



## INFORMATION SERIES

Issue No. 569

December 6, 2023

---

### **Deterrence via Intentional Civilian Targeting: A Dangerous Cold War Anachronism**

**Dr. Keith B. Payne**

*Dr. Keith B. Payne is a co-founder of the National Institute for Public Policy, professor emeritus at the Graduate School of Defense and Strategic Studies, Missouri State University, a former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense and former Senior Advisor to the Office of the Secretary of Defense.*

#### **Introduction**

Moscow and Beijing have been expanding their respective nuclear arsenals for years, in Russia's case, for well over a decade,<sup>1</sup> and issuing numerous explicit or implicit nuclear threats against the United States, allies and partners. Importantly, these threats have not been for the defensive purpose typically associated with deterrence strategies. They have signaled to Washington that Moscow and Beijing would use nuclear weapons first in a regional war to prevent or deter the United States from intervening against their military expansionism. Moscow has said explicitly that it could escalate a regional war via nuclear first use to "de-escalate" the conflict, i.e., paralyze the United States into inaction when Russia attacks a U.S. ally. This is Moscow's wholly self-serving definition of how to "de-escalate" a war of aggression against an American ally. These are unprecedented, coercive nuclear threats.

The expansion of Russian and Chinese nuclear capabilities and coercive nuclear threats has occurred in parallel with two relatively new threat developments: 1) Moscow's and Beijing's manifest goal of changing the global order to suit their authoritarian goals and values; and, 2) their growing cooperation to achieve their common goal of advancing a new world order. Unfortunately, Moscow's and Beijing's expansionist plans include extending hegemony over



## INFORMATION SERIES

Issue No. 569 | December 6, 2023

---

U.S. allies and partners. These allies and partners recognize the danger, which is why many are calling for Washington to establish a more credible extended nuclear deterrent to help protect them.

In this stark threat context, there have been numerous calls for comprehensive improvements to, and increases in, U.S. nuclear capabilities to sustain the U.S. nuclear deterrent, most recently by the bipartisan, Congressionally-mandated Strategic Posture Commission.<sup>2</sup> And, given Moscow's incessant treaty violations and Beijing's disdain for arms control agreements, these bipartisan calls often express deep skepticism regarding the potential for arms control to address the unprecedented nuclear threats facing the United States.

In response, some commentators clearly upset by this bipartisan policy direction advocate intentionally threatening opponents' populations and civilian targets as a basis for U.S. deterrence policy: "...the best, simplest, and least destabilizing way to deter massive counter-city strikes on the US homeland by a leading nuclear power is to threaten retaliation in kind," and suggest that 100 warheads able to retaliate against "enemy cities" would be adequate for such a threat.<sup>3</sup> This force measure supposedly would limit or reduce U.S. deterrence requirements and thereby facilitate arms control as a solution to new threats. This clearly is an attempt to move Washington away from strengthening U.S. deterrence capabilities to help meet the mounting threats confronting the United States.<sup>4</sup> How so?

Intentionally threatening an opponent's population and civilian targets would limit the deterrence requirement for numbers and types of U.S. nuclear weapons given the relative ease of destroying undefended civilian targets with nuclear weapons. So, moving to intentional civilian targeting would create a rationale for opposing ongoing and/or new U.S. nuclear programs. Washington, it is said, could limit its force numbers, and with the usual suggestion that opponents will follow the U.S. lead in this regard,<sup>5</sup> a deterrence equilibrium could follow very conveniently, i.e., without new U.S. forces. Problem solved.

In short, the unprecedented nuclear threat condition facing the United States has led to a bipartisan call for Washington to add nuclear capabilities suited for deterring unprecedented, new threats. But, some commentators seek to derail this by advocating instead a deterrence strategy that essentially reduces U.S. deterrence targeting and force requirements by adopting intentional civilian targeting as a part of U.S. deterrence strategy.

