PROCEEDINGS

Deterrence in a Trilateral Strategic Environment

The remarks below were delivered at a symposium on "Deterrence in a Trilateral Strategic Environment" hosted by National Institute for Public Policy on May 24, 2022. The symposium discussed the deterioration in the international security environment and highlighted the challenges of deterring two major nuclear powers in two theaters simultaneously.

David J. Trachtenberg
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There has been much commentary of late suggesting that the United States has entered a new phase of post-Cold War deterrence. As USSTRATCOM Commander Adm. Charles Richard has stated, "We have never before in our history faced two peer nuclear capable, potential opponents that we have to deter at the same time, that we have to deter differently."[1]
This is a profound statement. But the questions that flow from this simple statement are even more profound: Why must they be deterred differently? What does that entail? How are we to do this? And what is the relationship between these different deterrence modalities and the efficacy of our extended deterrent and the assurance of allies and partners facing different nuclear threats across multiple regions?

For some time, the United States has understood the importance of tailoring deterrence to specific adversaries, yet that tailoring becomes more complicated and complex when the number of peer adversaries we face increases, when they are peer nuclear powers, when they may combine their forces to challenge us, and when our efforts to deter one may impact the decision-making processes and behavior of the other. Deterrence is no longer two-dimensional checkers but three-dimensional chess. These challenges are highlighted in Keith Payne's recent *Information Series* article, *Multilateral Deterrence: What's New and Why it Matters*, which was published last week and is available on our website at nipp.org.

While there appears to be a general recognition that the current situation requires new ways of thinking about deterrence, the literature and public commentary to date is mostly devoid of any serious or detailed explanation of how deterrence should work in this new trilateral strategic environment, why and how Russia and China need to be deterred differently, and what specifically the United States requires to ensure success in this endeavor.

These are some of the issues I hope our discussion today will explore.

But let me start by acknowledging up front a few of the things that are different today than during the Cold War and the immediate post-Cold War period, and that will likely affect the conditions for effective deterrence going forward.

[1] Rebeccah L. Heinrichs, "Transcript: A Conversation with Admiral Richard," The Hudson Institute, September 14, 2021, available at https://www.hudson.org/research/17264-transcript-a-conversation-with-admiral-richard.

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For example:

- Russia is now developing a range of new and exotic strategic systems, a number of which are unaccountable under New START, and which are intended to overcome U.S. missile defenses and to serve as a backstop to its own aggressive actions and a deterrent to potential U.S. responses.
- Russian foreign policy is now admittedly oriented toward overturning what the Russian Ambassador to the United States has described as the U.S. and NATO-led "world order."[2] Russia's brazen aggression against Ukraine is a manifestation of a broader Russian agenda to reclaim lost glory and influence at America's expense.
- China's nuclear modernization program is extensive and has been called "breathtaking" and a "strategic breakout."[3]
  - Indeed, the discovery of more than 250 new missile silos means that China is abandoning its self-declared policy of "minimum deterrence" and—if those silos are loaded, for example, with MIRVed DF-41 ICBMs—China's total number of ICBM warheads could potentially far exceed the total number of deployed U.S. strategic nuclear weapons under New START.
    - The deterrence implications of this alone are significant.
- China's development of hypersonic technology is now said to be years ahead of the United States.[4]
- China and Russia are increasingly working together to replace the existing rules-based international order with one more to their liking, and they have participated in a growing number of joint military exercises, including joint naval drills and an extensive joint military exercise in China last year.
  - In February, Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping announced that Moscow and Beijing had agreed to a "friendship" with "no limits."[5]

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[2] Natalie Colarossi, "Putin Using Ukraine Invasion to Change 'World Order': Russian Ambassador," *Newsweek*, April 18, 2022, available at https://www.newsweek.com/putin-using-ukraine-invasion-change-world-order-russian-ambassador-1698657.

[3] John Vandiver, "'Breathtaking expansion': US Strategic Command leader expects further revelations of China's nuclear weapons advancement," *Stars and Stripes*, October 18, 2021, available at https://www.stripes.com/theaters/europe/2021-10-18/china-us-russia-nuclear-weapons-hypersonics-stratcom-3283272.html.

[4] Sakshi Tiwari, "F-22 Raptor: China Says Can Shoot-Down World's Top Stealth Jet 'Within Seconds' With New Heat-Seeking Hypersonic Missile," *The EurAsian Times*, January 2, 2022, available at https://eurasiantimes.com/china-shoot-down-f-22-raptors-within-seconds-hypersonic-missiles/.

