



ANALYSIS

STRENGTHENING EXTENDED DETERRENCE AND ASSURANCE OR ALLIANCE DISSOLUTION: A TIME FOR CHOOSING

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Introduction

Washington's global system of alliances is facing extremely tough internal and external problems. These problems are neither fleeting nor prosaic; they are now structural and will require significant efforts to ameliorate. That harsh reality would matter little if alliances were unimportant to Western security. But they are the West's key advantage over an aggressive, authoritarian bloc, including a Sino-Russian entente, North Korea and Iran, that seeks to overturn the liberal world order created and sustained by U.S. and allied power. To maintain that advantage, Washington must recognize and respond to those threats, while resisting the usual anti-defense spending/anti-military themes of the "progressive" Left and the seeming neo-isolationism of some on the political Right.

U.S. defense budgets in decline when adjusted for inflation,¹ and a trend within parts of the Republican Party to oppose continuing military aid to Ukraine, are not lost on allies who fear for their security and are ultimately dependent on a seemingly reticent United States for their security. As threat conditions become increasingly severe and obvious, some allies, particularly those who are on the frontlines vis-à-vis Russia, China, and North Korea, understandably are increasingly alarmed.

Evidence of this alarm includes open allied discussions about acquiring independent nuclear capabilities—with the corresponding potential for a cascade of nuclear proliferation. Perhaps most surprising are open German and Japanese discussions of independent nuclear deterrence capabilities.² In Japan, the subject is tied directly to the continuing credibility of the U.S. extended nuclear deterrent and has moved from being politically taboo to an open public discussion.³ In February 2023, a Japanese defense study chaired by former military chief of staff Ryoichi Oriki reportedly suggested that "Japan ease its three nonnuclear principles that prohibit possessing, producing or allowing entry into Japan of nuclear weapons."⁴

This article is adapted from Keith B. Payne, "A Time for Choosing': Urgent Action or Continuing Folly," *Information Series*, No. 580 (Fairfax, VA: National Institute Press, March 26, 2024).

¹ Michael J. Boskin and Kiran Sridhar, "Biden's Budget Neglects the Military," *The Wall Street Journal*, March 15, 2024, p. A17, available at <https://www.wsj.com/articles/bidens-budget-neglects-the-military-huge-gap-in-american-strength-and-readiness-142ccc30>.

² See, for example, Eckhard Lübke and Michael Rühle, "Nuklearmacht Europa: Braucht Europa gemeinsame Nuklearwaffen? Ein Für and Wider," *Internationale Politik*, No. 1 (Januar/Februar 2024), pp. 110-113.

³ See, for example, Jesse Johnson, "Japan should consider hosting U.S. nuclear weapons, Abe says," *Japan Times*, February 27, 2023, available at <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2022/02/27/national/politics-diplomacy/shinzo-abe-japan-nuclear-weapons-taiwan/>.

⁴ Hiroyuki Akita, "Why nuclear arms debate in South Korea cannot be underestimated: U.S. allies must think outside the



An alternative potential allied response to security threats is to move increasingly toward accommodating Moscow and/or Beijing. As contemporary power balances shift and fear among some allies grows, greater accommodation to China or Russia—and corresponding distance from the United States—may appear the most practicable option. Turkey appears to have been positioning itself between the West and Russia for years, while some allies appear to be serving Russia's interests from within NATO.⁵ In the Indo-Pacific, New Zealand deepens economic, trade, and cultural ties with Beijing.⁶

That some allies will hedge their geopolitical bets by seeking accommodations with Russia and/or China, and by distancing themselves from Washington, was demonstrated recently in statements by French President Macron and the European Commission's leadership.⁷ According to Macron, "strategic autonomy" must now be Europe's organizing principle;⁸ and the French ambassador reportedly has advised Canada to begin distancing itself from the United States, and stated that Ottawa must choose between the United States and Europe.⁹ As two prominent European commentators have observed, "... based on global American strategic supremacy, the very idea of autonomous European defense has long been considered detrimental to the vital transatlantic link. However, with global strategic challenges growing fast, this principle is no longer tenable."¹⁰

The manifest inconsistency in U.S. behavior important to allies has accelerated this problem. An Israeli analyst described the perception concisely: "The consensus in the region

box to counter new threats from North Korea," *Nikkei Asia Online* (Japan), May 5, 2023, available at <https://asia.nikkei.com/Spotlight/Comment/Why-nuclear-arms-debate-in-South-Korea-cannot-be-underestimated>.