This push to intentionally threaten an opponent's population and civilian targets, or, to use a euphemism, targeting an opponent's "society,"<sup>6</sup> as a basic element of U.S. deterrence policy, is the worst of the old Strangelovian Cold War world – long since discarded by Washington on a fully bipartisan basis. Yet, advocates of intentional population and civilian targeting now present it as if it were a new idea for a new era.<sup>7</sup> In fact, it dates back to the earliest years of the Cold War and, at this point, has been rejected as insufficiently effective for deterrence and immoral by Democratic and Republican administrations for decades.



## What's Old Is New Again

Fifty years ago, the United States expressly rejected the earlier declared intentional population and civilian targeting deterrence measure established in the 1960s by Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara. This was a declared metric for U.S. deterrence capabilities that included the threat to intentionally kill a large percentage of the Soviet population and destroy a large portion of Soviet industry.<sup>8</sup> Since the mid-1970s, every Democratic and Republican administration has measured the adequacy of America's deterrent forces by different standards.

Secretary McNamara defined the U.S. requirement for deterrence to include a specific measure of population and industry destruction, i.e., "assured destruction." He explicitly said this measure of adequacy "to deter a calculated deliberate Soviet attack" was the U.S. retaliatory capability to "destroy... the Soviet government and military controls, plus a large percentage of their population and economy (e.g., 30% of their population, 50% of their industrial capability, and 150 of their cities)."<sup>9</sup> In 1964, McNamara further elaborated on this formula for "assured destruction": "...it seems reasonable to assume that the destruction of, say, 25 percent of its population (55 million people) and more than two-thirds of its industrial capacity would mean the destruction of the Soviet Union as a national society."<sup>10</sup>

McNamara said the "assured destruction" threat was the "very essence of the whole deterrence concept."<sup>11</sup> It would be hard to overstate the importance he attributed to "assured destruction" as the standard for guiding the acquisition of U.S. strategic forces. In his 1968 *Draft Presidential Memorandum* he identified *only* the preservation of "assured destruction" as the standard for new U.S. capabilities: "We should develop new systems *only* as options which would restore our Assured Destruction capability..."<sup>12</sup>

Secretary McNamara's intentional population/civilian targeting became synonymous with nuclear deterrence in Washington—so much so that, following McNamara's tenure, many commentators and former officials fiercely resisted moves of U.S. deterrence policy *away from* "assured destruction" targeting, mistakenly criticizing these moves as contrary to deterrence.<sup>13</sup> That mistaken view and criticism have now returned.

It is important to note that while McNamara publicly adopted a population/civilian deterrence metric, less publicly he said that the United States: 1) also targeted Soviet military capabilities;<sup>14</sup> 2) had other limited, but still large-scale, targeting options;<sup>15</sup> and, 3) in the event of war, U.S. nuclear weapons would not necessarily be employed according to his "assured destruction" guidelines.<sup>16</sup>

Nevertheless, throughout the 1960s, McNamara and his colleagues offered five related purposes as the rationale for measuring U.S. nuclear deterrence adequacy in terms of intentional civilian targeting: 1) To help deter Moscow's extreme provocations; 2) To limit U.S. force requirements by limiting targeting requirements; 3) To give McNamara the basis for rejecting military requests for nuclear weapons beyond the "assured destruction" standard of adequacy;<sup>17</sup> 4) To avoid an action-reaction arms race by stopping U.S. nuclear programs, i.e., preventing a U.S.-led action-reaction arms race cycle; and, 5) To establish "stable" deterrence—



## INFORMATION SERIES

Issue No. 569 | December 6, 2023

---

because U.S. forces would be manifestly limited, opponents supposedly would not feel the need to strike first for fear of a U.S. first strike, creating a stable deterrence equilibrium. Claiming these benefits for intentional civilian targeting, i.e., stable deterrence with minimal force requirements, was a powerful elixir for the U.S. body politic at a time when the war in Vietnam was draining the nation's resources and attention.

