Good luck - Mainly **Taiwan and Baltics**

Moldovan investigators can’t be sure that the suspects who fled didn’t hold on to the bulk of the nuclear materials. Nor do they know whether the groups, which are pursuing buyers who are enemies of the West, may have succeeded in selling deadly nuclear material to extremists at a time when the Islamic State has made clear its ambition to use weapons of mass destruction.

Reports such as these surface periodically from the former Soviet Union and Pakistan and, perhaps because the implications are too terrible to think about and the solutions are too hard to find, they fade more quickly than their severity warrants. The underlying issues are largely the same as they were 20 years ago: The black market exists because there’s a supply of the material and a demand for it. As one Moldovan investigator told the AP: “As long as the smugglers think they can make big money without getting caught, they will keep doing it.”

At the center of these cases, of which the AP learned of four in the past five years, was a “thriving black market in nuclear materials” in a “tiny and impoverished Eastern European country”: Moldova.

Nuclear terrorism is quote, “the single most serious threat to the national security of the United States.” A study by Dr. Graham Allison of Harvard Kennedy School for National Defense University states By 2053 there is a 39.5% to 100% chance of a nuclear terrorist attack. Allison for National Defense University states, Quote, “A small group of people, none of whom have ever had access to the classified literature, could design and build a crude nuclear explosive device." If terrorists acquire 25 kg of High Enriched Uranium, they could make an Improvised Nuclear Device in less than one year.

<https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/nuclear-terrorism-fact-sheet>

<https://www.amacad.org/publication/reducing-greatest-risks-nuclear-theft-terrorism>

"A small group of people, none of whom have ever had access to the classified literature, could design and build a crude nuclear explosive device"

<https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/nuclear-terrorism-fact-sheet>

<https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/10/moldova-nuclear-weapons-isis/409456/>

The William J. Perry Project

Nuclear miscalculation refers to the risk that a state will mistakenly understand the intentions of another state and respond by launching a nuclear strike. The false belief that an attack is imminent causes a country to “miscalculate” the risk of full-scale war and escalate a conflict to the nuclear level.

**Taiwan cards**

Robert Ross, “Navigating the Taiwan Strait: Deterrence, Escalation Dominance, and US-China relations,” 2002,

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/3092143.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3Af565f19743478ebb3cdce55b61a9ae90>

Moreover, **Chinese leaders respect** not only **U.S. military capabilities** but also U.S. resolve, **and thus believe that American retaliatory threats are credible.** Effective deterrence enables Washington to avoid policies that undermine U.S.- China cooperation while maintaining peace in the Taiwan Strait.

Shulsky, Abram N., Deterrence Theory and Chinese Behavior. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2000.

<https://www.rand.org/pubs/monograph_reports/MR1161.html>

For this reason, **successful deterrence of China** has often **require[s]d the threat of very high levels of violence. In the** 1954–1955 **Taiwan Strait crisis,** for example, **the United States resorted to threats of nuclear attack to deter further Chinese use of force** with respect to the offshore islands and to **bring[ing] about a[n end to**] final cessation of **hostile action** (e.g., shelling).1

Parris Chang, 9-21-2016, "No-first use would only embolden China," Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, https://thebulletin.org/roundtable\_entry/no-first-use-would-only-embolden-china/

For years China has been substantially modernizing and expanding its conventional and nuclear military forces, and has used its overwhelming capabilities to compel smaller neighbors to settle disputes on Beijing's terms. Moreover, China has built up its anti-access and area-denial capabilities—hoping to deter, delay, and defeat US intervention. It would be extremely unwise for President Obama to proclaim a nuclear no-first-use policy. **Chinese leader Xi Jinping would construe [a No First Use policy] as a sign of US military decline, and he would only be emboldened to pursue China's dream of supplanting the United States as the world's superpower.**

Samson Ellis, 10-8-2020, "Here’s what could happen if China invaded Taiwan," Japan Times, https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2020/10/08/asia-pacific/china-taiwan-invasion-scenario/

This is a worry for U.S. military planners. A University of Sydney study warned last year that **America “no longer enjoys military primacy” over China and that U.S. bases**, airstrips and ports **in the region “could be rendered useless by precision strikes in the opening hours of a conflict.”**