⁵ Eric S. Edelman, David Manning, and Franklin C. Miller, "NATO's Decision Process Has an Achilles' Heel," *New Atlanticist*, March 12, 2024, available at <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/natos-decision-process-has-an-achilles-heel/>.

⁶ See, for example, Laura Zhou, "China and New Zealand are a 'force for stability' in a turbulent world, says Foreign Minister Wang Yi," *South China Morning Post*, March 18, 2024, available at <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3255852/china-and-new-zealand-are-force-stability-turbulent-world-says-foreign-minister-wang-yi>.

⁷ See for example, "Macron Says Europe Should Not Follow U.S. or Chinese Policy Over Taiwan," *Reuters*, in *U.S. News and World Report*, April 9, 2023, available at <https://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2023-04-09/macron-says-europe-should-not-follow-u-s-or-chinese-policy-over-taiwan>. See also, "After Macron, EU Chief Seeks 'Independent' China Policy, Says Abandon US' 'Confrontational' Approach," *Times Now (India)*, May 1, 2023, available at <https://www.timesnownews.com/videos/news-plus/after-macron-eu-chief-seeks-independent-china-policy-says-abandon-us-confrontational-approach-video-99916110>.

⁸ See Vivienne Machi, Tom Kington, Andrew Chuter, "French visions for an autonomous Europe proves elusive," *Defensenews.com*, May 9, 2023, available at <https://www.defensenews.com/global/europe/2023/05/09/french-vision-for-an-autonomous-europe-proves-elusive/#:~:text=EUROPE%20and%20WASHINGTON%20%E2%80%94%20After%20Russia,the%20continent%20standing%20alone%20militarily>.

⁹ Dylan Robertson, "Canada should link with Europe, surpass 'weak' military engagement, French envoy," *The Globe and Mail*, April 5, 2023, available at [HTTPS://WWW.THEGLOBEANDMAIL.COM/POLITICS/ARTICLE-CANADA-SHOULD-LINK-WITH-EUROPE-SURPASS-WEAK-MILITARY-ENGAGEMENT-FRENCH/](https://www.theglobeandmail.com/politics/article-canada-should-link-with-europe-surpass-weak-military-engagement-french/).

¹⁰ Maximilian Terhalle and Kees Klompenhouwer, "Facing Europe's nuclear necessities, Deterrence can no longer be seen as just a bipolar equation — and it's time NATO addresses this fact," *POLITICO Europe Online*, April 22, 2023, available at <https://www.politico.eu/article/facing-europe-nuclear-necessities-strategy-vulnerability-war-weapon/>.

is that the US has abdicated its role as the Superpower vis-à-vis the [Middle East].”¹¹ As allies respond to the reality of rising threats, if a trend toward increasing allied interest in independent nuclear capabilities and/or distancing themselves from the United States expands, sustaining U.S. global alliances will be problematic, to the degradation of U.S. security.

America’s experience with North Korea over the past two decades is instructive. During the period of unquestioned U.S. military superiority over any potential foe, Washington solemnly and repeatedly declared a nuclear-armed North Korea to be “unacceptable.” Yet, five consecutive administrations, Republican and Democrat, have done nothing effective to prevent North Korea’s deployment of nuclear weapons that can now target much of the world, including the United States. As a result, North Korea is a nuclear power that now must be deterred.¹²

U.S. officials and commentators have repeatedly offered confident assertions that the risk is minimal because the United States can reliably deter North Korea¹³—assertions based on little more than convenience, hope, and shallow guesswork. Simultaneously, Washington has incessantly pleaded with China to help de-nuclearize North Korea—a problem that Beijing has shown no interest in resolving. Mounting South Korean popular interest in independent nuclear capabilities is a direct consequence of this American failure to deal with a threat that Washington has declared, for more than two decades, to be “unacceptable.”

Russia seeks to recover hegemony in much of Europe, starting with Ukraine, and China is on track to be able to take Taiwan by force within a few years.¹⁴ Recent “leaked” Russian nuclear planning documents reveal a corresponding shockingly low Russian threshold for

¹¹ Shmuel Bar, “Self-perceptions and Nuclear Weapons,” *Information Series*, No. 558 (July 2023), available at https://nipp.org/information_series/shmuel-bar-self-perceptions-and-nuclear-weapons-no-558-july-13-2023/.

