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The Pernicious Effects of Arms Control Misconceptions on Extended Deterrence and Assurance

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NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC POLICY

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Preface

Credible U.S. extended deterrence, and the corresponding assurance of allies it provides, are keys to the cohesion of long-standing U.S. alliances—which, in turn, contribute critically to U.S. security, particularly given the looming entente of hostile authoritarian powers seeking to overturn the existing world order. The credibility of U.S. extended deterrence and allied assurance are important because U.S. alliances are important. This study presents an analysis that is as significant as it is unique: U.S. and allied eagerness for arms control notwithstanding, a systematic assessment of enduring U.S. arms control enthusiasms demonstrates their harmful effects on the credibility of Washington's extended nuclear deterrent and the assurance of allies.

This analysis does not limit the assessment of arms control enthusiasms to the terms and consequences of negotiated treaties and initiatives, although it includes them. The U.S. arms control agenda and related accords are a reflection of the common concepts and beliefs about arms control, deterrence, opponents, and nuclear weapons that rationalize them—basic ideas that have enduring effects on U.S. nuclear policies long after the duration of specific accords. Consequently, the definition of arms control enthusiasms for the purpose of this study includes accords and initiatives, but equally important are the concepts and beliefs that constitute their rationales. Following careful consideration, the conclusion presented here is that arms control treaties, agreements, and their underlying rationales have harmed the credibility of U.S. extended deterrence and the assurance of allies, and thus undermined the viability of U.S.-led alliances. In short, Washington's frequent hubris, and shallow, occasionally recklessly naïve underlying thinking have led to treaties, agreements and initiatives that have both frustrated stated U.S. arms control goals and undermined extended deterrence and allied assurance.

The fundamental corresponding recommendation following from this study is that, in an unprecedentedly dangerous threat environment in which strong alliances will be essential to U.S. security, Washington must finally depart from the concepts and beliefs about arms control, deterrence, opponents, and nuclear weapons that have contributed to the erosion of extended deterrence credibility and allied assurance.

This *Occasional Paper* elaborates in some detail the study's analysis, conclusions, and recommendations. Supporting and related analyses are presented in a series of articles appearing in National Institute's *Information Series*, a corresponding *Occasional Paper* by Dr. Michaela Dodge that is based on interviews with numerous experts from allied countries, and an *Occasional Paper* by Hon. David Trachtenberg on U.S. force planning standards.

I would like to thank my colleagues at National Institute for their outstanding contributions to this study, and Dr. Kathleen Bailey, Amb. Robert Joseph, and Hon. Franklin Miller, renowned arms control, nuclear policy and alliance experts, for reviewing and commenting on parts of this study. Great thanks and appreciation also are due to Amy Joseph for keeping meticulous track of the many, ever-maturing and -expanding parts of this study, and for preparing a difficult manuscript for publication, and to the Sarah Scaife and Smith Richardson foundations for supporting the research that went into this study and its publication.

Dr. Keith B. Payne
Study Director

Executive Summary

Introduction

The U.S. alliance system is critical to American security. It is a unique U.S. advantage; neither Russia nor China has anything remotely comparable. Allies are a critical element of U.S. power vis-à-vis contemporary foes. They provide political, operational and material support for American security goals.

Credible U.S. extended deterrence and the assurance it provides allies are critical to alliance cohesion. Key allies have emphasized that, if U.S. extended deterrence no longer is credible, they will need to pursue alternatives for their security, including acquiring nuclear weapons. Most of those alternatives hold potentially severe downsides for alliance cohesion and, by extension, U.S. security. It is no overstatement to conclude that credible extended deterrence is essential to allied assurance, alliance cohesion, and non-proliferation. If credible extended deterrence crumbles, assurance will crumble, and alliances will crumble—sparking a likely cascade of nuclear proliferation; the relationships are that direct and serious.

Yet, U.S. alliances are under great pressure to adapt to unprecedented structural problems that could otherwise lead to their dissolution. Since the end of the Cold War, interrelated structural problems have arisen that undermine credible extended deterrence, and thus the U.S. system of alliances. Structural problems are political and material realities that cannot be papered over by robust words and makeshift solutions out of Washington.

One of these problems is the declining credibility of America's extended deterrent and related assurance of allies in the context of hostile Russian and Chinese goals, a growing Sino-Russian entente and Russo-North Korean alliance, and their buildup of conventional and nuclear

force capabilities. One typically unexamined source of this particular structural problem is the U.S. arms control approach, including its norms, and their underlying assumptions and rationale. The weakening of America's extended deterrent amid growing threats is, in part, an unintended consequence of U.S. bipartisan arms control enthusiasms, but it is no less real. The pernicious consequences of American arms control practice for extended deterrence, assurance, and alliances are increasingly apparent.

A long-standing U.S. arms control agenda has unintentionally helped to degrade extended deterrence credibility and assurance, and thus contributed to the challenging realities confronting U.S. alliances. This U.S. arms control agenda that endangers America's global alliance system is a reflection of common concepts and beliefs about arms control, deterrence, nuclear weapons and opponents, and optimistic expectations regarding the international system; these views shape the goals and practice of arms control. For example, the percentage of GDP that Washington devotes to defense dropped from five percent in 1990, to under three percent in 2024. Overly optimistic expectations of amicable relations among great powers, including with Russia and China, clearly drove this precipitous decline and, correspondingly, Washington's arms control expectations and agenda.

Allies have generally supported the U.S. arms control agenda, given American posturing and their own internal politics—but that does not lessen the reality of its harmful consequences. The problem it has created for extended deterrence and assurance is that U.S. actions intended to advance Washington's arms control agenda and norms have contributed to the extended deterrence and assurance gaps that the United States now must fix. By undercutting extended deterrence and assurance, the U.S. pursuit of its arms control agenda has actually contributed to doubts

about extended deterrence credibility and increased incentives for some allies and partners to acquire independent nuclear capabilities—an effect that is wholly contrary to Washington’s arms control agenda itself. As a result, Washington must now scramble to solve a proliferation problem its arms control agenda has helped to create.

The U.S. agenda and approach that have caused contemporary deterrence and assurance problems—and thus endanger alliances—can be corrected with smarter policy guidance, 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 individuals and institutions with deeply invested interests in traditional U.S. arms control thinking and norms. But it is necessary.

Multiple separate case studies illustrate how specific U.S. arms control endeavors have led to results that have undercut extended deterrence and assurance—and thereby also contributed to proliferation incentives given the essential role credible extended deterrence plays in moderating those incentives. These case studies include the following:

The 1972 ABM Treaty and its Enduring Stability Rationale

The ABM Treaty intentionally codified the vulnerability of the U.S. homeland to Soviet strategic missiles and severely restricted missile defense development options. At the time, this was deemed necessary to end the “spiraling” arms race and ensure deterrence “stability.” This supposedly “stabilizing” vulnerability, however, has degraded the credibility of the U.S. extended deterrent and thus U.S. assurance goals by cementing the question of whether the United States would risk intercontinental nuclear war, and thus its own destruction, in support of a

distant ally in jeopardy. Some U.S. and allied officials find the credibility of that commitment to be suspect, given the risk to a fully vulnerable U.S. homeland. Washington's continued willful perpetuation of U.S. homeland vulnerability to Russian and Chinese missiles—a legacy of the thinking behind the ABM Treaty—magnifies the coercive power of these opponents' limited nuclear threats intended to exploit Washington's manifest fears of escalation, and thereby limit U.S. options in the defense of allies.

The U.S. homeland missile defense system remains severely limited and is not intended to address the Chinese or Russian limited missile threats that undermine the credibility of U.S. extended deterrence efforts. This credibility problem will grow as China, Russia, North Korea, and perhaps others continue to advance their missile programs, aggressive agendas and coercive nuclear threats. Expanded U.S. defenses capable of addressing such threats would, finally, move Washington beyond its Cold War thinking about missile defense and the corresponding ABM Treaty (which the Soviet Union manifestly violated), and provide a potentially critical level of societal protection against limited threats, strengthen extended deterrence, and contribute to the viability of U.S. alliances.

The 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty

The withdrawal and elimination of most U.S. regional nuclear forces worldwide, including via the INF Treaty, contributed to current structural alliance problems that appear to have no easy solution. The United States traditionally emphasized forward-deployed, theater nuclear systems that would lower the risk of U.S.-Soviet homeland-to-homeland exchanges and thereby increase the

credibility of the U.S. extended nuclear deterrent for U.S. allies.

The Reagan Administration, however, decided early on to pursue the elimination of intermediate-range Soviet nuclear forces, particularly including Moscow's SS-20 ballistic missile. After Washington and NATO successfully deployed U.S. intermediate-range nuclear systems to NATO Europe, the Soviet Union agreed to the INF Treaty in 1987, which required the "destruction of the Parties' ground-launched ballistic and cruise missiles with ranges of between 500 and 5,500 kilometers, their launchers and associated support structures and support equipment within three years after the Treaty enters into force."

At the time of the INF Treaty, many U.S. officials emphasized that, for extended deterrence credibility, the United States and NATO needed to modernize the theater nuclear forces not covered under the Treaty to offset the loss of intermediate-range nuclear forces because these non-strategic nuclear forces took on a greater deterrence role with the elimination of the intermediate-range U.S. options. Within three years after the signing of the INF Treaty, however, nearly all the planned theater nuclear modernization programs that had helped to rationalize the INF Treaty also were cut back or eliminated. As a consequence, the United States was forced to rely more heavily on its intercontinental-nuclear forces for extended deterrence - with the attendant degradation of its extended deterrence credibility.

The INF Treaty, and the U.S. arms control-related drive to "reduce the role" of nuclear weapons in general, have contributed to an extreme imbalance in theater nuclear weapons in favor of Russia and China. That imbalance appears to have emboldened Russia to issue reckless nuclear threats and calls into question the credibility of U.S. extended deterrence commitments. It also has contributed

to increased concern among some key allies about U.S. extended deterrence credibility.

The 1991-1992 Presidential Nuclear Initiatives

The Presidential Nuclear Initiatives (PNIs) of 1991-1992 were extensive in their scope. At the time, U.S. allies were generally quite supportive of the PNIs and hoped the vast nuclear reductions could further solidify improved political relations with Russia and usher in political stability and a "peace dividend" of fiscal savings. The PNIs were a product, in part, of the belief in Washington that the nuclear weapons so eliminated were of greatly reduced importance in an emerging more cooperative "new world order." It is now quite apparent that Beijing and Moscow do not share this belief about the global order or their own nuclear forces.

The September 1991 PNI eliminated ground-launched tactical nuclear weapons; withdrew tactical nuclear weapons from the Navy and eliminated all but the nuclear-armed Tomahawk (TLAM-N); de-alerted all strategic bombers; de-alerted Minuteman II missiles slated for elimination under the START Treaty; cancelled the mobility programs for the Peacekeeper and Small ICBMs; and, cancelled the short-range attack missile II (SRAM-II). President Bush called on Moscow to work with the United States to eliminate ICBMs with multiple warheads. While Moscow's initial response included some reciprocal actions, the hoped-for reciprocity ultimately did not take place.

On January 28, 1992, President Bush outlined some additional steps the United States was taking unilaterally, but again, with a call for reciprocal action from Russia. As the Soviet/Russian threat appeared to recede, there was no apparent role for U.S. ground-based short-range non-strategic nuclear weapons in Europe or Asia. This consideration, plus the promise of a safer and smaller arsenal, with all the attendant fiscal savings, made the PNIs

relatively uncontroversial. These reductions roughly coincided with the deep reduction in U.S. intermediate-range nuclear forces under the INF Treaty.

In addition, NATO's Nuclear Planning Group decided in October 1991, shortly after the first PNI announcement, that it would reduce the number of nuclear gravity bombs reportedly from 1,400 to 700 deployed at a relatively small number of potentially vulnerable bases. This action, when paired with the U.S. elimination of many intermediate-range nuclear forces under the INF Treaty, and the elimination/removal of ground-launched non-strategic nuclear forces under the September PNI, left the United States with only a greatly reduced number of dual-capable aircraft-delivered nuclear gravity bombs forward deployed in Europe. In Asia, the effects were even more pronounced—a complete removal of all forward-deployed nuclear weapons from South Korea.

U.S. officials generally were optimistic in the years after the PNIs about future deterrence requirements. Congress began cutting Department of Energy (DOE) programs to the point where officials in charge of nuclear weapons production publicly warned that the cuts were too much, too soon. Unfortunately, the assumptions behind the PNIs, such as amity with, and reciprocal behavior by Moscow, proved illusory. The factors that combined at a time and place in history to produce the PNIs ended relatively quickly.

The PNIs effectively removed most theater nuclear capabilities and options for extended deterrence—essentially compelling Washington to rely more on conventional forces and the U.S. strategic nuclear arsenal for its extended nuclear deterrence burden. Some allies question the credibility of a U.S. extended deterrence strategy that, by necessity, must rely heavily on strategic nuclear options. The absence of U.S. non-strategic nuclear options in the Indo-Pacific only worsens the extended

deterrence outlook for allies there, as the United States must rely heavily on its strategic nuclear arsenal to deter opportunistic aggression in future crises with Russia or China.

The non-strategic nuclear capabilities covered under the PNIs were a critical element of extended deterrence during the Cold War but, as the threat they were built to deter appeared to end, they were eliminated. Now, with an aged nuclear infrastructure and no new non-strategic nuclear capability in the program of record until perhaps the mid-2030s, some key allies lack confidence in the U.S. extended nuclear deterrent and Washington is hard-pressed to offer credible assurances to strengthen its alliances. Allies once again see U.S. extended deterrence and assurance as irreplaceable. But the legacy effects of the PNIs (in conjunction with the legacy effects of the INF Treaty) effectively constrain the United States from strengthening its regional nuclear deterrence capabilities in a timely manner. Given Russia's and China's focused modernization and buildup of theater nuclear capabilities and prospective limited nuclear escalation threats, the gap between what is needed for U.S. extended deterrence credibility and what the United States can provide will widen over the next decade. The PNIs, and underlying thinking regarding nuclear weapons and the "new world order," have contributed to the harsh realities confronting U.S. alliances.

The 2010 Elimination of TLAM-N and Corresponding Opposition to SLCM-N

An illuminating case study is the U.S. on-again, off-again pursuit of nuclear-armed sea-launched cruise missiles, specifically the Tomahawk Land Attack Missile (TLAM-N) and the Sea-Launched Cruise Missile (SLCM-N). This history illustrates how Washington's policies and actions – stemming, at least in part, from its commitment to reducing

the number and role of nuclear weapons – have contributed to allies’ increasing doubts regarding the credibility of U.S. extended deterrence, and thus have increased the potential for nuclear proliferation.

TLAM-N, from its inception in the 1970s, was strongly linked to extended deterrence and assurance missions, given its capability to be deployed regionally and its potential worldwide deterrence presence. U.S. officials assured European allies that the United States could eliminate its intermediate-range nuclear weapons under the 1987 INF Treaty without undermining extended deterrence because it would retain TLAM-N. Some allies came to see TLAM-N as uniquely relevant to extended deterrence and their assurance.

As the Cold War ended, however, the United States decided to remove TLAM-N from its surface combat ships and submarines, keeping the missiles in storage for redeployment if needed in time of a crisis. The plan for redeployment, reportedly was “farcical,” and the Obama Administration’s 2010 *Nuclear Posture Review Report* (NPR) codified the decision to retire TLAM-N unilaterally. The 2010 NPR explicitly subordinated deterrence and assurance to other policy goals and priorities, i.e., non-proliferation and movement toward a world free of nuclear weapons. Perhaps most importantly, reducing the “salience,” “role,” and “number” of nuclear weapons was considered key to these highest priority goals. Washington’s elimination of TLAM-N was a reflection of that perspective and policy prioritization.

However, U.S. allies, specifically Japan and South Korea, had significant reservations about the retirement of TLAM-N based on the value they attributed to it for extended deterrence, and thus their assurance. Key allies stated that they were concerned about the continuing credibility of the U.S. extended deterrent and that TLAM-N had the force characteristics they valued for extended

deterrence and their assurance. The advanced conventional forces and missile defense that the 2010 NPR indicated would help fulfill extended deterrence requirements in the absence of TLAM-N largely failed to materialize—to expressed allied consternation.

The 2018 *Nuclear Posture Review* initiated the return of a nuclear-armed sea-launched cruise missile, now called SLCM-N, in large part to provide a needed non-strategic regional nuclear presence. This NPR explicitly connected SLCM-N with the “increasing need for flexible and low-yield options to strengthen [extended] deterrence and assurance.” The Biden Administration, however, used its 2022 *Nuclear Posture Review* to announce the program’s termination. The stated justifications for cancelling the SLCM-N program were unresponsive to allies’ expressed concerns about extended deterrence.

The Biden Administration’s drive to cancel SLCM-N appears to be part of its broader effort to signal arms control virtue and promote the goal, as stated in the 2022 NPR, of, “reducing the role of nuclear weapons in U.S. strategy.” At a time when arms control with Russia and China appears virtually frozen, that NPR asserted that arms control, *not deterrence*, is the most effective way to prevent nuclear war. Washington’s enduring zeal to reduce the role of nuclear weapons and lack of mitigating measures to sustain deterrence clearly has contributed to the unintended consequence of fanning some allies’ skepticism of U.S. credibility, thus undermining assurance. This is a problem of Washington’s own making that must be addressed. For some allies, TLAM-N was the tangible evidence of a credible U.S. extended deterrence commitment. For many in Washington, however, TLAM-N and SLCM-N were/are “low-hanging fruit” to be discarded in a continuing pursuit of reducing the role and number of nuclear weapons—in an international threat context that makes a mockery of that goal.

No First Use: Threatening Alliance Cohesion, Assurance, and Non-Proliferation

The U.S. extended nuclear deterrent is underpinned by the deterrent threat option to escalate to nuclear first use in the event of otherwise unstoppable aggression against an ally. For decades, major allies have testified as to the critical importance they attach to this nuclear escalation threat behind the U.S. extended nuclear deterrent. It is a key reason, allies insist, that they are able to stand back from pursuing their own national possession of nuclear weapons—and thus a key to U.S. nuclear non-proliferation goals.

Episodic U.S. initiatives to move to “no first use” (NFU) or “sole purpose” nuclear weapon policies—that would preclude U.S. nuclear employment in response to anything other than an opponent’s nuclear attack—would directly contradict the traditional U.S. extended nuclear deterrent commitment to allies. U.S. allies have consistently expressed sharp, substantive opposition to U.S. proposals for an NFU or “sole purpose” nuclear policy—two different titles for essentially the same policy constraint on U.S. deterrent strategies, i.e., precluding a U.S. nuclear response to an opponent’s massive conventional or cyber attack, or chemical or biological weapons (CBW) attack.

Despite this consistent, enduring allied opposition and a deteriorating national security environment, recent U.S. presidential administrations continue to signal their enthusiasm for an NFU or “sole purpose” policy in an effort to showcase their commitment to reducing the number and role of nuclear weapons. Renewed signaling by the Biden Administration of interest in NFU is only the latest in Washington’s expressions of interest in an NFU policy and, if sustained, will likely again be followed by strong allied pushback. This cycle has been repeated numerous times over the past five decades.

Washington's continuing initiatives to adopt such an arms control policy that allies expressly and repeatedly oppose, based on their serious and understandable concerns about its degrading effect on the credibility of the U.S. extended deterrent, contribute to growing allied questioning of U.S. credibility as a guarantor of their security. Numerous U.S. arms control forays toward an NFU policy contribute to allied doubts about extended deterrence and undermine U.S. efforts to assure allies regarding their security positions. In short, Washington's repeated moves in the direction of an NFU policy fan allied fears about U.S. extended deterrence credibility that, in turn, undermine U.S. efforts to sustain allied cohesion and non-proliferation goals. Rather than recognizing this problem and finally curtailing its initiatives to advance an NFU policy, or spending the enormous resources needed to find a plausible alternative to the traditional U.S. nuclear escalation threat backstopping extended deterrence, Washington continually disturbs allies with its repeated NFU forays—only to stand back following equally-repeated allied pushback. This cyclical back and forth may be seen as exemplary of U.S. deference to allied concerns. From an allied perspective, however, it can only be disturbing that the same policy battle with Washington must repeatedly be fought to stem an initiative that so obviously is contrary to the need for credible extended deterrence and allied assurance—an initiative that continues to be a stated U.S. policy aspiration.

Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

There has been little examination of the pernicious effect arms control has had on U.S. extended deterrence credibility and the assurance of allies. U.S. arms control goals, agreements and proposals, including the continuing policy limitations on U.S. strategic ballistic missile defense,

the deep reduction of non-strategic nuclear systems, and Washington's continuing aspiration for an NFU policy – intentionally or not – have contributed to allied concerns about the credibility of “ironclad” U.S. extended deterrence commitments. When Washington's policies create unintended problems for extended deterrence and assurance, it is Washington that then must seek to ameliorate those problems it has created for the alliance and itself. This is an unfortunate cycle of Washington engendering alliance problems that it must then acknowledge and address.

How have the practical effects of U.S. arms control enthusiasms and agreements undermined the perceived credibility of extended deterrence and thus the assurance of key allies? In summary, this dynamic is a consequence of: 1) the virtually unmitigated vulnerability of the U.S. homeland to Chinese and Russian missiles attributable to the legacy of the ABM Treaty and its underlying faulty conception of “stability”; 2) the extremely limited U.S. non-strategic nuclear options supporting extended deterrence and the great imbalance in those forces attributable to the legacy effects of the PNIs, the INF Treaty, the elimination of TLAM-N, and opposition to SLCM-N; 3) Washington's bipartisan push to reduce the role and number of nuclear weapons in U.S. strategy; and, 4) the prospective application of nuclear deterrence exclusively to enemy nuclear threats attributable to enduring U.S. interest in adopting an NFU or “sole purpose” nuclear policy.

The credibility of U.S. extended deterrence for allies depends on whether the United States possesses the requisite military capabilities and apparent willingness to defend the independence and territorial sovereignty of others. Whether allies and strategic partners are assured of the U.S. commitment to their security depends on their perceptions of U.S. military prowess and willingness to employ force against adversaries who threaten peace and

the existing world order. Washington's deep reluctance to engage in what may be seen as escalatory moves for fear of provoking foes has been on full display for many months in Europe and the Middle East—likely undermining the credibility of U.S. extended deterrence commitments and allied assurance.

This manifest U.S. reluctance is not simply a matter of leadership will in a vacuum; it follows from changing military realities and risks. The military balance has shifted in favor of opponents, as U.S. military capabilities—both nuclear and conventional—have declined relative to those of opponents and U.S. global power projection capabilities have contracted. Under Washington's general arms control mandate to reduce the role and number of nuclear weapons, the United States has eliminated or rejected select nuclear capabilities, particularly including theater nuclear forces. And the contemporary U.S. nuclear modernization program of record remains lethargic and unfulfilled since initially proposed by the Obama Administration nearly a decade and a half ago to promote arms control ratification by the U.S. Senate.

Allied perceptions of the United States are not simply a function of Washington's rhetoric, diplomatic or otherwise; their estimates of U.S. power compared to that of enemies also is key. Allied leaderships must make large or small decisions, virtually on a daily basis, that are affected by their judgments as to whether Washington is gaining or losing strength vis-à-vis the foes that threaten them—whether they should continue to side with the United States or hedge their bets. A trend toward decisions based on the latter judgment will ultimately prove fatal to U.S. alliances.

Continuing U.S. efforts to reduce the role of nuclear weapons—in a threat environment that sees opponents emphasizing nuclear weapons in their expansionist strategies that threaten allies—have contributed to conditions that undermine the credibility of extended

deterrence, and thus allied assurance. These conditions include America's vulnerability to Russian and Chinese coercive, limited nuclear threats, and the near elimination of U.S. non-strategic nuclear options vis-à-vis opponents who are heavily nuclear armed, cooperating, and explicitly threatening U.S. allies and partners. The challenges these conditions pose for the continuing credibility of the U.S. extended deterrent and allied assurance cannot be "papered over" by robust words, ambiguity, or makeshift gestures from Washington because they are, in large part, based on material realities.

While arms control treaties and U.S. arms control enthusiasms have steadily reduced U.S. strategic and non-strategic nuclear forces over the past four decades, America's main nuclear rivals have more recently increased their nuclear forces and capabilities. This disparity clearly has degraded the credibility of the U.S. extended deterrent in the minds of some key allies who have come to rely on the United States as the ultimate guarantor of their security—and likely in the view of foes. U.S. arms control enthusiasms and actions that now undermine Western security given contemporary threat realities understandably contribute to allied skepticism regarding the future of extended deterrence and compel allies to consider their alternative options—particularly in a harsh threat environment. Those options potentially include distancing from Washington and conciliation to powerful foes, or independent acquisition of national nuclear capabilities: either such development would cause rifts in U.S.-allied relations; together they could unravel the global alliance system critical to American security.

Some senior U.S. officials continue to tout arms control as a potential solution to contemporary threats to U.S. and allied security and have been reluctant to move in ways inconsistent with past arms control endeavors. With this in mind, the United States should adopt the following

principles in order to ensure that any future agreement or initiative serves U.S. national security interests and helps to assure allies via a credible extended deterrent:

1. Expectations that China or Russia will reciprocate U.S. arms control enthusiasms ignore reality; the enduring U.S. confidence in a benign action-reaction dynamic led by U.S. self-restraint should be banished from U.S. policy planning. No member of the looming entente arrayed against the United States will respond to U.S. arms control self-restraint in a reciprocal fashion in the absence of a compelling reason to do so. There is no plausible benign “action-reaction” dynamic led by U.S. restraint at play. Foes see such U.S. gestures as indications of weakness rather than incentives to reciprocate. The means to encourage foes to accept limitations is their fear of the prospective U.S. capabilities they will face in the absence of limitations. Consequently, if Washington seeks to encourage new arms agreements, or the resuscitation of past agreements, it must devote the resources needed toward the programs that can actually facilitate agreements, and will strengthen deterrence if agreements do not materialize.
2. The United States must develop a deterrence strategy for a two-nuclear-peer environment and an entente among multiple hostile foes, resource that strategy appropriately, and procure the capabilities necessary for credible deterrence, including extended deterrence, *before formulating any arms control proposals*. This is a necessary prerequisite to help ensure any arms control aligns with national security requirements.

3. No arms control initiative should hinder the U.S. force posture flexibility that enables the quantity and characteristics of U.S. forces needed to adapt to changing strategic circumstances, including rapidly worsening political conditions. In a harsh threat context, an agreement that enables the United States to possess a wide range of deployed, reserve and prospective systems is preferable to one that locks the United States into a reduced static number over a period of years. A healthy U.S. nuclear infrastructure that can support such responsiveness is essential to prudent arms control considerations.
4. U.S. extended deterrence and allied assurance requirements, including the prospect for changes in those requirements, must shape any arms control negotiation. An agreement that erodes the credibility of American security guarantees will undermine extended deterrence, assurance, and U.S. nonproliferation goals—and thus U.S. security.
5. Any future arms control negotiations should focus on removing those areas of Russian and Chinese advantage that directly undercut the credibility of U.S. extended deterrence. This includes seeking to reduce Russia's enormous advantage in non-strategic nuclear systems that pose a direct threat to NATO Europe. Unless, as seems implausible at this point, verifiable, deep reduction of Chinese and Russian non-strategic options occurs, the United States should strengthen, not further constrain, its conventional and nuclear extended deterrent capabilities against their aggression. Specifically, U.S. non-strategic nuclear options must be expanded in Europe and the Indo-Pacific; realistic U.S. moves in this direction may, in fact,

be necessary to move Moscow and Beijing to more moderate behaviors.

6. Arms control limitations on missile defenses must be avoided. Improved and expanded homeland missile defenses would help bolster the credibility of U.S. extended deterrence by helping to deny Moscow and Beijing the power over Washington of their limited coercive nuclear threats, expand the decision space for a possible response, and possibly reduce the level of damage should deterrence fail.
7. Given the ample history of Moscow's blatant noncompliance with arms control agreements, including in case studies discussed above, and Beijing's purposeful lack of transparency, thorough verification, enforcement protocols, and exit provisions are essential for any future arms control agreement. If Washington is to engage in arms control seriously, it must develop a clear, effective compliance and enforcement policy in consultation with U.S. allies. This high bar for arms control verification and enforcement is likely impossible given Moscow's and Beijing's contemporary goals and actions.

In conclusion, while U.S. deterrence and arms control policies should not be set by allies, as long as U.S. alliances remain critical to American national security—which will continue to be the case for the foreseeable future—these policies should be informed by the requirements for credible extended deterrence and assurance of allies. Washington cannot continue to overlook the pernicious effects its arms control enthusiasms have had on the credibility of extended deterrence and assurance. The stakes simply are too great.

Structural Problems and Misconceptions

The U.S. alliance system is critical to American security. It is a unique U.S. advantage; neither Russia nor China has anything remotely comparable. Allies provide political, operational and material support for American security goals. This has been true since then Lieutenant Colonel George Washington was a 22-year-old soldier in the French and Indian Wars.