Contemporary advocates of intentionally threatening population and civilian targets as a measure of U.S. deterrence capabilities repeat McNamara's 1960s rationale; little has been added, changed, or lost. Yet, as noted, Washington began to reject "assured destruction" as a deterrence measure beginning in the mid-1970s—a rejection subsequently sustained by every Democratic and Republican administration.

The basic reasons for Washington's rejection of McNamara's "assured destruction" metric for deterrence were well-expressed over years by senior U.S. civilian and military leaders, particularly including Secretaries of Defense Schlesinger, Brown and Weinberger. As Weinberger concluded in 1986, the United States did not plan targeting options, "...to maximize Soviet casualties or *to attack deliberately the Soviet population*. Indeed, we believe such a doctrine would be neither moral nor prudent."<sup>18</sup> Their arguments, together, reveal why the rationale for intentional civilian targeting for deterrence is as fatally flawed now as it was decades ago.

### Why Fatally Flawed?

First, the enemy gets the vote regarding the targets Washington needs to threaten for optimal deterrence: The United States must be able to threaten what opposing leaderships value most, not what Washington might otherwise prefer. This has rightly been a standard for U.S. deterrence policy for decades on a fully bipartisan basis; a less tailored threat would give opponents room to calculate that some aggressive act could be worth the risk. Such a condition, as Secretary Weinberger said with understatement, would be imprudent. This is the *beginning* of deterrence wisdom.

Understanding that threatening what opposing leaderships value is critical for deterrence is not new. In 1983, the bipartisan President's Commission on Strategic Forces (Scowcroft Commission) elaborated on this deterrence requirement (voiced earlier by the Carter Administration): "Deterrence is the set of beliefs in the minds of the Soviet leaders, given their own values and attitudes...It requires us to determine, as best we can, what would deter them from considering aggression, even in a crisis—not to determine what would deter us."<sup>19</sup>

It is important to understand in this regard that multiple studies over decades have concluded that Moscow values most highly its military capabilities, political power and control, and war-supporting industry. The Scowcroft Commission, for example, concluded:

In order to deter such Soviet [nuclear] threats we must be able to put at risk those types of Soviet targets—including hardened ones such as military command bunkers and facilities, missile silos, nuclear weapons and other storage, and the rest—which the





## INFORMATION SERIES

Issue No. 569 | December 6, 2023

---

Soviet leaders have given every indication by their actions they value most, and which constitute their tools of control and power. We cannot afford the delusion that Soviet leaders – human though they are and cautious though we hope they will be – are going to be deterred by exactly the same concerns that would dissuade us.<sup>20</sup>

In 1986, as noted, Secretary Weinberger stated publicly that Washington did *not* base deterrence on intentionally targeting civilians. Instead, “secure deterrence should be based on the threat to destroy what the Soviet leadership values most highly: Namely, itself, its military power and political control capabilities, and its industrial ability to wage war.”<sup>21</sup> He also said that U.S. deterrence strategy “...consciously does not target population and, in fact, has provisions for reducing civilian casualties.”<sup>22</sup> This did not suggest a miraculous capacity to preclude prospective civilian casualties in any large-scale targeting plan, but an intentional effort to avoid them and a repudiation of McNamara’s earlier declared “assured destruction” deterrence metric.

There is no indication that the contemporary ruling tyranny in Moscow values its general civilian population or “society” most highly – indeed, there is considerable evidence to the contrary (the same appears to be true of Xi Jinping and the Chinese Communist Party).<sup>23</sup> Rather, as noted, the values that Washington likely still must threaten for effective deterrence, as described by the Scowcroft Commission, are their “tools of control and power.” Washington simply does not have the luxury to choose to threaten an opponent’s civilian targets for deterrence because that target set would conveniently limit U.S. force requirements. Doing so would prioritize limiting the U.S. force above the deterrence strategy designed for greatest effectiveness – a dangerous prioritization in an increasingly severe threat environment in which preventing nuclear war must be the Pentagon’s highest goal; it could degrade deterrence and thereby increase the probability of war.