¹² See for example, Timothy W. Martin, “Top U.S. General Sees Changing Nuclear Threat From North Korea,” *The Wall Street Journal Online*, March 11, 2024, available at <https://www.wsj.com/world/asia/top-u-s-general-sees-changing-nuclear-threat-from-north-korea-4788270a>.

¹³ See, for example, Wolfgang Panofsky, “Nuclear Insecurity: Correcting Washington’s Dangerous Posture,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 86, No. 5 (September/October 2007), pp. 113-114; David E. Sanger, “Don’t Shoot. We’re Not Ready,” *The New York Times*, June 25, 2006, p. 1; Mike Moore, “Missile Defenses, Relabeled,” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, Vol. 58, No. 4 (July/August, 2002), p. 22; Joseph Cirincione, “A Much Less Explosive Trend,” *The Washington Post*, March 10, 2002, p. B-3; Carl Levin, *Remarks of Senator Carl Levin on National Missile Defense, National Defense University Forum Breakfast on Ballistic Missile Defense*, May 11, 2001, p. 4, available at www.senate.gov/~levin/newsroom/release.cfm?id=209421; Craig Eisendrath, “Missile Defense System Flawed Technically, Unwise Politically,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 23, 2001; and, Sen. Joseph Biden, “Why Democrats Oppose Billions More on Missiles” (Letter to the editor), *The Wall Street Journal*, July 31, 2006, p. A11.

¹⁴ The U.S. Commander in the Indo-Pacific reportedly testified before Congress that Beijing is on track to its goal of being able to invade Taiwan by 2027. See, Bill Gertz, “U.S. Indo-Pacific commander warns of growing danger of war over Taiwan: Aquilino tells lawmakers \$11 billion in added funds needed to deter China,” *Washington Times Online*, Mar. 21, 2024, available at <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2024/mar/21/us-indo-pacific-commander-warns-of-growing-danger-/>; Jesse Johnson, “China on track to be ready to invade Taiwan by 2027, U.S. commander says,” *Japan Times Online* (Japan), March 21, 2024, available at <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2024/03/21/asia-pacific/politics/taiwan-china-invasion-2027/#:~:text=The%20top%20U.S.%20military%20commander,a%20single%20day%20this%20year.>

nuclear use,¹⁵ and in 2022, the Central Intelligence Agency reportedly concluded that there is a 50 percent or greater chance that Moscow will use nuclear weapons if facing defeat in Ukraine.¹⁶ This is devastating commentary on the West's contemporary deterrence position.

In this grim threat context, the fundamental alliance problem is the enduring U.S. preference to look away from stark security challenges and to prioritize non-defense goals. Western allies have unparalleled potential human and material advantages over virtually any combination of foes—Russia's and China's combined GDPs, for example, are a fraction of the combined GDPs of Western allies. The United States and allies have the potential to contain the Sino-Russian entente, North Korea and Iran. But they have continually punted in this regard and now confront multiple existential challenges.

Washington's actions, and more often inaction over many years, are a primary reason that authoritarian states now pose serious military threats to the West's future. The longer they go unanswered, the more likely it is that today's threats will be the source of tomorrow's crises and catastrophes. Whether the allied powers will act in unity and urgency, or ultimately move in different, disparate directions that undercut Western security, is an open question.

Who and What is to Blame?

The United States and allies may, in the foreseeable future, face a reckoning with harsh security realities. The immediate reason for this possible reckoning, of course, is the growing power and aggression of a hostile, authoritarian bloc that seeks to recast the world order, violently if necessary.