While there always is friction with allies, and some “entrapment” risks,¹ allies are a critical element of U.S. power vis-à-vis contemporary foes, including Russia, China, North Korea and Iran. Yet, U.S. alliances are under great pressure to adapt to unprecedented structural problems that could otherwise lead to their dissolution. One of these realities is the declining credibility of America’s extended deterrent and related assurance of allies in the context of hostile Russian and Chinese goals, a growing Sino-Russian entente and Russo-North Korean alliance, and their buildup of conventional, nuclear, and other strategic force capabilities.

One typically unexamined source of the ebbing credibility of the U.S. nuclear “umbrella” for allies is the U.S. arms control approach, including its norms and the misconceptions underlying them. There are few, if any, open discussions of the manifest fact that Washington’s arms control enthusiasms have produced results that have fallen far short of the expressed goals,² and now help to undermine extended deterrence. This is, perhaps, an

¹ See the discussion in, Glenn H. Snyder, “The Security Dilemma in Alliance Politics,” *World Politics*, Vol. 36, No. 4 (July 1984), pp. 461-495.

² See, David J. Trachtenberg, Michaela Dodge, and Keith B. Payne, *The “Action-Reaction” Arms Race Narrative vs. Historical Realities* (Fairfax, VA: National Institute Press, 2021), passim, available at <https://nipp.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Action-Reaction-pub.pdf>.

unintended consequence of U.S. bipartisan arms control enthusiasms, but it is no less real. It is unfashionable to discuss this inconvenient truth because many in Washington deem arms control to be an independent strategy and highest priority.

Nevertheless, Washington should care about this inconvenient truth because U.S. alliances are increasingly unsettled, and one of the sources of this development is the U.S. agenda for, and practice of, arms control. Allied governments, driven by U.S. posturing and their own internal politics at the time, often have endorsed U.S. arms control endeavors. That point, however, is irrelevant to this discussion and does not lessen the reality of that agenda's harmful consequences. Regardless of that support, the pernicious consequences of American arms control misconceptions and practice for extended deterrence, assurance, and alliances are increasingly apparent in a dramatically worsening threat context.

This introduction offers seven main points on this subject.

Seven Main Points

One: Extended Deterrence, Assurance and Alliance Cohesion

Credible U.S. extended deterrence and the assurance it provides allies are critical to alliance cohesion. Extended deterrence and assurance often are presented as distinct, separate goals. They are not. Credible extended deterrence is the primary means of assurance. Allies have emphasized that coming under the U.S. extended deterrent, including nuclear deterrence, is a main reason for aligning with the

United States. Finnish officials have said this most recently.³

Allies, including Germany, have also said that a credible U.S. extended nuclear deterrent is the security guarantee that enables them to refrain from seeking their own independent nuclear capabilities and that, if U.S. extended deterrence no longer is credible, they may need to pursue alternatives for their security—including independent nuclear capabilities.⁴ Most of those alternatives hold potentially severe downsides for alliance cohesion and, by extension, U.S. security.

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

Two: Structural Problems Challenging Alliances

Since the end of the Cold War, interrelated structural problems have arisen that undermine credible extended deterrence, and thus the U.S. system of alliances. Structural problems are political and material realities that cannot be papered over even by robust words out of Washington. These realities have no easy fixes.

These structural problems include: 1) an unprecedented threat context in terms of opponents' military power, revolutionary goals and emerging cooperation/

³ See, Anne Kauranen, "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-2024-03-01/.al>.

⁴ See, for example, the discussion in, Michael Rühle, "Germany and Extended Deterrence," *Journal of Policy & Strategy*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (2024), pp. 19-38.

coordination; 2) the degradation of the credibility of Washington's extended deterrent given America's reduced relative and absolute conventional and nuclear military capabilities since the end of the Cold War;⁵ 3) the reality that most allies to whom Washington has given "ironclad" security guarantees individually are quite weak militarily relative to the threats they face; and, 4) the fact that U.S. great power opponents are sovereign actors, while America's alliances consist of many diverse sovereign parties with competing interests and perceptions.

This fourth structural problem is potentially pernicious and warrants elaboration. Surveys consistently reveal deep public opposition within many allied states to enter into war on behalf of an ally. In one poll, only 34 percent of Germans, 25 percent of Greeks and Italians, 33 percent of Hungarians, 32 percent of Turks, and 41 percent of French agreed that their countries should go to war on behalf of a NATO ally. Only five national publics were above 50 percent in this regard.⁶ In a recent poll, a majority of the publics in only two out of 10 NATO states surveyed supported deploying their nations' troops to secure Latvian borders in a Ukraine-type crisis there.⁷ And, in late 2023,

⁵ See David J. Trachtenberg, *The Demise of the "Two-War Strategy" and Its Impact on Extended Deterrence and Assurance, Occasional Paper*, Vol. 4, No. 6 (Fairfax, VA: National Institute Press, June 2024), passim, available at <https://nipp.org/papers/the-demise-of-the-two-war-strategy-and-its-impact-on-extended-deterrence-and-assurance-david-j-trachtenberg/>.

⁶ See, for example, Walter Russell Mead, "Europeans Try to Have it Both Ways," *Wall Street Journal*, February 18, 2020, available at <https://www.wsj.com/articles/europeans-try-to-have-it-both-ways-11581974424>; and, John Vandiver, "Poll: Willingness to defend allies from attack low in some NATO states," *Stars and Stripes*, June 10, 2015, available at <http://www.stripes.com/news/europe/poll-willingness-to-defend-allies-from-attack-low-in-some-NATO-states-1.351606#document/p20/a222531>.

⁷ Matthias Mahder, "Increased support for collective defence in times of threat: European public opinion before and after Russia's invasion of Ukraine," *Policy Studies* (Vol. 45, January 2024), p. 8, available at

just half of those polled in the United States favored U.S. troops defending South Korea in the event of an invasion there – a percentage that has steadily declined.⁸

This type of fractured public opinion within NATO states is important because NATO forces ultimately are controlled by their many different capitals and consensus decision-making, not by the Supreme Allied Commander. Consequently, the power that NATO would or would not bring to a fight, and how long national capitals might take to decide, is open to question. Some allies may join robustly; others may decide to do little. The much-vaunted Article V of the Atlantic Treaty does not specify the required parameters of each state's obligation.

Ignoring this political reality is evident in misleading comparisons of Russian and NATO conventional forces. NATO's combined forces often are juxtaposed to Russian forces, with the latter looking modest in comparison.⁹ The apparent intended message is that there really is not a serious Russian military threat given NATO's overwhelming conventional power, and little need for NATO nuclear capabilities for deterrence.¹⁰ That message may be comforting but it wholly ignores the reality of diverse political decision-making centers and its plausible consequences.

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/377328896_Increased_support_for_collective_defence_in_times_of_threat_European_public_opinion_before_and_after_Russia%27s_invasion_of_Ukraine.

⁸ See, Park Chan-kyong, "Should South Korea 'scare Kim' with US nuclear bombs? 'China and Russia would raise hell,'" *South China Morning Post Online* (Hong Kong), May 20, 2024, available at <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/3263120/should-south-korea-scare-kim-us-nuclear-bombs-china-and-russia-would-raise-hell>.

⁹ Tytti Erästö, "Reducing The Role Of Nuclear Weapons In Military Alliances," *SIPR Insights on Peace and Security*, No. 2024/01, (June 2024), p. 20.

¹⁰ Ibid.

Yet another structural problem is that the center of power for U.S. alliances is in the United States, and typically thousands of miles away from the likely areas of conflict—placing significant burdens on America’s capability to project power to distant locales. The U.S. capacity to marshal and deploy forces to fight multiple, distant, great power conflicts simultaneously has declined greatly since the Cold War and may be increasingly vulnerable. In contrast, China, Russia, North Korea and Iran generally border, or are much closer to, the U.S. allies that are the targets of their respective expansionist ambitions.

Three: A Self-Inflicted Structural Problem

Some of these structural problems—such as geographic proximity—are inherent in the nature of U.S. alliances. But several are self-inflicted. For example, a long-standing U.S. arms control agenda has unintentionally degraded extended deterrence and assurance, and thus contributed to the structural problems confronting U.S. alliances. This U.S. arms control agenda that endangers America’s global alliance system *is a reflection of common concepts and beliefs about arms control, deterrence, nuclear weapons and opponents, and optimistic expectations regarding the international system; these views shape the goals and practice of arms control.* For example, the percentage of GDP that Washington devotes to defense dropped from five percent in 1990 to under three percent in 2024.¹¹ Overly optimistic expectations of amicable relations among great powers, including with Russia and China, clearly drove this precipitous decline and, correspondingly, Washington’s arms control expectations and agenda.

¹¹ See, Statista Research Development, “U.S. defense outlays and forecast of the United States for 2000 to 2034,” August 27, 2024, available at <https://www.statista.com/statistics/217581/outlays-for-defense-and-forecast-in-the-us-as-a-percentage-of-the-gdp/>.

For more than three decades following the Cold War, Washington has often acted as if the expected “New World Order” was real and that great power conflicts were a thing of the past. In 1990, President George H. W. Bush emphasized the emergence of an unprecedented transition to a cooperative new order in remarks to a joint session of Congress:

A new partnership of nations has begun...We stand today at a unique and extraordinary moment ...a new world order – can emerge: a new era – freer from the threat of terror, stronger in the pursuit of justice, and more secure in the quest for peace. An era in which the nations of the world, East and West, North and South, can prosper and live in harmony. A hundred generations have searched for this elusive path to peace, while a thousand wars raged across the span of human endeavor. Today that new world is struggling to be born, a world quite different from the one we've known. A world where the rule of law supplants the rule of the jungle. A world in which nations recognize the shared responsibility for freedom and justice. A world where the strong respect the rights of the weak.¹²

In 1992, Strobe Talbott, later President Clinton’s Deputy Secretary of State, doubled down on such expectations – musing that in the 21st century, “...nationhood as we know it will be obsolete; all states will recognize a single, global authority. A phrase briefly fashionable in

¹² President George H. W. Bush, *Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the Persian Gulf Crisis and the Federal Budget Deficit*, September 11, 1990, available at <https://bush41library.tamu.edu/archives/public-papers/2217>.

the mid-20th century – ‘citizen of the world’ – will have assumed real meaning by the end of the 21st.”¹³

Despite ample evidence that a cooperative New World Order was not emerging, in 2012, a “Nuclear Policy Commission,” chaired by Gen. James Cartwright (Ret.), former Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and Commander of U.S. Strategic Command, recommended that the United States significantly reduce its total inventory of nuclear weapons given the “irrelevance” of nuclear weapons “in dealing with 21st century threats,” and because “The risk of nuclear confrontation between the United States and either Russia or China belongs to the past, not the future....”¹⁴ Now, roughly a decade later, as realists at the time predicted,¹⁵ a world in conflict has returned and the risks of nuclear confrontations with Russia and China, and North Korea (and prospectively Iran) appear to have increased dramatically.

Washington has largely chosen not to face the reality that Russian and Chinese deference to the United States after the Cold War was given grudgingly and only because

¹³Strobe Talbott, “America Abroad: The Birth of the Global Nation,” July 20, 1992, *Time.com*, available at <https://time.com/archive/6720707/america-abroad-the-birth-of-the-global-nation/#ixzz2dz1q6axw>.

¹⁴General James Cartwright (Ret.), et al., *Global Zero U.S. Nuclear Policy Commission Report* (May 2012), pp. 1, 3, 6, available at https://www.globalzero.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/gz_us_nuclear_policy_commission_report.pdf.

¹⁵In 1999, Professor Colin Gray ridiculed then-prevalent expectations of a cooperative New World Order and presciently forecasted instead, “the strong possibility that world politics two to three decades hence will be increasingly organized around the rival poles of U.S. and Chinese power,” and that China then “would menace Japan.” He also fully expected that Russia would again confront the West militarily and “immediately would threaten independent Ukraine [and] the Baltics.” See, Colin S. Gray, *The Second Nuclear Age* (London: Lynn Reiner Press, 1999), pp. 39-41.

of dominating U.S. power at the time. They had no other prudent alternatives. Absent such fleeting, overwhelming U.S. power, that cooperation was doomed to end—as it has. Yet, accustomed to the privileges of being a lone superpower, Washington appears reluctant to recognize the depth of Russian and Chinese hostility, and that their deference to the West ended with a shifting power relationship. Indeed, in Washington, U.S. relations with both continue to be dubbed “strategic competition,” suggesting a gentlemanly level of restraint and adherence to rules that defy reality because the United States is far less capable of enforcing rules—including arms control compliance.

Correspondingly, Washington has long proceeded as if its priority goal is to set a wise and virtuous arms control example for opponents eager to follow the U.S. lead. Supposedly, if the United States first restrains itself, then opponents will show reciprocal restraint.¹⁶ If not, then not. Commentators have labeled this an “iron law,”¹⁷ and Washington has often treated it as such. Numerous senior U.S. officials, for example, asserted that if Washington would forego homeland missile defense, Moscow would follow with nuclear arms reductions. But, if Washington proceeded with homeland missile defense, there could be no nuclear reductions.¹⁸ The reality, of course, is that when Washington did forego homeland missile defense in 1972, Moscow responded with an enormous strategic nuclear buildup. And, when the United States moved forward with the deployment of homeland missile defense in 2002,

¹⁶ See, Trachtenberg, Dodge, and Payne, *The “Action-Reaction” Arms Race Narrative vs. Historical Realities*, op. cit., pp. 31-38.

¹⁷ Walter Pincus, “The First Law of Nuclear Politics: Every Action Brings Reaction,” *The Washington Post*, November 28, 1999, p. B-2.

¹⁸ See McGeorge Bundy, George F. Kennan, Robert S. McNamara, and Gerard Smith, “The President’s Choice: Star Wars or Arms Control,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 63, No. 2 (Winter 1984/85), pp. 264-278.

Moscow showed great enthusiasm for the 2002 Moscow Treaty—the deepest negotiated strategic nuclear cuts to date. This history illustrates the actual reverse of the supposed “iron law” of a benign “action-reaction” dynamic led by U.S. restraint. The history of the U.S.-Soviet arms competition similarly argues strongly against such an “action-reaction” pattern.¹⁹ Secretary of Defense Harold Brown pointed to the fallacy of a benign “action-reaction” dynamic led by the United States when he observed: “Soviet [defense] spending...has shown no response to U.S. restraint—when we build, they build, when we cut, they build.”²⁰

Nevertheless, the “action-reaction” theory for U.S. self-restraint is very much alive and well,²¹ despite being

¹⁹ See, *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), p. 811; Colin S. Gray, *The Soviet-American Arms Race* (Farnborough, Hants, England: Saxon House, 1976), pp. 12-57; and, Jean-Christian Lambélet, 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.

²⁰ 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, 1st Session (Washington, D.C.: USGPO, 1979), p. 492. See also, Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, *The Soviet Propaganda Campaign Against the U.S. Strategic Defense Initiative* (Washington, D.C.: Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, 1986), p. 8.

²¹ See, for example, Bruce G. Blair, Jessica Sleight and Emma Claire Foley, *The End of Nuclear Warfighting: Moving to a Deterrence-Only Posture* (Washington, D.C.: September 2018), pp. 9, 33; and, Michael T. Klare, “Now Is Not the Time to Start an Arms Race,” *The Nation*, March 31, 2020, available at <https://www.thenation.com/article/world/coronavirus-cold-war-race/>. More recently, see Erästö, “Reducing The Role Of Nuclear Weapons In Military Alliances,” op. cit., passim; Benjamin Giltner, “A Third Continental Missile Interceptor Site?” *RealClearDefense.com*, July 8, 2024, available at <https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/>

contrary to abundant evidence that foes do not deem Washington's self-restraint to be wise or virtuous, do not emulate it unless compelled to do so,²² and that Moscow and Beijing see U.S. self-restraint as coming not from strength, but from weakness, which is provocative.²³ As Russian President Putin has bluntly put the matter: "...we have more such nuclear weapons than NATO countries. They know about it and never stop trying to persuade us to start nuclear reduction talks. Like hell we will, right? A popular phrase. Because, putting it in the dry language of economic essays, it is our competitive advantage."²⁴

Nevertheless, expectations of an action-reaction dynamic led by U.S. restraint are key to the rationale for much of the official and unofficial U.S. arms control agenda, including enduring calls for a nuclear NFU policy, for strict limits on U.S. missile defense, and for Washington's continuing push to reduce the number and role of nuclear weapons "so as to pave the way for arms control and disarmament."²⁵ These goals and the rationales behind them reflect the U.S. post-Cold War "holiday" away from

2024/07/08/a_third_continental_missile_interceptor_site_1042908.html ; and, Joe Cirincione, "Trump Has a strategic Plan for the Country: Gearing Up For Nuclear War," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, July 2, 2024, available at <https://thebulletin.org/2024/07/trump-has-a-strategic-plan-for-the-country-gearing-up-for-nuclear-war/#post-heading>.

²² Trachtenberg, Dodge, and Payne, *The "Action-Reaction" Arms Race Narrative vs. Historical Realities*, op. cit., pp. 4-11, 65-68.

²³ See, Eric Edleman and Frank Miller, "Understanding that Weakness is Provocative is Deterrence 101," *The Dispatch*, October 9, 2022, available at <https://thedispatch.com/article/understanding-that-weakness-is-provocative/>.

²⁴ Vladimir Putin, "Remarks at the Plenary session of the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum," June 16, 2023, available at <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/71445>.

²⁵ Erästö, "Reducing The Role Of Nuclear Weapons In Military Alliances," op. cit., p. 2.

serious strategic thought, and now threaten credible extended deterrence and alliance cohesion.

Four: Internal Contradictions in the U.S. Arms Control Agenda Threaten Extended Deterrence and Alliances

The problem arms control has created for extended deterrence and assurance is that U.S. actions intended to advance Washington's arms control agenda and norms have contributed to the extended deterrence and assurance gaps that the United States now must fix. Multiple internal contradictions are inherent in this archaic agenda and are near certain both to deny Washington its arms control goals and to undercut extended deterrence. Five of these are presented below:

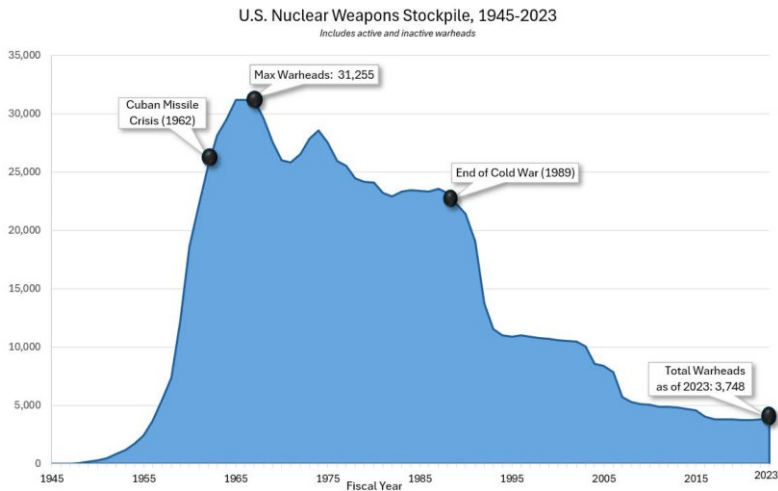
First, deep U.S. theater nuclear and conventional force reductions following the Cold War were meant to provide a virtuous arms control example for the world and strengthen stability. For example, under the 1991 Presidential Nuclear Initiative (PNI), the United States eliminated all forward-deployed short-range ground-based nuclear systems and ended deployment of tactical nuclear weapons on naval vessels and aircraft.²⁶ Yet, such moves have led to gaps in U.S. nuclear capabilities that now contribute to allied doubts regarding extended deterrence—and to an increasing interest among some for independent nuclear capabilities. The most obvious of these “gaps” is the absence of realistic U.S. non-strategic nuclear options in the Indo-Pacific theater, and the presence of only minimal remaining non-strategic capabilities in

²⁶ See, Department of State, Bureau of Arms Control, Verification and Compliance, *Adherence to and Compliance with Arms Control, Nonproliferation, and Disarmament Agreements and Commitments*, June 2020, pp. 23-26, available at <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/2020-Adherence-to-and-Compliance-with-Arms-Control-Nonproliferation-and-Disarmament-Agreements-and-Commitments-Compliance-Report.pdf>.

Europe. This places the extended nuclear deterrence burden largely on U.S. strategic nuclear forces—a burden they are ill-suited to carry credibly alone given the particularly severe escalatory risks of their employment for the United States.²⁷

The Department of Energy graphic below illustrates the steep reduction of total U.S. nuclear force numbers, including the elimination of many non-strategic nuclear forces. This steep reduction and elimination may suggest success if the ultimate U.S. goal is to reduce/eliminate the number, types and role of nuclear weapons in U.S. strategy. However, if the ultimate goal is the credible deterrence of war and attacks on allies, the consequences have been harmful.

²⁷ This point has been emphasized by former U.S. officials and expert commentators in moments of candor. In 1979, for example, Henry Kissinger remarked publicly that, “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.” See, Henry Kissinger, “The Future of NATO,” in *NATO, The Next Thirty Years*, Kenneth Myers, ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1981), p. 8. More recently, see, Michael Hochberg and Leonard Hochberg, “Our Restraint Destroys Your Deterrence,” *RealClearDefense*, February 10, 2024, available at https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2024/02/10/our_restraint_destroys_your_deterrence_1010986.html.



Source: National Nuclear Security Administration, *Transparency in the U.S. Nuclear Weapons Stockpile* (Washington, D.C.: NNSA, 2024), p. 1.

Second, U.S. nuclear force moderation and reductions following the Cold War were meant to encourage opponents to follow suit, but they have instead led Moscow to disdain America's pleading for arms control because U.S. forces are increasingly aged while Russia's are not. Sergei Ivanov, then Russian Deputy Prime Minister, made this point most succinctly: "When I hear our American partners say: 'let's reduce something else,' I would like to say to them: 'excuse me, but what we have is relatively new.' They [the United States] have not conducted any upgrades for a long time. They still use Trident [submarine-launched ballistic missiles]." ²⁸ Strategic logic validates this disdain: Why should Moscow consider eliminating largely modernized Russian nuclear forces when the United States

²⁸ Quoted in, Mark B. Schneider, "Russia's Growing Strategic Nuclear Forces and New START Treaty Compliance," *Information Series*, No. 407 (Fairfax, VA: National Institute Press, June 21, 2016), available at https://nipp.org/information_series/schneider-mark-russias-growing-strategic-nuclear-forces-and-new-start-treaty-compliance-information-series-no-407/.

has so few remaining non-strategic nuclear weapons with which to bargain and most U.S. strategic nuclear modernization programs will not mature for years, while some appear in disarray? Indeed, U.S. self-restraint may have made competition appear more potentially fruitful to Moscow and Beijing.

Third, Washington enthusiasts for nuclear disarmament based their rationale on America's fleeting unipolar conventional force superiority, i.e., U.S. conventional capabilities were deemed so superior to the rest of the world's that Washington could essentially forego nuclear weapons. Yet, of course, this well-advertised U.S. conventional superiority that supposedly made U.S. nuclear disarmament plausible was fleeting and gave opponents a powerful incentive to retain and improve their nuclear forces. This rationale for seeking nuclear disarmament was a reason opponents fully rejected the notion.

Fourth, while foes worked diligently to expand both their conventional and nuclear capabilities, Washington willingly abandoned its conventional force dominance, but continued to push reducing the role and number of nuclear weapons – as if the shifting conventional force balance had somehow become irrelevant. Clinging to the optimistic expectations engendered by the U.S. 1990s position of unparalleled power, Washington has continued to reason and behave as if that power position remains long after it has ended.

Fifth, in the past, the United States minimized homeland defense capabilities to promote deterrence stability and arms control. Yet doing so actually *facilitated* Moscow's *increased* investment in, and the expansion of, its Strategic Rocket Forces – which led to the destabilizing vulnerability of U.S. strategic nuclear forces in the 1980s. Now, the continuing minimization of U.S. homeland defenses leaves Washington fully vulnerable to Russian and Chinese

coercive, limited nuclear threats which, in turn, undercut the credibility of U.S. extended deterrence.

These five basic contradictions in the U.S. arms control agenda and approach, and the misconceptions underlying them, have contributed to the structural problem of potentially inadequate U.S. military wherewithal to meet numerous distant “ironclad” extended deterrence commitments concurrently against an increasingly powerful entente of hostile powers.

Five: Fanning Allied Motivations for Nuclear Proliferation

By undercutting extended deterrence and assurance, the U.S. pursuit of its arms control agenda has actually contributed to doubts about extended deterrence credibility and increased incentives for some allies and partners to acquire independent nuclear capabilities—an effect that is wholly contrary to Washington’s non-proliferation goals. Camille Grand, a former NATO assistant secretary-general, recently observed that, “A [European] conversation is opening up because nuclear power has regained a place in Europe’s security that, though perhaps less central than during the Cold War, is more important than what anyone could have imagined in the past 20 years.”²⁹ And, according to recent surveys, with North Korea spurning all U.S. pleading for it to “denuclearize,” almost 70 percent of South Koreans want Seoul to have independent nuclear capabilities.³⁰ South Korean Defense Minister nominee Kim

²⁹ Quoted in, Laura Kayali, Thorsten Jungholt, and Philipp Fritz, “Europe is Quietly Debating a Nuclear Future Without the US,” *Politico*, July 4, 2024, available at <https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2024/07/04/europe-us-nuclear-weapons-00166070>.

³⁰ “66 pct of South Koreans support developing own nuclear weapons – poll,” *Yonhap News Agency* (South Korea), June 27, 2024, available at https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2024/06/113_377671.ht

sponsored by the United States, Great Britain, and (ironically) Russia.³⁵

Heightened interest among some allies in the deterrent value of independent nuclear weapons is the near inevitable consequence of Washington's earlier decision to eliminate most of its non-strategic nuclear weapons in a forlorn bid to reduce the number and salience of nuclear weapons globally. As a result, Washington must now scramble to solve a proliferation problem its arms control agenda has helped to create.

Six: Case Studies Illustrating the Pernicious Effects of the U.S. Arms Control Agenda and Approach

Multiple separate case studies illustrate how specific U.S. arms control endeavors have led to results that have undercut extended deterrence and assurance – and thereby have contributed to proliferation incentives given the essential role credible extended deterrence plays in moderating those incentives. These case studies include:

- The 1972 ABM Treaty and its enduring arms control and stability rationale;
- The 1987 INF Treaty;
- The 1991-1992 Presidential Nuclear Initiatives;
- The 2010 elimination of TLAM-N and corresponding opposition to SLCM-N; and,
- The continuing aspiration of some in Washington for NFU or “sole purpose” policies.

Each of these case studies is examined separately below. How have the practical effects of these U.S. arms control enthusiasms and agreements undermined the perceived

³⁵ See, for example, Ellie Cook, “Bill Clinton: My Nuke Deal To Blame For Russia's Invasion Of Ukraine,” *Newsweek* (April 5, 2023), available at <https://www.newsweek.com/bill-clinton-ukraine-war-russia-nuclear-weapons-deal-vladimir-putin-1792682>.

credibility of extended deterrence and thus the assurance of key allies? In summary, this dynamic is a consequence of: 1) the virtually unmitigated vulnerability of the U.S. homeland to Chinese and Russian missiles attributable to the legacy of the ABM Treaty and its underlying, faulty conception of “stability”; 2) the extremely limited U.S. non-strategic nuclear options supporting extended deterrence and great imbalance in those forces attributable to the legacy effects of the INF Treaty, the PNIs, the elimination of TLAM-N, and opposition to SLCM-N; 3) Washington’s bipartisan push to reduce the role and number of nuclear weapons in U.S. strategy; and, 4) the prospective application of nuclear deterrence exclusively to nuclear threats attributable to enduring U.S. interest in adopting a no first use or “sole purpose” nuclear policy.

Seven: Rethinking the Arms Control Agenda and Practice

Finally, as noted earlier, several of the structural problems now confronting the U.S. alliance system are inherent. In contrast, the self-inflicted causes of these problems can, in principle, be rectified by changes in U.S. policies and behavior. The U.S. arms control agenda and approach that have caused contemporary deterrence and assurance problems – and thus endanger alliances – can be corrected with smarter policy guidance, 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 individuals and institutions with deeply invested interests in traditional U.S. arms control thinking and norms. But it is necessary because some senior U.S. officials continue to believe that arms control agreements prevent great power wars,³⁶ and promote arms control as the most effective

³⁶ See the comments by Assistant Secretary of State Mallory Stewart in, Steve Liewer, “Nuclear Experts Offer Shrill Warnings,” *Omaha World-*

solution to contemporary threats. The Biden Administration's 2022 *Nuclear Posture Review* repeatedly emphasizes the continuing priority attributed to arms control—asserting against all reason in the contemporary era that, "... arms control offers the most effective, durable, and responsible path to reduce the role of nuclear weapons in our strategy and to prevent their use."³⁷ If this were true, the logical priority would be on arms control vice deterrence requirements.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the U.S. system of global alliances is essential to meeting the unprecedented security challenge of a looming Chinese, Russian, North Korean, and Iranian entente. This is an ensemble of powerful foes determined to change the world, the likes of which have not been seen since the 1930s—with a key difference being that this century's set of foes possesses arsenals of weapons of mass destruction. For three decades leading up to this harsh threat context, much of Washington has been determined to see a cooperative new world order that does not exist and pursue arms control policies as if it does. In this illusory world, self-declared enemies are merely competitors, and

Herald, August 18, 2024, p. A-1, available at <https://ground.news/article/nuclear-experts-offer-shrill-warnings>.

