PROCEEDINGS

THE IMPACT OF ARMS CONTROL ON EXTENDED DETERRENCE AND ASSURANCE

The remarks below were delivered at a symposium on "The Impact of Arms Control on Extended Deterrence and Assurance" hosted by the National Institute for Public Policy on June 26, 2024. The symposium examined the ramifications of past arms control practices and agreements on the credibility of U.S. extended deterrence security guarantees. It also outlined principles for future arms control efforts that would avoid undermining extended deterrence and the assurance of allies.

Keith B. Payne
Keith B. Payne is President of the National Institute for Public Policy and was former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Forces Policy.

I look forward to our discussion today. As Dave mentioned, the panel's presentations follow from an on-going study at National Institute, the complete results of which will be published before the end of the year.

One topic from this study is how unintended consequences of the U.S. arms control agenda now jeopardize the U.S global alliance system. There are very few discussions of the inconvenient truth that the U.S. arms control agenda has fallen far short of its *own goals*, and while doing so, has contributed to the contemporary extreme pressures on the U.S. alliance system. This is a true, but unfashionable story.

I will briefly present seven points in this regard:

First Point

The U.S. system of global alliances is critical to U.S. security, and credible extended deterrence is the primary means of assuring allies, which in turn is essential for alliance cohesion.

Allies have emphasized that coming under the U.S. extended deterrent, including nuclear deterrence, is their main reason for aligning with the United States. Finnish officials have said this most recently.

Allies, including Germany, have also said that *credible* U.S. extended nuclear deterrence is the security guarantee that enables them to refrain from their *own* independent nuclear capabilities, and that if U.S. extended deterrence is no longer credible, they will need to pursue alternatives for their security. Most of those alternatives hold potentially severe downsides for alliance cohesion and U.S. security.

It is no overstatement to conclude that credible extended deterrence is essential to allied assurance, alliance cohesion, and to non-proliferation. If credible extended deterrence crumbles, assurance will crumble, alliances will crumble, and we will likely see a cascade of nuclear proliferation; the relationships are that direct and serious.

Second Point

Since the end of the Cold War, structural problems have arisen that undermine credible extended deterrence, and thus the U.S. system of alliances. By structural problems, I mean political and material realities that cannot be papered over by robust words or declarations. Structural problems have no easy fixes.

These structural problems include America's greatly reduced relative and absolute conventional and nuclear military capabilities since the end of the Cold War. Washington dramatically cut capabilities with little apparent appreciation of the prospective harm done to extended deterrence and assurance.

Third Point

Structural problems are inherent in the nature of U.S. alliances. But America's greatly reduced relative and absolute military position is a self-inflicted wound, caused *in part* by a long-standing U.S. arms control agenda and, more basically, the ideas driving that agenda.

For example, for almost two decades after the Cold War, Washington acted as if the expected cooperative new world order was real. Such an expectation was, of course, grossly mistaken. Yet, Washington proceeded as if its priority goal was to set a wise and virtuous arms control example for the rest of the world: supposedly, if we restrained ourselves, enemies would show the same restraint. This "action-reaction" theory driving U.S. self-restraint is alive and well, but contrary to the harsh truth that foes *don't* consider Washington's behavior to be wise or virtuous, nor do they emulate it. Nevertheless, the "action-reaction" theory typically is the rationale for arms control endeavors that threaten credible extended deterrence and alliance cohesion, including No First Use (NFU) and the continuing push to reduce the number and role of nuclear weapons.

Fourth Point

Multiple internal contradictions are inherent in the U.S. arms control agenda and near certain to *frustrate* Washington's arms control goals and to *degrade* extended deterrence credibility. Washington's arms control agenda is twice a loser; quite an accomplishment. I will mention *only four* of these contradictions now; there are more:

- Contradiction 1: U.S. force reductions following the Cold War were meant to provide a virtuous arms control example for the world, but instead created gaps in U.S. capabilities, contributed to allied doubts regarding extended deterrence, and increased interest among some allies for independent nuclear capabilities.
- Contradiction 2: U.S. nuclear force reductions during and after the Cold War were meant to encourage opponents to follow suit, but they instead led Moscow to disdain America's pleading for arms control because U.S. forces are increasingly

aged while Russia's *are not*. Why eliminate modernized Russian forces when U.S. forces are aging out anyway?

