

Stanton Nuclear Security Fellows Seminar

PANEL 2: New Thinking on Nuclear Strategy

1. Rebecca Lissner, CFR

Assessing the Effects of Conventional Warfare on Nuclear Strategy

How does conventional warfare shape participating states' nuclear strategies? Nuclear-armed states frequently conduct conventional military operations – yet, in emphasizing the categorical difference between nuclear and conventional weapons, scholars have largely overlooked the influence of conventional warfare on nuclear strategy.¹ As a Stanton Fellow, I plan to write a journal article that draws on interviews with policymakers and newly declassified archival documents to reconsider the conventional wisdom about the origins of nuclear strategy. Provisionally, my research suggests that conventional war-fighting can change policymakers' ideas about the political and military utility of nuclear weapons, with important grand-strategic implications.

Theory: My Stanton project draws on my dissertation, which argues that conventional warfare can cause grand strategic change by allowing states to compare prevailing strategic assessments with the reality of war.² Building on that insight, I will explore the mechanisms by which conventional warfighting can change policymakers' assessments of the military and political utility of nuclear weapons. Existing literature tends to emphasize the importance of crises for testing theories of nuclear coercion,³ but the process of nuclear learning from conventional warfighting deserves greater attention.⁴ I hypothesize that lessons learned from conventional warfare may shape the nuclear dimensions of grand strategy in two ways: first, by influencing policymakers' assessments of the relative military utility of nuclear versus conventional systems and, second, by shaping perceptions of the utility of nuclear threats in achieving foreign-policy objectives.

Research Design: My article will use qualitative process-tracing methods to assess the conditions under which conventional warfare causes nuclear-strategic change, focusing on case studies of U.S. military interventions in the Korean, Vietnam, and First Gulf Wars. This research design reflects Van Evera's insight that small-n qualitative methods provide the best tools for answering questions about how

¹ See, for example: Robert Jervis, *The Meaning of the Nuclear Revolution: Statecraft and the Prospect of Armageddon*, Cornell Paperbacks (Cornell University Press, 1989).

² I adopt Posen's characterization of grand strategy: Barry Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Britain, and Germany Between the World Wars* (Cornell University Press, 1986).

³ For two important recent contributions to this extensive literature, which yield different conclusions and thus suggest the utility of further study, see: Todd Sechser and Matthew Fuhrmann, "Crisis Bargaining and Nuclear Blackmail," *International Organization* 67, no. 1 (2013): 173–95; Matthew Kroenig, "Nuclear Superiority and the Balance of Resolve," *International Organization* 67, no. 1 (2013): 141–71.

⁴ In the most comprehensive study of nuclear learning, Nye mostly neglects this variable: Joseph S Nye, "Nuclear Learning and US–Soviet Security Regimes," *International Organization* 41, no. 03 (1987): 371–402.

processes function – in this case, *how* conventional warfare shapes nuclear strategy.⁵ Moreover, the United States is the best subject of study because it is the nuclear power that most frequently uses force abroad, and because of the availability of declassified documents as well as policymakers willing to be interviewed.

In particular, my research will test two hypotheses. The first hypothesis reflects the insight that, especially once battlefield nuclear weapons were developed, American policymakers viewed conventional and nuclear systems as substitutable options in war-planning. The second hypothesis reflects the insight that nuclear threats during conventional warfare provide policymakers with an opportunity to assess the political utility of nuclear weapons. In particular, the effectiveness of coercive bargaining during war provides a proxy measure of the coercing state's reputation for resolve, which is critical to make inherently incredible nuclear threats credible. I will test these hypotheses using: declassified documents collected at the Truman, Eisenhower, Johnson, Nixon, and Bush presidential libraries; *Foreign Relations of the United States* volumes; interviews with senior civilian and military leaders; and extensive secondary source research.

Hypothesis 1: If conventional military capabilities underperform relative to pre-war expectations, post-war strategy will place greater emphasis on the use of nuclear weapons in warfare. Conversely, if conventional military capabilities outperform pre-war expectations, post-war strategy will place lesser emphasis on the use of nuclear weapons in warfare.

Hypothesis 2: If policymakers view their nuclear threats as effective in yielding desired political outcomes during conventional wars, they are likely to expand their assessment of the political utility of nuclear weapons and increase foreign-policy objectives accordingly. Conversely, if nuclear threats are ineffective, policymakers are likely to contract their assessment of the political utility of nuclear weapons and the ends achievable through nuclear coercion.

