every administration. But it's been a principle that has been pushed by some where the Russians on this, sir.

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Dr. Stephen Blank 45:35

Well, then it gets it gets to several complicated situations because there are non nuclear

states in NATO, Germany. But there are nuclear weapons on on Germany based on your in Germany. There may be nuclear weapons based in Italy also at SA for example at Aviano Air Force Base or in Naples, naval base, so on. So it's not clear what is clear is that while they said they would not want to first strike on the President's their military plans called for launching many nuclear strikes against NATO. We because we now have the Warsaw Pact plans, and what's more attacking nuclear bases in Europe, even if they did so with conventional strikes? I mean, that's a trigger for a nuclear response. So I'm skeptical that that is as watertight as they claim or that they actually would refrain from doing that. Now, it depends what what non nuclear state we're talking about. Now, if you know, Finland attacked, they might not use US nuclear weapons against Finland, Finland is not a member of NATO. But, you know, I wouldn't I wouldn't take that argument to the bank.

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Peter Huessy 47:05

Another question came up as what do you think the Russians attitude is about whether or not Iran gets nuclear weapons? Are? Would they facilitate that capability? Are they indifferent to it? Where do you Where do you think they are?

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Dr. Stephen Blank 47:20

Good question. Um, they have always oppose the Iran having nuclear weapons. They are they know very well, first of all, that if the Iranians get close to having nuclear weapons, is able to attack. And that's, that sets the stage for a general war, and then and then you're giving them an ally, the United States. Second, they know that Iran, Iranian nuclearization, spawns proliferation all over the Middle East, which is then sent to them the most dangerous nuclear weapons in the world right now might be Pakistan, India. They certainly don't want more of that. And also, the more nuclear states there are, the less their nuclear status elevates them above everybody else. But they are going to support Iran against the United States. Because what they want, they need to have Iran as a more or less friendly operator on their Southern, you know, off the Caucasus and Caspian. And because Iran needs them as an as support against the United States. And they want to prevent the United States from dominating the Middle East. So they're going to thread this needle. But I don't think they will transfer nuclear weapons to Iran. Oh, supporting, although they were doing some, to some degree in the 90s. No longer. I don't think that's going to be the case. But they will help Iran arm itself with nuclear with conventional weapons. And that'll be sufficiently dangerous as it is.

P

Peter Huessy 49:00

We have a question here about, are there any legal prohibitions against putting nuclear

weapons in the Arctic, which would balance against Russian efforts to move nuclear weapons into the Arctic, other than what they have in Murmansk and a lot of my stock, if you can call those two submarine bases in the Arctic?

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Dr. Stephen Blank 49:20

Well, I mean, is no, I'm first of all, that's it's their territory. So they have a perfect right to do this. And they've always been, since the nuclear age started nuclear weapons in the Arctic, because that's the main the polar basis of their nuclear fleet. But it's also what the capabilities that they're adding to this. So we have a right look, we have a right to do this in Alaska, and we're building missile defenses in Alaska. If the Canadians and the Norwegians who are or the Danes well, Arctic men states and invited a members of NATO invited us under the treaty to do so. It would probably be Leo, we have. We have a washing station in tullian, Greenland, which is, you know, formerly Danish territory. We have stepped up our military cooperation with Norway. And that's just, you know, the we've only seen the overt signs of that we don't know what's below the water level, so to speak. in there. So there are I mean, there are legal possibilities for the US to place nuclear weapons in the audit. I mean, the real issue is that, I think strategically, because, you know, the Russians are going to put this stuff into the audit basis, and there's no way we can stop them. But we need to do is keep them from getting into the quarters called the high north, North Atlantic. Right, where they could then easily target not only all of Europe, but Canada in the US,

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Peter Huessy 51:09

right. We had a comment from someone at the University of Memphis, who is handling the ROTC program there. And he wants to say to you that this is very helpful for my seniors, as they prepare to study, the National Security Strategy is from Lieutenant Colonel Thompson, wanted to pass that on to you, Steve, Dr. Blank, have a very informative set of remarks. We have another question about have we entered an age of what this writer calls the age of nuclear coercion? And that it comes down to who blinks first. And that that is, as opposed to stopping people from attacking? Because for deterrence, you prevent people from coming to the defense of their friends, which is what you have explained to us what the Russian strategy is, what's your sense of, could we correctly call this a new age of nuclear coercion?