Daniel Russel. The 3 Flashpoints That Could Turn a US-China ‘Cold War’ Hot, The Diplomat, 06-03-2020. 11-1-2020. https://thediplomat.com/2020/06/the-3-flashpoints-that-could-turn-a-us-china-cold-war-hot/

For others, Taiwan is a blunt instrument used to harass and discomfit the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). But for Xi Jinping, Taiwan is an historical and a political imperative. **Putting Taiwan on a path to “unification” is key** both to the “great rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation” and **to Xi’s continued grip on power. No other issue is as central to [Xi jinping’s]**the CCP identity or to its leader’s **political survival.** Yet Xi has suffered a series of embarrassing setbacks over the past year. Not only did Beijing’s nemesis, Tsai Ing-wen, score a major victory in her reelection bid, but her success was fueled by her very public support for pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong and her public repudiation of Xi’s suggestion of a “one country, two systems” arrangement for Taiwan. In fact, the election outcome may have contributed to Beijing’s calculation that there was little to gain from continued restraint in Hong Kong. Taiwan’s stunningly efficient handling of COVID-19 won it international accolades and a backlash against Beijing’s policy of excluding Taiwan from international forums like the recent World Health Assembly.

Isaac Stone Fish. War in North Korea Could Be Devastating. But War in Taiwan Could Be Even Worse—and More Likely., Slate Magazine, 10-04-2017. 11-1-2020. https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2017/10/what-would-a-chinese-invasion-of-taiwan-look-like.html

But war between China and Taiwan could be equally devastating. There are three reasons to believe this scenario, in the next ten years, is at least as likely as war between the United States and North Korea. For one, **the goal of “liberating” Taiwan is the paramount foreign policy concern of Beijing. And it has been a top concern since the end of the** 1945–1949 **civil war[, as unification is integral to the great rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation (yes this is from Russel lol).]**between Mao Zedong’s Communists and Chiang Kai-Shek’s Nationalists, when Chiang and his people fled to the island, setting up what the West viewed as China’s legitimate government until the 1970s. (Because Beijing insists Taiwan is part of China, it does not call Taiwan an international issue.) Taiwanese reunification and independence is such a sensitive topic on the mainland that any polling on the issue is suspect. Anecdotally, however, in the dozens of conversations I’ve had with Chinese citizens about Taiwan over the last 15 years, many of them supported reunification—some with force, if necessary.

Isaac Stone Fish. War in North Korea Could Be Devastating. But War in Taiwan Could Be Even Worse—and More Likely., Slate Magazine, 10-04-2017. 11-1-2020. https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2017/10/what-would-a-chinese-invasion-of-taiwan-look-like.html

If the United States successfully replaced Kim with a regime more supportive of U.S. interests, or even more advantageously, facilitated the reunification of the Korean peninsula under a Western-friendly government in Seoul, that would improve the United States’ ability to project power in Asia and constrain the rise of China. Still, North Korea is a distraction, not an existential issue, for China. (Second) **Beijing’s** successful **occupation of Taiwan**, on the other hand, **would greatly improve its** prospects for **regional domination, and undermine the United States’ position in Asia by removing America’s democratic ally Taiwan and weakening Japan.** And it would ensure Beijing’s ability to maintain its trade links in the Western Pacific in the face of a U.S.-organized blockade.

Kenji Minemura. INTERVIEW/ John Mearsheimer: U.S.-China rift runs real risk of escalating into a nuclear war : The Asahi Shimbun, Asahi Shimbun, 8-17-2020. 11-1-2020. http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/13629071

I believe the **United States will fight to defend Taiwan if China invades Taiwan.** In my opinion, it's unthinkable that the United States would stand by and allow China to conquer Taiwan. **If we didn't defend Taiwan, it would have devastating consequences for our relationship with Japan, South Korea and our other allies in East Asia.** I would say however, and this was why the editors at The National Interest had used the title “Goodbye Taiwan,” you can imagine a possible situation in 30 or 40 years where China has grown so powerful that the United States simply cannot defend Taiwan because of the geographical location.

