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EDITOR's NOTE

Welcome to the *Journal of Policy & Strategy's* final issue of 2024. The year 2025 will bring in a new U.S. presidential administration and there is no shortage of questions it will face. Thus, we are pleased to feature a host of Analysis articles in this issue that examine many pressing topics.

ADM Charles Richard, USN (Ret.) and Robert Peters begin the Analysis section of this issue by calling for a national-level re-appraisal of what, and how, U.S. warfighters are being taught, and whether it is adequate in the emerging security environment. Marc Berkowitz's article is featured next and provides a timely study of U.S. national interests in space and how best to defend them in the face of growing counter-space threats. After that, Gary Geipel offers his thoughts on the "post-truth" era's effects on U.S. national security, both the implications and what may be done about it. Finally, Stephen Blank highlights how the Russian Federation is pursuing its revisionist aims in the Balkans at the same time most of Europe is concerned about fighting in Ukraine.

This issue's Interviews section features enlightening discussions with ADM Charles Richard, former Commander, United States Strategic Command; the Chair and Vice Chair of the bipartisan congressionally-mandated 2024 Commission on the National Defense Strategy, Hon. Jane Harman and Amb. Eric Edelman; and Professors Eliot Cohen, Arleigh A. Burke Chair in Strategy, Center for Strategic and International Studies, and Phillips O'Brien, Senior Associate (non-resident), Center for Strategic and International Studies.

The Proceeding's section highlights speakers' presentations from National Institute for Public Policy webinars in August and October, 2024. The first webinar examined the current size and expected growth of the Chinese nuclear arsenal—featuring a discussion of Dr. Mark Schneider's newly published *Occasional Paper*, *Current and Projected Growth of China's Nuclear Arsenal*. The second webinar examined the topic of just war theory and nuclear strategy—featuring a discussion of Dr. Rebeccah Heinrichs' newly published book *Duty to Deter: American Nuclear Deterrence and the Just War Doctrine*.

Reviewers in the Literature Review section examine a host of recent publications that reflect the diverse array of threats facing policymakers. Michaela Dodge reviews two important publications: first, the final report of the Commission on the National Defense Strategy, chaired by Hon. Jane Harman and Amb. Eric Edelman; and second, Michael Kimmage's new book, *Collisions: The Origins of the War in Ukraine and the New Global Instability*. David Trachtenberg reviews John Sullivan's new book, *Midnight in Moscow: A Memoir from the Front Lines of Russia's War Against the West*. Lastly, Matthew Costlow reviews three recently-published reports that each examine different aspects of China's nuclear breakout, including PRC leadership decision-making, China's growing military options, and U.S. response options.

The Documentation section contains select excerpts from two significant publications: first, a CSIS report on what analysts can learn from the Russia-Ukraine war; and second, a Norwegian report on U.S. nuclear extended deterrence.

Finally, the From the Archive section features select excerpts of the 2001 National Institute report *Rationale and Requirements for U.S. Nuclear Forces and Arms Control*—a publication that reportedly helped form the foundation for the 2001 *Nuclear Posture Review*.

We hope you, the readers, enjoy and find useful this issue of the *Journal of Policy & Strategy*.

ANALYSIS

THE NEED FOR OUR NATIONAL SECURITY PROFESSIONALS TO REFOCUS

Admiral Charles Richard, USN (Ret.) and Robert Peters

PART I
ESCALATION: A TOOL TO BE CONSIDERED, NOT DISMISSED[1]

In recent years, it has become nearly gospel that "escalation" during an acute crisis or conflict is inherently a bad thing. Indeed, "escalatory" has become a synonym for "bad" or "dangerous" or "undesirable." As a result, many of our national security professionals and uniformed officers nearly reflexively dismiss taking actions or postures that could be considered "escalatory" or "provocative" in both real-world and simulated crisis or conflict.

These ideas and practice are flawed. Crises and conflicts, especially between great powers, are ultimately issues of stake and resolve, and become competitions in risk taking. In many cases, escalation, or the threat of escalation, is required or desirable to achieve the desired objectives. In fact, deterrence by cost imposition inherently requires the withheld threat of escalation and is not credible without a willingness to do so.

This paper is based upon our years of service within the Defense Department as (respectively) a senior military officer and a civilian. These views are offered with an eye towards re-examining the concept of escalation as a useful tool of statecraft.

Escalation Defined

Escalation, defined as an increase in the intensity of violence or the geographic or other scope of a conflict, is a tool. Escalating a conflict can perform a number of functions, from communicating stake and will to demonstrating capability, to outright winning the conflict. It is also a critical component of deterrence itself. As former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Keith Payne has written, deterrence, at its core, is the withheld threat of escalation.[2] Escalation or the threat of escalation can be accomplished with any instrument of national power.

On the Avoidance of Escalation

Escalation can make a conflict worse, if employed with an improper regard for potential adversary reactions. However, it can also end a conflict sooner by convincing adversaries

[1] This analysis was originally published in, Admiral Charles Richard, USA (Ret.) and Robert Peters, "Escalation: A Tool to Be Considered, Not Dismissed" *Information Series*, No. 600 (Fairfax, VA: National Institute Press, October 2, 2024).

[2] Keith B. Payne, "The Great Divide in US Deterrence Thought," *Strategic Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (Summer 2020), pp. 16-48, available at https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/Portals/10/SSQ/documents/Volume-14_Issue-2/Payne.pdf.

that they have miscalculated and undervalued one's stake and commitment and that one is therefore prepared to intensify the level of violence or expand the conflict geographically.

Indeed, escalation is not necessarily inconsistent with the Law of Armed Conflict and can be advantageous by ending the conflict in a way that minimizes civilian casualties and broader collateral damage.[3] Ultimately, national security professionals may find during acute crisis or during the midst of an active conflict that escalation may be *required* to deter further aggression, defeat aggression, and achieve an outcome that maintains security for the United States and its allies.

Unfortunately, the United States has a generation of national security professionals trained to think "escalation" is always bad. Indeed, in wargame after wargame, we have observed that officers use "escalatory" as a synonym for "bad" or more precisely "a path we should not pursue." Instead, actions that demonstrate "restraint" on the part of the United States are overwhelmingly posited as inherently good courses of action—irrespective of whether such restraint actually helps the United States achieve its objectives.

Both authors have facilitated or directly observed numerous wargames and tabletop exercises where national security professionals avoid taking steps seen as potentially "escalatory" for fear of provoking the adversary. Very often these professionals, when discussing potential courses of action, will say "that's escalatory" to options or postures that could make a decisive difference in the course of the scenario's conflict. Those options at times have included what are indeed escalatory steps that could increase the level of violence significantly—but very often, even relatively benign options are described as "escalatory" and are therefore dismissed out of hand. Instead, players often times tout catch phrases such as "we show our strength by exhibiting restraint"—whatever that means. Indeed, the only totally, completely, inherently de-escalatory step one can take is to surrender.

Two examples of players avoiding escalation and exhibiting restraint come to mind. In one exercise, senior military officers—almost all general officers or flag officers—emulated a national security council advising the Blue president in the face of Red aggression against a non-treaty partner. When Red employed a limited number of low-yield nuclear weapons against the Blue partner, the players decided neither to escalate the level of violence nor expand the conflict—nor did they choose to respond in kind, for fear of being perceived as too *escalatory*. Consequently, the Blue players showed restraint by continuing to support fighting Red with conventional forces. Put another way, Red paid no cost for its nuclear employment. Two moves—and 41 Red nuclear detonations on the non-treaty partner and a number of full-fledged Blue treaty allies later—the Blue players decided that it was indeed time for a nuclear response, but that such a response should come from Blue's nuclear armed allies—not Blue itself. In this scenario, because of Blue's fear of escalation and the lack of cost imposed upon Red, the scenario that unfolded was one of near continuous Red employment of nuclear weapons across half a continent.

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[3] International Committee of the Red Cross, "The Law of Armed Conflict – Basic knowledge," available at https://www.icrc.org/sites/default/files/external/doc/en/assets/files/other/law1_final.pdf.

The second example involved mid-grade officers operating as a Blue Command staff. While setting up a deterrence posture to dissuade Red from initiating aggression against an overseas Green ally, the players decided not to flow Blue fighters, bombers, and ground forces into theater, because such a move could be seen as escalatory. Two moves later, Red was advancing across Green, and Blue did not have the time to get the requisite forces into theater before Green was overrun. During the post-exercise, when asked what they would have done differently, one colonel responded with "I sure wish we had flowed forces into theater in Move 1."

In both cases, the desire to avoid escalation made victory much more difficult to achieve once the conflict began or once the adversary chose to escalate to a particular level of violence. By not taking considered and prudent risks at the beginning of the conflict (when the stakes were lower and less blood and treasure had been spent by both Red and Blue), the U.S. national security professionals had set themselves up for failure. One of the lessons they learned was that the drive to avoid all risk can lead to a worse situation later in a conflict when *the adversary, not the United States,* had escalated and set the operational tempo—and corresponding level of violence—within the conflict. Consequently, the players were faced with the dilemma of making ever more dramatic, and therefore strategically riskier moves, in an attempt to restore deterrence—or accept defeat.

While it is tempting to think that these are isolated incidents, this is far from the case. Indeed, we see real world examples of national security professionals consistently and almost reflexively calling for restraint and de-escalation. From Secretary of State Antony Blinken's calling for Israel to show restraint and underscoring "the importance of avoiding further escalation" following Hezbollah strikes on northern Israel,[4] to calls not to "escalate" in response to the killing of five American service members and two contractors in Iraq by Iran-backed groups,[5] to Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin's call for Israel not to escalate the conflict with Hamas,[6] it seems that national security policymakers' first impulse is to seek de-escalation. In none of the aforementioned cases have those policymakers described why escalation may be bad. Instead, it was often times presented as fact that "escalation" is inherently counter to U.S. or allied interests.

Why is this the case? Why is there an almost reflexive default position among U.S. national security professionals to avoid escalation? There are no easy answers to these questions. Part of it may be a consequence of the Defense Department's Joint Professional Military Education (JPME) system, in which upwardly mobile officers and civilians are trained by

[4] "Blinken to Gallant: Important to avoid further escalation of the conflict," *Israel National News*, June 25, 2024, available at https://www.israelnationalnews.com/news/392060.

[5] Idrees Ali, Simon Lewis, and Phil Stewart, "US has communicated need to not escalate conflict to Iran and Israel, says Blinken," *Reuters*, August 6, 2024, available at https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/us-has-communicated-need-not-escalate-conflict-iran-israel-says-blinken-2024-08-06/.

[6] Jim Garamone, "Austin Urges Israeli Counterpart to De-escalate Conflict With Hamas," *DOD News*, May 19, 2021, available at https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/2624439/austin-urges-israeli-counterpart-to-de-escalate-conflict-with-hamas/.

other civilian and military leaders. Part of it may be a culture of risk aversion among national security professionals due to the decades-long U.S. role as a status quo power.

Risk Perception Among Status Quo Versus Revisionist Powers

The United States has, since the end of Cold War, been a status quo power that seeks to preserve and defend the existing international order that is characterized by free and open trade, a historical lack of interstate conflict (particularly interstate conflicts for which the goal is territorial conquest), and a promotion of classical liberal values and human rights. The United States has opposed threats to the existing international order for decades, particularly when states that wanted to overturn the status quo employed force to achieve revisionist aims.

States that seek to preserve and defend the status quo by their nature seek to return to the status quo once a conflict ends.[7] By definition, they do not seek radical changes to existing systems or arrangements. Consequently, they tend to be risk averse—they like what they have, they do not want to lose it, particularly through potentially risky actions.

Revisionist states—states that are highly motivated to overturn the status quo—are by their nature more willing to accept risk. Simply put, the status quo is intolerable for them, which is why they are willing to accept risk as a means to overturn the status quo. Escalation inherently involves some risk. But revisionist powers seeking to overturn an existing order are willing to accept the risks that come with escalation.

We now have perhaps two generations of officers and civilians who have been trained to think about escalation—and the risks inherent in escalation—in an exclusively negative light. Consequently, escalation has become, if not forbidden in American strategic thought, a tactic seen as undesirable and avoidable. This view of escalation among American national security professionals creates real problems when it comes to not only pre-conflict and intra-war deterrence, but to conflict termination and achieving desirable outcomes.

Since deterrence involves a withheld threat of escalation, an apparent unwillingness to escalate undermines one's ability to deter. Messaging that one's priority is to avoid escalation can render a deterrent threat or actions taken to restore deterrence questionable or even incredible. This is true even if an actor has the capability to escalate, given that deterrence requires both capability and will to be effective. Put another way, it does not matter how much capability an actor has if the receiver of the deterrent message questions one's will to employ force. It should be remembered that seeking to avoid escalation or provocation is

[7] For more in-depth analysis on risk aversion and decision-making see, Jon K. Maner, Matthew T. Gailliot, David A. Butz, and B. Michelle Peruche, "Power, Risk, and the Status Quo: Does Power Promote Riskier or More Conservative Decision Making?," *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, Vol. 33, Issue 4 (April 2007), available at https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0146167206297405; Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, "Power Politics and the Balance of Risk: Hypotheses on Great Power Intervention in the Periphery," *Political* Psychology, Vol. 25, No. 2 (April 2004), pp. 177-211, available at https://www.jstor.org/stable/3792561; and, William Samuelson and Richard Zeckhauser, "Status Quo Bias in Decision Making" *Journal of Risk and* Uncertainty, Vol. 1, No. 1 (March 1988), pp. 7-59, available at https://www.jstor.org/stable/41760530.

not the same as deterring, and may, in fact, degrade deterrence--something that U.S. national security professionals often confuse.

Adversary Reactions: Pricing-In and Wrong-Footing

An actor's decision to initiate a crisis, conflict, or a provocation is the summation of their perceptions of the potential costs and benefits of action and restraint, coupled with a risk analysis based upon projected outcomes. Said another way, for every action revisionist actors take, they "price-in" the expected response from the status quo power.

Put simply, revisionist state "Red" knows its provocation likely will trigger a reaction from status quo state "Blue." Red has gamed out the likely Blue reaction(s) before it has initiated a conflict. If Red believes that Blue will respond in a way that does not include significant escalation, but instead demonstrates restraint, it is more likely to initiate conflict. Moreover, if Red initiates a conflict and Blue responds in a non-escalatory fashion in an attempt to appeal to Red restraint, Red is unlikely to alter its course of action, because Blue's response was already "priced-in" by Red pre-conflict.

The key to restoring deterrence or convincing opponents to alter their course of action is to show them that their calculations that one's reaction would be tolerable are wrong. Some refer to this as the concept of "wrong-footing" an adversary.

Wrong-footing is not easy. It requires doing something that one's opponent did not expect, such as imposing an unexpected cost or exposing an unknown vulnerability on the Red actor who initiated the conflict in order to convince it that Red has underestimated Blue's decision-making and therefore miscalculated. Blue must further convince Red that not only is the conflict not going the way it planned, but there is a high chance that Red will lose the conflict it initiated. Wrong footing must sow enough doubt in Red's decision making such that Red sees it must recalculate the willingness of Blue to do what is necessary to deny Red victory or impose intolerable cost on Red—and therefore compel Red to seek an end to the conflict on terms that are still somewhat acceptable to both parties. Most importantly, Blue must convince Red that if the conflict does not end soon, Red could find itself in a worse place than the status quo ante.

Escalation: Not Too Hot, Not Too Cold

There is a degree of art to crafting a strategy that employs escalation. One must ensure that any escalation is not "too hot"—but also that it is not "too cold." It is necessary to avoid a threat so disproportionate that it is incredible, or its execution provokes a higher, unacceptable level of violence. Escalation could—if calibrated incorrectly—make the conflict worse and cause the adversary to escalate in response.

As an example, using nuclear weapons on an opponent's strategic forces as an escalatory response to a revisionist power conducting a limited invasion of one of its neighbors would

likely be incredible because employing strategic nuclear weapons against strategic targets would be highly disproportionate to a limited invasion.

An inadequate threatened response, however, is unlikely to change the course of the adversary's behavior. For example, an actor may be tempted to impose economic sanctions on the invader, but if the invader believed that such sanctions were the likely response to the invasion, and proceeded with the invasion anyway, then those sanctions would not change the invader's behavior. The use of sanctions would not be sufficient—or, escalatory enough—to get the invader to back down.

Stakes must be understood. An actor must decide how far it will go to defend its various interests. If an actor employs military force to defend its interests and the status quo, it must accept a certain level of violence. In that sense, the threat or act of escalation could end the violence before the adversary engages in a protracted conflict that is ultimately more costly to all parties.

Indeed, if an actor does not wrong-foot an adversary and the adversary continues down the path of conflict, it is possible that the conflict could become protracted, more intense, and ultimately more costly for all parties. Alternatively, escalation—if calibrated correctly—may end the conflict decisively and early.

Ultimately, national security professionals must understand their nation's stakes, limits, objectives, and what a post-conflict status quo might be that is desirable for them (and does not plant the seeds for another conflict), and then employ what tools are required—potentially, to include a decisive escalation—to achieve the objectives laid out for them.

Of Off-ramps

Instead of escalating during wargames and tabletop exercises, many national security professionals offer their opponents "off-ramps"—that is, an opportunity for their opponents to end a conflict in a way that "saves face." But revisionist powers initiate conflict not to "save face," but to overturn an order they find intolerable.

The idea of offering off-ramps is a phenomenon that has come become fashionable over the last twenty years. This is seen in wargames when military officers playing the "Blue" or "good guy" team have taken significant military losses and seek to offer their opponent a path to conflict termination that they hope Red will accept.

This approach rarely works in multi-celled wargames, where military officers and civilian defense policy makers emulate Red decision makers. There is a particularly good reason for that. Off-ramps to a conflict are only attractive when an actor wants to get out of a conflict. A Red team representing a revisionist power that is winning a conflict and is on a path to achieve its objectives has no incentive to accept an offramp from a Blue that is losing—particularly if they believe that the Blue team has an aversion to accept risk or failed to escalate the conflict in a decisive fashion.

Indeed, off-ramps *are only* accepted by an adversary when it is compelled to do so, i.e., when one is clearly winning the conflict, and the adversary is losing. To demonstrate this, a

simple analogy is useful. Two middle-school boys are in a fistfight after school. The boy who is losing the fight is in no position to offer the boy who is winning the fight an off-ramp; the boy who is winning the fight will decide at what point the fight will end, and therefore is in a position to offer terms. The boy who is losing the fight can seek one of four options: 1) accept the terms of the boy who is winning the fight; 2) break free and run away; 3) seek third party intervention or additional allies of his own; or 4) come up with a bold new plan to change the course of the fight and achieve victory.

Far too often, however, the authors have seen military officers in the midst of simulations in which they are losing a conflict with a revisionist adversary prematurely offer off-ramps—very often with disastrous "in-game" consequences.

Conclusion

Our nation's military officers and civilian policymakers must understand escalation dynamics. They must think deeply and critically about risk acceptance—and how avoiding operational risk and showing "restraint" may put the United States at greater strategic risk. They must understand that escalation can be a tool—useful at times, dangerous at others—within a larger toolkit, not one to be dismissed out of hand.

If America's national security professionals do not do these things, our nation runs the risk of not only failing during a large-scale conflict, but actually incentivizing adversary aggression and escalation.

PART II
ON VICTORY AND THE SEARCH FOR A STATUS QUO ANTE BELLUM[8]

In a recent publication, the authors—a former senior military commander and a defense policy civilian—argued that America's national security professionals are far too quick to dismiss escalation as a tool of statecraft—a position that undercuts America's ability to deter its adversaries.[9]

Another consequence of a hesitancy to consider escalation by America's national security practitioners—particularly military officers—is a loss of focus on the goal they ostensibly should be most focused upon: victory. In the authors' experience, very often during a conflict (real or simulated) American national security professionals do not think in terms of achieving a victory that can lead to a newer, potentially better status quo. Instead, the current

[8] This analysis was originally published in, Admiral Charles Richard, USA (Ret.) and Robert Peters, "On Victory and the Search for a Status Quo Ante Bellum" *Information Series*, No. 603 (Fairfax, VA: National Institute Press, October 24, 2024).

[9] See Admiral Charles Richard, USN (Ret.) and Robert Peters, "Escalation: A Tool to be Considered, Not Dismissed," *Information Series*, No. 600, National Institute for Public Policy, October 2, 2024, available at https://nipp.org/information_series/admiral-charles-richard-usn-ret-and-robert-peters-escalation-a-tool-to-be-considered-not-dismissed-no-600-october-2-2024/.

generation of national security professionals focuses on reestablishing the *status quo ante bellum*, or the situation as it existed before the war.

Status Quo Powers and the Dangers of Mirror Imaging

As established in the authors' earlier article, "Escalation: A Tool to be Considered, Not Dismissed," the United States is a status quo power that seeks to defend the existing global status quo from Europe to the Middle East to the Indo-Pacific. Consequently, American national security professionals are inclined to want to reestablish the status quo ante bellum as the desired end state of a conflict with a revisionist power. This inclination, however, often creates a number of problems.

Adversaries seek to overturn the status quo which American national security professionals want to preserve. To think otherwise is to mistake adversary goals for our own goals—to mirror image. In fact, U.S. adversaries are almost always revisionist powers for the very reason that the status quo we seek to preserve is intolerable for them. That is why revisionist powers—be they Russia with Ukraine, Iran with its proxies, or possibly China with Taiwan—initiate conflicts in the first place. They ultimately seek a new status quo that better aligns with their broader strategic objectives.

Indeed, seeking an end to conflict only to re-establish the "status quo" is another way of returning to the conditions in which deterrence already failed. Therefore, entreaties by American national security professionals which seek to convince a revisionist power to return to the status quo ante bellum will likely be opposed because revisionist powers: 1) find the status quo intolerable; and, therefore, 2) are willing to accept risk, employ force, and accept cost to achieve victory.

Moreover, once a conflict begins, revisionist powers will continue to employ force so long as they: 1) are able to sustain force; 2) see a pathway to victory; and, 3) do not pay costs that outweigh the benefits of the objective they seek once they create a new status quo. Attempts by national security professionals to convince themselves that a pathway exists to conflict termination that ends with a status quo ante bellum that is appealing to a *revisionist power* is one that is almost assuredly doomed to failure, or worse. If the revisionist power sees the status quo as intolerable, it has no reason to accept conflict termination short of a new status quo post bellum so long as the revisionist power has some hope that conflict protraction will serve its interest. That adversary will neither seek nor accept conflict termination so long as it can sustain the conflict or until it can achieve its revisionist goals.

U.S. national security professionals are mistaken when they expect that their opponents value a return to the status quo ante bellum as much as they themselves do. This form of mirror imaging does not take into account the actual desires and objectives of their opponents. Such mirror imaging makes it virtually impossible to craft a conflict termination strategy that will be enduring or even acceptable to the adversary.

Better Pathways to Conflict Termination and Decisive Victory

If not seeking to convince the revisionist power to return to the status quo ante bellum, what then should American national security professionals do when formulating conflict termination pathways? Put simply, they should seek pathways to achieve a better, new status quo that can be implemented after a decisive military victory.

Indeed, overly focusing on a return to status quo ante bellum, while desirable from an American point of view in many ways, also presents real dangers for the United States. To begin with, by focusing on non-escalatory pathways that are characterized by restraint for the restoration of status quo, national security professionals may end up not deterring the opponent and prolonging a conflict, and therefore increasing the numbers of civilian and military casualties in a conflict.

Even if a U.S.-led coalition "wins" a conflict with a revisionist aggressor, a failure to achieve a meaningful "victory" (however defined within a particular context, but one that very often is a decisive victory on the part of a U.S. or U.S.-led coalition that can dictate a new post-conflict status quo that benefits the existing system and U.S. interests), but instead reinstates the previous status quo ante bellum, leaves in place the reasons that the conflict began in the first place. That is, the revisionist state that initiated the conflict because it found the status quo intolerable, unless defeated decisively, will simply seek to change the status quo when conditions are (for them) more favorable.

Put another way, the goal of returning to the status quo ante bellum may sow the seeds for another future conflict over the same fundamental issues. Such was the case with the 1801 Peace of Amiens between the British Empire and Napolean Bonaparte, when the underlying causes of the first half of the Napoleonic Wars were unaddressed—but neither side was defeated—thus setting the stage for the second half of the Napoleonic Wars. Or, it may hold the seeds for a future conflict, because the new post-conflict status quo actually incentivizes a future conflict by creating animosity among the vanquished without substantially increasing the victor's benefits or expanding the coalition of the victors. For example, consider the post-World War I settlement in Europe, when the German Empire was defeated, but retained revanchist goals and the basic elements of power needed to dominate Europe given the disestablishment and break-ups of the Russian, Austro-Hungarian, and Ottoman empires. Decisive victory attained on the field of battle is the necessary condition by which a new status quo can be established that can prevent a follow-on conflict from unfolding.

Decisive victory ultimately deters a future war by changing the conditions that allowed a revisionist power to pursue conflict in the first place. This decisive victory could take a number of forms. It could be a victory in which the victors lead the vanquished to change their behavior by offering them a new role in a different post bellum security environment (as was the case with Germany and Japan after World War II). Decisive victory could also create the conditions for a more stable and therefore enduring peace by seeking accommodation with the vanquished (as was the case at the Treaty of Vienna in 1815, when both sides of the Napoleonic Wars, to include the successor regimes to the Bonapartist

coalition, cooperated for almost a century to defuse most foreign policy or security disputes in Europe and beyond). Finally, decisive victory could include an expansion of the coalition of the victors (such as occurred following the Cold War, when NATO expanded to include most of the former members of the Warsaw Pact). In almost all cases, decisive victory takes the form of a new, better status quo post bellum that is based on a new power and political relationship between the victor and the vanquished.

A new, better status quo could take many forms. It could result in a weakened adversary that has fewer instruments of national power and thus is unable to present a significant threat to U.S. or allied interests (such was the case after the first Gulf War). It could result in a strengthened alliance system that is better able to contain, deter, and ultimately defeat future aggression (as was the case after World War II). It could result in a better correlation of forces or some other basic change in the allocation of power. However, in almost all cases, a new status quo post bellum requires a decisive prior victory of some kind.

However the conflict ends, the military should focus on achieving decisive victory that leaves adversaries in a weaker position than before, in order to make them pay a price that demonstrates that their initial decision for conflict was a grave mistake and undermines their ability to initiate future conflicts. This new condition also serves as a warning to other actors who may seek to initiate conflict as a means to change the status quo.

Without a decisive victory that fundamentally changes the security environment into an enduring, stable, and therefore peaceful status quo post bellum, security challenges persist because the fundamental challenges that existed before the conflict erupted remain. In addition to the examples listed above, history offers many examples of post-conflict settlements that failed to address the fundamental tensions or security challenges that triggered the conflict in the first place. Whether it is the Arab-Israeli conflict, Kashmiri border disputes between India and China, or between China and Taiwan, cease-fires or peace treaties that fail to address the fundamental point of disagreement between two parties—and which therefore make a status quo intolerable for one or more parties—simply set the stage for a future conflict at a later date.

Conclusion

Our nation's military officers and civilian policymakers need to get back to basics. They must think deeply and critically about risk acceptance—and how avoiding operational risk and showing "restraint" may put the United States at greater strategic risk. In the final analysis, they need to think hard about *victory* and how to set the conditions for a successful conflict termination that improves America's position in a new status quo post bellum and ends an adversary's desire and power to challenge the status quo. This must be done in concert between uniformed military professionals and civilian policymakers. It must be done with a deep understanding of history, why an adversary found the existing status quo intolerable in the first place, the reasons that a conflict began, and a plausible path to a new status quo post bellum that will set the conditions for a new, enduring and stable peace.

If America's national security professionals do not do these things, our nation runs the risk of winning a war, only to refight it years later, due to a failure to focus on a decisive victory that enables an enduring peace.

ADM Charles Richard, USN (ret.) is a former Commander, U.S. Strategic Command, and University of Virginia Miller Center's James R. Schlesinger Distinguished Professor

Robert Peters is the Nuclear Deterrence and Missile Defense Research Fellow at the Heritage Foundation

ANALYSIS

PROTECTING AND ADVANCING U.S. NATIONAL INTERESTS IN OUTER SPACE[1]

Marc J. Berkowitz

Despite general interest in the heavens and periodic fascination with celestial events, the exploration and use of outer space tend to be considered esoteric matters unrelated to daily life in America or other nations. Yet the activities conducted in space have a profound impact on the United States, its foreign relations, and the world. Determining how space activities should serve U.S. national interests was an imperative for American policy makers during the 20th century. Today's imperative is determining how to protect and advance U.S. interests in space. America won the first space race with the Soviet Union and became the preeminent spacefaring nation when the Apollo 11 astronauts landed on the Moon in 1969. That contest was driven by the U.S.-Soviet geopolitical rivalry for the competitive advantages enabled by rocket and satellite technology.

The United States is again engaged in a geostrategic rivalry with an astropolitical dimension which extends to cislunar space, the region between geosynchronous Earth orbit and the Moon's surface. Despite entering the new space race with a considerable head start, America is at risk of losing its leadership position. Foreign powers are eroding U.S. strategic advantages in space as well as threatening freedom of access to and use of the domain. Near Earth space now reflects the complex, dynamic, and dangerous international security environment and the competition is spreading across the Earth-Moon system. The Peoples Republic of China seeks to supplant the United States as the preeminent space power by its centennial anniversary in 2049, if not sooner.[2]

Unfortunately, America has contributed to this situation through wavering political resolve, programmatic and fiscal instability, and risk averseness. This reflects either a fundamental lack of awareness, or insufficient appreciation, of U.S. national interests. Such interests are typically defined as the values, conditions, and factors of major importance to America's preservation and well-being. These include specific concerns such as territorial integrity, access to global markets and resources, and international order as well as broad ideals such as freedom, human rights, and economic prosperity. Vital interests are those of overriding importance to the United States' safety, integrity, and survival.

[1] This article is adapted from a National Security Space Association (NSSA) "Presidential Transition Issue Paper," entitled, "Winning the Competition for Space Leadership," and is printed here with permission. The views expressed herein are solely those of the author.

[2] See, for example, Marc Berkowitz and Chris Williams, "Strategic Implications of China's Cislunar Space Activities," Occasional Paper, National Security Space Association, August 21, 2023, available at https://nssaspace.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Strategic-Implications-of-Chinas-Cislunar-Space-Activities-8.21-final.pdf.

For decades, successive presidential administrations of both political parties have declared that access to and use of space are U.S. vital national interests.[3] This article examines why sustaining leadership in space exploration and use are of overriding importance to America. It discusses the competitive advantages the United States derives from space leadership, the imperative of protecting and advancing U.S. national interests in space, and how to sustain the America's preeminence in space activities.

Competitive Advantages

Space power is the total strength of a nation's capabilities to conduct and influence activities to, in, thru, and from outer space to achieve its national objectives.[4] Prowess in space operations contributes to all elements (diplomatic, informational, military, and economic) of U.S. national power. America leverages its position as the world's leading spacefaring nation for a broad range of competitive advantages — political prestige, international influence, scientific knowledge, technological advancement, and economic prosperity, as well as U.S. and international security.

Prestige and Influence

The United States' leadership in space exploration and use enhances its political prestige and international influence. The domestic and international political benefits of America's mastery of space operations increases national pride and demonstrates the success of U.S. values, culture, and governance model to the world.[5] Achievements in space activities generate respect and admiration at home and abroad. Regard for American scientific, technological, commercial, and national security space capabilities influence the policies and behaviors of other actors in the international system.

The three U.S. government (civil, defense, and intelligence) space sectors as well as the private or commercial space sector contribute to America's status. In addition to the Mercury, Gemini, and Apollo programs, the civil sector's human spaceflight accomplishments include extra vehicular activities, long duration habitation, and novel research and development on space shuttles and space stations. The United States excels at robotic space exploration, Earth observation and environmental monitoring, and myriad

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[3] *United States Space Priorities Framework* (Washington, D.C.: The White House, December 2021), available at https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/united-states-space-priorities-framework-_-december-1-2021.pdf.

[4] *Spacepower Doctrine for Space Forces* (Washington, D.C.: Headquarters U.S. Space Forces, June 2020), available at https://www.spaceforce.mil/Portals/1/Space%20Capstone%20Publication_10%20Aug%202020.pdf.

[5] Brian Kennedy and Alex Tyson, "Americans' Views of Space: U.S. Role, NASA Priorities and Impact of Private Companies," *Pew Research Center*, July 20, 2023, available at https://www.pewresearch.org/science/2023/07/20/americans-views-of-space-u-s-role-nasa-priorities-and-impact-of-private-companies/.

applications of satellite positioning, navigation, and timing as well as geospatial information services.

Similarly, activities conducted by the defense and intelligence space sectors contribute to America's prestige. In fact, the U.S. established the ability to access and use space for national security purposes as a *sine qua non* and symbol of great power status. Additionally, the commercial space sector enhances the nation's status through development and operation of reusable launch systems, dramatically lowering the cost of access to space, high quality geospatial imagery, telecommunications, satellite internet, and other space-related goods and services.

U.S. prestige and influence produce both tangible and intangible benefits in international relations, commerce, and trade. Cooperation in space activities is a valuable foreign policy tool. During the Cold War, such cooperation helped to manage the Soviet-American rivalry and served as a symbol of détente between the superpowers.[6] Similarly, international space cooperation eased tensions as the Cold War ended, kept Russian rocket scientists and engineers employed, and helped to prevent the proliferation of ballistic missile technology and know-how.

Today, the Artemis Accords are an important instrument for reinforcing common values and interests involving international cooperation in the peaceful and sustainable uses of space.[7] The international agreement, signed by forty nations, establishes a foundation for a new era of space exploration. Signatories commit to cooperation, transparency, and responsibility by working as partners in the exploration and use of space rather than as rivals. The worldwide diffusion of space technology and know-how as well as reduced launch costs, lowering the barriers to entry into the development and application of space capabilities, provide greater opportunities for such collaboration.

Other members of the international community seek to establish space-related political, economic, and security ties with America. Whether the mode of influence is private or public diplomacy, cultural exchanges, economic interactions, or latent U.S. power, this contributes to America's ability to shape decisions and actions by foreign governments, organizations, and individuals. This, in turn, helps to sustain the rules-based international order the United States and its allies established after World War II to enable peace and security.

Science and Technology

U.S. leadership in space activities greatly increases America's and the world's scientific knowledge about our planet, solar system, galaxy, and the universe. It also generates

[6] "U.S.-Soviet Cooperation in Outer Space, Part 1: From Yuri Gagarin to Apollo-Soyuz," National Security Archive, April 12, 2021, available at https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/briefing-book/russia-programs/2021-04-12/us-soviet-cooperation-in-outer-space-part-1-1961-1975; and "U.S.-Soviet Cooperation in Outer Space, Part 2: From Shuttle-Mir to the International Space Station," National Security Archive, May 7, 2021, available at https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/briefing-book/russia-programs/2021-05-07/us-soviet-cooperation-outer-space-part-2.

[7] "The Artemis Accords," National Aeronautics and Space Agency, 2020, available at https://www.nasa.gov/artemis-accords/.

advancements in a broad range of technologies and applications which improve the lives of Americans and peoples around the world. The scientific, technological, engineering, and mathematical knowledge and skills required to conduct space operations greatly contribute to the United States' status, well-being, and security.

America is the first nation to land humans on and explore the Moon as well as visit every planet in the solar system. When Japan, China, or another nation eventually accomplishes the feat in the coming decades, it will be more than half a century since Neil Armstrong took humankind's first step onto the lunar surface. U.S. spacecraft were also the first to investigate Mars, including with the Curiosity and Perseverance rovers as well as the Ingenuity helicopter, in addition to landing on and returning samples from the Bennu asteroid.