Second, the familiar argument that the United States can preclude a new arms competition by *not* acquiring the forces it needs for effective deterrence is fiction at this point, and not slightly ethnocentric. Arguing now, as do population/civilian targeting advocates, that the intentional targeting of civilians or “society” will reduce U.S. force requirements and thus prevent an “action-reaction” arms race, denies reality: Russia and China have been racing to their own nuclear doctrinal tune for years; prior U.S. actions have not driven this and a change in the U.S. measure of deterrence requirements would not stop it.

Thousands of assertions over decades to the contrary, the United States has not led an action-reaction arms race. For example, the most comprehensive Cold War studies concluded that the United States did not lead an action-reaction arms race.<sup>24</sup> Rather, the Soviet Union was “self-stimulated” by its specific nuclear doctrinal requirements to build its arsenal, including the number and types of nuclear weapons.<sup>25</sup> This inconvenient reality was reflected in Harold Brown’s famous quip: “Soviet spending ... has shown no response to U.S. restraint – when we build, they build, when we cut, they build.”<sup>26</sup> Contemporary claims that the United States can preclude an “action-reaction” arms race cycle by adopting a lower standard of deterrence fail to recognize that Harold Brown’s quip captures the past and present reality.



Third, the argument that a population/civilian targeting standard is uniquely “stable,” while U.S. threats to opponents’ “tools of control and power” will motivate opponents to launch a nuclear first strike against the United States for fear that Washington will strike first, has been popular for decades, but is logically incoherent. Unless the opponent is suicidal, it would *not* consciously launch a pre-emptive strategic nuclear war that will surely result in its own destruction in order to avoid the possibility of its own nuclear destruction. That would be akin to leaping off the ledge – ensuring the worst outcome – for fear of being pushed off the ledge. Leaderships can be reckless and anything may be possible, but there is very little historical experience to support this supposed nuclear “instability” truism, and much contrary to it. The United States has for many decades threatened opponents’ military capabilities as the center of, or an element of, its deterrence policy; this has not led to apparent deterrence instability throughout periods of both calm and great stress.

The burden of proof surely is on those who now assert that a return to population/civilian targeting will somehow mitigate an otherwise looming deterrence instability. This long-familiar part of the canon in support of intentional civilian targeting is logically incoherent and ahistorical. Yet, civilian targeting advocates continue to present this dynamic as a truism.<sup>27</sup> More likely “destabilizing” in the current threat environment would be a U.S. return to a civilian targeting metric that prioritizes constraining U.S. force requirements above deterrence effectiveness.

### **The Spin Regarding Casualties**

Finally, it is important to address a related point that advocates often make regarding the casualty levels associated with their intentional civilian targeting recommendations. In an apparent effort to deflect culpability for pushing an imprudent and morally problematic policy, advocates often suggest that it would likely not meaningfully increase civilian casualties over a “counterforce” targeting policy.<sup>28</sup> The seeming intention of this claim is to suggest that their favored approach to deterrence is no more morally culpable than a “counterforce” deterrence strategy. They typically do this by projecting the casualties likely from the destruction of a comprehensive “counterforce” target set via nuclear strikes that appear *not* to be constrained to limit civilian casualties and destruction. Unsurprisingly, they conclude that the civilian casualties from such a strike would be high – asserting or strongly suggesting casualty levels not meaningfully different from intentional civilian targeting.<sup>29</sup> One such seeming projection, for example, claims likely casualty levels numbering in the “tens” to “hundreds” of millions.<sup>30</sup>

This argument might be true, as postulated. But it also is highly misleading because it fails to recognize that, on the U.S. side, nuclear employment, including against opponents’ “tools of control and power,” would be limited by the legal requirements for distinction and proportionality, which could reduce the casualty level significantly. As James Schlesinger observed in 1974, “...one can reduce those collateral mortalities significantly, if that is one of the attacker’s objectives.”<sup>31</sup> This point is critical because, unlike intentional civilian targeting advocates and various projections of casualties, Pentagon planners do not have the luxury of