³⁷ U.S. Department of Defense, 2022 *Nuclear Posture Review* (Washington, D.C.: Department of Defense, 2022), p. 17, available at <https://media.defense.gov/2022/Oct/27/2003103845/-1/-1/1/2022-NATIONAL-DEFENSE-STRATEGY-NPR-MDR.PDF>; and, more recently, "Japanese, U.S. ministers discuss deterrence under nuclear umbrella," *Asahi Shimbun Online* (Japan), July 29, 2024, available at <https://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/15366617#:~:text=Japanese%2C%20U.S.%20ministers%20discuss%20deterrence%20under%20nuclear%20umbrella,-THE%20ASAHI%20SHIMBUN&text=Japan%20and%20the%20United%20States,China%2C%20North%20Korea%20and%20Russia>.

righteous U.S. arms control behavior will be reciprocated and lead the way to greater stability, cooperation and amity. In reality, that arms control agenda and approach are based on a pleasing illusion, and have contributed to a structural problem that must be corrected if the United States is to sustain the global alliance system necessary to meet the threat, i.e., correcting the “gaps” in U.S. arms needed to support Washington’s alliance commitments, particularly including extended deterrence.

Washington appears to have repeated the mistakes of its arms control enthusiasms of the early 20th century, as described by the distinguished U.S. diplomat, George Kennan:

The evil of these utopian enthusiasms was not only, or even primarily, the wasted time, the misplaced emphasis, the encouragement of false hopes. The evil lay primarily in the fact that these enthusiasms distracted our gaze from the real things that were happening... The cultivation of these utopian schemes, flattering to our own image of ourselves, took place at the expense of our feeling for reality. And when the rude facts of the power conflict finally did intrude themselves directly upon us, in the form of enemies against whom we were forced to fight in the two World Wars, we found it difficult to perceive the relation between them and the historical logic of our epoch, because we understood the latter so poorly.³⁸

An old adage is: “if you find yourself in a hole, stop digging.” The meaning, of course, is that when a condition is intolerable, it is best to stop those actions that, if continued, would only make it worse. In the case of U.S. alliances, one need is to revise, and recover from, a U.S.

³⁸ George F. Kennan, *Realities of American Foreign Policy* (London: Oxford University Press, 1954), pp. 20-23.

arms control agenda and approach that now undermine decades of American effort to credibly deter enemies and build alliances.

The 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty: When Strategic Arms Control Undercuts U.S. Extended Deterrence and Assurance Goals

The consequences of Washington's long-standing opposition to defending the United States against strategic missiles launched by other than "rogue" states include its corrosive impact on extended deterrence and assurance for allies. Under the prevalent U.S. "balance of terror" approach to deterrence, for decades, Washington has expected any more than rudimentary strategic missile defenses to *destabilize* deterrence and to be a primary cause of a "spiraling" arms race. This approach to deterrence was codified in the 1972 U.S.-Soviet Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty, which was designed to preserve continuing U.S. and Soviet homeland vulnerability to missile attack, thus supposedly ensuring deterrence stability and ending the arms race. An unintended consequence of this homeland vulnerability codified by the ABM Treaty is the degradation of the credibility of the U.S. extended deterrent for allies and their assurance.

In Washington, the ABM Treaty was described as the "crown jewel" of arms control. Yet, its effect was to perpetuate an approach to strategic deterrence based on societal vulnerability that undermines the credibility of the U.S. extended deterrent. The legacy of this Cold War arms control ideology and underlying approach to strategic deterrence continues to constrain U.S. strategic missile defense programs and goals, and to undermine extended deterrence and allied assurance by intentionally leaving the U.S. homeland vulnerable to Russian and Chinese missiles.

The ABM Treaty is a useful case study of how the unintended consequences of U.S. arms control enthusiasms now work to call into question the credibility of U.S. extended deterrence and assurance commitments to allies.

A Slow Crawl Toward a Missile Defense System

In the 1960s, the “balance of terror” was the predominant guiding principle of U.S. strategic nuclear deterrence declaratory policy under Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara. It emphasized deterrence via a survivable U.S. nuclear retaliatory capability after an opponent’s first strike, and generally rejected active defenses to protect against a nuclear attack.³⁹ Secretary McNamara believed that the Soviet Union adhered to a similar approach to deterrence and thus, if the United States deployed a homeland missile defense system, the Soviet Union would react by increasing the number of its nuclear warheads to sustain its retaliatory capabilities. McNamara was convinced that U.S. deployment of missile defense would thereby simply instigate a mechanistic “action-reaction” arms race.⁴⁰ This would put the United States on the unaffordable side of the economic curve because the cost of an interceptor was more than the cost of an offensive missile (the value of defended area was unimportant in this calculation). This was referred to as a disadvantageous “cost exchange ratio,” which contributed to Washington’s rejection of strategic missile defense.⁴¹

³⁹ Keith B. Payne, *The Great American Gamble: Deterrence Theory and Practice from the Cold War to the Twenty-First Century* (Fairfax, VA: National Institute Press, 2008), chapters 4 and 5.

⁴⁰ Remarks by Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara Before United Press International Editors and Publishers, September 18, 1967, available at <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP70B00338R000300100105-8.pdf/>. See also, David J. Trachtenberg, Michaela Dodge, and Keith B. Payne, *The “Action-Reaction” Arms Race Narrative vs. Historical Realities* (Fairfax, VA: National Institute Press, 2021), pp. 31-38, available at <https://nipp.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Action-Reaction-pub.pdf>.

⁴¹ Matthew Costlow, “A Curious Criterion: Cost Effective at the Margin for Missile Defense,” *Information Series*, No. 537 (Fairfax, VA: National Institute Press, October 21, 2022), available at https://nipp.org/information_series/matthew-r-costlow-a-curious-

NATO allies at the time worried that a U.S. homeland defense system would make it possible for the United States to “retreat” to “fortress America” in the event of a Soviet invasion of Europe.⁴² Consequently, several allies also expressed opposition to U.S. strategic defenses. Yet, at the same time, U.S. homeland vulnerability to Soviet nuclear retaliation was the basis for the inevitable question of whether the United States would risk its own destruction by using nuclear weapons in the defense of allies, i.e., U.S. vulnerability led to doubts about the very basis of the U.S. extended nuclear deterrent.

Russian President Putin has most recently expressed this same doubt about the credibility of the U.S. extended deterrent: “The Europeans have to think: if those with whom we exchange such [nuclear] blows are obliterated, would the Americans get involved in such an exchange, on the level of strategic weapons, or not? I very much doubt it.”⁴³ Ironically, the U.S. “balance of terror” approach to strategic deterrence stability, deliberately enshrined by the ABM Treaty, made it difficult for some allies (and apparently some Russian officials) to believe in the credibility of U.S. extended deterrence—thereby undermining the assurance of allies.

The ABM Treaty limited the United States to initially two (later one) ground-based missile defense sites, and severely restricted strategic missile defense development

criterion-cost-effective-at-the-margin-for-missile-defense-no-537-october-21-2022/.

⁴² Robert C. Watts, “A Double-Edged Sword: Ballistic-Missile Defense and U.S. Alliances,” *Naval War College Review*, Vol. 73, No. 1 (Winter 2020), available at <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=8093&context=nwc-review>.

⁴³ “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/>.

and radar capabilities. The United States essentially abandoned its strategic missile defense deployment program in the 1970s; yet, the Soviets continued to build up their strategic offensive arms. Despite this evidence that the arms race is not a mechanistic “action-reaction” process as believed by Secretary McNamara, many in Washington continued to label missile defenses as “destabilizing.” Not even the Reagan Administration, committed to rendering offensive missiles “impotent and obsolete,”⁴⁴ was able to gather the political support needed to free itself of the Treaty restrictions – despite Moscow’s violation of it.⁴⁵

Missile defense opponents criticized the Reagan Administration’s Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) program as destabilizing, and charged that it was impossible to pursue arms control and strategic missile defense at the same time.⁴⁶ These concerns were echoed in allied capitals at the time.⁴⁷ The United Kingdom and France also worried that U.S. strategic missile defenses would spur Soviet missile defense and thereby undermine their own nuclear forces. After some serious efforts by the George H. W. Bush Administration to develop a limited strategic missile defense program, Global Protection Against Limited Strikes (GPALS), the Clinton Administration showed no interest in

⁴⁴ Ronald Reagan, *Strategic Defense Initiative Address to the Nation*, March 23, 1983, available at

<https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/ronaldreagansdi.htm>.

⁴⁵ Ronald Reagan, *Message to the Congress Transmitting a Report on Soviet Noncompliance With Arms Control Agreement*, March 10, 1987, Ronald Reagan Library and Museum, available at <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/speech/message-congress-transmitting-report-soviet-noncompliance-arms-control-agreements-0>.

⁴⁶ McGeorge Bundy, George Kennan, Robert McNamara, and Gerard Smith, “The President’s Choice: Star Wars or Arms Control,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 63, No. 2 (Winter 1984/85), *passim*.

⁴⁷ Aaron Bateman, “The secret history of Britain’s involvement in the Strategic Defense Initiative,” *The Space Review*, February 1, 2021, available at <https://www.thespacereview.com/article/4116/1>.

advancing even rudimentary U.S. homeland missile defense. Subsequently, after the United States emerged victorious from the Cold War, few worried about resurgent great power antagonisms and the homeland missile defense program languished.

The First Gulf War and Iraqi use of short-range rockets and ballistic missiles, the proliferation of these (and then more advanced) systems to hostile states, and their potential to disrupt alliance cohesion led the United States to focus its limited efforts on the development and deployment of regional (or theater) missile defense systems. Congress became much more supportive of these systems than it ever was of homeland defense efforts.

Yet, international developments, particularly the proliferation of missiles, were intruding upon the deterrence and arms control paradigm that deemed homeland missile defenses undesirable. Ultimately, the George W. Bush Administration gathered sufficient political support to withdraw from the ABM Treaty in 2002 and initiate a homeland missile defense “test bed” based on the rationale that rogue states were acquiring offensive strategic missile capabilities and might not be reliably deterred by traditional U.S. deterrence policies—making missile defense against their limited capabilities a prudent necessity.⁴⁸

As early as 1991, President Richard Nixon’s former National Security Advisor and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger observed that, “Limitations on strategic defense will have to be reconsidered in light of the Gulf War experience; no responsible leader can henceforth leave his

⁴⁸ George W. Bush, “President Announces Progress in Missile Defense Capabilities,” *Press Release*, December 17, 2002, available at <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2002/12/text/20021217.html>.

civilian population vulnerable.”⁴⁹ In 1998, the Baroness Margaret Thatcher stated that “[t]he preservation of this Cold War relic [the ABM Treaty] is bizarre, and I am somewhat baffled when spokesmen for the United States government describe it as the cornerstone of strategic stability.”⁵⁰ She considered Ronald Reagan’s original decision on the SDI to be “the single most important of his presidency.”⁵¹ The problem this “cornerstone of arms control” spurred for extended deterrence and allied assurance was becoming increasingly obvious, if largely ignored, in Washington.

The ABM Treaty, Theater Missile Defense Systems, and Unintended Consequences

Even though the ABM Treaty was negotiated with the objective of severely limiting strategic missile defense development and deployment, the U.S. interpretation of the Treaty’s restrictions affected the U.S. theater missile defense program at a time when allies grew increasingly exposed to adversaries’ ballistic missiles. For example, due to the Treaty-based limitations on radars, 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, thus decreasing the potential for theater missile defense systems on the basis of a Treaty that was not intended to limit theater defenses. As the need for theater

⁴⁹ Kissinger’s observation is particularly intriguing given his role in bringing about the ABM Treaty. “A Sea Change in U.S.-Soviet Relations,” *The Washington Post*, April 12, 1991, p. A-13.

⁵⁰ Margaret Thatcher, *Special Issue: A Speech by the Rt. Hon. the Baroness Thatcher LG OM FRS, Deterrence is Not Enough: Security Requirements for the 21st Century (December 3, 1998)*, Information Series, No. 518 (Fairfax, VA: National Institute Press, March 23, 2022), available at <https://nipp.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/518.pdf>.

⁵¹ Ibid.

missile defenses became more obvious, the United States started to press against its interpretation of arms control restrictions that originally had nothing to do with theater missile defense systems.

The Clinton Administration's general rejection of strategic missile defense in favor of maintaining the ABM Treaty contributed to its cancelling GPALS in December 1993.⁵² GPALS was also opposed by many in Congress who desired to reap the post-Cold War "peace dividend" and, with a few exceptions, maintain the ABM Treaty. The new administration also discontinued the Bush Administration's Ross-Mamedov talks on missile defense cooperation with the Russian Federation. These talks, named after U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Dennis Ross and Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Georgiy Mamedov, were aimed at creating opportunities to cooperate on missile defense and overcome the specter of the "balance of terror." The Russians were highly receptive to the idea. In his 1991 speech to the United Nations, President Yeltsin went so far as to say:

I think the time has come to consider creating a global defence system for the world community. It could be based on a reorientation of the United States Strategic Defense Initiative, to make use of high technologies developed in Russia's defence complex. We are ready to participate actively in building and putting in place a pan-European collective security system - in particular during the Vienna talks and the upcoming post-Helsinki-II talks on security and cooperation in Europe.

⁵² Donald Baucom, "The Rise and Fall of Brilliant Pebbles," *The Journal of Social, Political and Economic Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (Summer 2004), p. 184, available at <http://highfrontier.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/The-Rise-and-Fall-of-Brilliant-Pebbles-Baucom.pdf>.

Russia regards the United States and the West not as mere partners but rather as allies.⁵³

The Ross-Mamedov talks were reportedly progressing well when the Clinton Administration effectively cancelled them,⁵⁴ contributing to acrimony in a relationship between the two countries that would continue for years. A part of the problem was that the Russians who supported missile defense cooperation with the United States and advocated for it in Russia became marginalized after the Clinton Administration decided instead to preserve the ABM Treaty as an important component of “strategic stability.”⁵⁵ The United States did not prove to be a reliable partner, and the Russian officials would remember.⁵⁶ Andrei Kortunov, President of the Moscow Public Science Foundation, stated years later that, “However, some Western actions and attitudes, for example, the NATO expansion, START II, as

⁵³ United Nations Security Council, *Provisional Verbatim Record of the Three Thousand and Forty-Sixth Meeting*, January 31, 1992, S/PV.3046, p. 46, available at <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/RO%20SPV%203046.pdf>.

⁵⁴ Ambassador Henry F. Cooper, *Global Defense: Return from Indifference to Rational Assessment?*, Prepared for the conference on Expeditionary Missile Defense, The Strand Palace Hotel, London, March 26, 2001, pp. 4-5, available at <https://highfrontier.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Cooper-NATO-010326.pdf>. See also, “‘Cold Peace’ or Cooperation? The Potential for U.S.-Russian Accommodation on Missile defense and the ABM treaty,” *Comparative Strategy*, Vol. 16, Issue 2 (1997), available at <https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/ucst20/16/2>.

⁵⁵ *Remarks by President Bill Clinton On National Missile Defense*, September 1, 2000, available at <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2000-09/remarks-president-bill-clinton-national-missile-defense>.

⁵⁶ Wayne Curtis Weldon, *America's National Security*, U.S. House of Representatives, Congressional Record (Bound Edition), Vol. 146 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Publishing Office, 2000), Part 13, pp. 18059-18066, available at <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CRECB-2000-pt13/html/CRECB-2000-pt13-Pg18059-6.htm>.

well as U.S. activities in the BMD area, particularly including U.S. discontinuation of the Ross-Mamedov talks, substantiate the position of those in Moscow expressing a fairly high level of acrimony and suspicion."⁵⁷

The Clinton Administration also tried to expand the scope of the ABM Treaty in a manner that would have affected theater missile defenses. The Administration argued for a formal "demarcation" distinguishing strategic from theater missile defenses. The subsequently negotiated demarcation agreements named the Soviet Union successor states Belarus, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan parties to the Treaty in addition to the Russian Federation. These agreements (depending on which version would end up being accepted) could impose limits on theater missile defense interceptors to be compliant with the ABM Treaty, thus subjecting them to restrictions originally not intended by the Treaty itself.⁵⁸ This meant that the United States would be limited in designing its theater missile defense systems to shoot down this class of regional missiles.⁵⁹

The Clinton Administration tried to amend the Treaty without congressional approval, but while congressional opposition to strategic missile defense remained strong, theater missile defenses had considerable support, partly

⁵⁷ Andrei Kortunov, Hearing before the Subcommittee on International Security, Proliferation, and Federal Services of the Committee on Governmental Affairs, U.S. Senate, 105th Congress, First Session, March 13, 1997, p. 13, available at <http://www.bits.de/NRANEU/BMD/documents/ABM130397.pdf>.

⁵⁸ One of the later proposals stated that interceptors tested with velocities of less than 3 km/sec would be considered Treaty-compliant; they could not be tested against targets with velocities over 5 km/sec and ranges over 3,500 kilometers. In a final form, the Clinton Administration also banned space-based theater missile defense. See Amy Woolf, *Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty Demarcation and Succession Agreements: Background and Issues*, Congressional Research Service Report, No. 98-496, April 27, 2000, pp. 12-13, 20, available at <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/nuke/98-496.pdf>.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

due to the advancement of regional ballistic missile threats. Mindful of its institutional prerogatives, the Senate compelled the Administration to submit the memorandum of understanding between the United States and the Russian Federation for advice and consent.⁶⁰ The Administration's effort became obsolete by events as it ran out of time and regional missile challenges became more pressing.

The ABM Treaty and Extended Deterrence

The vulnerability of the U.S. homeland to strategic missiles ensured by the ABM Treaty degraded the credibility of U.S. extended deterrence and thus U.S. assurance goals, and its impinging on theater missile defense constrained the potential for defending key regional targets. With regard to the former issue of credibility, for example, during a 1996 discussion of U.S. support for the security of Taiwan, a Chinese official suggested that U.S. extended deterrence could not be credible. He argued that, "In the 1950s, you three times threatened nuclear strikes on China, and you could do that because we couldn't hit back. Now we can. So you are not going to threaten us again because, in the end, you care a lot more about Los Angeles than Taipei."⁶¹ This was a variation of a decades-old problem the United States faced with respect to its extended deterrence credibility and assuring allies and partners. French President Charles de Gaulle famously doubted that the United States would be willing to trade New York for Paris during discussions about U.S. credibility in the face of a Soviet threat to the U.S.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁶¹ Barton Gellman, "U.S. and China Nearly Came to Blows in '96," *The Washington Post*, June 21, 1998, available at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1998/06/21/us-and-china-nearly-came-to-blows-in-96/926d105f-1fd8-404c-9995-90984f86a613/>.

homeland.⁶² Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev similarly challenged the U.S. Secretary of State Dean Rusk regarding the credibility of the U.S. extended nuclear deterrent in Europe when the Soviet Union could retaliate against the U.S. homeland. Rusk was reduced to replying that Moscow should fear that Washington might foolishly be self-destructive.⁶³ Years later, Henry Kissinger explained that allies should *not* expect the United States to do something so foolish.⁶⁴ This problematic credibility of extended deterrence was codified by the “cornerstone of arms control,” the ABM Treaty, and remains given the continuing absence of U.S. homeland defenses against Russian and Chinese strategic missiles.

A 1994 study on this subject pointed out that absent homeland defenses, “the United States could find itself paralyzed from responding forcefully to extreme proliferation problems, thereby undercutting the credibility of U.S. diplomatic efforts and all military counterproliferation options; missile defense may be critical to U.S. and allied decisions to project power in response to proliferation or aggression by a regional bully.”⁶⁵ Since 1994 this problem for the United States and Asian allies has worsened because adversaries’ missile and nuclear

⁶² U.S. Department of State, “Memorandum of Conversation: President’s Visit,” in Charles S. Samson, ed., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961–1963, Volume XIV, Berlin Crisis, 1961–1962* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1993), available at <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v14/d30>.

⁶³ 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.

⁶⁴ Henry Kissinger, “The Future of NATO,” in *NATO, The Next Thirty Years*, Kenneth Myers, ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1981), p. 8.

⁶⁵ Keith B. Payne, et al., *Proliferation, Potential TMD Roles, Demarcation and ABM Treaty Compatibility* (Fairfax, VA: National Institute for Public Policy, October 1994), p. 3, available at <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/ADA344594.pdf>.

capabilities have grown, most notably with North Korea detonating its first nuclear device in 2006 and advancing ballistic missile capabilities, including reportedly launching a solid-fueled intercontinental-range ballistic missile.⁶⁶

The ABM Treaty intentionally codified the vulnerability of the U.S. homeland to Soviet strategic missiles. At the time, this was deemed necessary to end the “spiraling” arms race and ensure deterrence “stability.” As noted, however, this supposedly “stabilizing” vulnerability degraded the credibility of U.S. extended deterrence and thus U.S. assurance goals by cementing the question of whether the United States would risk intercontinental nuclear war, and thus its own destruction, in support of a distant ally in jeopardy. Some U.S. and allied officials find the credibility of that commitment to be suspect given the risk to a fully vulnerable U.S. homeland. Washington’s continued willful perpetuation of homeland vulnerability to Russian and Chinese missiles—a legacy of the thinking behind the ABM Treaty—magnifies the coercive power of their limited nuclear threats. As the 2023 *Strategic Posture Commission Report* observed, adversaries’ limited, coercive nuclear threats are designed to “dissuade and deter the United States from defending or supporting its Allies and partners in a regional conflict; keep the United States from participating in any confrontation; and divide U.S. alliances.”⁶⁷ The Commission pointed out that countering these types of threats to provide deterrence credibility could well require missile defense capabilities beyond the rudimentary system intended to protect only against rogue

⁶⁶ Soo-Hyang Choi and Kantaro Komiya, “North Korea fires ICBM after condemning US ‘war’ moves,” *Reuters*, December 18, 2023, available at <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/north-korea-fires-ballistic-missile-south-korea-says-2023-12-17/>.

⁶⁷ Madelyn Creedon and Jon Kyl, et al., *America’s Strategic Posture* (Alexandria, VA: Institute for Defense Analyses, 2023), p. 63.

missile threats.⁶⁸ This is hardly a new observation, but benefits greatly from the status and bipartisan makeup of the Strategic Posture Commission.

In addition to undermining U.S. credibility and freedom of action, an adversary's missiles aimed at U.S. allies can disrupt U.S. alliances in several ways. For example, during the First Gulf War, Saudi Arabia reportedly waited four days to request U.S. intervention in Iraq following the fall of Kuwait, partly due to the Saudi lack of confidence that the United States would be able to shield it from a ground and air, including a missile, attack.⁶⁹ That it ultimately did so was, in part, thanks to the deployment of a U.S. Patriot theater missile defense system to the region.

During the time leading up to the U.S. 2002 withdrawal from the ABM Treaty, Washington's continued commitment to the Treaty undoubtedly slowed U.S. theater missile defense capabilities and effectively prevented the United States from deploying a homeland missile defense system—even as U.S. leaders recognized that missile threats were becoming more unpredictable and necessitated the development and deployment of theater-range capabilities.

Since the Clinton Administration's failed endeavor to set demarcation limits, theater defenses have demonstrated their great value many times over. Considerable opposition, however, continues against U.S. homeland missile defense capabilities beyond those designed against rogue states—despite an increasingly severe strategic nuclear threat environment. The United States continues to accept virtually unmitigated vulnerability to Russian and Chinese strategic ballistic missiles, even as it struggles to stay ahead of North Korea's missile and nuclear program.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 63.

⁶⁹ Michael W. Ellis 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>.

The arguments for remaining so vulnerable harken back to the Cold War notions of cost, stable deterrence and arms control instability.

Post-ABM Treaty Missile Defense and Allied Cooperation

In its December 2001 ABM Treaty withdrawal announcement, the Bush Administration pointed to risks stemming from ballistic missile proliferation in the hands of terrorists and rogue states.⁷⁰ The Administration's missile defense policy explicitly stated that, "The defenses we will develop and deploy must be capable of not only defending the United States and our deployed forces, but also friends and allies."⁷¹ In withdrawing from the Treaty upon six months' notice, as provided for in the Treaty's language, pundits and proponents of arms control argued at the time that "America's friends and allies would react with horror" to withdrawal, which "would complicate any efforts to build a missile defense."⁷² None of this came to pass.

The Bush Administration kept allies informed and sought to explain the merits of missile defense and the decision to withdraw.⁷³ While some U.S. allies, long

⁷⁰ The White House, *ABM Treaty Fact Sheet*, December 13, 2001, available at <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/12/20011213-2.html>.

⁷¹ Office of the White House, *National Security Presidential Directive/NSPD-23*, December 16, 2002, available at <https://irp.fas.org/offdocs/nspd/nspd-23.pdf>.

⁷² Ivo Daalder and James M. Lindsay, "Unilateral Withdrawal From the ABM Treaty Is a Bad Idea," *Brookings Commentary*, April 30, 2001, available at <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/unilateral-withdrawal-from-the-abm-treaty-is-a-bad-idea/>.

⁷³ Lynn Rusten, *U.S. Withdrawal from the Antiballistic Missile Treaty* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, January 10, 2010), p. 4, available at

accustomed to the U.S. rejection of homeland defenses under a “balance of terror,”⁷⁴ reportedly opposed the development of even a limited U.S. homeland defense system, the United States was able to establish robust missile defense cooperation programs with numerous allies and partners.⁷⁵ Japan, for example, was one of the first states to embrace missile defense cooperation with the United States.⁷⁶ This has included the joint development of the *Aegis* sea-based missile defense system that became the focal point of allied cooperative missile defense efforts.

Russian President Vladimir Putin’s immediate response to the withdrawal announcement was, “... I fully believe that the decision taken by the president of the United States does not pose a threat to the national security of the Russian Federation.”⁷⁷ By July 2001, representatives of 10 allied countries, including the Czech Republic, Hungary, Italy, the United Kingdom, Poland, Romania, Spain, Slovakia, Australia, Japan, and NATO Secretary General George Robertson, issued statements supporting the U.S. missile defense program.⁷⁸

https://ndupress.ndu.edu/portals/68/documents/casestudies/cswm_d_casestudy-2.pdf.

⁷⁴ “U.S. Steps up Missile Defense Marketing Abroad,” *Arms Control Association*, September 2002, available at <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2002-09/us-steps-up-missile-defense-marketing-abroad>.

⁷⁵ Stephen Rademaker, “America’s Cooperative Approach to Missile Defense,” *Remarks to the American Foreign Policy Council’s 2004 Conference on “Missile Defenses and American Security,”* December 17, 2004, available at <https://2001-2009.state.gov/t/isn/rls/rm/39920.htm>.

⁷⁶ Watts, “A Double-Edged Sword: Ballistic-Missile Defense and U.S. Alliances,” *op. cit.*, pp. 64-65.

⁷⁷ Terence Neilan, “Bush Pulls Out of ABM Treaty; Putin Calls Move a Mistake,” *The New York Times*, December 13, 2001, available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2001/12/13/international/bush-pulls-out-of-abm-treaty-putin-calls-move-a-mistake.html>.

⁷⁸ *The Administration’s Missile Defense Program and the ABM Treaty*, Hearing before the Committee on Foreign Relations, U.S. Senate, 107th

Under U.S. leadership, allied governments became convinced of missile defense as a net positive and international cooperation has since flourished. A NATO study completed in 2005 concluded that missile defense for Alliance populations and territory is needed and technologically feasible.⁷⁹ NATO developed an Active Layered Theatre Ballistic Missile Defence Program—a missile defense command and control “backbone” to which national missile defense assets can “plug in” — NATO’s 2022 *Strategic Concept* identifies missile defense as an integral part of its force posture, stating that “NATO’s deterrence and defence posture is based on an appropriate mix of nuclear, conventional and missile defence capabilities, complemented by space and cyber capabilities.”⁸⁰

At this point, some allied countries face particularly hostile adversaries and U.S. theater missile defenses are an important component of their assurance. However, with regard to homeland defenses, U.S. policy continues to harken back to the ABM Treaty and Cold War “balance of terror” thinking. Continued opposition to strategic missile defenses effective against even limited Russian and Chinese missile threats remains, with the consequent questionable credibility of U.S. extended nuclear deterrence commitments that follows from the intentional vulnerability of the U.S. homeland.

U.S. and allied missile defenses have not appreciably caught up with expanding offensive missile threats. This is by Washington’s conscious choice at the strategic level. As

Congress, First Session, July 24, 2001, available at <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-107shrg74505/html/CHRG-107shrg74505.htm>.

⁷⁹ Peppino DeBiaso, “Missile Defense and NATO Security,” *Joint Forces Quarterly*, Issue 51 (4th Quarter 2008), p. 50, available at <https://ndupress.ndu.edu/portals/68/documents/jfq/jfq-51.pdf>.

