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CONVERSATIONS ON NATIONAL SECURITY

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Conversations on National Security is a series of interviews with key national security experts conducted by David Trachtenberg, Vice President of the National Institute for Public Policy.

An Interview with The Honorable William Schneider, Senior Fellow at Hudson Institute; former Chairman of the Defense Science Board; former Under Secretary of State for Security Assistance, Science, and Technology; and former Associate Director for National Security and International Affairs at the Office of Management and Budget.

Q. As the former Chairman of the Defense Science Board (DSB), you headed major study efforts on emerging technologies, nuclear weapons issues, advanced computing, various weapons of mass destruction (WMD) issues, and other critical topics. How prepared is the Department of Defense to meet the broad range of challenges identified in the various DSB studies you supervised?

A. The DSB has addressed the policy and technology issues involved in deterring the coercive threat or use of WMD, deterring conventional military attacks by near-peer competitors (China & Russia) through the DSB's *Assault Breaker II* concept, and deterring adversary gray zone operations.¹ Unlike the Cold War, the United States faces a complex range of kinetic and non-kinetic threats embedded in an enduring political and economic competition with China in collaboration with Russia. Both adversaries are embarked on a broad military modernization



effort focused against the United States and its interests. The scale of their effort to challenge the United States is formidable. The combined annual defense budgets of China and Russia are comparable to the United States on a purchasing-power-parity basis.²

- Nuclear: The U.S. nuclear modernization effort is late-to-need owing to its delayed start after arms control initiatives failed to achieve Obama Administration aspirations. Apart from the strategic nuclear forces covered in the New START Treaty, Russia is in advanced development of six nuclear weapon delivery systems designed to defeat or bypass U.S. early warning systems. Russia's comprehensive modernization program extends to both strategic and 'sub-strategic' systems. Russia is modernizing or replacing its Cold War inventory of nuclear systems and changed its nuclear doctrine (in 2014) to provide for nuclear use in conventional conflicts. China's nuclear posture during the Cold War was not a material threat to the United States, but China has upended its Cold War posture and is rapidly increasing the size and scope of its nuclear weapons posture with the number of fielded weapons to double by 2030. China is systematically eliminating the barriers to the fielding of a large nuclear force with sophisticated intercontinental as well as regional capabilities. China has a declared "no-first-use" doctrine, and although Russia purportedly abandoned such a public declaration in 1993, both countries' policies and postures suggest that first use is a likely dimension of their nuclear doctrine.

The United States retains a powerful strategic nuclear deterrent and will continue to do so if its current modernization plans (nuclear command, control, and communications (NC3), Ground Based Strategic Deterrent (GBSD), B-21 bomber, Long Range Stand Off (LRSO) cruise missile and warhead modernization initiatives) remain on schedule and meet performance goals.

At risk is the extended nuclear deterrent in East Asia. Short- and medium-range nuclear armed missiles proliferate in Northeast Asia from China, North Korea, and Russia. These systems are within range of Japan, but not able to strike the United States. China's intermediate range ballistic missiles (DF-26 for example) are dual-capable (conventional or nuclear warheads) and consistent with China posture of 'nuclear ambiguity'. Other regional cruise and ballistic missiles may similarly be dual-capable. This stark asymmetry of risk between Japan and the United States undermines confidence in the extended deterrent and poses nuclear proliferation implications if not mitigated by other measures.

- Conventional: The proposed *Assault Breaker II* initiative is aimed at deterring the coercive threat or use of conventional military power by China or Russia (or in combination) to impose their political will or affect the outcome of a diplomatic dispute. This is an important capability for the United States and its associated allies and friendly regional



security partners as China's "One Belt One Road" initiative (OBOR) has provided a platform for its global military presence.

- *Gray zone:* U.S. interests are most at risk to Chinese and Russian operations in the gray zone. A recent DSB study on *New Dimensions of Conflict* illustrates how China and Russia seek to drive intense political-military confrontations from overt conflict into gray zone operations where the United States has been far less successful (e.g., Ukraine, Syria, Libya, etc.). The Congress has recognized the threat posed to U.S. and allied interests by adversary gray zone operations including OBOR (also known as the Belt and Road Initiative) and have approved three significant multi-billion-dollar legislative initiatives to enable the constructive policy response by the U.S. Government. These measures include the Better Utilization of Investments Leading to Development (BUILD) Act, the Asia Reassurance Initiative Act (ARIA), and the Pacific Deterrence Initiative (PDI). While the PDI is implemented by the DoD, the BUILD Act and ARIA are implemented by non-DoD agencies and have received little use for their intended purpose.

Q. DoD is currently focused on China as the "pacing threat" to the United States. What are the major challenges we face from China and how should the United States deal with them?

A. The threat posed by China is profound, multidimensional, and enduring. China's threat reflects a unique blend of increasing military capabilities behind a global political and economic edifice. Its One-Belt-One-Road global infrastructure project creates a global presence upon which its military presence is superimposed through naval bases and the inclusion of Private Military Contractors in some areas. China's civil and military infrastructure is led by a disciplined Communist Party that fuses Chinese nationalism and Han Chinese racism with global economic and military aspirations. China is likely to be led by President Xi—in control of the core institutions of power in China, the Communist Party, the government, and the Central Military Commission—through 2035. Moreover, China-Russia collaboration has reached a level of intensity and commitment unseen since the early post-War Stalin-Mao collaboration.

The United States needs to focus on deterrence on all three levels of conflict from gray zone operations to the coercive threat or use of nuclear weapons. The United States needs to build on its core strengths of alliances, formal (e.g., NATO and the Pacific region bilateral defense agreements) and informal (e.g., the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue) to deter, disrupt, and defeat Chinese political, military, and economic instruments of power and influence.



