



## INFORMATION SERIES

Issue No. 616

February 10, 2025

### **Deterrence and Arms Control: Ending the Deceptive “Holiday from History”**

**Dr. Keith B. Payne**

*Dr. Keith B. Payne is a co-founder of the National Institute for Public Policy, Professor Emeritus at the Graduate School of Defense and Strategic Studies, Missouri State University, a former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense, and former Senior Advisor to the Office of the Secretary of Defense.*

#### **Introduction**

U.S. deterrence strategies are now deeply problematic and the prospect for significant failure is very real. In contrast to the United States, Moscow and Beijing have been expanding their nuclear arsenals for over a decade and appear to view nuclear weapons as coercive tools for expansion. China appears intent on taking Taiwan by force if necessary.<sup>1</sup> Moscow frequently issues audacious nuclear threats and Russia’s doctrinal statements emphasize a steady lowering of the threshold for nuclear employment.<sup>2</sup> This will also be true with regard to China if there is a war over Taiwan. There is an emerging Sino-Russian entente, a Russo-North Korean alliance, and extensive Russo-Iranian-North Korean cooperation in a major war against Ukraine, a Western partner. These marriages of convenience are organizing around the clear common intent to overthrow the post-World War II liberal international order. There is potential for multiple, simultaneous geopolitical disasters.

The apparent degradation of the U.S. deterrence position is not the fault of one political party or one president. It is the culmination of decades of unrealistic thinking and self-deception by multiple administrations. Policy ideas matter, and U.S. deterrence policies and related preparations have long been beset by a strain of idealistic thinking regarding enemies, deterrence and arms control. A former member of the National Security Council staff has



## INFORMATION SERIES

Issue No. 616 | February 10, 2025

---

described “an illusion that entranced U.S. policy makers.” That is, “...the idea that Washington could depend on international organizations to help it confront major challenges and that ‘global governance’ would emerge with the help of American leadership. ...That view presumed that since other countries were progressing inexorably toward liberal democracy, they would share many of Washington’s goals and would play by Washington’s rules.”<sup>3</sup>

Security policies derived from, and consistent with this now demonstrably-mistaken worldview, ultimately have been responsible for the apparent degradation of U.S. deterrence credibility and contributed directly to *unprecedentedly* dangerous contemporary threat conditions. Strengthening the U.S. deterrence position now requires urgent action, as was emphasized repeatedly in the bipartisan Strategic Posture Commission’s 2023 report.<sup>4</sup>

### **Idealism: A New World Order?**

Washington’s aging idealistic approach to enemies, deterrence and arms control has had consequences entirely contrary to the optimistic promises made by its advocates in and out of government. Following the Cold War, President George H. W. Bush told us we were entering a “new world order” in which the rule of law would prevail in international relations and small powers would no longer need to fear larger powers.<sup>5</sup> Many Western officials and academics advanced the expectation that major great power conflict was a thing of the past and related military preparation was increasingly unnecessary, especially with regard to nuclear weapons. A new era of international relations supposedly was at hand. Many officials and academics confidently predicted continuing movement toward an integrated global economy in which commercial cooperation would subdue geopolitical conflicts. A bipartisan expectation was that opponents would bury the hatchet to secure economic benefits; political amity and economic progress would be mutually reinforcing.

This idealistic outlook has endured for decades. In June 2023, then-Secretary of State Antony Blinken described the post-Cold War worldview reigning in Washington: “We had a strong consensus coming out of the Cold War. We thought that major power competition was over. We thought we’d have an integrated global economy in which commerce ultimately trumped geopolitical competition. We thought we’d have former rivals working together to deal with big transnational problems.”<sup>6</sup>

An overarching security theme of this idealistic worldview was that there was little need to prepare for great power conflict because that was a thing of the past; nuclear capabilities and deterrence were of decidedly declining value and entailed only unnecessary risk. In 2012, a study led by a former Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and Commander of U.S. Strategic Command, recommended that the United States reduce its nuclear weapons to 450 deployed weapons given the “irrelevance” of nuclear weapons “in dealing with 21<sup>st</sup> century threats,” and because “The risk of nuclear confrontation between the United States and either Russia or China belongs to the past, not the future...”<sup>7</sup> The study concluded with the now obviously mistaken assertion that:



## INFORMATION SERIES

Issue No. 616 | February 10, 2025

---

9-11 exposed the lack of efficacy – indeed, the irrelevance – of nuclear forces in dealing with 21st century threats. The last episode of nuclear brinkmanship between Americans and Russians took place nearly forty (40) years ago. Since then their nuclear weapons have increasingly become liabilities, not assets.<sup>8</sup>

Professor Colin S. Gray offered a rare contrary prognosis. In 1999, he ridiculed the then prevalent expectations of great power amity and instead forecast, “that world politics two to three decades hence will be increasingly organized around the rival poles of U.S. and Chinese power,” and that China then “would menace Japan.” He also fully expected that Russia would again confront the West militarily and “immediately would threaten independent Ukraine [and] the Baltics.”<sup>9</sup> One might expect that many other academics would have offered similar cautions regarding Washington’s self-serving idealism; but in truth, many were its loudest advocates.

U.S. defense spending has reflected the general acceptance of an idealistic worldview. In 1985, Washington spent 5.7 percent of GDP on defense. It spent 2.7 percent of its GDP on defense in 2024—declining to 2.5 percent in 2034 (as projected). Washington was still *withdrawing* forces from Europe years after Russia’s malign goals and aggression were obvious. The United States withdrew its last battle tank from Europe in April 2013. Sgt. Jeremy Jordan of the 529th Military Police Company commented on the occasion that, “As these tanks sail back to the U.S., we are closing a chapter in history.”<sup>10</sup> And there now are public reports that the United States would likely run out of munitions within the first few days of war in the Pacific.<sup>11</sup> As late as 2022, Washington recklessly discarded the precaution of “hedging” nuclear deterrence capabilities against a worse-than-expected future.<sup>12</sup>

Washington’s numerous missteps were not *sui generis*. They followed from an unrealistic worldview and a corresponding unwillingness of many officials and commentators to acknowledge developments contrary to their favored worldview. For example, Washington’s recognition of emerging Russian and Chinese threats was extremely slow. And, many officials in Washington *still* refer to relations with Russia and China with the benign euphemism of a sportsman-like “competition.”<sup>13</sup> Why so? Because a more realistic characterization of their threats would cast doubt on the wisdom of what former Defense Secretary Gates has labeled Washington’s multidecade “holiday from history.”<sup>14</sup>

### **Ideas Matter: Self-Deception and Its Consequences**

The fashionable, unrealistic mode of thinking underlying this “holiday from history” has been the basis for many U.S. arms control initiatives that have contributed to where we are today. A common theme of Washington’s self-deception is the expectation that U.S. self-restraint will ease opponents’ fears; they will respond benignly and cease their political hostility. The key thought is that the United States has the power to turn off opponents’ hostility via benign signaling and behavior, i.e., opponents’ threats and hostility are not self-generated; they are a reaction to U.S. provocations and will be transformed by benign U.S. moves. This, of course,



## INFORMATION SERIES

Issue No. 616 | February 10, 2025

---

is the hubris and preferred hope of great, status quo powers.<sup>15</sup> To promote and protect this narrative, Washington has dismissed or looked away from opponents' indications of enduring hostility and malevolence.

The following are a few beliefs within this worldview that have been common in Washington. Much of this thinking is demonstrably false, and has been for years:

- 1) China and Russia will rise cooperatively and peacefully find their places in the liberal international order if only Washington will cooperate in the process – the old realist history is over;
- 2) Concerns about Russian and Chinese geopolitical threats are hyperbole – Washington's behavior drives their fears and can ease them with altruistic signaling and behavior;
- 3) The United States can safely retreat from a two-war standard because the history of great power war is over; America can enjoy a continuing "holiday from history" – particularly in terms of defense spending and preparation;
- 4) Assured U.S. societal vulnerability to enemy strikes is desirable because unmitigated U.S. vulnerability assures enemies, stabilizes deterrence and halts the arms race;
- 5) U.S. actions incite opponents' arms build-ups, not their own malign goals. Thus, U.S. armaments supposedly are the cause of arms racing; if the United States stops, so will opponents. This "action-reaction" dynamic is an "iron law" of international relations that explains arms racing. Correspondingly, U.S. inaction will lead to opponents' inaction. Washington can be the example of good behavior to the world and preclude arms races by not inciting them;
- 6) The lower the number of nuclear weapons, the lower the prospects for nuclear war, accidents, and societal damage. So reductions, by definition, are an unalloyed good virtually regardless of an agreement's details regarding arms;
- 7) Arms control agreements will drive improved political relations, so the United States should seek agreements for the priority purpose of easing political hostilities. Again, agreement details are far less important than achieving an agreement;
- 8) Nuclear weapons are essentially *useless* instruments – and if Washington reduces the role of these useless weapons, Russia and China will follow suit. Correspondingly, anti-nuclear activists must press Western leaders to reject nuclear weapons. This is the path to global nuclear disarmament.<sup>16</sup>

This worldview and associated expectations have been reflected in the West's arms control initiatives and enthusiasms. But, given their underlying lack of reality, Washington's arms control initiatives were bound to be frustrated and the practical results harmful to Western security.

There are many illustrations of this contention; eight of these follow:

First, Washington consciously gave up the capacity to build new nuclear weapons in the 1990s based on the claim that, to promote non-proliferation, Washington had to lead by





## INFORMATION SERIES

Issue No. 616 | February 10, 2025

---

example and move away from nuclear capabilities itself. A frequent quip of the 1990s in this regard was that “a drunk cannot advocate for abstinence.” The message, of course, was that U.S. nuclear abstinence is necessary for non-proliferation.

The United States decided to lead in this direction. For example, after listing a variety of key nuclear policy goals, including deterrence, extended deterrence and the assurance of allies, the Defense Department’s 2010 *Nuclear Posture Review Report* (NPR) stated: “As a critical element of our effort to move toward a world free of nuclear weapons, the United States will lead expanded international efforts to rebuild and strengthen the global nuclear non-proliferation regime—and for the first time, the 2010 NPR places this priority atop the U.S. nuclear agenda.” (Emphasis added). Doing so placed corresponding priority on reducing the role and number of U.S. nuclear forces. Defense Secretary Robert Gates’ cover letter to the 2010 NPR states that, “This NPR places the prevention of nuclear terrorism and proliferation at the top of the U.S. policy agenda” and explained that reducing the “role and numbers of nuclear weapons” via U.S. arms control efforts was a key to those ends.<sup>17</sup> Unfortunately, opponents clearly decided to move in the opposite direction.

Second, there has been a systemic delay in the public identification of Russian arms control violations because that reality is contrary to the preferred arms control narrative and the worldview that places the United States as the source of opponents’ hostile behavior. There were, for example, virtually no public comments about Russian INF Treaty violations until well after those violations were discussed by unofficial commentators *based on Russian publications*; Moscow’s misbehavior ultimately became so obvious that it had to be acknowledged.

Third, there has been a similar enduring lack of government openness regarding the immense Chinese nuclear build-up—again it is contrary to the preferred narrative. Public recognition of that build-up came by way of unofficial commentators using publicly available overhead surveillance. DoD public reports may still seriously undercount Chinese nuclear weapons.<sup>18</sup>

Fourth, 15 years ago, contemporary U.S. strategic nuclear modernization plans were set in motion at a glacial pace and with strict limitations—careful not to add numbers or new weapons lest Washington provoke opponents and ignite an action-reaction arms race. On the basis of such action-reaction expectations, there is continuing opposition even now to this much needed but tardy nuclear modernization program of record. The most secure element seems to be the B-21 Raider; but, at this point, it is constrained to a low production rate, apparently for budgetary reasons—the “holiday from history” endures.