Moreover, science missions conducted with the Spitzer, Chandra, Compton, Hubble, and Webb space telescopes provide unprecedented views of celestial objects and events. These observatories, among other things, discovered thousands of new galaxies, helped to determine the age of the universe, and that nearly every major galaxy is anchored by a black hole at its center. Similarly, Earth observation and environmental monitoring missions improve knowledge of our planet, resource utilization, and weather forecasting. Indeed, the civil space program significantly increases understanding of the Sun's impact on Earth's weather and climate systems.

U.S. space activities have produced countless other scientific discoveries. These include determining that ancient Mars had the chemistry necessary to sustain microbial life, finding a vast ocean of liquid water below the ice on Jupiter's moon Europa, and detecting over 4,000 planets beyond our solar system just within the Milky Way galaxy.[8] It also includes confirming the existence and obtaining the first image of a black hole as well as seeing back nearly to the beginning of the universe.[9]

The U.S. space program is responsible for a wide variety of technological advancements and spinoffs. These include, for example, advances in materials, propulsion, sensing, computing, robotics, and manufacturing. Notable byproducts of the space program include freeze dried food, aural thermometers, artificial limbs, computerized tomography scanners, water purification systems, and portable computers.[10] The program has benefited the agriculture, transportation, energy, healthcare, consumer products, and information technology sectors. America is respected for the advanced technology exemplified by its government and commercial space capabilities.

Moreover, technological advancements from the space program strengthen U.S. and international security. Space capabilities provide global situational awareness, facilitate

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[8] "Europa Up Close," National Aeronautics and Space Agency, available at https://europa.nasa.gov/why-europa/europa-up-close/#:~:text=Jupiter's%20moon%20Europa%20shows%20strong,life%20as%20we%20know%20it; and Exoplanet Exploration," National Aeronautics and Space Agency, available at https://exoplanets.nasa.gov/.

[9] "Black Holes," National Aeronautics and Space Agency, available at https://science.nasa.gov/universe/black-holes/; and "Early Universe," National Aeronautics and Space Agency, available at https://science.nasa.gov/mission/webb/early-universe/.

[10] "Spinoff," National Aeronautics and Space Agency, available at https://spinoff.nasa.gov/.

diplomacy, collect intelligence on foreign intentions and capabilities, and enable national and collective self-defense. They underpin deterrence, support the planning and execution of military operations and intelligence activities across the conflict spectrum, and reinforce America's foreign policy and defense commitments to allies and international partners.

Prosperity and Security

U.S. preeminence in space activities also increases the nation's wealth. Public and private investments in space capabilities drive technological and economic development. The international commercial space marketplace is projected to grow from about to over $1 trillion by 2030. America is the global leader in space investment, innovation, and invention.

U.S. private enterprises are catalysts of the commercial space economy's growth. Private investment in most areas of space research and development now exceeds the U.S. government's investment. According to the most recent federal government data, the U.S. space economy accounted for $211.6 billion (B) of gross output, $129.9B (0.6 percent) of gross domestic product, $51.1B of private industry compensation, and 360,000 private industry jobs in 2021.[11] The U.S. commercial space sector is vibrant and innovative. It either leads or competes successfully in the mature market segments of launch services, telecommunications, Earth observation, and navigation. The U.S. commercial space sector is similarly positioned in emerging market segments such as space situational awareness, tourism, in-space servicing and manufacturing, and resource extraction and utilization.

American space systems are integral to the national and global information infrastructures. They collect, generate, and relay an extraordinary volume and variety of data and information around the world as well as help to control physical assets in all sixteen U.S. critical infrastructure sectors. U.S. satellite internet, telecommunications, geospatial, and positioning, navigation, and timing services effectively are now utilities. They enhance the reliability and efficiency, among other things, of power grids' transmission and distribution, all modes of transportation and logistics, processing and analytics of hundreds of millions of financial transactions a second, synchronization of cellular telephone networks, and delivery of emergency services and disaster relief. In today's global economy, space-derived data, information, and knowledge are engines of prosperity.

Additionally, as noted, space leadership contributes to U.S. and international security. Defense and intelligence space systems enable U.S. national security strategy as well as support foreign policy and security commitments to allies and international partners. They provide awareness of global trends, conditions, and events, access to contested and denied areas, and unobtrusive forward presence. Moreover, space capabilities are high technology force multipliers which enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of joint and combined military operations.

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[11] Department of Commerce, "U.S. Space Economy Statistics 2012-2021," available at https://apps.bea.gov/scb/issues/2023/06-june/0623-space-economy.htm?_gl=1*m8uxgg*_ga*MTE1NzcyNjYwNy4xNzAxNDU2NDI5*_ga_J4698JNNFT*MTcwMTQ1NjQyOS4xLjEuMTcwMTQ1NjQ5My4wLjAuMA.

Space systems are central to America's way of deterrence and warfighting. U.S. nuclear deterrence operations, for example, rely on satellite systems for war planning, indications, warning, and attack assessment, missile launch detection, tracking, and defense, nuclear command, control, and communications, weapons targeting and delivery, nuclear detonation detection, and battle damage assessment. Space assets enable the top cover provided by U.S. strategic forces and extended deterrence to allies.

Indeed, space capabilities are the leading edge of U.S. information-age military power. Space operations enable U.S. global power projection with speed, precision, and lethality. They reduce the risk to U.S. and allied forces as well as help to minimize collateral damage. Satellite systems enable maneuver, synchronization, and massing of coercive effects from dispersed forces in non-linear, multi-domain, military operations. In particular, the command, control, communications, computing, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance provided by space systems are critical to achieving information and decision superiority over adversaries. The ability to sense, comprehend, and make informed decisions faster than an adversary allows military forces to gain the initiative and dictate the timing and tempo of joint and combined operations.

Strategic Imperative

The conduct of activities in outer space, as highlighted above, enhance the prestige, influence, prosperity, and security of the United States. Space capabilities are woven into the socioeconomic fabric of the nation, embedded in critical infrastructures, enable national essential missions and functions, and contribute to America's way of life. The erosion of U.S. strategic advantages in space thus must be reversed to protect and advance America's national interests.

U.S. decision makers, opinion leaders, and the public must be aware of and appreciate America's interests in space. They must be well informed about the benefits the United States derives from its position as the world's leading spacefaring nation. Similarly, they must be knowledgeable about the risks of allowing the continued erosion of U.S. strategic advantages in space and consequences of conflict beginning in or extending to the domain. In short, clarity about America's national purpose in the exploration and use of space must be restored.

Concurrently, the United States must confront the challenge to its national interests in space posed by a new entente of rival Axis powers. U.S. national, homeland, and economic security are imperiled by foreign powers contesting the freedom of space. Russia, China, Iran, and North Korea are led by autocratic regimes with revisionist or irridentist political objectives seeking to change the international order at the expense of the security of the U.S., our allies, and friends. These nations act independently and collude to undermine international norms of responsible behavior as well as threaten or use armed force to achieve their political aspirations.

All four countries possess either anti-satellite (ASAT) or counterspace weapon systems which put U.S. vital interests in space at risk.[12] Russia and China operate cyber, electronic warfare, kinetic energy, directed energy, nuclear, and orbital anti-satellite or counterspace weapons. Iran and North Korea also have cyber, electronic warfare, and missile capabilities which could interfere with space assets and operations.[13] Such space warfare capabilities could be employed to undermine U.S. and allied political resolve, societal cohesion and morale, economic vitality, intelligence gathering, and combat effectiveness.

Indeed, Russia and China see space a domain in which they can coerce the United States because of its dependence upon vulnerable space systems. They have conducted destructive tests of direct ascent anti-satellite missiles which generated large amounts of orbital debris, endangered space flight safety, and harmed the sustainability of the space environment. Russia has developed a nuclear-armed, space-based ASAT weapon and evidently is preparing to deploy it on-orbit in contravention of the 1967 Outer Space Treaty.[14] Such an orbital "Sword of Damocles" would likely create a situation akin to the 1962 Cuban Missile crisis which brought the world to the brink of thermonuclear war.

Russia has attacked Viasat's KA-SAT commercial communications satellite ground control system, Starlink's satellite internet service, and the U.S. Global Positioning System's positioning, navigation, and timing signals during its unlawful war of aggression against Ukraine.[15] Indeed, U.S. government and commercial space systems reportedly are regularly being inferred with by non-kinetic weapons in grey zone operations.[16] In addition, China has developed and tested a fractional orbital bombardment weapon on a hypersonic glide vehicle.[17] Moreover, both Russia and China crossed the threshold and weaponized space by deploying, testing, and exercising orbital weapons involving rendezvous and proximity operations.

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[12] Defense Intelligence Agency, *Challenges to Security in Space* (Washington, D.C.: Department of Defense, 2022), available at https://www.dia.mil/Portals/110/Documents/News/Military_Power_Publications/Challenges_Security_Space_2022.pdf; National Space Intelligence Center, *Competing in Space* (Wright Patterson, AFB, Ohio, 2018), available at https://media.defense.gov/2019/Jan/16/2002080326/-1/-1/0/190115-F-NV711-0001.JPG; National Space Intelligence Center, *Competing in Space*, 2nd ed., (Wright-Patterson AFB, Ohio, 2024), available at https://www.spoc.spaceforce.mil/Portals/4/Images/2_Space_Slicky_11x17_Web_View_reduced.pdf; *Space Threat Assessment 2023* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2023), available at https://www.csis.org/analysis/space-threat-assessment-2023; and *Global Counterspace Capabilities: An Open Source Assessment* (Washington, D.C.: Secure World Foundation, 2024), available at https://swfound.org/media/207826/swf_global_counterspace_capabilities_2024.pdf.

[13] Ibid.

[14] See, for example, Marc J. Berkowitz and Chris Williams, "Russia's Space-Based, Nuclear-Armed Anti-Satellite Weapon: Implications and Response Options," Occasional Paper, National Security Space Association, May 16, 2024, available at https://nssaspace.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Russian-Nuclear-ASAT-5.16.24.pdf.

[15] See, for example, Marc J. Berkowitz, "America's Asymmetric Vulnerability to Navigation Warfare," Occasional Paper, National Security Space Association, July 18, 2024, available at https://nssaspace.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/NAVWAR-FINAL.pdf.

[16] See, for example, Josh Rogin, "A Shadow War in Space is Heating Up Fast," *The Washington Post*, November 30, 2021, available at https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2021/11/30/space-race-china-david-thompson/.

[17] See, for example, *Challenges to Security in Space, Space Threat Assessment 2022*, and *Global Counterspace Capabilities*, op. cit.

China recognizes that space is the ultimate high ground and "the commanding height of strategic competition."[18] The Chinese Communist Party aspires to accumulate power to dominate the ongoing geopolitical and astropolitical contests. It is executing a military-civil fusion strategy, vastly expanding its space posture and operations, and integrating space capabilities into military plans for "precision-strike" and "system destruction" warfare.

Furthermore, China continues to put the infrastructure in place and conduct operations at Lagrange points, lunar transfer orbits, lunar orbits, and the Moon. It aims to use such "strategic points, resources, and thoroughfares" in cislunar space—the region beyond geosynchronous Earth orbit and the Moon—to exert influence on or control over the Earth-Moon system.[19] In particular, this includes the extraction of rare minerals and Helium-3 from the lunar surface estimated to be worth trillions of dollars to increase China's international competitiveness, wealth, and power. In this regard, China plans to land taikonauts on the Moon by 2030 and operate an International Lunar Research Station with Russia by 2035.

Given the expansion of the intensifying international rivalry to space, the U.S government must ensure that the nation is prepared to deter or, if necessary, defeat the threat or use of armed force in the domain. An adversary may decide to begin or extend conflict to space because of U.S. dependence on space systems and their strategic significance to the nation. Hostilities in space could influence the course and outcome of war. If America were denied use of mission-critical space assets, it would be weakened and reduced to a second or third tier industrial-age power or worse.

Conflict in space will not be isolated to the domain since the information lines of communications through space are directly linked to the U.S. homeland. The secondary and tertiary effects of the disruption or loss of key space capabilities will directly impact America. Given U.S. dependence on space services, their integration into critical infrastructures, and associated interdependencies, the impact of a lengthy disruption of such services just to the power grid could have cascading effects and unravel America's socioeconomic fabric. This would likely include casualties and fatalities from the interruption of water, food, and fuel supply and distribution, information technology and communications networks, transportation, financial transactions, and emergency services.

Hostile acts against space systems could influence perceptions, corrupt, disrupt, or usurp decision-making, and create deliberate or unintended effects on a cascading, global scale. Such effects may occur at an exponentially faster pace than previously experienced, endure for long periods of time, and generate large-scale collateral damage. In today's interconnected world, an attack on one state's space systems could adversely impact all nations.

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[18] The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, "China's Military Strategy," May 2015, available at http://eng.mod.gov.cn/Press/2015-05/26/content_4586805.htm.

[19] Berkowitz and Williams, "Strategic Implications of China's Cislunar Space Activities," op. cit.

Sustaining U.S. Leadership

The United States has the wherewithal to sustain its position as the world's preeminent space power. It has the necessary human capital, scientific knowledge, financial resources, technological capability, and industrial capacity. Moreover, in comparison to its main rivals, America has the asymmetric advantages of individual liberty, free enterprise, and allies with common values and interests. The United States seemingly only lacks the political leadership and resolve to protect and advance its interests in space.

Education about the value of space activities to the nation in general and Americans' daily lives in particular is essential to increase awareness and appreciation of U.S. interests in space, the stakes of the ongoing geopolitical and associated astropolitical contests, the risks of further erosion of America's space advantages, and potential consequences of war in space. Instead of suffering a "Space Pearl Harbor" as the 2000 Space Commission warned,[20] informing the polity about the strategic significance of space and the value of U.S. leadership in the domain should provide a catalyst for leaders to demonstrate political will, stabilize space programs and budgets, manage risks, and undertake the preparations necessary to deter or, if necessary, defeat threats to U.S. interests in space.

Despite the deep political divisions in the country, space activities are neither a polarizing nor partisan issue. Aside from occasional debate about whether investment in certain space capabilities is worth the expected return and the desire to keep the heavens unsullied by weaponry or pollution, space policy matters mainly have been devoid of partisan politics. In fact, the national pride, scientific knowledge, economic growth, technological advancement, and national security derived from the exploration and use of space are part of the solution to many of the problems facing America.

Leadership from the President and Congress as well as competent stewardship and consistent execution by all space sectors are required to protect and advance U.S. interests in space. The federal government must establish a compelling vision, clear objectives, and policy guidance to restore America's national purpose in space.[21] As President John F. Kennedy stated, "The exploration of space will go ahead, whether we join in it or not, and it is one of the great adventures of all time, and no nation which expects to be the leader of other nations can expect to stay behind in the race for space."[22]

The U.S. government must also formulate and implement a comprehensive national strategy which links policy objectives (ends), courses of action (ways), and resources (means) to sustain U.S. leadership in the exploration and use of space. The strategy must be "whole of nations" to encompass and leverage the human, financial, and technical resources

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[20] *Commission to Assess United States National Security Space Management and Organization* (Washington D.D.: January 11, 2001), available at https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/ADA404328.pdf.

[21] Marc J. Berkowitz, "Winning the Competition for Space Leadership," Presidential Transition Issue Paper Series, National Security Space Association, August 15, 2024, available at https://nssaspace.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/NSSA-Presidential-Transition-Paper-Series_1.pdf.

[22] President John F. Kennedy, "Address at Rice University on the Nation's Space Effort," September 12, 1962, available at https://www.jfklibrary.org/learn/about-jfk/historic-speeches/address-at-rice-university-on-the-nations-space-effort.

of the U.S. public and private space sectors as well as allies and partners. While America does not necessarily have to lead in all aspects of space activities, it must do so in the missions essential to its preservation and well-being. Moreover, it must continue to be the first mover establishing the operational precedents for responsible spacefaring behavior.

America must take a leadership role in continuing to advocate for the peaceful uses of space, encourage other nations to adhere to the international space legal regime, and set appropriate precedents for norms of responsible spacefaring behavior. The United States must also continue to lead and orchestrate international cooperation in the exploration and use of space. Allies and partners now have significant space capabilities to contribute to space exploration, collective security, and mutual defense. Similarly, the U.S. government must continue to establish the statutory and regulatory framework necessary to sustain the commercial space sector's growth and take full advantage of its goods and services. It must align the government's roles as consumer, investor, and regulator of the commercial space sector to enable and harness the ingenuity and initiative of private enterprise.

In particular, the federal government must establish the proper incentives and partnerships with private enterprises to ensure that the United States wins the new space race. America must make winning the contest a priority to ensure it maintains its leadership role in space activities, shapes the operating environment across the Earth-Moon system, and is able to access and utilize lunar and other resources in the solar system. Indeed, the United States must provide the international leadership and power to extend the rules-based order to space and assure that no hostile nation or condominium of nations gains control over the freedom of passage through and operations in the Earth-Moon system.

Concurrently, America must directly confront the unprecedented buildup of space armaments by rivals, especially by China and Russia, and the challenge they pose to the freedom of operations in and passage through space. While it is preferable to counter the threat to the freedom of space in concert with allies and partners, the United States must act independently to protect its vital interests if it must. The U.S. armed forces must be structured and postured to deter or prevail in the event of a conflict that begins in or extends to space. Indeed, America must field and operate the defense and intelligence space capabilities required for national or collective self-defense. This includes capabilities to evade, withstand, operate through, suppress, and destroy threats to space systems, joint or combined forces, as well as U.S. and allies' homelands.

Consequently, the United States must prioritize the acquisition, deployment, and operation of a dynamic, layered, space defense-in-depth with passive and active countermeasures.[23] Critical space mission capabilities must have sufficient survivability, endurance, and operational continuity to assure U.S. national, homeland, and economic security, sustain national essential missions and functions, and support commitments to allies and partners even under the most stringent wartime scenarios. While proliferation,

[23] See, Marc J. Berkowitz, "Redesigning Space Forces for Deterrence and Warfighting," Occasional Paper, National Security Space Association, February 2, 2023, available at https://nssaspace.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/pub_2023-02-23.pdf, for a discussion on how to alter the structure, posture, and operating practices of U.S space forces.

distribution, and diversification of space mission architectures will enhance mission assurance and resilience against some ASAT and counterspace threats, active defenses for suppression and destruction of other threats will be necessary for space deterrence and warfighting as they are in all other domains. Moreover, offensive capabilities are essential to counter an enemy's hostile uses of space for targeting, command and control, and weapons delivery and provide force protection and operations security. A range of such capabilities and effects are critical to pre-war and intra-war deterrence, escalation control, and warfighting.

Conclusion

If America is to continue to realize the strategic advantages it has derived from being the world's leader in the exploration and use of outer space, national decision makers, opinion leaders, and the public must be aware of and appreciate U.S. national interests in the domain. Space systems are essential to the nation's preservation and well-being. Although transparent to most Americans, space capabilities contribute to the nation's prestige, influence, knowledge, wealth, and power. Indeed, space activities are not esoteric pursuits disconnected from the daily lives of Americans. They directly impact their welfare and security.

Sustaining the United States position as the leading spacefaring nation in the world and mitigating its vulnerability to the threat or use of armed force in space should not be a polarizing or partisan political issue. U.S. leaders must comprehend and be able to explain to the public why access and use of space are a vital national interest. To win the ongoing geopolitical and astropolitical contests, America must restore clarity about its national purpose in the exploration and use of space, reverse the erosion of its competitive advantages in space, and sustain its preeminence in space activities. Bold leadership and decisive action, utilizing all elements of national power and instruments of statecraft, are needed to protect and advance U.S. national interests in space.

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ANALYSIS

POST-TRUTH AND NATIONAL SECURITY: BACKGROUND AND OPTIONS FOR A NEW ADMINISTRATION

Gary L. Geipel

Why This Matters

"Post-truth" describes an information environment characterized in particular by "truth decay," to use a term coined by RAND scholars, in which verifiable facts are widely ignored or distrusted—replaced by opinion if not outright invention.[1] In this author's larger analysis, the major components of our post-truth environment are (1) the embrace of "narratives" rather than fact-based accounts of the world, (2) increasing "tribalism," and (3) a breakdown of corrective institutions, leading to the "entrenchment" of these conditions on a massive scale.[2] See Figure 1 for a summary graphic useful throughout this paper.

The 2024 U.S. presidential election campaign displayed all of these components. It eschewed competing policy ideas almost entirely in favor of competing narratives—pitting "save democracy" against "save America." It appealed to the most virulent tribalists on both sides rather than aiming for voters in the remaining center. And it took place in entrenched information silos composed almost entirely of epistemic partisans rather than objective reporters. But now the campaign is over. As president, Donald Trump faces even greater stakes than he did during his first term—when he already became a major victim (via the "Russia collusion" hoax, for example) and a major player (via his 2020 re-election claims, for example) in the post-truth information environment. The new Trump administration needs to sort fact from torrents of fiction—or face potentially immense consequences. Where U.S. national security is concerned, the challenges and risks of post-truth continue to grow apace. Impressionistic, social-media-borne understandings of conflicts in the Middle East and Ukraine, for example, already have as much influence on U.S. policy as verifiable information and longstanding national or alliance interests. The next administration will face constant decisions about whether to ignore, manage, or try to shape a digital information environment full of alternative realities.

Rising to the challenge will require long-absent bipartisanship. Neither party's entrenched attitudes about the information environment—with Democrats focused on "fighting disinformation" and Republicans on "protecting free speech"—offer an effective roadmap for navigating post-truth. Robust national security policies amid a digital cacophony remain possible but require commitments to transparency, consensus-building

[1] See Jennifer Kavanagh and Michael D. Rich, "Truth Decay: An Initial Exploration of the Diminishing Rose of Facts and Analysis in American Public Life," RAND Corporate Research Report RR-2314-RC (2018).

[2] Gary L. Geipel, *Reality Matters: National Security in a Post-Truth World, Occasional Paper*, Vol. 3, No. 6 (Fairfax, VA: National Institute Press, June 2023), available at https://nipp.org/papers/reality-matters-national-security-in-a-post-truth-world/.

between parties and tribes, and political leadership—all of which have been sorely lacking in broader U.S. policymaking for a generation.

This paper builds on earlier work by this author.[3] It will provide an update on post-truth conditions and their impact on national security, consider other recent analyses, isolate the most pressing challenges for the United States, and offer responses that could be effective and practical for an incoming administration.

Background and Recent Examples

Figure 1: National Security, Post-Truth – Definition

Definition	General Threats	National Security Scenarios
Narratives	Information Accuracy	Designed Crises / Ignorance
Tribalism	Decision Quality	Epistemic Coups
Entrenchment	National Resilience	Fatal Distractions

The large-scale narratives that power online information exchange consist of individual assertions that cohere into a larger notion of how some aspect of the world works. However, narratives are not collections of evidence put forward for questioning and eventual reassessment in the manner of scientific paradigms. Today's dominant narratives usually emerge from dramatic events and fragments of information but evolve quickly into rigid dogmas—rigged elections, systemic racism, the power of the Deep State, catastrophic climate change, the Great Replacement, and Settler Colonialism are examples—to which any verifiable evidence must conform if it is considered at all.

The notion of what constitutes "news" itself has been upended in this environment, as the assembly of narrative-conforming storylines by "influencers" replaces anything resembling objective journalism. As political scientist Jon Askonas aptly describes it: "Today, journalists sell compelling narratives that mold the chaotic torrent of events, Internet chatter, and information into readily understandable plotlines, characters, and scenes. … Like Scheherazade, if they can keep subscribers coming back for more of the story, they will stay alive."[4]

Tribalism, meanwhile, describes the sorting of more and more individuals into antagonistic groups based on cultural, ethnic, and religious affinity, partisan alignment, and/or geographic proximity. Social media platforms encourage—indeed compel, via powerful algorithms—the clustering of these tribes into silos where the only available information confirms the particular narratives to which they have subscribed or succumbed. In this environment, many institutions that once offered correctives—such as traditional news organizations, universities, and even scientific organizations[5]—have taken the path of

[3] Ibid.

[4] Jon Askonas, "How Stewart Made Tucker," *The New Atlantis* (Summer 2022), available at https://www.thenewatlantis.com/publications/how-stewart-made-tucker.

[5] Geipel, op. cit., pp. 16-18, 43-44.

least resistance and greatest profit to protect and further entrench narratives and tribalism rather than to challenge them.[6]

As described in previous work, [7] the general threats to national security arising from the current information environment center on (1) the accuracy of information in widespread circulation; (2) the quality of decision-making amid epistemic chaos; and (3) the ultimate resilience of a nation operating without a shared fact base. Examples of these growing threats include "designed crises," "epistemic coups," and "fatal distractions," respectively. Examples continue to multiply. Consider the relationship between major narratives and official U.S. policy on today's two most serious military conflicts.

Designed Ignorance 1: The Middle East

- On October 7, 2023, Iran-backed Hamas forces executed a surprise attack that killed 1,200 Israelis, most of them civilians, and took an additional 200 hostages. The bolt-from-the-blue terror attack was the largest in the history of Israel, a U.S. ally—the proportional equivalent of an assault killing 45,000 Americans in a day (15 times the September 11, 2001, death toll).
- Within hours, a narrative thread emerged in a letter from student groups at Harvard University—describing Israel as "entirely responsible for all unfolding violence."[8] The statement faced significant criticism on and off the Harvard campus but established the outlines of a larger narrative that spread quickly. By October 14, an "open letter" had appeared in the *New York Review of Books*, signed by dozens of progressive writers and artists, already labeling Israel's limited actions at that point a "crime" in which "governments of the USA, UK, France and others are participating."[9]
- Fueled by disinformation on social media platforms such as Instagram, Telegram, TikTok, and X, ignorance of Hamas' actions and criticisms of Israel's military response rapidly dominated progressive information silos.[10] Within months, anti-Israel protest encampments appeared at dozens of universities across the United States and strident criticisms of Israel spread to numerous other settings.
- According to recent polling by the Pew Research Center, four in 10 American adults under 30 believe that "the way Hamas carried out its attack on Israel" (note: this

[6] See, for example, Martin Gurri, "Journalism Betrayed," *City Journal* (Winter 2021), pp. 12-19.

[7] Geipel, op. cit., pp. 34-51.

[8] *The Harvard Crimson* (October 10, 2023), available at https://www.thecrimson.com/article/2023/10/10/psc-statement-backlash/.

[9] "An Open Letter from Participants in the Palestine Festival of Literature," *New York Review of Books* (October 14, 2023), available at https://www.nybooks.com/online/2023/10/14/an-open-letter-from-participants-in-the-palestine-festival-of-literature/.

[10] Brian Fung and Claire Duffy, "The Israel-Hamas war reveals how social media sells you the illusion of reality," CNN (October 16, 2023), available at https://www.cnn.com/2023/10/14/tech/social-media-misinformation-israel-hamas/index.html.

included the targeted killing of civilians, including children, and sexual assaults[11]) was "acceptable" (9%) or describe themselves as "not sure" (32%).[12] In another large poll only weeks after Israel's initial response, fully 55% of American adults in the under-30 age group said that they believe that Israel's treatment of Palestinian Arabs in Gaza constitutes "genocide."[13]

- An Anti-Defamation League poll in early 2024 found that more than 50% of Gen Z Americans "somewhat" or "strongly" agree that they would "be comfortable being friends with someone who supports Hamas" while 40% of Americans across all age groups strongly or somewhat agree that Israelis "intend to cause as much suffering to Palestinians as possible."[14]
- These and other widespread beliefs are at odds with easily accessible and verifiable information on the details of the October 7 attacks, the actions and positions of Hamas, Israeli efforts to minimize civilian casualties during its recent Gaza incursions, the liberal and multi-cultural nature of Israeli society, and the very definition of the word "genocide."
- Polls show that overall U.S. support for Israel remains relatively strong. In this information environment, however, the U.S. Government—while initially clear and forceful—has wavered increasingly in its backing of Israel's efforts to destroy Hamas' capacity for further terror attacks or even to negotiate with Hamas from a position of strength.
- Recently, as Israel retaliated with precision against the Iran-backed leadership of the Hezbollah terrorist organization in Lebanon (with which the U.S. itself has been at odds since the 1980s), U.S. officials interspersed demands for a ceasefire[15] with a statement calling the result of these actions "a measure of justice."[16] America's regional adversaries and allies must struggle to make sense of Washington's actual position.

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[11] "I Can't Erase All the Blood from My Mind," Human Rights Watch (July 17, 2024), available at https://www.hrw.org/report/2024/07/17/i-cant-erase-all-blood-my-mind/palestinian-armed-groups-october-7-assault-israel.

[12] Laura Silver, et al., "Views of the Israel-Hamas War," Pew Research Center (March 21, 2024), available at https://www.pewresearch.org/2024/03/21/views-of-the-israel-hamas-war/.

[13] Jamie Ballard, "Has genocide been happening in either Israel or Gaza?" YouGov.com (January 19, 2024), available at https://today.yougov.com/politics/articles/48442-has-genocide-been-happening-israel-gaza-americans-split-holocaust-native-americans-ukraine-poll.

[14] Center for Antisemitism Research, "Antisemitic Attitudes in America 2024," ADL (February 29, 2024), available at https://extremismterms.adl.org/resources/report/antisemitic-attitudes-america-2024.

[15] "US and allies call for an immediate 21-day cease-fire between Israel and Hezbollah," *Associated Press* (September 25, 2024), and "Biden calls for 'a cease-fire now' amid Israel's strikes in Lebanon," *Associated Press* (September 30, 2024).

[16] Aamer Madhani and Matthew Lee, "Biden and Harris call the Israeli strike killing Hezbollah's Nasrallah a 'measure of justice'," *The Washington Post* (September 28, 2024), available at https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2024/09/28/biden-hezbollah-nasrallah-israel-lebanon/3237d14c-7db9-11ef-980d-341a84fdff8f_story.html.

Designed Ignorance 2: Ukraine

- Russia's February 2022 invasion of Ukraine—unprovoked except in the fevered propaganda of Russian President Vladimir Putin's government—has led to more than one million casualties and constitutes the largest European land war since World War Two. Playing out on the borders of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the war naturally raised European security concerns. It spurred U.S. financial and material support for Ukraine (though no direct U.S. military intervention).
- Soon after the invasion, former President Donald Trump described Putin's initial moves as "genius," explained Russia's intention as wanting "to rebuild the Soviet Union … where there was a lot of love,"[17] and claimed that the attack would not have happened had he remained president. Combined with vitriol about Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky[18] and a recurring image of Putin as a bulwark against Western decadence,[19] a persistent narrative emerged among supporters of Trump in which Russia's actions are justifiable and regardless can be shut down quickly. As Trump told the September 2024 debate audience: "I will get it settled before I even become president."[20]
- More recently in the presidential campaign, Trump praised Russia's historical military record, said the United States must "get out" of Ukraine (though it is not involved directly), and claimed erroneously that "every time Zelensky comes to the United States, he walks away with $100 billion."[21]
- According to polling by the Pew Research Center, fully 10% of Americans say they have at least "some confidence" that Putin "will do the right thing regarding world affairs." About a third of all Americans and half of those who "lean Republican" believe that the U.S. is providing "too much" support for Ukraine.[22]
- Polls show that overall U.S. public opinion still favors Ukraine. However, Congressional support for aid appropriations and military deliveries to Ukraine has wavered in this information environment. Passage of the most recent (April 2024)

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[17] Alexandra Hutzler, "What Trump Has Said About Putin Since Russian Invasion of Ukraine Began," *Newsweek* (March 14, 2022), available at https://www.newsweek.com/what-trump-has-said-about-putin-since-russian-invasion-ukraine-began-1687730.

[18] David French, "The Oddly Intense Anger Against Zelensky, Explained," *The Atlantic* (December 23, 2022), https://www.theatlantic.com/newsletters/archive/2022/12/ukraine-aid-right-wing-republican-anger/676541/.

[19] Lionel Barber et al., "Vladimir Putin says liberalism has 'become obsolete,'" *Financial Times* (June 27, 2019), available at https://www.ft.com/content/670039ec-98f3-11e9-9573-ee5cbb98ed36.

[20] "Trump promises to 'settle' war in Ukraine if elected," PBS.com (September 11, 2024), available at https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/watch-trump-promises-to-settle-war-in-ukraine-if-elected.

[21] "Trump praises Russia's military record in argument to stop funding Ukraine's fight," *Associated Press* (September 24, 2024.

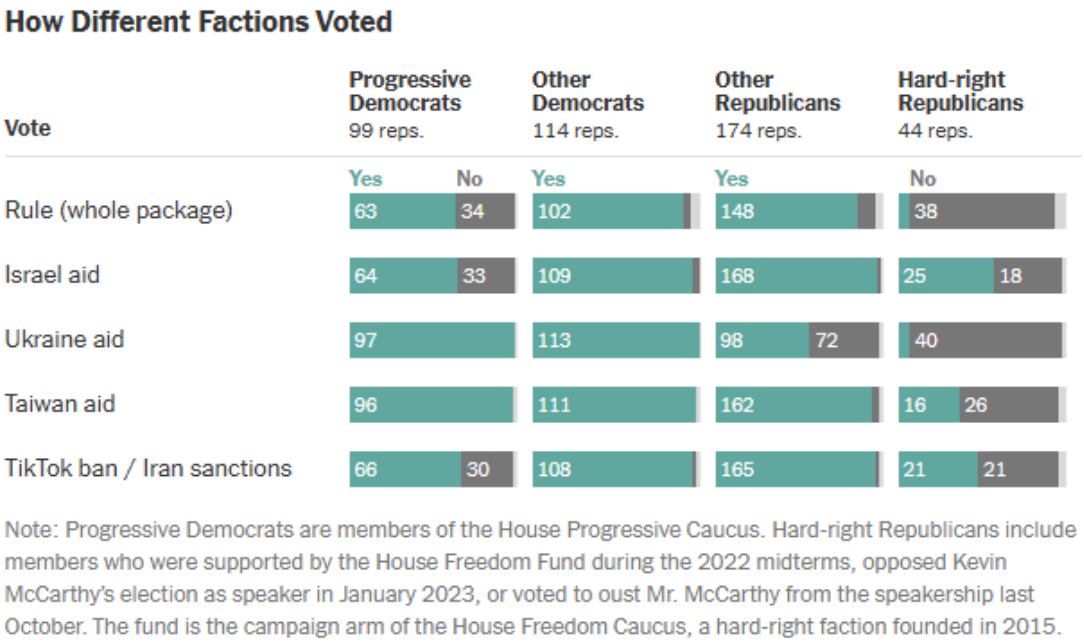
[22] Richard Wike, et al., "Views of Russia and Putin," Pew Research Center (May 8, 2024), available at https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2024/05/08/views-of-russia-and-putin/.

foreign aid package, for example—which ultimately bundled U.S. aid for Israel, Taiwan, and Ukraine—required complex procedural maneuvers. More than half of all House Republicans voted against the Ukraine portion of the package—including the body's only Ukrainian immigrant member, Rep. Victoria Spartz, in apparent deference to the narrative that prevails among her Indiana constituents.[23]

U.S. Foreign Aid: Dodging an Epistemic Coup

Post-truth narratives on the Gaza and Ukraine conflicts afflict American perceptions across party lines. These perceptions, in turn, influence national security decision-making in profound ways—mirror-imaged along the partisan spectrum. Figure 2, for example, summarizes U.S. House votes by party faction on the April 2024 aid package. Almost 20% of Democrats (on aid to Israel) and more than 50% of Republicans (on aid to Ukraine) voted in line with prevailing narratives that emerged on the fringes of their respective parties as just described—leaving the diminished ranks of "other Democrats" and "other Republicans" to take a broader view of the available facts and corresponding U.S. interests.

Figure 2: U.S. House of Representatives –
Vote Tallies on U.S. Aid to Israel, Taiwan, and Ukraine (April 19-20, 2024)



Source: Catie Edmondson et al., "How the House Voted on Foreign Aid to Ukraine, Israel and Taiwan," *The New York Times* (April 20, 2024).