[5] *Joint Statement of the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China on the International Relations Entering a New Era and the Global Sustainable Development*, February 4, 2022, available at https://fm.cnbc.com/applications/cnbc.com/resources/editorialfiles/2022/03/31/Joint_Statement_of_the_Russian_Federation_and_the_Peoples_Republic_of_China_on_the_International_Relations_Entering_a_New_Era_and_the_Global_Sustainable_Development__President_of_Russia.pdf.

  - DIA Director Lt. Gen. Berrier has called the level of cooperation "their deepest since any time before the Sino-Soviet split" and an effort "to maximize their power and influence."

Should Russia and China set aside historical differences and join forces as part of an anti-U.S. coalition, their combined arsenals could significantly exceed that of the United States.

This could call into question the adequacy and deterrent value of current U.S. nuclear force levels and the relevance of continued adherence to New START limitations that were agreed to in a bilateral deterrence context.

Keep in mind that the New START Treaty locks the United States into a static and inflexible ceiling on deployed strategic nuclear weapons and delivery systems until 2026. In a trilateral deterrence environment, having greater flexibility to deal with the potential challenges posed by two peer nuclear adversaries—operating either independently or in concert—seems like a more prudent approach to minimize the chances of deterrence failure.

Those who argue that numbers do not matter should consider that numbers DO seem to matter to our adversaries—otherwise there would be little rationale for the massive expansion in both Russia's and China's strategic arsenals.

The existence of this new strategic situation also has implications for extended deterrence, as the United States considers how to deter two peer adversaries in two major theaters without appearing so reluctant to risk direct confrontation that it calls into question the credibility of U.S. extended nuclear guarantees in either.

In addition, in the context of a trilateral strategic environment, the deterrence value of strategic defenses may need to be reassessed and Cold War theories of "strategic stability" may need to be reevaluated and possibly replaced with an approach more aligned to contemporary deterrence realities.

In other words, as the nuclear threat from both Russia and China manifestly grows, is it in the U.S. interest to remain vulnerable to nuclear threats from either? To rely on nuclear deterrence to protect the U.S. homeland may have been a problematic approach when we were focused on deterring only one peer adversary, but it looks increasingly questionable as a prudent strategy when the United States faces two nuclear peers—each bent on ending what they see as American strategic dominance.

Limiting U.S. missile defenses in exchange for the promise of an arms control agreement that reduces the other side's nuclear offensive forces is quite simply the triumph of hope over experience and makes little sense when multiple parties have goals and objectives that contrast with U.S. national security interests.

Finally, as Adm. Richard has noted, "we are facing a class of potential adversary that we haven't had to deal with in 30 years. Both Russia and China have the ability, unilateral, at their own choosing, to go to any level of violence, to go to any domain, to go worldwide with all instruments of national power. We've not faced competitors like that in 30 years, which I think we need to re-examine any number of our basic operating concepts, starting with our escalation control."

It is in this context that the debate over U.S. nuclear policies and programs must be viewed, and the adequacy of U.S. nuclear modernization plans must be considered. The need

to prevent Russia and China—either independently or in collaboration—from believing they have an exploitable military advantage over the United States at any level of conflict requires a reassessment of U.S. deterrence objectives and force posture.

In this new environment, it is difficult to see how scrapping the sea-launched nuclear cruise missile (SLCM-N)—a system similar to what Russia already possesses, canceling a routine test launch of our ageing ICBM force while Russia trumpets the test launch of its new heavily-MIRVed ICBM, and further reducing the role of nuclear weapons in U.S. national security strategy while Russia and China move in the opposite direction can lead to anything other than an increased risk of miscalculation and deterrence failure.

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Keith B. Payne

Keith B. Payne is President of the National Institute for Public Policy, Professor Emeritus in Missouri State University's Defense and Strategic Studies graduate program and former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Forces Policy.

Thank you, Dave. It's an honor to participate with this great panel today. My remarks are my personal views.

My brief comments on multilateral deterrence today are divided into two parts: The first identifies some important truths about what we can know about the real-world functioning of deterrence; the second begins the related discussion of how multilateral deterrence is different from the past, and then connects those differences to prospective changes in U.S. deterrence policy.

First, some inconvenient truths about what we can know about real-world deterrence.