- Contradiction 3: Washington based its post-Cold War rationale for pushing nuclear disarmament on its overwhelming conventional force superiority, but then quickly gave up that conventional force superiority while *still* pushing to reduce the role and number of nuclear weapons as if nothing had changed. It did so while foes worked to expand both their conventional and nuclear capabilities.
- Contradiction 4: In the past, the United States minimized homeland defenses to promote deterrence stability and arms control. Yet doing so led to *increased* Soviet investment in its Strategic Rocket Forces and the *destabilizing* vulnerability of U.S. strategic nuclear forces. The continuing minimization of U.S. homeland defenses leaves Washington fully vulnerable to enemies' nuclear coercion—undercutting the credibility of U.S. extended deterrence for allies.

These are only four examples of how the U.S. approach to arms control has degraded extended deterrence and allied assurance.

Fifth Point

By undercutting extended deterrence, the U.S. pursuit of arms control has increased incentives for some allies to acquire independent nuclear capabilities. So, Washington now must *scramble to solve a proliferation problem* it has helped to create.

Sixth Point

Multiple separate case studies illustrate how specific U.S. arms control measures under Republican and Democratic administrations have undercut extended deterrence and assurance. These case studies include:

- The ABM Treaty and its enduring arms control and stability rationale;
- The INF Treaty;
- The Presidential Nuclear Initiatives;
- The past elimination of TLAM-N and current opposition to SLCM-N; and,
- Washington's continuing aspiration for NFU.

Seventh and Final Point

As I mentioned earlier, several of the structural problems now confronting the U.S. alliance system are inherent. In contrast, the U.S. arms control agenda that has contributed to contemporary deterrence and assurance problems can be corrected—but *only if Washington*

will undertake a realistic, zero-based review of its approach to arms control. Such a review will be opposed strenuously by both individuals and institutions deeply invested in traditional U.S. arms control thinking and norms. But it is necessary.

I will conclude here so my colleagues can discuss *how* several of the specific U.S. arms control measures I listed have unintentionally endangered extended deterrence, and by doing so have contributed to the structural problems confronting U.S. alliances.

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Matthew Costlow

Matthew Costlow is Senior Analyst at the National Institute for Public Policy and former Special Assistant in the DoD Office of Nuclear and Missile Defense Policy.

Today I will be presenting on a topic that many of you are likely quite familiar with: the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF Treaty). But the real focus of my remarks will be on the treaty's effects on extended deterrence.

As Dr. Keith Payne explained quite nicely, today the warning signs are flashing red among U.S. allies and partners. Their threat perceptions have shifted dramatically, and thus, their assurance and extended deterrence requirements have also shifted dramatically. But what makes these developments particularly dangerous for the U.S. network of alliances and partnerships is that the United States self-evidently cannot adapt its nuclear force posture in ways or at a pace that could improve alliance relations in the near term. One of the reasons for that lack of U.S. flexibility, and thus diminished allied perceptions of U.S. credibility, is the long-term effects of the INF Treaty.

To begin, what occasionally gets lost in discussions about the INF Treaty is that its origins lie in another time period when U.S. allies were dissatisfied with the state of U.S. nuclear forces—the late 1970s. It was clear by the early 1970s that the Soviet Union would not be satisfied with parity in overall nuclear force levels with the United States. And by the late 1970s, the Soviet Union made it even more clear that it intended to gain coercive leverage over NATO with its substantially larger intermediate-range forces (the SS-20 being the main culprit). When President Jimmy Carter cancelled the "enhanced radiation weapon" or "the neutron bomb"—allied concerns grew to a roar.