[23] Catie Edmondson et al., "How the House Voted on Foreign Aid to Ukraine, Israel and Taiwan," *New York Times* (April 20, 2024).

Occasional grassroots opposition to some aspects of U.S. national security policy is not new. In previous decades, however, it was limited mainly to situations in which the U.S. had sustained military casualties and large-scale expenditures over many years (as in the Afghanistan and Iraq wars). Opposition arose due to verifiable "facts on the ground." In contrast, today's post-truth information environment inflames poorly founded opinions of overseas conflicts with little direct U.S. involvement—inventing "facts" (see Israeli "genocide" and Ukrainian "decadence") that do not exist on the ground. American officials may experience considerable personal dissonance when making decisions in this environment but have not pushed back consistently against post-truth cascades. The resulting U.S. policy tends toward vagueness and indecision. Hamas and Hezbollah, their Iranian backers, and the Putin regime—some of America's most potent adversaries—have been the beneficiaries.

Additional Insights

This ongoing research effort remains unique in focusing on the national security implications of a post-truth information environment. However, several additions to the broader understanding of post-truth appeared in the past year, which have important implications as we consider effective policy responses.

Realities Proliferate

Most analyses of the post-truth environment focus on the larger-scale narratives shared by the most visible tribes, such as the Israel- and Ukraine-critical narratives described earlier. Perceptions of reality in today's hyper-online society are exponentially more diverse, however, as disinformation expert Renée DiResta explains in a recent book:

> State actors, terrorists, ideologues, grassroots activists, and even ordinary people now compete against each other in a war of all against all to shape public opinion. This collision, combined with social media's restructuring of human social networks, … enables bespoke realities. … [S]ome news outlet somewhere has written the story you want to believe; some influencer is touting the diet you want to live by or demonizing the group you also hate. … Whereas consensus reality once required some deliberation with a broad swath of others, with a shared epistemology to bridge points of disagreement, bespoke reality comfortably supports a complete exit from that process.[24]

As more and more Americans trade "consensus reality" for "bespoke reality," there are at least three broad implications for national security. First—and particularly if the United States were to confront a large-scale military crisis—it is difficult to imagine a unified and resilient home front emerging from millions of self-curated realities. Post-9-11 and post-

[24] Renée DiResta, *Invisible Rulers: The People Who Turn Lies into Reality* (PublicAffairs, 2024), p. 41.

Pearl Harbor America would have behaved differently without at least some shared beliefs about the threats at hand and the nature of their adversaries and allies. Second, the U.S. national security field must pay attention to how individual narratives gain force and accumulate followers in a digital environment. Three hundred million bespoke realities create a resilience problem. Meanwhile, especially in a democracy, even a handful of widely held falsehoods can create a decision-making crisis. Third, the downsides of bespoke realities for their adherents may hold some clues about how to overcome them. DiResta writes that living in a false reality "may eventually result in a harsh confrontation with the laws of physics or biology."[25] Helping Americans avoid these harsh confrontations would be a public service.

An Old Game

Post-truth describes the widespread detachment of individuals from objective reality and the failure of once-trusted institutions to help us understand reality. The term suggests deterioration from a longstanding norm but that is not quite right. What we face is more like a return to the *status quo ante*. For most of human history, our default condition was to believe the stories told by people like us, whether they were trying to understand the weather, explaining a sickness, or bad-mouthing the tribe over the hill. We could rarely check the evidence (if there was any) and had access to very few second opinions. However, as we gathered in larger numbers and had time to do more than survive, people tried new approaches. These involved recording information in some form for later reference—and establishing institutions and mechanisms to determine (or to decree) what was true. During the last 200 years, we have become fairly good at this in some parts of human society, thanks to open intellectual inquiry, the scientific method, and burgeoning amounts of information available to test. Our recent Enlightenment is a fragile achievement, however, and the sheer quantity of information is a curse as much as a blessing in determining what is true.

The Israeli historian Yuval Noah Harari codifies these insights in a new "history of information networks from the Stone Age to AI."[26] He debunks the notion that information is necessarily an attempt to represent reality—calling this "the naïve view of information." Instead, Harari argues, the raw information that surrounds all of us has been processed for millennia in a tug-of-war between "mythmakers" (think: the creators and weavers of narratives) and "bureaucrats" (think: authorities that collect, organize, and adjudicate information) in networks that have grown larger and faster over time. Only fairly recently in the rise of human information networks has the possibility of error and the need for correction been taken seriously in this tug-of-war—and "truth" remains an incomplete rendering of reality in the best cases.

Harari's compelling assessment explains quite a bit—for example, why the patent falseness of information is no barrier to its acceptance and why bespoke realities proliferate

[25] Ibid., p. 41.

[26] Yuval Noah Harari, *Nexus: A Brief History of Information Networks from the Stone Age to AI* (Random House, 2024).

when any of us can be mythmakers and error-conscious bureaucrats leave the field. From a national security perspective, it helps to explain why seemingly powerful decision-makers are no less cowed by mythmakers than by experts—and why most "experts" are little more than information bureaucrats themselves, with agendas and biases often linked to preserving their power. For those of us concerned about the future of reality-based foreign and security policies, Harari's insights are sobering but quite helpful in ruling out responses based solely on glorifying the mythmakers or empowering new bureaucrats.

New Inorganic Players

Previous work in this series outlined the additional national security risks posed when post-truth meets artificial intelligence (AI) and "virtual reality" technologies allow people to join digital worlds even more completely.[27] Other analysts are helping to flesh these concerns out. Harari devotes much of his new book to considering the implications of AI for the evolution of human information networks: "Silicon chips can create spies that never sleep, financiers that never forget, and despots that never die."[28] His key insight: "Whereas printing presses and parchment scrolls offered new means for connecting people, AIs are full-fledged members in our information networks, possessing their own agency … bound to change the shape of armies, religions, markets, and nations."[29] Some AI enthusiasts hope these inorganic players will be wiser in their judgments and curate information into truth more often than humans do, but there is little basis for this hope. AIs can process information faster and more comprehensively than humans. Still, they draw on the same inchoate raw material and will be subject to the biases and mistakes of their human designers—and eventually their own. Error-correction mechanisms will be more important—and more difficult to establish—than ever before.

As the agency of inorganic entities and networks grows, the losers almost certainly will be the "organic" players: individual citizens. In a recent essay, the indispensable Canadian media theorist Andrey Mir describes the subtle dance between digital platforms and their users that has played out in less than two decades. Hundreds of millions of Americans have created (and often recreated) our digital personae in rich detail—encompassing our beliefs, biases, friends, and enemies, as well as our likenesses, performances, travels, and buying habits—all of which the platforms now control:

> Platforms have ushered in the era of digital biopolitics, allowing us to grow our digital bodies but not to own them. Offering social rewards, the platforms own us without exercising real coercion. So far, the most disturbing social consequence has been the unfreedom of digital speech. But this is just the beginning. The environmental power of the platforms over our digital personalities is limitless. Shadow-banning (the canceling of one's digital presence on behalf of the regnant

[27] Geipel, op. cit., pp. 77-83.

[28] Harari, p. xxxi.

[29] Ibid., p. 399.

> ideology) and un-personing (disabling one's ability to participate in, say, digital banking) have already shown us the contours of the future. The next stage of digital biopolitics will involve social scoring: we will be obliged to live an approved digital life—or pay the price.[30]

What Mir calls "the unfreedom of digital speech" has been documented in this author's previous work and elsewhere: the recent "epistemic coups" in which accurate and relevant information on political candidates, public health, and other topics has been kept from users by some of the major digital platforms—independently or in coordination with public officials.[31]

In August 2024, Meta (Facebook) CEO Mark Zuckerberg unexpectedly acknowledged examples of this in a public letter:

> In 2021, senior officials from the Biden Administration, including the White House, repeatedly pressured our teams for months to censor certain COVID-19 content, including humor and satire, and expressed a lot of frustration with our teams when we didn't agree. … I believe the government pressure was wrong, and I regret that we were not more outspoken about it. I also think we made some choices that, with the benefit of hindsight and new information, we wouldn't make today.[32]

Zuckerberg's sincerity has been roundly debated—and was met with particular scorn by anti-disinformation activists who favor precisely the sorts of interventions he regretted.[33] Ultimately, however, the epistemic coups of 2020-21 left little doubt that the silencing of viewpoints and more draconian "un-personing" described by Mir already are within the power of digital networks—individually and certainly when they act (or are compelled to act) together. This puts a large premium on preventing the homogenization of these platforms—in terms of their biases and ownership—and salvaging whatever vestiges of individual control their human users can muster.

Calls to Action

Our post-truth information environment and its growing impact on national security raise three urgent considerations for policymakers. First, America's elected officials must prioritize this challenge. Second, responses to post-truth must transcend rather than reinforce partisan and tribal divides if they are to have a chance of success. Third, the United States should elevate the goals of transparency and individual human agency in responding to post-truth—to remain true to our American values in a world of powerful adversaries.

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[30] Andrey Mir, "The Platform Paradox," *City Journal* (Summer 2024).

[31] Geipel, op. cit., pp. 41-47.

[32] Mark Zuckerberg, Letter to the Chairman of the Committee on the Judiciary of the U.S. House of Representatives (August 26, 2024).

[33] See for example Nina Jankowicz, "Let's talk about Mark Zuckerberg's letter …," thread on X.com (August 27, 2024).

Prioritize This

Rarely have challenges with a clear impact on the security and well-being of the nation been relegated to such policy-political backwaters as those associated with the post-truth information environment. As a result: far from questioning the epidemics of deception, hostility, and smugness in our recent public life, more and more Americans regard this state of affairs as normal. The effects of post-truth are not fevers that will pass with time. The choice to live entirely outside the digital realm is a choice that most Americans can no longer make. Much of our citizenship and our professional and social lives take place in the online cacophony. We must make the best of it—yet we have not really tried.

Though ubiquitous, the effects of post-truth are not impervious to leadership and human engagement. Like other serious challenges, however, addressing them begins with acknowledging them.

Transcend the Policy Divide

The harmful manifestations of the post-truth information environment afflict all Americans and can only be addressed in a framework of reasonable consensus.

One of the most harmful impressions about post-truth—reinforced constantly in most academic and media coverage of disinformation—is that it is a problem primarily or solely of the American Right. This author's previous work presented numerous examples to show that no education level, professional class, or geography—let alone ideological orientation—inoculates one against mindsets and behaviors hard-wired into all of humanity.[34] The ideologically blinkered way post-truth has been discussed contributes significantly to the standoff around potential responses.

On the one side—associated with the Democratic Party and the progressive Left—responses focus on identifying and reducing the online flow of "disinformation," understood as false information capable of causing harm. On the other side—associated with the Republican Party and the populist Right—responses focus on assuring "free speech" as an antidote to groupthink. Not unreasonably, some conservatives believe that it is <u>their</u> free speech that is most at risk from restrictions on disinformation, which too many on the left define as information contrary to progressive dogma.

Ironically, effective responses to the post-truth information environment can be found precisely in the synthesis of these two views—but not in either of them alone. Disinformation is the often-dangerous manifestation of post-truth while free speech sets the guardrails within which disinformation should be confronted.

Seen this way, an effective synthesis begins with acknowledging that disinformation cannot simply be purged. As DiResta describes in her recent book, "[I]f we boot off the bad actors, filter nasty speech, or kill off the algorithms that help wild conspiracy theories trend, will we return to a less polarized, more harmonious way of relating to each other? No. That's

[34] For example, Geipel, op. cit., pp. 21-27.

because the content itself reflects real opinions. Real demand."[35] That is a breakthrough insight worth emulating—from someone closely associated with the anti-disinformation side.

The free-speech imperative raises another serious question about the anti-disinformation approach: who will decide what is disinformation and what to fight? One of the most bizarre and frightening ideas in response to post-truth is to appoint a federal government "reality czar"—as discussed in a typically one-sided *New York Times* assessment in 2021.[36] Though the progressive Left in particular struggles to accept this, one person's "reality" can be another's coerced dystopia—as America's experiences with the COVID-19 pandemic should have made clear. No "czar" can sort these views into right and wrong in a free society.

At the same time, digital free speech without an understanding of risks and the possibility of error-correction also is a path to bad outcomes. Enjoying the freedom to speak does not equal the freedom to speak without challenge or rebuttal. The government cannot supply that pushback, however. Not even the digital platform companies can. It will take an army of citizen-users of information platforms—better enlightened about what they are dealing with.

Encourage Transparency and Individual Control

Beyond preserving free speech, the other key considerations in a response to post-truth should be to maximize transparency and to expand the choices and tools available to individual citizens.

Transparency should take at least three forms. First, the United States should greatly increase transparency about the post-truth problem itself. This begins with elected officials willing to acknowledge that we are struggling to trust information and that the problem afflicts all of us—not just the usual suspects in the other party.

Second, transparency about the federal government's response to post-truth is essential—especially where national security is concerned. Any new commissions, laws, and offices created to deal with the problem should be rolled out with maximum detail and visibility—unlike the Biden Administration's ill-conceived roll-out of a Department of Homeland Security "Disinformation Governance Board" in 2022.[37] As citizens, Americans should know not only what their government is doing but also who is involved, how the work is conducted, and how to access the assistance and tools that exist.

Finally, transparency is vital where the U.S. Government's own "fact base" is concerned. In an information environment where versions of reality can vary so widely as to prompt completely different responses, knowing in real time what its leaders believe and consider

[35] DiResta, op. cit., p. 317.

[36] Kevin Roose, "How the Biden Administration Can Help Solve Our Reality Crisis," *The New York Times* (February 2, 2021).

[37] "Disinformation head Nina Jankowicz resigns after DHS board is paused," *NBC News* (May 19, 2022), available at https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/white-house/dhs-disinformation-head-resigns-board-paused-rcna29578.

important is healthy for an open society. This is not as simple as pointing to long-standing "Freedom of Information" options. Nor is it as complicated (indeed impossible) as trying to capture every data point in the federal government's decision process on myriad issues. But especially when national security is involved—when alternative realities multiply and collide—knowing what presidents and their teams know, to the extent practicable, can be clarifying for all concerned.

Presidential addresses to the nation during a crisis served this purpose in the recent past and still could help. Today, however, something akin to the Ukrainian government's "pre-bunking" efforts before the February 2022 Russian invasion is needed as well. As assessed by RAND, Ukraine's efforts to share with domestic and international audiences what it knew about Russia's intentions—and to debunk Russian disinformation in advance—contributed significantly to understanding and support for Kyiv.[38] Except in rare instances—in which delicate "sources or methods" actually would be at risk—classification should not be a barrier to similar transparency in the United States. The topic of U.S. Government information security exceeds this brief. This author shares the view of political scientist Jon Askonas, however, that "reforms to the government secrecy system that serious critics from both political parties have demanded for fifty years, and a true recommitment to openness, can restore Americans' faith in their institutions."[39]

For similar reasons, the U.S. Government and its citizens would benefit from information tracking efforts that do not rely on classified sources at all. New private-sector tools, for example, promise an ability to track the content, origins, and reach of digital narratives—giving decision-makers time to assess and respond to such information flow and citizens a better sense of what is being discussed outside their siloes.[40] Recently, for example, a tool created by the firm Edge Theory compared "narrative slants on nuclear doctrine"—and other live topics—originating with Western media and "foreign malign sources."[41]

In addition to transparency, post-truth responses that play to the historical strengths of American society should encourage individual control over online engagement. One such effort—largely funded by investor Frank H. McCourt, Jr.—seeks to establish a new, open-source "Decentralized Social Networking Protocol (DSNP)" that "enables users to reclaim and control their data and can support a healthier digital ecosystem, where apps are interoperable, data is portable, and platforms must adhere to [individual users'] terms."[42] To demonstrate the viability of this new protocol and user-centric platform policies on a

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[38] Todd C. Helmus and Khrystyna Holynska, "Ukrainian Resistance to Russian Disinformation - Lessons for Future Conflict," *RAND Research Report* (September 3, 2024), available at https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA2771-1.html.

[39] Jon Askonas, "An America of Secrets," *The New Atlantis* (Summer 2023), available at https://www.thenewatlantis.com/publications/an-america-of-secrets.

[40] See for example, "What is Narrative Intelligence," EdgeTheory.com, available at https://edgetheory.com/narrative-intelligence.

[41] Available on LinkedIn at https://www.linkedin.com/posts/activity-7233983714278391808-CmCY.

[42] See "5 Insights From Our Biggest Fight," available at https://ourbiggestfight.com/key-insights/, and Frank H. McCourt, Jr., *Our Biggest Fight: Reclaiming Liberty, Humanity, and Dignity in the Digital Age* (Crown, 2024).

large scale, a McCourt-affiliated non-profit entity called Project Liberty is organizing a "People's Bid" to acquire the TikTok social media platform.[43]

Somewhat more modestly, a growing group of academics focuses on so-called "middleware" to enhance the power of platform users. Barak Richman and Francis Fukuyama elaborated on this approach in a 2021 essay: "A spate of third-party companies would create and operate software to curate and order the content that users see on their digital platforms, according to the users' preferences. Users could insert their preferred middleware as plug-ins to the platforms and thus choose their own trusted intermediary to sort their news, rank their searches, and order their feed."[44] Middleware has been criticized as little more than an additional siloing mechanism that could increase self-segregation. Its advocates push back that—if combined with greater transparency about the harms of deception on digital platforms—middleware tuned to accuracy could become attractive to more and more users in the manner of proven career or investment advice. The argument for middleware hinges on the possibly optimistic notion that truth will be recognized as more valuable than its alluring alternatives.

These and other means of equipping Americans to identify and resist disinformation may help them as individuals navigating a digitized society and as citizens concerned with national security.

Staying Free, Secure, and United in a Digital Public Square: A Practical Agenda

Earlier work identified three broad types of policy responses to the post-truth information environment—encompassing norm-setting, technology-based responses, and education efforts. This five-part agenda builds on that framework, for consideration by incoming federal officials.

One—Above all: elected officials beginning with the President of the United States should acknowledge the heightened challenges of opinion formation, decision-making, and national resilience created by the digital information environment—making clear the implications for national security. This should be done in a spirit of humility, emphasizing the susceptibility of Americans across ideological and party lines and committing the new administration to bipartisan problem-solving efforts. The issue warrants initial elevation to a State of the Union-type setting or even a stand-alone address but must be reinforced regularly by the President; the Secretaries of Defense, Education, HHS, and State; and Congressional leaders.

Two—Linked to the national security risks of post-truth: the dangers of "always-online" socialization should be elevated to a public health emergency, recognizing their close connection to mental health (especially among young people), economic productivity, and other aspects of general well-being. The U.S. response to the COVID-19 pandemic left many

[43] "The People's Bid for TikTok," www.projectliberty.io, available at https://www.projectliberty.io/campaign/.

[44] Barak Richman and Francis Fukuyama, "How to Quiet the Megaphones of Facebook, Google, and Twitter," *The Wall Street Journal* (February 12, 2021).

Americans with a dim view of such drills but also provided essential lessons on transparency, citizen engagement, and course correction to improve large-scale efforts in the future. Virginia and other states have begun to test restrictions on smartphone use in public schools that should be given a chance.[45] Large-scale awareness and education efforts are as important as restrictions and will be taken more seriously in a widely recognized emergency.

Three—Education should be the centerpiece of America's response to post-truth. In their online silos and embrace of alternative realities, Americans place not only their nation but also themselves and their families at serious risk—yet they remain largely in the dark about the nature of the problem or what to do about it. A new administration should lead efforts to develop and promulgate curricula that equip Americans from a young age (a) to understand the difference between information and truth, facts and opinions, and evidence and impressions; (b) to approach information critically; (c) to recognize deception and propaganda; (d) to identify reliable authorities and seek them out; and (5) to challenge and revise their conclusions. In a pervasively digital society, these skills are as important as reading, writing, and arithmetic. They must be imparted objectively to be effective—a daunting challenge for an education establishment notoriously one-sided in its ideological orientation.

Four—A new administration should encourage and invest in the rapid development of technology-based measures (a) to increase Americans' control over their digital lives and (b) to track and understand virulent narratives likely to influence national security. Fact-based middleware and new social networking protocols are examples of tools that could enhance control, but additional approaches should be encouraged simultaneously. Where tracking tools are concerned, a new administration should make clear that its purpose is not to attack or outlaw competing views but to equip decision-makers (and ordinary citizens) to recognize and respond to information before millions have embraced it uncritically. Such technologies should not become shadowy additions to the government's intelligence suite but public resources to help all Americans establish a shared fact base.

Five—The United States has allies in its response to the post-truth information environment—as in other military-security realms—and should work closely with them to deal with our common challenges. We can develop norms of digital truth-seeking together, and share ideas and best practices for education and technology-based responses. The United States has essential values of free speech and societal openness in common with other North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) countries and our allies in Asia, Oceania, and elsewhere. In contrast, the governments of China, Iran, North Korea, and Russia deliberately control information inside their own countries—and will spread these models of control if given a chance.

This agenda is an outline requiring additional detail. It is exemplary rather than definitive. It is intended above all to call for action. America's post-truth information environment and its impact on national security demand much higher-level, more even-handed, and more widespread attention than these problems have received from the handful

[45] See, for example, Suzanne S. Youngkin, "Protect Kids From Social Media," *The Wall Street Journal* (September 25, 2024).

of academics and activists who engage with them today. Mastering the post-truth information environment without succumbing to authoritarianism or chaos will be an essential test of liberal societies in the 21st Century. It is time for the United States to meet that test.

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ANALYSIS

RUSSIA'S SECOND FRONT: THE BALKANS

Stephen J. Blank

Introduction

Both President Joe Biden and France's Minister-Delegate for Europe, Jean-Noel Barrott, stated on March 7, 2024, that Vladimir Putin will not stop in Ukraine.[1] Because both men correctly assessed Putin's objectives and modus operandi it is important to understand that Russia's war also aims at Europe as a whole and that the Balkans, because they adjoin Ukraine and the Black Sea, are therefore also in Russia's crosshairs. Thus, Balkan security is inextricable from any concept of European security and regional if not international order. Indeed, for some Balkan states, e.g., Romania, the narrative of European integration shapes their overall foreign policy.[2] Consequently Russia's aggression against Ukraine threatens the Balkans and every other region adjacent to Ukraine and the Black Sea: the Caucasus, Eastern Mediterranean, and the Middle East.[3]

Understanding Four Key Precepts

To grasp Russia's Balkan objectives and the tactics needed to stop Moscow, first by defeating Russian forces in Ukraine and also by overcoming Russia's "hybrid war" in the Balkans, it is important to begin with four historically validated precepts. First, every Balkan challenge, if not crisis, since 1750 either reveals or triggers a major crisis of the European state system. At the same time, non-Balkan crises like the invasion of Ukraine, render the Balkan situation more fragile because of the pre-existing cleavages there. Indeed, the currently unresolved tensions across the Balkans, not only those involving Serbia, Kosovo, and Bosnia, but also those within or between Balkan states, continue to demonstrate the validity of these observations. Hence when these crises emerge, they necessarily engage every major player in European security in protracted struggles.

For example, earlier this year, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky addressed the Western Balkan states, led by staunchly ant-Russian Albania, to elicit their military-political support against Russia. His visit occurred under the backdrop of French President

[1] Joseph R. Biden, "2024 State of the Union Address," March 7, 2024, available at https://www.whitehouse.gov/state-of-the-union-2024/; Douglas Herbert, "'Vladimir Putin will not stop in Ukraine': French Minister Delegate for Europe," *France 24*, March 8, 2024, available at https://www.france24.com/en/tv-shows/talking-europe/20240308-vladimir-putin-will-not-stop-in-ukraine-says-french-minister-delegate-for-europe.

[2] Lucian Moga, Nadiia Burelko, Loredana Maria Simionov, "Constructing Romania's Foreign Policy and Security Role In Its Eastern Neighborhood: The Cases Of Moldova and Ukraine," *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, Vol. 21 No. 4, 2021, pp. 615-638.

[3] Galip Dalay and Natalie Sabanadze, "How Geopolitical Competition In the Black Sea Is Redefining Regional Order," Chatham House, March 7, 2024, available at https://www.chathamhouse.org/2024/03/how-geopolitical-competition-black-sea-redefining-regional-order.

Emmanuel Macron's remark that European forces could go to Ukraine.[4] Not surprisingly, President Alexander Vucic of Serbia, who often speaks and acts on behalf of Russian interests, retorted that the West is engaged in a "mad" total militarization against Russia. Thus, Vucic attempted to fracture this latest attempt at uniting the Balkans.[5] Clearly much of the Russia-Europe confrontation in the Balkans preceded the war in Ukraine and could, if unchecked, continue afterwards. The good reasons why this confrontation still pervades the Balkans pertain to the second of these precepts.

Second, since Russia emerged as a major actor on the European scene, every Russian leader from Peter the Great to Putin has defined an integrated Europe, particularly if unified as a military-political entity under a single rubric, be it Napoleonic, Nazi, or NATO, as a lethal threat to the Russian empire and Moscow's autocracy. Even though a democratic Europe organized around NATO and the European Union (EU) in no way constitutes a military threat to Russia, that perspective still governs Moscow's thinking because a democratic Europe represents a constant reproach to Russia's autocracy and imperial ambitions. Thus, Russian officialdom, pace George Kennan, has hypnotized itself into believing Russia is under permanent threat. This obsession of confronting constant threats contributes greatly to the institutionalized paranoia, regardless of regime, that characterizes historical Russian policy and is a congenital driver of Russia's foreign and defense policies in and beyond the Balkans.

Regarding the Balkans there is a widespread military view that the wars in the former Yugoslavia represented "an indirect blow to Russia's sovereignty."[6] Elite officialdom probably shares this viewpoint. Therefore, it is unsurprising that Moscow resists Western advances in the Balkans, and not only Ukraine, and seeks to overturn the entire Western enterprise as Moscow understands it. Since Russian elites also remain equally obsessed with forcing the world to acknowledge their threatened global great power status and privileged role in Europe, notwithstanding exterior realities, they have habitually sought by any means possible, including force, if necessary, to disrupt, fragment, and ultimately reverse such integration. Russia's answer to these perceived threats invariably entails at some point attempts to expand and extend autocratic power into new territories, that is, empire-building often by force majeure. These interventions, whatever their nature, constitute Russia's reply to regional challenges and denote a heightened effort to intervene, possibly forcefully, to augment its power, influence, or even territory in the Balkans. While frequently those efforts, e.g. 1854, 1876-78, 1908-14, 1946, and the 1948-53 effort to unseat Josip Broz Tito, have failed leading to heightened external pressure upon Russia, many have also succeeded.

But they all represented efforts at imperial aggrandizement. And empire inevitably means war or at least Cold War against the West, as it does today. Moreover, Russia's self-

[4] "'Madness!': West Is Conducting 'All-Out-Militarization' To Defeat Russia, Serbian President Warns," *Gulf Insider*, March 10, 2024, available at https://www.gulf-insider.com/madness-west-is-conducting-all-out-militarization-to-defeat-russia-serbian-president-warns/.

[5] Ibid.

[6] MG I.N. Vorob'ev (Ret.) and Col. V.A. Kisel'ev (Ret.), "Strategies of Destruction and Attrition," Moscow, *Military Thought*, in English, No. 1, January 1, 2014-March 31, 2014.

proclaimed war against the West is not a recent invention. Putin has been at war with the United States and the West for over a decade.[7] Already on January 18, 2005, Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov told the Academy of Military Sciences, that,

> Let us face it, there is a war against Russia under way, and it has been going on for quite a few years. No one declared war on us. There is not one country that would be in a state of war with Russia. But there are people and organizations in various countries, who take part in hostilities against the Russian Federation.[8]

Dmitri Trenin, then-Director of the Moscow office of the Carnegie Endowment, subsequently similarly observed that, for some time, "the Kremlin has been de facto operating in a war mode." [9] This posture is intrinsic to the idea and fundamental objective of restoring Russia's former Eurasian empire because empire presupposes war even if it a non-kinetic war.[10] As Alfred Rieber of the Central European University has written,

> If imperial boundaries have no intrinsic limitations and are solely established by force, then they are bound to be heavily and persistently contested. The universal claims of empires, whatever the practical constraints may be in carrying them out, cannot by their very nature be accepted as legitimate by either the people they conquer or their rivals for the contested space. There can be no community of empires as there is a community of nation states. All empires share a common problem of legitimizing boundaries. As perceived through the prism of the community of nations imperial frontiers appear problematic because they are sustained by force, even though they might have been recognized from time to time by solemn treaties.[11]

These precepts allow us to grasp the Russian motives that drive Putin's and presumably any successor's policy unless successors are ready to forego or renounce empire and/or autocracy, a highly unlikely forecast at present. Indeed, contemporary Russian policy frankly and openly contemplates a global multi-dimensional albeit not necessarily kinetic war against the West employing the tactics and instrument of "cross-domain coercion" and weaponized corruption that has been seen in the Balkans.[12]

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[7] *PBS Frontline*, "Putin's Revenge," available at http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/film/putins-revenge/.

[8] M.A. Gareyev, *Srazheniya na Voenno-Istoricheskom Fronte* (Moscow: ISAN Press, 2010), p. 729, cited in Vorob'ev and Kisel'ev, op. cit.

[9] Dmitri Trenin, quoted in Ivo H. Daalder, "Responding to Russia's Resurgence Not Quiet on the Eastern Front," *Foreign Affairs* (November/December 2017), available at https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russia-fsu/2017-10-16/responding-russias-resurgence.

[10] Aliaksei Kazharski and Andrey Makarychev, "Suturing the Neighborhood? Russia and the EU in Conflictual Intersubjectivity," *Problems of Post-Communism*, Vol. 62, No. 6 (November-December 2015), pp. 328-339, 331, available at https://doi.org/10.1080/10758216.2015.1057077.

[11] Alfred J. Rieber, "Comparative Ecology of Complex Frontiers," in *Imperial Rule*, Alexei Miller and Alfred J. Rieber (eds.) (Budapest and New York: Central European Press, 2004), pp. 199-200.

[12] Dmitry (Dima) Adamsky, *Cross-Domain Strategy: The Current Russian Art of Strategy*, Institut Francais Des Relations Internationales (IFRI), Proliferation Papers, No. 54, 2015, available at https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/pp54adamsky.pdf; Thomas Kent, *How Russia Loses: Hubris and*

Therefore, the third precept is that, as often as not, Russia has chosen the Balkans as a place or theater where it will undertake not only to obstruct European integration but also to augment its own power, status, and even possibly territory whether on the grounds of security, ethno-cultural-religious affinity, or sheer opportunism or some mélange of all these motives. The governing principle here was expressed by Catherine the Great who proclaimed that the only way she had of protecting her frontiers was by expanding them. Thus, Putin's February 29, 2024, speech to the Federal Assembly laid down a marker for a global ideological campaign on behalf of the "traditional values" he ascribes to Russia and even to "millions in Western countries." This clearly underscores an unrelenting effort to expand Russia's ongoing non-kinetic and ideological war to the West, including the Balkans and Europe beyond them.[13] We must therefore accept that the Balkans are a key theater in this war. For example, Dmitry Medvedev, Chairman of the Russian Security Council, just stated that Ukraine is Russia and must come home. Moreover, he unveiled a map of Russia's desired Ukraine where Moscow owns the entire coast and Poland and Romania swallow up much of Western Ukraine, indicating a Russian ambition to revamp not only Ukraine's and its own borders but those of the Balkans and Eastern Europe.[14]

The fourth precept states that a key element of Russia's habitual strategy of imperial expansion over a fragmented Eurasia has been for centuries a consistent campaign employing the tactics of elite capture in targeted states whether they be in economic, military, intelligence, media, or political domains. Elite capture or cooptation has been a fundamental if not primary tactic in Russian imperial aggrandizement since Russia's inception as a state and that remains true today.[15] This strategy of elite capture, hopefully leading to state capture, also represents Russia's current global modus operandi.[16] In the Balkans, as elsewhere, Russia's aims to capture permanent strategic leverage in targeted sectors of local governments and countries and then exploit that situation permanently to block these states' integration into Europe while also fragmenting other European states by similar means.

Even more specifically, by gaining leverage in one or more sector or in one or another state—particularly one where conflict is occurring, whether it be civil war or conflict with a neighbor—Russia then works to expand that leverage and obtain a "veto power" if not a

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Miscalculation In Putin's Russia: Washington D.C, 2024, pp. 331-334; Matthew H. Murray, Alexander Vindman, Dominic Cruz Bustillos, "Perspectives: Assessing the Threat Of Weaponized Corruption,"*Eurasianet*, July 12, 2021, available at https://eurasianet.org/perspectives-assessing-the-threat-of-weaponized-corruption?utm_source=dlvr.it&utm_medium=facebook.

[13] "Послание Президента Федеральному Собранию," February 29, 2024, available at http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/73585; Tatiana Stanovaya, "Putin's Six-Year Manifesto Sets Sights Beyond Ukraine," Carnegie Endowment *Politika*, March 1, 2024, available at https://carnegieendowment.org/russia-eurasia/politika/2024/02/putins-six-year-manifesto-sets-sights-beyond-ukraine?lang=en.

[14] Shannon Vavra, "Top Putin Aide Unveils Fantasy Map Of New Russian Borders," *The Daily Beast*, March 4, 2024, available at https://www.thedailybeast.com/dmitry-medvedev-unveils-map-with-new-russian-borders-in-anti-ukraine-screed.

[15] Boris Nolde, *La Formation de L'Empire Russe: Etudes, Notes et Documents*, Tome Premier, Deuxieme Tome (Paris: Institut des Etudes Slavs, 1952).

[16] Kent, op. cit., pp. 331-334.

permanent presence in that state for its own pecuniary and security interests. It would then utilize its enduring presence across the targeted state's media, energy, economy, defense, and political domains to convert the state into a corrupt, anti-liberal, pro-Russian government that also resembles the Russian state. Russia's strategy weaponizes corruption as well as all the other classic kinds of weaponry of elite capture located in the Tsarist and Soviet arsenals to obtain that veto power.[17] In conflict zones, it then uses that veto power to enhance that leverage and impede actual or final resolution of the conflict.[18] Thus, to prevent the full integration of the Balkans, Russia appears ready even to entertain the option of inciting new, or at least stimulating existing, Balkan conflicts and even using force to further its interests.

This is hardly an inconceivable scenario. In the context of past and present Russian policies, the reports of an attempted plebiscite in Transnistria that was intended to occur under Russian auspices on February 28-29, 2024, were quite plausible.[19] These reports of Russia inciting a plebiscite in Transnistria clearly replicated previous Russian Federation, Tsarist and Soviet tactics. Russia's initial military takeover of this territory in 1992 falsely based its legitimacy on ancient Tsarist, not to mention Stalinist, grounds that Russians were at risk of being oppressed. Then, in 2006, a referendum was staged approving incorporation into Russia, and beginning in 2022 Moscow evidently initiated moves leading to an attempted coup in neighboring Moldova in 2023.[20] Indeed, since 2022 Russia has subjected Moldova to intense pressure.[21] When the 2023 coup failed due to public Moldovan-Ukrainian warnings of the Wagner Private Military Company's (PMC's) leadership of this coup that evoked earlier ones in Montenegro and Macedonia, Transnistria's leaders resumed the cry of their oppression calling for incorporation into Russia and intensified it in 2024, claiming a deteriorating crisis-like situation that was apparently intended to lead to the proclamation of Russia's takeover of the province on February 28, 2024.[22] In the event, Ukrainian intelligence, which helped forestall the 2023 coup attempt, then reported correctly that no such coup was being planned.[23]

Therefore, despite the primacy of the usually non-kinetic strategy of elite capture, there is always the real threat of Moscow using force majeure to capture Balkan states that have previously been attacked from within by Russian clients and influences, but which might

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[17] Murray, Vindman, Bustillos, op. cit.