John Gower, 3-6-2018, "The Dangerous Illogic of Twenty-First-Century Deterrence Through Planning for Nuclear Warfighting," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, https://carnegieendowment.org/2018/03/06/dangerous-illogic-of-twenty-first-century-deterrence-through-planning-for-nuclear-warfighting-pub-75717

**The chance that a conventional attack by a dual-capable system is perceived to be a nuclear first strike increases significantly during a conflict between nuclear-capable states. Indeed, retaining dual-capable aircraft or air- or ground-launched nuclear cruise missiles, while also possessing a conventional equivalent, raises the likelihood of miscalculation in such circumstances** from quite possible **to near probable.**

Parris Chang. No-first use would only embolden China, Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, 9-21-2016. 11-1-2020. https://thebulletin.org/roundtable\_entry/no-first-use-would-only-embolden-china/

To be sure, China has declared a no-first-use policy, and has demanded that other nuclear powers make the same commitment. But **Beijing's** own no-first-use policy may be under reconsideration. In 2005, General Zhu Chenghu of China's National Defense University made worldwide headlines when he **warned that if the United States intervened in a military conflict over Taiwan, China would launch nuclear attacks** on US cities[, as]. "We are ready to sacrifice all cities east of Xian," Gen. Zhu claimed. "Of course, the Americans must be prepared for hundreds of their cities to be destroyed." When a reporter raised the issue of **China's no-first-use policy, Zhu said "the policy may change"—and asserted that it applies in any case only to conflicts between China and non-nuclear states.**

Charles Glasser. Will China's Rise Lead to War?, Foreign Affairs, 04-11-2011. 11-1-2020. https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/asia/2011-03-01/will-chinas-rise-lead-war

A crisis over Taiwan could fairly easily escalate to nuclear war, because each step along the way might well seem rational to the actors involved. Current U.S. policy is designed to reduce the probability that Taiwan will declare independence and to make clear that the United States will not come to Taiwan's aid if it does. Nevertheless, the United States would find itself under pressure to protect Taiwan against any sort of attack, no matter how it originated. Given the different interests and perceptions of the various parties and the limited control Washington has over Taipei's behavior, a crisis could unfold in which the United States found itself following events rather than leading them. Such dangers have been around for decades, but ongoing improvements in China's military capabilities may make Beijing more willing to escalate a Taiwan crisis. In addition to its improved conventional capabilities, **China is modernizing its nuclear forces to increase their ability** to survive and **retaliate following a** large-scale **U.S. attack.** Standard deterrence theory holds that Washington's current ability to destroy most or all of China's nuclear force enhances its bargaining position. China's nuclear modernization might remove[s] that check on Chinese action, **leading Beijing to behave** more **boldly in** future **crises** than it has in past ones.

Ching Cheong, “Will Taiwan Break Away? The Rise of Taiwanese Nationalism,” 2001, https://books.google.com/books?id=TocvXqTwiboC&pg=PA6&lpg=PA6&dq=%22this+means+South+Korea,+Japan,+the+Philippines+and,+to+a+lesser+extent,+Singapore.+%22&source=bl&ots=UQmnCDUlsC&sig=ACfU3U20J4aGp2DELrJgWqK0RJabeus2zQ&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwiI-86-8bnjAhVRUt8KHb3sDbgQ6AEwAHoECAkQAQ#v=onepage&q&f=false

Beijing also [is] prepared to go for the nuclear option. A **Chinese** military officer disclosed recently that Beijing was considering a review of its "non first use" principle regarding nuclear weapons. Major-General Pan Zhangqiang, president of the military-funded Institute for Strategic Studies, told a gathering at the Woodrow Wilson International Centre for Scholars in Washington that although the government still abided by that principle, there were strong pressures from the military to drop it. He said **military leaders considered the use of nuclear weapons mandatory if the country risked dismemberment as a result of foreign intervention.** Gen Ridgeway said that should that come to pass, we would see the destruction of civilisation. There would be no victors in such a war. While the prospect of a nuclear Armageddon over Taiwan might seem inconceivable, it cannot be ruled out entirely, for **[because] China puts sovereignty above everything else.**

Talmadge 18 finds The **Pentagon’s warfare would be a potential recipe for nuclear escalation** China not only has nuclear weapons; it has also intermingled them with its conventional military forces, making it difficult to attack one without attacking the other. This means that **a major U.S. military campaign targeting China’s conventional forces would** likely **also threaten its nuclear arsenal.** Faced with such a threat, Chinese leaders could decide to use their nuclear weapons while they were still able to.