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Dr. Stephen Blank 52:15

Well, we've had nuclear coercion since 1945. Understood? I don't know that it's a new age. You know, let me give you an example. I mean, I said in my talk that what I believe the

Russians are doing is trying to build a capability that can strike continental US, just as they think, as we have a capability that can strike Russia. I mean, that's the motive that drives force jobs, to build missiles in Cuba in 1962, with a metaphor of blinking originated with Dean Rusk. And that was a case of coercive diplomacy. And certainly involve the threat of nuclear war. Exactly. We've had enough questions. You look, the Russians are doing this. They raised the threat of nuclear strikes, you know, against anybody wanting to come to Ukraine's help in 2014. Nuclear coercion is inherent in the facts of life today. Yes. So I don't know that we have a new age of this. And one of the reasons for the sino Russian buildups individual is because both of them felt after 1990, that the US was so militarily supreme that it challenged them, and they had to build up their conventional and nuclear capabilities in the Russia gate, otherwise, they would, they would lose out as great powers. Understood.

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Peter Huessy 54:02

What's your sense of the impact of the end of the INF Treaty with respect to being able to now place missiles in the Arctic, that be given the closeness in the Canadian to know the Canadian border, but to the continental United States, which goes to the issue you raised, which we've talked about the Cuban Missile Crisis, how quickly they could get something to attack conus the continental United States? What is your sense as to the impact of the INF Treaty going away?

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Dr. Stephen Blank 54:35

It has facilitated the build up of these forces, but I believe that what we are seeing, I should have said this in the lecture, but I believe that what we are seeing is a classic Russian military buildup what they built up first in the Arctic, and which is which is what led people to say it's purely defensive. Is that it, they built up fairly, first the purely defensive capabilities. And I see Anthea, and you know, search and rescue and all the things that are necessary as the audit becomes more navigable and more open to commercial and non military use, in general. So those capabilities are needed. But they also preparatory to bringing in the offensive capabilities because they that way you can bring the offensive capabilities in. And as we've seen in countless studies of Russian military thinking, the anti air and anti sea capabilities, extend the perimeter of where Russia can operate freely, whether we're talking about the air, or in the maritime realm. further and further out, we see this unconventional capabilities as well, where there's no nuclear, the Black Sea Fleet, which although now it's a nuclear capable fleet, then goes to form what, at least create the basis for the core of what is now the permanent Mediterranean Squadron or Escada in Russian, which is also has some nuclear capable ships there, they're building up their bases in Syria. Now, I mentioned the base in Sudan,

they want bases all along the Red Sea and the Levant, and the Mediterranean coast, in order to push the envelope, where NATO can operate freely back, but also to extend the envelope wherein they can operate freely. I mean, this is a classic Russian, see denial, it's not just that Russia see denial strategy, that by building up defenses, you then create an opportunity and space for offensive capabilities to come in and work behind that. And we have an example in history of how this work. Those of you are members of your audience, who will who have studied or Remember, the Yom Kippur War of 1973, the Egyptian army using Soviet doctrine, cross the Sinai, took out the Israeli forces on the other side of the Suez Canal, and advanced a certain distance into the Sinai, but stayed there because they stayed within their air defense umbrella that the Soviet said taught them about. So the air defense created an offensive zone where they could operate with superiority, if not freedom. And they took advantage of that. Now, ultimately, the Israelis reverse that situation at a at a heavy cost. But that's a classic example of Russian Soviet doctrine. Now, if you translate that to the maritime and aerial domains, you can see the same principles at work.

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Peter Huessy 57:58

Let me ask you one more question because we're coming toward the end of our session, but the head of North comm has recently talked about the Russian operations in the Arctic. And his remarks have been laid out by some of the media, what's your sense of of the direction the general is going and some of the issues he raised? What's your comment on that?

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Dr. Stephen Blank 58:22

I think, General, the general accurately depicted the developing threats, because he talked to us about the Chinese, which we haven't discussed. He's obviously campaigning for budgetary authorizations to build defenses against that. Now, the question is, we may see this in the Nuclear Posture Review that's being developed as we speak. And we may see this also in the Air Force's Arctic strategy and some of the maybe the Navy's as well. even possibly the Army's Arctic Strategy, An attempt by the US military, not just the Air Force, but not northcom NORAD joined forces commanded Norfolk which has responsibility for the waters in the North Atlantic, NATO, and the maritime branch of EUCOM to come up with a across the board because it can't be just one service and across the board, network of defenses to reduce, mitigate and mitigate, because I don't think you can eliminate the threat except by by arms control treaty. These threats And to keep the Russians out of the high north, from where they could strike with great lethality if any of these three sets are in the Pacific, and Alaska with these, any of these targets that is Canada, US, Europe.



Peter Huessy 1:00:18

Oh, thank you, Steve. Dr. Blank, I want to say thank you. And we have come to the end of this nuclear deterrence and missile defense form event. And big thank you to our guests, Dr. Blank, and to our audience. From all of us here at the Mitchell Institute. Please have a great aerospace day. And we will see you shortly again, Dr. Blank, thank you very much.



Dr. Stephen Blank 1:00:38

Thank you, Peter.