We are early in the process of trying to understand deterrence in a very different international structure. Aside from the most obvious points about deterrence, we are in the world of speculation and conjecture. In fact, a pervasive myth in this field is that reliable, detailed prediction about the real-world functioning of deterrence is possible.

In truth, prediction beyond the most obvious points often is out of reach because the functioning of deterrence can be affected by an extremely wide range of factors. On any given occasion, some of these factors will be known, but others will be completely obscure and their significance unrecognized.

Consequently, when planning for deterrence, the first, paramount need is to reduce our ignorance about opponents' goals, will, perceptions, commitments, values, and expectations. Greater understanding allows deterrence tailoring—which is now acknowledged as necessary on a bipartisan basis.

But understanding opponents and tailoring deterrence accordingly is a task made much more challenging by the expansion of the number of opponents to be so understood. The uncertainties, imponderables and unknowns of deterrence multiply with every new party engaged and circumstance, and confident prediction moves further out of reach.

Recognition of this inconvenient truth about deterrence prediction leads to the second part of my brief remarks today, that is: How should the expanded uncertainties of multilateral deterrence affect our thinking about deterrence policy and practice?

The United States is not simply deterring Russia and China sequentially or in isolation, but with each watching each and possibly shifting their calculations based upon what they see in each engagement.

A new analytic task, consequently, is to understand how the developments in one geographic area will affect the decision making of opponents in distant areas, and thereby shape U.S. deterrence goals and practice in all areas. This is the opposite of the Cold War focus on the Soviet Union, with the expectation that Moscow shared fundamental U.S. concerns and values, and that if Moscow could be deterred, all others were "lesser included cases." Those analytic conveniences simplified deterrence planning, but are no longer prudent, if they ever were.

It is important now to place new or greater emphasis on at least three directions in U.S. deterrence policy and practice: 1) hedging against opponents' coordination; 2) hedging against uncertainty in deterrence requirements; and 3) hedging against the likely increased potential for deterrence failure.

First, is the need to hedge against opponents' coordination.

The contemporary trilateral context includes the possibility that Russia and China will coordinate their actions in confrontations with the United States. Consequently, the adequacy of U.S. deterrence capabilities must, in at least some circumstances, be measured against the forces of two nuclear great powers—this is a wholly unprecedented condition with enormous implications.

For example, Russia and China may confront the United States with two coordinated, expansionist regional wars. If so, the United States will need to deter theater aggression, including nuclear first-use threats, in two different geographical locations *simultaneously*. This is a deterrence challenge that U.S. theater capabilities may not be prepared to meet given the reported near-elimination of those U.S. forward-deployed and deployable theater nuclear weapons that are proportional to the potential limited nuclear threats we face.

At the strategic nuclear level, the potential for Sino-Russian coordination includes the possibility that their combined counterforce capabilities will present new problems for the survivability of U.S. retaliatory forces, i.e., calculating what is necessary for adequate U.S. force survivability, *not* against Chinese or Russian forces separately, but against combined Sino-Russian force numbers.

These two examples just scratch the surface of this unprecedented problem for U.S. deterrence policy and practice in the emerging deterrence context.

Second, is the need for increased hedging against the greater uncertainty regarding deterrence requirements.

The multiplication of deterrence uncertainties increases the challenge of predicting "how much is enough?" for deterrence. This has always been more art than science. But the need

to hedge against setting that standard incorrectly, particularly too narrowly, has become even more acute in a multilateral deterrence context. Simply put, increasing uncertainty increases the requirements for hedging.

During the Cold War, a common civilian, academic analytic practice was the mechanistic positing of non-descript Countries A and B, and then essentially using game theory and deductive logic to project the expected functioning of deterrence in U.S.-Soviet relations. This apolitical, ahistorical methodology simply washes out key factors that are likely to determine if and how deterrence actually functions. It was woefully inadequate in the past; it now is more likely to mislead than to enlighten.

The need now is for the identification and understanding of the many different (and in some cases unique) decision-making drivers of multiple players. Correspondingly, there now can be no single "assured destruction" standard presumed to define the U.S. strategic deterrent, as was U.S. practice for decades during the Cold War. Instead, there must now be multiple, simultaneous measures of adequacy for diverse contingencies. And, once those requirements are agreed upon, it must be recognized that they will likely shift over time as opponents and contexts evolve. As a result, deterrence flexibility was important in the past, but it now is even more so.