⁸⁰ North Atlantic Treaty Organization, *Strategic Concept*, June 29, 2022, p. 6, available at <https://www.nato.int/strategic-concept/>.

adversaries' capabilities continue to advance, an inadequate U.S. ability to defend its homeland against even limited Russian and Chinese missile threats will continue to fan doubts about the credibility of U.S. extended nuclear deterrence, including among opponents and allies. In Europe, these concerns are likely strengthened by Russia's numerous nuclear missile threats and extensive missile use in Ukraine. Since February 2022, Russia has attacked Ukraine with more than 7,400 missiles of various types.⁸¹ The casualties from these attacks would be much higher absent the measure of protection provided by Western theater defense systems.⁸²

Conclusion and Recommendations

Wartime experience now underscores the importance of missile defense systems for both the protection of people and assets, and the credibility of extended deterrence – yet, more than two decades since the U.S. withdrawal from the ABM Treaty, Washington remains under that Treaty's shadow and its underlying Cold War rationale. The homeland missile defense system remains severely limited and is not intended to address the Chinese or Russian limited missile threats that undermine the credibility of U.S.

⁸¹ Liliانا Oleniak, "Number of Russian missiles launched at Ukraine since February 2022 counted," *RBC-Ukraine*, December 28, 2023, available at <https://newsukraine.rbc.ua/news/number-of-russian-missiles-launched-at-ukraine-1703755020.html>.

⁸² The first of two recent large attacks reportedly cost Russia over \$1.2 billion. See, "Today's Massive Attack on Ukraine Cost Russia Over \$1.2 Billion," *Kyiv Post*, December 29, 2023, available at <https://www.kyivpost.com/post/26109>; and, Eero Epner, "'Human Life Has No Value There': Baltic Counterintelligence Officers Speak Candidly About Russian Cruelty," *Eesti Ekspress*, October 2022, available at <https://ekspress.delfi.ee/artikkel/120083694/human-life-has-no-value-there-baltic-counterintelligence-officers-speak-candidly-about-russian-cruelty>.

extended deterrence efforts. This credibility problem will grow as adversaries continue to advance their missile programs, aggressive agendas and coercive threats. Expanded U.S. defenses capable of addressing such coercive missile threats would, finally, move Washington beyond its Cold War thinking regarding missile defense and the corresponding ABM Treaty, and provide a potentially critical level of societal protection against limited threats, strengthen extended deterrence, and contribute to the viability of U.S. alliances.

Given the negative threat developments discussed above, the United States ought to improve its strategic missile defense to add credibility to extended deterrence and strengthen assurance. U.S. adversaries are developing capabilities intended to coerce the United States away from responding to their regional aggression, including by threatening to attack the U.S. homeland with missiles.⁸³ The 2023 *Strategic Posture Commission Report* states “that the role of missile defenses in the U.S. deterrence framework is to reduce the adversary’s perception that an offensive missile strike will be effective” and that “this effect must be achieved in order to deter and, if necessary, defend against coercive strikes from an adversary.”⁸⁴ To do so, the Commission recommends that the United States examine

⁸³ For an excellent discussion on the topic, see 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, August 2022), available at <https://nipp.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/OP-Vol.-2-No.-9.pdf>.

⁸⁴ 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 Analyses, 2023, pp. 66-67, available at <https://armedservices.house.gov/sites/republicans.armedservices.house.gov/files/Strategic-Posture-Committee-Report-Final.pdf>.

new missile defense approaches rather than just expand existing ones.

A homeland missile defense designed to defeat Russian and Chinese limited strikes would strengthen deterrence by helping to deny the coercive power of limited nuclear threats to the U.S. homeland.⁸⁵ Protecting the military infrastructure, often co-located with populated areas, could give the United States more time and capability to respond to an attack on an ally, and likely save civilian lives in the process.⁸⁶

A U.S. homeland missile defense system capable of defending against coercive nuclear threats would strengthen U.S. extended deterrence credibility and make more believable that the United States would, indeed, come to the defense of its allies. This level of missile defense could also lower damage should deterrence fail, including in instances of accidental launches. Such defenses are essential in an environment with two nuclear peers, where the United States has to be concerned about Russian and Chinese coercive nuclear threats. In short, the United States can improve its strategic position, including its extended deterrence credibility, by enhancing homeland defenses and its cooperative approach to missile defense with allied countries.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ See for example, Keith B. Payne, "Deterrence Via Mutual Vulnerability: Why Not Now?" *Information Series*, No. 536 (Fairfax, VA: National Institute Press, October 19, 2022), available at https://nipp.org/information_series/keith-b-payne-deterrence-via-mutual-vulnerability-why-not-now-no-536-october-19-2022/.

⁸⁶ Costlow, "Vulnerability is No Virtue and Defense is No Vice: The Strategic Benefits of Expanded U.S. Homeland Missile Defense," *op. cit.*, p. 28.

⁸⁷ For suggestions on how to do so, see, Keith Payne and David Trachtenberg, "Deterrence in the Emerging Threat Environment: What is Different and Why it Matters," *Occasional Paper* Vol. 2, No. 8 (Fairfax, VA: National Institute Press, August 2022), p. 58, available at <https://nipp.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/OP-Vol.-2-No.-8.pdf>.

Another recommendation pertains to communications. The incongruence between the perspective of the United States and an allied government versus that of an allied country's public on issues related to missile defense and nuclear weapon policy is a common potential source of frustration in bilateral relations.⁸⁸ While the United States and allied governments seem to prefer to avoid protracted public discussions on potentially controversial topics, public discussions will happen regardless of whether they participate. By avoiding hard discussions, they are vacating the field to misinformation and disinformation, creating a longer-term problem for U.S. public diplomacy efforts. The language of nuclear strategy is arcane, even to most U.S.-based national security professionals. Other states, particularly small states, often choose to spend their limited resources on understanding issues that they perceive as more relevant or immediate problems. U.S. assistance in providing opportunities for a better-informed public debate ought to be an essential component of U.S. missile defense cooperation with allies.

⁸⁸ For examples see, Michaela Dodge, *Russia's Influence Operations in the Czech Republic During the Radar Debate and Beyond*, *Occasional Paper*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (Fairfax, VA: National Institute Press, February 2021), available at <https://nipp.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/OP2-for-web.pdf>; and, Michaela Dodge, "Russia's Influence Operations in the Czech Republic, Poland, and Romania," *Occasional Paper*, Vol. 2, No. 4 (Fairfax, VA: National Institute Press, April 2022), available at <https://nipp.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/OP-Vol.-2-No.-4.pdf>.

The INF Treaty, Extended Deterrence, and Assurance: A Case Study in Unintended Consequences

Introduction

The 31-year lifespan of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty is a prominent example of the dangers the United States faces if it fails to adapt its arms control agenda to changing threats and allied threat perceptions, extended deterrence requirements, and assurance needs. Despite the initial overwhelming support for the INF Treaty in Washington and among NATO allies, the actions that the United States took (or failed to take) in the years following the Treaty's entry into force and Moscow's violation of the Treaty, military aggression, and nuclear threats, have contributed to growing allied concern.

Broadly speaking, the withdrawal and elimination of most U.S. regional nuclear forces worldwide, including via the INF Treaty, and the subsequent deep drawdown of forward-deployed conventional forces, combined with the worsening threat environment, have created structural alliance problems that appear to have no easy solution. It is therefore important to review the INF Treaty's effects on U.S. nuclear procurement options, allied extended deterrence and assurance requirements, and the linkages among these factors. By better understanding the history of the INF Treaty and related U.S. and allied developments, Washington can craft a prospective approach to arms control and extended deterrence that is more informed by, and tailored to, the realities of shifting assurance requirements. In short, learning from the lessons of the INF Treaty today can improve the chances for more effective deterrence and assurance positions tomorrow.

This case study begins with a brief explanation of the rationale behind, and substance of, the INF Treaty. Then, it

examines the notes of caution, and rare dissents, that some officials made in response to the INF Treaty's terms. Following that is a description of subsequent U.S., allied, and Soviet/Russian and Chinese force procurement decisions that led to the strategic environment that U.S. officials find themselves in today. This analysis concludes with a brief set of recommendations based on the lessons learned about extended deterrence and assurance from the INF Treaty case study.

The Reasons for an Agreement on Eliminating Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces

The Reagan Administration decided early on that a central tenet of its arms control efforts would be to pursue the elimination of intermediate-range Soviet nuclear forces, primarily the SS-20 intermediate-range ballistic missile (IRBM).⁸⁹ The United States and its NATO allies were particularly concerned about the SS-20 for two reasons: its payload and its adaptability. Unlike the systems it would replace, the SS-20 was mobile and could carry three warheads—tripling the warhead loads for the Soviet IRBM force that could be employed against NATO.⁹⁰ Additionally, the SS-20 was essentially the same missile as the Soviet SS-16 intercontinental-range ballistic missile (ICBM), minus a third stage—a capability that could be

⁸⁹ One of the Reagan Administration's first National Security Decision Directives was on the subject of intermediate-range nuclear forces. See, Ronald Reagan, *National Security Decision Directive 15: Theater Nuclear Forces, Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces* (Washington, D.C.: The White House, November 16, 1981), p. 1, available at <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/public/archives/reference/scanned-nsdds/nsdd15.pdf>.

⁹⁰ For more on the development and capabilities of the SS-20, see, Steven J. Zaloga, *The Kremlin's Nuclear Sword: The Rise and Fall of Russia's Strategic Nuclear Forces, 1945-2000* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Books, 2002), pp. 171-173.

fairly easily added.⁹¹ U.S. officials were concerned that the Soviet Union retained what amounted to a “breakout” force that circumvented the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT II) political agreements that were still in place, and worse, represented a significant potential increase in the intercontinental threat to the United States.⁹²

After Washington and NATO successfully deployed U.S. INF systems to NATO Europe, the Soviet Union agreed to the INF Treaty in 1987, which required the “destruction of the Parties’ ground-launched ballistic and cruise missiles with ranges of between 500 and 5,500 kilometers, their launchers and associated support structures and support equipment within three years after the Treaty enters into force.”⁹³ The Soviet Union eliminated its SS-20 IRBMs, plus the older SS-4s and SS-5s, while the United States eliminated its Pershing II IRBMs and Gryphon ground-launched cruise missiles (GLCMs).⁹⁴ Other systems like sea-launched cruise missiles (SLCMs), sub-500 km-range nuclear forces, and intercontinental-range nuclear forces were not covered by the INF Treaty, with the latter covered by the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START I), signed in 1991.

The Reagan Administration enjoyed bipartisan support for ratifying the INF Treaty (winning Senate support 93-5) while allies in NATO also strongly supported the treaty. There was widespread attraction to the prospect of the first major nuclear arms control treaty to *reduce* arsenal sizes instead of simply capping numbers. Ambassador Edward L. Rowny, Special Adviser to the President and Secretary of

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 171.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 172.

⁹³ “Treaty Between The United States Of America And The Union Of Soviet Socialist Republics On The Elimination Of Their Intermediate-Range And Shorter-Range Missiles (INF Treaty),” *State.gov*, no date, available at <https://2009-2017.state.gov/t/avc/trty/102360.htm>.

⁹⁴ *Loc. cit.*

State for Arms Control Matters, summarized the views of many INF Treaty supporters when he stated, "This treaty also satisfies our requirement to maintain deterrence and coupling while not undermining our conventional forces. Imbalances in NATO and Warsaw Pact conventional forces exist today and will continue to exist after the missiles are eliminated, but deterrence is assured by the fact that NATO will retain those nuclear weapons required to prevent the Soviets from taking advantage of their superior conventional power."⁹⁵ Similarly, NATO Secretary General Peter Carrington emphasized the importance of removing a potent Soviet threat while still retaining alliance unity: "The strength of the linkage between the two sides of the Atlantic is not a function of one particular weapons system. It is forged by the presence of 330,000 troops in Europe, the theatre nuclear systems remaining after the INF agreement as well as the conventional defence and the whole web of interlocking interests on which the transatlantic defence relationship is based."⁹⁶ Overall then, INF Treaty supporters generally recognized that, while force asymmetries between NATO and the Warsaw Pact remained, enough NATO forces remained to ensure deterrence and assurance while removing a greater number of Soviet missiles than the United States was required to eliminate.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Edward Rowny, as quoted in, U.S. Senate, *The INF Treaty, Part 1* (Washington, D.C.: United States Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, January 27, 1988), p. 246.

⁹⁶ Peter Carrington, *Reflections on NATO: 1984-1988* (Brussels, BE: NATO, June 2, 1988), p. 4, available at https://archives.nato.int/uploads/r/null/1/4/141438/STATEMENT_CARRINGTON_1988-06-02_ENG.pdf.

⁹⁷ On the number of missiles captured under the INF Treaty for both the United States and the Soviet Union, see, U.S. Department of State, "Memorandum Of Understanding Regarding The Establishment Of The Data Base For The Treaty Between The Union Of Soviet Socialist Republics And The United States Of America On The Elimination Of

INF Treaty Concerns and Dissents

Those who had concerns about the INF Treaty, or who outright opposed it, were notable even if greatly outnumbered. Their criticism of the INF Treaty primarily focused on concerns that the elimination of U.S. intermediate-range nuclear forces in Europe would undermine U.S. deterrence goals and U.S. objectives should deterrence fail. Renowned scholar Colin Gray observed that the United States had traditionally emphasized forward-deployed nuclear systems that would lower the risk of U.S.-Soviet homeland-to-homeland exchanges and thereby increase the credibility of the U.S. extended nuclear deterrent for U.S. allies. In contrast, European allies generally sought to preserve a “short fuse” between a Soviet conventional attack and a prospective U.S.-Soviet strategic nuclear exchange in order to maximize the nuclear threat underlying the U.S. extended deterrent.⁹⁸

In short, to support credible extended deterrence, the United States had traditionally favored relying on nuclear systems based in Europe, as opposed to intercontinental-range strategic systems, in conjunction with expanded NATO conventional forces. At the same time, NATO allies typically favored procuring enough conventional forces to ensure the Soviet Union would need to wage a major conflict to achieve its aims – a conflict NATO hoped Soviet leaders would be deterred from initiating given the potential for escalation to U.S. intercontinental-range nuclear systems. U.S. intermediate-range nuclear forces based in Europe helped minimize these potentially discordant approaches to extended deterrence.

Their Intermediate-Range And Shorter-Range Missiles,” *State.gov*, no date, available at <https://2009-2017.state.gov/t/avc/trty/102360.htm#mou>.

⁹⁸ Colin S. Gray, *War, Peace, and Victory* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1990), p. 284.

Similarly, even those who ultimately supported the INF Treaty had concerns about its impact on U.S. nuclear deterrence strategy and the greater reliance it placed on U.S. long-range nuclear forces for extended deterrence. As James Schlesinger testified before the Senate during the ratification hearings, at that point as a former Secretary of Defense, "... it must be strongly emphasized that the INF agreement removing from Europe missiles that have served, however temporarily, to help deter a Warsaw Pact attack expands the role in overall nuclear deterrence that must be played by U.S. strategic forces. The role of these forces in providing extended deterrence is therefore an increasingly preponderant one."⁹⁹ The scholar William Van Cleave, who ultimately did not support the INF Treaty, echoed Schlesinger's criticism but took it one logical step further, stating, "The strategic consequence of the INF agreement... is to place greater reliance on U.S. strategic nuclear forces for extended deterrence, on the strategic balance, at a time when that balance is decidedly adverse to the United States... while at the other end of the spectrum it will put more stress and emphasis on an unfavorable conventional balance."¹⁰⁰

Colin Gray linked these two related criticisms by noting that eliminating U.S. intermediate-range nuclear forces in Europe harmed both the preferred U.S. *and* European-NATO extended deterrence strategies by removing a critical response option, while leaving both the United States and its allies in unfavorable positions vis-à-vis the Soviet Union in the remaining theater nuclear forces outside the INF Treaty. As he summarized the issue: "Frequent public

⁹⁹ James R. Schlesinger, "Prepared Statement of James R. Schlesinger," in U.S. Senate, *The INF Treaty, Part 2* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, February 2, 1988), p. 377.

¹⁰⁰ William R. Van Cleave, as quoted in, U.S. Senate, *The INF Treaty, Part 3* (Washington, D.C.: United States Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, February 19, 1988), pp. 159-160.

reference is made to the 'NATO triad' of conventional, tactical nuclear, and strategic nuclear forces. A balanced NATO triad means that undue prominence is not accorded the role in deterrence of strategic force, which has been unacceptable to the United States since 1961; while undue burdens are not placed upon conventional forces, which is unacceptable to NATO-Europe."¹⁰¹ In Gray's view then, if NATO-Europe was unwilling to invest more heavily in conventional forces while also minimizing in-theater nuclear capabilities (e.g., via the INF Treaty), then the United States would be forced to rely more heavily on its intercontinental-nuclear forces for extended deterrence – with the attendant degradation of its extended deterrence credibility.

Supporters of the INF Treaty generally responded to these criticisms by noting that even with U.S. INF forces removed from Europe, there would be sufficient nuclear forces to maintain extended deterrence. For example, Reagan Administration official Ambassador Rowny was asked during testimony to respond to a quotation from Gen. Brent Scowcroft who reportedly stated the INF Treaty would "leave us the choice of a conventional defeat or using strategic weapons to defend Europe." Ambassador Rowny responded that the United States under the INF Treaty would still retain dual-capable aircraft, sea-launched missiles, and numerous sub-500 kilometer-range nuclear weapons.¹⁰² Thus, Rowny and other supporters of the INF Treaty concluded that, as long as the United States and NATO-Europe maintained theater nuclear forces *not covered* by the treaty, the remaining and projected U.S. nuclear force posture would be sufficient to support extended deterrence and assurance efforts without overreliance on strategic nuclear forces. It is precisely this expectation of maintaining

¹⁰¹ Gray, *War, Peace, and Victory*, op. cit., p. 285.

¹⁰² Rowny, as quoted in, U.S. Senate, *The INF Treaty, Part 1*, op. cit., p. 286.

forces outside the Treaty, however, that did not come to pass in the years following the INF Treaty's implementation.

Post-Ratification U.S. and NATO Force Developments

Although little discussed in current analyses of the INF Treaty, notable government officials and non-government analysts were largely united in their desire to see the United States and NATO modernize the forces not covered by the Treaty at the time it was signed. For some, the rationale for the Treaty depended in large part on whether theater forces outside the Treaty were modernized to offset the loss of intermediate-range nuclear forces for extended deterrence purposes. During the INF Treaty hearings, for example, U.S. Senator John Warner thought it was remarkable that there was general agreement among subject matter experts from both political parties on this priority: "The overwhelming majority of witnesses pointed to the importance of following up the elimination of ... intermediate [range] nuclear forces with conventional, chemical, and short-range nuclear modernization. Many of these witnesses warned that without a serious and comprehensive modernization program, NATO's flexible response strategy and extended deterrence would be weakened—if not become destabilizing."¹⁰³ Indeed, even those analysts that typically favored deep nuclear reductions, such as Ambassador Paul Warnke, cautioned against beginning arms control discussions on nuclear systems below the 500 km range set

¹⁰³ John Warner, "Prepared Statement of Senator John Warner," in, United States Senate, *NATO Defense and the INF Treaty* (Washington, D.C.: United States Senate, Committee on Armed Services, February 16, 1988), p. 179.

by the INF Treaty because of the conventional imbalance favoring the Soviets.¹⁰⁴

Secretary of Defense Frank Carlucci, for instance, cautioned that, to extend deterrence for the NATO alliance, certain capabilities required “additional emphasis” in the wake of the INF Treaty:

Notwithstanding the INF Treaty's success in reducing the number of nuclear weapons arrayed against NATO, we must remember that deterrence in Europe depends on maintaining a nuclear force structure capable of providing a full set of flexible response options. The continuing unfavorable balance in conventional forces confirms the need for nuclear forces. To ensure a credible deterrent, we expect to place additional emphasis on dual-capable aircraft (i.e., aircraft assigned missions for delivering both nuclear and conventional weapons) as well as on sea-based [nuclear] systems to hold at risk targets located deep in the Warsaw Pact.¹⁰⁵

Beyond sustaining existing programs, Carlucci also advocated for new force modernization programs, including the Tactical Air-to-Surface Missile (TASM) as a standoff option for DCA, also known as SRAM-II (Short-Range Attack Missile), and a Follow-On-to-Lance (FOTL) surface-to-surface missile.¹⁰⁶ Moreover, Carlucci explained that “with the exception of TLAM-N [Tomahawk Land-Attack Missile, Nuclear-armed] and the new strike bomb,

¹⁰⁴ Paul C. Warnke, as quoted in, U.S. Senate, *The INF Treaty, Part 3*, op. cit., p. 174.

¹⁰⁵ Frank C. Carlucci, *Annual Report to the Congress, Fiscal Year 1990* (Washington, D.C.: Department of Defense, January 17, 1989), p. 193, available at https://history.defense.gov/Portals/70/Documents/annual_reports/1990a_DoD_AR.pdf?ver=2014-06-24-151621-343.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 194.

the current U.S. naval tactical stockpile is approaching the end of its useful life.”¹⁰⁷ He therefore stated that the Department of Defense was developing a new nuclear depth strike bomb (NDSB) and considering a nuclear variant of the Sea Lance submarine-launched anti-submarine missile – both for deployment in the 1990s.¹⁰⁸

In short, many U.S. officials at the time emphasized that advancing U.S. tactical nuclear programs, including TASM, FOTL, NDSB, and the nuclear Sea Lance variant, had gained increased importance for deterrence following the signing of the INF Treaty because they took on a greater deterrence role with the elimination of the intermediate-range U.S. options.

Senior NATO officials also recognized the importance of continuing defense investments in the aftermath of signing the INF Treaty – an increasingly difficult position to hold for European officials at the time. As Lord Carrington, NATO Secretary General, stated in 1988: “What worries me rather more than our policy on formal arms control is what might be called involuntary or structural disarmament, which is what Alliance governments are finding increasingly hard to avoid. I mean by that, the ability to continue to provide the resources necessary to maintain an adequate common defence. In this sense we are victims of our own success. The progress in East-West relations and its impact on public opinion has made support for defence spending harder to win.”¹⁰⁹ Carrington’s term as NATO Secretary General came to an end in 1988, but he spent his remaining time in the position advocating publicly for maintaining defense spending levels and, specifically, a

¹⁰⁷ Loc. cit.

¹⁰⁸ Loc. cit.

¹⁰⁹ Peter Carrington, *Reflections on NATO: 1984-1988* (Brussels, BE: NATO, June 2, 1988), p. 5, available at https://archives.nato.int/uploads/r/null/1/4/141438/STATEMENT_CARRINGTON_1988-06-02_ENG.pdf.

diverse set of nuclear capabilities “of differing ranges and types, broadly deployed throughout the area.”¹¹⁰

Within only three years after the signing of the INF Treaty, however, threat perceptions in the United States and NATO-Europe had shifted so dramatically that nearly all the planned defense modernization programs that had rationalized the INF Treaty also were cut back or eliminated. From 1987-1989, for instance, total NATO defense spending, including nuclear and conventional weapons, remained flat, and even decreased as a percentage of gross domestic product.¹¹¹ In quick succession, the Bush Administration cancelled the Follow-on-to-Lance program and pursued the elimination of all nuclear artillery shells – again, placing greater reliance on dual-capable aircraft and U.S. strategic forces for deterrence.¹¹²

By early 1991 then, NATO-Europe relied on U.S. theater-range systems comprised primarily of a shrinking number of land-based tactical nuclear weapon systems, the sea-launched nuclear cruise missile TLAM-N, and DCA with gravity bombs and a standoff capability in development. But, in September 1991, President Bush

¹¹⁰ Peter Carrington, *NATO: Benefits and Burdens* (Bonn, GE: NATO, May 5, 1988), p. 4, available at https://archives.nato.int/uploads/r/null/1/4/141410/STATEMENT_CARRINGTON_1988-05-05_ENG.pdf.

¹¹¹ North Atlantic Treaty Organization, *The North Atlantic Treaty Organization: Facts and Figures, An Alliance for the 1990's* (Brussels, BE: NATO, 1989), pp. 454, 456.

¹¹² On support for Lance, see Carlucci, *Annual Report to Congress, Fiscal Year 1990*, op. cit., p. 194; and on Bush's decision to cut FOTL, see, Susan J. Koch, *The Presidential Nuclear Initiatives of 1991-1992* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University, September 2012), p. 6, available at https://ndupress.ndu.edu/portals/68/documents/casestudies/cswm_d_casestudy-5.pdf; and, Dick Cheney, *Annual Report to the President and the Congress* (Washington, D.C.: Department of Defense, January 1991), p. 57, available at https://history.defense.gov/Portals/70/Documents/annual_reports/1991_DoD_AR.pdf?ver=2014-06-24-151830-167.

announced the cancellation of TASM as part of the Presidential Nuclear Initiatives (PNIs) which effectively eliminated the only standoff nuclear-armed option for DCA.¹¹³ The 1991 PNI announcement also removed TLAM-N from deployment on submarines and surface ships and placed it into storage, with the capability to re-deploy if necessary during a crisis or conflict.¹¹⁴ The 2010 *Nuclear Posture Review Report* ultimately retired TLAM-N.¹¹⁵

It is worth restating briefly the immense scope of the changes U.S. and NATO officials decided upon in the span of just five years after the signing of the 1987 INF Treaty. After choosing to eliminate U.S. intermediate-range nuclear forces under the INF Treaty and to rely more heavily on nuclear and conventional forces not covered by the Treaty, U.S. officials steadily eliminated program after program—particularly in sub-500 kilometer-range nuclear forces—even as those remaining forces were expected to shoulder an ever greater deterrence and assurance burden. The U.S. non-strategic triad was reduced to a dyad as all nuclear-armed land-based systems below intercontinental range were eliminated, while the sea-based and air-based legs were removed from deployment and severely reduced, respectively. From the end of the Cold War to today, the only U.S. non-strategic nuclear weapons program to be modernized is the B61-12 bomb, carried by DCA.¹¹⁶

The United States, in coordination with its allies, also greatly reduced its forward-deployed conventional forces

¹¹³ Koch, *The Presidential Nuclear Initiatives of 1991-1992*, op. cit., p. 11.

¹¹⁴ Loc. cit.

¹¹⁵ U.S. Department of Defense, *Nuclear Posture Review Report* (Washington, D.C.: Department of Defense, April 2010), p. 28, available at https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/features/defenseReviews/NPR/2010_Nuclear_Posture_Review_Report.pdf.

¹¹⁶ Amy F. Woolf, *Nonstrategic Nuclear Weapons* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, March 7, 2022), pp. 23-24, available at <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/RL/RL32572/46>.

after signing the INF Treaty. As the Government Accountability Office (GAO) documented at the time, the U.S. military presence in Europe, for example, featured approximately 225,000 personnel in 1990, 105,000 in 1993, and 100,000 in 2001.¹¹⁷ Indeed, among U.S. conventional force drawdowns in the wake of the INF Treaty, the status of U.S. main battle tanks in Europe is one of the more illuminating examples: a peak of approximately 6,000 tanks to their complete withdrawal from the continent in 2013—five years after Moscow’s military occupation of parts of Georgia and just one year before Russia’s initial invasion of Ukraine.¹¹⁸

While the United States has refrained from developing intermediate-range nuclear forces that would have been illegal under the INF Treaty, Russia and China have not followed that same course. The U.S. intelligence community assessed in 2018 that, in the mid-2000s (after the INF Treaty verification regime had ended), Russia began developing an intermediate-range ground-launched cruise missile—a finding that led the United States to find Russia to be in violation of the INF Treaty beginning in 2014.¹¹⁹ Ultimately,

¹¹⁷ Information collected from, Government Accountability Office, *U.S. Military Presence in Europe: Issues Related to the Drawdown* (Washington, D.C.: GAO, 1993), p. 13, available at <https://www.gao.gov/assets/t-nsiad-93-3.pdf>; and, Government Accountability Office, *Military Readiness: Effects of a U.S. Military Presence in Europe on Mobility Requirements* (Washington, D.C.: GAO, 2001), p. 1, available at <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-02-99.pdf>.

¹¹⁸ Alexander A. Burnett, “21st TSC assists movement of last main battle tanks out of Europe,” *Army.mil*, April 5, 2013, available at https://www.army.mil/article/100363/21st_tsc_assists_movement_of_last_main_battle_tanks_out_of_europe.

¹¹⁹ Daniel Coats, “Director of National Intelligence Daniel Coats on Russia’s Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty Violation,” *DNI.gov*, 2018, available at <https://www.dni.gov/index.php/newsroom/speeches-interviews/speeches-interviews-2018/3270-director-of-national-intelligence-daniel-coats-on-russia-s-inf-treaty-violation>.

Russia's violation of the INF Treaty and unwillingness to answer satisfactorily U.S. and allied concerns led to the U.S. withdrawal from the Treaty in 2019.¹²⁰ China, meanwhile, was never a party to the INF Treaty, and, according to the latest Department of Defense report on the subject, has over 1,500 intermediate-range missiles, many of which are likely nuclear-armed or nuclear-capable.¹²¹

The United States, however, does not have any intermediate-range land-based missiles that are forward-deployed permanently even five years after the United States withdrew from the INF Treaty.¹²² The United States reportedly may deploy ground-launched intermediate-range missiles in the Pacific theater in the future, but the system would be a variant of the Navy's long-serving

¹²⁰ C. Todd Lopez, "U.S. Withdraws From Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty," *Defense.gov*, August 2, 2019, available at <https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/article/article/1924779/us-withdraws-from-intermediate-range-nuclear-forces-treaty/>.