**Baltics cards**

Samuel A. Greene; Graeme B. Robertson, 8-27-2019, "Perspective," Washington Post, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/putins-power-depends-on-his-popularity-that-makes-him-vulnerable/2019/08/27/c5e0cf1a-b4a2-11e9-8e94-71a35969e4d8_story.html>

In general, **public opinion plays an underappreciated role in Russian politics.** The regime does sometimes rig elections: Indeed, **the Kremlin’s effort to exclude its critics from the city council ballot in Moscow is what’s driven people into the streets** this summer. But **most of the time, Putin’s Kremlin** goes to extraordinary lengths to win, **through persuasion, the votes of ordinary Russians.** When Putin himself is on the ballot, if his share of votes falls below 70 percent in a given region — ideally with 70 percent turnout — officials lose their jobs. The targets are lower for the candidates he supports, but the concept is the same. **This reliance on popularity makes Putin vulnerable. Being too harsh on protesters could easily lead to a backlash in public opinion.** But being too soft might encourage even more demonstrations against the evident corruption and mismanagement across Russia. As a result, **the Kremlin often acts tough, then backs off.** After **overflowing landfills in the suburbs of Moscow and St. Petersburg inspired months of angry protest**, officials tried to quell anger by shipping waste from the country’s largest cities farther afield. Rather than settle down, however, the movement went nationwide, as news spread of plans to build a huge waste dump in the Arctic. **Activists** there — backed by sympathizers from around the country — **managed to block the effort; the Kremlin dispatched riot police but eventually backed down**. Elsewhere, **Putin caved to residents** of Ekaterinburg, the country’s fourth-largest city, who turned out by the thousands to protect a popular city park from encroachment by the Orthodox Church: **After first criticizing the protesters, Putin proposed a halt to the project while a poll was taken.** If the supposed puppet-master of Russian politics — and increasingly, Western politics, too — can be so easily backed into a corner, perhaps we need to revisit our metaphors. **Putin’s power comes not from an ability to impose his will on an oppressed public; rather, our research suggests, it is built jointly** — co-constructed — **with tens of millions of ordinary Russian citizens.** The most reliable independent polls show that **Putin’s support has never been below 60 percent since he took office in 1999** and has peaked at times as high as 89 percent. Even as his poll numbers were beginning to slip, he won the 2018 presidential election with 77 percent of the vote. Some of those showings — both in the polls and at the ballot box — are certainly a result of fear and pressure. But research (by Columbia’s Timothy Frye and co-authors) suggests that wariness about expressing one’s true opinion accounts for maybe six or nine percentage points in public opinion polls; and some of that has to do with pressure created by social consensus.

Holly Ellyatt, MAY 6 2020, “Putin’s popularity rating falls to lowest level in over two decades amid coronavirus outbreak,” CNBC, <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/05/06/coronavirus-russia-putins-popularity-rating-falls-to-historic-low.html>

Russian President Vladimir **Putin’s approval rating fell in April to a historic low as the coronavirus crisis engulfs the country,** along with the rest of the world. **Putin’s approval rating fell to 59% in April, down from 63% in the previous month**, according to a poll carried out by the independent Levada Center in Russia, which surveyed 1,608 Russian adults between April 24-27.

Mikheil Saakashvili, 11-27-2018, "Russia’s Next Land Grab Won’t Be in an Ex-Soviet State. It Will Be in Europe.," Foreign Policy, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/03/15/russias-next-land-grab-wont-be-in-an-ex-soviet-state-it-will-be-in-europe-putin-saakashvili-sweden-finland-arctic-northern-sea-route-baltics-nato/>

Those who attempt to answer this question miss the point. In Crimea, eastern Ukraine, South Ossetia, or anywhere else Putin considers Russia’s backyard, territorial gain has never been an end in itself. **Putin’s goal today is the same as when he invaded my country in 2008: to tighten his grip on the levers of power in Russia. Whenever Putin’s domestic popularity dips, he either escalates an ongoing conflict or launches a new offensive. And, clearly, it works. Putin has ruled the largest country in the world for nearly two decades, consolidating more control as he weathers each crisis.** Ordinary Russian voters may struggle to survive on pensions of $200 each month, but Putin’s base can be proud to live in a superpower.