A contemporary issue that illustrates this problem is whether the United States should proceed with development of the nuclear, sea-launched cruise missile (SLCM-N). In the emerging multilateral deterrence context, diverse U.S. theater response options that are proportional to opponents' threats, and available in different theaters rapidly and simultaneously, may be of greatly increased value for credible deterrence. *Prudent* planning for deterrence thus certainly includes the continued development of SLCM-N, as the senior U.S. military leadership has emphasized publicly.

Third is the increasing need to hedge against deterrence failure.

The expansion of uncertainties applies to both *how and whether* deterrence will function. No one knows if nuclear deterrence will continue to work perfectly as we hope, or even what probability may be assigned to its working. The harsh reality is that, if the United States is unprepared for the failure of nuclear deterrence, it is unprepared for the realities of multilateral deterrence.

After three decades of focusing on rogue states and terrorists, the question now is: how prepared is the United States to operate in a nuclear environment? I fear the answer to that question because, as Admiral Charles Richard recently noted, the U.S. military as a joint force "has not had to seriously consider what competing in an armed conflict with a nuclear armed opponent is like for 30 years."[6]

The many implications of the answer to this question are significant. For example, as confidence in the predictable functioning of deterrence declines, active and passive defenses

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[6] Jim Steele, "Events require U.S. to refocus on nuclear capabilities, STRATCOM commander says," University of Alabama in Huntsville, May 19, 2022, available at https://www.uah.edu/news/items/events-require-u-s-to-refocus-on-nuclear-capabilities-stratcom-commander-says#.

become more important for many purposes. This may not be a popular point in many quarters, but it is another inconvenient truth regarding multilateral deterrence.

In summary, identifying the many ways in which multilateral deterrence is different, and the implications of those differences for deterrence policy and practice, is likely to be a generational process; we are just starting. The "greatest generation" of deterrence scholars did the heavy lifting for their time; it is time for us to get to this serious work.

Thank you. I look forward to the panel's further remarks.

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Jennifer Bradley

Jennifer Bradley is a Senior Deterrence Analyst in the Plans and Policy Directorate at U.S. Strategic Command.

Thank you, David for your kind introduction and to the National Institute for hosting this seminar on this important topic. But before I begin let me say that the views presented are my own and do not necessarily represent the views of USSTRATCOM, DoD, or the U.S. government.

Deterrence is, and always has been an uncomfortable proposition. It relies on convincing a decision maker, with unique values, traits, culture, world view and risk-taking propensity not to take an egregious action. When deterrence fails, it can and has been catastrophic. Yet when it is successful, to paraphrase Lawrence Freedman, nothing much happens.[7] This makes it exceedingly difficult to determine why it was successful. But determining the ingredients that enhance deterrence is crucial. Deterrence remains a cornerstone of U.S. national security policy, as it has since the creation of nuclear weapons made preventing wars an imperative. However, unlike the Cold War, we can no longer plan a deterrent for one adversary and assume that it is sufficient to deter a lesser included adversary. We are faced with a more complicated and dynamic security environment. I come here today with more questions than answers.

First, how should we assess this strategic environment? It is tempting to analyze the relationships between the United States and Russia and the United States and China in isolation from each other. But, in fact, it is a Deterrence Triangle. As Therese Delpech noted, "triangles may make a situation more unstable and difficult to control as they introduce more variables into the algebra of deterrence."[8] What are these variables? Well, first the relationship between Russia and China. Is it cooperative? An alliance? Adversarial? It is clear that both Russia and China are revisionist nations who are dissatisfied with the status quo. But how enduring is the current partnership?

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[7] Lawrence Freedman, Introduction—The Evolution of Deterrence Strategy and Research. In: Osinga, F., Sweijs, T. (eds) *NL ARMS Netherlands Annual Review of Military Studies 2020*. NL ARMS. T.M.C. Asser Press, The Hague, available at https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-6265-419-8_1.

[8] Therese Delpech, "Nuclear Deterrence in the 21st Century," RAND (2012) p. 39

The deterrence triangle between the United States, Russia and China is not the only significant trilateral relationship. The relationship between China, India and Pakistan is also an important deterrence triangle. Significantly, it overlaps the deterrence triangle with the United States, Russia and China. Meaning, deterrent actions taken in one triangle have the potential to reverberate in another. Does this increase risk? If so, how? Can it be mitigated?

