

China to cease supporting Russia seem unlikely to be effective when similar public messages have already failed.

That approach also now makes it harder for Europe to build credible ties with new partners in the broader Indo-Pacific, including India and Japan, which have each taken serious measures in recent years to reduce their dependency on China. Indian and Japanese leaders are also frank and open about the economic and security threats that China poses. Viewed from New Delhi or Tokyo, Scholz's trip will simply be taken as evidence of Europe's unreliability and strategic unseriousness.

It all seems especially odd given that there are clearly better templates. Recent trips by senior U.S. officials show that business can be done in Beijing while delivering tough messages. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen struck a similar balance on de-risking during the most recent EU-China summit in Beijing last December. Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte did much the same in March, openly criticizing Chinese cyberespionage tactics and support for Russia on Ukraine.

It is possible to imagine a different German trip, in which Scholz coordinated with European partners and Washington, arrived in Beijing with his most capable ministers, and was willing to state a joint policy firmly in public, complete with clear carrots and sticks. Instead, Germany's approach seemed to lack long-term strategic acumen. Its policymakers bristle at the notion that Germany's economic and foreign policies are set in corporate boardrooms rather than the chancellery and ministries in Berlin. But it is hard to explain Scholz's trip—and, dispiritingly, much of Germany's China policy—in any other way. ■

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## Putin Is Playing a Nuclear Mind Game

By Rose Gottemoeller

Russian President Vladimir Putin's order for nuclear weapons drills went public on May 6, the day after Orthodox Easter—a bitter irony since he styles himself a fervent guardian of Christian values, which do not include the simulation of nuclear annihilation the last time I checked. I wonder whether he signed the order before or after his much-publicized attendance of Easter service at Moscow's Cathedral of Christ the Savior.

The exercises, centered in Russia's southern military district, are intended to simulate "theater," or regional, nuclear attacks, in contrast to "strategic" nuclear exercises simulating war with the United States—likely targeting not only Ukraine but also NATO members Romania, Bulgaria, and Turkey. Moscow's messaging is that the exercises are in answer to talk from French President Emmanuel Macron and other NATO leaders about sending Western soldiers to Ukraine.

The Kremlin appears to be reinforcing, in no uncertain terms, a red line against NATO boots on the ground in Ukraine. Fortunately, it is a red line that most NATO leaders share, including U.S. President Joe Biden. From the very outset of Putin's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Biden made it clear that the United States and its allies would send military assistance to Ukraine but not engage in the fighting. His goal remains crystal clear: to avoid a direct fight between Russia and NATO that could escalate to World War III and nuclear conflict.

Putin also wants to avoid a Russia-NATO fight. For him, that means avoiding strikes against NATO territory or reconnaissance aircraft patrolling the Black Sea airspace. NATO deliveries are fair game for attack once they arrive in Ukraine but not while they are still transiting NATO territory.

The United States and Russia thus agree on one thing in this terrible war: They do not want to risk a nuclear holocaust. Why, then, do the Russians keep claiming that the world is facing one?

Part of it is evidently the Kremlin's effort to derive value from this very brinkmanship—a pattern of behavior rarely seen since the 1962 Cuban missile crisis, the last time the world came to the brink of a nuclear exchange. During the Cold War, the United States and Soviet Union fought proxy wars in many places but rarely threatened to use nuclear arms. Neither side used such threats to achieve conventional battlefield goals, the way senior Russian officials have been doing throughout the war in Ukraine.

Instead, Washington and Moscow first built up their strategic arsenals—the long-range nuclear weapons by which they threaten each other directly—sustaining essential parity as they went. So long as neither side built significantly more than the other, and as long as both sustained a high level of readiness, the two superpowers had a nuclear deterrent that both considered stable.

This stability became so boring and reliable that people more or less forgot about nuclear annihilation. Once policymakers in Washington and Moscow began to control and limit their nuclear arsenals in the 1970s—starting with the U.S.-Soviet détente and the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty—the rest of the world was glad. No one wanted to think about what would happen if the superpowers "pressed the button." And they did not have to: The superpowers were heading in a different direction, reducing their reliance on nuclear weapons.

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The war in Ukraine has ended this complacency because Putin and his minions have insisted on rattling the nuclear saber. Now the rest of the world has to think again about nuclear weapons and what Russia might do with them.

This bizarre game of nuclear look-at-me is linked to the Kremlin's equally bizarre complaint that its act of invading Ukraine has created an existential threat to Russia. In this telling, NATO support to Ukraine is tied up with Russia's strategic defeat. As commentators in Moscow claim, Russia only wanted the best for Ukraine—its liberation from a so-called Nazi regime and a fake idea of statehood. However, once



In a photo distributed by Russian state media, President Vladimir Putin attends an Orthodox Easter service

deterrent and the reliability of its command and control systems. That means consistent support for the ongoing modernization of the nuclear triad. It means continuing nuclear training and exercises in a transparent manner and testing nuclear delivery systems. All of these actions should be articulated in a nonthreatening manner—Washington should not be the one rattling the nuclear saber—but convey quiet confidence in the country's nuclear deterrence forces.

Third, Washington should pursue the mutual predictability that comes from controlling nuclear weapons at the negotiating table. Russia, China,

## Influence of Nuclear Arsenals

On May 6, President Putin ordered nuclear weapons drills, just a day after Orthodox Easter. His call for nuclear drills contradicts with his public image of as a saviour of Christian values. Unlike the strategic nuclear exercises against the United States, these regional nuclear drills were targeted against Ukraine and NATO countries as a response to the statements of western leaders regarding deployment of troops in Ukraine. Russian government is seemingly strengthening a red line against NATO leaders including Joe Biden. Both leaders of both countries are avoiding a direct Russia-NATO fight which that could lead to nuclear holocaust. The Kremlin's brinkmanship resembles Cuban Missile Crisis, reviving nuclear threats that were not seen since the Cold War. In the Ukraine war, unlike the proxy wars, Russia is using conventional war tactics to gain influence. Back in 1970s, there had been accords and treaties b/w between the United States and Russia, <sup>meant</sup> to control ~~and~~ nuclear arsenals for stability in the world. Ukraine war has reignited the global concern about nuclear weapons due to Russia's consistent nuclear threats.