## INFORMATION SERIES

Issue No. 569 | December 6, 2023

---

ignoring the targeting restrictions of *distinction and proportionality*: Distinction meaning that the *intentional* targeting of civilians is unacceptable, and proportionality meaning that potential *unintentional* civilian destruction may be countenanced *only* if judged proportional to the high military value of the target struck. These legal targeting restrictions are derived from millennia-old Just War moral principles regarding the use of force, and shape how, when and where U.S. leaders can employ force, including nuclear. The intentional targeting of population and civilian assets is inherently irreconcilable with these legal/moral requirements, unlikely to provide optimal deterrent effect in key cases, and an invitation for a similar nuclear reply.

The reality of these targeting limits was reflected in Secretary Weinberger's 1985 statement quoted above that the United States "...consciously does not target population and, in fact, has provisions for reducing civilian casualties," and in his then classified memorandum to the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff regarding "Collateral Damage Restraint": "The general proscription against targeting civilian populations per se, which results in guidance not to target deliberately residential areas, is intended primarily to cause our nuclear war plans to conform with Western morality."<sup>32</sup> In 1986, then Commander in Chief of NATO Forces General Bernard Rogers put distinction and proportionality in plain operational terms with a corresponding comment on nuclear targeting: "I place certain restraints on myself in regard to collateral damage. I will not fire a nuclear weapon into a city. I am concerned about those targets that are militarily significant, that we need to strike because it will have an impact on the battlefield, but which are close to cities. I will not strike those targets if a large percentage of civilians are going to be killed."<sup>33</sup> Gen. Rogers did *not* absolutely exclude "militarily significant" targets near (or presumably in) cities, but would not strike them if doing so would inflict a disproportional number of civilian fatalities.

For many years, Republican and Democratic administrations have publicly confirmed the governing legal principles of distinction and proportionality for U.S. nuclear planning, including the Obama, Trump and Biden Administrations. Advocates of civilian targeting appear to ignore these constraints in their efforts to deflect moral culpability away from *intentionally* threatening population and civilian targets.

In addition, civilian targeting advocates unsurprisingly do *not* highlight the likely casualty levels from their favored *intentional* targeting of cities or "society" – casualty levels which, by virtually any analysis, are likely to be much higher than the targeting strategy that they criticize. For example, in 1979, the Office of Technology Assessment concluded that a comprehensive strike "deliberately targeting population" could entail 90-190 million U.S. fatalities.<sup>34</sup> The glib suggestion that there is no meaningful difference in the potential level of civilian casualties from intentional population and civilian targeting defies analysis, and any moral, legal or military logic.

In short, advocates of population and civilian targeting, apparently eager to deflect moral culpability, ignore the reality that the principles of discrimination and proportionality demand targeting restrictions that could greatly limit casualties from targeting opponents' "tools of control and power." That America's opponents are most likely best deterred not by intentional



## INFORMATION SERIES

Issue No. 569 | December 6, 2023

---

civilian threats, but by threats to their “tools of control and power,” facilitates operationalizing distinction and proportionality. In contrast, intentional targeting for “massive counter-city strikes” to inflict “massive punishment” on an opponent’s “society,”<sup>35</sup> is inherently irreconcilable with well-established legal/moral standards and unlikely to provide optimal deterrent effect. This may be why an advocate of intentional “society” targeting, seemingly in a matter of weeks, switched to recommending targeting opponents’ conventional military forces instead<sup>36</sup> – an aged notion and longstanding element of “counterforce” targeting.<sup>37</sup>

### Conclusion

The return of advocacy for intentional population and civilian targeting was inevitable – it provides a rationale for doing almost nothing beyond changing the definition of deterrence adequacy in response to a dramatically more dangerous nuclear threat environment. Of course, doing almost nothing is what some in Washington always prefer with regard to nuclear weapons – no matter the harsh realities of the threat and deterrence requirements.