While I will just mention it here, we must also consider the security requirements and capabilities of the allies protected by the U.S. nuclear umbrella when considering these deterrent relationships. These relationships are an important variable in the deterrence algebra.

Second, how should we adapt our deterrent strategy to account for the change in the security environment? While we await the release of the Nuclear Posture Review, which will articulate the Biden Administration's approach to deterrence strategy, the Department of Defense did release a Fact Sheet on the policy document which contains the broad foundations of the Administration's vision. It includes "reducing the role of nuclear weapons," "emphasizing strategic stability," and "reestablishing [US] leadership in arms control."[9] Further, it amends the U.S. declaratory policy, stating, "As long as nuclear weapons exist, the fundamental role of U.S. nuclear weapons is to deter nuclear attack on the United States, our allies, and partners."[10] While not quite a sole purpose policy, it is a step in that direction. But does this strategy adequately take into account the complexity in the security environment?

Finally, what is the right mix of capabilities to enhance deterrence? This question is complicated by having to consider the capabilities of multiple adversaries in different regions, as well as considering the requirements of our allies. Further, both Russia and China are modernizing their nuclear capabilities, with China increasing both the size and sophistication of its arsenal.[11] This is in addition to investments and advancements in China's conventional capabilities. If the United States is going to rely less on nuclear weapons in the future, what sort of investments in conventional capabilities must we make to close this gap as U.S. conventional superiority is diminished in key areas? Is this a cost-effective strategy? Will conventional capabilities have the same influence over our adversaries' decision making as nuclear capabilities?

The questions I've asked here today only scratch the surface of what we need to consider. It requires a reinvigoration of deterrence assessments, increased intelligence, additional war gaming, and continued cooperation with our allies. We also need to be clear eyed on the value our adversaries place on their nuclear capabilities before making decisions regarding our own nuclear force. Though we may desire our adversaries follow our "good example," historically, that has not been a successful strategy. While deterrence is an uncomfortable

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[9] Fact Sheet: 2022 Nuclear Posture Review and Missile Defense Review, The Department of Defense (29 March 2022) available at: https://media.defense.gov/2022/Mar/29/2002965339/-1/-1/1/FACT-SHEET-2022-NUCLEAR-POSTURE-REVIEW-AND-MISSILE-DEFENSE-REVIEW.PDF.

[10] Ibid.

[11] U.S. Report to Congress, "Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China," Department of Defense (2021).

proposition, it is still better than the alternative. I look forward to your questions and today's discussion. Thank you.

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Peppino DeBiaso

Peppino DeBiaso is a non-resident Senior Associate at the Center for Strategic and International Studies and former Director of the Office of Missile Defense Policy in the Office of the Secretary of Defense

Introduction

My remarks today focus on the issue of missile defense in a trilateral deterrence context. To help inform this discussion, its useful to begin with a brief review of where current U.S. policy stands on the matter of missile defense vis-vis the large nuclear powers – Russia and China. This will be followed by an examination of changes occurring in the security environment related to growing prospect of the threat of limited nuclear and limited conventional missile strikes that raise new questions over long-standing U.S. policy which rejects any role for missile defense of the homeland against Russia and China.

Foundations of Current Policy

The foundation of contemporary American missile defense policy is anchored in the 1999 National Missile Defense (NMD) Act. The legislation set a national policy to "deploy as soon as is technologically possible an effective national missile defense system capable of defending the territory of the United States against limited ballistic missile attack, whether accidental, unauthorized, or deliberate." Since 1999, every administration, including the current one, have elaborated policies within the framework of the NMD Act centered around the defense of the United States against nuclear-armed long range ballistic missiles from so-called "Rogue States." This reflects the judgment that nuclear deterrence may not be fully reliable in preventing these unpredictable and unstable nuclear states from seeking to threaten a missile attack or employ such weapons in a crisis or conflict.

At the same time, each administration has also pursued a policy seeking to reassure the large nuclear powers that U.S. homeland missile defenses are not designed or intended to counter their strategic forces. The U.S. has consistently affirmed its policy that it relies on nuclear deterrence and the threat of retaliation to address the large and more sophisticated Russian and Chinese nuclear ballistic missile capabilities. The declaratory policy rejecting any role for missile defense against large nuclear powers remains rooted in the Cold War belief that mutual vulnerability provides a basis for stable deterrence and removes incentives to engage in arms racing behavior (which it demonstrably failed to do throughout the Cold War). Moreover, this view was sustained by the arguments made by missile defense

opponents that the technical feasibility and costs associated with countering large missile strikes would, at any rate, prove too difficult to overcome.