The "dual-track" decision for the United States to develop and deploy intermediate-range ballistic and cruise missiles in Europe while pursuing arms control with the Soviets helped ease allied concerns. In 1987, President Reagan and General Secretary Gorbachev signed the INF Treaty which eliminated all ground-based intermediate-range systems in the two states' inventories. U.S. allies were quite supportive of the INF Treaty and so was the U.S. Senate, winning support in a 93-5 vote. Among the reasons that proponents supported the treaty were that it removed a larger number of Soviet weapons than it did U.S. weapons and helped solidify alliance relations.

Those who had concerns about the INF Treaty, or were against it, were small in number but notable in their dissent at the time. James Schlesinger, for instance, ultimately supported the INF Treaty but noted his concern that eliminating intermediate-range nuclear forces

would place additional extended deterrence burdens on U.S. strategic nuclear forces at a time when the Soviet Union had an overwhelming lead in that area. The scholar Willian Van Cleave, who ultimately did not support the INF Treaty, extended Schlesinger's concern by noting that the INF Treaty not only placed a greater extended deterrence burden on an outnumbered U.S. strategic nuclear force, but also on greatly outnumbered U.S. and NATO conventional forces. Another scholar, Colin Gray, summarized these concerns by explaining that if the United States and NATO Europe were not willing to invest more in non-strategic nuclear forces below the intermediate-range, or conventional forces to meet the Soviet Union while staying at the conventional level of war, then the United States by necessity would likely need to escalate to strategic nuclear weapon employment in a conflict with the Soviets—something inherently not in the U.S. national interest.

Of course, the United States and NATO Europe sought to strengthen their conventional and non-strategic nuclear forces as a way to win approval for the INF Treaty in the Senate—almost every witness that testified before Congress supported such improvements. But the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union made those improvements appear irrelevant and wasteful in the new, far less threatening international environment. In essence, the end of the Cold War delayed a U.S. and allied reckoning about the credibility of U.S. extended deterrence threats in the wake of the INF Treaty. The Presidential Nuclear Initiatives of 1991-1992 eliminated most of the U.S. non-strategic nuclear weapons, leaving only nuclear gravity bombs and dual-capable aircraft for regional extended nuclear deterrence and assurance.

Now, just as those who had concerns with the INF Treaty feared, the United States is forced to rely largely on the threat of strategic nuclear escalation to deter regional conflict. What is worse, this over-reliance on intercontinental forces comes at a time when those same forces are being asked to bear an even greater deterrence burden to counter growing Russian and Chinese strategic forces. And, when one considers that the United States today lacks the nuclear infrastructure to make any major changes to the U.S. nuclear force modernization plan, then the true scope of the danger for U.S. alliances and partnerships becomes clearer.

In short, U.S. allies and partners have greater assurance and extended deterrence requirements at precisely the time the United States is least able to meet those new requirements.

The INF Treaty and the PNIs are not solely responsible for this development, but neither can their role be dismissed. Where does the United States stand today? China has the largest intermediate-range missile force in the world today, Russia has deployed its INF Treaty-violating missiles, and the United States only a few months ago deployed its first missile that would have violated in the INF Treaty on a temporary training assignment. And, as the Biden Administration has noted several times, the United States only has plans for conventional intermediate-range systems.

I do not have time in my remaining minutes to examine all the lessons that can be learned from the INF Treaty episode that relate to extended deterrence, but I will conclude by noting the old maxim that we in the United States seem to forget every time: that arms control

agreements simply shift competition from the areas covered by the arms control agreement to the areas NOT covered by the agreement. Sooner or later, this competition will resume, and the United States must anticipate that. For now, as the 2023 Strategic Posture Commission recommended, U.S. officials should focus on building adaptability into the U.S. nuclear infrastructure and force posture to meet increasingly severe extended deterrence and assurance challenges.

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Michaela Dodge
Michaela Dodge is Research Scholar at the National Institute for Public Policy.

My contribution to the debate will concern the impact of the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty on extended deterrence and allied assurance. It may not surprise you that I will argue that the ABM Treaty and its legacy continue to undermine both extended deterrence and allied assurance just at the time when we need them to be more effective.