To be sure, deterrence via threatening opponents’ “tools of control and power” while seeking to practice discrimination and proportionality puts a premium on discriminate U.S. deterrence planning and capabilities, nuclear and conventional. But, the alternative of intentional population and civilian targeting, as Weinberger said, is “neither moral nor prudent.” It might satisfy some peoples’ desire for revenge, but revenge against citizens is unlikely to be the most effective deterrent and an illegitimate war aim.

The contemporary arguments to intentionally threaten population and civilian targets for deterrence are neither different nor more coherent than they were when voiced by McNamara 60 years ago. Two generations of Democratic and Republican leaders have moved policy away from this Cold War deterrence metric beginning 50 years ago. A new generation of leaders and scholars needs to understand why they did so and why the value of that move endures.

<sup>1</sup> See the discussion in, Mark B. Schneider, *How Many Nuclear Weapons Does Russia Have? Occasional Paper*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (Fairfax, VA: National Institute Press, August 2023), available at <https://nipp.org/papers/how-many-nuclear-weapons-does-russia-have-the-size-and-characteristics-of-the-russian-nuclear-stockpile/>.

<sup>2</sup> Madelyn Creedon and Jon Kyl, et al., *America’s Strategic Posture* (Alexandria, VA: Institute for Defense Analyses, 2023).

<sup>3</sup> Keir Lieber and Daryl Press, “US Strategy and Force Posture for an Era of Nuclear Tripolarity,” *Issue Brief*, Atlantic Council, April 2023, pp. 3, 6. Former Defense Secretary William Perry suggests threatening 50 Russian cities with destruction as an adequacy standard. See, William J. Perry and Tom Z. Collina, *The Button* (Dallas, TX: BenBella Books, 2020), p. 119. See also, Charles L. Glaser, James M. Acton, and Steve Fetter, “The U.S. Nuclear Arsenal Can Deter Both China and Russia: Why America Doesn’t Need More Missiles,” *Foreign Affairs Online*, Oct. 5, 2023, available at <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/us-nuclear-arsenal-can-deter-both-china-and-russia#:~:text=Even%20if%20Russia%20and%20China,the%20United%20States'%20only%20adversary.>





## INFORMATION SERIES

Issue No. 569 | December 6, 2023

---

<sup>4</sup> Lieber and Press, *op. cit.*, p. 9. See also, Andreas Kluth, “US, China and Russia’s Three-Body Nuclear Problem,” *Bloomberg Opinion*, November 9, 2023, available at <https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2023-11-09/the-us-china-and-russia-have-a-three-body-nuclear-problem#xj4y7vzkg>.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Lieber and Press suggest a capability to “inflict massive punishment on Russian society.” Lieber and Press, *op. cit.*, p. 10; Glaser, Acton, and Fetter similarly suggest “threatening to damage or totally destroy an adversary’s society and infrastructure” and that “90 warheads” have the capacity to “inflict the level of damage that is required for assured destruction.” *op. cit.* (Emphasis added).

<sup>7</sup> Lieber and Press, *op. cit.*, pp. 3, 9-12.

<sup>8</sup> *Draft Memorandum for the President, Secretary of Defense [Robert S. McNamara] to the President [Lyndon B. Johnson], Subj: Recommended FY 1966-FY1970 Programs for Strategic Offensive Forces, Continental Air and Missile Defense Forces, and Civil Defense*, December 3, 1964, p. 4. (Originally classified; sanitized and declassified on January 5, 1983.) See also the discussion in, Alain C. Enthoven and K. Wayne Smith, *How Much Is Enough?* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1971), p. 175.

<sup>9</sup> *Draft Memorandum for the President, Secretary of Defense [Robert S. McNamara] to the President [Lyndon B. Johnson], Subj: Recommended FY 1965-FY 1969 Strategic Retaliatory Forces*, December 6, 1963, p. 1-5. (Originally classified; sanitized and declassified on January 5, 1983.)