For three decades, both Republican and Democratic administrations endorsed this "tailored" approach to homeland ballistic missile defense that treated rogue states differently from the established nuclear powers on the matter of missile defense and deterrence.

American policy shaping the question of regional missile defense has been less contentious. Such defenses are generally viewed as essential to the conduct of modern conventional warfare in light of the large and varied regional missile capabilities of our potential opponents. Yet even here, U.S. policy has been ambivalent with regard to Russia and China. While it has not distinguished states against whom it would or would not build regional missile defenses, as it has done with its homeland strategy, for much of the post-Cold War period the focus was squarely on regional powers and the prospective employment of missile capabilities in regional wars. There is little discussion, for example, within the leading policy and strategy documents over the last three decades (e.g., QDRs, NDSs, BMDRs) on the question of regional missile defenses to deter and defend against Russian and Chinese regional missile attacks.

However, changes are occurring in the strategic environment that have potential implications for the role of both homeland and regional missile defense in American defense and deterrence strategies toward Russia and China.

Evolving U.S. Policy: Regional Missile Defense and Large Powers

Let's look first at regional missile defenses. Most official U.S. post-Cold War assessments did not conclude that either Russia or China posed a regional missile threat to U.S. interests warranting policy recognition as a military problem to be addressed by missile defense. However, the assessment of the security landscape began to shift in 2018 with the NDS and the acknowledgement of the reemergence of long-term great power competition with Russia and China.

One significant aspect of this competition has been an increased understanding of the substantial strides Russia and China are making in developing a new generation of long-range weapons, to include advanced ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, and hypersonic weapons, to support anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) strategies to disrupt, degrade and ultimately defeat the ability of the U.S. to project military power, sustain combat operations, and support alliance security commitments in Europe and Asia. In this context, a policy role for missile defense in responding to the rise in prominence of Russian and Chinese regional missile forces in their respective warfighting strategies was explicitly identified for the first time in the 2019 MDR. It declared that the U.S. would strengthen its air and missile defenses to deter and defend against the regional offensive missile capabilities of both Russia and China, in addition to rogue states.

Homeland Defense and Large Powers: Issue and Considerations

Concerning homeland missile defense and the large powers, important changes are occurring that also pose new questions about the desirability of retaining the policy trajectory of the past rejecting any missile defense against Russia or China within our defense and deterrence strategy. Two developments stand out as especially consequential.
The first is related to development of Russia's policy, doctrine and capability which now envisions the prospective escalation to limited nuclear strikes against either the U.S. homeland or its forces abroad in order to coerce or otherwise compel the United States to de-escalate or halt any further action and terminate its involvement in order to salvage an otherwise failing or stalemated Russian conventional regional attack. As the Director of DIA described it in 2017, Russia is "...the only country that I know of that has this concept of escalate to terminate or escalate to deescalate… they have built this into their operational concept, we've seen them exercise it…" While this doctrine remains shrouded in ambiguity, the decision to threaten or conduct such strikes against either the United States homeland or Western forces in a regional conflict is likely to be shaped by the scope and scale of Russia's collapsing efforts in a regional war and what type of political risk it poses to Moscow and its leadership.

In the context of Russia's nuclear de-escalation concept, there is a potential deterrent role for missile defense in addressing this strategic problem. Namely, to deny the coercive and blackmail value of missile backed threats in a crisis or ongoing regional conflict by negating the political and military utility of limited strike options (or "cheap shots"). Under conditions of a rapidly deteriorating regional conflict, U.S. nuclear deterrence may be insufficiently reliable to prevent a threat of limited nuclear escalation with Russia calculating, or miscalculating, that the political-military benefits of a limited strike in a conflict going badly for them outweigh the risks of possible U.S. retaliation. Under these circumstances, missile defenses sized to defeat limited nuclear coercive threats or attacks would reinforce the credibility of broader U.S. deterrence threats.

Such defenses, to be clear, would not be capable of coping with larger nuclear strikes, nor sized to do so, but rather focused on deterring Moscow's resort to its policy of escalate to de-escalate. This may apply to China as well—especially as they continue to build out their nuclear posture. The steady expansion of China's long range nuclear missiles will soon provide it options to conduct similar coercive/limited nuclear strikes to shape the escalation process in order to deter or otherwise blunt any U.S. military response in a major crisis, e.g., Taiwan.