¹²¹ U.S. Department of Defense, *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China* (Washington, D.C.: Department of Defense, 2023), p. 67, available at <https://media.defense.gov/2023/Oct/19/2003323409/-1/-1/1/2023-MILITARY-AND-SECURITY-DEVELOPMENTS-INVOLVING-THE-PEOPLES-REPUBLIC-OF-CHINA.PDF>.

¹²² The United States recently deployed the Typhon missile as part of a series of exercises to the Philippines, a capability that reportedly has a 1,600 kilometer range. It is unclear at the time of this writing how long this missile type will remain deployed there, but it is not believed to be a permanent duty station. Brad Lendon, "US Sends Land-attack Missile System to Philippines for Exercises in Apparent Message to China," *CNN*, April 22, 2024, available at <https://www.cnn.com/2024/04/22/asia/us-land-attack-missile-philippines-china-intl-hnk-ml/index.html>; and, U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *2023 Annual Report to Congress* (Washington, D.C.: U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, November 2023), p. 455, available at https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/2023-11/Chapter_4_Section_2--Weapons_Technology_and_Export_Controls.pdf.

Tomahawk cruise missile.¹²³ The only new, foreseeable ground-launched intermediate range missile the United States is developing, according to open sources, is the U.S. Army's Dark Eagle hypersonic weapon.¹²⁴ Washington and Berlin have most recently announced plans for the "episodic" deployment in Germany of U.S. intermediate-range missiles capable of striking targets inside Russia,¹²⁵ a decision likely to generate political opposition within Germany. Notably, in another instance of China and Russia failing to follow the example of U.S. restraint, officials in the Trump and Biden Administrations have stressed that whatever intermediate-range capabilities the United States will develop *will be conventionally armed only*.¹²⁶

¹²³ Patrick Tucker, "US to Deploy New Land-based Missiles, Army's Pacific Commander Says," *Defense One*, November 19, 2023, available at <https://www.defenseone.com/technology/2023/11/us-deploy-new-land-based-missiles-armys-pacific-commander-says/392137/>.

¹²⁴ U.S. Director Operational Test and Evaluation, "Dark Eagle," *DOTE.OSD.mil*, 2021, available at <https://www.dote.osd.mil/Portals/97/pub/reports/FY2021/army/2021darkeagle.pdf?ver=77oKISiMzpHP9Y76-FLetQ%3D%3D>.

¹²⁵ See, "Joint Statement from United States and Germany on Long-Range Fires Deployment in Germany," White House Press Statement, July 10, 2024, available at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2024/07/10/joint-statement-from-united-states-and-germany-on-long-range-fires-deployment-in-germany/>.

¹²⁶ For remarks by Trump Administration officials, see, Mark T. Esper, "Statement From Secretary of Defense Mark T. Esper on the INF Treaty," *Defense.gov*, August 2, 2019, available at <https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/1924386/statement-from-secretary-of-defense-mark-t-esper-on-the-inf-treaty/>; and, Andrea L. Thompson, as quoted in, U.S. Senate, *Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty* (Washington, D.C.: Foreign Relations Committee, May 15, 2019), p. 9, available at <https://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/05%2015%2019%20Intermediate-Range%20Nuclear%20Forces%20Treaty.pdf>. For an example from the Biden Administration, see, Jake Sullivan, "Remarks by National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan for the Arms Control Association (ACA) Annual Forum," *WhiteHouse.gov*, June 2, 2023, available at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches->

Conclusion and Recommendations

In the five years following the signing of the INF Treaty in 1987, U.S. and NATO threat perceptions of the Soviet Union, and then Russia, declined rapidly, leading to further drawdowns and the elimination of multiple U.S. nuclear capabilities—the expected presence of which were key to the Treaty’s rationale. In the nearly 10 years since Russia first invaded Ukraine, U.S. and allied threat perceptions have once again changed rapidly, but this time toward recognizing the malign threats of Russia and subsequently China, including Moscow’s numerous explicit nuclear threats.

Unlike the years immediately following the signing of the INF Treaty, however, the United States has not made drastic changes in its military capabilities corresponding to these new threats. U.S. conventional intermediate-range missile forces remain in development and the nuclear modernization program, largely identified in 2010, remains basically unchanged—with the only notable exception being a drawn-out (and still ongoing) debate over a single weapon system, the nuclear-armed sea-launched cruise missile (SLCM-N) that is opposed by the Biden Administration. This dynamic illustrates the harsh reality that U.S. defense thinking adapts slowly to an unwanted threat environment, and that the U.S. defense industrial base, even assuming political backing, cannot respond as quickly as the threat environment can change. It is simply far more difficult, time consuming and politically unwelcome to think anew and to build new capabilities than it is to retire and eliminate a capability.

What are lessons from this INF Treaty case study? First and most obvious, U.S. officials should understand that arms control agreements can have pernicious unintended

consequences as threats evolve. That is, the United States and NATO seemingly “solved” the problem of Soviet intermediate-range nuclear forces threatening the West, but an aggressive, corresponding U.S. nuclear reduction agenda led to the near elimination of those U.S. capabilities expected to mitigate the deterrence downsides of eliminating U.S. INF.

While the U.S. commitment to the INF Treaty satisfied allied governments from the late 1980s through the early 2010s, it is clear that the Treaty, and the U.S. arms control-related drive to “reduce the role” of nuclear weapons in general, and U.S. theater nuclear weapons in particular, have led to an extreme imbalance in theater nuclear weapons in favor of Russia and China. That imbalance appears to have emboldened Moscow to issue reckless nuclear threats and calls into question the credibility of U.S. extended deterrence commitments. Indeed, the 2010 *Nuclear Posture Review Report* predicted just such an allied reaction when it stated, “But large disparities in nuclear capabilities could raise concerns on both sides [in the United States and Russia] and among U.S. allies and partners, and may not be conducive to maintaining a stable, long-term strategic relationship...”¹²⁷ The INF Treaty and subsequent U.S. arms control enthusiasms clearly have contributed to increased concern among some key allies about U.S. extended deterrence credibility. Indeed, there are growing allied calls for the United States to significantly adapt its nuclear forces in Europe and the Indo-Pacific to improve the credibility of its extended deterrence and sustain allied assurance.¹²⁸

¹²⁷ U.S. Department of Defense, *Nuclear Posture Review Report*, op. cit., p. 30.

¹²⁸ Artur Kacprzyk, *NATO Nuclear Adaptation: Rationales for Expanding the Force Posture in Europe* (Warsaw, PL: Polish Institute of International Affairs, November 23, 2023), available at <https://www.pism.pl/publications/nato-nuclear-adaptation-rationales-for-expanding-the-force-posture-in-europe>; and, Peter K. Lee

Second, U.S. officials should recognize the importance of in-theater forces for extended deterrence and assurance, particularly when allied threat perceptions have understandably increased dramatically. Many U.S. and NATO officials emphasized the increased importance of sub-500 km range U.S. tactical nuclear weapons during the ratification of the INF Treaty. When it appeared INF systems would be reduced or eliminated, U.S. and allied officials emphasized the importance of regionally-deployed capabilities, like TLAM-N—which Washington subsequently also eliminated. More recently, the bipartisan 2023 U.S. Strategic Posture Commission concluded that “Given the geographic distance between the U.S. homeland and its Allies overseas and the long lead time for force projection from the U.S. homeland, Allies stressed the importance of U.S. military forces being available in theater for deterrence and assurance purposes.”¹²⁹ Although the prospect for U.S. forward-deployed intermediate-range nuclear forces is unclear at best, the much-debated SLCM-N represents a potentially helpful in-theater option. As Secretary of Defense Schlesinger stated in an interview during the Cold War, “There is no substitute for a battlefield weapon, except for a weapon deployed near the battlefield.”¹³⁰ Pursuing SLCM-N, a weapon deployed

and Kang Chungku, *Comparing Allied Public Confidence in U.S. Extended Nuclear Deterrence* (Seoul, SK: The Asan Institute for Policy Studies, March 27, 2024), available at <https://en.asaninst.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Issue-Brief-Comparing-Allied-Public-Confidence-in-U.S.-Extended-Nuclear-Deterrence.pdf>.

¹²⁹ Madelyn R. Creedon and Jon L. Kyl, Chair and Vice Chair, *America’s Strategic Posture: The Final Report of the Congressional Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Institute for Defense Analyses, 2023), p. 75, available at https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/americas_strategic_posture_the_final_report_of_the_congressional_commission_on_the_strategic_posture_of_the_united_states.pdf.

¹³⁰ James Schlesinger, as quoted in, “Interview with James Schlesinger, 1987, Part 2,” *GBH Archives*, October 28, 1987, available at

“near the battlefield” as it were, is an obvious option for the United States to improve the credibility of its extended deterrence and assurance efforts.

Third, and finally, U.S. officials must recognize that deterrence (including extended deterrence) and assurance requirements can change rapidly and unexpectedly—far faster than stodgy U.S. thinking and faster than the U.S. industrial base can be expected to respond.¹³¹ These realities point to the importance of a flexible, in-place nuclear force posture and a more responsive U.S. defense industrial base. As the 2023 U.S. Strategic Posture Commission noted, “The Commission recommends this urgent expansion of the capacity of the U.S. nuclear weapons defense industrial base and the DOE/NNSA nuclear security enterprise include[s] the flexibility to respond to emerging requirements in a timely fashion.”¹³² While flexibility within existing military capabilities is vitally important, it may not in all circumstances satisfy new requirements, especially those that were unforeseen when existing capabilities were designed and produced. Thus, the United States should prioritize the ability to produce capabilities responsive to the unique extended deterrence and assurance requirements that the emerging two-nuclear-peer threat environment likely will produce.

In summary, Russia and China have dramatically heightened the threat environment. Russian actions and threats have caused NATO allies to alter their threat perceptions, extended deterrence requirements, and

https://openvault.wgbh.org/catalog/V_3828CDDC8A064FC69F1DF92E6D1AD7E6.

¹³¹ On today’s shifting extended deterrence and assurance requirements, see, Matthew R. Costlow and Keith B. Payne, “TLAM-N and SLCM-N: Lessons for Extended Deterrence and Assuring Allies,” *Information Series*, No. 567 (Fairfax, VA: National Institute Press, November 15, 2023), available at <https://nipp.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/IS-567.pdf>.

¹³² Creedon and Kyl, *America’s Strategic Posture*, op. cit., p. 60.

assurance requirements. The reality of these threats and allied perceptions, in turn, requires a U.S. response—one which the United States has largely proven either incapable or unwilling to undertake. The case of the INF Treaty, its negotiation and aftermath, provides important lessons concerning the importance of understanding the potential magnitude of unintended consequences imposed by arms control agreements, the vital role of in-theater U.S. capabilities for extended deterrence and assurance, and the critical importance of a responsive U.S. defense industrial base.

The requirements for deterrence and assurance are still being set in the emerging two-nuclear-peer threat environment with Russia and China; but, should the United States heed the lessons of the INF Treaty, Washington has the opportunity to coordinate and tailor responses to adversary developments in ways that advance U.S. and allied deterrence goals—and to ensure that arms control agreements or Washington's unilateral arms control gestures do not prevent those goals. Should U.S. officials prove willing to grant greater focus and effort on meeting the extended deterrence and assurance requirements of U.S. allies, Washington can improve both its own short-term and long-term security outlooks in a threat environment where the advantages of reliable allies may prove decisive.

The 1991-1992 Presidential Nuclear Initiatives and the Cascading Effects on U.S. Alliances

Introduction

The end of the Cold War was marked by the rapid transformation of political relations between the United States and the Soviet Union that led to radical changes to each of their nuclear postures. The Presidential Nuclear Initiatives (PNIs) of 1991-1992 were extensive in their scope (affecting both non-strategic and strategic nuclear forces), size (thousands of warheads), and nature (unilateral commitments with calls for reciprocal action). The PNIs were a product, in part, of the belief in Washington that the nuclear weapons so eliminated were of greatly reduced importance in an emerging more cooperative “new world order.” President George H. W. Bush saw the wholly transformed threat environment as an opportunity to reduce the U.S. nuclear posture in ways that many of his senior advisors already favored and which, if done quickly, were expected to influence Moscow’s decisions toward reciprocal nuclear reductions. At the time, U.S. allies were generally quite supportive of the PNIs and hoped the vast nuclear reductions could further solidify improved political relations with Russia and usher in political stability and a “peace dividend” of fiscal savings.

Today, however, U.S. allies are becoming increasingly vocal in their dissatisfaction with Washington’s commitment to maintaining the status quo regarding its much-reduced and limited nuclear posture. Where does Washington’s resistance to change originate? Undoubtedly, some part of the U.S. reluctance to expand the size of its nuclear forces can be attributed to the lingering post-Cold War attitude that nuclear weapons are increasingly irrelevant and that the role and number of nuclear weapons

should continue to be reduced. It is now quite apparent that Beijing and Moscow do not share this belief about the global order or their own nuclear forces.

This analysis therefore proceeds in four main parts. First, it offers a brief summary of the main elements of the PNIs and the reasons why U.S. officials supported these initiatives. Second, it examines how U.S. allies reacted to the PNIs when they were first implemented. Third, it examines the PNIs' effects over the longer term with special emphasis on U.S. deterrence options in an increasingly dangerous international security environment. Fourth and finally, this analysis offers a brief set of conclusions and lessons learned from a study of the PNIs.

The Context and Substance of the Presidential Nuclear Initiatives

The months leading up to the first PNI in September 1991 were tumultuous in the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact. Indeed, states were, in quick succession, declaring their independence from the Soviet Union and finding themselves burdened with large amounts of Soviet military equipment, even nuclear weapons, on their now-sovereign territory.¹³³ Since many of these nuclear weapons were designed for either the battlefield (landmines, artillery) or short-range engagements (tactical missiles), their relative size, weight, and transportability—plus the political instability of newly independent states—caused U.S. officials to worry about the possibility of “loose nukes” falling into the hands of terrorists or criminals on the black

¹³³ For a detailed account of the events leading up to both the September 1991 and January 1992 PNI announcements, see, Susan J. Koch, *The Presidential Nuclear Initiatives of 1991-1992* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 2012), pp. 1-22, available at https://ndupress.ndu.edu/portals/68/documents/casestudies/cswm_d_casestudy-5.pdf.

market. These concerns, plus the possibility of rogue Soviet military units with access to nuclear weapons, led President George H. W. Bush and his advisors to seek ways to encourage the consolidation and security of Soviet nuclear weapons. On September 27, 1991, President Bush announced in a television address to the nation a sweeping series of actions that were meant to publicly reassure and strengthen Soviet leaders against hardliners in their ranks towards a path of nuclear reductions and security. The United States was willing to undertake unilateral reductions while hoping for Soviet reciprocation.

The September 1991 PNI eliminated ground-launched tactical nuclear weapons; withdrew tactical nuclear weapons from the Navy and eliminated all but the nuclear-armed Tomahawk (TLAM-N); de-alerted all strategic bombers; de-alerted Minuteman II missiles slated for elimination under the START Treaty; cancelled the mobility programs for the Peacekeeper and Small ICBMs; cancelled the short-range attack missile II (SRAM-II); and consolidated nuclear command and control under the newly formed United States Strategic Command (USSTRATCOM).¹³⁴ Additionally, President Bush called on Moscow to work with the United States to eliminate ICBMs with multiple warheads and permit the “limited deployment” of non-nuclear defenses to protect against “limited ballistic missile strikes, whatever their source...”¹³⁵ Moscow’s initial response included some reciprocal actions.¹³⁶ The hoped-for reciprocity, however, ultimately did not take place.

¹³⁴ For more details, see the presentation of Greg Schulte, *President’s Nuclear Initiatives* (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Secretary of Defense, 1992), available at https://www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/FOID/Reading%20Room/NCB/09-F-0134_President's_Nuclear_Initiative.pdf.

¹³⁵ Koch, *The Presidential Nuclear Initiatives*, op. cit., p. 26.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 14-17.

On December 25, 1991, a little less than three months after President Bush's September 1991 announcement, the Soviet Union ceased to exist, with the Russian Federation taking its place. President Gorbachev resigned and President Yeltsin became Russia's leader, immediately receiving an invitation to meet President Bush in the United States to discuss further steps related to nuclear reductions.¹³⁷ On January 28, 1992, President Bush outlined in his State of the Union address some additional steps the United States was taking unilaterally, but again, with a call for reciprocal action from Russia. What became known as PNI II concerned strategic nuclear forces. It ended production of the B-2 bomber at 20; cancelled the Small ICBM program entirely; ceased production of the Advanced Cruise Missile; ceased production of the Peacekeeper missile; and ceased production of the W-88 warhead for the Trident SLBM.¹³⁸ In response, President Yeltsin re-affirmed support for President Gorbachev's actions and further clarified how Russia would implement its unilateral proposals.¹³⁹ Additionally, President Yeltsin announced the cessation of production of Backfire and Blackjack bombers, current air-launched cruise missiles (ALCMs), and long-range sea-launched cruise missiles (SLCMs), among other actions.¹⁴⁰

In summary, the scope and scale of U.S. actions under the PNIs were, and remain, unprecedented. As seen in the below figure, after 1990, U.S. non-strategic (or tactical) nuclear weapons were cut unilaterally by over 75 percent (with many of the remaining placed in storage) while strategic nuclear weapons were cut by about 25 percent. The difference would have appeared even starker to allies at the

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

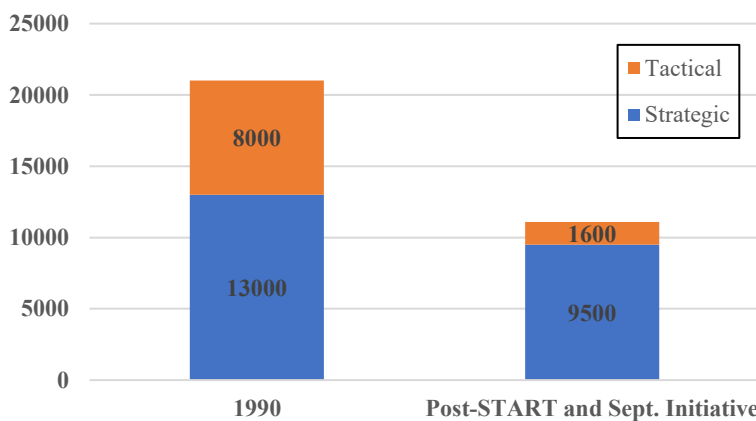
¹³⁸ Schulte, *The President's Initiatives*, op. cit., p. 5.

¹³⁹ For more details, see, Koch, *The Presidential Nuclear Initiatives*, op. cit., pp. 19-21, 34-39.

¹⁴⁰ *Loc. cit.*

time since, as discussed above, these reductions roughly coincided with the deep reduction of U.S. intermediate-range nuclear forces under the INF Treaty.

Total U.S. Nuclear Warheads¹⁴¹



These totals are also notable when compared to what the United States assessed at the time were the Soviet Union's totals: 17,000 tactical nuclear warheads, of which approximately 10,000 would be destroyed and 2,000 placed in storage if the Soviets actually reciprocated Washington's moves.¹⁴² Within only a few years, however, U.S. officials were voicing their concerns that Russia was not following through on its commitments.¹⁴³ Nevertheless, U.S. and allied officials generally believed that improved political relations with Russia was the highest priority in the immediate post-Cold War era and a welcome reprieve from

¹⁴¹ Data and labels adapted from chart in Schulte, *The President's Initiatives*, op. cit., p. 7.

¹⁴² Dick Cheney, as quoted in, "Press Briefing," *Department of Defense*, September 28, 1991, p. 18, available at https://www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/FOID/Reading%20Room/NCB/09-F-0134_Dick_Cheney_Press_Briefing.pdf.

¹⁴³ Koch, *The Presidential Nuclear Initiatives*, op. cit., p. 21.

the tensions that plagued the Cold War only a few years earlier.

Immediate Allied Reactions

U.S. allies in NATO were supportive of reductions in U.S. non-strategic weapons deployed in Europe, due in part to pressure from their domestic constituencies, and their preferences led to changes in the U.S. nuclear posture even before the PNIs. As documented by Susan Koch, "The NATO Allies... had begun discussing withdrawal of those [non-strategic] forces after the fall of the Warsaw Pact. Those changing Allied views contributed to President Bush's May 1990 decision to cancel Follow-On to Lance and nuclear artillery warhead modernization, and to the July 1990 NATO Summit call for a negotiated elimination of short-range nuclear artillery in Europe."¹⁴⁴ Thus, NATO allies were already primed for further U.S. reductions in non-strategic nuclear weapons when President Bush made his announcements of the PNIs.

Indeed, as Koch points out, NATO's Nuclear Planning Group decided in October 1991, shortly after the first PNI announcement in September 1991, that it would reduce the number of nuclear gravity bombs reportedly from 1,400 to 700,¹⁴⁵ at a relatively small number of potentially vulnerable bases. This action, when paired with the U.S. elimination of many intermediate-range nuclear forces under the INF Treaty, and the elimination of ground-launched non-strategic nuclear forces under the September PNI, left the United States with only a much-reduced number of dual-capable, aircraft-delivered nuclear gravity bombs forward deployed in Europe. In Asia, the effects were even more pronounced – a complete removal of all forward-deployed

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 11-12.

nuclear weapons from South Korea.¹⁴⁶ As with NATO allies in Europe, South Korea's political leaders supported and even touted the U.S. decision to withdraw the weapons, although recently declassified documents indicate they appear to have sought "conventional enhancements" to offset the removal of nuclear weapons.¹⁴⁷

Long-Term Effects of the PNIs

As U.S. officials grappled with the sweeping changes in the immediate post-Cold War period, they made a conscious effort to promote what seemed to be prudent nuclear reductions, but they also stressed the importance of not being swept up in the expectation that the emerging good relations with Russia would necessarily endure. As Secretary of Defense Cheney stated at the time:

I want to emphasize that as we have put forward a sweeping package here and moved to dramatically change our overall nuclear posture, that here in the Department [of Defense] we have carefully considered the consequences of these reductions from the standpoint of being able to

¹⁴⁶ South Korean President Roh announced in December 1991 that "there does not exist any nuclear weapons whatsoever, anywhere in the Republic of Korea." James Kim, "Roh Declares South Korea is Free of Nuclear Weapons," *UPI.com*, December 18, 1991, available at <https://www.upi.com/Archives/1991/12/18/Roh-declares-South-Korea-is-free-of-nuclear-weapons/6592693032400/>; see also, Dick Cheney, *President's Initiative and Korea* (Washington, D.C.: Department of State, October 15, 1991), pp. 1-4, available at https://www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/FOID/Reading%20Room/MDR_Releases/FY18/FY18_Q1/The_Presidents_Initiative_10Oct1991.pdf.

¹⁴⁷ Paul Wolfowitz, *Consultations in Seoul* (Washington, D.C.: Department of Defense, November 1, 1991), p. 2, available at https://www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/FOID/Reading%20Room/MDR_Releases/FY18/FY18_Q1/Consultation_1Nov1991.pdf.

maintain the nation's security. I am absolutely confident, based upon the work that we've done, that we can have confidence that our security and that of our allies is protected, even with these initiatives, that we will retain sufficient nuclear forces, and that we are committed to keeping them up to date and effective. The world has changed, but insurance is still a good idea. Under this plan, we believe we will have enough.¹⁴⁸

Nevertheless, U.S. officials generally were optimistic regarding the PNIs and future deterrence requirements, but, as seen below, these expectations did not hold up over the long term.

ADM David Jeremiah, Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in 1992, provided one of the most complete explanations about U.S. nuclear force reductions and the assumptions driving them. Testifying before Congress, he stated:

But at the same time, I also want to assure you that we carefully examined the risk to our overall national security before recommending such sweeping changes. We believe that we can safely project a requirement for only [deleted] weapons, and possibly as few as 6,300 [deleted] because:

It is no longer feasible for the former Soviet Union to launch a massive conventional attack on Western Europe;

The demise of the former Soviet Union has reduced the number of strategic weapons and military sites we must hold at risk to achieve strategic deterrence;

¹⁴⁸ Dick Cheney, as quoted in, "Press Briefing," *op. cit.*, p. 4.

The evolving geopolitical situation has allowed us to broadly reconsider our tactical nuclear weapon doctrine and targeting policy;

And Operation Desert Storm demonstrated the capability of [U.S.] advanced conventional munitions in holding targets at risk.

Furthermore, we think the planned reductions in stockpile size enable us to improve significantly the safety of the enduring stockpile. We are preferentially eliminating older weapons that don't possess the full suite of modern safety features.¹⁴⁹

As the Soviet/Russian threat appeared to recede, there was no apparent role for U.S. ground-based, short-range, non-strategic nuclear weapons in Europe or Asia. This consideration, plus the promise of a safer and smaller arsenal, with all the attendant fiscal savings, made the PNIs relatively uncontroversial. The PNIs were an expression of the overall U.S. goal of reducing the number and salience of nuclear weapons in an apparently much more benign threat environment.

There have been, however, negative long-term consequences from the shift in U.S. thinking about the potential for great power conflict and corresponding deep reduction of nuclear weapons. Department of Energy officials, for instance, were among the first to note the importance of maintaining the full range of nuclear weapons development, testing, and production capabilities. As one official reflected on the changed international environment and a much smaller U.S. nuclear posture, "...

¹⁴⁹ ADM David E. Jeremiah, Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, as quoted in, U.S. House of Representatives, *Hearings on National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1993 - H.R. 5006 and Oversight of Previously Authorized Programs* (Washington, D.C.: Committee on Armed Services, April 30, 1992), p. 1005.

for the first time since 1945, the United States is not building any new nuclear weapons. The challenge this presents is to find ways to reduce costs, which we are doing, while at the same time maintaining a viable research, development, testing, and production capability, which will service a decreasing, but nonetheless vital stockpile of nuclear weapons.”¹⁵⁰ Another Department of Energy official echoed this sentiment, stating, “As long as we rely on nuclear weapons for deterrence, it is an absolute necessity that our remaining nuclear stockpile be supported by a fully capable nuclear weapons complex that can perform all the tasks associated with maintaining a nuclear stockpile, from the design and testing stages, through producing nuclear materials and warheads and fixing problems as they occur, to dismantling the warheads once they have been retired.”¹⁵¹

Yet the allure of financial savings and the push to reduce the role and number of nuclear weapons proved too tempting for Congress, which began cutting back DOE programs to the point where officials in charge of nuclear weapons production were publicly warning the cuts were too much, too soon. As Assistant Secretary for Defense Programs Richard Claytor testified in 1992, “Indeed, I think we have cut back substantially and I would even say we might be teetering on the brink of losing our nuclear competence.”¹⁵² When asked by then Representative Jon Kyl to elaborate on “losing our nuclear competence,” Claytor responded that his worries were not confined only

¹⁵⁰ Richard A. Claytor, as quoted in, U.S. House of Representatives, *Energy and Water Development Appropriations for 1993* (Washington, D.C.: Committee on Appropriations, March 10, 1992), p. 1490.

¹⁵¹ Robert B. Barker, as quoted in, *Ibid.*, p. 1605.

¹⁵² Richard Claytor, as quoted in, U.S. House of Representatives, *Hearings on National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1993 – H.R. 5006 and Oversight of Previously Authorized Programs* (Washington, D.C.: Committee on Armed Services, April 30, 1992), p. 1012.

to nuclear weapon testing and laboratory experiments: "... we really are cutting back our production work force such that if we had to get into heavy production of a weapon it would probably take us a couple years to get up [to] speed again. We can deal with individual problems, small problems. We simply don't have capability to get back into quick production right now. We are down to that kind of level."¹⁵³

Clearly the PNIs are not alone responsible for the long-term deterioration of the U.S. nuclear infrastructure, including its workforce. They do, however, reflect the narrative regarding reductions in nuclear weapons underlying Washington's policies and show how major changes in the U.S. nuclear force posture can produce unintended consequences. Unfortunately, the assumptions behind the PNIs, such as amity with, and reciprocal behavior by Moscow, have proved illusory. Today, the factors that combined at a time and place in history to produce the PNIs are not present. And, much like the late Cold War, some allies are asking the United States to alter its nuclear posture—this time in response to a dramatically worsened threat environment. So far, the United States has done little in that respect, whether because of infrastructure constraints, the lack of political will, or both.

The PNIs were among the most consequential U.S. arms control efforts—not simply because they fundamentally reduced the U.S. nuclear force posture; they removed capabilities and options for deterrence and extended deterrence. With only one shorter-range, forward-based, non-strategic nuclear capability in its arsenal remaining in Europe, the PNIs effectively removed most theater nuclear capabilities and options for extended deterrence—essentially compelling Washington to rely more on conventional forces and the U.S. strategic nuclear arsenal

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 1013.

for extended nuclear deterrence. The enormous disparity in the number and types of weapons in the U.S. and Russian non-strategic nuclear arsenals is concerning for the United States and its allies as Russia's coercive nuclear threats intensify. Indeed, it is an open question whether allies perceive as credible a U.S. extended deterrence strategy that, by necessity, must rely heavily on strategic nuclear options in response to Russian non-strategic nuclear employment. The absence of U.S. non-strategic nuclear options in the Indo-Pacific only worsens the extended deterrence outlook for allies there as the United States must rely heavily on its strategic nuclear arsenal to deter opportunistic aggression in future crises with Russia or China. U.S. conventional forces clearly are not postured for two major regional wars overseas, much less in two distinct and geographically distant theaters.¹⁵⁴

The non-strategic nuclear capabilities covered under the PNIs were critical elements of extended deterrence during the Cold War, but as the threat they were built to deter appeared to end, they were eliminated. Regrettably for the United States and its allies, however, their expectations of an enduring benign threat environment lasted longer than obvious threat realities given adversary hostilities and nuclear threats. Now, with an aging nuclear infrastructure and no new non-strategic nuclear capability in the program of record until perhaps the mid-2030s, some key allies are questioning U.S. extended nuclear deterrence credibility and Washington is hard pressed to offer convincing assurances.