ABM Treaty as the Basis of Deterrence Stability

During the Cold War, U.S. and Soviet homeland vulnerability was considered the basis for deterrence stability. The degradation of the credibility of U.S. extended deterrence and allied assurance was an unintended consequence of this vulnerability. Extended deterrence and assurance depend on allies and adversaries believing that the United States would come to its allies' defense. But how can the United States be credible if its homeland is vulnerable to a catastrophic missile attack?

As early as 1961, French President Charles de Gaulle famously doubted that the United States would be willing to trade New York for Paris. In 1979, Henry Kissinger addressed the question directly: "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."[1] This was the condition deliberately enshrined by the ABM Treaty.

But that was not the treaty's only unintended consequence that impacted allies.

The Clinton Administration decided that the United States would not build certain radars to provide theater-range interceptors with the best possible data while the ABM Treaty was in force. This decreased their potential effectiveness and set back progress in U.S. regional missile defense. As the need for these systems became more urgent, the United States started to press up against its interpretation of arms control restrictions that originally had nothing to do with theater missile defense. Had the Clinton Administration been successful in setting limits on theater missile defenses with a "demarcation" of the ABM Treaty, U.S. regional

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

missile defenses today would be even more hampered, leaving allies and U.S. forces abroad more vulnerable.

Why are theater missile defenses important for allies? This audience is well familiar with the Iraqi use of Scud missiles against Israel in an effort to draw it into the First Gulf War. This would have disrupted the U.S. coalition with other Arab states.[2] Saudi Arabia reportedly waited four days to request U.S. intervention in Iraq following the fall of Kuwait, partly due to the lack of Saudi confidence that the United States would be able to shield it from ground and air attacks.[3]

The Bush Administration withdrew from the ABM Treaty in 2002. But the treaty is the ultimate zombie. We may have thought it was dead, but its Cold War "balance of terror" thinking continues to shape U.S. missile defense policy.

Beyond the Legacy of Mutual Vulnerability

Considerable opposition has existed against U.S. homeland missile defense beyond those capabilities designed against rogue states, even though the nuclear security environment is becoming worse. The United States is continuing to choose this vulnerability, and it struggles to stay ahead of North Korea's missile and nuclear programs. The arguments for remaining so vulnerable harken back to the Cold War notions of relative cost, and deterrence and arms control instability.

Today, Washington relies on expensive, fixed, ground-based interceptors with limited effectiveness. There is continued opposition to strategic missile defenses capable of countering a modest number of rogue offensive missiles because it could be appreciably effective against limited Russian and Chinese missile attacks. The lack of funding for advanced missile defense concepts illustrates the point.

I would be remiss not to mention that some allies believed the United States would retreat to a "fortress" if it had a robust missile defense system, or that they bought into U.S. arguments that missile defenses are destabilizing, too expensive, and a direct cause of an arms race. This should not stop us. On strategic issues, allies usually follow where the United States leads. In fact, there is no better example of this dynamic than the ABM Treaty.

We went from allies buying into the ABM Treaty logic, to them supporting the U.S. withdrawal, to now having a NATO-wide agreement on the need to protect populations from missile attacks. We also have a robust international cooperation. We literally cannot produce missile defense assets fast enough to satisfy allied demand. That is partially a reaction to Russia's missile use against Ukraine.

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[2] Michael W. Ellist and Jeffrey Record, "Theatre Ballistic Missile Defense and US Contingency Operations," *Parameters*, Vol. XXII, No. 1 (Spring 1992), pp. 11-12, available at https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/tr/pdf/ADA246696.pdf.

[3] Ibid., p. 17.