[18] David G. Lewis, "Russia As Peacebuilder? Russia's Coercive Mediation Strategy," *Security Insights,* George C. Marshall European Center For Security Studies, 2020, available at https://www.marshallcenter.org/sites/default/files/files/2020-06/SecurityInsights61.pdf

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Velvl Chernin, "Prospects For Conflict Settlement In Transnistria," The Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, PSCRP-BESA Reports, No. 33, February 7, 2024, available at https://besacenter.org/conflict-settlement-in-transnistria/.

[22] Lewis; Thomas Escritt, "Fake bombs and Failed Coup: Moldova Smolders on Border Of Russia's War," *Reuters*, March 14, 2023, available at https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/fake-bombs-failed-coup-moldova-smolders-border-russias-war-2023-03-10/; "Russia is planning coup in Moldova, says President Maia Sandu," *Politico*, February 13, 2023, available at https://www.politico.eu/article/moldova-president-maia-sandu-russia-attack/.

[23] Ella Bennett, "Transnistria Holds Off on Request to Join the Russian Federation," *MSN.com*, February 24, 2024.

nevertheless opt for membership and integration in the EU and NATO. Moscow has previously instigated attempted coups in Montenegro and what is now the Republic of North Macedonia (formerly Macedonia) and Montenegro to prevent the resolution of ethnic conflicts between the former and its neighbors and block the latter from joining NATO.[24] In those coups it exploited the efforts of intermediaries suborned by Russian intelligence and the businessmen Konstantin Malofeev and Ivan Savvidis, who bankrolled private armed groups, that is, forerunners of the notorious Wagner PMC, to incite uprisings in those countries.[25] But Russia also based its and Wagner's actions on their and Moscow's pre-existing media infiltration and economic influence within those countries. Since these previous attempts to capture Balkan states involved direct force, Russia has no reason to renounce that route to power in the future if it believes circumstances warrant it. Hence, the justified fear of a forceful attempt to annex Transnistria.

However, the plausibility of potentially violent Russian moves demonstrates the tense situation not only around Moldova, but also more broadly in the Balkans. If this annexation process had occurred, or occurs in the future, it would then represent a new military threat to Ukraine's rear, intensify the threats to Moldova and the Danubian basin that has become increasingly important for Ukraine's maritime commerce, and aggravate Serb-Kosovar tensions and intra-Bosnian rivalries. It would also validate Putin and Russia's use of surrogates, weaponized corruption, hybrid war tactics, and deployment of non-kinetic instruments of power to undermine the entire process of European integration.

Beyond obstructing the integration of Europe and of Ukraine, such a coup would have also realized a second critical Russian objective, namely the intensification of existing tensions in Moldova and potentially pro-Russian states like Bulgaria to create what amounts to a second, and not necessarily non-kinetic, front in what Russia views as the current pan-European war. The potential annexation of Transnistria also signals Russia's ambition for further territorial expansion as a potential third intermediary goal that comports with the overall objective of imperial restoration. Fourth, in this context would be the acquisition of permanent bases and a belt of pro-Russian governments, including Hungary and other Balkan states who can be suborned in this way. This would permit further projection of Russian power abroad not unlike what is now occurring in Africa.[26]

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[24] Stephen Blank, "Adding to the Russian Tool Set: The Role of Russian 'Private' Military Contractors," *SLDinfo.com*, August 4, 2018, available at https://sldinfo.com/2018/08/adding-to-the-russian-tool-set-the-role-of-russian-private-military-contractors/; Kent, op. cit., pp. 227-278.

[25] Paul Stronski, Aimee Hinds, "Russia's Game In the Balkans," Carnegie Endowment, 2019, available at https://carnegieendowment.org/2019/02/06/russia-s-game-in-balkans-pub-78235; J. Lester Feder, "Macedonia Suspects A Greek-Russian Billionaire Paid For Violent Protests To Prevent It From Joining NATO," *Buzzfeed News*, July 18, 2018, available at https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/lesterfeder/macedonia-russia-nato.

[26] Stephen Blank, "Russia's Goals In Africa," forthcoming from *Trends.*

Additional "Front Lines"

Neither is Transnistria the only active "front" in this "theater." For example, another minority in the Moldova area, the Gagauz people, a Turkic but Orthodox Christian minority, have also been a long-standing target of Russian tactics.[27] Indeed, Putin has just expressed his support for the Gagauz against Moldova. Allegedly they too suffer from oppression by Moldova due to their Orthodox religious affiliation. And this led Putin to promise their leader, Evghenia Gutul, that he would "extend support to Gagauzia and the Gagauz people in upholding our legal rights, our authority, and positions in the international arena."[28] Similarly Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has now accused Moldova of following in Kyiv's footsteps to oppress Russians and of wanting to join Romania, old propaganda charges that also clearly intimate threats against Moldova. In other words, Putin and his government want and promise to undermine Moldova's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Bosnia too exemplifies Russian tactics and strategy. For example, Russia's ambassador to Bosnia made clear in 2018 that his government views the EU's Peace Envoy to Bosnia as no longer being necessary and implicitly that the whole structure of the Dayton accords is outdated.[29] Russia still maintains this position and uses its influence there to block a resolution of Bosnia's status and possible inclusion in NATO.[30] It also opposes Bosnian membership in the EU and with China has tried to block extension of the Dayton treaty mandate.[31] The Bosnian Serb Respublika Srpska embodies Russian tactics, is wholly penetrated by Russia, and exemplifies what happens to states or movements who succumb to those tactics. Here it is worth displaying the entire litany of fulsome praise and dependence on Russia stated by Bosnian Serb strongman and Russian client Milorad Dodik in his visit with Putin in Kazan to grasp the scope of the Bosnian Serbs' dependence on Moscow. This address reads like a medieval presentation to the Grand Prince of Muscovy or the early Tsars, highlighting the continuity of Russian imperial practices and rituals:

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[27] Paula Erizanu, What danger does Transnistria pose to Ukraine, Moldova?," *Kyiv Independent* , March 3, 2024, available at https://kyivindependent.com/can-transnistria-pose-danger-to-moldova-and-ukraine/; Paul Goble, Russian Seeking Once Again To Use Gagauz in Blocking Moldova's Turn To the West," Jamestown Foundation, March 21, 2023, available at https://jamestown.org/program/russian-seeking-once-again-to-use-gagauz-in-blocking-moldovas-turn-to-the-west/.

[28] Victor Jack, "Putin Vowed To Protect Pro-Russian Moldovan Region, Its Leader Says," *Politico*, March 7, 2024, available at https://www.politico.eu/article/vladimir-putin-russia-moldova-gagauzia-evghenia-gutul/.

[29] Stephen Blank, "Our Man in Belgrade: Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov Visits the Balkans," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, March 5, 2018, available at https://jamestown.org/program/man-belgrade-russian-foreign-minister-lavrov-visits-balkans/.

[30] Hamza Karcic, "NATO Needs To Welcome Bosnia Before It's Too Late," *Foreign Policy*, February 27, 2023, available at https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/02/27/bosnia-nato-expansion-russia-putin/; David Brennan, "Bosnia Must Join NATO 'Soon as Possible' Minister Says as Russia Looms Over Serb Crisis," *Newsweek*, November 5, 2021, available at https://www.newsweek.com/bosnia-join-nato-soon-possible-foreign-minister-bisera-turkovic-russia-looms-serb-crisis-balkans-1646250.

[31] "Russia Denounces EU for Granting Bosnia Candidacy Status," *Reuters*, December 23, 2022, available at https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russia-denounces-eu-granting-bosnia-candidacy-status-2022-12-23/; Edith M. Lederer, "Russia and China Try To End Bosnia's International Overseer," *Associated Press*, July 14, 2021, available at https://apnews.com/article/europe-russia-china-united-nations-0ca800a4fb55c22962415d64bc6ffa14.

> Indeed, I confirm the good relations that Respublika Srpska is building and expanding with the Russian state, thanks primarily to you. We are certainly living through a difficult time, and we appreciate your understanding. You recently emphasized in your annual address that you understand where our relations are right now. They are complicated, they are not straightforward; they are indeed very complicated. The situation is further aggravated by the fact that we remain under Western supervision, and we are in the midst of an international, primarily Western intervention. They have now moved from Dayton to abuse, to imposing on us a German national as High Representative, one who has not been appointed by the UN Security Council. Thank you for your attention to this issue. If that individual had been given the authority, he would definitely have abolished Respublika Srpska. In these circumstances, we are trying to fend off any calls to join the sanctions against Russia. They [the West] are trying hard enough, trying to persuade us to do this almost on a daily basis. It goes without saying that we also refuse to move towards NATO membership, even though we are being subjected to considerable pressure.[32]

Thus enabled, Russia has periodically repeated its habitual, menacing, but ambiguous threat that it would have to react if NATO invited Bosnia to join.[33]

To achieve these goals Moscow utilizes assets like the Respublika Srpska to obstruct any moves towards integration. Likewise, there is good reason to believe that the long-standing tensions between Moldova and Transnistria originate in Russia's long-running plan to destabilize Moldova, Moldova's efforts in response to join the EU, and its corresponding gradual efforts to bring mounting pressures upon Transnistria.[34] These last two points, of course, are anathema to the Transnistrian authorities in Tiraspol and no less unwelcome in Moscow. But the former's failure to ask for incorporation into Russia reveals Russia's current incapacity to proceed by force in the Balkans. Instead, Russia continues to employ its tactics of elite capture to achieve by non-kinetic means the fragmentation of the Balkans, if not Europe. Consequently, these objectives of frustrating the full integration of the Balkans with Europe transcend Serbia and Bosnia to encompass the entire Balkan peninsula.

Russia's Goals and Objectives

Accordingly, one may postulate Russia's primary strategic objectives in the Balkans in the following manner. What Russia wants most of all is to arrest, fragment, and even reverse the process of European integration or what EU insiders used to call the "finalite" of integration with the rest of Europe. In turn, achieving those outcomes presupposes prior attainment of other Russian regional objectives. The first of these regional goals is the exacerbation of

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[32] "Meeting with President of the Republika Srpska Milorad Dodik," February 21, 2024, available at http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/73515.

[33] Karcic; Brennan, op. cit.

[34] Ibid.; Chernin, op. cit.

regional tensions because that hinders if not precludes the attainment of this "finalite" and gives Russia added levers of influence to protract these strugglers and to some degree regulate them. For example, a merely partial list of such goals means no resolution of the Serb-Kosovar tensions, or of the status of Bosnia-Herzegovina, and continued efforts to destabilize Bulgaria, Serbia, Moldova, etc. It also means no further EU or NATO enlargement to the Balkans because continuation of these conflicts impedes those enlargements and hands Russia more instruments with which to oppose further integration. This "wish list" entails no vision for the Balkans other than continuing instability, conflict, and backwardness while Russia engages in an equally unending quest for renewed imperial glory.

This goal of reversing European integration comprises a number of intermediary or subordinate objectives needed to reach this grand strategic objective. For example, a first intermediary outcome that must precede cessation of the integration process is the regression, corruption, and/or subversion of pro-Western, democratically oriented Balkan states to corrupt, autocratic pro-Russian states like Hungary or Respublika Srpska. Achieving this objective also connects to a second intermediary objective of freezing or inciting conflict situations as needed in order to undermine pro-Western tendencies and enhance both Balkan instability and Russia's regional presence. There are substantial Russian pressures being exercised simultaneously along many dimensions and across the board on virtually every Balkan state to effectuate such regressions and conflicts. [35] But at present, the process is most marked in countries like Serbia, Bosnia, Bulgaria, and Moldova-Transnistria where Russia has long engaged in multi-dimensional campaigns of attempted state capture.[36] These efforts to exploit all existing cleavages in Balkan states to create and sustain reliable pro-Moscow parties (e.g., through subsidies, energy, media, and intelligence penetration, influence operations, arms sales, and active measures) are a direct legacy of first Tsarist and then Soviet policy.

So, the importance to Moscow of devising and then sustaining such levers through which it can frustrate integration and regional peace goes back centuries. Ultimately, gaining leverage over parties, movements, elite associations, and corruption of local political processes generates possibilities for replicating Russia's own political system in these countries and creating a reliable anti-Western and anti-liberal bloc of states that can be trusted to advocate Russia's line and frustrate integrationist processes, as does Hungary and Robert Fico's government in Slovakia. These processes of state subversion also allow Moscow to recruit agents of influence and outright spies to penetrate the rest of Europe and execute missions on behalf of Russia that might not otherwise be possible for its own people to carry out. These missions include classic espionage and attacks on Balkan targets like

[35] Martin Vladimirov, "Reassessing Russian Influence: Economic and Governance Underpinning," in *The Russian Economic Grip on Central and Eastern Europe*, Ognan Shentov, Ruslan Stefanov, and Martin Vladimirov (eds.) (London and New York: Routledge, 2019); Heather A. Conley, James Mina, Ruslan Stefanov, Martin Vladimirov, *The Kremlin Playbook, Understanding Russian Influence in Central and Eastern Europe, Vol. I* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2016); Heather A. Conley, Donatienne Ruy, Ruslan Stefanov, Martin Vladimirov *The Kremlin Playbook, Vol. 2: The Enablers* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2019).

[36] Vladimirov, et al., op. cit.

ammunition storages earmarked for Ukraine or attacks, including assassinations of leading anti-Russian figures.[37] The ubiquity, frequency, and continuing scope of these particular operations highlight Russia's belief, like its Soviet predecessor, that it is engaged in a permanent war against the West.

A third intermediary goal is discernible with regard to the acquisition of Balkan military bases. Russia seeks to formalize these relationships with subverted and corrupted non-democratic states in an enduring if not permanent fashion by obtaining bases in the Balkans. Russia has sought a land base in Serbia and a naval base in the Adriatic from which it could then apparently serve to frustrate and deter NATO plans for integrating the Balkans more completely into Europe.[38] It then pressured Serbia to grant diplomatic recognition to this base on its territory presumably so it could then serve as Russia's "spy base" in the Balkans.[39] Similarly in 2022, the Russian Mediterranean Eskadra sought to forcibly block the passage of the USS Harry S. Truman aircraft carrier in the Adriatic Sea.[40]

As described elsewhere, Russia also exerts constant pressure on Serbia through its control of Serbian energy assets, its prominent role in the media, through the Orthodox Church, and through its contacts with the Serbian armed forces.[41] Similarly, upon seizing Crimea and its off-shore energy facilities in 2014 and thus becoming a maritime neighbor to Romania and its critical off-shore energy installations, Moscow has engaged in regular and threatening overflights of those facilities, clearly to intimidate Romania.[42] Russia's quest for influence, land, and maritime bases and ongoing threats validates its ambition to be a decisive player with a permanent veto power if not more over Balkan developments, especially given the many regional conflicts that it intends to exploit. Since "bases and power projection activities are an input into the world order," Russia's never-ending quest for foreign bases represents an important intermediate objective in the Balkans.[43] Then Russia

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[37] Camut and Christian Nicholas, "Bulgarian PM: No More 'Eyes Wide Shut' On Russian Interference," *Politico*, July 5, 2023, available at https://www.politico.eu/article/bulgaria-nikolai-denkov-pm-russia-influence-rumen-radev/; Christopher Nehring, "Bulgarian Cyberattack: Sabotage As a Cover For Spying?," *Deutsche Welle*, October 19, 2022, available at https://www.dw.com/en/bulgarian-cyberattack-sabotage-as-a-cover-for-spying-on-nato/a-63483887; Michael Schwirtz, "How a Poisoning Exposed Russian Assassins In Europe," *The New York Times*, October 19, 2022, available at https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/22/world/europe/bulgaria-russia-assassination-squad.html; Krassen Nikolov, "Bulgaria's Spy Affair Spreads To Other Countries," *Euractiv.com*, February 7, 2024, available at https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/bulgarias-russian-spy-affair-spread-to-other-eu-countries/.

[38] "Russia Opens 'Humanitarian' Base In Serbia," *Euractive.com*, October 18, 2011, available at https://www.euractiv.com/section/global-europe/news/russia-opens-humanitarian-base-in-serbia/.

[39] Dusan Stojanovic, "Russia Pressures Serbia On Status Of Controversial Base," *Associated Press*, October 17, 2017, available at https://apnews.com/general-news-824e3d69ffb049a784b4e462d40b14a8.

[40] Maritime Security Forum, "Russian warships entered the Adriatic Sea, trying to block US aircraft carrier," *MS Daily Brief*, August 22, 2022, available at https://www.forumulsecuritatiimaritime.ro/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/MS-Daily-Brief-22-August-2022-en.pdf.

[41] Stephen Blank, "Russia's Energy Influence Over Serbia," *Kremlin Influence Quarterly,* Vol. IV, 2022, pp. 24-34; "Russia's Quest For Military Influence in Serbia," *Kremlin Influence Quarterly,* Vol. IV, 2022, pp. 35-47.

[42] Conversations with Romanian diplomats since 2014.

[43] Henk Houweling and Mehdi Parvizi Amineh, "Introduction," Mehdi Parvizi Amineh and Henk Houweling, eds., *Central Eurasia in Global Politics: Conflict, Security, and Development, International Studies in Sociology and Social Anthropology* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2004), p. 15.

could employ its presence in those bases to transform the regional if not global order, especially during conflict situations.[44] As R. Craig Nation of the U.S. Army War College wrote in 2002,

> Disappointments notwithstanding, the capacity to project forces into combat zones to enforce peace when diplomatic mechanisms fail, maintain peace in the wake of negotiated ceasefires, and ensure a safe and secure environment within which a process of post-conflict peacebuilding can go forward remain vital attributes of any effort to contain and reverse a proliferation of low and medium intensity conflicts in the Adriatic-Caspian corridor.[45]

While he wrote about Western efforts to pacify the Balkans; these observations apply equally to Russia's pursuit of its own, rather different Balkan interests.

Russia's pursuit of these Balkan outcomes has acquired greater urgency due to the still incompletely resolved disintegration of the former Yugoslavia and the war in Ukraine, itself a sign of the still ongoing disintegration of the Soviet empire as well as being an obvious war of imperial revanche as Putin's personal writings and rantings on TV make clear.[46] This imperial drive manifests itself in both Ukraine and the Balkans. Indeed, there is evidence that Moscow's original invasion of Crimea in 2014 was intended to culminate in a Russian seizure of Odessa, utilizing forces flown in from Moldova to suppress alleged Ukrainian uprisings triggered by Russia and thus create a unified "Novorossiia" (new Russia) that would have amputated Ukraine's coastline and state economic viability. Indeed, Medvedev's map essentially restates those territorial objectives. Moscow can use Tiraspol's airport to receive IL-86 aircraft that give it a regional power projection capability. So, in 2014, and in conjunction with the seizure of Crimea, Moscow mobilized 2-3,000 Spetsnaz forces either to airlift them or have them march on Odessa once its supporters inside the city had seized power through rioting.[47] Therefore Moldova, even today, cannot be excluded as a target in order to capture Ukraine's entire coastline up to and including Moldova to create another Novorossiia as Putin tried to do in 2014.[48] These points now possess a special significance given the recent reports that Putin wants to annex Russian-occupied Transnistria as part of the Russian Federation, thus threatening Ukraine from the rear, menacing the Danube's lower reaches, and gaining a new doorway into the Balkans.[49] In this light, the recent

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[44] Ibid.

[45] R. Craig Nation, "Military Contributions to Regional Stability," Stefano Bianchini and Susan L. Woodward, eds., *From the Adriatic to the Caucasus: Viable Dynamics of Stabilization* (Ravenna, Italy: A. Longo Editore, 2003), p. 33.

[46] "The Vladimir Putin Interview," February 6, 2024, available at https://tuckercarlson.com/putin/; "Article by Vladimir Putin 'On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians,'" July 12, 2021, available at http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/66181.

[47] Conversations with Ostap Kryvdyk, Washington, D.C., June 19, 2014; LTG (Ret.) Ben Hodges (U.S. Army), Janusz Bugajski, Col. (Ret.) Ray Wojcik (U.S. Army), Carsten Schmiedl, *One Flank, One Threat One Presence: A Strategy For NATO's Eastern Flank,* Center for European Policy Analysis, 2020, pp. 17-21, available at https://cepa.org/comprehensive-reports/one-flank-one-threat-one-presence/; Chernin, op. cit.

[48] Ibid.

[49] Brendan Cole, "Russia May Annex Another European Country," *Newsweek*, February 23, 2024, available at https://www.newsweek.com/moldova-transnistria-annex-russia-1872699; George Barros, Frederick W. Kagan, Christina

reorganization of the GRU (military intelligence), the vanguard of Russian influence operations and subversion abroad, with an intensification of its rigorous and long-standing subversive activities in Moldova and the Balkans more generally suggests attempts to open a second, albeit, non-kinetic front in Europe.[50] The apparent effort to instigate a Transnistrian plebiscite would corroborate this argument that the Balkans represent a kind of second front in Europe for Moscow. Certainly, the talk of such a plebiscite in Transnistria evokes Soviet and Russian precedents like many of Putin's earlier policies.[51] And it would likely have inflamed the entire Balkan region thereby creating a second front with which to distract and threaten the West.

Implications For European Security

Since Balkan and overall European security are inextricable and indivisible, progress in one theater requires progress in the other to achieve lasting security. Any serious aggravation of Balkan tensions would engender serious repercussions for both the EU and NATO and not only in the Balkans. It would certainly accelerate pressures to derail the entire integration project for both the EU and NATO in and beyond the Balkans. By calling the EU and NATO enlargement processes into question it would expose these organizations' unwillingness to defend those processes or the European status quo and trigger trends encouraging a stronger Russian push to restore the empire and further consolidate it and the Putinist autocracy indefinitely.[52] Any such restoration will also rejuvenate Russia's non-military and military influence campaigns in and beyond the Balkans.

Therefore, the first requirement of a successful integrationist policy in the Balkans mandates a genuine commitment to Ukraine's victory, that is, restoring its sovereignty, integrity, and integration with European security organizations. Second, that policy must coincide with the concurrent intensification of programs to bring about Balkan membership in those organizations and admit Ukraine to regional and sub-regional institutions, e.g., the Three Seas Initiative. Only under such conditions can we even conceive of, let alone bring about improved governance and resolution of ethic agendas that will deprive Russia of many of the pretexts it now utilizes for leverage in the Balkans. Logically, this entails a coordinated Western program of multi-dimensional support: economic, military, and political for both Ukraine and the neighboring Balkans.

Harvard, Angelica Evans, "Warning: Transnistria May Organize a Referendum On Annexation To Russia To Support Russian Hybrid Operation Against Moldova," Institute For the Study Of War, February 22, 2024, available at https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/warning-transnistria-may-organize-referendum-annexation-russia-support-russian-hybrid.

[50] John Paul Rathbone, "Russia Revamps GRU Spy Network To 'Disrupt Adversaries'," *Financial Times*, February 20, 2024, available at https://www.ft.com/content/5b1b88d3-de43-4a5e-8446-e4339848b156.

[51] Barrows; Kagan; Harvard; Evans, op. cit.

[52] Sven Biscop, "If Russia 'Protects' Transnistria Will the EU Defend Moldova and Georgia," Egmont Institute, March 5, 2024, available at https://www.egmontinstitute.be/if-russia-protects-transnistria-will-the-eu-defend-moldova-and-georgia/.

Although space considerations preclude an extensive review of the requirements incumbent upon all these states and European organizations to bring about multi-dimensional improvements in regional governance, it seems that focusing on taking on Balkan energy agendas makes a lot of sense here. Using Western resources and policy instruments in the energy field strikes at Russia's declining and now threatened energy presence in Europe and the revenues it has accrued thereby because those funds and presence comprise the fiscal foundation of Russia's many-sided presence across the Balkans. For example, leaked documents have again confirmed Russia's concealed Kremlin control over the Turk Stream pipeline from Turkey to Bulgaria, Serbia, and Hungary.[53] Sanctions have provided a great opportunity to increase the energy (specifically gas) connections between countries like Azerbaijan and Balkan states like Serbia and Bulgaria.[54] However, failure in Ukraine or the tangible signs of security institutions' weakness will disrupt if not reverse those trends and regenerate Moscow's opportunities to establish energy connections throughout not only the Balkans but even neighboring Central European states like Austria.[55]

Not only would such deals help move Bulgaria, Serbia, and Austria who, despite widespread Russian economic-political influence there, strongly favor inclusion of the Balkans in the EU, further out of Russia's orbit and facilitate European integration, such agreements also expand the integrationist ties between Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia.[56] Serbia has even signed a defense deal with Azerbaijan that will also expand its discretion on that agenda.[57] Enhancing the Balkans' energy and subsequent economic-political connections to Europe would also undermine Russia's unceasing efforts to subordinate both Central Asia and the Caucasus through control of pipelines and energy infrastructure. Given what Russian imperialist programs mean to all these regions, attenuating Moscow's capabilities should be a high priority and justifies programs to enlarge the EU to these areas, at least in terms of its influence if not membership. While it is necessary to press on with fortifying front-line states in both the Northern European area like Finland, the Baltic States, and Poland, it is an equal priority to move forward to achieve

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[53] Georgi Gotev and Krassen Nikolov, "Leaked Documents Reveal Kremlin Control Over Turkish Stream Pipeline Construction Through Bulgaria," *Euractiv.com*, March 14, 2024, available at https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/leaked-documents-reveal-kremlin-control-over-turkish-stream-pipeline-construction-through-bulgaria/.

[54] Krassen Nikolov, "Bulgaria Negotiates With Azerbaijan To Boost Gas Supplies To Balkans, Ukraine," *Euractiv.com*, March 5, 2024, available at https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/bulgaria-negotiates-with-azerbaijan-to-boost-gas-supplies-to-balkans-ukraine/; Milica Stojanovic, "Serbia Signs Natural Gas Deal With Azerbaijan," *Balkan Insight*, November 15, 2023, available at https://balkaninsight.com/2023/11/15/serbia-signs-natural-gas-deal-with-azerbaijan/.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Federal Ministry Republic of Austria, European and International Affairs, "The Future of the Western Balkans Lies in the EU," October 6, 2023, available at https://www.bmeia.gv.at/en/ministerium/presse/aktuelles/2023/10/the-future-of-the-western-balkans-lies-in-the-eu.

[57] "Serbia, Azerbaijan Sign Military Cooperation Plan," *N1*, February 2, 2024, available at https://n1info.rs/english/news/serbia-azerbaijan-sign-military-cooperation-plan/.

both a resolute defense of the Balkan-Black Sea zones and the aforementioned finalization of EU integration.

Moreover, a major program to reduce Balkan dependence on coal and oil while simultaneously transitioning to both natural gas and ultimately green energy sources, although very difficult, will facilitate Ukrainian integration to Europe. Ukraine has the means not only to supply its own energy needs if it reconstructs after victory, but it also has a substantial gas export capability, as does Romania. As a 2023 report observed,

> Ukraine's ambition of becoming a natural gas exporter may be ambitious, but the country's political elites are serious about these plans. In June 2023, during a conference in London on Ukraine's post-war recovery, Deputy Head of the Office of Ukrainian President Rostyslav Shurma announced that, apart from providing 10 bcm [billion cubic meters] of biomethane to Europe, Ukraine will be able to export 15 bcm of natural gas in the future. Some steps are being made in this direction. Even in war time, Ukrainian extractive industries are trying to develop further. Ukrainian public and private companies are building their expertise in unconventional extraction methods, such as natural gas extraction from coal beds and horizontal drilling, or in new ways of exploration, like focused magnetic resonance.[58]

Ukraine is also, despite the war, exporting record amounts of electricity to Poland, Slovakia, Romania, Moldova, and Hungary.[59] If Ukrainian, Middle Eastern, American, and African gas and green energy can be transported to the Balkans with a modernized infrastructure then it will be possible not only reduce Russian opportunities for regional subversion but also dramatically improve regional governance over time, sponsor European investment and integration trends within the Balkans, dramatically enhance regional environmental quality, and thus achieve lasting progress on Balkan security.[60] Indeed, the sheer scope of the investments needed here could act as a major spark by which the overall European economy could experience a much-needed transformation along with those of Ukraine and the Balkans. A perfect institutional vehicle for such energy and infrastructure-driven reconstruction could be the Three Seas Initiative, which could, thereby, also achieve a much-needed reinvigoration as a powerful engine of regional development and integration. Likewise, EU agreements on energy with Serbia offer possibilities for reducing conflicts with

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[58] Thomas Lafitte and Igor Moshenets, "Synchronized: The Impact Of the War on Ukraine's Energy Landscape," Foreign Policy Research Institute, December 5, 2023, available at https://www.fpri.org/article/2023/12/the-impact-of-the-war-on-ukraines-energy-landscape/.

[59] Ella Bennett, "Ukraine Set to Achieve Historic High in Electricity Exports to Multiple European Nations," March 4, 2024, available at https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/ukraine-set-to-achieve-historic-high-in-electricity-exports-to-multiple-european-nations/ar-BB1jiqfX.

[60] Stephen Blank, "The Balkans and Euro-Atlantic Energy Security," *Orbis*, Vol. LXVI, No. 1, Winter, 2022, pp. 58-77, available at https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0030438721000661.

Kosovo that do so much to facilitate Russian influence in Belgrade.[61] And these programs should occur in conformity with the expansion of the pipeline infrastructure needed to diversify the sources of Balkan energy imports from abroad.[62] Experience also shows that concurrent processes of conflict-reduction with this economic revitalization would reduce chances for Russian meddling because they would occur in tandem with the precondition needed for this outcome. That precondition takes place when European security structures actively manage the conflict-reduction processes in the Balkans as NATO's experience shows in Kosovo.[63]

Conclusions

This article began with well-founded warnings that Putin will not stop at Ukraine. And the evidence of ongoing Russian machinations in Moldova, Bosnia and across the Balkans is enormous and continuing. While this region is undergoing a crisis even without the war in Ukraine, crisis, as the Chinese character says, also denotes opportunity. Indeed, Putin's war on Ukraine and efforts to generate a second front do not only represent a serious challenge to the West they also present an immense once in a generation opportunity to make dramatic and positive moves in European if not international security in both the Ukraine and the Balkans. But for that to happen Western governments must stop wringing their hands and instead demonstrate will and proceed to the achievement of victory that alone will open dynamic vistas for all of Europe.

Victory alone will stop Putin and his endless war on the West. Moreover, the West has the resources to enable it. Failure to seize this opportunity will inevitably generate more conflicts in the Balkans and globally, and the results are already plainly visible and frightful. Today, as in earlier generations, the Balkans and its adjoining regions confront the challenge of rising to the occasion and advancing peace, security, and democracy or descending even further into Putin's frightful world. Can the West afford not to rise to that challenge and instead seize the opportunity it presents?

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[61] European Union External Action, "EU-facilitated Dialogue: Parties agreed on the Energy Agreements' Implementation Roadmap," June 21, 2022, available at https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-facilitated-dialogue-parties-agreed-energy-agreements%E2%80%99-implementation-roadmap_en.

[62] Blank, "The Balkans and Euro-Atlantic Energy Security," op. cit.

[63] Edward Newman and Gezim Visoka, "NATO In Kosovo and the Logic Of Successful Security Practices," *International Affairs*, Vol. 100, Issue 2, March 2024, pp. 631-653.

INTERVIEWS

As part of its continuing effort to provide readers with unique perspectives on critical national security issues, National Institute has conducted a series of interviews with key subject matter experts on a variety of contemporary defense and national security topics. In this issue of National Institute's *Journal of Policy & Strategy*, we present three interviews: the first with Admiral Charles Richard, USN (ret.) former Commander, U.S. Strategic Command, and the University of Virginia Miller Center's James R. Schlesinger Distinguished Professor. Adm. Richard discusses worsening national security conditions, deficiencies in the current nuclear force posture and the urgency of adjustments required to counter them, and offers insights on the continued importance of nuclear deterrence. This interview was conducted at National Institute for Public Policy in Fairfax, VA on August 12, 2024. The second interview, conducted by Michaela Dodge, is with the Chair of the National Defense Strategy Commission Congresswoman Jane Harman and Vice Chair of the National Defense Strategy Commission Ambassador Eric Edelman. They discuss the most important findings from the recently published report of the Commission on the National Defense Strategy, the importance of increasing defense resources, and harnessing innovation for defense needs of the country. The third interview, conducted by Michaela Dodge, is with Prof. Eliot Cohen, the Arleigh A. Burke Chair in Strategy at the Center for Strategic and International Studies and the Robert E. Osgood Professor at Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS), and Prof. Phillips O'Brien, Senior Associate (non-resident), Center for Strategic and International Studies and Head of the School of International Relations, at the University of St. Andrews, on their most recent co-authored report titled "The Russia-Ukraine War: A Study in Analytic Failure." In addition to the interview, the *Journal* brings you select excerpts from the report in the "Documentation" section.

An Interview with
ADM Charles Richard, USN (Ret.)
former Commander, U.S. Strategic Command,
University of Virginia Miller Center's
James R. Schlesinger Distinguished Professor

Q. The current nuclear modernization program is a legacy of the Obama Administration. Yet, in the past 14 years since it was initiated, the threats facing the United States and allies have expanded and become more dangerous, including nuclear threats. Does the United States need to augment the current nuclear program of record to strengthen the credibility of the U.S. deterrent, including extended deterrence, in this more dangerous threat environment? If so, how?

A. The recent, bipartisan National Defense Strategy Commission report makes several profound points. It endorses the conclusions of the Strategic Posture Commission on nuclear forces and missile defense, and also calls for a multi-war force sizing-construct. We need a

separate force-sizing construct for strategic forces as compared to our current "one war" construct. We need a larger, more diverse force to address the potential for three-party aggression. In short, we now have a strategy-to-resources mismatch.

Beyond our current capabilities, we must have forces and procedures that can be effective in scenarios involving two nuclear peers without having to make intolerable choices, including whether one should prioritize defense of an ally in one theater over another. We have known for a long time that we have a capacity issue, e.g., in bombers and tankers. We can address that issue by adding more resources to defense. We have a twenty-nine trillion-dollar economy; we can afford necessary defenses. As Secretary of Defense James Mattis has said "America can afford survival."

There needs to be greater urgency in nuclear force modernization. Strategic deterrence needs to function under the worst conditions. But despite the speed with which nuclear threats to this country and allies have matured, the new systems will not be coming online at a sufficient rate until the end of the decade or more, and so we must figure out what we can do with the forces we have. In the shorter term, absent treaty limits, we can upload nuclear warheads, which is also desirable as a hedge against Russia's and China's closer cooperation. We also ought to exercise holding higher levels of readiness for extended periods of time and with different forces, including re-alerting a part of the bomber force. The nuclear command, control, and communications network also is critical. While planning for new forces, we must ensure continued maintenance of the legacy forces; they must be as good on their last day as they were on their first, and that takes resources. We are not now on a trajectory to do that and there is no sense of urgency.

In this more dangerous era with multiple nuclear-armed opponents, the United States places an ever greater deterrence burden on strategic forces. We must think about the gaps at the strategic force level as they appear to opponents and allies. U.S. leaders should not be in a position in which they are overly constrained in the alert level options available during a crisis, or the number of missiles devoted to surety tests, or the frequency and duration of exercises. I am concerned that without additional resources, the United States may be taking on unnecessary risk at a time when it can least accept it.

Q. The Trump Administration initiated the Sea-Launched Cruise Missile-Nuclear (SLCM-N) program; the Biden Administration subsequently opposed it. Congress, however, has approved proceeding with it on a bipartisan basis. What is your view of the potential deterrent value of SLCM-N? Is it likely to be important for the credibility of U.S. extended deterrence commitments and allied assurance?

A. The SLCM-N will offer an extremely important capability, particularly for allies. It will provide an option to generate capabilities undetected, which may be useful during a crisis when the United States does not want to make visible changes in its forces but still chooses to maintain an increased level of readiness. It also provides the United States with unique force posture options that are likely to be significant in some scenarios, especially in the Indo-Pacific.