Preliminary Findings: Initial research into the Korean, Vietnam, and First Gulf Wars suggests that conventional military interventions shape policymakers' ideas about the utility of nuclear weapons in important and often-overlooked ways. Although the Korean War was a wholly conventional conflict, it revolutionized the United States' approach to nuclear weapons, serving as a testing ground for early concepts of nuclear doctrine, posture, and strategy. At the outset of the Cold War, the United States subscribed to a minimalist strategy of containment, which entailed military demobilization, strict limits on national-security spending, and faith in a small nuclear deterrent as sufficient to defend core commitments in Western Europe and Japan. During and after the Korean War, however, the United States massively and durably increased its military power; expanded its overseas commitments; and accepted the necessity of forward deployment as well as a large nuclear arsenal to maintain its extended deterrent. Ultimately, the Korean War resulted in the first forward deployment of nuclear-weapon components and prompted the most significant build-up in nuclear materials, nuclear weapons, and nuclear delivery vehicles of the Cold War.

⁵ Stephen Van Evera, *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science* (Cornell University Press, 1997), 54.

When the United States launched its ground war in Vietnam in 1965, this post-Korea version of globalized containment was put to the test. Prior to the Vietnam War, the theory of containment that prevailed in the early-to-mid 1960s was a grand strategy predicated on “flexible response” to threats based on highly calibrated uses of conventional as well as nuclear force. The prosecution of the Vietnam War revealed the limits of flexible response and of containment more broadly: even a mighty nuclear power like the United States could not defeat communism in far-flung corners of the earth, even with brazen nuclear threats.⁶ The trajectory of the war in Vietnam augured what Kissinger called a “transformation in the nature of power” as nuclear might had become decoupled from the ability to produce desired political outcomes.⁷ The result was American strategic retrenchment, with the reality of nuclear parity diminishing the role of nuclear weapons in U.S. foreign policy and encouraging détente and arms control with the Soviet Union and China.

Forty years later, amidst the collapse of the Soviet Union and the realization of the “revolution in military affairs,” the First Gulf War shaped U.S. nuclear policy in the post-Cold War era. The war highlighted the danger of nuclear proliferation by regional powers, prompting a new counter-proliferation mission for U.S. nuclear forces.⁸ Meanwhile, the impressive performance of conventional weapons indicated that advanced conventional military technology could increasingly substitute for nuclear systems. This realization prompted the convergence of conventional and nuclear missions within the newly created STRATCOM as well as major downward revisions to nuclear targeting plans.

Implications for Policy & Scholarship: By challenging the prevailing wisdom on the origins of nuclear strategy, my findings will have important implications for policy and scholarship. My research illuminates the general processes by which states learn nuclear lessons from conventional warfare—a finding that is important for policymakers as they assess the strategies of current and prospective adversaries. For example, if the theory generalizes beyond the United States, it could predict how the performance of Russia’s modernized conventional forces in Syria will shape the future role of nuclear weapons in the Kremlin’s grand strategy. Moreover, nuclear learning from conventional warfare is likely to become increasingly salient in the second nuclear age. Technological advances have begun to blur the lines between nuclear and conventional weapons: formerly nuclear delivery systems like ICBMs and SLBMs can carry conventional payloads, and low-yield nuclear weapons reduce fallout risks, particularly when detonated as airbursts. By assessing policymakers’ mistakes in learning from the Korean and Gulf Wars, as well as the consequences of those mistakes, my research provides a framework for extracting nuclear lessons from past and future conventional wars.

My project also enhances nuclear scholarship by improving theoretical and historical understanding of the origins of nuclear strategy. First, the project advances the movement toward empirically grounded assessments of nuclear politics by using new archival and interview data to trace changing ideas about

⁶ Scott Sagan and Jeremi Suri, “The Madman Nuclear Alert: Secrecy, Signaling, and Safety in October 1969,” *International Security* 27, no. 4 (Spring 2002): 150–83.

⁷ Henry Kissinger, *White House Years* (Simon & Schuster, 2011), 66.