U.S. Alliances Would Benefit from Strong Missile Defense

In as much as the United States is not developing missile defenses to counter adversaries' systems, it is undermining the credibility of its extended deterrence and allied assurance. At a minimum, a homeland missile defense designed to defeat a major adversary's coercive capabilities would strengthen deterrence. It would raise the threshold for their attack since an adversary would have to consider using a larger number of weapons to have a high degree of confidence he will achieve his objectives.[4] Protecting military infrastructure, often co-located with populated areas, could give the United States more time to implement a strategy with the highest potential for de-escalation and save a number of civilian lives in the process.[5] Perhaps in a sign of a more hopeful future for missile defense, the bipartisan 2023 Strategic Posture Commission recommends the United States develop and field homeland integrated air and missile defense that can deter and defeat coercive attacks by Russia and China, and determine the capabilities needed to stay ahead of the North Korean threat.[6] The strategic benefits of a comprehensive missile defense system would be even greater, because they would obviate massive investments our adversaries have made in their missile forces.

Importantly for extended deterrence and assurance, having a comprehensive homeland missile defense system would strengthen U.S. credibility. It would make it more believable that the United States will, indeed, come to defense of its allies, even at the risk of an adversary's retaliation against the U.S. homeland.[7] Missile defenses could also lower damage should deterrence fail, including in instances of accidental launches. They are essential in an environment with two nuclear peers, where the United States has to be concerned by China's in addition to Russia's nuclear weapons.[8]

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David J. Trachtenberg
David J. Trachtenberg is Vice President of the National Institute for Public Policy and served as Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Policy from 2017-2019.

I'd like to take a few minutes to offer some of my thoughts on how arms control has impacted extended deterrence and assurance and what we should do about it.

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[4] Matthew Costlow, *Vulnerability is No Virtue and Defense is No Vice: The Strategic Benefits of Expanded U.S. Homeland Missile Defense*, *Occasional Paper* Vol. 2, No. 9 (Fairfax, VA: National Institute Press, September 2022), pp. 25-25, available at https://nipp.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/OP-Vol.-2-No.-9.pdf.

[5] Ibid., p. 28.

[6] Congressional Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States, *America's Strategic Posture, The Final Report of the Congressional Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States*, Institute for Defense Analysis, 2023, p. x, available at https://www.ida.org/-/media/feature/publications/a/am/americas-strategic -posture/strategic-posture-commission-report.ashx.

[7] Costlow, "Vulnerability is No Virtue and Defense is No Vice: The Strategic Benefits of Expanded U.S. Homeland Missile Defense," op. cit., pp. 33-36.

[8] Ibid., p. 37.

First, it seems clear that the way the United States has practiced arms control in the past has contributed to growing allied concerns over the efficacy and credibility of American extended deterrence security guarantees. The examples provided by my colleagues reinforce this conclusion. And while the current prospects for arms control appear grim indeed, the possibility that arms control will once again become a U.S. priority cannot be discounted.

With this in mind, the United States should adopt some fundamental principles in order to ensure that any future arms control agreement serves U.S. national security interests, enhances overall deterrence, and assures allies of the credibility of the U.S. extended deterrent and American security guarantees.

For example, *first and foremost*, the United States must develop an adequate strategy for a two nuclear peer environment, resource it appropriately, and procure the necessary forces and capabilities before developing any arms control proposals. As the bipartisan Strategic Posture Commission concluded, this is a necessary prerequisite to ensure arms control aligns with national security requirements. The United States must place primacy on the requirements for deterrence, extended deterrence, and assurance, and any arms control proposals must be subservient to and consistent with U.S. deterrence objectives.

Second, any future arms control agreements should allow for sufficient flexibility such that the quantity and characteristics of U.S. forces can adapt to changing strategic circumstances. An agreement that allows the United States to possess a range of deployed and reserve systems is preferable to one that locks the United States into a static number over a period of many years. It would also be more responsive to possible shifts in U.S. extended deterrence and assurance considerations.

In this regard, an agreement like the 2002 Moscow Treaty, which allowed the United States to deploy between 1,700 and 2,200 strategic nuclear weapons, makes more sense in a dynamic security environment than an agreement like the New START Treaty, which imposed a static quantitative limit of 1,550 on deployed U.S. strategic weapons for 10 (now 15) years. In this case, the desire for greater predictability may actually work against the objective of stability.