For much of the Cold War, the United States forward deployed shorter-range nuclear weapons overseas to fulfill multiple roles, including: extending deterrence on behalf of allies, compensating for conventional inferiority, and

¹⁵⁴ See the discussion in, Trachtenberg, *The Demise of the "Two-War Strategy" and Its Impact on Extended Deterrence and Assurance*, op. cit., passim.

assuring allies of U.S. credibility as a security partner. Today, allies once again see U.S. extended deterrence and assurance as irreplaceable, especially in the face of conventionally superior adversaries. But the legacy effects of the PNIs (in conjunction with the legacy effects of the INF Treaty) effectively constrain the United States from strengthening its regional nuclear deterrence capabilities in a timely manner. Given Russia's and China's focused modernization and buildup of theater nuclear capabilities and their limited nuclear escalation threats, the paucity of comparable U.S. options to deter these threats is a growing concern for allies. The gap between what is needed for U.S. extended deterrence credibility and what the United States can provide will widen over the next decade as adversary threats continue apace and Washington struggles to stand up a single regional nuclear program, SLCM-N. The PNIs, and underlying thinking regarding nuclear weapons and the "new world order," have contributed to the harsh realities confronting U.S. alliances.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The removal and elimination of many U.S. nuclear weapons from Europe satisfied Washington and allies, and produced fiscal savings; it may, at the time, have strengthened the position of democratic forces in Russia against hardliners. On the other hand, the assumptions behind the PNIs about the international threat environment and Russian reciprocity proved illusory. Even while the security environment changed for the worse, the United States did not modernize its nuclear infrastructure or force posture accordingly—hopeful that better political relations would return, and that conventional weapons could take up the deterrence burden.

Some allies have signaled to the United States that these factors did not materialize as hoped and changes were

necessary. Recent commentary on NATO's nuclear deterrence requirements, and the need for additional and more capable options, illustrates one of the unintended consequences of the PNIs.¹⁵⁵ At the time, no newly independent state that was once in the Warsaw Pact had joined NATO, and alliance unity was assured. Over the next 30 years, however, former Warsaw Pact states and states that had been part of the Soviet Union joined NATO. They have sought changes to the U.S. theater nuclear posture – and yet, there has been no stated change in requirements for anything more than nuclear gravity bombs delivered by DCA.¹⁵⁶

Perhaps unsurprisingly, a U.S. report that helped lay the foundation for NATO's "dual-track" decision, i.e., pursuing theater nuclear modernization simultaneously with renewed arms control negotiations with the Soviets, presented one of the more comprehensive assessments of the benefits of NATO theater nuclear modernization. In June 1978, President Jimmy Carter tasked an interagency group led by National Security Council staff to study how "possible increased long-range theater nuclear force capabilities" might impact the prospect of arms control discussions with the Soviet Union.¹⁵⁷ The interagency group submitted its report in response to Presidential Review Memorandum 38 and stated that DCA are limited in

¹⁵⁵ See, for instance, Artur Kacprzyk, *NATO Nuclear Adaptation: Rationales for Expanding the Force Posture in Europe*, op. cit.

¹⁵⁶ For example, Julian Borger, "Poland Suggests Hosting US Nuclear Weapons amid Growing Fears of Putin's Threats," *The Guardian*, October 5, 2022, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/oct/05/poland-us-nuclear-wars-russia-putin-ukraine>.

¹⁵⁷ Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Presidential Review Memorandum / NSC-38: Long Range Theater Nuclear Capabilities and Arms Control* (Washington, D.C.: NSC, June 22, 1978), available at https://www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov/sites/default/files/pdf_documents/assets/documents/memorandums/prm38.pdf.

important ways that affect both deterrence and assurance: “The DCA in the theater nuclear role are subject to attrition while carrying out their conventional missions, and subject to further losses when penetrating Warsaw Pact air defenses while executing long-range missions.”¹⁵⁸

The interagency report also found that land-based theater nuclear forces (TNFs) had unique advantages that included presenting a visible manifestation of political will and alliance unity. Additionally, it stated that land-based TNF provided “... additional options which can prevent the enemy from predicting with confidence NATO’s specific response, thus encouraging him to conclude that an unacceptable degree of risk would be involved regardless of the nature of his attack.”¹⁵⁹ This insight is especially pertinent for U.S. and NATO officials today as nuclear gravity bombs delivered by DCA are the only non-strategic nuclear response option available to the Alliance—a direct consequence of the PNIs and INF Treaty. As such, while Russia may not be able to predict with certainty whether NATO would respond to a particular provocation with nuclear weapons, or with how many if it did, Russia could anticipate that any NATO nuclear response would be limited to DCA with gravity bombs and prepare accordingly. Moscow’s confidence that it could predict (at least well enough) NATO’s response to Russian limited nuclear employment in-theater, and prepare accordingly, is very likely to degrade extended deterrence and be a source of understandable allied concern.

Thus, one important lesson from the PNIs is that nuclear reductions can inadvertently plant the seed for future force

¹⁵⁸ National Security Council, *PRM 38, Section II: Possible Long Range Theater Nuclear Modernization* (Washington, D.C.: NSC, August 16, 1978), p. 12, available at https://www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/FOID/Reading%20Room/NCB/05-F-0738_DOC_16C_final_response-OCRD.pdf.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

posture gaps. The PNIs eliminated or restricted U.S. nuclear options that were seen as unnecessary at the time, and many officials thought that if changes were necessary in the future, then the modernized U.S. nuclear infrastructure could produce the required capabilities. Those hopes have proven false and the United States today is hampered by decisions made 30 years ago—limiting its ability to meet shifting extended deterrence, and assurance requirements. Today, U.S. strategic nuclear forces bear a far greater extended deterrence burden than likely is credible given the relative lack of regional nuclear systems—a capabilities gap that widens every day as Russia and China improve and increase their non-strategic nuclear arsenals and allies perceive a growing need for more credible U.S. extended deterrence threats.

Naturally, this leads to a second “lesson learned” from the PNIs, which is that U.S. officials should place a priority on building adaptability, and retaining that adaptability, in the U.S. nuclear infrastructure. NATO allies greatly valued the diversity of options provided by U.S. theater nuclear forces and they proved invaluable for both extended deterrence and the conclusion of arms control agreements. Indeed, the bipartisan and consensus report of the 2023 Strategic Posture Commission recognized this insight and recommended modifications to the U.S. theater nuclear force posture to “address allied concerns regarding extended deterrence.”¹⁶⁰ To aid in that effort, the Commission also recommended that the Department of Defense and Department of Energy/National Nuclear Security Administration “urgently expand strategic infrastructure” so that the infrastructure can “respond to emerging requirements in a timely fashion.”¹⁶¹

¹⁶⁰ Creedon and Kyl, *America's Strategic Posture: The Final Report of the Congressional Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States*, op. cit., p. 48.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

As noted above, however, the United States cannot currently respond rapidly to urgent calls for major modifications to the U.S. nuclear force posture. The PNIs, a perceived more benign threat environment, and the allure of a “peace dividend” of fiscal savings all combined to cut back on the U.S. nuclear force posture and infrastructure, which leaves the United States unable to adjust its nuclear forces to meet dynamic allied extended deterrence and assurance requirements. Indeed, more than 30 years since the PNIs, the Administrator of the National Nuclear Security Administration has described how the U.S. nuclear infrastructure remains “fragile,” making current modernization programs “difficult to produce.”¹⁶²

One of the more significant consequences of a reduced U.S. nuclear force posture and infrastructure is the lack of margin to meet increased allied extended deterrence and assurance requirements in response to the shift in threat perceptions. For instance, China’s “breathhtaking” nuclear breakout took just a few years to manifest itself – but since the United States did not anticipate this development when it eliminated its nuclear forces in the Indo-Pacific, and had no margin in its nuclear infrastructure, it is forced to build future capabilities such as the potential nuclear-armed sea-launched cruise missile in a manner that does not interfere with current modernization efforts, pushing SLCM-N toward a 2034 deployment date.¹⁶³ One of the advantages of

¹⁶² Jill Hruby, “NNSA Administrator Jill Hruby Remarks at Strategic Weapons in the 21st Century Symposium,” *Department of Energy*, April 18, 2024, available at <https://www.energy.gov/nnsa/articles/nnsa-administrator-jill-hruby-remarks-strategic-weapons-21st-century-symposium>.

¹⁶³ On the “breathhtaking” pace of China’s nuclear breakout as assessed by then Commander of United States Strategic Command, ADM Charles Richard, see, David Vergun, “China, Russia Pose Strategic Challenges for U.S., Allies, Admiral Says,” *Defense.gov*, August 12, 2021, available at <https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/2729519/china-russia-pose-strategic->

the short-range non-strategic nuclear weapons that were eliminated by the PNIs is that they were easily deployable on relatively short notice—and thus could be shifted overseas based on changed allied threat perceptions.

As the United States develops its nuclear deterrence requirements to meet the emerging two-nuclear-peer threat environment, the prospect of major negotiated nuclear reductions in concert with either Russia or China appears incredibly unlikely. Nevertheless, a close study of the PNIs can yield valuable insights for U.S. and allied officials seeking to improve Western security against growing threats. In contrast to the PNIs, extreme care must be taken to sustain options and flexibility for worsening threat environments that few in Washington want to entertain. The PNIs demonstrate the risks involved in essentially abandoning flexibility to meet unexpected requirements. The challenge is retaining adaptability in the event that hope prevails over prudence—when the requirements for flexibility and responsiveness appear too costly and anachronistic. The PNIs were the products of a far different time and security environment, but their effects continue to limit U.S. extended deterrence options in ways that very likely degrade U.S. credibility and allied assurance, and contribute to consideration by some allies of independent nuclear capabilities.

challenges-for-us-allies-admiral-says/; On the unanticipated nature of China's nuclear developments, see, Creedon and Kyl, *America's Strategic Posture: The Final Report of the Congressional Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States*, op. cit., p. 38; and, on SLCM-N's initial operational capability date, see, Hruby, "NNSA Administrator Jill Hruby Remarks at Strategic Weapons in the 21st Century Symposium," op. cit.

TLAM-N and SLCM-N: Lessons for Extended Deterrence and Assuring Allies

Introduction

Allied confidence in the United States is not static; it shifts in reaction to changes in allies' domestic politics, the broader security environment, or dissatisfaction with U.S. policies. The latter variable is most within U.S. control since Washington is able to consult with allied leaderships regularly to understand their concerns and adjust its policies. Today, it is readily apparent that some allies are dissatisfied with the way the United States has approached the requirements for extended deterrence and assurance, a dynamic that is most clearly seen in the realm of U.S. nuclear weapons policy and capabilities.

An illuminating case study in this regard is the U.S. on-again and off-again pursuit of nuclear-armed sea-launched cruise missiles, specifically the Tomahawk Land Attack Missile (TLAM-N) and the Sea-Launched Cruise Missile (SLCM-N). This history illustrates how Washington's policies and actions—stemming, at least in part, from its commitment to reducing the number and role of nuclear weapons—have contributed to allies' increasing doubts regarding the credibility of U.S. extended deterrence, and thus increased the potential for nuclear proliferation. In short, the United States has often created a vicious cycle by causing allies to doubt the credibility of U.S. nuclear deterrence threats and its reliability as a security partner, and subsequently proposing "fixes" that fail to address the underlying material nature of allied doubts.

This case study examines the history of TLAM-N and SLCM-N, how the demise of the former and questionable future of the latter have promoted allied doubts regarding the credibility of U.S. extended deterrence and assurance,

and how Washington could move in light of the lessons learned from this history.

TLAM-N: History and Allied Views

The United States began research and development of a nuclear-armed sea-launched cruise missile based on the Tomahawk design beginning in the late 1970s, with initial deployment on attack submarines and surface ships in 1983.¹⁶⁴ As Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger explained in his 1986 annual report to Congress, TLAM-Ns, "...which are effective against a wide range of land targets, give us a cost-effective means of increasing hard-target capability at sea in the near term. Because they are distributed among a large number of ships, nuclear SLCMs complicate a potential attacker's planning and improve the overall survivability of the force."¹⁶⁵ In addition to holding at risk hard targets and complicating Moscow's attack planning, Secretary Weinberger stated that TLAM-N had three other distinct roles: "contributing to our nuclear reserve force; providing a worldwide deterrent presence; and deterring attacks on our naval forces by Soviet nuclear antiship missiles (especially those aboard Backfire and Badger bombers). U.S. sea-based nuclear forces, along with our land-based forces, support our policy of confronting the Soviet leadership with uncertainty and risk should they contemplate a nuclear war at sea."¹⁶⁶

TLAM-N from its inception was strongly linked to extended deterrence and assurance missions given its capability to be deployed regionally and "worldwide

¹⁶⁴ Caspar Weinberger, *Annual Report to Congress, FY1986*, p. 209, available at

https://history.defense.gov/Portals/70/Documents/annual_reports/1986_DOD_AR.pdf?ver=2016-02-25-102404-647.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 209.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

deterrent presence.” In a recently declassified memorandum from Secretary Weinberger to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff on TLAM-N, Weinberger notes that the missile had “excellent capabilities” as part of the “Designated Reserve Force” or “a theater support role worldwide—including Europe.”¹⁶⁷ Later, U.S. officials assured European allies that the United States could eliminate its intermediate-range nuclear weapons under the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty without undermining extended deterrence because it would retain TLAM-N.¹⁶⁸ Some allies came to see TLAM-N as uniquely relevant to extended deterrence and their assurance.

As noted above, however, as the Cold War ended, the United States decided to remove TLAM-N from its surface combat ships and submarines, keeping the missiles in storage for redeployment if needed in time of a crisis.¹⁶⁹ The Navy continued to exercise capabilities to return the system to full operational status within 30 days as a hedge against the potential deterioration in the security environment.¹⁷⁰ The plan for redeployment, however, reportedly was “farcical,”¹⁷¹ and the Obama Administration’s 2010 NPR

¹⁶⁷ Caspar Weinberger, *TLAM/N Targeting (U)* (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Secretary of Defense, October 9, 1985), p. 1, available at https://www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/FOID/Reading%20Room/MDR_Releases/FY18/FY18_Q2/Targeting_9Oct1985.pdf.

¹⁶⁸ See the comments of Chief of Naval Operations, ADM A. Carl Trost, in “302. Memorandum of Conversation,” *State.gov*, May 20, 1988, available at <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1981-88v11/d302>.

¹⁶⁹ Koch, *The Presidential Nuclear Initiatives of 1991-1992*, op. cit., p. 11.

¹⁷⁰ John Harvey and Robert Soofer, “Strengthening Deterrence with SLCM-N,” *Atlantic Council Issue Brief*, November 5, 2022, p. 4, available at <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Strengthening-Deterrence-with-SLCM-N.pdf>.

¹⁷¹ See Franklin C. Miller, “Del Toro Missed the Boat on SLCM-N and on the Submarine Force’s Role,” *RealClearDefense*, July 10, 2024, available at https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2024/07/10/del_toro_mis

codified the decision to retire TLAM-N unilaterally, stating that its “deterrence and assurance roles” were “redundant” in light of the forward-deployable nature of U.S. bombers and dual-capable fighters.¹⁷² Yet, forward-deployable U.S. bombers and dual-capable aircraft had been available prior to 2010 when great deterrence value had been attributed to TLAM-N. Why, according to Washington, had it become redundant and unnecessary for deterrence and assurance in 2010?

President Barack Obama and the 2010 NPR answered this question by referring to the end of the Cold War and noting that the elimination of TLAM-N was part of a broader effort that, “... recognizes that the greatest threat to U.S. and global security is no longer a nuclear exchange between nations, but nuclear terrorism by violent extremists and nuclear proliferation to an increasing number of states. Moreover, it recognizes that our national security and that of our allies and partners can be increasingly defended by America’s unsurpassed conventional military capabilities and strong missile defenses.”¹⁷³ The NPR elaborated that “for the first time,” and as the “most urgent priority,” Washington placed non-proliferation as a step toward the elimination of nuclear weapons “atop” its agenda.¹⁷⁴ “As a critical element of our

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n_and_on_the_submarine_forces_role_1043438.html.

¹⁷² U.S. Department of Defense, *Nuclear Posture Review Report* (Washington, D.C.: Department of Defense, April 2010), p. 28, available at https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/features/defenseReviews/NPR/2010_Nuclear_Posture_Review_Report.pdf.

¹⁷³ Barack Obama, “Statement by President Barack Obama on the Release of the Nuclear Posture Review,” *WhiteHouse.gov*, April 6, 2010, available at <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/statement-president-barack-obama-release-nuclear-posture-review>.

¹⁷⁴ *Nuclear Posture Review Report*, op cit., pp. v-vi.

effort to move toward a world free of nuclear weapons, the United States will lead expanded international efforts to rebuild and strengthen the global nuclear non-proliferation regime—and for the first time, the 2010 NPR places this priority atop the U.S. nuclear agenda.”¹⁷⁵

This was an extraordinary, if little noted, policy development. The 2010 NPR explicitly subordinated deterrence and assurance to other policy goals and priorities, i.e., non-proliferation and movement toward a world free of nuclear weapons.¹⁷⁶ Perhaps most importantly, reducing the “salience,” “role,” and “number” of nuclear weapons was considered key to these highest priority goals.¹⁷⁷ Washington’s elimination of TLAM-N was a reflection of that perspective and policy prioritization.

It was clear, however, that U.S. allies in Asia, specifically Japan and South Korea, had significant reservations about the retirement of TLAM-N based on the value they attributed to it for extended deterrence, and thus their assurance. The 2009 bipartisan, congressionally mandated Strategic Posture Commission concluded, “In Asia, extended deterrence relies heavily on the deployment of nuclear cruise missiles on some Los Angeles class attack submarines—the Tomahawk Land Attack Missile/Nuclear (TLAM/N)... U.S. allies in Asia are not integrated in the same way into nuclear planning and have not been asked to make commitments to delivery systems. In our work as a Commission it has become clear to us that some U.S. allies in Asia would be very concerned by TLAM/N retirement.”¹⁷⁸ In subsequent testimony before Congress, Dr. John S. Foster Jr., one of the Commissioners, stated that representatives from allied nations that neighbor Russia

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., p. vi.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., pp. v-vi.

¹⁷⁸ William Perry, James Schlesinger, et al., *America’s Strategic Posture* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Institute of Peace, 2009), p. 26.

and China informed the Commission that they were “concerned about whether or not the nuclear umbrella will be credible,” and that the U.S. nuclear force posture characteristics they valued most highly for extended deterrence and assurance included forces that could be “stealthy,” “transparent,” and “prompt,” as needed. Dr. Foster added that allies also said that they would like U.S. nuclear capabilities “that can penetrate hard targets with minimum collateral damage and low yield...”¹⁷⁹ TLAM-N missiles aboard submarines, of course, had these characteristics.

In rollout briefings on the 2010 NPR, Obama Administration officials stressed that there were consultations with allies prior to the decision to retire TLAM-N and that further consultations would continue, with the strong implication that U.S. bombers and dual-capable fighters would take on an increasing role for extended deterrence and assurance in Asia.¹⁸⁰ Despite the occasional bomber overflight, however, the United States does not forward deploy its bombers or dual-capable aircraft in Asia and, in fact, converted multiple nuclear-capable bombers to conventional-only to meet the New START requirements.¹⁸¹ In addition, the advanced

¹⁷⁹ John S. Foster Jr., as quoted in, U.S. Senate, *The Report of the Congressional Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: May 7, 2009), p. 28, available at <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-111shrg54357/pdf/CHRG-111shrg54357.pdf>.

¹⁸⁰ See, for instance, James Miller, as quoted in, *Foreign Press Center Briefing* (Washington, D.C.: Department of Defense, April 7, 2010), p. 7, available at https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/features/defenseReviews/NPR/PC_4-7-10_Nuclear_Posture_Review.pdf; and, James Cartwright, as quoted in, “Briefing on Release of the Nuclear Posture Review,” *State.gov*, April 6, 2010, available at <https://2009-2017.state.gov/t/us/139934.htm>.

¹⁸¹ Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Nuclear Matters, “Chapter 3: Nuclear Delivery Systems,” *ACQ.OSD.mil*, no date, available at

conventional forces and missile defense that the NPR indicated would fulfill extended deterrence requirements in the absence of TLAM-N largely failed to materialize—to expressed allied consternation.¹⁸²

Japanese officials apparently were the most vocal in their concerns about the retirement of TLAM-N, specifically requesting an explanation of how Washington would supplement U.S. capabilities to fill the deterrence role with TLAM-N's retirement.¹⁸³ Published commentary and the recollections of U.S. officials agree that U.S. extended deterrence and assurance efforts were damaged significantly.¹⁸⁴ Washington's zeal to reduce the role of nuclear weapons and lack of mitigating measures to sustain deterrence clearly contributed to the unintended consequence of fanning some allies' skepticism of U.S. credibility, undermining assurance, and abetting what has become increased allied interest in independent nuclear capabilities, i.e., nuclear proliferation. This is a problem of Washington's own making that still needs to be addressed.

<https://www.acq.osd.mil/ncbdp/nm/NMHB2020rev/chapters/chapter3.html>.

¹⁸² Authors' interview with allied officials following publication of the 2010 NPR.

¹⁸³ See, for example, Katsuya Okada, "Letter to the US State Secretary Hillary Clinton," December 24, 2009, available at https://icnndngo-japan.files.wordpress.com/2010/01/20091224_okada_letter_en.pdf.

¹⁸⁴ See, Justin V. Anderson and Jeffrey A. Larsen, with Polly M. Holdorf, *Extended Deterrence and Allied Assurance: Key Concepts and Current Challenges for U.S. Policy* (USAF Academy, CO: Institute for National Security Studies, September 2013), p. 117, available at <https://www.usafa.edu/app/uploads/OCP69.pdf>; and, Gen. Kevin P. Chilton, "On Nuclear Deterrence," *Strategic Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 11, No. 4 (2017), pp. 9-10.

SLCM-N: History and Allied Views

The Trump Administration's 2018 NPR initiated the return of a nuclear-armed sea-launched cruise missile, now called SLCM-N. The report stated that it would "provide a needed non-strategic regional presence, an assured response capability, and an INF-Treaty compliant response to Russia's continuing Treaty violation."¹⁸⁵ Additionally, in recognition of increasing allied unease regarding U.S. extended deterrence, the 2018 NPR explicitly connected SLCM-N with the "increasing need for flexible and low-yield options to strengthen deterrence and assurance" – signaling SLCM-N's importance for extended deterrence commitments.¹⁸⁶ While U.S. allies did not explicitly comment publicly on the missile, there was broad allied support for the 2018 NPR overall, including Japan's expressed enthusiasm.¹⁸⁷ Senior U.S. civilian and military leaders also endorsed SLCM-N as important for extended deterrence and assurance.¹⁸⁸

While the Analysis of Alternatives for SLCM-N dragged on through the end of the Trump Administration, the Biden Administration used its 2022 NPR to announce the program's termination. It stated that, "SLCM-N was no longer necessary given the deterrence contribution of the

¹⁸⁵ U.S. Department of Defense, *Nuclear Posture Review* (Washington, D.C.: Department of Defense, 2018), p. 55, available at <https://media.defense.gov/2018/Feb/02/2001872886/-1/-1/1/2018-NUCLEAR-POSTURE-REVIEW-FINAL-REPORT.PDF>.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁷ Taro Kono, "The Release of the U.S. Nuclear Posture Review (NPR)," *MOFA.go.jp*, February 3, 2018, available at https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press4e_001893.html.

¹⁸⁸ For example, see, *Strengthening Deterrence and Reducing Nuclear Risks, Part II: The Sea-Launched Cruise Missile-Nuclear (SLCM-N)* (Washington, D.C.: Department of State, July 23, 2020), available at <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/T-Paper-series-SLCM-N-Final-508.pdf>.

W76-2 [strategic nuclear warhead], uncertainty regarding whether SLCM-N on its own would provide leverage to negotiate arms control limits on Russia's NSNW [non-strategic nuclear weapons], and the estimated cost of SLCM-N in light of other nuclear modernization programs and defense priorities."¹⁸⁹ The Biden Administration's 2022 NPR did not comment on the expected reaction of allies to this development, but the administration reportedly solicited allied opinions ahead of time.¹⁹⁰ The stated justifications for cancelling the SLCM-N program were unresponsive to allies' expressed concerns about extended deterrence.

The Biden Administration's drive to cancel SLCM-N appears to be part of its broader effort to signal arms control virtue and promote the goal, as stated in the Administration's 2022 NPR, of "reducing the role of nuclear weapons in U.S. strategy." Indeed, as noted, the 2022 NPR elaborated that arms control, *not deterrence*, is the most effective way to prevent nuclear war.¹⁹¹

While U.S. allies have not commented publicly on SLCM-N's intended cancellation, there is an abundance of evidence that some are profoundly dissatisfied with the credibility of U.S. extended deterrence, and are seeking assurance in the form of public displays of U.S. nuclear

¹⁸⁹ U.S. Department of Defense, *2022 Nuclear Posture Review*, op. cit., p. 20.

¹⁹⁰ Greg Hadley, "Pentagon Solicits Allies' Input In Drafting Nuclear Posture Review," *Air & Space Forces Magazine*, December 3, 2021, available at <https://www.airandspaceforces.com/article/pentagon-solicits-allies-input-in-drafting-nuclear-posture-review/>.

¹⁹¹ *2022 Nuclear Posture Review*, op. cit., pp. 12, 16. For more commentary on this point, see, Matthew R. Costlow, "What is a 'Responsible' Nuclear Power? Assessing the 2022 Nuclear Posture Review," and Keith B. Payne, "The 2022 NPR: Commendation and Concerns," chapters in, Keith B. Payne, ed., *Expert Commentary on the 2022 Nuclear Posture Review* (Fairfax, VA: National Institute Press, March 2023), pp. 1-10, 85-96.

capabilities. South Korean President Yoon has openly entertained the idea of South Korea developing its own nuclear arsenal or asking the United States to bring non-strategic nuclear weapons back to the peninsula as a forward-deployed asset.¹⁹² After making these declarations and meeting with President Biden, South Korea agreed to the “Washington Declaration,” which focuses on U.S. nuclear weapons and deterrence. Specifically, it states, “Going forward, the United States will further enhance the regular visibility of strategic assets to the Korean Peninsula, as evidenced by the upcoming visit of a U.S. nuclear ballistic missile submarine to the ROK, and will expand and deepen coordination between our militaries.”¹⁹³ This rare port visit by a U.S. SSBN was recently supplemented by a flyover and landing of a nuclear-capable B-52H bomber.¹⁹⁴ While these visits undoubtedly are helpful, they do not satisfy the force characteristics allies have identified as critical for extended deterrence and their assurance – and South Korea’s interest in a more credible basis for extended nuclear deterrence appears to be unabated.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹² Choi Si-young, “[Top Envoy] S. Korea is done with ‘Strategic Ambiguity,’ ex-envoy says,” *The Korea Herald*, October 25, 2023, available at <https://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20231025000595>.

¹⁹³ The White House, “The Washington Declaration,” *WhiteHouse.gov*, April 26, 2023, available at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/04/26/washington-declaration-2/>.

¹⁹⁴ Chae Yun-hwan, “U.S. Strategic Bomber B-52 Lands at S. Korean Air Base for First Time,” *Yonhap News Agency*, October 17, 2023, available at <https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20231017005300315#:~:text=SEOUL%2C%20Oct.,South%20Korean%20stealth%20fighter%20jets>.

¹⁹⁵ See, for example, Kwak Yeon-soo, “Debate over South Korea’s nuclear option resurfaces amid NK’s continuing threats,” *Korea Times Online* (South Korea), May 26, 2024, available at https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2024/05/103_375283.html#:~:text=The%20debate%20over%20South%20Korea's,nuclear%20weapons%20for%20self%2Ddefense. See also, “U.S. nuclear weapons should be committed to supporting South Korea’s security against N.K.”

Creating Alliance Problems – Lessons Unlearned

This case study illustrates the uncomfortable truth that Washington appears to have undermined some allies' confidence in extended deterrence credibility, and thus their assurance, by subordinating extended deterrence and assurance requirements to its enthusiasm to lower reliance on nuclear weapons. For some allies, TLAM-N was the tangible evidence of a credible U.S. extended deterrence commitment. For many in Washington, however, TLAM-N and SLCM-N were/are "low-hanging fruit" to be discarded in pursuit of reducing the role and number of nuclear weapons. In essence, Washington appears to value virtue signaling regarding lowering reliance on nuclear weapons above allied concerns regarding extended deterrence and their assurance—in an international threat context that makes a mockery of that goal. Allies will continue losing confidence in U.S. extended deterrence when Washington appears to lack appreciation for the nuclear capabilities they view as essential for deterrence.