**Moscow Times.** Putin's Approval Rating Falls for First Time This Year, 8-28-2014. **11-21-2020.** <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2014/08/28/putins-approval-rating-falls-for-first-time-this-year-a38841>

**Putin's popularity has soared this year despite Western criticism of Russia's annexation of Crimea** and alleged involvement in eastern Ukraine, climbing steadily from 80 percent since March. **It hit an all-time high of 87 percent earlier this month,** just weeks after the international community rounded on Putin for alleged Russian involvement in the downing over war-torn Ukraine of Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17, a catastrophe that claimed 298 lives on July 17. **Last year at this time, long before the Ukraine crisis erupted, the president's approval rating was 63 percent.**

**Jerry Hendrix**, 2-5-20**18**, When Putin Invades the Baltics, National Review, <span class="skimlinks-unlinked"><https://www.nationalreview.com/magazine/2018/02/05/vladimir-putin-invade-baltics>

Vladimir **Putin is playing a vast chess game with NATO, and his next move will be to invade the Baltic nations** of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. When this happens, the United States will need to move armored forces quickly to Europe, via Poland, in order to prevent NATO from being checkmated, and it’s going to have a problem doing that. Note that I said “when” Putin invades rather than “if.” **It’s clear that his grand strategy is to rebuild Russia’s empire of buffer states in an attempt to assuage his nation’s cultural paranoia regarding outside invaders.**

Emily **Ferris**. Unplugging the Baltic States: Why Russia’s Economic Approach May Be Shifting, No Publication, **7-1-2020. 11-15-2020.** <https://russiamatters.org/analysis/unplugging-baltic-states-why-russias-economic-approach-may-be-shifting>

**There is** certainly **a security dimension to Russia’s approach to the Baltic states. Russia considers them an important site of intelligence gathering to understand NATO capabilities there**, and there are frequent spy exchanges on both sides, suggesting ongoing intelligence operations.

(ERSC) The Committee on Europe and Regional Security Cooperation, 03-04-2015, "RUSSIAN AGGRESSION IN EASTERN EUROPE: WHERE DOES PUTIN GO NEXT AFTER UKRAINE, GEORGIA, AND MOLDOVA?" US Government Publishing Office, https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-114shrg97882/pdf/CHRG-114shrg97882.pdf

**Ultimately Putin knows that the best check on his power is a united transatlantic community, and he has sought** to divide Europe, undermining the resolve for sustained sanctions. But the most tempting objective for Putin is **to call into question the credibility of NATO’s Article 5 mutual defense commitment as doing so would effectively end NATO. A Russian move against an ally, such as a Baltic State, cannot be ruled out.** Putin has demonstrated time and again that **if he senses an opportunity to act he will, convinced that the West lacks the will or the ability to take decisive action**. That is why today’s situation is dangerous. We have seen repeatedly that Putin’s objectives expand with success and contract with failure. This means that the best determinant of his action is Western action.

Brad Roberts, 21 May 2019., Global Politics and Strategy, https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2019.1614788

Fifthly, some in the administration judged that the views of worried allies needed to be prioritised over those of more secure allies. This was a moral choice. But it also reflected a desire to ensure that **decisions about NATO’s nuclear policy and posture be made by the allies collectively rather than individually and separately.** Had such **unilateral decisions** become the norm, it is **likely that NATO’s collective nuclear deterrent would have collapsed,** stranding those more worried allies without a nuclear umbrella and generating among them resentment about the disengagement of NATO’s long-standing members from their defence.