⁸ Janne E. Nolan, *An Elusive Consensus: Nuclear Weapons and American Security after the Cold War* (Brookings Institution Press, 2001).

nuclear utility.⁹ I provide a fresh interpretation of the influence of the Korean and Vietnam Wars on U.S. nuclear strategy, and I provide the first systematic analysis of the nuclear lessons learned from the First Gulf War. Second, my research highlights a causal pattern largely overlooked in the existing literature, which tends to emphasize the influence of bureaucratic drivers, action-reaction arms race dynamics, and normative constraints on nuclear policy.¹⁰

Project Weaknesses: I look forward to discussing this memo at the Stanton Conference and – particularly given its early stage of development – welcome feedback on all aspects of the project. In particular, I would appreciate suggestions for how to address these weaknesses and outstanding questions:

Hypotheses: Are these the right hypotheses to capture the phenomenon under study?

Measurement: Whose learning matters in measuring variation in the dependent variable? What are the transmission mechanisms that actually matter for policy-making?

Generalizability: What are the prospects for generalization given the singularity of U.S. nuclear history?

Path Dependence: The Korean and First Gulf Wars seem to be particularly important cases because they occur early in new global orders/amidst major military-technological changes and therefore have precedent-setting effects. How can I capture that dynamic?

Cold War vs. Post-Cold War: Are there confounding variables not captured by my theory related to the changed geopolitical context? Is nuclear learning possible from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and, if not, why not?

⁹ E.g.: Francis Gavin, *Nuclear Statecraft: History and Strategy in America's Atomic Age* (Cornell University Press, 2012).

¹⁰ On bureaucracy, see: Matthew Evangelista, *Innovation and the Arms Race: How the United States and the Soviet Union Develop New Military Technologies* (Cornell University Press, 1988). On the action-reaction debate, see: Paul C. Warnke, "Apes on a Treadmill," *Foreign Policy*, no. 18 (April 1, 1975): 12–29; Albert Wohlstetter, "Is There a Strategic Arms Race?," *Foreign Policy*, no. 15 (July 1974): 3–20. On norms, see: Nina Tannenwald, "Stigmatizing the Bomb: Origins of the Nuclear Taboo," *International Security* 29, no. 4 (2005): 5–49.

2. Anya Loukianova, RAND

Russia's Views on Nuclear Escalation and Risks

1. Introduction

How does Russia understand escalation from conventional to nuclear weapons and view nuclear risks? Russia's potential for using nuclear weapons during a conventional conflict is an important issue on the agenda for U.S./NATO policymakers as they debate a credible deterrence posture for forces in Europe.

Since Russia's 2014 invasion of Ukraine, NATO allies in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) have expressed concerns that they are vulnerable to Russian coercion, destabilization, and even a challenge of their territorial integrity. These concerns have led to discussions on the need for a new U.S. and NATO conventional posture that could deter Russian adventurism as well as a potential enhancement of NATO's nuclear guarantees to its members in the CEE. With the backdrop of recent Russian leadership statements on nuclear use, these discussions have focused attention on the uncertainties in Russian thinking on escalation thresholds and how Russia assesses nuclear risk in a conflict with the United States and NATO.

My project this year during my Stanton Nuclear Security Fellowship will focus on gaining a better understanding of Russian views on escalation and the risks of nuclear weapons use in a conventional conflict through a systematic study of recent Russian-language military writings, doctrinal documents, military exercises, and conventional and nuclear procurement. It will contribute to the debate about Russia's intentions and capabilities vis-à-vis NATO, as well as provide a basis for defining future Western deterrence needs and avoiding the dangers of Euro-Atlantic conflict escalation.

2. Existing Work on the Subject

There are distinct schools of thought in the current U.S. policy debate on this issue. The first camp, made up of deterrence-focused generalists, argues that Russia has lowered its threshold for nuclear use and warns that Washington lacks credible deterrence options in Europe. The second camp, comprised of Russia-focused security policy experts, counters that the nuclear threshold has not been lowered, and that Moscow's doctrinal developments and procurement efforts point to an interest in conventional deterrence.

