



INFORMATION SERIES

CONVERSATIONS ON NATIONAL SECURITY

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The following is an interview with Hon. Franklin Miller, Principal, the Scowcroft Group, and a Commissioner on the congressionally mandated 2023 Strategic Posture Commission. Mr. Miller discusses key findings in the bipartisan Commission's recently released consensus report on America's strategic posture, including the imperative of proceeding with a timely nuclear weapons modernization program and communicating to the U.S. public the vital national interests at stake in the worsening threat environment. This interview was conducted in early November 2023.

An Interview with Hon. Franklin C. Miller Principal, the Scowcroft Group and a Commissioner on the congressionally mandated 2023 Strategic Posture Commission

Q. Regarding the findings of the Commission, what are the most important developments in U.S. thinking and/or policy regarding: deterrence; extended deterrence; and the U.S. force posture, including Integrated Air and Missile Defence (IAMD)?

I believe there are several extremely important findings:

- First, international developments and the increased threat require the United States on an urgent basis to recognize that we now have to deter Russia and China simultaneously.



INFORMATION SERIES

Issue No. 573 | January 22, 2024

- Second, we need to realize that the strategic modernization program is necessary but not sufficient and that in the out years (mid-2030s and beyond), unless the threat picture improves dramatically, we will need to procure additional (i.e., more than twelve) Columbia Ballistic Missile Submarines (SSBNs), additional B-21s, and additional Long-Range Stand-Off Weapons (LRSOs).
- Third, in a change to U.S. policy of many decades, the Commission found that the United States needs to deploy an IAMD to deter and protect the U.S. homeland against limited “coercive” strikes by Russia and/or China. If adopted by the administration this would be the first time the United States would seek to deter and defend the homeland against ballistic or cruise missile attacks by Russia and China.
- Fourth, the Commission report highlights the need to modernize the infrastructure of the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) production complex and of the U.S. defense industrial base.
- All of the above said, there are 81 recommendations in the report and I believe all of them point to steps the United States must take in the near future to enhance deterrence and reduce the possibility of aggression and war.

Q. What is the most important message articulated in the report?

- The most important message is that the world has become a much more dangerous place over the past 10-15 years and that as a result the United States must recognize this and take urgent steps to enhance deterrence.
- A second message is that America’s leaders in both the Executive and Legislative branches need to inform the American people of the changes in the world described immediately above. Part of that message must include the fact that just as we are vital to our allies’ security so too are they vital to our security.

Q. What do you see as the critical “to do’s” for implementing the Commission’s recommendations?

- If the Commission’s recommendations are to be implemented, they need to be embraced by institutions which can make things happen. We have seen some enthusiasm from the Hill, from the Armed Services Committees on a bi-partisan basis. We have not had any official reaction from the administration. Speaking bureaucratically, writing “policy” (while often painful) is easy compared to implementing that policy. We need to have the administration and the Hill step up.

Q. What would be the consequences of a failure to implement the Commission’s recommendations?



INFORMATION SERIES

Issue No. 573 | January 22, 2024

- The Commission is clear that if its recommendations are not acted upon the United States will see a continued diminishment of its ability to deter aggression against itself and its allies.

Q. How do the Commission's conclusions compare to those of the 2022 Nuclear Posture Review (NPR)?

- In general, the Commission report is more robust than the 2022 NPR. That is certainly the case with respect to the urgency of the threat (and of the need to deter Russia and China simultaneously) and the need to expand the modernization program in the out years. On missile defense, the Report goes well beyond the 2022 NPR/*Missile Defense Review* by recommending a major shift in U.S. policy and calls for IAMD deployments to support that.

Q. Critics of the report at the Federation of American Scientists claim that implementing the Commission's recommendations would "likely kick the arms race into an even higher gear." How would you respond to these charges?

- Those charges stem from what the late Ambassador Jeanne Kirkpatrick dubbed the "Blame America First" school and are risible. Russia has been fielding modernized nuclear forces since around 2008 and continues to do so. China has been fielding new nuclear systems for at least the past five years. The U.S. modernization program has not fielded a new nuclear system since the late 1980s/early 1990s. To the degree there is a nuclear arms race today it exists between Russia and China; the United States has not even entered the race. Only in Russian and Chinese propaganda and within the "Blame America First" school could one characterize the U.S. effort to modernize our forces due to increasing age and the actions by the other two as "starting a nuclear arms race." It's truly a "through the looking glass" charge.

Q. Why did the Commission recommend moving all "050" programs that are in NNSA under Defense appropriations subcommittees (House Appropriations Committee-Defense (HAC-D), Senate Appropriations Committee-Defense (SAC-D))?

- The Commission believes that the expertise of the Senate and House Energy and Water Committees resides with energy and water programs – not nuclear weapons. Nuclear weapons are part of our national defense, a subject under the auspices of the Senate and House Defense Appropriations Committees. The Commission believes therefore that the SAC-D and HAC-D are best equipped to deal with Department of Energy "050" programs.



INFORMATION SERIES

Issue No. 573 | January 22, 2024