<sup>10</sup> *Draft Memorandum for the President, 1964*, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

<sup>11</sup> Robert S. McNamara, *The Essence of Security: Reflections in Office* (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), pp. 52-53.

<sup>12</sup> *Draft Memorandum for the President, Secretary of Defense [Robert S. McNamara] to the President [Lyndon B. Johnson], Subj: Strategic Offensive and Defensive Forces*, January 15, 1968, p. 11. (Originally classified; sanitized and declassified on January 5, 1983). (Emphasis added.)

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, Seymour Melman, “Limits of Military Power,” *The New York Times*, October 17, 1980, p. A-31.

<sup>14</sup> Secretary McNamara’s then Top Secret 1961 *Draft Presidential Memorandum* to President Kennedy included 200 “urban/industrial” targets and “150 [Soviet] bomber bases” in the list of “high priority” nuclear targets. In 1962, he said that the U.S. deterrence threat included the capability to destroy “Soviet urban society,” and to deny Moscow the prospect of “achieving a military victory by attacking our forces.” See, respectively, *Draft Memorandum for the President, Secretary of Defense [Robert S. McNamara] to the President [John F. Kennedy], Subj: Recommended Long Range Nuclear Delivery Forces 1963-1967*, Appendix I, September 23, 1961, p. 6. (Sanitized and declassified January 5, 1983); and, *Draft Memorandum for the President, Secretary of Defense [Robert S. McNamara] to the President [John F. Kennedy], Subj: Recommended FY 1964-FY 1968 Strategic Retaliatory Forces*, November 21, 1962, p. 5. (Originally classified; sanitized and declassified on January 5, 1983).

<sup>15</sup> See, Franklin Miller, “Tailoring U.S. Strategic Deterrent Effects on Russia,” in Barry Schneider and Patrick Ellis, eds., *Tailored Deterrence* (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: USAF Counterproliferation Center, 2011), pp. 41-56.

<sup>16</sup> See, *Draft Memorandum for the President, 1963*, *op. cit.*, p. 1-12, and, *Draft Memorandum for the President, 1968*, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

<sup>17</sup> Henry S. Rowen, “Formulating Strategic Doctrine,” Commission on the Organization of the Government for the Conduct of Foreign Policy, *Adequacy of Current Organization: Defense and Arms Control* (Washington, D.C.: USGPO, June 1975), Volume 4, Appendix K, p. 227. See also, Enthoven and Smith, *op. cit.*, pp. 23-24, 170-171, 179, 194-195.

<sup>18</sup> Caspar W. Weinberger, “U.S. Defense Strategy,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 64, No. 4 (Spring 1986), pp. 680-681. (Emphasis added).

<sup>19</sup> President’s Commission on Strategic Forces, *Report of the President’s Commission on Strategic Forces* (April 1983), p. 3.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>21</sup> Weinberger, “U.S. Defense Strategy,” *op. cit.*, p. 682.



## INFORMATION SERIES

Issue No. 569 | December 6, 2023

---

<sup>22</sup> Caspar Weinberger, *The Potential Effects of Nuclear War on Climate: A Report to the United States Congress* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1985), p. 11.

<sup>23</sup> As suggested in, Robert Gates, “The Dysfunctional Superpower,” *Foreign Affairs* (Nov./Dec. 2023), available at <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/robert-gates-america-china-russia-dysfunctional-superpower>.

<sup>24</sup> See, for example, *History of the Strategic Arms Competition: 1945-1972*, Part II, Alfred Goldberg, ed., with contributions by Ernest R. May, John D. Steinbruner, and Thomas W. Wolfe (Washington, D.C.: Historical Office, Office of the Secretary of Defense, March 1981), pp. 810-811.

<sup>25</sup> Jean-Christian Lambelet, Urs Luterbacher, and Pierre Allan, “Dynamics of Arms Races: Mutual Stimulation vs. Self-Stimulation,” *Journal of Peace Science*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (1979), p. 64.