However, the United States and allies have facilitated the security challenges they now face. The antecedents to Moscow's aggression in Europe and China's belligerent expansionism have been blatantly obvious for well over a decade. These threats would be less significant had Washington taken needed steps over the past three decades. But many political leaders, Republican and Democrat, have made decisions based on convenient illusions, and the severe results of those decisions are increasingly obvious. That is, contemporary challenges, in principle, were largely manageable had Western leaders not been captured by unrealistic expectations regarding Russia, China, North Korea, Iran, and a cooperative, post-Cold War "new world order." Instead, Washington has facilitated foes' hostile moves and magnified their significance by its failure to recognize and prepare

¹⁵ See Mark B. Schneider, "The Leaked Russian Nuclear Documents and Russian First Use of Nuclear Weapons," *Information Series*, No. 579 (March 18, 2024), available at https://nipp.org/information_series/mark-b-schneider-the-leaked-russian-nuclear-documents-and-russian-first-use-of-nuclear-weapons-no-579-march-18-2024/.

¹⁶ Ronny Reyes, "CIA estimated 50% chance that Russia would nuke Ukraine if it risked losing war: report," *New York Post*, March 10, 2024, available at <https://nypost.com/2024/03/10/world-news/cia-warned-50-chance-that-russia-would-nuke-ukraine-report/>.

proactively for obviously mounting dangers; as two serious experts have emphasized, Western “weakness is provocative.”¹⁷

The U.S. defense budget, defense industrial base and nuclear infrastructure, starved for decades, have not caught up with the great power military threats now confronting the United States and allies.¹⁸ And, for more than a decade beyond any reasonable expectation of Russian or Chinese reciprocity, Washington has continued to pursue antiquated arms control thinking and practices that constrain needed U.S. military preparation and deterrence capabilities. Many in Washington still fail to recognize their culpability in this regard. They have extended the immediate post-Cold War “strategic holiday,” “peace dividend” and fixation on arms control solutions decades longer than prudent.

For example, in an unprecedented threat context, rather than responding urgently to an increasingly dangerous and hostile bloc of states, the Biden Administration’s “grand strategy” appears to prioritize pressing the United States and the world into the progressive political mold fashionable in Washington. As Professor Colin Dueck writes, “If the Biden administration’s grand strategy could be summed up in a single phrase, it would be - *progressive transformation at home and abroad.*”¹⁹

Professor Dueck’s apt and jarring assessment of Washington’s focus is confirmed in numerous ways. In response to looming military threats, including the prospect of nuclear war, Washington seems uninterested in correcting course significantly. America now pays more annually to service the national debt than is devoted to national defense. Despite a threat context that is more dangerous than that of the Cold War, the percentage of GDP devoted to defense is roughly half of what it was during the Cold War. And, as currently planned, U.S. defense spending will essentially be flat from 2023 through 2028,²⁰ and adjusted for inflation, the real buying power of the U.S. defense budget will actually decline.²¹ The Commander of Indo-Pacific Command reportedly testified that the administration’s current budget request is \$11 billion short of that needed to provide the means identified as necessary to deter conflict with China.²² At the strategic nuclear force level, by the end of the decade, it appears that Washington will have to retire aging existing forces before their

¹⁷ Eric Edelman and Frank Miller, “Understanding that Weakness is Provocative is Deterrence 101,” *The Dispatch*, August 8, 2022, available at <https://thedispatch.com/article/understanding-that-weakness-is-provocative/>.

¹⁸ For a discussion of frustrated efforts to align the defense budget with threat realities see, Bryant Harris, “A Nearly \$1 Trillion Defense Budget Faces Headwinds at Home and Abroad,” *Defense News Online*, March 7, 2024, available at <https://www.defensenews.com/congress/2024/03/07/a-nearly-1-trillion-defense-budget-faces-headwinds-at-home-and-abroad/>.

¹⁹ See Colin Dueck, “The Biden Doctrine,” *The Caravan*, Hoover Institution, March 5, 2024, available at <https://www.hoover.org/research/biden-doctrine>. (Emphasis in original).

²⁰ Congressional Budget Office Report, *Long-Term Implications of the 2024 Future Defense Program*, October 25, 2023, available at <https://www.cbo.gov/publication/59511#:~:text=The%20proposed%20budget%20for%20DoD,2024%20in%20the%20previous%20FYDP>.

²¹ Elaine McCusker, “Don’t Be Fooled by Biden’s Budget: He’s Cutting Military Spending as Our Needs Grow,” *AEI Op-Ed*, March 10, 2023, available at <https://www.aei.org/op-eds/dont-be-fooled-by-bidens-budget-hes-cutting-military-spending-as-our-needs-grow/>.