Q. You have spoken presciently of the expansion of China's nuclear arsenal. What do you believe are China's goals in significantly expanding its nuclear forces? Do you believe China is seeking to use its expanded nuclear capabilities for coercive purposes in addition to traditional deterrence purposes?

A. It will be a challenge to make it through the next ten years without conflict with China. Our opponents in Moscow and Beijing are authoritarian regimes. They are betting the legitimacy of their regimes on the outcome of their efforts to overturn the existing international order and the conflicts that goal may generate. Any such conflict will likely involve existential stakes for these adversaries. This suggests an asymmetry in the stakes of a potential engagement that makes U.S. deterrence goals more problematic. Disadvantageous asymmetries in U.S. capabilities will make the situation more difficult, especially if U.S. strategic forces are not sufficiently survivable and credible at the top level of the escalatory ladder (e.g., in the case of a coordinated or opportunistic aggression on the part of China and Russia).

Q. What are the biggest problems facing the U.S. Strategic Command (STRATCOM) today? Does STRATCOM have the resources it needs to accomplish its missions?

A. The greatest challenge is deploying modernized capabilities in time, given the threat trajectory adversaries are presenting. We lack a sense of urgency commensurate to the threat we face.

The largest gap in STRATCOM's capabilities is in prompt global strike. Such capabilities could allow us to conventionally strike many of the targets for which we currently require nuclear weapons. This also feeds into the larger problem of supported and supporting commanders in the military since any conflict with peer adversaries is likely to be global in scale and across all domains—making the geographic and functional command structure we have today difficult to operate effectively, and perhaps a hindrance.

I am also concerned about the general "business as usual" attitude pervading parts of the U.S. Government. There is a distinct lack of urgency, even among some in the military who perhaps recognize there are growing nuclear threats and yet are unwilling to adapt their practices and requirements to the new reality. We need more options, including a greater range of pre-planned posture options.

Q. Have you seen allied perceptions of the United States affected by the political polarization in Washington? If so, do you believe that the political polarization in Washington negatively affects allied views of U.S. credibility or in any other way that undermines the U.S. alliance system?

A. Yes, allies appear worried about the long-term U.S. commitment and about our potential unwillingness to escalate to nuclear weapons use on their behalf. Allies perceive a lack of U.S. will to risk escalation to a level that may be necessary to provide for their defense. There is

a growing strain of isolationism in U.S. domestic politics, which is a reflection of the political polarization in Washington that is of concern to our allies.

Q. There appears to be a growing entente among Russia, China, North Korea, and Iran—with each working more closely together in an effort to displace the United States in global affairs. Should Washington take the emerging Sino-Russian entente seriously into account in its planning and preparations for deterrence, including extended deterrence (the 2022 Nuclear Posture Review appears to suggest not)? If so, how might that entente, and the prospect for coordinated or opportunistic Sino-Russian aggression, affect U.S. deterrence planning and preparations?

A. Sino-Russian cooperation is very concerning. We have never had to deter two peer, nuclear capable potential adversaries at the same time who have to be deterred differently. In the past, we worried about the Russian Federation (or the Soviet Union earlier), but we have never had to worry simultaneously about China's arsenal to such a degree. To deter, the United States needs to deploy more forces to be able to hold at risk targets in Russia, China, and potentially North Korea simultaneously, particularly as their cooperation deepens.

We also have to keep in mind that some scenarios are improbable because our hard work to deter over the decades has made them improbable, for example, a "bolt out of the blue" attack against the U.S. homeland. Unlike during the Cold War, there is now little concern about the potential for an opponent's (or opponents') "bolt out of the blue" nuclear attack. But it must not be forgotten that such a scenario became improbable only because the United States sustained the needed credible deterrent capabilities. We have designed weapons, command and control arrangements, and maintained degrees of readiness so adversaries know they cannot achieve their objectives by such an attack. If we fail to do so, a bolt out of the blue attack could become a plausible option for an adversary. Deterrence is not a condition that persists on its own; it takes massive, continuing U.S. effort.

Q. Do you have recommendations in the areas of force posture, strategy, or policy as they relate to deterring opportunistic and coordinated aggression by the emerging entente? Are there aspects of these two problems that you believe deserve greater study?

A. We appear to confuse avoiding provocation and escalation with deterrence stability. But U.S. deterrence goals require that opponents fear, and perceive as credible, the potential for U.S. escalation. Deterring opponents in crises virtually demands that they concede a goal, perhaps a dearly held goal. Our challenge is to develop capabilities and options that Washington can credibly wield in ways that present opponents with prospective costs that they deem intolerable for themselves. This includes in regional conflicts because the most likely path to nuclear use runs through a failure of regional conventional deterrence. We want to make crisis confrontations so potentially costly for adversaries that they will

continually decide not to pursue conflict with the United States or its allies. They must continually conclude, "not today." We also must keep in mind that there is nothing automatic about deterrence working as hoped; adversaries must decide to be deterred.

We can use our posture for signaling purposes. We are in a situation where we have more options than during the Cold War, yet we need more options that can be fine-tuned to communicate degrees of risk so that the adversary knows that we can outmatch him and create intolerable difficulties for him on any level of the escalatory ladder. In short, for credible deterrence, we need greater force capacity to provide more options for tailored signaling in many plausible scenarios.

In wargames, we can consider how nuclear weapons impact the decision-making process, including during a conventional conflict. Any wargame that does not consider this aspect is unrealistic from the beginning and its results likely invalid. Any conflict with a nuclear power will involve the shadow of nuclear weapons. We also ought to conduct more surprise exercises to expose potential flaws in practices or plans.

Q. The 2022 Nuclear Posture Review states that the United States may need to rely more on nuclear weapons to deter opportunistic aggression—but it does not elaborate. What might "increased reliance" on nuclear weapons to deter opportunistic aggression mean in practice?

A. We must have readiness in our nuclear forces now to be able to strengthen deterrence of opportunistic aggression. The problem is that we do not invest enough resources into the kinds of activities and exercises that generate readiness. We do the bare minimum to keep our nuclear forces. We forget that nuclear forces are unique among U.S. capabilities and cannot be replaced by other capabilities, particularly for deterrence; no other capability in the U.S. arsenal can present opponents with the prospect of incalculable costs on short notice.

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An Interview with Congresswoman Jane Harman, Chair, Commission on the National Defense Strategy and Amb. Eric Edelman, Vice Chair, Commission on the National Defense Strategy

Q. One can observe a great deal of continuity between the 2018 and the 2024 National Defense Strategy Commissions' reports. What are the main differences?

A. As noted, the two Commissions found that the threats to U.S. national security are grave and growing while the ability of the United States to meet the threats is decreasing. That trend (which began before the 2018 Commission) is exacerbated by the worsening of the

strategic environment over the past couple of years: Russia's invasion of Ukraine and Hamas' attack on Israel both happened after the 2022 NDS was written, underscoring our belief that the United States must be postured and prepared to fight multiple adversaries in multiple theaters at the same time. As such, the 2024 Commission report goes further in calling for an "all elements of national power" approach and farther-reaching changes to U.S. force structure and national security spending.

Q. The Commission pinpoints domestic polarization as a significant impeding factor in getting defense spending on track. How can the United States overcome the effects of domestic polarization?

A. The Commission believes that U.S. leaders have not informed the public at large of the challenges and threats we face and why it is so important that the United States retains its global leadership role. Public support is the necessary foundation not just for increased national spending—and the taxes and reforms to entitlements that spending will require—but for the viability of the all-volunteer force, the needed partnership between the government and the private sector, and for the resilience that will be required at home if the nation goes to war. There are elected leaders on both sides of the aisle who understand the situation and they must share in the responsibility of informing the public and making the case for an engaged foreign policy. It is time for our national leaders to treat the American people like adults.

Q. What is, in your opinion, the most difficult obstacle to implementing the NDS Commission's recommendations?

A. We suffer from enormous bureaucratic inertia and risk aversion. We saw it at the Department of Defense throughout our work but it is also true in Congress. Too often, significant change in the government is only possible with the continued, direct involvement of very senior leaders, all of whom are extremely busy. The President, NSC principals, and Congress need to foster a culture where innovation and change come at lower levels so that not all change has to be driven from the top. We have found the will to act quickly in our history, but all too often it followed a tragedy like Pearl Harbor or 9/11. We hope that our report will help push action before a disaster opens people's eyes.

Q. How has Russia's ongoing invasion of Ukraine shaped the Commission's recommendations?

A. Russia's invasion of Ukraine demonstrated that the United States and its allies can't be solely focused on the threat posed by China. The nature of the war in Ukraine showed that conflicts can be protracted and our industrial base isn't able to produce the weapons, munitions, and equipment needed in large numbers or rapidly. The war has also highlighted

lessons we must learn for involving space, cyber, information operations, and rapid technical innovation.

Russia's inability to quickly subdue Ukraine led to Russia's massive mobilization of personnel and industrial output, and its operational partnership with China, Iran, and North Korea—both of which have major ongoing strategic implications for the United States. We have seen military cooperation among these nations that makes each one more capable, to include Iran and North Korea gaining insights from the battlefield and likely technology transfer from Russia and Russian-Chinese joint training operations. The bloc of partnered nations, including two with UN Security Council vetoes, also makes international sanctions more difficult to impose and enforce.

Q. If there is limited political support for increased defense spending, what can the Department of Defense do to posture itself to counter Russia's and China's aggressive policies?

A. There are certainly ways that the Department of Defense can make better use of the existing defense budget, as we lay out in the report. It can and should change how it spends money as well as what it spends money on. Congress, for its part, should stop the regular use of continuing resolutions and provide more budget flexibility to allow DoD to move money around more effectively and efficiently. But ultimately, we unanimously agreed that meeting the multi-theater threat from multiple peer and near-peer adversaries will require spending more—at DoD and other parts of the government that contribute to national security—as well as spending smarter.

Q. The Commission proposes "a Multiple Theater Force Construct" to address simultaneous conflict in two geographically distinct theaters. Is this construct different from an earlier strategy that called for the United States to prepare to fight two major regional contingencies? If so, how?

A. The two-war construct that followed the Cold War was designed to shape the military around lesser contingencies—basically dealing with rogue states like Iran and North Korea. That construct was replaced in the last decade by one that prioritized effort against a more capable adversary: China or Russia. Our Commission notes that there are already two theater wars going on, in Europe and the Middle East, and China's military modernization and aggressive action in the Taiwan Strait and the South and East China Seas require that the United States and its allies maintain focus and presence in that theater as well. Our recommendation is based on the reality that wars along multiple fronts or multiple wars across theaters is not only possible, but likely if the United States and its allies fail to deter them. China and Russia may not have the global reach that the United States does, but both are able to cause problems far from their homeland, and across all domains. More importantly, the partnership between China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea means that if

conflict begins with any of them, the others could either make a concerted or an opportunistic aggressive effort in another theater. This scenario is much more like the axis that existed during World War II than disparate rogue states after the fall of the Soviet Union.

Q. Is the Department of Defense doing enough to foster innovation? How can Congress best help the Department of Defense to harness innovation for defense purposes?

A. Innovation is happening in the commercial sector at increasing speed, but most of it is unconnected to defense work. Numerous reports have found that DoD has an "innovation adoption" problem. DoD itself has recognized this—starting with Ash Carter and the original stand-up of the Defense Innovation Unit—but the large majority of DoD's R&D and acquisition budgets are still tied to defense-centric production from an increasingly small number of suppliers. Part of the problem stems from the legal and regulatory barriers that make it so much harder for companies to work with DoD than to operate commercially. But DoD continues to have a risk-averse culture more likely to continue to evolve existing programs than to do things entirely new.

Q. Can you elaborate on what the Commission believes might happen if its recommendations are not adequately addressed?

A. There are countries around the world that very much want to upend the status quo—including by erasing national borders, removing U.S. influence from their regions, and installing authoritarian regimes around the world. They are ramping up their conventional and nuclear arsenals to do so and undermining stability, democracy, and free trade every day through gray zone military operations, mis- and disinformation campaigns, and building on their ability to project power and influence globally.

We tried to be very clear that the United States is not prepared for these challenges. We are losing our ability to deter other nations from taking actions we oppose—actions like invading U.S. allies, restricting access to critical minerals, or compromising our computer networks. If it comes to war to protect our interests, we may lose. History shows that no nation remains predominant indefinitely. If our recommendations are not addressed, we will likely lose our position as the global economic, scientific, and military superpower.

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An Interview with Prof. Eliot Cohen, Arleigh A. Burke Chair in Strategy, Center for Strategic and International Studies and the Robert E. Osgood Professor, Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies and Prof. Phillips O'Brien, Senior Associate (non-resident), Center for Strategic and International Studies and Head of the School of International Relations at the University of St. Andrews

Q. Your most recent co-authored report "The Russia-Ukraine War A Study in Analytic Failure" discusses some of the ways in which the U.S. national security community was wrong in assessing the course of Russia's February 2022 invasion of Ukraine. What inspired you to look back and undertake the project?

A. My friend Phil O'Brien, a professor of military history at St. Andrews University and I [Eliot Cohen] were early optimists about the war, and were surprised at the pervasive pessimism about Ukraine's possibilities. We began comparing notes and realized that the errors were large, systemic, and consequential, and decided to dig in further.

Q. What are the most important findings from this effort?

A. As I [Eliot Cohen] said, that the errors were large, systemic, and consequential, extending well beyond normal estimative error. One of the most important findings was that the nature of the Russia military analytic community – insular, narrow, and resistant to outside critique – missed a great deal about both militaries. The biggest errors had to do with a radical underestimation of the importance of intangibles (e.g., corruption); a tacit and probably subconscious acceptance of Russian views of Ukraine; ignorance of some fundamentals of military campaigning as seen throughout history.

Q. The study identifies eight misplaced assumptions that informed U.S. policy vis-à-vis Ukraine, e.g. that the war will be short or that Russia's army was far more competent than it turned out to be. Do you see any of them continuing to be relevant in today's policy debate on Ukraine? And if so, how can they be rectified?

A. The belief that the Ukrainians can only be helped not to lose, or to not lose quickly, continues to restrict the kinds and quantity of weapons we supply Ukraine, and the urgency with which we deliver them. It is important to note that the analysts who were most off base in their predictions before the war continue to be some of the most influential voices commenting about it, and engaging government, today.

Q. In the cases of experts correcting their initial wrong assumptions, was there any common denominator as to why they were able to correct while others were not?

A. For the most part, analysts have admitted that they underestimated Ukrainian will to fight and overestimated the competence of the Russian military, although there are still voices saying that the original assault would have worked without political or FSB interference. We reject those arguments.

Q. How can we prevent repeating similar analytic errors in the future?

A. Bring outside expertise in a variety of subjects to bear on these kinds of estimates; create opportunities for sharp debate and disagreement within expert communities that too often have powerful internal incentives for consensus and deference to senior figures; foster wider and deeper knowledge, particularly of military history.

Q. Are there any other areas of national security policy where you see experts agreeing on how international events are going to unfold with certainty that perhaps is not justified?

A. It happens all the time – in the Middle East for example. But the issue is not just military: look how many people shared the consensus view that expanded trade and economic development would cause China to liberalize. It has not. Fundamentally, the future is always opaque, and we have to recognize that. The problem is that the current media environment, from broadcast to social media, incentivizes certitude: we have to fight that.

Q. Your report is on what experts got wrong and why. What did experts collectively get right that stands out to you?

A. The intelligence community, and the outside expert community with which it is linked, understood that Putin would attack. Many of them understood as well that he intended to occupy most if not all of Ukraine, certainly to overthrow its government and replace it with a puppet regime. And by and large, I [Eliot Cohen] think they knew that this was not a reaction to the growth of NATO through the accession of the Baltic and East European states.

CURRENT AND PROJECTED GROWTH OF CHINESE NUCLEAR WEAPONS

The remarks below were delivered at a symposium on "Current and Projected Growth of Chinese Nuclear Weapons" hosted by the National Institute for Public Policy on August 27, 2024. The symposium examined the growth of China's nuclear arsenal and how it is portrayed in the West, focusing on official Department of Defense reports as well as unofficial reports that are generally considered authoritative but tend to underestimate the size and capabilities of Chinese nuclear forces.

David J. Trachtenberg (moderator)
David J. Trachtenberg is Vice President of the National Institute for Public Policy. Previously, he served as Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Policy.

The expansion of China's military and, in particular, its nuclear forces and capabilities has been referred to as "breathtaking" by Adm. Charles Richard, former Commander of STRATCOM, who called China's nuclear expansion a "strategic breakout."[1] Indeed, the current Commander of STRATCOM told Congress that China now has more ICBM silos than the United States. According to Gen. Anthony Cotton, "It is not an understatement to say that the Chinese nuclear modernization program is advancing faster than most believed possible."[2] Indeed, China is building and modernizing a true strategic Triad with modern, mobile, MIRVed ballistic missiles, submarines, and long-range bombers.

In fact, more than a decade ago, Chinese state media, including the CCP's flagship *Global Times*—boasted that "The 12 JL-2 nuclear warheads carried by one single Type 094 SSBN can kill and wound 5 million to 12 million Americans."[3] Maps of fallout patterns resulting from Chinese SLBM strikes on the United States were published and later removed from the internet when Western analysts discovered them.

Despite this immense nuclear buildup, both official and some unofficial sources appear to consistently underestimate the size, scope, and capabilities of China's burgeoning nuclear arsenal. For example, both the DoD annual China military power reports and those published by the Federation of American Scientists—which are often viewed as authoritative—tend to downplay or discount the magnitude of China's nuclear buildup. This has significant implications for deterrence, as an accurate understanding of China's nuclear potential is essential to determining what it takes to deter Chinese provocation or aggression.

The undercounting of China's nuclear arsenal takes on even greater significance and carries additional risks when considering the growing entente between China and Russia and their common goal of displacing the United States as the world's preeminent military

[1] David Vergun, *DOD News*, August 12, 2021, available at https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/2729519/china-russia-pose-strategic-challenges-for-us-allies-admiral-says/.

[2] Haley Britzky, "China has more ICBM launchers than US, senior general tells lawmakers," *CNN*, February 7, 2023, available at https://www.cnn.com/2023/02/07/politics/china-icbms-us-letter-congress/index.html.

[3] Zachary Keck, "State Media Boasts of China's Ability to Nuke US Cities," The Diplomat, November 5, 2013, available at https://thediplomat.com/2013/11/state-media-boasts-of-chinas-ability-to-nuke-us-cities/.

power. Clearly, Beijing is less than fully transparent regarding its nuclear arsenal. But Chinese sources themselves have given us indications that the United States may be significantly underestimating the size and capabilities of China's nuclear forces.

The failure to acknowledge an opponent's true arsenal—especially when there is credible evidence to suggest the opponent possesses a capability that exceeds Western estimates that are generally considered authoritative—may serve to foster a sense of complacency regarding the true extent of the Chinese nuclear threat and may actually encourage China to engage in opportunistic aggression.

The DoD has repeatedly spoken of China as the "pacing threat." The *2022 Nuclear Posture Review* acknowledges that China "has embarked on an ambitious expansion, modernization, and diversification of its nuclear forces."[4] And reportedly, the Biden Administration has revised U.S. nuclear employment guidance to focus on the rapid growth of China's nuclear potential. As one former administration official recently stated, "The president recently issued updated nuclear-weapons employment guidance to account for multiple nuclear-armed adversaries. And in particular, the significant increase in the size and diversity" of the Chinese nuclear arsenal.[5]

Nevertheless, the DoD appears to undercount the size and diversity of that arsenal in its public reports.

Finally, the growth in Chinese nuclear weapons and capabilities underpins Beijing's more belligerent military activities and its efforts to overturn the U.S.-led international order, as part of a growing entente with other authoritarian regimes. Despite this, the administration continues to seek to engage China in arms control discussions, which China has consistently rejected. Moreover, just last week, Beijing called on the United States to make "drastic and substantive cuts to its nuclear arsenal" and to end its policy of "extended deterrence."[6] This is what my mother would call "chutzpah."

I will stop here and look forward to the comments of our panelists.

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[4] Department of Defense, *2022 Nuclear Posture Review*, p. 4, available at https://media.defense.gov/2022/Oct/27/2003103845/-1/-1/1/2022-NATIONAL-DEFENSE-STRATEGY-NPR-MDR.PDF.

[5] Vipin Narang, "'Nuclear Threats and the Role of Allies': Remarks by Acting Assistant Secretary of Defense for Space Policy Dr. Vipin Narang at CSIS," August 1, 2024, available at https://www.defense.gov/News/Speeches/Speech/Article/3858311/nuclear-threats-and-the-role-of-allies-remarks-by-acting-assistant-secretary-of/#:~:text=The%20President%20recently%20issued%20updated,of%20the%20PRC's%20nuclear%20arsenal.

[6] Joel Gehrke, "China demands 'drastic and substantive cuts' to US nuclear arsenal," *Washington Examiner*, August 21, 2024, available at https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/news/3130176/china-demands-drastic-substantive-cuts-us-nuclear-arsenal/.

Mark B. Schneider
Mark B. Schneider is Senior Analyst with the National Institute for Public Policy and former Principal Director for Forces Policy in the Office of the Secretary of Defense.

The annual Pentagon reports on Chinese military power are the most authoritative available but have a poor track record on Chinese nuclear weapons. If current (2022/2023) DoD numbers are accurate, then every previous version of the DoD report underestimated the Chinese nuclear threat.

The 2022/2023 Pentagon estimates of Chinese nuclear weapons are:

- 500+ "operational" nuclear weapons in May 2023.
- 1,000+ "operational" nuclear weapons in 2030,
- About 1,500 in 2035.

The Pentagon reports register a sharp disconnect between the rapid visible growth in Chinese delivery vehicles and the relative slow growth in the number of China's nuclear weapons.

The Rocket Force is China's main nuclear strike force, but the other services have nuclear weapons, ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, and some have aircraft. This includes 72 nuclear SLBMs and Air Force nuclear-capable bombers. All the ICBMs and SLBMs are nuclear-armed. And STRATCOM Commander General Anthony Cotton says about 1,000 IRBMs and MRBM are nuclear-capable.

In fact, DoD's 2023 estimate of 500+ "operational" nuclear weapons is mathematically impossible. To get the number as low as 500+ all of the following dubious assumptions would have to be true:

- All MIRVed Chinese missiles are deployed with one warhead.
- China is building launchers faster than it is building missiles and building missiles much faster than warheads.
- Less capable DF-31 ICBMs are "probably" being deployed in China's new silos.
- China has only a handful of air-delivered nuclear warheads, no nuclear-capable cruise missiles and no nuclear-capable H-6K bombers.
- China lacks nuclear-capable short-range ballistic missiles.
- China has only a small number of non-strategic nuclear warheads.

In addition, DoD's 2030 and 2035 estimates are low. To be even close to correct, they would have to be based upon the same dubious assumptions, except for more MIRVing.

DoD's estimate of three warheads for the large DF-41 ICBM is among the lowest estimate that exists. For example, then-Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General John Hyten and then-STRATCOM Commander Admiral Charles Richard both said the DF-41 can carry ten warheads. Moreover, in 2017, China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) Rocket Force said there were three DF-41 warhead options: 1) one 1,600-kg warhead of 5.5 megatons; 2) six 250-kg warheads of 650 kilotons; or 3) ten 165-kg warheads of 150-kt.

By 2030 and 2035, all elements of the Chinese nuclear Triad will have been improved and numerically increased. Chinese sources report a more capable ICBM called the DF-45 or DF-51. DoD says China is developing new stealthy heavy and medium bombers. And DoD says China is developing a new missile submarine called the type 096.

Alternative assessments of China's nuclear warhead numbers indicate China has advanced nuclear weapons technology. It conducted 45-47 high-yield nuclear tests through 1996. There is evidence of continued Chinese nuclear testing. And China has stolen design information on all advanced U.S. nuclear weapons.

In addition, there is evidence that China has sufficient fissile material to arm its new MIRVed missiles promptly. In 2019, noted nuclear expert James R. Howe concluded that China had enough fissile material for 3,878 nuclear warheads. In 2021, Dr. John A. Swegle and Dr. Christopher Yeaw, both noted experts on nuclear weapons, estimated China had enough plutonium from its military reactors for 1,300 nuclear weapons. In 2021, former DoD Deputy Assistant Henry Sokolski estimated that China could produce 1,270 warheads by 2030, and stated, "If Beijing instead chooses to develop single-stage nuclear weapons using boosting, highly enriched uranium (HEU) or composite plutonium-HEU warhead designs, it could easily exceed this number by a factor of two or more."

In Congressional testimony in September 2022, Madelyn Creedon, a senior official in the Obama Administration, and subsequently Chairman of the bipartisan congressional Strategic Posture Commission, stated that, "Although estimates vary, China is projected to have between 1,000 and 1,500 nuclear weapons by 2030." In June 2024, Captain (ret.) James Fanell, former Senior Intelligence Officer for the U.S. Pacific Fleet, told Congress that, "The rapid, yet still opaque growth of the PRC's nuclear arsenal may very well exceed the U.S.'s by 2030, if not sooner. Beijing already possesses more tactical nuclear weapons and theater forces than does the U.S." And Bill Gertz has pointed out that, "If 10 warheads are deployed on the DF-41s in the new silos, China's warhead level will increase to more than 4,000 warheads on its DF-41s alone."

The reality is that by 2030, Chinese nuclear weapons numbers are likely to be much higher than the DoD has assessed.

PROCEEDINGS

JUST WAR THEORY, NUCLEAR WEAPONS, AND DETERRENCE

The remarks below were delivered at a symposium on "Just War Theory, Nuclear Weapons, and Deterrence" hosted by the National Institute for Public Policy on October 29, 2024. The symposium examined various misperceptions expressed by some religious and secular scholars regarding the morality of nuclear weapons and deterrence and considered how nuclear deterrence aligns with Just War doctrine and principles.

David J. Trachtenberg (moderator)
David J. Trachtenberg is Vice President of the National Institute for Public Policy. Previously, he served as Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Policy.

As noted in the invitation to this event, there has been an episodic debate in the United States regarding the morality of nuclear weapons and nuclear deterrence in general. Religious and secular scholars, and church-based studies have reached contrary conclusions on these subjects. This topic received considerable attention during the 1980s but was largely dormant following the Cold War. Yet, with numerous Russian nuclear threats, growing hostility among nuclear-armed great powers, and debate surrounding the U.N. Nuclear Ban Treaty, the morality of nuclear weapons and deterrence has once again become a prominent topic for consideration.

All of our panelists today have commented eloquently on the applicability of Just War doctrine to nuclear weapons and nuclear strategy. Keith Payne has written extensively on the logical nexus between Just War principles and nuclear deterrence.[1] And Rebeccah Heinrichs' new book on the subject, *Duty to Deter*, expertly dissects the arguments against nuclear deterrence raised by both religious and secular leaders who argue that the use or threatened use of nuclear weapons can never adhere to the Just War principles of proportionality, discrimination, and a reasonable chance of success.

As Rebeccah states in her excellent book, "Can the United States maintain a nuclear deterrence posture that credibly meets the deterrence objectives in the modern nuclear threat environment and that is also in accordance with the Just War Doctrine? The answer is a confident yes."[2]

For many people, the issue of nuclear weapons and nuclear war is understandably emotional. Yet emotion is an inadequate substitute for rational, clear-headed thinking on such an important issue. Some religious leaders, disarmament advocates, and others who question the morality of deterrence often cite the potentially devastating consequences of any nuclear weapons use. But understanding the potentially horrific consequences of an event tells us nothing about how to prevent it.

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[1] See, for example, Keith B. Payne, *Chasing a Grand Illusion: Replacing Deterrence With Disarmament* (Fairfax, VA: National Institute Press, 2023).

[2] Rebeccah L. Heinrichs, *Duty to Deter: American Nuclear Deterrence and the Just War Doctrine* (Fairfax, VA: National Institute Press, 2024), p. 34.

Some argue that even limited nuclear weapons use will inevitably lead to escalation that causes massive and disproportionate casualties and the inability to "win" in any meaningful sense. Therefore, they argue, no use of nuclear weapons is consistent with Just War principles and, therefore, they cannot be used. Some argue that even their threatened use violates Just War doctrine.

As one academic argued last week, "One way to ensure that nuclear weapons are never used in battle is to talk honestly about them as the inherently unlawful, indiscriminate and inhumane weapons they are…. the rules on indiscriminate targeting do not just require the use of weapons that can be directed at military objectives only. They also require the use of weapons whose effects can be limited—that is controlled—once they are unleashed. With nuclear weapons, that level of control is simply not possible…."[3]

Much of the academic commentary on the morality of nuclear deterrence assumes that the Just War principle of proportionality cannot be met with nuclear weapons because even their employment in a limited way would automatically lead to escalation, and therefore, there can be no reasonable chance of success. This thinking permeates much of the discussion of this issue, even at the highest levels of government, and is reflected in the oft-repeated statement that, "A nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought."

Yet, if nuclear weapons cannot comply with Just War principles and, therefore, cannot be used or threatened to be used, how is deterrence to be preserved? In an international system that is anarchic and lacks any effective mechanism or global authority to enforce rules of behavior universally and equitably on all states, abandoning the deterrent effect that nuclear weapons provide potentially means increasing the risk of aggression by adversaries, which is likely to cause excessive suffering to innocents, in contravention of Just War doctrine and the Law of Armed Conflict which flows from it. Consequently, nuclear weapons arguably do more to protect the innocent—in accordance with Just War principles—than abandoning them would do.

I would also note that Just War principles reflect a Western way of thinking about warfare based on Judeo-Christian values and a belief that even the most destructive of human activities should be conducted according to a set of rules that places primacy on protecting innocent human life. The fact that others may operate in contravention of these moral strictures does not absolve us of our responsibility to strictly abide by them.

Today's discussion looks at this issue as it applies to nuclear weapons and nuclear deterrence. And I believe our panelists will help sift through the various misperceptions that often seem to dominate the debate over the morality of nuclear deterrence.

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[3] Charli Carpenter, "There's No Such Thing as 'Limited' Nuclear Weapons," *World Politics Review*, October 22, 2024, available at https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/nuclear-weapons-international-law/.

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

Thank you Dave, it's a pleasure to address this subject today with my fellow panelists. The occasional public debate about *the morality* of nuclear deterrence and weapons over the past five decades is a mixed bag. At *every* level, commentaries on this arcane subject often reflect a barely disguised political agenda, or little familiarity with moral analysis, nuclear forces, deterrence policy, or international threats. Readers must carefully distinguish between that which is coherent and informed, and that which is unbalanced political advocacy.

Fortunately, Rebeccah Heinrichs' new book, *Duty to Deter,* has successfully accomplished what fewer than a dozen American scholars have accomplished in the past half century—she has given us a book that reflects understanding of moral analysis, nuclear deterrence policy, and international threats. Rebeccah examines the morality of nuclear deterrence within the framework of the Just War Doctrine and in recognition of the enduring harsh realities of international relations.

The result is a uniquely valuable contemporary moral assessment of nuclear deterrence and possible nuclear employment options.

To appreciate the value of Rebeccah's new book and today's seminar, it is necessary to understand the historic backdrop to this subject, beginning in the 1980s. That decade saw a flowering of commentary by numerous church-based authors and institutions. This commentary received enormous attention at the time, but often demonstrated a woeful lack of familiarity with U.S. deterrence policy or practice, or recognition of the Soviet threat.

The majority of these 1980s works reached one of two conclusions regarding deterrence—both based on the principles of distinction and proportionality, and a presumption of unlimited escalation. These conclusions were directly opposed to long-standing U.S. nuclear deterrence policy. So they got our attention. The first of these conclusions was that neither the *possession nor employment* of nuclear weapons can be deemed morally acceptable, and policies of nuclear deterrence *must be rejected*. I call this the *nuclear pacifist* position. This was the position of the Methodist Bishops' 1986 report on the subject.

The second basic conclusion was that the possession of nuclear weapons *for deterrence purposes is morally acceptable,* pending global nuclear disarmament under a global authority. However, the *actual employment* of nuclear weapons *cannot* be morally acceptable. I call this position *nuclear deterrence by bluff until the impossible happens*. This essentially was the position of the 1983 Catholic Bishops' report on the subject.

In contrast, a minority of the 1980s analyses concluded that U.S. *possession* of nuclear weapons for deterrence purposes and *some* prospective nuclear employment options can be compatible with the Just War Doctrine, including the principles of distinction and proportionality. This argument in support of nuclear deterrence generally came *not* from government or church leaders, but from a handful of prominent scholars of the day, including Colin Gray, Herman Kahn, William O'Brien, and Albert Wohlstetter.

Fashionable moral criticism of U.S. nuclear weapons and deterrence policy came to an end with the close of the Reagan Administration—which gives you a clue as to the political agenda behind much of the criticism in the first place. There was a subsequent, decades-long quiet on the subject. This quiet came to an end when a coalition of activist organizations began lobbying for the United Nations' nuclear ban treaty. The International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, or ICAN, began its expressions of *moral outrage* against nuclear weapons and deterrence. This contemporary advocacy, which is even more banal than much of the 1980s criticism of deterrence, declares nuclear weapons and deterrence to be inherently immoral.

Missing from this contemporary advocacy, of course, is any recognition of the nuclear threats posed by aggressive, authoritarian powers seeking to reorder the world, and the corresponding need for Western nuclear deterrence strategies and weapons. In 2017, the Nobel Prize Committee actually awarded the Peace Prize to ICAN for its credulous expressions of moral outrage on behalf of the nuclear ban treaty.

Geopolitical developments have coincided with ICAN advocacy and contributed to the revival of interest in the moral analysis of nuclear weapons and deterrence. Moscow and North Korea increasingly engage in reckless, explicit nuclear threats and China is expanding its nuclear capabilities at a breathtaking pace, likely for coercive purposes.

In this darkening international context, the public debate about the morality of nuclear weapons and deterrence has resumed. I should note here that, along with Rebeccah's outstanding new book, Brad Roberts has contributed excellent analyses to this resumed public discussion.

As this debate proceeds, it is important to recognize that useful moral analysis on the subject demands an understanding of the international threat context and the stakes at risk: if the grave threats confronting the United States and allies are conveniently *dismissed—or worse, blamed on* the United States—it is a simple matter to conclude that U.S. nuclear weapons and deterrence policies pose *only* deadly risks, and therefore serve no purpose and *cannot be* morally condoned. Presuming the absence of any serious threat often is the idealistic framework for expressions of moral outrage—but never the reality.

Rebeccah's new book rightly acknowledges the risks of nuclear deterrence, but ultimately reaches a conclusion that is contrary to most of the 1980s church-based analyses and to ICAN's moralistic outrage in favor of the contemporary nuclear ban treaty. Her conclusions are: 1) that sustaining nuclear deterrence is Washington's duty and can be done in a morally acceptable way, and 2) for decades, U.S. nuclear policy has been moving in the direction required by the Just War Doctrine as DoD has sought to establish credible deterrence strategies. These conclusions are spot on and in line with the minority of scholars writing in the 1980s; they essentially call out the shallowness of ICAN's contemporary lobbying on behalf of the nuclear ban treaty.

In summary, Rebeccah's new book runs profoundly counter to most of the past and contemporary church-based and secular commentary on the subject. Perhaps most importantly, this timely, thoughtful analysis elaborates *why* those working to *help sustain*

U.S. nuclear deterrence strategies and capabilities can do so *confident* in the moral integrity of their work.

I will conclude on a related personal note: when I give a public presentation along these lines to civic groups, active-duty personnel and veterans inevitably approach me afterwards and say something like, "thanks very much, it's so good to *finally* hear that what I do is alright." Highlighting the fundamental morality of sustaining nuclear deterrence, as Rebeccah's new book does so well, is *much more important* to civilian and military personnel than is suggested by the *limited attention* Uncle Sam devotes to such concerns. People *care very much, and their concerns can be satisfied with honesty and without pretense*. Doing so deserves more DoD and the uniformed services' attention; there is an important lesson here for professional military education.