Indeed, the TLAM-N/SLCM-N decisions compound U.S. alliance difficulties because, within a 12-year timespan, the United States has withdrawn or canceled two capabilities with those characteristics valued by allies and *intended* to strengthen extended deterrence and assurance. Most recently, the Biden Administration's efforts to cancel

threats - report," *Yonhap News Agency (South Korea)*, October 30, 2023, available at [https://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20231030000479#:~:text=National%20North%20Korea-,100%20US%20nuclear%20weapons%20should%20be%20committed%20to%20supporting%20S,security%20against%20NK%20threats%3A%20report&text=KCNA\)-,South%20Korea%20and%20the%20United%20States%20should%20modernize%20around%20100,a%20research%20report%20said%20Monday](https://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20231030000479#:~:text=National%20North%20Korea-,100%20US%20nuclear%20weapons%20should%20be%20committed%20to%20supporting%20S,security%20against%20NK%20threats%3A%20report&text=KCNA)-,South%20Korea%20and%20the%20United%20States%20should%20modernize%20around%20100,a%20research%20report%20said%20Monday).

SLCM-N come at a time when allies face an increasingly dangerous threat environment.

Washington's TLAM-N/SLCM-N decisions have damaged U.S. extended deterrence and assurance efforts in several ways. First, U.S. reversals regarding the value of TLAM-N and SLCM-N, especially when viewed in succession, convey to allies that the United States is an inconsistent, unpredictable security partner that does not prioritize extended deterrence and allied assurance highly. U.S. rhetoric to the contrary ultimately is likely unconvincing—particularly as allied security comes under increasing nuclear pressure by China, Russia, North Korea and, potentially Iran.

Second, the elimination of TLAM-N and intended elimination of SLCM-N comes at times of increasing U.S. concerns about opponents' limited nuclear employment as a coercive tactic to facilitate their expansionist aggression.¹⁹⁶ TLAM-N and SLCM-N were both well-suited to support deterrence in that scenario: Deployed regionally they could serve as a visible or covert assurance to allies depending on the requirements at the time. In their absence, with few proportional options (particularly in Asia) to respond to limited adversary nuclear employment, the United States is essentially asking allies to trust that U.S. leaders ultimately will be willing to use intercontinental strategic nuclear weapons on their behalf at a time when the United States itself is highly vulnerable to strategic nuclear attack and manifestly concerned about how its actions might escalate a conflict. The internal contradiction involved in that option is not lost on allies; it is made worse by the relative lack of proportional U.S. regional response options.

¹⁹⁶ Ashton Carter, "Remarks by Secretary Carter to troops at Minot Air Force Base, North Dakota," *Defense.gov*, September 26, 2016, available at <https://www.defense.gov/News/Transcripts/Transcript/Article/956079/remarks-by-secretary-carter-to-troops-at-minot-air-force-base-north-dakota/>.

Finally, without tangible capabilities that are proportional to threats and readily identifiable to adversaries and allies alike, some allies will continue to be skeptical of U.S. extended deterrence commitments; periodic visits by strategic systems are unlikely to suffice. Allies have grown increasingly fearful as their security environment deteriorates and have thus made more explicit references to gaining their own independent nuclear forces. As the former Commander of Indo-Pacific Command, and Ambassador to South Korea, Harry Harris, stated recently:

Our allies don't trust the United States enough on extended nuclear deterrence. I think we're better now in the past few years than we were before. And that matters because when they lose that trust, when they believe that we're not going to extend our nuclear deterrence to them, that's when they will proliferate and build their own nuclear weapons. And you can't blame them for that. So I think it's imperative that we continue to underscore our commitment to extended nuclear deterrent of our allies, that we've provided that deterrent too. Japan, and Korea, Australia come to mind.¹⁹⁷

By subordinating allied extended deterrence and assurance requirements to the goal of reducing reliance on nuclear weapons, the United States has not only undermined its extended deterrence and assurance efforts, but its nonproliferation goals as well. Ironically, U.S. rejection of TLAM-N/SLCM-N to advance nonproliferation and nuclear reductions has had the reverse effect of

¹⁹⁷ Harry B. Harris, Jr., as quoted in, *Peace in the Pacific: A Conversation with Former Indo-Pacific Commanders* (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, October 16, 2023), p. 8, available at <https://www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/231016-Peace-in-the-Pacific-A-Conversation-with-Former-Indo-Pacific-Commanders-Transcript-1.pdf?x91208>.

increasing some allied considerations of pursuing independent nuclear capabilities.

Finally, this case study illustrates how the United States often hears the concerns of its allies about U.S. deterrence capabilities, but those concerns are either dismissed as uninformed or considered easily addressed with robust words, ambiguity, or makeshift solutions. However, just as deterrence works in the mind of the adversary, allies decide whether or not they are assured. What the United States believes is sufficient for assurance is irrelevant, and robust U.S. rhetoric is likely to be disdained by allies as their threat environments worsen.

The United States can gain insight into allied concerns, and the true solutions to those concerns, by listening to allied officials, prioritizing deterrence and allied assurance, and working together to execute agreed solutions. In particular, allied confidence is likely only repairable with a more consistent U.S. policy of elevating extended deterrence and assurance considerations above the continued fruitless pursuit of reciprocal Russian and Chinese nuclear reductions and nuclear disarmament.

Conclusion and Recommendations

To extend deterrence credibly and assure allies, the United States should consider a number of diplomatic and military measures. First, the United States needs to take great care regarding how its decisions on the size and composition of its forces will affect allies' perceptions of U.S. extended deterrence credibility. Given the growing chorus of allied commentators calling for independent nuclear weapon programs, the United States should prioritize its nuclear force requirements for extending deterrence and assuring allies. This will both strengthen alliances and help preserve nonproliferation. As Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter stated in 2016, "You [military members supporting nuclear

missions] assure allies that our extended deterrence guarantees are credible, enabling many of them to forgo developing nuclear weapons themselves, despite the tough strategic environment they find themselves in and the technological ease with which they could develop nuclear weapons.”¹⁹⁸

The 2023 Strategic Posture Commission consulted with multiple allied representatives and came to similar conclusions as Secretary Carter’s, namely:

The United States uses its strategic posture to support Allies by extending to them deterrence, including nuclear deterrence, against adversaries. The U.S. strategic posture also serves to assure Allies that the United States is a credible security partner. As a result, many Allies perceive no need to develop their own nuclear weapon capabilities, which is in the U.S. national security interest. Any major changes to U.S. strategic posture, policies, or capabilities will, therefore, have great effect on Allies’ perceptions and their deterrence and assurance requirements.¹⁹⁹

Another step for helping to restore credibility to extended deterrence is a sustained reversal of the Biden Administration’s decision to cancel SLCM-N. Congress has kept the program on life support and there appears to be growing bipartisan backing for SLCM-N. The bipartisan Strategic Posture Commission report, for example, notes that forward-deployed systems like SLCM-N are directly connected to allied concerns: “Given the geographic distance between the U.S. homeland and its Allies overseas

¹⁹⁸ Carter, “Remarks by Secretary Carter to troops at Minot Air Force Base, North Dakota,” *op. cit.*

¹⁹⁹ Creedon and Kyl, *America’s Strategic Posture: The Final Report of the Congressional Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States*, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

and the long lead time for force projection from the U.S. homeland, Allies stressed the importance of U.S. military forces being available in theater for deterrence and assurance purposes.”²⁰⁰ Indeed, the Commission reported that, “Allies repeatedly stressed that the worsening threat environment requires closer and stronger cooperation with the United States because the consequences of deterrence failure are so severe, and for some Allies, existential.”²⁰¹

Finally, the United States must improve its understanding of, and responsiveness to, allied concerns regarding the credibility of extended deterrence. As this case study demonstrates, the United States often creates its own problems by either failing to heed allies’ concerns or by subordinating them to U.S. arms control goals which have proved illusory. The United States largely failed to take those actions that were to compensate for the elimination of the TLAM-N—potentially contributing to some allies’ increased interest in their own security arrangements and capabilities, including nuclear weapons programs. By increasing meaningful dialogue with allies and responding to their concerns, however, the United States can likely improve the credibility of its extended deterrence threats and strengthen allied assurance—all to the benefit of U.S. security.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

No First Use: Threatening Alliance Cohesion, Assurance, and Non-Proliferation

Introduction

The U.S. extended nuclear deterrent is underpinned by the deterrent threat option to escalate to nuclear first use in the event of otherwise unstoppable aggression against an ally. For decades, major allies have testified as to the critical importance they attach to this nuclear escalation threat behind the U.S. extended nuclear deterrent. It is a key reason, allies insist, that they are able to stand back from pursuing their own national possession of nuclear weapons—and thus a key to U.S. nuclear non-proliferation goals. It is no overstatement to conclude that, for decades, the U.S. extended deterrent, including the nuclear escalation option, has been essential to the cohesion of U.S. alliances and the relative success of nuclear non-proliferation.²⁰²

Episodic U.S. initiatives to move to NFU or “sole purpose” nuclear weapon policies—that would preclude U.S. nuclear employment in response to anything other than an opponent’s nuclear attack—would directly contradict the traditional U.S. extended nuclear deterrent commitment to allies. These initiatives are a prime example of how the U.S. pursuit of arms control goals can unintentionally undermine the keys to alliance cohesion—extended nuclear deterrence and the assurance of allies. U.S. allies have consistently expressed sharp, substantive

²⁰² Japan, for example, is in a tough neighborhood with nuclear-armed North Korea, China, and Russia, and relies on the U.S. extended deterrent, “with nuclear deterrence at its core.” Ministry of Defense, *National Defense Program Guidelines for FY 2019 and Beyond*, December 18, 2018, Provisional Translation, p. 8, available at https://www.mod.go.jp/j/approach/agenda/guideline/2019/pdf/20181218_e.pdf.

opposition to U.S. proposals for an NFU or “sole purpose” nuclear policy – two different titles for essentially the same policy constraint on U.S. deterrent strategies, i.e., precluding a U.S. nuclear response to an opponent’s non-nuclear attack, including massive conventional or cyber attacks, or chemical or biological weapons (CBW) attacks.²⁰³

Despite this consistent, enduring allied opposition and a deteriorating national security environment, recent U.S. presidential administrations have continued to signal their enthusiasm for an NFU or “sole purpose” policy in an effort to showcase their commitment to reducing the number and role of nuclear weapons. For example, coincident with Secretary of State Antony Blinken’s most recent three-day visit in China, Assistant Secretary of State Mallory Stewart reportedly declared with seeming enthusiasm that the United States “is open to considering a proposal by China that nuclear weapons states negotiate a treaty on the no-first use (NFU) of nuclear weapons.”²⁰⁴ This renewed signaling by the Biden Administration regarding NFU is only the latest in Washington’s expressions of interest in an NFU policy, and, if sustained, will likely again be followed by strong allied pushback. This cycle has been repeated numerous times over the past five decades. As a recent academic study of the subject rightly concluded, “The question of whether the United States should adopt an NFU

²⁰³ See the discussion in, Matthew Costlow, *A Net Assessment of “No First Use” and “Sole Purpose” Nuclear Policies, Occasional Paper, Vol. 1, No. 7* (Fairfax, VA: National Institute Press, July 2021), available at <https://nipp.org/papers/a-net-assessment-of-no-first-use-and-sole-purpose-nuclear-policies/>.

²⁰⁴ Reported in, Daniel Schoolenberg, “Is the U.S. Finally Taking China’s NFU Seriously? The U.S. is open to considering a proposal by China that nuclear weapons states negotiate a treaty on the no-first use (NFU) of nuclear weapons,” *The Diplomat Online*, April 27, 2024, available at <https://thediplomat.com/2024/04/is-the-us-finally-taking-chinas-nfu-seriously/>.

pledge has arisen repeatedly in debates of declaratory policy and is likely to recur...."²⁰⁵

Various administrations' aspirations to move toward an NFU policy in contradiction of the U.S. nuclear umbrella for allies typically have been supported by some members of Congress who have proposed laws articulating their own version of an NFU or "sole purpose" policy.²⁰⁶ Washington's continuing initiatives to adopt such an arms control policy that allies expressly and repeatedly oppose, based on their serious and understandable concerns about its degrading effect on the credibility of the U.S. extended deterrent, contribute to growing allied questioning of U.S. credibility as a guarantor of their security.

Ironically, perhaps, Washington's numerous arms control forays toward an NFU policy contribute to allied doubts about extended deterrence and undermine U.S. efforts to assure allies regarding their security position. In short, Washington's repeated moves in the direction of an NFU policy fan allied fears about U.S. extended deterrence credibility that, in turn, undermine U.S. efforts to sustain allied cohesion and non-proliferation goals. Rather than recognizing this problem and finally curtailing its initiatives to advance an NFU policy, or spending the enormous resources needed to find a plausible alternative to the traditional U.S. nuclear escalation threat backstopping extended deterrence, Washington continually disturbs allies with its repeated NFU forays—only to stand back following equally-repeated allied pushback.

²⁰⁵ Caitlin Talmadge, Lisa Michelini, and Vipin Narang, "When Actions Speak Louder Than Words," *International Security*, Vol. 48, No. 4 (Spring 2024), p. 44.

²⁰⁶ Joe Gould, "Warren, Smith introduce bill to bar US from using nuclear weapons first," *Defense News*, January 30, 2019, available at <https://www.defensenews.com/congress/2019/01/30/warren-smith-introduce-bill-to-bar-us-from-using-nuclear-weapons-first/>.

Allied Opposition to NFU

Allied opposition to NFU and “sole purpose” policies is based largely on understandable fears that, at a time of increasing regional threats to their security, U.S. adoption of such policies would undermine the credibility of extended nuclear deterrence.²⁰⁷ This fear is almost certain to be accurate in plausible circumstances.²⁰⁸ Yet, some U.S. administrations have repeatedly expressed interest in implementing NFU or “sole purpose” policies—raising questions among allies about U.S. intentions and the continuing credibility of the U.S. extended deterrent—and thus undermining needed alliance cohesion and expanding the potential for nuclear proliferation. By continuing to promote NFU or “sole purpose” policies despite consistent allied objections, Washington contributes to allied uncertainty regarding the U.S. commitment to extended deterrence and to their security, and thereby contributes to the very allied doubts and associated proliferation problem Washington seeks to avoid in the first place.

Washington should keep in mind the guidance that former Defense Secretaries William Perry and James Schlesinger offered pertaining to allied concerns regarding U.S. nuclear policy choices. Secretary Schlesinger advised:

²⁰⁷ See, for example, Sayuri Romei, “Japan and the Nuclear Challenge in a New Era of Rising Tensions,” *Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 2, Issue 3 (Fall 2019), pp. 70-71, available at https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/Portals/10/JIPA/journals/Volume-02_Issue-3/04-Romei.pdf.

²⁰⁸ See Franklin C. Miller and Keith B. Payne, “The dangers of no-first-use,” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, August 22, 2016, available at <https://thebulletin.org/2016/08/the-dangers-of-no-first-use/>; and, Keith Payne, “Once Again: Why ‘No-First-Use’ is a Bad Idea,” *Information Series*, No. 408 (Fairfax, VA: National Institute Press, July 5, 2016), available at https://nipp.org/information_series/payne-keith-b-once-again-why-a-no-first-use-policy-is-a-bad-very-bad-idea-information-series-no-408/.

“It is important for us to pay attention to their [allied] concern and not to judge whether deterrence is effective by our standards, but we have to take their standards into account as well.”²⁰⁹ Secretary Perry went on to argue that “the failure to do this, as suggested by Dr. Schlesinger, the failure to do this will be that those nations will feel that they have to provide their own deterrence – in other words, they will have to provide their own nuclear weapons. So that will lead to a failure of [non]proliferation.”²¹⁰

Alliance dissolution and the consequent likely cascade of nuclear proliferation would be a major blow to U.S. national security and non-proliferation goals. Yet, by periodically floating NFU policies that are anathema to allied perceptions of extended deterrence and assurance requirements, Washington continues to fan the prospects for alliance dissolution and a cascade of nuclear proliferation. This ongoing problem is wholly avoidable if only Washington would recognize the implications this U.S. aspiration holds for extended deterrence credibility – and its corresponding potential effect on alliance cohesion and proliferation incentives.

NFU or “Sole Purpose” in the First Obama Administration

In 2009, President Obama famously emphasized America’s commitment to nuclear disarmament,²¹¹ stating that

²⁰⁹ See, Hearing before the House Armed Services Committee on *Report of the Congressional Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States*, U.S. House of Representatives, 111th Congress (Washington, D.C.: U.S. GPO, May 6, 2009), available at <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-111hhrg53569/html/CHRG-111hhrg53569.htm>.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹¹ Office of the White House, “Remarks By President Barack Obama In Prague As Delivered,” April 5, 2009, available at

Washington would take “concrete steps towards a world without nuclear weapons” and reduce “the role of nuclear weapons in our national security strategy.”²¹² As one of these steps, the Obama Administration reportedly considered adopting an NFU or “sole purpose” declaratory policy during the lead-up to its 2010 *Nuclear Posture Review Report* (NPR), and again toward the end of the Administration’s second term.

Ultimately, the 2010 NPR itself effectively avoided an NFU policy by rejecting the proposition “that deterring nuclear attack is the sole purpose of nuclear weapons.”²¹³ This carefully crafted language left open the possibility of U.S. nuclear escalation in some scenarios of an otherwise unstoppable attack on allies. However, foreshadowing subsequent U.S. initiatives toward an NFU policy, the 2010 NPR also stated that the Administration “will work to establish conditions under which such a policy could be safely adopted.”²¹⁴

This approach included an advertised strengthening of advanced conventional forces, missile defenses, and regional security architectures, and eliminating chemical and biological weapons.²¹⁵ While much of this non-nuclear agenda failed to materialize, the 2010 NPR explicitly recognized the importance of allied concerns regarding NFU when it stated it would “consult with allies and partners regarding the conditions under which it would be

<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-barack-obama-prague-delivered>.

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Department of Defense, *Nuclear Posture Review Report*, April 2010, pp. viii, 16, available at https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/features/defenseReviews/NPR/2010_Nuclear_Posture_Review_Report.pdf.

²¹⁴ Department of Defense, *Nuclear Posture Review Report*, op. cit., p. 16.

²¹⁵ Ibid. pp. 17, 47.

prudent to shift to a policy under which deterring nuclear attack is the sole purpose of U.S. nuclear weapons.”²¹⁶

Allied governments’ concerns appear to have played a significant role in the Obama Administration’s ultimate rejection of an NFU policy during its first term.²¹⁷ Robert Einhorn, Special Advisor for Nonproliferation and Arms Control at the Department of State, said at a rollout event for the 2010 NPR, “In our discussions with allies and friends around the world—and we had many frequent contacts with those friends—they indicated to us that such a radical shift [sole purpose] in [sic] U.S. approach could be unsettling to them.”²¹⁸ Allied concerns with respect to a U.S. NFU declaratory policy were also noted by the 2009 Strategic Posture Commission, which stated that the adoption of such a policy would be “unsettling to some U.S. allies” and that it “would also undermine the potential contributions of nuclear weapons to the deterrence of attack by biological weapons.”²¹⁹ Despite changes in allied governments and often-expressed aspirations for global nuclear disarmament—similar to Washington’s own long-declared disarmament aspirations—allyed opposition to NFU policies has remained remarkably consistent.

²¹⁶ Ibid. p. 48.

²¹⁷ Brad Roberts, “Debating Nuclear No-first-use, Again,” *Survival*, Vol. 61, No. 3 (June-July 2019), p. 43, available at <https://cgsr.llnl.gov/content/assets/docs/Debating-Nuclear-No-first-use-Again.pdf>.

²¹⁸ Robert J. Einhorn, as quoted in, “DoD’s Nuclear Posture Review Rollout Briefing,” *Defense.gov*, April 7, 2010, available at https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/features/defenseReviews/NPR/PC_4-7-10_Nuclear_Posture_Review.pdf.

²¹⁹ United States Institute for Peace, *America’s Strategic Posture: The Final Report of the Congressional Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States*, 2009, p. 36, available at https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/America's_Strategic_Posture_Auth_Ed.pdf.

President Obama's Second Term

Toward the end of President Obama's second term, the Administration reportedly again considered implementing an NFU declaratory policy. A group of Democratic Senators urged President Obama to do so in order "to bolster U.S. national security and advance the [nuclear disarmament] commitment" the President made in Prague in 2009.²²⁰ The idea again had significant support within Washington's usual disarmament community that had been disappointed by President Obama's rejection of NFU and "sole purpose" in his first term.²²¹

By the end of President Obama's second term, however, it was blatantly clear that the Administration's attempted "reset" with Russia had come to naught as Moscow invaded yet another country, this time Ukraine, in 2014. The invasion was Russia's second in six years (Russia invaded Georgia in 2008) and reflected the worsening security environment that made NFU policies less likely to gain traction in Washington and even more anathema to key allies. China's revisionist ambitions also became clearer and some experts warned that the PRC would interpret a U.S. NFU declaration "as a sign of US military decline" that would embolden Beijing's leadership to pursue its "dream of supplanting the United States as the world's superpower."²²²

²²⁰ *Letter to President Barack Obama*, U.S. Senate, July 20, 2016, available at https://www.feinstein.senate.gov/public/_cache/files/9/6/96cf16f8-2e75-4a6d-a71d-b7ebd7404296/39888086CF8EC760E72A410351FE05C6.letter-to-president-obama-on-nuclear-weapons.pdf.

²²¹ Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

²²² Parris Chang, "No-first use would only embolden China," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, September 21, 2016, available at https://thebulletin.org/roundtable_entry/no-first-use-would-only-embolden-china/.

It is, therefore, unsurprising that the Obama Administration's reconsideration of NFU, yet again, ran into opposition from U.S. allies and reportedly prompted several of them, including Japan, South Korea, France and the United Kingdom, to lobby the Administration against the change in policy.²²³ A senior government official close to Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe called adoption of NFU "unacceptable" from the standpoint of Japan's security.²²⁴ The Obama Administration's apparent renewed interest in an NFU declaration was again not supported by many experts and policymakers in allied countries and the United States.

For example, the Administration's renewed NFU foray reportedly was opposed by several high-level cabinet officials, including the then Secretaries of Defense, Energy, and State.²²⁵ Then Secretary of the Air Force Deborah Lee James also publicly expressed concerns about the policy, and several other high-level military officials rejected it.²²⁶

²²³ Josh Rogin, "U.S. allies unite to block Obama's nuclear 'legacy,'" *The Washington Post*, August 14, 2016, available at https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/global-opinions/allies-unite-to-block-an-obama-legacy/2016/08/14/cdb8d8e4-60b9-11e6-8e45-477372e89d78_story.html?utm_term=.c0e0d6c4d694.

²²⁴ "Japan seeks talks with U.S. over 'no first use' nuclear policy change," *The Japan Times*, July 15, 2016, available at <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/07/15/national/japan-seeks-talks-u-s-no-first-use-nuclear-policy-change/>. Nuclear disarmament advocate Joe Cirincione mocked these allies as "nervous nellies," as if they did not understand their own security requirements. Quoted in, Rogin, op. cit.

²²⁵ Paul Sonne, Gordon Lubold, and Carol Lee, "'No First Use' Nuclear Policy Proposal Assailed by U.S. Cabinet Officials, Allies," *The Washington Post*, August 12, 2016, available at <https://www.wsj.com/articles/no-first-use-nuclear-policyproposal-assailed-by-u-s-cabinet-officials-allies-1471042014>.

²²⁶ Aaron Mehta, "US Air Force Secretary Skeptical of No-First-Use Nuclear Policy," *Defense News*, August 3, 2016, available at <https://www.defensenews.com/pentagon/2016/08/03/us-air-force-secretary-skeptical-of-no-first-use-nuclear-policy/>; and, Bill Gertz,

Then Commander of the U.S. Strategic Command Cecil Haney and then Commander of the U.S. Air Force Global Strike Command Robin Rand also spoke against NFU, given an international threat environment that had become more complex and dangerous.²²⁷

Allies reportedly first learned about the Administration's reconsideration of an NFU declaratory policy from the news, which, if true, indicates an inadequacy in Washington's communications on the subject, despite the 2010 NPR's explicit commitment to improving communications with allies.²²⁸ Japan, under a new government since President Obama's first term, and South Korea, expressed strong opposition to a U.S. NFU nuclear weapons declaratory policy and "would likely have deep concerns about a sole purpose commitment."²²⁹

Despite this repeated allied expression of opposition to NFU, and the Obama Administration's second retreat from it, in January 2017, then Vice President Joseph Biden again indicated continuing enthusiasm for an NFU policy, stating that he believed the administration had "made enough progress that deterring—and if necessary, retaliating against—a nuclear attack should be the *sole purpose* of the U.S. nuclear arsenal."²³⁰ While the Obama Administration

"Military Warns Against Nuclear Policy Change," *The Washington Free Beacon*, July 15, 2016, available at <https://freebeacon.com/national-security/military-warns-nuclear-policy-change/>.

²²⁷ Gertz, *op. cit.*

²²⁸ Rogin, *op. cit.*

²²⁹ Richard C. Bush and Jonathan D. Pollack, "Before moving to 'no first use,' think about Northeast Asia," *The Brookings Institution*, July 20, 2016, available at <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2016/07/20/before-moving-to-no-first-use-think-about-northeast-asia/>.

²³⁰ Office of the White House, "Remarks by the Vice President on Nuclear Security," January 12, 2017, available at <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press->

had ultimately again decided against significant changes in the U.S. declaratory policy, the Biden Administration subsequently returned to the cause. The cycle of Washington advancing the policy and allies opposing it continued yet again—suggesting Washington’s seeming imperviousness to recognizing the associated alliance, extended deterrence, and proliferation problems.

NFU, “Sole Purpose,” and the Biden Administration

Despite enduring allied opposition, presidential candidate Biden continued to support an NFU nuclear declaratory policy during his 2020 campaign. In 2019, the House Armed Services Committee Chairman Adam Smith and Senator Elizabeth Warren, a Senate Armed Services Committee member, introduced a “No First Use Act,” which would have legally prohibited the United States from employing nuclear weapons first in a conflict.²³¹ The bill did not make it into law but it was an indication that an NFU or “sole purpose” policy would become a prominent part of the 2020 Democratic Party platform.

President Biden’s team members spoke in favor of an NFU or “sole purpose” declaratory policy prior to joining the administration, including then-nominated (and later confirmed) Ambassador Bonnie Jenkins, Undersecretary of State for Arms Control and International Security.²³² President Biden himself reiterated his belief that “*the sole*

office/2017/01/12/remarks-vice-president-nuclear-security. (Emphasis added).

²³¹ Gould, “Warren, Smith introduce bill to bar US from using nuclear weapons first,” op. cit.

²³² Bryan Bender, “‘This is going to be quite a show’: Biden’s arms control team eyes nuclear policy overhaul,” *Politico*, January 27, 2021, available at <https://www.politico.com/news/2021/01/27/biden-nuclear-weapons-policy-463335>.

purpose of the U.S. nuclear arsenal should be deterring – and, if necessary, retaliating against – a nuclear attack.”²³³ He said he would “work to put that belief into practice, in consultation with the U.S. military and U.S. allies.”

During the preparation of the 2022 NPR, the Biden Administration reportedly sent a questionnaire to allies asking for their views regarding U.S. adoption of “sole purpose” and “NFU” policies.²³⁴ Allied responses apparently (again) were overwhelmingly negative, including from the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Japan, and Australia.²³⁵ As noted, successive Japanese governments have opposed U.S. initiatives to adopt such declaratory policies.²³⁶

Indeed, there is a long-running Japanese government position in favor of keeping the nuclear escalation option open for extended deterrence purposes, despite the Japanese public’s apparent opposition to nuclear weapons.²³⁷ Tokyo’s opposition to an NFU or “sole purpose” policy appears largely to be based on fear that the adoption of such a policy would weaken extended

²³³ Joseph Biden, “Why America Must Lead Again,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 99, No. 2 (March/April 2020), available at <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2020-01-23/why-america-must-lead-again>. (Emphasis added).

²³⁴ Demetri Sevastopulo and Henry Foy, “Allies lobby Biden to prevent shift to ‘no first use’ of nuclear arms,” *Financial Times*, October 29, 2021, available at <https://www.ft.com/content/8b96a60a-759b-4972-ae89-c8ffbb36878e>.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*

²³⁶ Nobuyasu Abe, “No First Use: How to Overcome Japan’s Great Divide,” *Journal for Peace and Nuclear Disarmament*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (2018), p. 137, available at <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/epdf/10.1080/25751654.2018.1456042?needAccess=true&role=button>.