²² As reported in, Gertz, “U.S. Indo-Pacific commander warns of growing danger of war over Taiwan,” *op. cit.*

replacements can be deployed. These are not the behaviors of a sensible alliance leader prepared to, or preparing to, address unprecedented security dangers.

To be sure, a lack of serious focus on emerging security threats is not new. Washington's dramatic drawdown of forces from Europe, for example, began immediately following the collapse of the Soviet Union, and inexplicably occurred even with Russia's attack on Georgia in 2008 and its first assault on Ukraine in 2014.²³

Russia and China combine unprecedented nuclear buildups and expansionist geopolitical goals, yet Washington remains mired in some of the most optimistic thinking of the immediate post-Cold War period. For example, the 2022 *Nuclear Posture Review* (NPR) calls for "urgent" U.S. moves to advance long-standing arms control goals with no prospect for Russian or Chinese reciprocation. In the harsh contemporary threat context, the NPR asserts that "Mutual, verifiable arms control offers the most effective, durable and responsible path to reduce the role of nuclear weapons in our strategy and prevent their use."²⁴ The comforting expectation that arms control now is the "most effective" way to prevent Chinese or Russian nuclear employment is otherworldly thinking given Moscow's and Beijing's words and deeds over many years—yet it continues in Washington.

In a most disturbing reflection of Washington's misplaced priorities, John Kerry recently asserted that if Moscow would "make a greater effort to reduce emissions now," it would "open the door for people to feel better about" Russia's military invasion of Ukraine.²⁵ In fact, a Russian commitment to "reducing emissions" would do nothing to ease Moscow's crime of invading Ukraine or alter its commitment to violently changing borders in Europe. Similarly, while China and Russia see themselves as in a long-term war with the United States, Washington continues to label engagement with Russia and China as "great power competition,"²⁶—a rhetorical obfuscation that prolongs the pretense of a relatively benign threat environment rather than confront stark threat realities.

In contrast to the Biden Administration's NPR, the near-contemporaneous Congressional Strategic Posture Commission's 2023 report repeatedly calls for "urgent" U.S. movement to meet looming security threats. The need to call for urgency, and the fact that it has been criticized as being overwrought,²⁷ is testament to Washington's decades-long preference for convenient illusions over recognition of rising threats.

²³ See, Michael Allen, Carla Martinez Machain, and Michael Flynn, "The US Military Presence in Europe Has Been Declining for 30 Years—the Current Crisis in Ukraine May Reverse That Trend," *The Conversation* (January 5, 2022), available at <https://theconversation.com/the-us-military-presence-in-europe-has-been-declining-for-30-years-the-current-crisis-in-ukraine-may-reverse-that-trend-175595>.

²⁴ Department of Defense, *2022 Nuclear Posture Review*, October 2022, p. 16, available at <https://media.defense.gov/2022/Oct/27/2003103845/-1/-1/1/2022-NATIONAL-DEFENSE-STRATEGY-NPR-MDR.PDF>.

²⁵ Quoted in, Sarah Rumpf-Whitten, "John Kerry says people would 'feel better' about the Ukraine war if Russia would reduce emissions," *Fox News*, March 6, 2024, available at <https://www.foxnews.com/politics/john-kerry-says-people-feel-better-about-ukraine-war-russia-reduce-emissions>.

²⁶ *2022 Nuclear Posture Review*, op. cit., p. 5.

²⁷ For example, Harlan K. Ullman, "America's strategic nuclear posture review is miles off the mark," *The Hill Online*, October 30, 2023, available at <https://thehill.com/opinion/national-security/4282404-americas-strategic-nuclear-posture-more-deterrence-and-more-weapons/>.

In short, the immediate cause of the West's unprecedented security challenge is a hostile bloc of revisionist, authoritarian states. A deeper cause is the decades-long failure of Washington and allies to recognize and rise to the threat—which could have been managed given their unparalleled combined power potential. Ultimately unrealistic, antiquated U.S. and allied thinking and behavior are responsible for the significance of contemporary security challenges.

Burden Sharing

Some U.S. leaders claim that overly dependent allies who refuse to contribute enough for Western defense are the problem. To be sure, many wealthy allies, such as Holland, Belgium, Germany, Spain and Italy, devote an essentially trivial fraction of their GDP to Western security—preferring to rely on the United States. Their defense efforts are wholly out of sync with the character of threats posed by a hostile Sino-Russian entente.