With that, I thank you for listening; I look forward to the other panelists' remarks.

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Rebeccah L. Heinrichs
Rebeccah L. Heinrichs is Senior Fellow at the Hudson Institute and Director of its Keystone Defense Initiative.

I wrote the book thinking primarily about those who operate the nuclear triad. Why? Because we are so far from the days of the Second World War and the Cold War, and we should not presume that we share the same moral clarity for the mission. Protecting those operators from moral injury is good and protecting them from moral bruising as they carry out the deterrence mission is necessary, because if they have the confidence that what they are doing is right, it will have the effect of bolstering the credibility of the deterrent mission. Those conducting planning, policy, strategy, and carrying out the training, exercises, and operations, should be confident in the mission and willing and able to execute the plan if the nation requires it. Ensuring that those carrying out the deterrence mission do not experience moral bruising helps to prevent moral injury if those operators are one day required to carry out orders to employ a nuclear weapon.

And I also wrote it for the everyday American who is the "lesser magistrate." He should know why the United States has nuclear weapons and how we use them to deter major war and preserve the peace. And he should know that we do it in a way that he can morally defend. Now that the United States is facing two major nuclear powers that are determined to break U.S. alliances and undermine U.S. influence, and must deter both, the American people should be convinced that U.S. nuclear deterrence is necessary and good. It is necessary and good, and the United States must adapt it to meet the changing security environment. New, different, differently postured capabilities, or some combination of the three, may be required. Adapting the deterrent, adding possibly new capabilities, or complementary defenses, will require national leadership, political capital, and money. The American people should know why this is so important to earn their support, especially when there are so many demands on national resources.

Among the several conclusions in the book, I'll list just two.

One, since the Cold War, U.S. efforts to adapt the U.S. deterrent to ensure it remains credible have hewed closer to the principles of the Just War Doctrine (JWD). Credibly deterring adversaries and the principles of the JWD have been reinforcing. A tailored deterrence strategy seeks to hold at risk what the adversary values most and does not intentionally target its civilian and societal populations. Active defenses have also gone through changes and have contributed to deterrence by complicating the adversary's calculations; at the same time, active defenses protect the defender and could, if deployed, defend its innocent societal populations. Indeed, one of the recommendations that I make in the book is to further expand U.S. homeland defense to provide greater protection of the American people from enemy missile threats.

And the second point relates to proportionality. Proportionality is a very commonly misunderstood concept, and we can see how badly people understand it by watching reactions to the Israeli effort to destroy the Iranian proxies that surround it. Proportionality is not "tit for tat." And sometimes escalating is required for a just defender to compel an adversary to back down; that is not necessarily in violation of the JWD principle of proportionality. Proportionality requires an assessment of the possible and even anticipated civilian loss of life measured against the good of destroying an adversary target that will further the objectives of the just military campaign. The JWD is not merely consequentialist—but it must consider the consequences. It also places restrictions on the just defender. It cannot intentionally seek harm to civilians or maximize civilian suffering. It is therefore neither purely consequentialist nor deontologically rigid.

There is much more, and I regret that we don't have more time, but I do look forward to the discussion.

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Marc LiVecche
***Marc LiVecche is the McDonald Distinguished Scholar of Ethics, War, and Public Life at* Providence: A Journal of Christianity and American Foreign Policy *and a non-resident research scholar at the US Naval War College. He is the author of* The Good Kill: Just War and Moral Injury.**

My regard for Rebeccah Heinrichs' fine book begins at the threshold, before even cracking the cover. I note, with great appreciation, a pair of titular assertions that not only link—*re*link really—the concept of deterrence with the tradition of just war but that also establishes deterrence as a *duty.* Given the normative presumptions of just war reasoning, this is morally essential.

Among much else, it reminds us that the just war tradition does not simply commend *restrictions* to the use of force but, under certain conditions, commends the use of force itself. This is to say that just war tradition serves as both a limit and a *spur* to war or, as Heinrichs

reminds us in the case of deterrence, as a spur toward preparing for war in the hope of not actually having to enter it.

The assertion that deterrence is a duty also does remedial service. Much of contemporary just war scholarship—perhaps especially within the theological discourse—is divided over the basic moral presumption that grounds just war. By "presumption" I mean a foundational idea that serves as a basis for generating and judging other ideas and for guiding behavior. The basic presumptions that ground our moral actions carry extraordinary weight as we contemplate what to do in a particular situation, especially in morally complex circumstances in which there appears to be a clash of goods or a conflict of duties. Some insist, as epitomized—and popularized—by the U.S. Catholic Bishops in their 1983 pastoral letter, *The Challenge of Peace,* that just war reasoning begins with a "presumption against war." This has been recast in a variety of ways, including as a "presumption against violence" or a "presumption against harm." According to this logic, the just war tradition's primary function is to identify those rare—and morally catastrophic—exceptions that compel Christians to override fundamental moral obligations.

Particularly relevant to Heinrichs' work, this presumption against war was supercharged by the advent of modern war's heightened destructiveness—including, and especially, the specter of nuclear war, which hung like heavy haze in the Cold War climate in which the Bishops' letter was written. The impact of nuclear weapons on just war reasoning was so significant so that the presumption against war position goes under the sobriquet "modern war—or nuclear—pacifism."

This is *not* the presumption that characterizes the stream of just war reasoning in which Heinrichs stands. As a guide for responsible government, the classic just war tradition provides a moral framework for thinking about the ethics of war that draws upon the intellectual patrimony of the classical and Hebraic traditions. Flowing from its headwaters in Augustinian and Thomistic political thought, the just war framework helps identify both when it is right to fight (*jus ad bellum*) and how to rightly fight the fight that's right to fight (*jus in bello*).

Taken together, these distinct but overlapping *jab* and *jib* criteria counsel both duty and prudence of sovereign authority—that political sovereign, or sovereign body, over whom there is no one greater charged with the care of the political community and on whom rests the responsibility to determine when, in the last resort and with the aim of peace, discriminate and proportionate force is necessary to restore justice through punishing a sufficiently grave evil, taking back something of sufficient worth that has wrongly been taken, or protecting the sufficiently threatened innocent. In such cases, and only such, war may be required to restore order, justice, and, thereby, peace—political goods without which no other good—such as health or life—can long perdure and which together characterize the good society. Within the just war conception of good politics, therefore, a ruler's right to rule is confirmed by his meeting this responsibility to establish and maintain the just order—and therefore the peace—of, first, his own political community and, by extension, to contribute to orderly, just, and peaceful relationships with other political communities.

With these responsibilities in mind, the logic that grounds a sovereign's deliberation about going to war can be understood by comparing it with the deliberation over less contentious questions, such as, say, whether one ought to perform a life-saving medical procedure. Imagine the sad scenario in which a highly capable surgeon is confronted with a child whose injured leg has become severely gangrened and who must now make the decision whether to remove the diseased limb. What kind of presumption would guide the surgeon's decision to proceed with the amputation? Surely not, in the first degree some kind of presumption against surgery but, rather, something like a presumption to recover the health of the child and to save his life. Correlative with this is a corresponding presumption against those things that threaten the child's health and life.

A similar logic guides just war. Focused on the responsibility to respond appropriately to wrongdoing, just war's basic moral motivation is grounded in a presumption *for justice*. The just warrior does not even begin to contemplate the prospect of going to war until and unless there is a sufficiently grave *in*justice already—or imminently—occurring.

Going back to our surgeon, it is only the presence of a sufficiently grave injury presenting a sufficiently grave threat that the benevolent doctor would even consider harming a child by hobbling him. To be sure, the surgeon, in some general sense, begins with something that appears like a presumption against harm. That's to say, he does not walk down the street contemplating lopping off the legs of the children around him and waiting for any excuse to do so. In the same way, just warriors do not think about initiating conflict unilaterally, they only ever permit *responding* to conflict already engaged.

The problem with the presumption against harm logic is that it only works in a world in which the one person I need to be concerned about is me and the preservation of *my* piety. But according to the moral tradition Heinrichs champions—which she identifies as Christian realism—proper responsibility understands that morality isn't only concerned with what I—or "my team"—do but also about how I—or we—react to what others do. My adhering to the presumption against harm might well keep me from deciding, with no provocation, to kick in the face of my neighbor. But it's the presumption for justice that spurs my moral resolve to rescue that neighbor when someone *else* is unjustly kicking in his face.

It seems obvious to me that if one presumption overrules another, then it is that presumption—not the one overruled—that is the primary ground of action. Heinrichs does her readers a tremendous service in reminding them that deterrence is a part of a just war tradition that insists that the duty to protect the innocent, to take back what has been wrongly taken, and to punish evil trumps the duty not to fight. In doing so, she makes us realize that we do not, in fact, have a duty not to harm, *tout court.* Rather, we have a duty not to *unjustly* or *unnecessarily* harm. This is a different thing altogether.

Why is this lengthy disquisition on just war tradition relevant to Heinrichs' book? In part, because one reason Heinrichs wrote *Duty to Deter* is to fortify, as she writes, "the consciences of those policymakers, military strategists, and operators charged with the responsibility to design and carry out plans for deterrence and to protect and prevail in a war if deterrence fails." By grounding her defense of deterrence in the classic just war tradition—and its presumption for justice—Heinrichs gives those responsible for our nuclear triad the

confidence of knowing that the just maintenance and deployment of that triad does not violate duties against harm but instead manifests the duty to champion justice.

This confidence, Heinrichs notes, is important for at least two reasons. First, doubts about the morality of our nuclear arsenal can undermine our ability to successfully deter our adversaries. To be sure, deterrence—essentially the practice of convincing adversaries that you have the capability and will to make your enemy regret aggression by identifying what he loves and credibly threatening to kill it—is, on the surface, an ethically difficult thing to square with our conscience. But, this lack of confidence in whether nuclear deterrence is licit, Heinrichs cautions, risks "conveying a shaky political resolve to adversaries, allies, and the American people." Errors in how we think about deterrence can lead to policymakers making unnecessary concessions in our deterrence posture, thereby inviting aggression from adversary nations who share few of our moral scruples.

Second, moral confidence in our nuclear deterrent is essential in a Western cultural milieu that is increasingly uncertain about the morality of force. This uncertainty is manifest, in part, by the large numbers of psychiatric battle casualties suffered during operations in Iraq and Afghanistan; indeed, which have attended military activity throughout history. Too often, veterans stagger home from battle suffering not necessarily from physical injuries as classically perceived but injured all the same. While Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) has long been recognized as a psychiatric wound among warfighters, there is an increasing recognition that something else is at play as well. Many combat veterans suffer symptoms atypical to their PTSD diagnosis. Many do not present—or do not only present—the paranoia, hyper-vigilance, or other typical responses to life-threat ordeals. Instead—or additionally—they display what is best described as soul wounds: crippling degrees of guilt, shame, sorrow, or remorse. These soul wounds have come to be termed "moral injury," and, by one definition, designate a psychic trauma resulting from doing, allowing to be done, or having done to you something that goes against deeply held normative beliefs.[4] This definition illuminates Vietnam combat veteran Karl Marlantes' observation—in his extraordinary *What It Is Like To Go To War*—that "The violence of combat assaults psyches, confuses ethics, and tests souls. This is not only a result of the violence suffered. It is also a result of the violence inflicted."

If doing something that goes against deeply held normative beliefs leads to moral injury, it should be unsurprising—frankly, even welcomed—that a warfighter would be morally injured following the commitment of an atrocity. This is appropriate, and there are ways to work toward the moral reclamation of that warfighter. However, large numbers of warfighters are suffering from having done the most basic business of war: killing the lawful enemy even under conditions commensurate with the rules of armed conflict and the guidance of moral frameworks such as the just war tradition. Why this a problem is revealed

[4] This definition emerges from two sources, first, and primarily: Brett T. Litz et al., "Moral Injury and Moral Repair in War Veterans: A Preliminary Model and Intervention Strategy," *Clinical Psychology Review* 29, no. 8 (December 2009): 697. It is also the primary definition I use in my *The Good Kill: Just War & Moral Injury.* The critical addition that moral injury can occur from something "done to *you*" comes from the important essay by US Army Europe command chaplain Col. Timothy Mallard in: "The (Twin) Wounds of War," *Providence: A Journal of Christianity & American Foreign Policy,* no. 5 (Fall, 2016).

by clinical studies that identify having killed in combat—no matter the circumstances—to be a chief predictor of moral injury. Moreover, moral injury has proved to be a chief predictor of combat veteran suicide.[5] While other issues such as PTSD, Traumatic Brain Injuries, and increased operational tempos can be contributing factors—not least because that they can wreak havoc on servicemembers' relationships to the very people they most depend on for holistic support and emotional stability—it remains that moral trauma is a major catalyst behind the troubling uptick of warfighters dying by their own hands, casualties of war even after battle has long-ended. Much of the shame that warfighters feel—the doubt they have over whether their martial vocation is morally honorable—is, strictly speaking, entirely unnecessary. Fighting right fights rightly ought not to lead to moral injury because fighting right fights rightly ought not to go against deeply held moral norms. By speaking to the moral probity of deterrence, Heinrichs helps our warfighters square their military service with their moral commitments. She provides them with a kind of Kevlar for their souls.

In each of these ways, *Duty to Deter* serves as both a force protection mechanism as well as a combat multiplier. It puts steel in the spine and conscience of those who work to deter those wars we really hope we do not have to fight as well as in those who will have to fight them if those who mean us harm dash our hopes. Rebeccah Heinrichs has provided a tremendous service to those who serve.

[5] See, for example: Shira Maguen et al., "Killing in Combat May Be Independently Associated with Suicidal Ideation," *Depression & Anxiety (1091-4269)* 29, no. 11 (November 2012): 918, and: Shira Maguen et al., "Veterans' Perspectives on the Psychosocial Impact of Killing in War," *The Counseling Psychologist* 44, no. 7 (2016).

Michael Kimmage, *Collisions: The Origins of the War in Ukraine and the New Global Instability* (Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2024), 296 pages.

In *Collisions: The Origins of the War in Ukraine and the New Global Instability*, Michael Kimmage describes various dynamics that contributed to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, including conflicts between Russia and Ukraine, Russia and Europe, and Russia and the United States. The book does not provide an exhaustive account of Ukraine-Russia relations, rather it offers the author's insights regarding the different dynamics and factors that may have contributed to Vladimir Putin's decision to invade the country twice, in 2014 and 2022. As the author states, the book "is an early draft of the history that will one day be written about the 2022 war, which began in 2014, if not earlier."

The author discusses the Russia-Ukraine war through a prism of conflicts, or collisions. First, and the most obvious one, is a conflict between Ukraine and Russia, a conflict with a long history. The second is a conflict between Russia and Europe, a conflict with a similarly long history, now unfolding in the context of European states supporting Ukraine's pro-Western orientation. The third collision is the resurgent animosity between Russia and the United States. This is a useful analytical framework, which the author uses to familiarize the reader with the most important factors leading to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

The book is divided into three parts, discussing Russia and Ukraine relations within three timeframes: 2008-2013, 2013-2021, and 2021-2023, although some of the information overlaps and the book is occasionally repetitive. Each section highlights Russia's and Ukraine's internal dynamics, major domestic events and their implications for the bilateral relationships, and U.S. foreign policy responses. It also discusses the West's role and intentions in Ukraine's search for, finding, and shaping of its national identity. However, the rather broad discussion occasionally caricatures events and does not provide much analytic depth.

Despite his self-declared desire to provide an objective account of events leading to Russia's full-scale invasion, the author's political leanings shine through in how he presents the material—and which material he leaves out. This political bias distorts the story—and presents a missed opportunity to identify mistakes U.S. administrations made in their relations with Russia and Ukraine.

For example, the author mentions the Obama Administration's "reset" policy in passing as a well-intentioned attempt to get U.S.-Russia relations back on track. Yet, the "reset," coming on the heels of Russia's invasion of Georgia in 2008, contributed to Russia's perception of its own impunity and U.S. weakness, and was a major enabler of Russia's first invasion of Ukraine in 2014. The Trump Administration's comparatively solid Russia policies get little credit whatsoever; rather, the author opts for discussing President Trump's more damaging tendencies, including the volatility he introduced into the U.S. alliance system. Yet, allies have been deserving of some of President Trump's criticism, and his message was not particularly new. Americans have been complaining about European NATO allies not

contributing their fair share to the alliance's collective defense almost since NATO's founding.

Readers unfamiliar with Russia, Ukraine, and U.S. foreign policy vis-à-vis these countries will find *Collisions: The Origins of the War in Ukraine and the New Global Instability* interesting. Those more familiar with the subject matter, however, may be left wondering whether a less partisan account would yield better lessons learned for the future of U.S.-Russia-Ukraine relations.

Reviewed by Michaela Dodge
National Institute for Public Policy

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John J. Sullivan, *Midnight in Moscow: A Memoir from the Front Lines of Russia's War Against the West* (New York, NY: Little Brown and Company, 2024), 388 pages.

Russia's unprovoked and illegal aggression against Ukraine, its increasingly strident nuclear threats against the United States and the West, and its growing collaboration with China, North Korea, and Iran as part of an anti-American entente have strained U.S. relations with the Russian Federation so much that some observers have characterized the bilateral relationship as the worst since the days of the Cuban Missile Crisis. In this deteriorating environment, one of the most difficult and challenging assignments in the U.S. government is serving as Ambassador to Russia.

In *Midnight in Moscow: A Memoir from the Front Lines of Russia's War Against the West*, former Deputy Secretary of State and U.S. Ambassador to Russia John Sullivan provides readers with a front row seat to his experiences on the front lines of dealing with Russia and the frustrations of seeking common ground with an autocratic, hostile adversary purposefully intent on diminishing America's role in global affairs. Sullivan takes the reader on a personal journey from his days in his seventh-floor office at the State Department in Washington to Spaso House, the U.S. Ambassador's residence in Moscow. As a Bostonian of Irish descent and a life-long Boston Bruins fan, he recounts his love of the sport and how he sought to use "hockey diplomacy" to break the ice (no pun intended) in his dealings with ordinary Russians, despite limitations imposed on him by a suspicious and autocratic government.

I encountered Sullivan multiple times in his capacity as Deputy Secretary of State while serving as Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Policy. We engaged in Deputies Committee meetings in the White House Situation Room. We testified together on U.S. counterterrorism efforts in Africa before the House Foreign Affairs Committee in 2017. He is thoughtful, personable, and a consummate professional.

Sullivan's first-person narrative is fascinating and reads at times like a John le Carré novel. It moves along briskly (perhaps aided by the absence of any footnotes or references). After being confirmed as Ambassador to Russia in the Trump Administration, President

Biden asked him to stay on until he retired from government service in 2022. His ability as a diplomat in the hostile capital of a nuclear-armed adversary representing U.S. interests over two different administrations adds credibility to his account. He tells of how he dealt with Russia's human rights violations, in particular, the imprisonment and subsequent death of Putin critic Alexei Navalny and the wrongful detention of Americans; Moscow's cyber warfare, disinformation and information operations; the difficulties of seeking Russian agreement to extend the New START arms control treaty; and Russia's dangerous and unjustified full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Praising the extraordinary work of the professional diplomats serving in Russia, Sullivan describes the difficulties of working with a reduced U.S. embassy staff as a result of Russia's tit-for-tat expulsion of diplomats after the Trump Administration closed the Russian consulate in Seattle and expelled 60 Russian "diplomats" (in reality, intelligence agents) in response to Moscow's brazen 2018 chemical weapons attack in the UK on former Russian military defector Sergei Skripal and his daughter Yulia. He explains the stresses of working in a country where U.S. officials are systematically harassed and constantly under surveillance by the host state, and the difficulties of working to free wrongly imprisoned Americans by a government that does not seek justice but uses imprisoned Americans as bargaining chips to trade for captured Russian intelligence agents and spies.

Sullivan describes his initial meeting with Vladimir Putin as he presented his ambassadorial credentials, perceiving Putin as the personification of the Russian state, similar to the role his Soviet predecessors played. (His description of Putin calls to mind Louis XIV's statement, "L'etat, c'est moi.) He describes Putin, a KGB-trained apparatchik, and the Russian government as an extension of Soviet-style governance, beset by paranoia and intrigue. And he explains how this attitude made working under difficult conditions even worse by the coronavirus pandemic that swept across Russia. Putin, according to Sullivan, is "a very savvy gangster, unbound by facts, law, morals, or truth."

Sullivan also has some unflattering words for both U.S. presidents at whose pleasure he served. He notes that under Trump, the "chaos and unpredictability of the White House remained a vexing problem." He laments Trump's "lack of discipline," writing that "Donald Trump had no interest in the ordinary duties of his office." He notes that Trump "would not or could not draw a distinction between his own interests and those of the country he was leading," calling his diplomatic approach to Putin "misguided" and arguing that it "did not consider the larger strategic interests and values of the United States."

He contends that the Biden Administration in 2021 was so desperate to "stabilize" the U.S. relationship with Russia, that "the planning in Washington for a summit between Biden and Putin was underway long before there was even an agreement" that such a meeting would take place. He also criticizes President Biden for the "slow and erratic pace" of support to Ukraine resulting from "his fear of provoking Putin to widen the war." In Sullivan's view, "That was no way to support a fellow democracy under attack by a much larger, aggressive, authoritarian foe." He is critical of Biden's public statement that suggested a "minor incursion" by Russia into Ukraine would be different than a full-scale invasion, noting, "Not only did it signal a lack of resolve to confront Russian aggression on any level, but it also

called into question our commitment to our principles and values." President Biden's comments that day, according to Sullivan, "further emboldened Putin and undermined Ukrainian morale." And he acknowledges that the "chaotic, deadly, and dishonorable withdrawal from Afghanistan" severely damaged American standing and credibility in the world.

Russia's repeated nuclear threats over Ukraine have become almost a daily staple of Russian diplomacy, which Sullivan experienced repeatedly during his Moscow posting. He notes how "amazed and appalled" he was at "how quickly my Russian interlocutors could invoke the threat of nuclear war—often with just a hint or a suggestion, but occasionally with outright nuclear blackmail—to support their position and hijack a discussion about a subject that had nothing to do with nuclear weapons or war." He attributes this to Russia's attempt "to heighten the sense of crisis and put the United States on its back foot," noting that "the Russians were nonetheless willing to say anything, including invoking nuclear war, to achieve the objectives of the state in the person of Putin." In his second term, President Trump would be well-advised to take note of Sullivan's observations and craft an American strategy that understands Moscow's tactics and does not cede the diplomatic and political initiative to Russia based on its constant threats to escalate a crisis.

Sullivan's recounting of his meetings with Russian officials to discuss serious issues like Ukraine and European security resemble meetings I had with Russian officials two decades earlier to discuss missile defense cooperation after President George W. Bush decided to withdraw the United States from the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty. The Russian side was unwilling to engage in serious discussions and content to read their talking points, asserting they were not authorized to engage in any substantive dialogue. Sullivan's narrative suggests that the old adage rings true: the more things change, the more they stay the same.

The most vexing problem Sullivan had to deal with was the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Russia denied repeatedly that it had any plans to invade, and the U.S. government declassified intelligence indicating such denials were false. Sullivan contends that the declassification of intelligence was an "innovative and effective strategy." Yet, though useful in disrupting some Russian information operations and rallying allied support for Ukraine, it failed to deter Putin from launching the most extensive military operation to change the borders of Europe by force of arms for the first time since World War II.[1] Sullivan details the historical parallels between the crimes committed by Nazi Germany in World War II and the brutal actions of the Russian regime against a democratic Ukraine, including the use of "sham diplomacy for propaganda purposes."

Sullivan concludes that support for the defense of Ukraine is squarely in the U.S. national security interest. He is critical of both the trend in some U.S. quarters toward isolationist tendencies reflected in some of the pronouncements by former President Trump and his

[1] I discuss the failure of this approach in "The Fallacy of 'Deterrence by Detection,'" *Information Series*, No. 562 (Fairfax, VA: National Institute Press, September 11, 2023), available at https://nipp.org/information_series/david-j-trachtenberg-the-fallacy-of-deterrence-by-detection-no-562-september-11-2023/.

congressional supporters and the hesitancy of the Biden Administration in providing the necessary means to allow Ukraine to repel the Russian invaders rapidly and successfully. He argues that an appropriate balance should be struck that allows the United States to give Ukraine the tools it needs (without writing a "blank check" and with "equitable burden-sharing" by NATO) while avoiding direct conflict with Russia. Russia is not just an "adversary" of the United States, he writes, but a "self-declared enemy." He characterizes the Russian government as untrustworthy and contends that Putin will not be diverted from his aggression by Western goodwill gestures. "Trust is impossible," he writes, which suggests the prospects for future agreements with Russia on arms control (or anything else for that matter) are indeed grim. His solution to the dilemma of Russia: the United States must again practice a policy of containment. The implications for U.S. foreign policy and the credibility of U.S. security guarantees to allies of failing to stand up to Putin's aggression, he argues, "would be seismic."

Midnight in Moscow provides an insightful tutorial on the inner workings of the Russian bureaucracy and the mindset of the Russian government as seen by a senior level American official who on a daily basis confronted intransigence, disinformation, and roadblocks to progress in improving the bilateral U.S.-Russia relationship. The reader can find much here reminiscent of Soviet-style behavior. In that respect, Sullivan has done a significant service in exposing the reality behind Moscow's decision-making apparatus and its obsession with seeking unilateral advantage over the United States—including psychological advantage—at every opportunity. As such, the book should be required reading not just for would-be American diplomats, but for anyone seeking to understand the difficulties of dealing with a hostile regime that sees great power competition with the United States as a zero-sum game, compromise and reciprocity as foreign concepts, and cooperation as a sign of weakness.

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Lyle J. Morris and Rakesh Sood, *Understanding China's Perceptions and Strategy Toward Nuclear Weapons: A Case Study Approach* (Washington, D.C.: The Asia Society, September 2024), 41 pages.

Chris Andrews and Justin Anderson, *China's Theater-range, Dual-capable Delivery Systems: Integrated Deterrence and Risk Reduction Approaches to Counter a Growing Threat* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University, August 2024), 16 pages.

David O. Shullman, John Culver, Kitsch Liao, and Samantha Wong, *Adapting US Strategy to Account for China's Transformation into a Peer Nuclear Power* (Washington, D.C.: The Atlantic Council, September 2024), 28 pages.

China's "breathtaking" expansion of its nuclear weapons program over the last several years has prompted the U.S. government to reconsider a number of its prior strategic assumptions and associated requirements.[2] The Defense Threat Reduction Agency's (DTRA) "Strategic Trends Research Initiative" has funded a number of recently published studies on different aspects of China's nuclear breakout, including the three reviewed here. In all, they represent a useful series of studies that examine a range of topics that are all pertinent to U.S. policymakers, including China's: deterrence thresholds, leadership values, missile capabilities, threat perceptions, and more.

The Morris and Sood co-authored report, *Understanding China's Perceptions and Strategy Toward Nuclear Weapons*, uses case studies to examine how Chinese strategists view questions about the use of force, and crisis management, against another nuclear power. Since much of the existing literature draws heavily from an outdated Second Artillery Corps', now the Strategic Rocket Forces, text, the authors supplement this gap in the literature by studying academic and government affiliated historians that have commented on six historical events: the Korean War, First and Second Taiwan Strait Crises, the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Sino-Soviet border clashes of 1969, and the 2020-2021 Sino-Indian border clashes. Morris and Sood seek answers to methodology questions such as: how do Chinese experts characterize nuclear crises? What role did nuclear weapons play in those crises according to Chinese experts? And, what do Chinese experts say are the lessons learned for China from these crises or conflicts?

Their study highlights the lessons Chinese military officials and academics appear to draw from each crisis or conflict, and some lessons are worryingly common, suggesting a trend. For instance, Chinese scholars believe U.S. allied opposition to nuclear employment has prevented such use in multiple conflicts or crises over the decades – given America's large network of allies and partners today, how many expressing concern over U.S. nuclear employment during a crisis might it take for Chinese officials to be persuaded the United States will, once again, back down? Morris and Sood also helpfully explain when the lessons Chinese analysts glean from crises are in tension, or direct contradiction with, China's public nuclear policies and current posture. While the case studies they examined are, by virtue of page limitations on the reports, necessarily short, they admirably convey the relevant nuclear deterrence elements of each crisis and conflict and the lessons Chinese experts appear to be learning from each. It remains an open question whether Chinese military officials, much less the political leaders in charge of such decisions as nuclear employment, share the same opinions as the scholars examined in this report, but their approach provides fascinating insights into at least some corner of the conversation happening in China right now.

The Andrews and Anderson report, *China's Theater-range, Dual-capable Delivery Systems: Integrated Deterrence and Risk Reduction Approaches to Counter a Growing Threat*, focuses

[2] The "breathtaking" descriptor was popularized by then-Commander, 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-challenges-for-us-allies-admiral-says/.

specifically on the growth of China's theater-range dual-capable missiles and the implications for U.S. strategy. These missiles are meant to threaten U.S. military bases and assets across the Pacific Ocean and are integral to China's military theory of victory. The authors examine three questions in this regard: what are the roles of these missiles in China's strategy? How can the United States deter and defeat these threats? What role might risk reduction approaches play in reducing the threat?

Andrews and Anderson provide a succinct explanation of China's military theory of victory, which, in summary, involves building up a preponderance of conventional power in the region, issuing multiple nuclear deterrence threats and associated actions to signal credibility, employing non-military tools such as information campaigns to communicate a greater stake in the conflict, and relying on an anti-access area-denial strategy to defeat U.S. intervention. The authors utilized subject matter expert interviews for their report, but one cause for pause in their analysis is their set of assumptions about how China would employ its theater dual-capable missiles during a conflict with the United States. In a simulated conflict over Taiwan, the authors believe PRC officials would likely follow a graduated set of actions that grow in their escalatory nature roughly in line with how the military conflict is proceeding – a strategy description that appears suspiciously Western, seemingly matching a Schelling-esque conflict-as-bargaining theory. Granted, Chinese strategists are unlikely to ever reveal their order of operations publicly, so a lack of sourcing and educated guesses are simply an occupational hazard. But it is notable that the authors do not mention China's military writings that emphasize the importance of speed, surprise, or seizing the initiative early in a conflict, elements that at least indicate the possibility of bypassing a graduated set of actions for a "shock and awe" campaign early in a conflict.

The authors' recommended U.S. posture changes are well thought out and clearly written. What is most notable, and should be copied by other analysts, is that they link each suggested posture change with a clear set of deterrence messages that are meant to change the cost-benefit analysis of Chinese leaders according to their unique strategic culture. Too often analysts shortcut this process by recommending U.S. posture changes without articulating their deterrence purpose, making them appear to be for simply altering the military balance.

The Shullman, Culver, Liao, and Wong report, *Adapting US Strategy to Account for China's Transformation into a Peer Nuclear Power*, examines a 2032 scenario involving Taiwan. The authors are most interested in China's nuclear thresholds and the leadership decision-making factors that might be at play, plus the implications for the United States. Their first major summary finding is that during a U.S.-China conflict over Taiwan, Chinese leaders could quickly come to believe they face a near-existential threat to their regime if they were to fail in their invasion, which could cause them to employ nuclear weapons first. The second major summary finding is that there is significant potential for U.S. misperceptions regarding China's intent which may cause nuclear escalation.

One of the areas the authors focus their attention on is the split in the U.S. government regarding the creation of operational plans: there are conventional plans and there are nuclear plans, and rarely are the two integrated. Their analysis regarding potential problems resulting from the conventional and nuclear split in developing operational plans is correct

– this split can lead to divergent assumptions and misperceptions without careful integration. The primary problem in this section, and throughout the report generally, is the authors' tendency to assert that there is a problem that must be corrected, rather than *demonstrating* that there is a problem. For instance, the authors state, "US nuclear experts, lacking the necessary appreciation for China's strategic intent and perception of stakes involved in a near-existential crisis that could threaten Xi's regime, are likely to rely on the Cold War era assumption that a hard ceiling and firebreak for nuclear use must exist for China, further exacerbating US misperceptions regarding China's nuclear use." While likely true of some U.S. nuclear experts, this description (which is without citation) gives short shrift to the team of China experts at United States Strategic Command, and those who have worked in government more generally, some of whom have published open-source reports demonstrating their expertise on this topic.[3]

The overstatements continue with the authors' assertion that the United States is likely going to face a choice between conventional victory over China to secure Taiwan or ensuring nuclear deterrence keeps a lid on the conflict – the authors raise the issue of the finite number of bombers and tankers in this regard. While certainly there is tension between conventional and nuclear missions, as with the use of any dual-capable system, it is not self-evident that victory hinges on that particular factor. What is more curious is that even after making this case, the authors do not make a recommendation on the United States altering its nuclear force posture to account for this contingency.

The authors do make a good point, largely unexamined in the existing open literature, that U.S. allies will try to, and likely will, influence the U.S. decision to employ or not employ nuclear weapons. As demonstrated in the Morris and Sood report referenced above, Chinese leaders historically have taken this factor into account. Thus, U.S. officials would do well to plan ahead in this regard and discuss Taiwan scenarios with their allied counterparts in extended deterrence meetings.

DTRA should be commended for funding this series of reports on an important set of inter-related aspects of China's nuclear breakout. There is more work to be done, of course, but analysts are building a greater foundation of knowledge that is key to an improved U.S. deterrence strategy.

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[3] For example, see, Jennifer Bradley, *China's Nuclear Modernization and Expansion: Ways Beijing Could Adapt its Nuclear Policy, Occasional Paper*, Vol. 2, No. 7 (Fairfax, VA: National Institute for Public Policy, July 2022), available at https://nipp.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Vol.-2-No.-7.pdf.; and, Keith B. Payne (Study Director), Matthew R. Costlow, Christopher Ford, David Trachtenberg, and Alexander Vaughan, *Deterring China in the Taiwan Strait*, *Journal of Policy & Strategy*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (Fairfax, VA: National Institute for Public Policy, 2022), available at https://nipp.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Special-Issue-final.pdf.

Congresswoman Jane Harman, Chair and Ambassador Eric Edelman, Vice Chair, *Report of the Commission on the National Defense Strategy*, July 2024, 114 pages.

The congressionally mandated Commission on the National Defense Strategy recently published a report[4] that should be a wake-up call for the U.S. national security establishment. The report notes that the "threats the United States faces are the most serious and most challenging the nation has encountered since 1945 and include the potential for near-term major war."[5] Yet, in many ways, the United States is poorly prepared to face them, starting with an out-of-date force sizing construct and defense budgets that are inadequate to meet objectives set forth by the respective *National Security Strategies* and *National Defense Strategies* of consecutive presidential administrations. Just as problematic is that Congress, which "has become a major impediment to national security,"[6] almost never agrees to pass defense budgets on time, and hence forces the Department of Defense to incur further inefficiencies caused by operating under continuing resolutions.

The report is divided into nine chapters: Introduction; Strategic Environment; Domestic Constraints and Visions of Success; Creating an All Elements of National Power Approach to Defense; Innovation at Department of Defense in Technology, Concepts, and Approaches; Force Sizing, Capabilities, and Posture; The Defense Industrial Base and Defense Production; Personnel and Readiness; and Resources. Each discusses the state of affairs in that particular area of interest, challenges to adapting to new national security realities, and makes recommendations to improve the situation. These recommendations are bipartisan, which makes them that much more worthwhile. They include empowering the Office of the Secretary of Defense and the Joint Staff to cancel programs and "making structural changes and prioritization adjustments to spend national security funds more effectively and more efficiently."[7]

The Commission calls on different parts of the U.S. government to work jointly to utilize all elements of state power. To that end, the Commission proposes that security considerations be included in the work of traditionally non-security departments and agencies (e.g., Department of Education). Even non-defense departments can foster a sense of the importance of public service and make the population healthier, thus expanding the pool of those who would be eligible to serve in the U.S. armed forces. The Commission explicitly discusses "the domestic political climate," which currently "complicates recruitment and distracts from crucial security issues,"[8] the first time ever the domestic polarization issue was highlighted in such a report.