The first school of thought has built its analyses on deterrence theory and Russia's political and military leadership's recent statements to reach conclusions with important policy implications. Keir Lieber and Daryl Press have argued that Russia's strategy involves nuclear coercion of NATO members, and that there is a need to consider lower-yield nuclear weapons in response to this development.¹¹ Brad Roberts has noted that Russia is one of several states that has "developed theories of victory built around nuclear coercion, blackmail, and brinkmanship, aimed at breaking the will of the United States and its

¹¹ Keir Lieber and Daryl Press, *Preventing Escalation During Conventional Wars* (PASC, 2015), pg. 21.

allies, including with limited nuclear strikes to demonstrate ... resolve.”¹² Elbridge Colby has warned that Russia would not hesitate to use nuclear threats to “escalate its way to victory” in the Baltics.¹³

The second school of thought has relied on Russian sources in the original and engaged in Kremlinology to counter these arguments and to highlight no less dramatic implications for regional security. Nikolai Sokov has argued that recent developments in Russian doctrine, procurement, and employment point to the emergence of “strategic nonnuclear deterrence” that adds a plank below the current nuclear threshold.¹⁴ Olga Oliker has posited that there is little credible evidence to suggest that Russia’s nuclear strategy is “escalate to de-escalate,” and that a rush to develop lower-yield nuclear capabilities could undermine U.S./NATO deterrence by signaling a lack of confidence in their conventional capabilities.¹⁵ Pavel Podvig has noted the dangers of accidental nuclear war in Russia’s development of dual-capable platforms.¹⁶

3. The Study Précis

How does Russia understand escalation from conventional to nuclear weapons and view nuclear risks? Building on research conducted by other scholars to-date, my Stanton Nuclear Security project will focus on understanding Russia’s nuclear doctrine and planning, divining the meaning of its leadership’s nuclear threats, assessing the ways in which nuclear and conventional force structure and procurement patterns reflect inherent risk, and determining offensive intentions and resolve through military exercises involving nuclear use. A preliminary summary of the framework is offered in the Appendix, and feedback on this table is most welcome.

Concerns about the use of nuclear coercion against the United States and its allies are rooted in deterrence theory. Scholars have long argued that militarily-weak states could use nuclear escalation threats for defensive purposes against stronger states with lower resolve, and recent scholarship has added that, in some cases, these weak states could also use such threats for offense.¹⁷ While Russia’s nuclear posture has been inconsistent with “assymetric escalation” strategies of others, its willingness to run the risk of nuclear war has been shrouded in ambiguity. If deterrence theorists’ worst suspicions about Russia are correct, one would expect to see evidence supporting the intent to escalate to the use of nuclear weapons to demonstrate resolve reflected in official statements, writings, procurement, and exercises.

This project will focus on the nature of vertical escalation to the nuclear use threshold, which can take place through deliberate, inadvertent, and accidental mechanisms. Western concerns about Russian escalation pertain to all three of these mechanisms, and Russia’s views on the risks involved in each of

¹² Brad Roberts with Steve Fyffe, “The Case for U.S. Nuclear Weapons in the 21st Century,” CISAC News, December 18, 2015, <http://cisac.fsi.stanford.edu/>.

¹³ Elbridge Colby, *Nuclear Weapons in the Third Offset Strategy* (CNAS, 2015), pg. 8.

¹⁴ See Sokov presentation in “Russian Nuclear Strategy,” CSIS, June 27, 2016, <https://www.csis.org>.

¹⁵ Olga Oliker, “Russia’s Nuclear Doctrine,” CSIS, May 2016, <https://www.csis.org>.

¹⁶ Pavel Podvig, “Blurring the Line Between Nuclear and Nonnuclear Weapons: Increasing the Risk of Accidental Nuclear War?” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, May 3, 2016, <http://thebulletin.org>.

¹⁷ See an overview of recent scholarship and arguments in Robert Powell, “Nuclear Brinkmanship, Limited War, and Military Power,” *International Organization*, 69/3, July 2015, pp. 589-626.

them have implications for U.S./NATO policy makers. For example, Russia has traditionally viewed escalation in a linear way: a large-scale conventional conflict escalates to strategic nuclear use. Thus, changes in doctrine or exercises involving the use of substrategic nuclear weapons in an event other than an existential threat to the Russian homeland could indeed point to a lowering of the threshold that would demand a U.S./NATO response. With regard to inadvertent escalation, Russian military thinkers' debates that dispel the ambiguity of threats, doctrinal developments, and nuclear red lines could help U.S./NATO to clarify escalation thresholds. Finally, given the history of U.S.-Soviet cooperation to reduce the risks of accidental nuclear war, changes in Russian views on this could be of utmost importance.