Washington, however, has been on its own “strategic holiday” for decades and generally has passively indulged allied free riding. U.S. leaders have called on allies for greater defense “burden sharing” for decades. But Washington's simultaneous actions have, with few exceptions, consistently countenanced allies' continued indolence.

Washington continually assures allies that the U.S. extended nuclear deterrence umbrella covering them is solid and reliable. The United States can hardly criticize allies for engaging in wishful thinking and indolent behavior when it continually offers “ironclad” assurances. Why expect allies to spend serious national treasure when Washington promises its unfailing protection? Why should allies want to change a security formula that demands so little from them—until, of course, that formula is manifestly unreliable.

U.S. and allied thinking are comparably naïve and self-serving: Washington for seemingly expecting—beyond any logic—that its extended nuclear deterrent promises will continue to be credible absent significant new effort, and allies for imprudently going along for the ride because it is most convenient and inexpensive. Allies may be castigated for their share of this folly, but doing so is not slightly hypocritical, and U.S. finger-wagging will ultimately prove unhelpful without real U.S. commitment and leadership.

A Structural Problem: Extended Nuclear Deterrence Credibility

A credible U.S. extended nuclear deterrent is critical to prevent regional war and is an essential glue that holds the alliance system together. Regarding Finland's recent joining of NATO, Finnish President Alexander Stubb said that, “I would start from the premise that we in Finland must have a real nuclear deterrent...which comes from the United States.”²⁸ In

²⁸ Anne Kauranen and Louise Breusch Rasmussen, “NATO's nuclear deterrent must be real for Finland, says new president,” *Reuters*, March 1, 2024, available at <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/finland-inaugurates-alexander-stubb-president-nato-era-2024-0301/#:~:text=NATO's%20nuclear%20deterrent%20must%20be%20real%20for%20Finland%2C%20says%20new%2>

the absence of a credible U.S. extended nuclear deterrent, key allies have indicated that they could be compelled to acquire independent nuclear capabilities—which would likely unravel the alliances, unleash a cascade of nuclear proliferation, and cause unpredictable, paranoid responses by Russia and China.

It is important to pull back the curtain on the extended U.S. nuclear umbrella: It is the U.S. and NATO threat to escalate a regional non-nuclear conflict, potentially to a thermonuclear war, in response to an attack on an ally. It includes the U.S. threat that Washington may resort to a level of warfare on behalf of an ally that could escalate to the destruction of both allies and the United States.

When the United States was reasonably well-protected from nuclear attack by wide oceans and defenses, Washington could, in relative safety, issue such strategic nuclear deterrence threats on behalf of allies. However, as the Soviet Union became increasingly capable of targeting the United States with its own strategic nuclear forces, U.S. extended deterrence nuclear threats became increasingly problematic. During the Kennedy Administration, Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev asked U.S. Secretary of State Dean Rusk directly why Moscow should believe that Washington would risk self-destruction in a thermonuclear war on behalf of distant allies. Rusk's answer was reduced to, "Mr. Chairman, you will have to take into account the possibility we Americans are just [expletive] fools."²⁹ This answer did not even try to claim any logical credibility for the U.S. extended deterrent, but that Moscow should fear that Washington might foolishly be self-destructive.

The questions, of course, are: How credible is this 'we may be fools' basis for extended deterrence, against which enemies, and in what contexts? In 1979, Henry Kissinger addressed this question directly, telling allies publicly that they should *not* expect the United States to abide by suicidal U.S. strategic nuclear threats for their security: "Our European allies should not keep asking us to multiply strategic assurances that we cannot possibly mean, or if we do mean, we should not want to execute, because if we execute, we risk the destruction of civilization."³⁰

During the Cold War, Washington undertook numerous steps to restore credibility to the U.S. extended nuclear umbrella. This included maintaining an enormous standing U.S. force in Europe, including over 300,000 troops throughout the 1980s, to help prevent an easy fait accompli that might tempt Soviet aggression, and brandishing approximately 7,000 locally-deployed or deployable, nonstrategic nuclear weapons (NSNW) to buttress the credibility of the U.S. extended strategic deterrence umbrella. The expectation was that conventional forces and NSNW would add credibility to the nuclear umbrella and manifest links to the U.S. strategic nuclear threat of intercontinental missiles and bombers. The United States also developed a deterrence doctrine that planned limited strategic nuclear options in support of

Opresident,By%20Anne%20Kauranen&text=HELSINKI%2C%20March%201%20(Reuters),fought%20election%20on%20Feb.%202011.