The Commission is also vocal in its warning that the U.S. homeland is vulnerable to an adversarial attack, and that the likelihood that enemies would execute such an attack during

[4] Jane Harman and Eric Edelman, et al., *Commission on the National Defense Strategy*, RAND, July 2024, pp. v-xiii, available at https://www.rand.org/nsrd/projects/NDS-commission.html.

[5] Ibid., p. v.

[6] Ibid., p. 18.

[7] Ibid., p. xii.

[8] Ibid., p. 15.

war is very high. In fact, the Commission points out the failure of U.S. government representatives to effectively communicate to the public why a strong defense is essential and why it is in the people's interest to sufficiently fund it over other priorities.

The Commission's report discusses the importance of the defense industrial base and starkly warns that "U.S. industrial production is grossly inadequate to provide the equipment, technology, and munitions needed today, let alone given the demands of great power conflict."[9] The Commission believes that the issue of rebuilding the defense industrial base requires greater urgency and resources, including fixing the munition shortfall and "reduction (where possible) of barriers to using commercial products and software for defense purposes."[10]

Stating the problem clearly is just one of many excellent contributions of the report, recommending ways to mitigate them is another, no less valuable one. Americans would be well served if the U.S. government heeded the Commission's recommendations.

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[9] Ibid., p. 51.
[10] Ibid., pp. 56-57.

This section brings excerpts from the Center for Strategic and International Studies report *The Russia-Ukraine War: A Study in Analytic Failure* authored by Eliot Cohen, the Arleigh A. Burke Chair in Strategy at the Center for Strategic and International Studies and the Robert E. Osgood Professor at Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS), and Phillips O'Brien, chair of strategic studies and head of the School of International Relations at the University of St Andrews. The report discusses assumptions that shaped initial analysis of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 and analyzes why experts were wrong in their initial assessment of how Russia's invasion will unfold. Also included in this issue are excerpts are from the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs report, *The future of the US nuclear guarantee* authored by Svein Efjestad. The report analyzes changing international security trends and the role of U.S. nuclear guarantees in European security given these trends.

Document No. 1. Eliot A. Cohen and Phillips O'Brien (Foreword by Hew Strachan), "The Russia-Ukraine War: A Study in Analytic Failure," Center for Strategic and International Studies, September 2024, Select Excerpts*

Foreword

Reflections on Analytical Surprise

The Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, was a shock but not a surprise. It was a shock because, in a world where the use of aggressive war has been a contravention of international law since 1945, such action must be viewed as such. It was not a surprise because Western intelligence agencies had detected indications of a possible attack from late 2021, and they had made their conclusions public. They did so in part to deter Russia and in part to build "Western resolve."[1] The intelligence was also passed on to Ukraine, even if many in Kyiv struggled to accept that Russia would actually invade. The real surprise for several commentators and for U.S. intelligence itself was not the invasion but its immediate aftermath. The Russian forces failed to achieve a quick success, and Ukraine, in turn, mounted an effective response.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine was not the first time that both participants in a war and their observers on the sidelines have made the wrong calls. It will probably not be the last, although the purpose of this report is to mitigate that danger in one particular case: a

* Select Excerpts published with permission. The full report is available at https://www.csis.org/analysis/russia-ukraine-war-study-analytic-failure.

[1] David V. Gioe and Michael J. Morell, "Spy and Tell: The Promise and Peril of Disclosing Intelligence for Strategic Advantage," *Foreign Affairs* 103, no. 3 (May/June 2024), 140 and 148, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/spy-and-tell-gioe-morell.

possible clash between the United States and the People's Republic of China in the Pacific. No one example will exactly match any other. However, the quality and quantity of information—much of it not the product of leaks from official agencies but from open sources like Bellingcat—make the overestimation of Russia's capacities and the underestimation of Ukraine's particularly egregious.

The Prussian military thinker Carl von Clausewitz considered that "a great part of the information obtained in war is contradictory, a still greater part is false, and by far the greatest part somewhat doubtful." In Clausewitz's day, most tactical intelligence was collected by cavalry patrols, and much of it was dependent on rumors, often inflated, or on reports from illiterate peasants of doubtful loyalty. Because of the inherent unreliability of the intelligence on which planning and operations were based in the Napoleonic era, he observed, "what a dangerous edifice war is, how easily it may fall to pieces and bury us in its ruins."[2] The advent of wireless, the consequent collection of signals intelligence, the development of aerial reconnaissance, and now the use of drones and satellites for persistent surveillance have all transformed the quantity and quality of information available to commanders. Artificial intelligence and its capacity to handle and interpret big data promise to deliver an era of intelligence-led operations.

Recent experience, however, should warn against hubris. Information superiority has not in itself delivered victory in recent wars, despite its capacity to enable stunning individual successes. In the 1990s, the assumption that dominant battlespace knowledge could allow the United States to dictate the tempo and outcomes of armed conflict was a key feature of the "revolution in military affairs,"[3] but it did not prove of much use in preventing the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the United States or in directing the wars that followed in Iraq and Afghanistan to satisfactory conclusions. It, therefore, behooves states and their organizations to consider why their expectations were not correct and how they might do better next time. For there will be a next time: that is another reason why wars, even if they are shocks, should never be surprises.

The place to begin any such exercise in lesson-learning from the Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, is with those assumptions that are so inherent they are the most likely to be left unquestioned by otherwise well-informed analysts, whether they are from Beltway think tanks or government intelligence agencies. This prologue to the report that follows sets out eight such assumptions, several of which have a resonance that goes beyond the specifics of the Ukraine case. They illustrate how easy it is to take shortcuts in some thinking, not least because ideas are taken from others who are presumed to be experts without critical reflection, or—in the case of the United States' allies—because they accept them from the

[2] Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. O.J. Matthijs Jolles (Washington, D.C.: Infantry Journal Press, 1950), 51.

[3] Bill Owens with Ed Offley, *Lifting the Fog of War* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000) is an example of this sort of thinking; Frederick W. Kagan, *Finding the Target: the Transformation of American Military Policy* (New York: Encounter, 2006) provides a more balanced retrospective view.

United States without giving them context. In some cases, these ideas may indeed be appropriate in Washington, but they may not travel so well to the capitals of the United States' partners.

The first of these assumptions is the short-war illusion. The expectation of an easy Russian victory in February 2022 began here, with the argument that the war would be short. What is a short war? Historians conventionally describe World War I as a long war because it did not end by Christmas 1914. That was the hope of those who were mobilized and taken from their families and peacetime jobs in late July 1914, but it was not the conclusion of many prewar staff planners who had thought more deeply about the issues. When they looked at the dependencies created by alliance structures and the effects of industrialization on war's conduct, they were not convinced that the war could end so quickly.[4]

The popular expectations, and their rapid disappointment, have led many to see World War I as a "long" war, a point that is sustained when one bears in mind that, after the German armistice of November 11, 1918, bitter fighting continued from the Baltic to the Balkans and across the southern arc of the British and French empires until the last peace treaty was signed in 1923. But on one reading, particularly if one takes 1918 as its traditional end point, World War I was not so long, especially in relation to its scale. At just over four years, it was shorter than World War II (1937–45), and much shorter than the Seven Years' War (1756–63), the Thirty Years' War (1618–48), or the Hundred Years' War (1337–1453). It was also shorter than the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The reality in any war—especially after it has started—is that few of its participants can anticipate the war ending tomorrow, but they will still hope that something will happen to end it in the next six months or so, precipitated perhaps by a surprise attack at the front or by a sudden domestic collapse in the enemy's rear. After three or four months of conflict, when the possibility of a quick victory, or its corollary, the danger of quick defeat, has passed, such speculations look to an event out of the ordinary, one that is not on the immediate horizon but could have an instantaneous effect—such as the addition of a major new ally or the collapse of a coalition. World War I and World War II were transformed in 1917 and 1941, respectively, by the former. Both world wars ended with the victors acting with growing coherence while the soon-to-be defeated powers lost whatever unity they possessed and sought separate ways out of the conflict.

The equivalents by the autumn of 2022 were the hopes that Russia's president, Vladimir Putin, was fatally ill or that Russia would, once again, as in 1905 and 1917, respond to war with revolution. When these hopes are regularly postponed, they are abandoned as fantasies,

[4] Stig Förster, "Der deutsche Generalstab und die Illusion des kurzen Krieges, 1871-1914. Metakritik eines Mythos" [The German General Staff and the illusion of the short war, 1871-1914. Metacriticism of a myth], *Militärgeschichtlichen Mitteilungen* [Military History Information] 54 (1995), 61–95; and Hew Strachan, *The First World War: Volume 1: To Arms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 1005–14.

and so the short war expectation becomes a long war in reality. It does so through accumulation: the end never ceases to be somewhere around the next corner. The main point, however, is that neither "short" nor "long" is an adjective endowed with any precision, despite the determination of analysts to use both.

How short or long did analysts think the Russian invasion would be? Three days? Three months? Three years? Any of these would have revealed how devoid of context they were. By February 2022, the war was already into its ninth year and, by most standards, had become a long war even before the Russian invasion. In 2013–14, Ukraine effectively acquiesced in the loss of Crimea and parts of the Donbas. That acquiescence magnified the capabilities of the Russian forces because they were not tested. It locked in the minds of Western observers the apparent threat of "hybrid" war, even if hybrid war was largely fabricated by NATO.[5] It ignored what became, in the jargon, a "frozen conflict"—a misnomer—even a euphemism—given that fighting continued and people were killed. It also led to an underestimation of what Ukraine achieved between 2014 and 2022 as it sought to put its armed forces on a better footing.

Aided by training teams from Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States, Ukraine prepared over eight years for a possible renewal of more active hostilities. From 2014 onward, it enhanced its capacity for national mobilization and popular resistance, prepared plans for territorial defense, and built up both the training and the tactical and operational competence of its battalions and brigades. A striking omission was the failure of those powers charged with advising Ukraine to consolidate the knowledge of its fighting capacity gleaned from their training missions or to integrate the views of those who executed these tasks into any strategic assessments. The reports submitted by the advisers were, at least in the United Kingdom's case, treated as matters of defense engagement and not as an index of the levels of preparedness for the next round of fighting. Effectively, they went into a separate, self-contained file and were not shared at a higher level.

The second assumption that reveals remarkably little about war in reality is that, in order to mount a successful offensive, the attacker requires a 3:1 superiority. Despite its endless repetition, that statement is profoundly misleading.[6] Only very rarely has that margin of superiority been available to any military commander. Unusually, however, the preinvasion analysis of Russia and Ukraine's relative strengths insisted that this was, in fact, the sort of advantage which Russia was alleged to enjoy. As of November 2020, Russia was

[5] Guillaume Lasconjarias and Jeffrey A. Larsen, eds., *NATO's Responses to Hybrid Threats* (Rome: NATO Defense College, 2015); and Chiara Libiseller, "'Hybrid warfare' as an academic fashion," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 46 (2023), 858–80, https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2023.2177987.

[6] The origins of this "rule" are unclear. The online debate suggests that it was a tactical principle for the late nineteenth century Prussian army: see "Force Ratios and the 3:1 Rule Debate," Total War Center, January 15, 2017, https://www.twcenter.net/forums/showthread.php?746807-Force-Ratios-and-the-3-1-Rule-Debate. It seems more likely that it is extrapolated from the calculations of the multiplying effects of smaller margins of superiority in actual combat developed in Frederick W. Lanchester, *Aircraft in Warfare: The Dawn of the Fourth Arm* (London: Constable, 1916).

reported to have 900,000 active-duty troops to Ukraine's 209,000, 2 million reservists to 900,000, and similar ratios in terms of tanks and guns. Its superiority in combat aircraft was even greater.[7]

The reality in most armed forces is that strengths on paper do not convert into actual numbers available for combat. The result, and this was true in February 2022, is that forces are frequently much more evenly balanced and that, if they are not, the inferior force avoids battle and opts for other methods like guerrilla warfare or terrorism. Russia did not manage to create a local superiority of 3:1 and had not even sought to do so. On December 30, 2021, the Financial Times put the total Russian force on the Ukrainian border at 175,000. This was definitely not a 3:1 advantage. Nonetheless, it was enough for some analysts to conclude that "Russia's military superiority would enable it to overrun Ukraine's army in weeks by launching assaults on multiple fronts."[8] That interpretation of Russian intent was right, but it ignored the fact that Russia lacked the manpower to put it into effect.

Third, the assumption about the inherent superiority of Russia was not one just about quantity but also about quality. It reflected a greater faith in the professional soldier than in the conscript or national serviceperson. The Russian forces were portrayed in glowing terms twice over, as professional soldiers and as professionals with extensive combat experience, most recently in Syria.

This calculation rested on three core assumptions. The first was NATO's own rejection of the principles of mass and national service in favor of long-service professionals better adapted for expeditionary warfare than home defense. Even France and Germany, the long-standing exemplars in Europe of the conscript army, went down that route in 1997 and 2011, respectively. The United Kingdom and the United States, territorially more secure because of the sea and with their defenses also underpinned by nuclear deterrence, had done so even earlier, in 1960 and 1973, respectively. Both Russia and Ukraine are continental states with long land frontiers, and neither could afford to make such a choice. Moreover, their immediate western neighbors, the most resilient Eastern European and Scandinavian states—Norway, Sweden, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland—either never abandoned conscription after 1991 or have returned to it since.

Second, Ukraine's own combat experience since 2014 was discounted as somehow insignificant because it had been gained in a "frozen" conflict, not in an active, high-tempo war. The one-sidedness of the estimates of relative quality was striking, not so much for their underestimation of the Ukrainian army as for their almost complete lack of attention to it. As a result—and the third attribute of this third assumption—very little attention was given to

[7] Jonathan Masters and Will Merrow, "How Do the Militaries of Russia and Ukraine Stack Up?," Council on Foreign Relations, February 4, 2022, https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/how-do-militaries-russia-and-ukraine-stack.

[8] Max Seddon, "Air strikes or invasion: what are Putin's military options for Ukraine?," *Financial Times*, December 30, 2021, https://www.ft.com/content/7202f007-d7b1-4830-a816-3b975d722761.

what Ukraine's own professional forces had learned from the continuity and depth of their combat experience over a period of eight years.

Fourth, the prewar assessments were conditioned by the Military Balance, the annual publication of the International Institute for Strategic Studies, which counts the equipment and manpower strengths of each state. A standard reference in the think tank community (for good reason), the Military Balance has encouraged generations of analysts to begin any judgments of capability with crude numbers—a process rarely put to the test in the Cold War because it never became hot. That approach in itself is not unreasonable precisely because it is capable of some form of exactness. But that very feature gives it a dominance that overshadows efforts to assess its less quantifiable aspects—will, morale, and intent. These, too, are part of fighting power and its measurement. For those who forgot that, Ukraine's response since February 24, 2022, has reminded them that all three matter.

Two direct consequences emerged from the prewar estimates as a result. First, insufficient account was taken of the fact that Ukraine's soldiers were defending their homeland and that its people were fighting an existential war for national survival. Debates about the motivators for high morale, which focus, for example, on small-group cohesion, pale into insignificance in comparison with the unifying effects of legitimate and passionate national defense. The surprise—not that it should have been—was the fact that the sum of the state's military capabilities did not represent the full sum of Ukraine's defensive strength. If it were true that the number of professional soldiers married to sophisticated technology invariably trumped motivation and self-belief, the United States might have done better in Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan.

The second and related consequence was the mistake of treating prewar measurements as predictors of wartime applications. States may want to match each other before a war, not least to deter their adversaries from attacking, but during a war, they endeavor to exploit differences to establish a relative advantage. They seek ways to exploit enemy vulnerabilities, not just to match strength with strength. Arms races, peacetime military competition, and the Military Balance focus attention on the latter, but, in doing so, fail to reflect war's realities. After the 9/11 attacks, the United States called its enemies' refusal to pitch like against like "asymmetric" warfare, as though they were somehow behaving unfairly by not meeting it on a level playing field in the sort of battle for which the United States had prepared and so reckoned it would win. But by so derogating asymmetric warfare, the United States failed to take sufficient account not just of the resilience and adaptability of Iraqi militias or the Taliban but, ultimately, also of Ukrainian strength in 2022.

Part and parcel of this approach is a continuing fifth assumption that there is a clear division between the "conventional" operations of "major war" and the insurgent and guerrilla warfare historically associated with "small wars." Russia, an analyst from the Institute for the Study of War commented in January 2022, had created "a large-scale

maneuver army to conduct operations against Ukraine."[9] That military capability had been modernized since 2008 and especially since 2014. However, that analyst and another from the Center for Naval Analyses recognized that if the Russian invasion in February 2022 became a protracted conflict, it would also turn into an insurgency. The war in Ukraine would, therefore, become a quagmire for Russia.

For some commentators, this was the gleam on the horizon. Although Kyiv would fall and Russia would win quickly in the opening conventional phase of the war, a national insurgency would follow. The relative insouciance with which some senior politicians accepted this scenario demonstrated a striking ignorance of what an insurgency would do—and had done very recently in Iraq and Afghanistan. It would have divided the Ukrainian people; it would have broken the state; it would have fostered criminality and corruption, both in part legitimized by their necessary role in funding resistance; and it would have made the transfer to peace and the recovery of national unity even more protracted and complex than the war's current shape—that of an interstate conflict—suggests is likely. This sequencing, conventional success for one side followed by that side's exhaustion and possible defeat in a much messier, protracted war, appealed because it was familiar: it did, of course, mirror the experience of the United States in its post-9/11 wars.

In 2001, the United States, aided by the Northern Alliance, took Kabul in short order, but the war in Afghanistan did not end there. Insurgency followed, and two decades later, in 2021, the United States acknowledged defeat. But the lessons of Afghanistan had not sunk in with everyone, however recent and traumatic they were for many U.S. soldiers. One retired U.S. Army major wrote that if Russia took Kyiv in short order, "At that point you've lost the war. Yes, you may start the greatest insurgency in history. But you've [presumably meaning the Russians] won the war."[10] That is an extraordinary statement. This is not just a point about the inherent strength of an insurgency; it is also a point about the presumed sequence of events in Ukraine. It would begin with a high-tempo operation, as in Afghanistan in 2001–2 and in Iraq in 2003, and then would be followed by an insurgency. There was no allowance for the possibility that Ukraine would plan on incorporating some aspects of insurgent warfare from the outset.

The statement of the retired major was not only revealing for what it assumed about sequencing; it also assumed that the conventional operations of major war and the guerrilla operations of an insurgency were opposites and thus to be seen as alternatives. It ignored the fact that in both the world wars of the twentieth century, as well as in the Napoleonic Wars of the nineteenth century, guerrilla operations and partisan warfare had coexisted with

[9] Paul Sonne, Isabelle Khurshudyan, and Mary Ilyushina, "As it weighs action in Ukraine, Russia showcases its new military power," *Washington Post*, January 26, 2022, https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/russia-miiitary-advances-ukraine/2022/01/26/25f959b0-7ec4-11ec-a844-86749890616a_story.html.

[10] John Spencer in David Petraeus and Andrew Roberts, *Conflict: The Evolution of Warfare from 1945 to Ukraine* (London: William Collins, 2023), 358.

"major war." The standard narratives of all three of Europe's major wars since the French Revolution, by focusing on conventional operations, omitted or marginalized the contributions and roles of insurgencies on multiple fronts. Nor was this neglect necessarily caused by the perception that insurgencies were somehow lesser forms of war, as the term "low-intensity operations" suggested. Frequently, they were not. Popular resistance to enemy occupation elicited brutal responses and indiscriminate violence. There was plenty of firepower-intensive, face-to-face combat in Afghanistan between 2006 and 2014. The division between the two forms of war is an illusion: over the course of a conflict, especially if it is protracted, war changes its shape and can do so many times.

Between 2014 and 2022, Ukraine had prepared the capabilities for a war of national resistance, and it mobilized them on February 24, 2022. The territorial defense units formed in small groups and the non-attributable sabotage teams operating on Russian lines of communication had the potential to enable an insurgency at the same time that Ukraine also fought major conventional operations.[11] It is worth remembering that in 1941–44, Ukraine was a theater of war characterized both by major conventional operations—using armor, artillery, and airpower—and by partisan warfare, sustained and directed from Moscow. The Soviets claimed that 200,000 partisans were organized into 2,145 groups, and at their peak they tied down 424,000 Germans. These figures may be exaggerated, but the SS and the Wehrmacht were provoked into counterinsurgency operations of extraordinary ferocity.[12] The early Cold War texts on the subject stressed how the Soviet Union placed partisan warfare at the center of its thinking about war. Today, Russia, unlike the United States, makes no distinction between major wars and counterinsurgency. War, whether it is waged in Afghanistan, Chechnya, Syria, or Ukraine, is about the use of force.

Sixth was the way in which the issues of terrain and weather and their effects on the conduct of operations were examined. The Military Balance mentality, which looks at capabilities, can tend to neglect geography—broad, deep rivers; boggy ground and swamps; forests; and mountains. These are the principal concerns of field commanders and key elements in the conduct of land operations. In analyzing Ukraine's case, commentators saw its size and strategic depth as a source of weakness for Kyiv. In the words of two analysts,

[11] For accounts of the responses in 2022 available in English, see Andrew Harding, *A Small, Stubborn Town: Life, Death and Defiance in Ukraine* (London: Ithaka, 2023); and Andrey Kurkov, *Diary of an Invasion* (London: Welbeck, 2022), 71–2.

[12] Raymond L. Garthoff, *How Russia Makes War: Soviet Military Doctrine* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1954), 391–409, 408. For other early Cold War writing on the subject, see N. Galay, "The Partisan Forces" in B. H. Liddell Hart. ed., *The Soviet Army* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1956), 153–71; and Valdis Redelis, Partisanenkrieg. *Entstehung und Bekämpfung der Partisanen- und Untergrundbewgung im Mittelabschnitt der Ostfront 1941 bis 1943* [Partisan war. Establishment and combat of the partisan and underground movement in the central section of the Eastern Front 1941 to 1943] (Heidelberg: Scharnhorst Buchkameradschaft, 1958). For a more recent and scholarly account, see Kenneth Slepyan, *Stalin's Guerrillas: Soviet Partisans in World War II* (Lexington, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2006).

"Ukraine is vast, which makes it impractical for the country's inferior force to mount an effective defence against an invasion."[13]

For Russia in 1812 and the Soviet Union in 1941, strategic depth proved to be not a liability but a major defensive asset. In focusing on the problems for Ukraine of its force-to-space ratio, analysts failed to consider the much greater challenges that Russia would face on the same grounds. An army of 175,000 men was simply insufficient for a front of roughly 1,000 kilometers and a depth that was far greater.

In the two world wars, the Pripet (or Pripyat or Pinsk) marshes were studiously avoided by the armies of both sides as unsuitable for the conduct of major war. Straddling the border of Belarus and Ukraine, they create a natural obstacle north of Kyiv, which in itself makes the city's encirclement a daunting task. Some argued that, by attacking in the winter, Russia would be able to maneuver because the ground would be frozen. By late February 2022, however, it was not. Much of the landscape around Kyiv—thick forests in standing water—was unsuitable for mechanized warfare.

The propositions around terrain took another twist. Pundits said that, if Ukraine had to wage guerrilla warfare, it would do so in the cities, and, if it did that, Russia would find its forces sucked into dense urban spaces. They counseled Ukraine against exercising this option: it would endanger the civilian population and cause major damage to the nation's infrastructure. But if Russian columns could not maneuver across open ground because it was too waterlogged and so were instead forced onto the roads, the towns and cities where these lines of communication converged could be fortified as hubs of resistance. Mariupol was the obvious example in 2022: the Stalingrad of the Russo-Ukrainian war. The fighting here, however, was less urban insurgency and more conventional defense—a fight which, once again, made the distinction between the two much more fluid than the prevailing wisdom suggested was likely. In both world wars, attacking armies avoided cities with good reason: generals lose tactical control of their troops and operational designs are hijacked by house-to-house fighting.[14]

Seventh, there is a further point about the importance of territory, which the preinvasion analysis, and much that has been written since, has failed to address. The United States has encouraged Ukraine and its de facto NATO allies to identify this war, as it encouraged Europe to see both world wars, as a war for the defense of democracy and freedom. The "Western allies" clothe war in the vocabulary of the United States' "manifest

[13] Michael Kofman and Jeffrey Edmonds, "Russia's Shock and Awe: Moscow's Use of Overwhelming Force Against Ukraine," *Foreign Affairs*, February 22, 2022, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/ukraine/2022-02-21/russias-shock-and-awe.

[14] Anthony King, *Urban Warfare in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge: Polity, 2021); and see also the graphic account in David Bellavia and John R. Bruning, *House to House: A Soldier's Memoir* (New York: Free Press, 2007).

destiny." Ukraine has colluded in that, not least to ensure its leverage with NATO members, and specifically with Congress in Washington and with the American people as a whole.

Of course, there is an underlying truth in this characterization of the war, but the United States' physical distance from Europe also minimizes the fact that for Russia, as Putin has himself described it, the war in Ukraine is designed to recover a lost empire, while for Ukraine it is a war to reestablish its 1991 frontiers. In other words, the control of territory is as much at the heart of this conflict as is the difference between an autocracy and a liberal and democratic government. In that context, possession is nine-tenths of the law. Ukraine has to fight to regain the land it has lost in order to be in a strong negotiating position when the war ends. Russia only has to hold what it has to have won something. That is why maneuvering, especially withdrawal, is so risky, and why counterattacking to regain what has been lost is so important.

The centrality of territory—with small gains counting as significant victories for Ukraine—feeds a narrative that plays badly in the United States. It smacks of attrition. The need for Ukraine to hold what it has elevates trench warfare. U.S. observers doubted that Ukraine could sustain the operational level of warfare. They saw its army as locked in by tactics and battles characterized by exhaustion and heavy casualties. Hence, the surprise created in September 2022 by the thrust on Kherson and then the switch to the counteroffensive at Kharkiv. Ukraine was not meant to be able to maneuver. The doubters argued that the success was due to Russia's relative lack of numbers in the Kharkiv sector. A very similar set of arguments was run in August–September 2024 when the Ukrainian forces advanced into Russian territory to create the "Kursk pocket." The Ukrainian military had used the best of its brigades against the weakest of Russia's.

That emphasis on territorial control and trench warfare became a recurring part of the narrative as summer turned to autumn in 2022. It evoked frequent, but largely unhelpful, comparisons with World War I, not just from the international press but also from many of those fighting at the front.

The World War I analogy played badly in the United States for three reasons. First, the United States, even more than the United Kingdom, sees World War I as a wasteful war, a conflict into which it was lured by a combination of British propaganda and Wilsonian rhetoric. It ended with a peace settlement that unraveled by the 1930s. By contrast, World War II is the "good" war, even if that narrative rests on retrospective myth-building.

Second, attrition became a taboo word after the war in Vietnam, with maneuver being elevated, especially in the U.S. Army's Field Manual 100-5: Operations (1982), as the virtuous form of war, both more decisive in its effects and less costly in lives. That debate, which presented attrition and maneuver as opposites, rested on a false premise. At the tactical level, fire and movement are not competing alternatives but complementary and mutually

dependent forms of fighting. Troops use fire to create the opportunity to move and to improve their position for firing. Moreover, the supposed antithesis between fire and movement, or between attrition and maneuver, is totally redundant in the air, where platforms do both. So, too, do most of today's land platforms.

Much of the fighting of 2022–23 was characterized as attritional: Mariupol became Ukraine's Stalingrad and Bakhmut its Verdun. Attritional battles make sense where terrain matters and where—as a result—the enemy is prepared to commit its forces to patterns of fighting that exhaust them. Bakhmut became symbolic for Ukraine because of the losses it suffered in its defense, just as Verdun did for France in 1916: "Ils ne passeront pas" [They shall not pass], in the words of the French posters that year. But Bakhmut also had significance for Russia's capacity to maneuver: it sits athwart the junction of several roads running westward. The defense of Stalingrad similarly fulfilled two strategic functions in 1942–43. It was a rallying call for Soviet morale, which, in annihilating Friedrich Paulus's 6th Army, inflicted the most obvious direct losses on Germany's order of battle so far in World War II. The siege also blocked Germany's access to the southeast and the Caucasus.

Attrition is, therefore, a means to an end, at the strategic level to exhaust the enemy and at the tactical to enable maneuver. Too many popular interpretations of World War I, not least those peddled in the United States, fail to observe that that major war ended with the successive surrenders of four powers and allied victory, even if the peace was lost. By the same token, the equivalent narratives of World War II, because victory was more successfully translated into a lasting peace, overlook the importance of attrition on the eastern front in 1941–45, in northwestern Europe in 1944–45, and at sea and in the air throughout the conflict.

The eighth and last set of assumptions about the expectations put in place in advance of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, concern the United States' appetite for mirror-imaging its adversaries and their approach to war. In the eyes of both the United States and NATO, Ukraine, it is important to remember, was a potential ally, not an enemy. Then U.S. president George W. Bush raised the possibility of Ukraine's membership in NATO after Russia's war with Georgia in 2008. The enemy was Russia. For that reason, the United States thereafter focused on Russia's military modernization: its move beyond the "little green men" of 2013–14, its development of advanced technologies, its restructuring of combined-arms armies, and its growing presence beyond its borders—in Belarus and Syria, as well as in Crimea and the Donbas. U.S. military intelligence and U.S. military analysis were focused here and not on Ukraine. It is worth remembering, too, that the United Kingdom's 2021 strategic defense review, "Global Britain in a Competitive Age: the Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign

Policy," named Russia as its principal adversary.[15] Moreover, so focused was NATO on Russia that its attention, and with it the United States', was concentrated on those members of the alliance that looked most vulnerable to Russia—the Baltic states and Poland. In 2016, a RAND study on reinforcing deterrence on Russia's eastern flank war-gamed the defense of the Baltic states, not of Ukraine.[16]

That attention to Russian capabilities focused on two that the United States expected to have an even greater salience in any expansion of the war in Ukraine than they have had. The first was cyber warfare. Before the invasion of February 24, 2022, much of the Western narrative was disproportionately focused here, as though the war might be so restricted to cyberspace that it would replace more traditional and destructive forms of war. It was anticipated that, at the bare minimum, Russia would precede any invasion with a cyberattack. It did, but Ukraine's cyber defenses proved equal to the task. It provided clear evidence of Russia's intent, but it came so late, in the early hours of February 24, that it neither acted as an early warning of Russia's intentions nor formed a dominant image of the invasion itself. More important, however, is that although cyber has been immensely important to both sides since February 2022, it has been as an enabler, not as a weapon of destruction in its own right. Traditional forms of combat have had as high a salience as activity in cyberspace.

The second capability was "shock and awe," the U.S. phrase coined to cover the establishment of rapid dominance over the enemy, especially through air power in the opening stages of a campaign. One of the reasons for the elevation of Russia's military effectiveness was its massive superiority over Ukraine in the air, particularly in manned aircraft: 1,857 combat aircraft to 160.[17] Because it would be unthinkable for a NATO land force to deploy without significant air assets, Ukraine's weakness in this respect promised to become a besetting sin. The prewar commentary emphasized how Russia would—alongside a cyberattack—embark simultaneously on a "shock and awe" campaign directed at Ukrainian cities.[18] An early air offensive would force Ukraine to choose whether to prioritize its ground forces in the field or its civilian air defenses to protect its population. This is not the place, nor would it be right, to play down the impact of Russian aircraft and missile attacks on Ukrainian cities and civilians in 2022. Nonetheless, the point remains that the consequences of Ukraine's inferiority in the air proved far less significant than first feared. The surprising conclusion from the opening year of the war proved to be the reverse of what was anticipated: Ukraine's aerial defenses, especially over its major cities, were strikingly successful, and the numbers

[15] Cabinet Office, "Global Britain in a Competitive Age: the Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy," GOV.UK, March 16, 2021, https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/global-britain-in-a-competitive-age-the-integrated-review-of-security-defence-development-and-foreign-policy.

[16] David A. Shlapak and Michael Johnson, "Reinforcing Deterrence on NATO's Eastern Flank: Wargaming the Defense of the Baltics," RAND Corporation, January 29, 2016, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports?RR2563.html.

[17] Masters and Merrow, "Militaries of Russia and Ukraine."

[18] Sam Cranny-Evans, "The Role of Artillery in the War between Russia and Ukraine," RUSI, February 14, 2022, https://rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/role-artillery-war-between-russia-and-ukraine.

of civilian deaths lower than forecast. It is important to remember that the title "shock and awe" reflected not Russian doctrine but U.S. doctrine. Its use referred not to what might have happened in Ukraine in 2022, so much as what did happen in Iraq in 2003.

"Shock and awe" especially showed how the United States was using mirror images of its adversary to guide its expectations and doing so in preference to sustained analysis of how to avoid or defend against air threats. Moreover, there was a further problem when the United States looked in the mirror. It confused its image of Russia with its image of itself.

During the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, U.S. commentators regularly cited two injunctions from their reading of Clausewitz's On War. The first was Clausewitz's reminder that the principal task of a state embarking on a war is to recognize the sort of war on which it is embarking and not to mistake it for something else. The second, and the one so often quoted that it is frequently identified simply by the adjective "Clausewitzian," is that war is a continuation of policy by other means. It implies that war has utility as an instrument of state power. In the debate surrounding the post–9/11 wars, both aphorisms became accusations. The United States' use of war over the first two decades of the twenty-first century proved an inadequate deliverer of effective outcomes. Neither in Afghanistan nor in Iraq did operations match their objectives. U.S. statesmen overpromised and underdelivered in both countries—and in Afghanistan catastrophically so.

In February 2022, Putin's record in the same period seemed to be the exact opposite. One analyst described Putin as brilliant in his use of war in the pursuit of policy.[19] Putin had come to power on the back of success in the Second Chechen War, so reversing the result of the First Chechen War; he took "southern Ossetia" from Georgia within days in 2008; he intervened in Syria in 2014–15 and shored up Bashar al-Assad's stumbling regime; and in 2013–14, he took Crimea and a large chunk of eastern Ukraine. In this last instance, NATO was deterred from trying to stop him. Putin's calculations seemed to be spot on and, therefore, war delivered on its political objectives. Putin's record in the use of war was more obviously successful than that of any U.S. president since George H. W. Bush in the First Gulf War of 1990–91.

In 2020, another analyst, who served as an adviser to U.S. governments in the post–9/11 wars, spoke of Putin's "undeniable genius."[20] Commentators constructed the successes against Ukraine in 2014 as the work of this genius, embodied in the use of "little green men" in "hybrid warfare" to achieve objectives in ways that made Russia's role deniable. One analyst called this "liminal warfare."[21] One U.S. general, then the Supreme Allied Commander

[19] Kofman as quoted in Seddon, "Air strikes or invasion."

[20] David Kilcullen, *The Dragons and the Snakes: How the Rest Learned to Fight the West* (London: Hurst, 2020), 164.

[21] Ibid.

Europe, described it as "the most amazing information warfare blitzkrieg we have ever seen."[22]

The effects of U.S. failure and Russia's success in the use of force were threefold. First, NATO credited Russia with developing a new form of warfare—"hybrid war" or, in later versions, "gray-zone warfare." Having created this fantasy, NATO turned it against itself and proceeded to doubt its own internal resilience when confronted by Russia. Second, NATO then emphasized Russia's readiness to use force and politicized it to make the case for improving its own conventional defense. The Russian army, which had been discounted as corrupt and inefficient, was seen as having turned a corner, rooting out its problems and embracing reform and modernization. Although real enough, the evidence to support this interpretation was elevated for reasons that had more to do with the domestic politics of NATO member states. Third, the enhanced conventional capability delivered by Russia's military reforms was reinforced by its apparent readiness to use tactical nuclear weapons, which in turn gave Putin escalation dominance before he invaded Ukraine in February 2022. The more nuanced findings of academic scholars working on the Russian military made little impact on these assessments.[23]

In reality, Putin was unlikely to escalate the war in Ukraine to the nuclear level precisely because that could have provoked NATO to intervene. Russia would have lacked the strength to match NATO in a conventional conflict if that happened. The possibility of "vertical escalation" was further reduced by China's warning to Russia that it would not tolerate the use of nuclear weapons, an approach fully consonant with China's own policy of no first use. Nonetheless, Putin's readiness to use force, reinforced by recurrent rhetoric to that effect, so grips Western imaginations—particularly in the upper reaches of the United States government—that the United States has been self-deterred. Consequently, despite being the weaker power, Russia has appeared to enjoy escalation dominance.