²³⁷ Sayuri Romei, “The legacy of Shinzo Abe: a Japan divided about nuclear weapons,” August 24, 2022, available at <https://thebulletin.org/2022/08/the-legacy-of-shinzo-abe-a-japan-divided-about-nuclear-weapons/>.

deterrence.²³⁸ The Japanese Defense Ministry's 2023 *White Paper* argues that the international community "has entered into a new era of crisis" not seen since the Second World War.²³⁹ Given the dangerous trends in Japan's neighborhood, particularly including the Russian, Chinese, and North Korean promotion of nuclear capabilities and threats, successive Japanese governments *have rejected calls* for the United States to adopt an NFU or "sole purpose" declaratory policy, even if they occasionally expressed an interest in reviewing the policy.²⁴⁰

Discussing the issue of the U.S. extended nuclear deterrent, an Australian expert noted that when "doubts have arisen about US commitments in the past, Taiwan, Japan, South Korea, and even Australia have toyed with their own nuclear weapons programs," and that there "is no reason to assume they will not do so again."²⁴¹ Jüri Luik, Estonia's permanent representative to NATO, publicly commented that in Estonia's opinion, the present nuclear posture should be maintained, i.e., the United States should continue to reject NFU or "sole purpose."²⁴² Ben Wallace, then British Secretary of State for Defence, spoke out

²³⁸ Romei, "Japan and the Nuclear Challenge in a New Era of Rising Tensions," op. cit., pp. 70-71.

²³⁹ Ministry of Defense, Japan, *Defense 2023*, 2023, p. 230, available at https://www.mod.go.jp/en/publ/w_paper/wp2023/DOJ2023_EN_Full.pdf.

²⁴⁰ Abe, op. cit. p. 37.

²⁴¹ Andrew O'Neil, "A 'No-First-Use' doctrine would undermine American nuclear deterrence," *The Interpreter*, January 21, 2021, available at <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/no-first-use-doctrine-would-undermine-american-nuclear-deterrence>.

²⁴² Joe Gould, "Estonia's envoy to NATO talks Russia, Afghanistan and US nuclear policy," *Defense News*, November 24, 2021, available at <https://www.defensenews.com/global/2021/11/24/estonias-envoy-to-nato-on-the-russia-crisis-us-nuclear-policy-and-afghanistan-pullout/>.

specifically against changes in U.S. declaratory nuclear policy toward NFU and “sole purpose.”²⁴³

Again, following serious allied pushback, the Biden Administration stepped back from an NFU or “sole purpose” policy in its 2022 NPR, despite endorsement in the 2020 Democratic Party platform. Negative allied and public responses appear to have contributed to the Administration’s foregoing NFU or “sole purpose.” Nevertheless, and undoubtedly to allied distress and consternation, the 2022 NPR identified a “sole purpose” policy as a continuing U.S. goal,²⁴⁴ an ongoing aspiration that has indeed been manifest in Administration statements on the subject.

This continuing cycle of Washington’s expressed desire to adopt an NFU policy to advance an arms control agenda despite strong, repeated allied opposition is evidence of Washington’s seemingly obtuse unwillingness to acknowledge the incompatibility of NFU with a U.S. extended nuclear deterrence policy that key allies deem crucial for their security and for non-proliferation goals. Allies repeatedly express their concerns about the need to *reinforce* credible extended deterrence in the contemporary threat context while offices in Washington and commentators continue to promote an NFU policy.²⁴⁵ The friction between expressed U.S. aspirations in this regard and allied opposition to those aspirations reflects a continuing profound difference in Washington’s and allied

²⁴³ Ben Wallace, *Web Event at the American Enterprise Institute*, July 13, 2021, available at <https://www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/210713-UK-Secretary-of-State-for-Defence-Ben-Wallace-discusses-strategic-priorities.pdf?x91208>.

²⁴⁴ U.S. Department of Defense, *2022 Nuclear Posture Review*, op. cit., p. 9.

²⁴⁵ “Why Is the US Fighting Nuclear Threats Behind Closed Doors?” *Bloomberg News*, August 23, 2024, available at <https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2024-08-23/biden-and-harris-must-talk-publicly-about-the-nuclear-risk-with-china-russia>.

understandings of the role of nuclear weapons in extended deterrence and assurance requirements.

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 and its subsequent repeated brandishing of nuclear threats bear further bad news for proponents of NFU or "sole purpose" declaratory policies, and arms control in general.²⁴⁶ In fact, among publics in some NATO countries and in South Korea, there has been a marked shift in favor of hosting U.S. nuclear capabilities on their territory since Russia's unjustified invasion escalated.²⁴⁷

Conclusions and Recommendations

For decades, Washington has episodically and seriously considered the adoption of NFU or "sole purpose," but on each occasion ultimately did not do so following allies' pushback. This cyclical back and forth may be seen as exemplary of U.S. deference to allied concerns. From an allied perspective, however, it can only be disturbing that the same policy battle with Washington must repeatedly be fought to stem an initiative that so obviously is contrary to the need for credible extended deterrence and allied assurance—an initiative that continues to be a stated U.S. policy aspiration. This ongoing cycle understandably contributes to skepticism regarding the future of extended deterrence and compels allies to consider their options if

²⁴⁶ Michaela Dodge, "What Do Russia's Nuclear Threats Tell Us About Arms Control Prospects?," *Information Series*, No. 564 (Fairfax, VA: National Institute Press, October 2, 2023), available at https://nipp.org/information_series/michaela-dodge-what-do-russias-nuclear-threats-tell-us-about-arms-control-prospects-no-564-october-2-2023/.

²⁴⁷ Michal Onderco, Michal Smetana, and Tom Etienne, "Hawks in the making? European public views on nuclear weapons post-Ukraine," *Global Policy*, January 5, 2023, available at <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/1758-5899.13179>.

they are unsuccessful the next time this familiar cycle reemerges—particularly in a harsh threat environment. Those options potentially include distancing from Washington and conciliation to powerful foes, or independent acquisition of national nuclear capabilities: either such development would cause rifts in U.S.-allied relations; together they could unravel the global alliance system critical to American security. It is time to take the repeated allied “no” on this subject to heart for the continued cohesion of U.S. alliances.

Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

Much has been written about arms control. Yet, there has been little examination of the pernicious, unintended impact arms control has had on U.S. extended deterrence credibility and the assurance of allies. When Washington's policies create unintended problems for extended deterrence and assurance, it is Washington that then must seek to ameliorate those problems it has created for the alliance and itself. This is an unfortunate circle of Washington engendering alliance problems that it must then acknowledge and address.

The credibility of U.S. extended deterrence for allies depends on whether the United States possesses the requisite military capabilities and apparent willingness not only to defend its homeland against aggression but to defend the independence and territorial sovereignty of others. Whether allies and strategic partners are assured of the U.S. commitment to their security depends on their perceptions of U.S. military prowess and willingness to employ force against adversaries who threaten peace and the existing world order. Washington's deep reluctance to engage in what may be seen as escalatory moves for fear of provoking foes has been on full display for many months in Europe and the Middle East—likely undermining the credibility of U.S. extended deterrence commitments and allied assurance.

This manifest U.S. reluctance is not simply a matter of leadership will in a vacuum; it follows from changing military realities and risk. The military balance has shifted in favor of opponents, as U.S. military capabilities—both nuclear and conventional—have declined relative to those of opponents and U.S. global power projection capabilities have contracted. Under Washington's general arms control mandate to reduce the role and number of nuclear weapons,

the United States has eliminated or rejected select nuclear capabilities, particularly including theater nuclear forces. And the contemporary U.S. nuclear modernization program of record remains lethargic and unfulfilled since initially proposed by the Obama Administration nearly a decade and a half ago, in part to facilitate arms control ratification by the U.S. Senate.

Allied perceptions of the United States are not simply a function of Washington's rhetoric, diplomatic or otherwise; their estimates of U.S. power compared to that of enemies also is key.²⁴⁸ Allied leaderships must make large or small decisions, virtually on a daily basis, that are affected by their judgments as to whether Washington is gaining or losing strength vis-à-vis the foes that threaten them – whether they should continue to side with the United States or hedge their bets.²⁴⁹ A trend toward decisions based on the latter judgment will ultimately prove fatal to U.S. alliances.

Continuing U.S. efforts to reduce the role of nuclear weapons – in a threat environment that sees opponents emphasizing nuclear weapons in their expansionist strategies that threaten allies – have contributed to conditions that undermine the credibility of extended deterrence, and thus allied assurance. These conditions

²⁴⁸ See, for example, Shi Jiangtao, "Why Japan and South Korea are Debating Joining the Nuclear Club," *South China Morning Post* (Hong Kong), August 7, 2024, p. A2.

²⁴⁹ Reflecting this point is Turkey's recent bid to join BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa). BRICS is an expanding alliance of countries intended to rival the Western G-7--reportedly including a Russian initiative to establish a new international currency for trade among BRICS members. Sinan Ulgen, head of a Turkish think tank, described Turkey's move to join BRICS as "a strategy to strengthen relations with non-Western powers at a time when the US hegemony is waning." Quoted in, Katie Daviscourt, "Turkey Becomes first NATO member to apply for BRICS membership," *Human Events*, September 4, 2024, available at https://humanevents.com/2024/09/04/turkey-becomes-first-nato-member-to-apply-for-brics-membership#google_vignette.

include: America's vulnerability to Russian and Chinese coercive limited nuclear threats, and the deep reduction of U.S. non-strategic nuclear capabilities vis-à-vis opponents who are heavily nuclear-armed, cooperating, and explicitly threatening U.S. allies and partners. The challenges these conditions pose for the continuing credibility of the U.S. extended deterrent and allied assurance cannot be "papered over" by robust words and makeshift gestures from Washington because they are, in large part, based on material realities.

While arms control treaties and U.S. arms control enthusiasms have steadily reduced U.S. strategic and non-strategic nuclear forces over the past four decades, America's main nuclear rivals have more recently increased their nuclear forces and capabilities. This disparity clearly has degraded the credibility of the U.S. extended deterrent in the minds of some key allies who have come to rely on the United States as the ultimate guarantor of their security – and likely in the view of foes.

A Checkered History

Limitations on Strategic Defenses

The initial U.S.-Soviet strategic arms limitation treaties in 1972, the SALT I and the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty, were hailed by advocates at the time as stabilizing accords that would help preserve a "balance of terror" between the United States and the Soviet Union and reduce the risk of nuclear conflict. The ABM Treaty, in particular, was considered the "crown jewel" of arms control and prohibited a nationwide territorial defense of the United States, essentially giving Soviet intercontinental-range ballistic missiles (ICBMs) a "free ride" to their American

targets.²⁵⁰ Mutual vulnerability was equated with strategic stability; yet the codified vulnerability of the U.S. homeland carried increased risks for extended deterrence and assurance. It raised the logical question of whether Washington could credibly extend nuclear deterrence on behalf of distant allies when the U.S. homeland itself was vulnerable to Soviet nuclear forces. Correspondingly, a publication of the Chinese Communist Party recently seemingly endorsed a Chinese “expert” regarding the credibility of the U.S. extended deterrent: “In American logic, US’ homeland security takes precedence... The interests of US allies rank fourth. That says, if defending Japan with nuclear weapons poses any risk to US homeland security, Washington will think twice... The US’ nuclear umbrella only protects itself.”²⁵¹

One of the most influential strategic thinkers during the Cold War, Herman Kahn, argued that leaving the American homeland vulnerable to Soviet missile attack was not only imprudent for U.S. security, but would negatively impact the U.S. ability to extend deterrence credibly to U.S. allies. As he stated in 1960, without some means of protecting the homeland, “...it is hard for me to visualize the Soviets’ believing that the United States would willingly commit suicide” on behalf of an ally.²⁵²

²⁵⁰ Statement of Henry A. Kissinger, cited in Brad Knickerbocker, “US prepares new concessions, new initiatives on arms. ABM debate revived as both sides seem poised to break treaty,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, September 20, 1984, available at <https://www.csmonitor.com/1984/0920/092021.html>.

²⁵¹ See, Editorial, “Will US Defend Japan With Nukes or Turn it Into the Line of Fire,” *Global Times*, July 23, 2024, p. 5, available at <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202407/1316500.shtml>.

²⁵² Herman Kahn, *The Nature and Feasibility of War and Deterrence* (Santa Monica, CA: The RAND Corporation, January 20, 1960), p. 16, available at <https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/papers/2005/P1888.pdf>.

In part, the independent French nuclear deterrent grew out of concern that the growing vulnerability of the United States itself to nuclear attack would lessen the credibility of American security guarantees to Europe. As French General Pierre Marie Gallois recounted:

Before 1960, when the Americans were out of reach... we had no doubt in our minds that they would use atomic weapons from the onset of any serious attack against any country of Europe, because they were out of reach themselves. The risks were, risks were small, after all. But, it was easy to foresee that ten years later, the situation would change and that America being the first lines, in the same position vis-à-vis the enemy than Europe, they would change their strategy, and try to reduce the atomic commitments.²⁵³

The 1972 ABM Treaty, which codified U.S. vulnerability to Soviet nuclear missile strikes, ultimately reinforced some allied concerns over U.S. extended deterrence credibility and diminished the U.S. assurance of allies. The extended deterrence and assurance value of missile defenses to protect the U.S. homeland has generally been recognized by U.S. allies and partners who feel threatened by regional actors with nuclear weapons. For example, as one Japanese analyst commented:

If missile defense is deployed to counter ballistic missile attacks from rogue states, the U.S. can then pursue military operations against these countries without fearing retaliation against its mainland or forces stationed overseas. Military commitments to allies and the performance of extended

²⁵³ Interview with Pierre M. Gallois, *War and Peace in the Nuclear Age*, June 11, 1986, available at https://openvault.wgbh.org/catalog/V_A5E2A43ED3F84292B85F66FE35C38F90.

deterrence will become more credible and reliable.... Key to increasing the credibility of the threat of nuclear use and subsequent nuclear escalation is the damage-limitation capability of the country providing the nuclear umbrella and the strength of political relations between the country providing the nuclear umbrella and its protege.²⁵⁴

Despite the fact that the United States withdrew from the ABM Treaty more than two decades ago, U.S. policy continues to reject missile defense capabilities vis-à-vis Russian and Chinese strategic ballistic missiles. Indeed, there have been continuing domestic calls for negotiated restrictions on U.S. missile defenses to ensure continuing American vulnerability to Russian and Chinese missiles as part of a broader arms control agenda.²⁵⁵ Yet, as Herman Kahn noted, constraints on U.S. strategic missile defense capabilities render U.S. extended deterrence credibility and corresponding allied assurance goals problematic.

Offensive Nuclear Arms Reductions

Offensive nuclear arms reductions have also impacted extended deterrence and assurance. The deployment of non-strategic nuclear weapons in Europe has traditionally been seen as a way to “couple” European security to that of the United States by providing a crucial deterrence means between conventional forces and America’s strategic

²⁵⁴ Shinichi Ogawa, “Missile Defense and Deterrence” (Tokyo, Japan: National Institute for Defense Studies, 2001), pp. 32, 34, available at https://www.nids.mod.go.jp/english/publication/kiyo/pdf/bulletin_e2001_2.pdf.

²⁵⁵ Steven Pifer, “Enhancing Strategic Stability: New START and Beyond,” *Arms Control Today*, January/February 2021, available at <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2021-01/features/enhancing-strategic-stability-new-start-beyond>.

nuclear arsenal. However, in the 1990s, under George H. W. Bush's PNIs, the United States eliminated most of its non-strategic nuclear weapons, including nuclear artillery shells, nuclear warheads on short-range ballistic missiles, and naval anti-submarine nuclear capabilities. Unfortunately, the Soviet Union (and later Russia) ultimately did not follow suit. This asymmetry in non-strategic nuclear forces has created heightened allied anxiety over the credibility of the U.S. extended nuclear deterrent as the possibility of a U.S. nuclear response to a limited nuclear attack on American allies largely receded to a highly escalatory, and thus potentially incredible, strategic nuclear exchange. As noted, most recently in Ukraine, Washington has repeatedly demonstrated great caution with regard to escalatory steps that might provoke Moscow. As Henry Kissinger much earlier stated, "...we must face the fact that it is absurd to base the strategy of the West on the credibility of the threat of mutual suicide...because if we execute, we risk the destruction of civilization."²⁵⁶

Similarly, the 1987 INF Treaty was hailed as a major arms control breakthrough that eliminated an entire class of ground-based nuclear systems in Europe. Yet, it contributed to the deep reduction of U.S. intermediate-range theater forces intended to provide credible means in support of the U.S. extended nuclear threat. As Russia continued to build and deploy shorter-range nuclear systems, the asymmetry between U.S. and Russian non-strategic weapons grew.

Continued Russian expansion of its non-strategic nuclear delivery systems provides Moscow with numerous theater nuclear options with which to threaten or strike NATO Europe. The lack of comparable U.S. theater capabilities can only diminish allied confidence in the

²⁵⁶ Henry Kissinger, "The Future of NATO," in Kenneth Myers, ed., *NATO, the Next Thirty Years* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1979), p. 8.

willingness of the United States to threaten limited, non-strategic nuclear escalation (or a limited, non-strategic response) on behalf of distant allies, including NATO members.

U.S. allies in the Indo-Pacific have also expressed growing alarm over the credibility of Washington's security assurances as a result of the reductions in U.S. nuclear capabilities that underpin American extended deterrence guarantees. For example, as discussed, the decision by the Obama Administration in 2010 to retire and eliminate TLAM-N caused consternation among Asian allies, who saw the decision as evidence of a weakening U.S. commitment to extended nuclear deterrence as the threats grew. The 2009 Strategic Posture Commission warned, "that some U.S. allies in Asia would be very concerned by TLAM/N retirement."²⁵⁷

Subsequently, in its 2018 NPR, the Trump Administration called for the development and deployment of a new nuclear sea-launched cruise missile (SLCM-N), noting that it would provide an important non-strategic, regional deterrent capability.²⁵⁸ In addition, the 2018 NPR stated that the SLCM-N would help tailor deterrence and enhance assurance by providing greater "flexibility and diversity" – attributes that would be responsive to extended deterrence requirements given changes in the strategic environment "in the near term and beyond."²⁵⁹

²⁵⁷ William J. Perry, James R. Schlesinger, et al., *America's Strategic Posture: The Final Report of the Congressional Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2009), p. 26, available at https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/America's_Strategic_Posture_Auth_Ed.pdf.

²⁵⁸ Department of Defense, *Nuclear Posture Review*, February 2018, p. 55, available at <https://media.defense.gov/2018/Feb/02/2001872886/-1/-1/1/2018-NUCLEAR-POSTURE-REVIEW-FINAL-REPORT.PDF>.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

Despite the likely extended deterrence and assurance value of restoring a regional sub-strategic nuclear capability, the Biden Administration refused to support the SLCM-N, arguing that the deterrence capabilities it would provide are unnecessary, redundant, costly, and unlikely to “provide leverage to negotiate arms control limits” on Russia’s extensive non-strategic nuclear forces.²⁶⁰ Nevertheless, Congress has continued to provide modest funding to sustain the program.²⁶¹

Strategic Arms Control Efforts

Historically, nuclear arms control treaties have generally focused on reducing and capping the number of nuclear launchers or weapons at fixed ceilings over an extended period of time. Such an approach essentially presumes the continuation of the conditions that led to the agreements. Yet, international threat conditions can worsen quickly and, correspondingly, the requirements for extended deterrence can change rapidly. Understandably, as an analyst has noted, in a dynamic threat environment: “As [U.S.] numbers go down, extended deterrence concerns go up.”²⁶²

²⁶⁰ Department of Defense, *2022 Nuclear Posture Review*, p. 20, available at <https://media.defense.gov/2022/Oct/27/2003103845/-1/-1/1/2022-NATIONAL-DEFENSE-STRATEGY-NPR-MDR.PDF>.

²⁶¹ See, in particular, Section 1640 of the *National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2024*, Public Law 118-31, December 22, 2023, available at <https://www.congress.gov/118/plaws/publ31/PLAW-118publ31.pdf>.

²⁶² Chris Jones, “The Shades of Extended Deterrence,” Center for Strategic and International Studies, January 4, 2010, cited in David J. Trachtenberg, “US Extended Deterrence: How Much Strategic Force Is Too Little?,” *Strategic Studies Quarterly*, Summer 2012, p. 86, available at <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26270524>.

Washington's Policies and Preferences

The credibility of extended deterrence is shaped by Washington's apparent willingness to accept risks on behalf of allies, and on U.S. nuclear capabilities that backstop the U.S. willingness to do so. Reducing the role of nuclear weapons has been a recurring U.S. arms control theme for decades, and is again emphasized repeatedly in the 2022 NPR.²⁶³ Yet, as executed, Washington's continuing drive to reduce the role and number of nuclear weapons has undermined extended deterrence and the assurance of allies. As noted above, there is a striking inconsistency between this U.S. enthusiasm and that of opponents. Indeed, Russia, China, North Korea, and Iran have all been moving in the *opposite* direction, increasing emphasis on (or, in Iran's case, seeking the capability to acquire) nuclear weapons for the coercive role they can play in deterring the United States and its allies from challenging their aggressive behavior. Russia, in particular, has made extensive and unprecedented nuclear threats against the West in connection with its illegal and unprovoked invasion of Ukraine.

In this harsh context, continuing moves to limit U.S. nuclear deterrence capabilities as part of an enduring effort to reduce U.S. reliance on nuclear weapons would further increase allied concerns over the credibility of U.S. extended deterrence commitments. As allied officials, including German and Japanese, have observed over many years, their countries' security relies on the credibility of the U.S. extended nuclear deterrent.

Allied concerns were exacerbated when President Biden, while running for office, expressed his belief that the only U.S. use of nuclear weapons should be in response to a

²⁶³ 2022 *Nuclear Posture Review*, op. cit., pp. 1, 3, 7, 11, 16, 25.

nuclear attack.²⁶⁴ This “sole purpose” statement tracked with his earlier comment that the United States should adopt such a policy with respect to nuclear weapons.²⁶⁵ Such a policy, if it were adopted, would clearly increase fears among U.S. allies in Europe and Asia about the credibility of the U.S. extended deterrent. As one analyst noted, forswearing the first use of nuclear weapons by the United States would be “cold comfort for countries like Japan, Taiwan, and Australia all of which would have to contend with superior PLA [People’s Liberation Army] conventional forces in the event of hostilities with China.”²⁶⁶ The 2022 NPR ultimately rejected “sole purpose” for now, but also likely disturbed allies by highlighting a continuing U.S. aspiration for it.²⁶⁷

Conclusions and Recommendations

U.S. arms control goals, agreements and proposals, including the continuing policy limitations on U.S. strategic ballistic missile defense, the near elimination of non-strategic nuclear options, and Washington’s continuing aspiration for a No First Use policy – intentionally or not –

²⁶⁴ Joseph R. Biden, Jr., “Why America Must Lead Again: Rescuing U.S. Foreign Policy After Trump,” *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2020, available at <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2020-01-23/why-america-must-lead-again>.

²⁶⁵ The White House, “Remarks by the Vice President on Nuclear Security,” January 11, 2017, available at <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2017/01/12/remarks-vice-president-nuclear-security>.

²⁶⁶ Andrew O’Neil, “A ‘No-First-Use’ doctrine would undermine American nuclear deterrence,” January 21, 2021, available at <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/no-first-use-doctrine-would-undermine-american-nuclear-deterrence>.

²⁶⁷ See the discussion in, Michaela Dodge and Keith B. Payne, “No First Use: Threatening Alliance Cohesion, Assurance and Non-Proliferation,” *Information Series*, No. 588, June 6, 2024, p. 507. See also, Department of Defense, *2022 Nuclear Posture Review*, op. cit., p. 9.

have contributed to allied concerns about the credibility of repeated “ironclad” U.S. extended deterrence commitments.

The consequences of this concern are illustrated by recent public opinion polls that show an increasing desire on the part of some allies to consider their own nuclear weapons as a deterrent, and by calls by some to move toward decoupling their security from the United States. These developments suggest a growing disillusionment with the credibility of American security guarantees. The *consequences* of U.S. arms control enthusiasms have stoked anxiety among U.S. allies by restricting the very capabilities that backstop the apparent U.S. willingness to defend them. That understandable allied reaction has become increasingly pronounced in a dramatically worsening threat environment.

To help strengthen extended deterrence and assurance commitments to allies, the U.S. approach to arms control and deterrence must reflect realism and acknowledge that opponents who seek to overturn the existing world order are exceedingly unlikely to engage in a benign “action-reaction” arms control dynamic led by U.S. restraint, or agree to measures that help Washington to satisfy its extended deterrence commitments intended to check their aggressive moves. In a threat environment that is more dangerous and complex than was the case during the Cold War, Washington’s approach to nuclear arms, and thus arms control, must be to facilitate the policy and force *flexibility* that best supports U.S. deterrence and assurance goals.

Some senior U.S. officials continue to tout arms control as a realistic solution to contemporary threats to U.S. and allied security and have been reluctant to move in ways inconsistent with past arms control endeavors. With this in mind, the United States should adopt the following principles in order to ensure that any future agreement or

initiative serves U.S. national security interests and helps to assure allies via a credible extended deterrent.²⁶⁸

1. Expectations that China or Russia will reciprocate U.S. arms control enthusiasms ignore reality; the enduring U.S. confidence in a benign action-reaction dynamic led by U.S. restraint should be banished from U.S. policy planning. No member of the looming entente arrayed against the United States will respond to U.S. arms control self-restraint in a reciprocal fashion in the absence of a compelling reason to do so. There is no plausible benign “action-reaction” dynamic led by U.S. restraint at play. These foes see such U.S. gestures as indications of weakness rather than incentives to reciprocate. The means to encourage foes to accept limitations is their fear of the prospective U.S. capabilities they will face in the absence of limitations. Consequently, if Washington seeks to encourage new arms agreements, or the resuscitation of past agreements, it must devote the resources needed toward the programs that can actually motivate agreements, and will strengthen deterrence if agreements do not materialize.
2. The United States must develop an adequate strategy for a two-nuclear-peer environment and an entente among multiple hostile foes.

²⁶⁸ Some of the recommendations that follow are addressed in more detail in Dr. Keith B. Payne, Dr. John S. Foster, Jr., et al., *A New Nuclear Review for a New Age* (Fairfax, VA: National Institute Press, April 2017), available at https://nipp.org/monographs_cpt/a-new-nuclear-review-for-a-new-age/. See also, Keith B. Payne and Michaela Dodge, *Stable Deterrence and Arms Control in a New Era*, Occasional Paper, Vol. 1, No. 9 (Fairfax, VA: National Institute Press, September 2021), pp. 52-53, available at <https://nipp.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Payne-Dodge-OP-9.pdf>.

Washington must resource that strategy appropriately, and procure the capabilities necessary for deterrence, including extended deterrence, *before formulating any arms control proposals*. As the bipartisan Strategic Posture Commission suggested, this is a necessary prerequisite to help ensure arms control aligns with national security requirements.²⁶⁹

3. No arms control initiative should hinder the U.S. force posture flexibility that enables the quantity and characteristics of U.S. forces needed to adapt to changing strategic circumstances, including rapidly worsening political conditions. In a harsh threat context, an agreement that enables the United States to possess a wide range of deployed and reserve systems is preferable to one that locks the United States into a reduced static number over a period of years. A healthy U.S. nuclear infrastructure that can support such responsiveness is essential to prudent arms control considerations.
4. U.S. extended deterrence and allied assurance requirements, including the prospect for changes in those requirements, must shape any arms control negotiations. An agreement that erodes the credibility of America's extended deterrence, assurance, and nonproliferation goals will undermine U.S. security.
5. Any future arms control negotiations should focus on removing those areas of Russian and Chinese advantage that directly undercut the credibility of U.S. extended deterrence. This includes seeking to

²⁶⁹ See Creedon and Kyl, et al., *America's Strategic Posture: The Final Report of the Congressional Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States*, op. cit., in particular, pp. 84-86, 110-111.

reduce Russia's enormous advantage in non-strategic nuclear systems that pose a direct threat to NATO Europe. Unless, as seems implausible at this point, the verifiable, deep reduction of Chinese and Russian non-strategic options occurs, the United States should strengthen, not further constrain, its conventional and nuclear extended deterrent capabilities against their aggression. Specifically, U.S. non-strategic nuclear options must be expanded in Europe and the Indo-Pacific; realistic U.S. moves in this direction may, in fact, be necessary to move Moscow and Beijing to more moderate behaviors.

6. Arms control limitations on missile defenses must be avoided. Improved and expanded homeland missile defenses would help bolster the credibility of U.S. extended deterrence by helping to deny Moscow and Beijing the power over Washington of their limited coercive nuclear threats, expand the decision space for a possible response, and could help reduce the level of damage should deterrence fail.
7. Given the ample history of Moscow's blatant noncompliance with arms control agreements, including in case studies discussed above, and Beijing's purposeful lack of transparency, thorough verification and enforcement protocols, and exit provisions, are essential for any future arms control agreement. If Washington is to engage in arms control seriously, it must develop a clear, effective compliance and enforcement policy in consultation with U.S. allies. This high bar for arms control verification and enforcement is likely impossible given Moscow's and Beijing's contemporary goals and actions.

In conclusion, it should be recognized that, at present, despite continuing U.S. enthusiasm, the prospects for arms control that enhance the credibility of U.S. security guarantees to allies and strategic partners are slim. While U.S. deterrence and arms control policies should not be set by allies, as long as U.S. alliances remain critical to American national security, which will continue to be the case for the foreseeable future, these policies should be informed by the requirements for credible extended deterrence and assurance of allies. Washington cannot continue to overlook the pernicious effects its arms control enthusiasms have had on the credibility of extended deterrence and assurance. The stakes simply are too great.

About the Contributors

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