Drawing on the author's language capabilities, this project's unique contribution is a systematic analysis of recent Russian-language military journals. The sources of evidence include articles in the authoritative journal *Voyennaya Mysl'* (Military Thought); military interviews in *Krasnaya Zvezda* (Red Star); and "expert community" discourse in internet periodicals *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozrenie* (Independent Military Review) and *Voенно-Промышленныи Кур'ер* (Military-Industrial Courier). It should be noted that, despite Russia's extensive use of online media for propaganda efforts, these publications have retained their quality. Thus, analysis of authoritative (and non-Western oriented) military publications allows us to assess the level of debate, consensus, or discord in Russian military and security expert circles with regard to nuclear escalation and risks. It also offers a glimpse of future developments in strategy and weapons development plans, especially with regard to "strategic nonnuclear deterrence."

This project, which differs from my doctoral research, is in the very early stages of development. My preliminary argument is that deterrence scholars overstate Russia's resolve to escalate to substrategic nuclear use in a conflict with NATO. There is little concrete evidence to suggest that military planners in Russia have embraced the use of nuclear escalation for offense. Instead, doctrinal developments, planning, procurement, and exercises still point to a linear view of escalation. In addition, there is some thinking about ways to manage inadvertent escalation risks—for example, discussions about what level of damage from Western conventional strikes on the Russian homeland would call for a nuclear response, and how to assess that damage in order to not respond "inappropriately." That said, Russian strategy is in a period of transition, and there is evidence of the desire to raise the nuclear threshold—not lower it—in order to improve the credibility of the deterrence posture against potential "Western aggression."

4. Policy Implications

U.S./NATO policymakers may have a short window of opportunity to shape Russia's posture in a direction that would be more concordant with long-term Western security interests. If my preliminary argument holds true, a broad implication is that Western policy makers need to develop a political-military posture that strengthens U.S./NATO deterrence and improves assurance of CEE allies in Europe based on a view that Russia seeks to keep a potential conflict below the nuclear threshold. In addition, U.S. and NATO diplomatic efforts with Russia should seek to improve the transparency of conventional military operations and clarify the intended employment of dual-capable systems.

5. Appendix: A Preliminary Summary of the Framework

DELIBERATE ESCALATION	INADVERTENT ESCALATION	ACCIDENTAL ESCALATION
Russia escalates <i>or threatens escalation</i> to nuclear use to send signals or to coerce Russia escalates <i>or threatens to do so</i> to gain advantage or avoid defeat	Russia escalates <i>or leaves open the chance of escalation</i> to nuclear use as a response to Western use of conventional forces	Russian nuclear escalation takes places as the result of an operator error or an inability to exercise control over forces
EVIDENCE FROM DOCTRINE AND LEADERSHIP STATEMENTS:		
Stated use for nuclear weapons and shifts of doctrine overtime Use of nuclear threats (offensive or defensive?), level of explicitness Clarity of articulation of stakes involved in escalation (e.g. possibility of defeat in conventional conflict?) Evidence of certainty in resolve to use nuclear weapons Articulated nuclear red lines, clarity of their communication	Stated nature of use for dual-capable systems Appreciation of importance of accident avoidance, physical protection, positive control	
EVIDENCE FROM PROCUREMENT AND DEPLOYMENT PATTERNS:		
Deployment of systems intended for regional nuclear use Potential shifts in deployment patterns of conventional forces Evidence of war planning, locations of infrastructure hardening	Procurement and deployment patterns for dual-capable systems	
EVIDENCE FROM MILITARY EXERCISES AND OPERATIONS:		
General model of escalation, stated and ascribed intent of nuclear use Timeline for escalation, nature of pressures on command and control (C2) Attitude toward confidence and security-building measures	C2 challenges or risky behavior by forces in conventional operations that results in accidents	
EVIDENCE FROM MILITARY PUBLICATIONS:		
Critique or acceptance of official policies and practices Stated concerns about deliberate escalation, risk management strategies Analysis of intent of signals Perception of Western deterrence theorists' arguments Views on cooperation with West to reduce deliberate escalation risks	Critique or acceptance of official policies and practices Stated concerns about inadvertent escalation, risk management strategies Discussions of acceptable conventional damage levels Views on cooperation w/West to reduce inadvertent escalation risks	Critique or acceptance of official policies and practices Stated concerns about accidental escalation, risk management strategies Views on cooperation with West to reduce accidental escalation risks

3. Anna Péczeli, CISAC

Shifting away from Cold War nuclear thinking?