In light of these emerging changes in the strategic context, the United States should be prepared to re-examine the extent to which missile defense presents new opportunities to both strengthen deterrence of such limited threats/attacks and if deterrence fails, limit the scope and scale of destruction to the United States.

A prospective policy shift along these lines raises two significant issues. The first is the technical challenge of developing missile defenses against the more advanced long range missile threats posed by Russia and China. For the last two decades the U.S., as a matter of

policy, has chosen not to design or develop its homeland missile defenses against Russian or Chinese ICBMs. A shift in policy likely requires an adjustment in our approach in the types of technologies, systems and platforms to counter, even on a limited basis, more advanced missiles.

The second issue that arises is related to the concern that this change in U.S. policy will undermine strategic stability and lead to a new arms race. This contention is problematic for a number of reasons. First, Russia possesses an unquestioned capability to overwhelm U.S. missile defenses, even in a modestly expanded form, given its large, diverse, and advanced strategic air-breathing and missile platforms. Second, the United States has long accepted Russian homeland missile defenses which are larger and more capable than those the U.S. currently possesses—and yet this has not led to U.S. "arms racing" behavior or concerns over crisis stability. Third, with a limited defense against Russia, the United States would be doing nothing more than moving towards an active defense posture essentially equivalent to that long operated by Russia which, incidentally, views its own active defense/damage limitation capabilities as wholly consistent with its conception of strategic stability.

The second development that raises important questions about retaining the policy of the past rejecting homeland missile defenses is connected to the growing prospect of Russian and Chinese limited non-nuclear strategic attacks against the United States.

The Biden Administration's *2022 National Defense Strategy Fact Sheet* calls attention to this new risk: "Recognizing growing kinetic and non-kinetic threats to the United States' homeland from our strategic competitors, the Department will take necessary actions to increase resilience—our ability to withstand, fight through, and recover quickly from disruption." One area in particular associated with "growing kinetic threats" is Russia's and China's pursuit of advanced long range cruise missiles that can launch from the air, land or sea intended to destroy critical targets within the United States in order to disrupt and degrade the U.S. ability to project military power, sustain combat operations, and support alliance security commitments across Europe and the Indo-Pacific. The long standing American operating model that assumes it can project military power globally from a safe and secure homeland is eroding, according to the Commander of NORTHCOM, Gen. VanHerck. Russia and China are now moving towards an ability to bring their A2/AD strategy to the homeland.

The United States is beginning to recognize this shift in the military posture of Russia and China to conduct conventional strikes, likely combined with other kinetic and non-kinetic attacks, below the threshold of nuclear weapons use, against the homeland. The scope of these attacks, while limited, would seek to undermine U.S. political resolve and military capability to either respond to or halt aggression in a regional crisis or conflict while exploiting what they perceive, either correctly or incorrectly, as the American leadership's fear of taking any action suggesting the initiation of nuclear escalation. Consequently, a more serious examination would appear to be warranted of the contribution homeland cruise missile defenses (CMD) can provide to strengthen deterrence of such attacks in the first place by complicating our opponents' military plans, in turn eroding or otherwise denying their confidence in the successful execution of those plans. Along these lines, Gen. VanHerck noted

recently that the NDS endorses developing capabilities to deter and defeat specific threats to the homeland, including Russia's growing long-range cruise missile threat, with priority given to improving the ability to detect and track these threats. While important questions will have to be addressed over the ultimate scope and scale of homeland CMD, the benefits of some defense capability here to deny Russia and China an unchallenged pathway to threaten the United States would appear to be growing.

Conclusion

In light of changes in the strategic context that are generating new vulnerability pathways to the United States, it seems prudent to revisit the core assumptions regarding the role of missile defense for the homeland against missile threats from large powers. The existing approach which reflexively rejects any active defense for the nation increasingly appears to lag behind the onset of an increasingly worrisome set of strategic dilemmas Russia and China are creating for the United States. Washington should be prepared to re-examine the extent to which missile defense presents new opportunities to both strengthen deterrence of limited missile threats by degrading the adversary's ability to successfully conducts such strikes and, if deterrence fails, limit the scope and scale of destruction which could be inflicted upon the nation.