Putin would attack to destroy NATO

Tom Nichols, 2-24-2015, "Russia Can't Beat NAT," No Publication, <https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2015/02/25/russia_cant_beat_nato--but_putin_may_try.html>

Putin suffers from the same kind of thinking, but **Russia’s generals**, who are neither fools nor madmen, almost certainly **understand that a sustained war with NATO is an unwinnable proposition. [Russia is]** Both Putin and his generals, however, are **counting on a political, not military, victory.** Putin’s bluster and **the Russian military’s continued probes and feints into NATO territory are all predicated on the** Soviet-era **belief that NATO is essentially a charade, [and]** a phony alliance made of spun glass: pretty to look at, but so delicate it will shatter at even the smallest blow. Should Putin attack, it will not be to defend the “rights of Russian-speakers” or some other fantasy, but rather from the delusion that **one sharp military strike will smash NATO as a political entity once and for all.**

(ERSC) The Committee on Europe and Regional Security Cooperation, 03-04-2015, "RUSSIAN AGGRESSION IN EASTERN EUROPE: WHERE DOES PUTIN GO NEXT AFTER UKRAINE, GEORGIA, AND MOLDOVA?" US Government Publishing Office, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-114shrg97882/pdf/CHRG-114shrg97882.pdf>

A Russian move against an ally, such as a Baltic State, cannot be ruled out. **Putin has demonstrated** time and again **that if he senses** an opportunity to act he will, convinced **that the West lacks the will or the ability to take decisive action[, he will attack]**. That is why today’s situation is dangerous. We have seen repeatedly that Putin’s objectives expand with success and contract with failure. This means that **the best determinant of his action is Western action.**

Kevin Lamarque, 7-17-2018, "‘No First Use’ and Nuclear Weapons," Council on Foreign Relations, https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/no-first-use-and-nuclear-weapons

During the Cold War and even today, **the credible threat of the United States using its nuclear weapons first against an adversary has been an important component of reassuring allies.** At the height of the Cold War, the threat of U.S. tactical nuclear use was conceived of as a critical bulwark against a conventional Soviet offensive through the Fulda Gap, a strategically significant lowland corridor in Germany that would allow Warsaw Pact forces to enter Western Europe. **A nuclear first-use policy was thought to be a cornerstone of the defensive posture of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)**, given the large number of bases of Warsaw Pact conventional military forces. **Accordingly, NATO has always opposed a U.S. NFU declaration and has never ruled out U.S. first use under its “flexible response”** posture since 1967. **Today, U.S. allies in East Asia and Europe alike rely on credible commitments from the United States to use nuclear weapons first to deter major nonnuclear threats against them.**

Mark Schneider, 10-31-2008, The Future of the U.S. Nuclear Deterrent, Taylor & Francis, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01495930802358539?scroll=top&amp;needAccess=true>

We must not ignore the requirement to provide extended deterrence to our allies. **British and French nuclear forces are not large enough, and these nations are not perceived as tough enough, to provide a deterrent for NATO Europe against Russia.**

Davis, Paul K., 2019, "Exploring the Role Nuclear Weapons Could Play in Deterring Russian Threats to the Baltic States," No Publication, <https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2781.html>

Despite its global advantages, **the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)'s current deterrent posture in the Baltic states is militarily weak and generally questionable. A Russian invasion there would almost surely capture some or all of those states' capital cities within a few days,** presenting NATO with a fait accompli.

Tom Nichols, 2-24-2015, "Russia Can't Beat NAT," No Publication, <https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2015/02/25/russia_cant_beat_nato--but_putin_may_try.html>

**This is not to say that the Russians won’t achieve their initial goals with speed and violence. A sudden dash into the Baltics or across the Polish border might succeed at the operational level for several days.** But NATO is not Ukraine: Russian forces will find themselves not among shell-shocked, conflicted, and impoverished people in the post-Soviet ruins of Donetsk, but in modern towns and cities full of people who hate them and whose skies and streets will rapidly be filled with the kind of military response the Ukrainians can only dream about.

