TAMING ARMAGEDDON
Revisiting the Concept of Limited Nuclear War

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International Relations Honors Thesis
Total Nuclear War
Limited Nuclear War
Research Framing

Research Puzzle

What factors contribute to nuclear posture selection?

Research Question

Why has the United States shifted its nuclear posture towards limited nuclear war?
Case 1:

Case 2:

US-Russia Relations, 1994-2019
Research Design

Methods
- Comparative case study
- Historical approach
- Process tracing

Sources of Evidence
- Scholarly articles, government documents, news reports, interviews
Main Findings

1. Patterns in the process of integrating limited nuclear war into US nuclear posture

2. Cold War: Consistent failure by the US to produce viable war plans, mimics the USSR

3. Post-Cold War: Continued mimicking of Russian nuclear capabilities
Finding 1: Patterns

Groundwork

Active Integration

Shift in political will
Finding 2: Cold War Approach

Each administration which pursued Active Integration judged the last administration’s plans, or even its own, as non-viable.
Finding 3: Post-Cold War Approach

The current shift in US nuclear posture is not founded on a renewed belief in the practicality of limited nuclear war.

“I don't know how [escalation control] will play out, it could go either way.”

The current US nuclear posture is founded on the belief that if the US mimics Russian capabilities, it can achieve deterrence.

“These weapons are for deterrence, not for use.”
Conclusions

1. The United States is in a qualitative nuclear arms race with Russia

2. Nuclear posture is the product bureaucratic legacies and individual decisions
## Implications

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