²⁹ Dean Rusk, *As I Saw It* (London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1990), p. 228. See also, Arnold Beichman, "How Foolish Khrushchev Nearly Started World War III," *The Washington Times*, October 3, 2004, p. B 8.

³⁰ Henry Kissinger, "The Future of NATO," in *NATO, The Next Thirty Years*, Kenneth Myers, ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1981), p. 8.

extended deterrence, in the expectation that limited U.S. strategic nuclear threats on behalf of allies would be more credible than massive, potentially self-destructive U.S. threats.³¹ These theater and strategic moves intentionally added multiple layers to the U.S. extended deterrent in the search for what Herman Kahn called a “not incredible” U.S. extended nuclear deterrent.

Yet, the United States and allies have since minimized or eliminated the multiple theater deterrent layers that reinforced the credibility of the U.S. extended strategic deterrent during the Cold War—and, with few exceptions, have not advanced new and different measures to replace them. The 2001 and 2010 *Nuclear Posture Reviews* touted U.S. advanced conventional weapons as deterrence tools enabling Washington to reduce the number of, and reliance on, nuclear forces. But the United States has done very little in terms of actually deploying advanced conventional weapons; key allies have noticed. And, while Moscow disdains arms control, expands its nuclear arsenal, and increases its reliance on nuclear weapons,³² Washington inexplicably continues to prioritize the goals of constraining its strategic and theater capabilities, and reducing reliance on nuclear weapons, as emphasized in the 2022 *Nuclear Posture Review*. This includes continuing to embrace unmitigated vulnerability to Chinese and Russian strategic missiles, rejecting new NSNW, abiding by arms control agreements that Russia has clearly abandoned, and harboring an enduring aspiration for a No-First-Use nuclear policy that would serve only to further degrade extended nuclear deterrence credibility, as multiple allies have warned for decades. These behaviors reflect a Washington that remains largely stuck in the post-Cold War “strategic holiday,” “peace dividend,” and demonstrably vapour hope that arms control can solve serious force posture problems.

This continuing fundamental lack of Western realism contributes to the declining credibility of the U.S. extended deterrent—a structural problem for the U.S. alliance system given the hostile bloc now confronting the West. The burden for extended nuclear deterrence is largely on the U.S. strategic nuclear triad, which may be insufficiently credible for this purpose without layers of supporting deterrence capabilities because, as Henry Kissinger emphasized in 1979, it connotes a threat Washington “cannot possibly mean” and “should not want to execute.”

Conclusion

Washington and many allies continue to behave as if they are still in the immediate post-Cold War springtime of great expectations. It may be too late to deter a reckoning that decades of

³¹ See, Keith B. Payne, *The Great American Gamble* (Fairfax, VA: National Institute Press, 2008), pp. 95-96.

³² For discussions of increasing reliance see, Office of the Director of National Intelligence, *Annual Threat Assessment of the U.S. Intelligence Community* (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Director of National Intelligence, February 6, 2023), p. 14, available at <https://www.dni.gov/index.php/newsroom/reportspublications/reports-publications-2023>; and, The White House, *National Security Strategy* (Washington, D.C.: The White House, October 2022), p. 26, available at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Biden-Harris-Administrations-National-Security-Strategy-10.2022.pdf>.

indolence and wishful thinking have effectively invited. Recognizing and addressing the threats and structural problems that now beleaguer U.S. global alliances are urgent needs. That recognition and effort must begin in Washington. Ronald Reagan's famous Cold War speech, "A Time for Choosing," included a line that fully pertains to Washington and allies today: "We're at war with the most dangerous enemy that has ever faced mankind in his long climb from the swamp to the stars, and it's been said if we lose that war, and in so doing lose this way of freedom of ours, history will record with greatest astonishment that those who had the most to lose did the least to prevent its happening."³³

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³³ Ronald Reagan, *A Time for Choosing*, October 27, 1964, available at <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/reagans/ronald-reagan/time-choosing-speech-october-27-1964>.