On what issue are you working and why is it important?

The main focus of my research is the Obama administration's nuclear strategy through the lens of the Cold War. The roots of nuclear strategy go back to the 1950s and over the course of the Cold War the primary goals of U.S. nuclear planning did not change much. Military planners and targeteers were preparing for the "unthinkable" with war plans that reduce the vulnerability of U.S. nuclear forces to a surprise attack and limit damage under any condition of war intention. In the meanwhile, presidents and policy makers were trying to solve the fundamental challenge of how to deter a first strike by credibly threatening to use nuclear weapons, but at the same time avoiding a confrontation where their actual employment would be necessary. In order to ensure the credibility of these threats, every administration tried to implement innovations in U.S. nuclear doctrine, but despite their best efforts, doctrinal changes usually had only limited effects on the actual war plans. As a result of the lack of a strong civilian oversight, a striking difference started to emerge between the declaratory policy and the operational level practice. While the political guidance went through several fundamental changes, war plans were mostly lagging behind with moderate transformations (which had a direct effect on force level requirements, as well). With the fall of the Soviet Union, the United States lost its main adversary and it was logical to assume that the number of nuclear weapons would be dramatically reduced and their mission profoundly revised. Although dramatic reductions were implemented in the force structure, the degree of change at the operational level was still far behind the degree of change in the post-Cold War security environment, and Cold War legacies continue to define certain aspects of U.S. nuclear weapons policy. This is why, it is still timely to discuss what Cold War nuclear thinking means and how it affects the evolution of U.S. nuclear posture.

What is the big question that you are seeking to answer about that issue?

In his 2009 Prague Address, President Obama stated himself that it is time to "put an end to Cold War thinking" and pave the way towards a world without nuclear weapons. Since the Prague address, the term "Cold War nuclear thinking" has been widely used in academic, as well as in political circles but it has never been defined what it exactly means or what the administration meant by it. Therefore, it is not clear what specific aspects of the so called Cold War nuclear posture President Obama promised to shift away from. In the lack of a clear definition, the term has been mostly used in a negative context, or as a sarcastic description of anyone whose thinking is not "progressive enough." This, however, is only one side of the coin – it is true that many legacies of the Cold War are outdated in the current security environment, but there are still some characteristics of U.S. nuclear strategy which were developed during the Cold War and are logically sound today.

In this regard, the first goal of the research is to examine the evolution of Cold War nuclear strategy and to objectively identify those guiding principles which were characteristics of the bipolar system and designated U.S. nuclear strategy for decades. After establishing the central concept of the research, I

intend to use this Cold War nuclear thinking framework as an analytical tool to examine the Obama administration's nuclear strategy. Of course, the two decades between the end of the Cold War and President Obama's inauguration cannot be ignored either. Therefore, I will also reflect on the post-Cold War administrations, highlight the changes that were implemented by Presidents Clinton and Bush, and compare their nuclear postures with the Obama posture. Under the Bush administration, the number of potential adversaries and contingencies against which the U.S. made pre-planned nuclear wars plans has widened. As President Obama inherited most of these challenges, it is also necessary to examine whether one doctrine is adequate to deter all these different adversaries and address all these scenarios. It is also important to analyze how other factors -- such as ballistic missile defense or cyber threats -- change offensive nuclear policies in the modern era.

Altogether, I seek to answer the following questions: How has the Prague agenda changed U.S. nuclear strategy? How has Obama's employment guidance affected operational policies (i.e. the new focus on proportionality and distinction)? Has the administration really shifted away from Cold War traditions (e.g.: damage limitation, preemption, high damage expectancy) or is there still Cold War nuclear thinking on the different levels of nuclear policy? If so, how does it affect the prospects of further nuclear reductions?

How are you going to answer your question? What methods will you use and what evidence or cases will you explore?

My method is a detailed case study method. Based on primary documents and data, I will examine the evolution of U.S. nuclear strategy on three analytical levels: in the declaratory policy, in the force structure, and on the operational level. Despite some differences in the official rhetoric and the toolkit, I want to show that there were many continuities between the Cold War administrations which add up to a unique conceptual thinking on nuclear strategy and war planning. Then, I want to empirically show what has changed under the Obama administration and what has not changed. Finally, I want to explain why there was less change operationally than one might have predicted.