Finally, **NATO has something the Russians sorely lack: experience**. Wisely or not, **the U.S. and its allies have been at war** in the Middle East and Central Asia **for nearly 15 years, and NATO’s armies are salted throughout with men and women who know how to fight, supply, communicate, and remain cohesive in the face of actual combat. Russia’s military,** once sharpened by World War II survivors and later by the veterans of the brutal attempt to subdue Afghanistan, **now boasts men whose combat experience mostly consists of blowing up apartment blocks in Chechnya and shooting at outgunned conscripts in Ukraine.**

Hal Brands, Nov 12, 2019 "How Russia could force a nuclear war in the Baltics," Japan Times, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2019/11/12/commentary/world-commentary/russia-force-nuclear-war-baltics/>

**NATO doesn’t have the capability to prevent Russian forces from quickly overrunning Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. Russian invaders would be at the gates of the Baltic capitals in two to three days; existing NATO forces in the region would be destroyed or swept aside. NATO could respond by mobilizing for a longer war to liberate the Baltic countries, but this would require a bloody, dangerous military campaign.** Critically, that campaign would require striking targets — such as air defense systems — located within Russia, as well as suppressing Russian artillery, short-range missiles and other capabilities within the Kaliningrad enclave, which is situated behind NATO’s front lines. **Moreover, this sort of NATO counteroffensive is precisely the situation Russian nuclear doctrine seems meant to avert. Russian officials understand that their country would lose a long war against NATO.** They are particularly alarmed at the possibility of NATO using its unmatched military capabilities to conduct conventional strikes within Russian borders. **So the Kremlin has signaled that it might carry out limited nuclear strikes — perhaps a “demonstration strike” somewhere in the Atlantic, or against NATO forces in the theater — to force the alliance to make peace on Moscow’s terms.** This concept is known as “escalate to de-escalate,” and there is a growing body of evidence that the Russians are serious about it.

Starr 3-11 - associate of the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation and senior scientist for Physicians for Social Responsibility, Steven, “Ukraine + NATO = Nuclear War,” <https://truthout.org/articles/ukraine-nato-nuclear-war/>

Russia has for some time adopted the policy of "nuclear de-escalation":¶ "In order to maintain a credible nuclear deterrence effect under the conditions of a regional war, Russia believes it should not rely on strategic nuclear forces, or on them only, but must maintain a range of options for the limited or selective use of nuclear weapons in order to be able to inflict a precisely set level of damage to the enemy sufficient to convince him to terminate military confrontation by exposing him to the danger of further nuclear escalation¶ . . . **When introducing the concept of "nuclear de-escalation" in the late 1990s, the Russian defence establishment was obsessed with the possibility of a Kosovo-type US/NATO intervention in the war** ("armed conflict") in Chechnya, which resumed in 1999. **It did not exclude the possibility that, in the event of such a case, Russia would be forced to resort to nuclear weapons." ¶ In a NATO-Russian conflict, in which Russia introduced nuclear weapons, NATO would be fully capable of responding** in a tit-for-tat fashion. This would be the same pattern as was seen in the NATO war games of the Cold War. **Once the nuclear "firebreak" is crossed, once nuclear weapons are introduced into a military conflict in which \*both sides have nuclear weapons\*, there would likely be an almost inevitable escalation of conflict, a progressive use of nuclear weapons by both sides,** with progressively larger targets being taken out. **Peer-reviewed scientific studies predict that a war** fought with hundreds or thousands of US and Russian strategic nuclear weapons **would ignite nuclear firestorms over tens of thousands of square miles.** These mass fires would produce between 50 million to 150 million tons of smoke, which would quickly rise above cloud level in to the stratosphere, where winds would carry it around the Earth. **In a matter of weeks or months, a global stratospheric smoke layer would form, which would block up to 70% of warming sunlight, quickly producing Ice Age** weather conditions in the Northern Hemisphere.¶ The scientists predict that **temperatures** in the central US and Eurasia **would fall below freezing every day for about three years**. The smoke, the darkness, and extreme cold weather would last for ten years or longer, eliminating growing seasons, making it impossible to grow food. Most people and animals would perish from nuclear famine. **Nuclear war is suicide for the human race**.¶ **Therefore, it is imperative that NATO does \*not\* come into support Ukraine or enter into any Ukrainian conflict.** Should it do so, it would risk coming into a direct military conflict with Russia. **A US/NATO-Russian battle in Ukraine could easily become a nuclear war that could destroy all** nations and **peoples.**