Moreover, as Colin Gray recognized, equal numbers do not necessarily translate into an equitable outcome, especially since the United States is thousands of miles away from the areas of potential conflict while U.S. adversaries enjoy the advantage of geographic proximity. The tyranny of time and distance works to the U.S. disadvantage.[9]

Third, U.S. extended deterrence and allied assurance requirements must be considered in any arms control negotiation. To this end, the views of allies and strategic partners should inform the U.S. negotiating posture. An agreement that is seen by U.S. allies as eroding the credibility of American security guarantees will likely create instabilities that could negatively impact regional security and potentially undermine U.S. nonproliferation policy should allies decide to acquire their own nuclear weapons to ensure their own security.

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[9] For a more detailed elaboration on this point, see B. A. Wellnitz, *Los Alamos Scientific Laboratory panel on tactical nuclear warfare. Report of the fifth meeting (short title: TAC-5), April 5-6, 1977*, pp.73-78, available at https://www.osti.gov/servlets/purl/7091279.

Fourth, future arms control negotiations should focus on removing those areas of adversary advantage that directly undercut U.S. extended deterrence and assurance requirements. This includes seeking to reduce Russia's enormous advantage in non-strategic nuclear systems that pose a direct threat to NATO Europe. Putin's recent statement that the United States would likely not come to Europe's defense because Russia has "many times more" non-strategic nuclear weapons than the United States and that therefore Europe is "more or less defenseless" is an ominous commentary on the credibility of U.S. extended deterrence.[10]

In addition, China's expansive nuclear buildup is also a concern to U.S. regional allies. The United States should improve its deterrent against potential Chinese aggression. This might help to convince China that its reluctance to engage in arms control talks is more detrimental than beneficial to Beijing's long-term interests.

Fifth, arms control limitations on missile defenses must be avoided. Despite calls by some to encourage adversary interest in arms control by putting strategic defenses on the negotiating table, improved and expanded homeland missile defenses not only strengthen overall deterrence, but they help bolster the credibility of U.S. extended deterrence. By reducing the level of damage expectancy should deterrence fail and expanding the decision space for a possible response, U.S. resolve to confront aggression against allies is reinforced. As Herman Kahn noted, without some means of protecting the homeland, U.S. threats to defend allies may be seen as incredible, as Putin's comments suggest.

Finally, though verification protocols are essential for any arms control agreement, the United States must develop a clear compliance and enforcement policy to address any violations. This policy should be developed in consultation with U.S. allies. Fred Ikle's 1961 *Foreign Affairs* article, "After Detection—What?," remains relevant more than six decades after its publication. In that article, he stated, "detecting violations is not enough. What counts are the political and military consequences of a violation once it has been detected, since these alone will determine whether or not the violator stands to gain in the end."[11]

In light of the history of arms control violations by the Soviet Union and Russia, any agreement that ignores this fundamental principle is unlikely to be in the U.S. national security interest and will likely cause fissures among allies over how to respond appropriately.

It should be recognized that, at present, the prospects for arms control that enhances the credibility of U.S. security guarantees to allies and strategic partners are slim, indeed. While U.S. deterrence policies should not be determined solely by allied considerations, as long as extended deterrence and assurance remain important ingredients in U.S. national security

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[10] "US wouldn't rescue allies in nuclear war—Putin," *RT,* June 7, 2024, available at https://www.rt.com/russia/598987-us-allies-nuclear-war-putin/

[11] Fred Charles Iklé, "After detection—What?," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 39, No. 2 (Jan., 1961), p. 208, available at https://www.jstor.org/stable/20029480?saml_data=eyJzYW1sVG9rZW4iOiI0NzhkYWQwMC1mYTU1LTQxNzktYThlMC1iZDhlNDBjYTZiYzAiLCJpbnN0aXR1dGlvbklkcyI6WyI5ZDY5N2Y2Mi01MzA4LTRkMzctOTM3ZC0wZDE1NWFmNWExY2UiXX0&seq=1.

policy, the United States can ill afford to ignore the concerns of its alliance partners. The stakes are simply too great.

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