War lies in the realm of contingency and uncertainty. Its course fluctuates, and its outcomes are unpredictable.[24] For this reason, among others, the notion of "applied history" can be a false friend when it is used to analyze war and strategy. Some will say, with justification, that some of the predictions made before February 2022 began to look more sure-footed in 2024 as the war progressed through its third year. That may be true, but it still does not indicate

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[22] John Vandiver, "SACEUR: Allies must prepare for Russia 'hybrid war,'" *Stars and Stripes*, September 4, 2014, https://www.stripes.com/migration/saceur-allies-must-prepare-for-russia-hybrid-war-1.301464.

[23] The English-language literature urging caution in the interpretation of Russian military reform published before 2022 was not insignificant. See Ofer Fridman, *Russian 'Hybrid Warfare': Resurgence and Politicisation* (London: Hurst and Co., 2019); Bettina Renz, *Russia's Military Revival* (Cambridge: Polity, 2018); and Oscar Jonsson, *The Russian Understanding of War: Blurring the Lines between War and Peace* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2019).

[24] Bettina Renz's article makes this point to come to different and more forgiving conclusions surrounding the initial failure to read the Russians and the invasion better. Bettina Renz, "Western Estimates of Russian Military Capabilities and the Invasion of Ukraine," *Problems of Post-Communism* 71, no. 3 (2024), 219–31, https://doi.org/10.1080/10758216.2023.2253359.

how the war will end. At what proved to be the midpoints of the two world wars, in 1916 and 1941, the eventual victors were on the ropes as plans miscarried and losses mounted. What matters to this analysis is that critical early failings based on false assumptions can tend to have longer-term consequences than missteps later.

Opportunities to avoid the descent into war or to act preemptively could have forestalled war or ended it with the rapidity that gave rise to the short-war expectation in the first place. The result of flawed assessments before February 2022 wrong-footed the United States and its NATO allies and has left them struggling to catch up. The claim that they have been behind the curve of events in their support of Ukraine has persisted. Moreover, if the signals had been better read in advance, going back not just to late 2021 but instead to 2013, Ukraine's supporters might have read them better, enabling an earlier resolution to the war or—even better—deterring the invasion in the first place. Applied history may not work, but that is not a reason for failing to consider the reasons for failure and for not endeavoring to do better next time by learning from experience.

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Why the Analytic Failure?

Analytic error of some kind is inevitable. But in the case of the Russia-Ukraine military analysis, the errors (a) were well beyond the normal failures expected in any intellectual project, (b) had potentially consequential policy implications, and (c) were not, in most cases, mitigated by any noticeable analytic humility or caution on the part of those committing them. It is also striking that the analysts who were most egregiously wrong in their assessments remained prominent and influential despite these errors.

As erring forecasters often do, the analysts resorted to classic explanations that seemingly obviate the need for searching self-criticism. The guide to such self-exculpation is Philip Tetlock's *Expert Political Judgment*, a powerful study of expert error. The book is particularly interesting in this case because it illuminates some of the retrospective justifications for error. Many of these have indeed been brought to bear in the Russia-Ukraine military analysis problem and take the form of what Tetlock refers to as "belief system defenses," which, as he puts it, "reneg[e] on reputational bets."[25] Of those he lists, the ones most germane to the failures described here are as follows.

[25] Philip E. Tetlock, *Expert Political Judgment: How Good Is It? How Can We Know?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005). See in particular chapter 4, "Honoring Reputational Bets" (129–43), from which most of what follows is derived.

The Exogenous Shock Defense

The exogenous shock defense is the proposition that while the core prediction was correct and solidly based, an unforeseeable event undermined it by deranging the prognosticators' calculations. In the current case, that exogenous shock would be the exquisite degree of warning that the United States provided the world and Ukrainian leadership about the impending attack. This defense may also include the supposition that U.S. and other friendly intelligence agencies provided Ukraine with the details of the Russian plan, allowing them to make essential tactical adjustments (e.g., dispersing aircraft). As a result, Western intelligence stymied the invasion by mitigating Russia's overwhelming advantages.

This defense falls apart, however, given the open menace that President Putin had presented Ukraine in the preceding year, which the Ukrainian military seems to have taken seriously. The Ukrainian government, by contrast, refrained from publicly predicting and preparing for the massive assault for a variety of reasons, including a hope to avert it. Moreover, the Russian army did achieve local successes, particularly in the south, against Ukrainian forces that seem to have been surprised by the attack. None of this would explain the Ukrainian military's tactical effectiveness, innovation, and successful counterattacks around Kyiv and Kharkiv. In any case, even though Western agencies were providing detailed information about the Russian buildup well before February 22, the expert community did not modify its predictions accordingly.

The Close-Call Counterfactual Defense ("I Was Almost Right")

This argument has had a good deal of play because of the close-run defense of Hostomel Airport outside Kyiv. On February 24, Russian airborne troops launched an attack on the airport, less than 10 kilometers from Kyiv. They were held back for a day, in part by Ukrainian national guardsmen, the latter of whom were subsequently reinforced by regular units. Although Russian mechanized units and airborne forces took Hostomel a day later, the airport had been damaged, and the delays, analysts argued, prevented Russian columns from suddenly dashing into Kyiv proper, which might have toppled the Zelensky administration overnight.[26]

But was it fortuitous that Ukrainian mechanized units were available to defend the airport? And for that matter, even if the Russian forces had taken Hostomel on the first day, is it right to assume that a Russian column charging into a dense, hostile urban area like Kyiv, filled with armed civilians and light infantry, would have done better than their counterparts in, say, the city of Mariupol in the south? Other similar "for want of a horseshoe nail" arguments include the possibility of President Zelensky being killed on the first night of the war—but it was not for want of trying by Russian secret services, nor was it a coincidence that the president, well protected by his own efficient bodyguards and secret services, was not killed.

[26] The Wikipedia entry on the Battle of Hostomel provides a good set of links to some of these contentions. Wikipedia, "Battle of Antonov Airport," accessed February 15, 2024, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Antonov_Airport.

Moreover, such arguments can play in the opposite direction: Suppose Putin had a fatal heart attack on February 21. Suppose even more Ukrainian forces had deployed to Hostomel, north of Kyiv, and so on. The analysts were not nearly right; they were simply wrong.

The "Politics Is Hopelessly Cloudlike" and "The Low-Probability Outcome Just Happened to Happen" Defenses

The "Politics Is Hopelessly Cloudlike" and "The Low-Probability Outcome Just Happened to Happen" defenses are two versions of an argument common to defenses of poor predictions of military outcomes. War is an intrinsically uncertain affair, as every theorist notes; no prediction can claim complete accuracy, and a variety of outcomes are always possible. The problem with either version as applied to the analysis of the Russian and Ukrainian militaries before the war is that a serious belief in the unpredictability of war should have moderated analysts' certainty. As demonstrated, it did not. Instead, analysts depicted war as a large engineering operation in which all the heavy equipment and logistical planning argued overwhelmingly for the success of the aggressor nation. There was no more uncertainty in the prediction than there would have been about the completion of a major construction project, which, after all, has a set of uncertainties associated with it—though nothing like those of war.

The "I Made the Right Mistake" Defense

The final justification for analytic failure is that the Russian forces should have accomplished everything that they planned but were thwarted by the unpredictable and foolish intervention of President Putin and his advisers from the Federal Security Service (FSB).[27] In this version, the Russian general staff had the right ideas and the requisite organizations, doctrine, and technology at their disposal but were undermined by the meddling of an ignorant civilian leader and his incompetent intelligence services. The original Russian plan would have involved fewer axes of advance (three rather than five) and would have had more regard for Ukrainian capabilities, some have suggested. In this view, the president, encouraged by FSB advisers who convinced him that Ukraine was ripe for the plucking and that resistance would be minimal, interfered with a competent general staff that would otherwise have conducted the operation with the results the Western analysts expected.

The difficulty here is that early Russian failures were multidimensional, and many had little to do with Putin or the FSB. The logistical challenges and the organization and tactics that left Russian armored columns exposed to light infantry ambushes would all have remained the same. There is no evidence of general staff pushback against the simultaneous attack on multiple vectors or apprehension about it; indeed, the idea of such an attack presenting too many challenges for the Ukrainian military to cope with had a certain plausibility to it. It would be closer to the mark to say that the general staff made its own set of mistakes. The "civilian meddling and incompetence" explanation for the outcome, and hence for the

[27] A senior military officer made this argument to Eliot A. Cohen in the spring of 2023.

analytic failure, is in some ways the most interesting. It represents a seemingly subconscious desire to make the Russian military out to be more formidable than it actually was—perhaps not implausible for those who had devoted their careers to studying it.

Conclusion: Remedies

The analytic failure at the outset of the war rippled beyond the conflict. The initial estimates seem to have influenced the tentativeness with which the West armed Ukraine, holding back on advanced weapons systems in part based on the argument that the primitive Ukrainian military could not operate them successfully. Pessimism about Ukrainian chances, hesitation about reinforcing Ukrainian successes, and difficulty in seeing Russia's true weaknesses were all hangovers from the initial failure, even though many analysts eventually adjusted to the reality of the situation.

The broader implications of the failure are even more important. It is striking how small the analytic community was that made the judgments that shaped public perceptions and, in some measure, government policy. These individuals, for the most part, had similar backgrounds—degrees in political science and experience almost exclusively in think tanks, along with occasional stints in the intelligence community. They were not historians and certainly not military historians. Few had field experience as soldiers. They were overwhelmingly "Russia military analysts" by trade and not experts on Ukraine, often accepting, at a tacit level, deep-seated Russian views about the unreality of Ukrainian nationhood. Their internal system was mutually supportive. They constantly approved citations of one another's work and treated both the underlying uncertainty and commentary of those outside the community with a degree of disdain.

This was a recipe for what the pioneering social psychologist Irving L. Janis referred to as groupthink.[28] Indeed, the analytic community exhibited many of the characteristics Janis noted: underestimation of the group's susceptibility to error, stereotyped views, self-censorship of dissent and commitment to unanimity, and even "self-appointed mindguards" who enforced orthodoxy.[29]

How did this happen? Analysis of the Russian military was a major intellectual field during the Cold War, but it shrank after the war's end and the emergence of new threats in the form of radical Islam and China. The result was a small community dependent on mutual support, operating in the research institution environment. The latter point is important. Academic disciplines, despite all their faults, promote (at least in theory) sharp debates and disagreement, and professors are usually rewarded for challenging and displacing

[28] See Irving L. Janis, *Groupthink: Psychological Studies of Policy Decisions and Fiascos*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1982).

[29] Ibid., 174–75.

conventional wisdom rather than elaborating it. Academics can also switch fields of specialization, which can bring in new perspectives.

This is much less the case in research institutions, particularly in small areas where patronage by leading figures is necessary for career advancement. In the case of government-funded research—much of it coming from the U.S. Department of Defense, with its vested interests—in the decades before the war there was considerable disincentive to underplay Russian capabilities. Moreover, the initial failures of Russian operations in the opening phases of the war did not change matters much. If anything, the pathologies were reinforced during crisis and ensuing wars as the small group of acknowledged experts became media stars, repeatedly interviewed and quoted in major outlets, on social media, and even by government officials.

The analysts discussed here did not exhibit moral turpitude, much less stupidity or willful blindness. They were the product of their incentive systems and the intellectual structures that produced them. But the failure is a warning because it can and will happen again in other cases—possibly more consequentially. Luckily, however, potential remedies are available to governments, journalists, and research organizations.

BRING IN THE GENERALISTS

A self-conscious effort by journalists and government consumers of military analysis to critique expert conclusions is a good idea. In the present case, military officers, historians, and Ukraine experts might all have offered useful counters to the analytic orthodoxy. Indeed, research institutions could make contributions in this area by convening reviews of expert consensus in military analysis.

BRING IN DIFFERENT KINDS OF SPECIALISTS

Some of the commentators who were most optimistic about Ukraine's chances came from the ranks of soldiers, particularly those who had served in advisory and training roles in Ukraine since 2014.[30] Diverse intellectual and professional backgrounds might well have changed the weight of expectation.

MAINTAIN ACCOUNTABILITY

Outsiders need to keep book—not with the purpose of banishing or blacklisting analysts but confronting them with their errors and putting them in a position to reflect on why the errors were made. Unfortunately, there are few professional incentives to do this work, reflecting a larger problem in the social sciences, such as the "replication crisis" in psychology and many other disciplines.[31]

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[30] Lieutenant generals Ben Hodges and Mark Hertling were considerably more optimistic than most of the analytic community.

[31] For a thoughtful discussion of this problem, see Stuart Ritchie, *Science Fictions: How Fraud, Bias, Negligence, and Hype Undermine the Search for Truth* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2020).

BROADEN THE EDUCATION OF ANALYSTS

Social sciences and humanities bring different qualities to analysis. Political science and sociology have their strong points, but so does history, which would have been particularly useful in this case. The sensibility of historians—their alertness to contingency, nuance, culture, personality, and much else—differs from that of political scientists. Students of the history of war, in particular, have a much better visceral feel for the imponderables than social scientists usually do. This is, of course, even more true of well-educated soldiers.

ENCOURAGE A CULTURE OF DEBATE

Consensus on analytic forecasts is perilous, as students of intelligence failure have long noted. The problem with the usual solution—an in-house contrarian of some kind—is that it runs the risk of being formulaic. Analysts need venues and incentives to disagree with one another without fearing professional consequences, either for their reputation as oracles or due to retaliation from leaders in the field.

The authors again stress that they do not find deliberate dishonesty or manipulation, much less simplemindedness or stupidity, in the poor analysis of the Russian and Ukrainian militaries before the war. Rather, the structure of the analytic community—its incentive structures and educational formation—makes the failure understandable, if no less disturbing. The authors' concern is that in an era of severe military conflict, this is highly unlikely to be a one-off case, with quite possibly more cases to come. In such cases, consensus and certainty are not only intellectually problematic, but they are also downright dangerous. Consumers of such analysis, as well as those who produce it, must act to prevent another such failure.

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Document No. 2 Svein Efjestad, "The future of the US nuclear guarantee," *Norwegian Institute of International Affairs*, September 2024, Select Excerpts.*

[…]

Introduction

The full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022 ushered in a new era in European security. The return of expansionist war, large-scale atrocities, and overt nuclear signaling by Russia has plunged relations between Russia and the West to depths not seen

* Select Excerpts published with permission. The full report is available at https://www.nupi.no/content/pdf_preview/29151/file/NUPI_Report_9_2024_Efjestad.pdf?mc_cid=eace07fcc0&mc_eid=6a56106a20.

since the height of the Cold War, with no prospects for normalization apparent. As European powers scramble to re-establish credible conventional forces, the region remains overdependent on US extended deterrence,[32] both conventional and nuclear. At the same time, Washington faces a bloc of autocratic states set on challenging US power all along the Eurasian perimeter.[33] While Russia has become increasingly isolated economically and politically from the West, it has turned to China, Iran, and North Korea for diplomatic and material support. At the same time, the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) remains the world's largest military force and continues to expand and modernize its capabilities, including its nuclear forces.[34] The modernization of the PLA has reinforced the threat against Taiwan, the US, and its allies and partners in the region.[35] Adding to the demand for US political and military support, North Korea has acquired a considerable nuclear inventory and developed a diverse array of capable nuclear delivery systems. Iran continues to develop and deploy long-range missiles that could potentially serve dual-use roles, and maintains a nuclear breakout capability, including steadily increasing stockpiles of highly enriched uranium.

The US remains Europe's principal security guarantor, providing extended deterrence for all NATO members ultimately based on a diverse and capable inventory of nuclear and conventional forces. […]

US nuclear forces require substantial modernization in the coming years while NATO's nuclear policy and posture remain largely shaped by the benign security situation that emerged in Europe after the end of the Cold War. […] Notably, the US withdrew all non-strategic nuclear weapons from Europe, except for a small number of free-fall nuclear bombs which now constitute the entire arsenal included in the nuclear sharing arrangement. While Russia has re-introduced dual-capable medium-range land-based missiles to its arsenal, Chinese and North Korean nuclear expansion is also placing increased demand on US nuclear deterrence in the Indo-Pacific region.

What sets the US apart from all its competitors is its vast network of qualified and reliable allies and partners in Europe and Asia. NATO's new deterrence and defense policy includes regional operational plans, reinforcement planning, and a more ambitious force posture. The US has a decisive role in this policy, and has strengthened its force posture in Europe. The US has also strengthened its cooperation with allies and partners in Asia as a response to the Chinese military build-up in the region. Nonetheless, the partnerships with the UK and France are particularly important in nuclear affairs, as is the cooperation with NATO and

[32] Max Bergmann (2024) 'A More European NATO'. Foreign Affairs, 21 March.

[33] Hal Brands (2024) 'The New Autocratic Alliances'. Foreign Affairs, 29 March.

[34] The Military Balance (2023), International Institute for Strategic Studies ch. 6.

[35] Ragnhild E. Siedler et al (2024), Wargaming Taiwan 2027, Norwegian Defense Research Establishment No. 251.

particularly those states in Europe which host US nuclear weapons on their soil (presumably Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, Italy, and Türkiye). […]

What has received less attention is the development of the US extended deterrence policy in the region, and in particular how it ties into overall US strategy and global commitments. Ongoing developments in US nuclear policy and posture have important implications for European security. This includes both the modernization of US nuclear weapons in Europe and the modernization of all legs of the US strategic triad. Improvements in other US military capabilities are also highly relevant for European security. While US air, land, and maritime forces continue to play a crucial role in European security, advances in US ballistic missile defense (BMD) and conventional long-range precision strike capabilities also have fundamental implications for strategic stability and security in Europe. […]

Background: NATO, extended deterrence, and nuclear weapons

NATO's nuclear policy has undoubtedly also contributed to reducing the number of nuclear powers in the West and probably also in Asia. As such, extended nuclear deterrence is also an effective non-proliferation mechanism. But to make extended deterrence credible, this policy need[s] to be supported by modern and effective capabilities, visible exercises, and a strong political solidarity expressed and confirmed at the highest political level. […]

New relevance: Russian aggression in Ukraine; China and Taiwan

[…] While it is impossible to establish any causal link between the Budapest memorandum and the 2014/2022 invasions, the outcome could potentially reinforce the desire of threshold states to acquire nuclear weapons. […]

Unofficial statements have suggested that Western countries could engage directly in combat operations against Russia with conventional weapons if Russia chose to use nuclear weapons. This could lead to a total collapse of Russian conventional forces, and must be seen as a more realistic and likely response than retaliation with nuclear weapons. A scenario like this could, however, easily lead to a widespread international war which again could escalate into nuclear warfare.

The fact that most observers and officials do not believe that Russia would use nuclear weapons in Ukraine could also be seen as an indication that nuclear forces have become less relevant. However, the unwillingness of NATO countries to engage directly in the defense of Ukraine must be seen in light of the nuclear capabilities of Russia. The debate about allowing Ukraine to use weapons received from the West to attack targets on Russian soil is taking place in the shadow of Russian nuclear saber rattling. Long-range precision guided missiles with conventional munitions could be decisive for the outcome of the war. The United States has already deployed such land-based intermediate range missiles in Asia. The demise of the

INF Treaty makes production and deployment of such weapons more attractive also for European states. […]

Russia has a range of nuclear options available. They could resume live testing at their testing range in Novaja Zemlya they could choose a demonstrative use without any tangible effect on the battlefield. Limited battlefield use would send a very strong signal. However, it is still very unlikely that Russia would use nuclear weapons. […]

It seems unlikely that the Western nuclear powers would respond to such scenarios with nuclear weapons. It would be very risky, as it might lead to further escalation once the nuclear threshold has been crossed, and it could cause division and controversy among Western states. Western unity and a resolute response would be essential to deter the opponent and to signal that a nuclear exchange limited to Europe would be totally unacceptable.

Adversaries' expanding and improving capabilities

[…] Russia's conventional strength will suffer for many years to come, whatever the outcome of the war in Ukraine. Economic and demographic decline will have an impact on the Russian armed forces. This makes it more likely that the Kremlin will rely more on its nuclear forces. […]

US nuclear policy and posture

[…] US policymakers are facing significant challenges in developing and maintaining a nuclear posture and policy to effectively deter all the country's potential adversaries and extend credible deterrence to reassure its allies.[36] […]

The total modernization package of the nuclear forces will probably cost approximately $1.5 trillion. It is questionable whether that much money will be made available for this purpose. It is not only a question of financing and priorities. Critics argue that the US cannot and should not carry this enormous burden on behalf of the free world, and there is also political and moral opposition to the current concept of nuclear deterrence. […]

Coordinated response to threats and challenges by the US and its Allies are thus a requirement for effective deterrence.

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[36] Brad Roberts, 'The Next Chapter in US Nuclear Policy' (2024), The Washington Quarterly, Summer. House Armed Services Committee, "America's Strategic Posture, the Final Report of the Congressional Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States," October 2023, 5, 3, https://armedservices.house.gov/sites/republicans.armedservices.house.gov/files/Strategic-Posture-Committee-Report-Final.pdf.

The US will soon face two adversaries with extensive nuclear arsenals: Russia and China. The policy and posture must be designed so that both of these countries will be deterred, which is very demanding. The proliferation of nuclear weapons to new states is also a complicating factor. North Korea's nuclear capability, and the possibility that Iran may acquire nuclear weapons, are particularly worrisome. In light of thes[e] developments there is also a risk that US allies develop an independent nuclear deterrent.

The US needs a robust nuclear posture in order to maintain its security interests and support its Allies. The current plans seem adequate in terms of numbers and categories although there could be a case for reintroducing nuclear tipped Sea Launched Cruise Missiles. This could add to the credibility of the US deterrent. A complicated issue is the survivability and effectiveness of the nuclear force in a hostile situation. The dependence on space-based systems for navigation and intelligence is an obvious vulnerability. Missile defense could complicate the planning and execution of a nuclear attack on the US but could not provide an effective defense against a peer adversary. And while the submarine-based force is still considered highly survivable, new developments in autonomous and space technologies might change this in the longer term.

Despite these challenges, the future US posture consisting of ICBMs, SLBMs and strategic air forces, in addition to a smaller number of free-fall nuclear bombs on US and Allied multirole fighters, should suffice to stop any rational state from contemplating a nuclear attack on the US. Any employment against US Allies carries with it a substantial risk for a comprehensive conventional or nuclear response, which in turn could trigger an extensive nuclear war. Effective deterrence depends on the mindset and rationale that the employment of nuclear forces carries with it a far greater risk and burden than any conceivable gain.

Nuclear policy and posture in Europe

No states can launch an attack on NATO countries knowing that a nuclear response is out of the question. […] The forward deployment of nuclear weapons contributes to deterrence primarily by providing a linkage to the strategic nuclear forces. […] However, should deterrence fail, and nuclear forces are used against Western targets, this will fundamentally change the nature of the conflict. The old question of whether the United States would risk a response on its own territory remains. […]

Any use of nuclear weapons is a strategic issue. The distinction between tactical and strategic weapons originates from a time when the world political situation was totally different and arms control agreements required distinguishing between different classes of weapons. […]

The importance of European-based nuclear weapons is political in nature. Their military utility and relevance is less important. […] It is still important to demonstrate solidarity and agreement on the role of nuclear weapons in Europe. The public strategic concepts and

summit declarations serve this purpose. It is also important that as many member states as possible participate in planning through the Nuclear Planning Group, in procedural exercises, and by giving support to those states which provide aircraft for the nuclear role in Europe. Other kinds of support for nuclear operations in terms of providing escort, intelligence, electronic warfare, refueling, and SNOWCAT are also important.

There are those who argue that deployment of nuclear forces on the territory of new members will strengthen deterrence. […] But it could also be argued that such deployments will increase tension in Europe without improving the Western position. Such a basing arrangement would also be in violation of the NATO-Russia Founding Act of 1997, which is still in effect although Russia has violated the agreement. There is also the danger that Western opinion would be even more negative to NATO's deterrence policy if Western moves were seen to be provocative.

None of the Nordic states have indicated support for the permanent deployment of nuclear forces on their territories in peacetime. […] Upon entering NATO, Sweden and Finland have not declared any similar reservations regarding nuclear weapons, but there are no indications that they wish to host nuclear weapons on their territory in peacetime. Most likely therefore, all Nordic countries will probably end up with very similar nuclear weapons policies. There is, however, the question of the extent to which Nordic countries will provide support to nuclear operations through the SNOWCAT concept. […] Perhaps the Nordic countries could also coordinate their nuclear policies through the Nordic Defense Cooperation (NORDEFCO) – for instance by common support for the nuclear modernization underway in the Alliance. However, skeptisism regarding NATO's nuclear policy exists in all Nordic countries. In Norway, this is reflected in the fact that the Norwegian Pension Fund Global is prohibited from investing in all companies involved in nuclear weapons programs, despite the fact that all Norwegian governments have supported NATO's nuclear policies. After some hesitation, Sweden decided not to support the Treaty on the prohibition of nuclear weapons. Norway has decided to be an observer to the meetings in the treaty body, but has declared it will not sign the treaty.

Should extended deterrence lose its credibility, there could be a danger that some European nations will develop their own independent nuclear capability. […] Moving US warheads closer to the East-West divide is a more probable development. Such deployment could enhance the deterrent, but deployment close to Russia could also increase the vulnerability of the nuclear weapons during hostilities.

During the Cold War, NATO might have felt compelled to resort to nuclear weapons by deliberate escalation in order to avoid military defeat. In the future, NATO and the West will be in a much better situation regarding the balance of conventional forces. Given the state of Russian capabilities, NATO should be able to deter by denial and thus not face the dilemma of deliberate nuclear escalation. European Allies must make a more fair and stronger

contribution to the collective defense to achieve this. Current plans indicate that European Allies will strengthen their defense forces substantially.

Future US extended deterrence and Europe

Politicians and experts need to communicate the implications of extended nuclear deterrence. Transatlantic cohesion is based on extended deterrence, and this is underlined in NATO's strategic concept and thus agreed by all member states. However, despite the fact that this is the backbone of deterrence, there is not much evidence that this – and the political and economic burden that the United States carries – is understood and valued by European Allies. […]

The political climate in the United States is becoming more and more dysfunctional. Major changes in US policies, notably a new administration and a higher priority given to Asia, might weaken US involvement in, and support for, security in Europe. This could also have implications for the credibility of the extended deterrence policy of the United States.

The modernization of the strategic forces of the United States is a huge endeavor. The cost of the proposed modernization is enormous, and the political support for the US nuclear umbrella is challenged both from the radical circles in the Democratic party and from right wing Republicans. US federal debt is high and increasing. These facts underline the need for a new burden-sharing between the US and its NATO Allies.

In this situation, it is important that European Allies give full support to the US efforts to maintain a credible and effective nuclear posture. The strategic modernization and the maintenance of the sub-strategic nuclear forces in Europe are necessary elements in a strategy of integrated deterrence. Furthermore, Europeans must contribute more significantly to collective defense. By creating a solid conventional defense, NATO can establish a more credible deterrence based on denial, which is necessary in order to avoid undue reliance on nuclear forces by deliberate escalation. Such an option seem more and more unacceptable as the Russian advantage in number and types of sub-strategic nuclear weapons is increasing.

In conclusion, Allies of the United States should therefore be more vocal in supporting the modernization of the strategic forces. They should also be more active in promoting operational cooperation with strategic forces when opportunities arise. One should have in mind that the sub-strategic weapons deployed in Europe are only a small fraction of the nuclear capabilities in the US arsenal. […]

Presented below are the Preface and Executive Point Summary of National Institute's January 2001 study, *Rationale and Requirements for U.S. Nuclear Forces and Arms Control*. The goal of the study was to present a transparent analysis of the continuing need for nuclear deterrence and the force posture requirements following from that need. The study was a departure from the politically powerful perspective prevalent in Washington at the time that nuclear deterrence and weapons were of rapidly declining value. A popular expectation at the time was that, with the peaceful conclusion of the Cold War and collapse of the Soviet Union, international relations were rapidly becoming reliably more cooperative, open hostilities among great powers was a thing of the past, and global nuclear disarmament had become a realistic prospect. This study was manifestly skeptical of this optimistic set of expectations, noting that:

- Current public proposals for codifying nuclear disarmament and/or deep nuclear reductions assume an international environment in which nuclear deterrence either is unnecessary or relatively easily accomplished; they also assume that this environment will prevail in the future.
  - The current post-Cold War period is one of great political and military dynamism. Even the most basic of the variables concerning U.S. nuclear force posture requirements (e.g., the identity of likely foes) may change rapidly, affecting U.S. nuclear requirements. The current relatively benign conditions cannot be predicted with any confidence to pertain in the future.

With the advantage of over two decades hindsight, it is clear that the study's skepticism of the prevalent expectations at the time, and their implications for the value of nuclear deterrence and weapons, was well placed. Perhaps as important as the study's findings was that contributors to the study included retired senior military officers, noted academic scholars, and highly-regarded individuals who had served in senior positions in Republican and Democratic Administrations or, again with the advantage of over two decades hindsight, would subsequently go on to serve in senior positions in the U.S. foreign and defense establishment. Press reports later said that this study became the "blueprint" for the subsequent December 2001 *Nuclear Posture Review*.

Rationale and Requirements for U.S. Nuclear Forces and Arms Control, Volume I, Executive Report **(Fairfax, VA: National Institute for Public Policy, 2001), select excerpts.**

Preface

This study departs from the variety of recent public proposals for nuclear "abolition" to examine instead the methodology necessary to assess U.S. nuclear force requirements and

arms control positions. The study first contrasts the basic contours of official U.S. policy with public proposals for new nuclear disarmament treaties, and then focuses on the type of methodical analysis that must precede recommendations concerning the size and composition of U.S. nuclear forces. In the post-Cold War period the various complex technical, political, and operational factors that must be taken into account in advance of such recommendations are far from static. Even the most basic factors, such as the identity of potential opponents and the requirements for deterrence, are unclear at present, and wholly opaque for the future. Consequently, this study concludes that an important priority for the United States is to preserve its capability to adapt U.S. offensive and defensive forces to rapidly changing strategic conditions. Preserving the U.S. capability to adapt does not exclude the potential for U.S. nuclear force reductions, now or in the future. A proper nuclear posture review may determine that U.S. nuclear requirements can be met at lower force levels. Strategic adaptability does, however, weigh heavily against continuation of the traditional bipolar Cold War approach to strategic arms control. Rather than the past focus on rigid treaties designed to perpetuate U.S. and Russian capabilities for Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD), post-Cold War strategic arms control should focus on close consultation, coordination and transparency. Rather than "locking in" ceilings that may soon be excessive or inadequate, arms control should encourage "full disclosure" and predictability with regard to nuclear forces, and facilitate movement away from MAD, which now serves only to sustain unnecessarily a relationship based on mutual threat, suspicion, and animosity.

The participants endorse the study's general thrust and conclusions as presented in this *Executive Report*. Each participant may not, however, be in full agreement with every specific point and detail.

Dr. Keith B. Payne
Study Director

Executive Point Summary

- Specific nuclear force posture recommendations should follow a comprehensive review of technical, operational, and political variables. This strategic review must consider factors such as current and potential threats, U.S. deterrence and wartime goals, nuclear targeting strategy and warhead options, enemy passive and active defenses, conventional strike capabilities, and Third Country use.
  - The 2001 Congressionally-mandated nuclear posture review must take these technical, political, and operational variables into account.
  - Force posture recommendations that do not take these variables into account are likely to be flawed (e.g. recent public proposals for nuclear "abolition" or deep force reductions).
  - Proper review may indicate that current U.S. nuclear requirements can be met with reduced nuclear forces.

- Current public proposals for codifying nuclear disarmament and/or deep nuclear reductions assume an international environment in which nuclear deterrence either is unnecessary or relatively easily accomplished; they also assume that this environment will prevail in the future.
  - The current post-Cold War period is one of great political and military dynamism. Even the most basic of the variables concerning U.S. nuclear force posture requirements (e.g., the identity of likely foes) may change rapidly, affecting U.S. nuclear requirements. The current relatively benign conditions cannot be predicted with any confidence to pertain in the future.
  - U.S. foreign policy goals and requirements, and the technical, political, and operational variables that must help shape U.S. nuclear force requirements, can change rapidly as the strategic environment changes.
  - It is not now possible to predict with confidence future deterrence requirements. The future may prove to be far more dangerous than benign: nuclear deterrence may become more important for the United States, and a robust nuclear capability may be essential to support U.S. deterrence objectives.

- Possible current/future deterrence and wartime roles for nuclear weapons may include:
  - Deterring weapons of mass destruction (WMD) use by regional powers.
  - Deterring WMD or massive conventional aggression by an emerging global competitor.
  - Preventing catastrophic losses in conventional war.
  - Providing unique targeting capabilities (deep underground/biological weapons targets).
  - Enhancing U.S. influence in crises.

- Because the international environment and operational considerations are dynamic, as is the context for deterrence, the ability to adjust the U.S. offensive and defensive force posture to a changing strategic environment is critical.
  - Adaptability requires the capacity to both *augment and reduce* U.S. defensive and offensive forces to fit a changing strategic environment and rapid possible shifts in technical, operational, and political variables.
  - Adaptability also requires a capacity to design and build new weapons.

- Cold War-style arms control, a process that has focused on specific limitations designed to codify "Mutual Assured Destruction"(MAD), now contributes to U.S.-Russian political enmity, and is incompatible with the basic U.S. strategic requirement for adaptability in a dynamic post-Cold War environment.

  - There is an inherent contradiction in attempting to improve U.S.-Russian political relations by remaining committed to the Cold War approach to arms control, an approach designed to perpetuate MAD. This contradiction is recognized by U.S. and Russian officials.
  - The codification of deep reductions now, according to the traditional Cold War approach to arms control, would preclude the U.S. *de jure* prerogative and *de facto* capability to adjust forces as necessary to fit a changing strategic environment. It would render the U.S. vulnerable to the highly questionable assumption that the international environment is and will continue to be relatively benign.
  - The U.S. is highly restricted politically in its capability to withdraw from or even modify established arms control agreements regardless of changes in the strategic environment (witness the ABM Treaty) or evidence of an opponent's non-compliance.
  - The traditional strategic arms control process does not affect many factors potentially relevant to U.S. strategic requirements, and thus cannot preclude the potential for disturbing changes in the strategic environment.
  - Further adjustment to the U.S. strategic forces must not be rendered practically or legally "irreversible" via codification in the traditional arms control process.

- The United States should move toward a new post-Cold War framework for arms control, and new forms of U.S.-Russian engagement and dialogue aimed at moving away from MAD, not its perpetuation.
  - If indicated by comprehensive strategic review, the U.S. should move unilaterally toward significant nuclear force reductions and other changes in the force posture, while retaining its prerogative and capability to reconstitute or further reduce its forces as made necessary or possible by future developments in the strategic environment.
  - Post-Cold War strategic arms control, including potential U.S. unilateral reductions, should focus on efforts to promote transparency and predictability in U.S. and Russian decision-making concerning active defenses and nuclear forces, including systematic discussions.
  - To advance movement away from MAD, the U.S. should initiate "Mutual Assurance Talks" with Russia, which should draw on the 1992 Ross-Mamedov Talks.
  - The strategic arms control process should be restructured to reflect this new, post-Cold War approach.