Regarding the sources that I will use, the Cold War administrations are analyzed based on a great number of declassified guidance documents from the White House and the Office of the Secretary of Defense, along with numerous declassified memorandums and letters between senior members of the Cold War administrations. Although by now there are several excellent books on Cold War nuclear planning, many of the primary sources have just recently been declassified which makes it possible to reveal some new aspects of operational planning, and to contribute to the existing literature.

With regards to the analysis of the Obama administration, the declaratory policy level is examined through numerous speeches from the President and key members of the administration, as well as through a thorough analysis of the 2010 Nuclear Posture Review. In the force structure, the regular data exchanges under the New START Treaty will help to monitor the changes in the strategic nuclear forces, and the overall stockpile numbers – which were revealed by the administration twice – will help to make assumptions on the rest of the arsenal. In addition, the National Defense Authorization Acts and the Stockpile Stewardship and Management Plans also provide information on nuclear modernization

efforts and the shape of the future stockpile. However, the big challenge is of course the operational level, where the 9-page summary of the 2013 Nuclear Employment Strategy of the United States is the only primary document that provides some information on operational planning. But despite the high level of secrecy in this matter, I have already conducted a number of interviews with senior officials from the DoD, State, STRATCOM, the NSC and the JCS, and I intend to arrange additional interviews.

What is your answer to the question you are asking?

My tentative argument is that in the declaratory policy, the Obama administration has lessened the reliance on Cold War nuclear thinking but on the operational level, it still retains key elements of Cold War nuclear thinking, and retaining these elements on the operational level has a negative effect on the prospects of further deep reductions in the nuclear stockpile of the U.S.

How does your work fit into the existing work on your subject?

I believe that this is an important and policy-relevant subject, and the findings and recommendations of my research will be relevant to the next administration(s), as well. In summary, the project is unique for the following reasons:

- this is the first academic attempt to conceptualize Cold War nuclear thinking and clearly outline the continuities in U.S. nuclear strategy in terms of rhetoric, forces and operational planning;
- it also identifies some new elements of Cold War traditions and proves that not all of these are outdated in the current security environment;
- there are plenty of excellent papers on the Obama administration's nuclear policy (especially in the field of non-proliferation) but there is very limited literature on nuclear strategy and arms control;
- it approaches the question of nuclear reductions from an operational perspective which (thanks to the high level of secrecy) is an under-researched area (especially in the case of such a recent administration);
- and finally, on the rhetorical level, the crisis in Ukraine and the downturn of U.S.-Russia relations triggered an academic discussion on a "new Cold War", which makes this historical approach a highly relevant framework again, and examining the effects of this new security environment on posture planning is going to be crucial for the next U.S. administration, as well.

What policy implications flow from your work? What concrete recommendations can you offer to policymakers?

The security environment is always a crucial determining factor of what can be achieved in arms control negotiations, but there are a number of operational factors which equally matter when it comes to implementing deep reductions in the force structure. I suggest the following operational adjustments which could contribute to future reductions: introduce a "sole purpose" posture, and apply an unconditional negative security assurance to limit the number of contingencies and adversaries against which nuclear weapons play a role; limit damage criteria (the level of "desired destruction" in a designated target) to reduce the reliance on more capable, higher yield nuclear weapons; reduce flexibility requirements for strike options, which could reduce the number of scenarios that nuclear

weapons have to cover; end (hard) counterforce targeting, which would reduce reliance on a robust and advanced nuclear arsenal, and could also significantly reduce the amount of weapons, which are needed to hold at risk the designated targets; and finally reduce planning for damage limitation, which would mean a reduced reliance on alert levels and LUA capability, potentially triggering significant changes in the delivery platforms. Unless some (or all) of these operational policies are changed, the chances of dramatic force reductions are extremely remote, regardless of how favorable the political circumstances might be.

What do you think is the weakest or most vulnerable aspect of your study and what sort of feedback would be most useful to you?

I would really appreciate a general feedback on the overall approach of this project, whether it is worth making Cold War nuclear thinking such a central concept of the research. And I would also appreciate some advice on the methodology, and especially some creative ideas on the analysis of the Obama administration's operational policy.