Q. U.S. missile defense policy is currently under review, with some critics arguing that the United States should accept limits on its missile defense programs in order to facilitate future arms control treaties with Russia. What is your view of the current U.S. missile defense program? Is it adequate to deal with present and anticipated threats to the homeland? Should the United States consider missile defense limitations for the sake of arms control agreements?

A. The national as well as regional missile defense programs need to be modernized to reflect the evolution of the threat.³ Such an effort could also reinforce the new administration's aspiration to reduce what it believes to be the prominence of offensive nuclear weapons in U.S. foreign policy for both regional and homeland defense. The U.S. Space Force and Space Development Agency as well as the Missile Defense Agency have active programs studying Chinese and Russian hypersonic missile payloads, but no missile defense program is in place to intercept them. The ballistic missile defense (BMD) modernization programs in place for homeland defense (i.e., the Next Generation Interceptor (NGI)) do not respond to the scope of the threats presented. As a matter of policy, they remain focused on a North Korean and Iranian 'rogue' threat—a descriptor that is rapidly becoming obsolescent as their modernization initiatives accelerate.

Q. Every administration on a bipartisan basis has stated that nuclear deterrence is the Number One priority of the Department of Defense. Do you believe DoD is devoting adequate attention and resources to ensuring the long-term viability and credibility of the U.S. nuclear deterrent?

A. The current strategic modernization program for all three legs of the Triad began under President Obama when there was a high order of optimism that the "Spirit of Prague" would be a shared U.S. and Russian commitment.⁴ Alas, within a week after the U.S. Senate consented to the ratification of New START in December 2010, Russia announced its ten-year State Armament Plan, which included development, production, and fielding of many of the new nuclear delivery systems that are not included in the limitations under New START. Reflecting New START optimism, the United States reduced its land-based ICBMs by 40 percent from their Cold War figure. The contract for the GBSB replacement for the Minuteman III ICBM was not signed for another decade. Russia (and China) modernized their strategic systems, emphasizing mobility, a hardened command-and-control system, commingled conventional and nuclear payloads, and integrated non-kinetic technologies with nuclear operations (e.g., China's *Strategic Support Force*). The Obama Administration also reduced the number of planned ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs) from 14 to 12. While relations with both China and Russia have sharply deteriorated, their nuclear weapons modernization efforts have significantly exceeded New START era expectations. Emerging defense coordination, and in some areas, collaboration between China and Russia raises an issue of whether the planned U.S. strategic force modernization program will be sufficient to sustain deterrence by mid-century.



Q. Some have expressed concerns that the credibility of the U.S. extended nuclear deterrent is fraying. There have even been recent suggestions that the UK and France should be encouraged to extend their nuclear deterrents to protect the rest of Europe rather than rely on the U.S. extended nuclear deterrent. How do you assess this proposal?

A. This approach is neither diplomatically nor militarily feasible. The UK is no longer a member of the European Union (EU), and hence has no European defense responsibilities apart from those associated with the NATO alliance—the enabling document coupling U.S. nuclear capabilities to the transatlantic alliance. The United States has no defense-related links with the EU that would facilitate data sharing with an EU-based nuclear defense of Europe. U.S.-UK nuclear collaboration is based on a unique set of bilateral diplomatic and statutory relationships that are not adaptable to a Eurocentric model of nuclear deterrence.

Q. Russia has been engaged in an extensive nuclear modernization program, developing a plethora of new strategic nuclear systems. While some see this as an ominous development that reflects Moscow's drive for an exploitable strategic advantage, others believe the Russians are simply wasting their resources on systems that have no significant military utility. What is your view of these developments and how should the United States respond?

A. The Russian modernization program is developing six new nuclear delivery systems not addressed by New START. They share a common characteristic—their capabilities enable them to avoid detection by U.S. early warning systems, and thus diminish the value of arms control arrangements as a diplomatic vehicle for bilateral stability. These systems have military and diplomatic utility. It is likely that Russia will use the existence of these systems to gain diplomatic advantage in arms control negotiations since the United States has no comparable systems as well as seeking to extract concessions in other bilateral security issues that may not be 'on the table' in New START (e.g., U.S. missile defense).

1. *Assault Breaker II* builds on work done by the DSB on the original *Assault Breaker* concept in the 1970s. The *Assault Breaker* concept sought to destroy the source of Soviet conventional military power in Europe by interdicting the reinforcement of the Group of Soviet Forces in Germany (GSFG) by precision strikes on the movement of Soviet echeloned reserves from the Western Military Districts of the USSR into Central Europe. Airborne ground surveillance, long-range precision strike, and advanced Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (C4ISR) were critical elements of the approach (See <https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a096142.pdf>). The *Assault Breaker II* concept is much more extensive, reflecting the scale of Chinese and Russian conventional forces in a 21st century context



(See <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/buzz/us-militarys-master-plan-kill-hundreds-chinese-ships-and-russian-tanks-179873>)

2. See <https://breakingdefense.com/2018/05/us-defense-budget-not-that-much-bigger-than-china-russia-gen-milley/>
3. For Iran, see <https://www.iiss.org/blogs/research-paper/2021/04/iran-missiles-uavs-proliferation>; for North Korea, see <https://missilethreat.csis.org/country/dprk/>; for China, see <https://media.defense.gov/2020/Sep/01/2002488689/-1/-1/1/2020-DOD-CHINA-MILITARY-POWER-REPORT-FINAL.PDF>; and for Russia, see <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9091/#:~:text=Russia%20has%20the%20largest%20nuclear,to%20any%20arms%20control%20limitations.>
4. At the signing of the New START Treaty in Prague in 2009, President Obama stated, “clearly and with conviction America's commitment to seek the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons”; See <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-barack-obama-prague-delivered>

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