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Trends. Employment Policies for Nuclear Weapons: Uses of First Use

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During much of the Cold War, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) publicly advocated a "first use" of nuclear weapons policy. This policy seems to have constituted two ideas. First--when confronted with the superior military numbers of the Warsaw Pact in a "hot" war--NATO's "going nuclear" first might be the only way to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat. Second, the public advocacy of such a policy--even with its propaganda vulnerabilities exploited by the Warsaw Pact--might deter an attack, a "hot" war, and the need to "go nuclear at all."

With the disestablishment of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw pact, Russia publicly claims--since at least 1993--a "first use" policy. The Russian advocacy likewise seems to be predicated on winning a "hot" war, deterring one, and obviating the need to "go nuclear." One big difference is that Russia would face both superior numbers and technology in a conflict with the United States (US) or NATO and the US. Another is that the US and NATO have not yet sought to intensively exploit the propaganda value of the Russian declaration.

But does embracing or rejecting a "first use" policy have much direct significance to the actual what, when, where, why, and how of nuclear weapons employment? Won't rational and irrational political actors alike act as necessary to achieve victory as respectively defined in this life, some hereafter, or even an existential void? Debate over "first use" may have direct significance for defense budgets, assets, plans, programs, exercises, and many aspects of international and domestic politics--but not for actual nuclear employment. "First use" will not be predictive of first users and abusers. (See Bundy, M., Crowe, W., & Drell, S. (Spring 1993). Reducing nuclear danger. *Foreign Affairs*, 72, 140-155; First use of nuclear weapons, preserving responsible control. Hearings before the Subcommittee on International Security and Scientific Affairs of the Committee on International Relations, House of Representatives, Ninety-Fourth Congress, second session. No: Y 4. In 8/16:N 88/3; Gordon, M.R. (July 10, 1999). Maneuvers show Russian reliance on nuclear arms; Atomic attack simulated. *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com>; Krause, C. (1986). Can NATO renounce the first use of nuclear weapons? : Comments on the current debate over security policy in the United States and in the Federal Republic. Bonn: Study Group on Security and Disarmament in the Research Institute of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung; NAS recommends that U.S. amend nuclear weapons policy to reflect new realities, including rejection of first use. (1997). *Chemical and Engineering News* ("News edition" of the American Chemical Society") 75; Tucker, R. C. (1963). Proposal for no first use of nuclear weapons: Pros and cons. Princeton, NJ: Center of International Studies, Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs, Princeton University; Turner, S. (1999). *Caging the genies: A workable solution for nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons* 2nd ed. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press.) (Keywords: First Use, Game Theory, NATO, Nuclear Weapons, Security, Soviet Union.)