<sup>26</sup> Secretary of Defense Harold Brown, Statement on February 27, 1979, in *Outlook and Budget Levels for Fiscal Years 1979 and 1980*, Hearings Before the Committee on the Budget, House of Representatives, 96th Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session (Washington, D.C.: USGPO, 1979), p. 492.

<sup>27</sup> Glaser, Acton, and Fetter, op. cit.; and, Kluth, op. cit.

<sup>28</sup> Lieber and Press, op. cit., pp. 3, 6. See also, James Acton, “Two Myths about Counterforce,” *WarOnTheRocks.com*, November 6, 2023, available at <https://warontherocks.com/2023/11/two-myths-about-counterforce/>.

<sup>29</sup> Kluth, op. cit. See also, James Acton, op. cit. Other earlier studies found the potential for *far fewer* fatalities in some potential “counterforce” targeting scenarios than from intentional population targeting. See the briefing on September 11, 1974 by Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger, in U.S. Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, Subcommittee on Arms Control, *Briefing on Counterforce Attacks*, Hearings, 93rd Congress, 2nd Session (Washington, D.C.: USGPO, 1975), p. 33. See also, William Daugherty, Barbara Levi, and Frank von Hippel, “The Consequences of ‘Limited’ Nuclear Attacks on the United States,” *International Security*, Vol. 10, No. 4 (Spring 1986), pp. 3-45.

<sup>30</sup> Acton, op. cit.

<sup>31</sup> Schlesinger, *Briefing on Counterforce Attacks*, op. cit., p. 26. See also, Donald Rumsfeld, *Annual Department of Defense Report FY78* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, January 17, 1977), p. 73.

<sup>32</sup> Caspar Weinberger, *Memorandum for the Joint Chiefs of Staff: Collateral Damage Restraint*, November 12, 1985, (declassified, September 6, 2018), available at [https://www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/FOID/Reading%20Room/MDR\\_Releases/FY18/FY18\\_Q2/Collateral\\_Damage\\_Restraint\\_12Nov1985.pdf](https://www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/FOID/Reading%20Room/MDR_Releases/FY18/FY18_Q2/Collateral_Damage_Restraint_12Nov1985.pdf).

<sup>33</sup> Quoted in, Bob Furlong and Macha Levinson, “SACEUR Calls for Research on a European ABM System,” *International Defense Review* (February 1986), p. 151.

<sup>34</sup> The Office of Technology Assessment, *The Effects of Nuclear War* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1979), p. 8.

<sup>35</sup> Lieber and Press, op. cit., pp. 3, 10.

<sup>36</sup> Acton, op. cit.

<sup>37</sup> See Bruce Russett, “Assured Destruction of What? A Countercombatant Alternative to Nuclear MADness,” *Public Policy*, Vol. 22 (Spring 1974), pp. 121-138.

The author would like to thank John Harvey, Frank Miller, David Trachtenberg, Matt Costlow, and Jonathan Trexel for their helpful comments on this article.

The National Institute for Public Policy’s *Information Series* is a periodic publication focusing on contemporary strategic issues affecting U.S. foreign and defense policy. It is a forum for promoting critical thinking on the evolving international security environment and how the dynamic geostrategic landscape affects U.S. national security.



## INFORMATION SERIES

Issue No. 569 | December 6, 2023

---

Contributors are recognized experts in the field of national security. National Institute for Public Policy would like to thank the Sarah Scaife Foundation for the generous support that made this *Information Series* possible.

The views in this *Information Series* are those of the author(s) and should not be construed as official U.S. Government policy, the official policy of the National Institute for Public Policy or any of its sponsors. For additional information about this publication or other publications by the National Institute Press, contact: Editor, National Institute Press, 9302 Lee Highway, Suite 750 | Fairfax, VA 22031 | (703) 293-9181 | [www.nipp.org](http://www.nipp.org). For access to previous issues of the National Institute Press Information Series, please visit <http://www.nipp.org/national-institute-press/information-series/>.

© National Institute Press, 2023