Fifth, even after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the Biden Administration’s 2022 *Nuclear Posture Review* still asserted arms control and reducing the role of nuclear weapons to be *the most effective* ways to prevent nuclear use, despite Russia’s and China’s obvious rejection of arms control and their *elevating* the role of nuclear weapons.<sup>19</sup> At this point in history, a policy position that so places priority on arms control over deterrence ignores threat realities.

Yet, Washington has continued to abide by the force limitations of the New START Treaty despite Russian withdrawal and violations; doing otherwise would cast doubt on the favored arms control narrative. In adherence to that narrative, the Biden Administration killed the B83



gravity bomb unilaterally, inexplicably eliminated hedging as a deterrence requirement, and opposed even the modest addition to U.S. non-strategic capabilities included in the 2018 *Nuclear Posture Review*.

Sixth, U.S. societal vulnerability to strategic missile threats was ensured by the 1972 ABM Treaty. That Treaty ended, but in many quarters the underlying policy position that U.S. vulnerability is a positive condition endures.<sup>20</sup> Of course, this continuing vulnerability leaves Washington fully susceptible to Russian and Chinese coercive nuclear threats and fans allies' logical fears that the U.S. extended deterrent is incredible – causing related allied proliferation pressures.<sup>21</sup>

Seventh, Reagan's 1987 Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty was predicated on the promise that remaining U.S. theater nuclear capabilities would be updated and would continue to ensure extended deterrence. Yet, shortly thereafter, George H.W. Bush's Presidential Nuclear Initiatives *unilaterally* eliminated most of those remaining theater nuclear capabilities – to serve as a model for the world to follow. These were the theater nuclear forces intended to provide continuing credible extended deterrence for allies.<sup>22</sup> They were almost entirely removed with no serious hedging against the prospect that the future would not be as rosy as expected. The consequence? Moscow now is emboldened by at least a 10-to-one advantage in theater nuclear weapons. Based on illusion, Washington recklessly and unilaterally gave up all apparent non-strategic nuclear escalation options in the Indo-Pacific theater and sustains a minimal nuclear capability in Europe. This dangerous condition degrades the logical credibility of the U.S. extended nuclear deterrent and again compels some allies to consider acquisition of nuclear weapons.

Eighth, Washington episodically announces the intent to move to a No-First-Use nuclear policy, despite the *obvious* reality that it would destroy the existing basis for extended deterrence – without any apparent benefit beyond virtue signaling.<sup>23</sup>

This dynamic of self-deception leading policy is not new. In 1979, Henry Kissinger offered a similar assessment before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee with regard to the then increasing power imbalance in favor of the Soviet Union: “[W]e have placed ourselves at a significant disadvantage *voluntarily*... it is the consequence of unilateral decisions extending over a decade and a half: by a strategic doctrine adopted in the sixties ... and by the choices of the present administration.”<sup>24</sup> Unfortunately, there rarely is any accountability in Washington for critical policy decisions made on demonstrably failed and unrealistic ideas.

### **What Can Now Be Done?**

The first suggestion is what *not* to do. Washington must not now return to deterrence strategies emphasizing the intentional targeting of civilian centers – as advocated by several prominent academics to avoid having to increase U.S. nuclear capabilities now in response to Russia and China.<sup>25</sup> Seemingly unknown to most commentators, the United States rejected intentionally targeting civilian population centers as the basis for deterrence decades ago; in fact, since at least the 1980s, the United States has sought to minimize civilian targeting as the basis for



## INFORMATION SERIES

Issue No. 616 | February 10, 2025

---

deterrence. This rejection of a so-called societal “Mutually Assured Destruction” (MAD) deterrent was for good and strategic reasons – it is logically incredible for any scenario other than a massive strategic attack on the homeland, and is contrary to the Law of Armed Conflict and the Just War Doctrine.

### **With Regard to Strategic Defense?**

Washington must get past the old Cold War canards that strategic defenses are destabilizing and are of no value unless they are “leakproof.” Defenses likely contribute to credible deterrence in many pertinent scenarios in which they are not “leakproof.” For example, credible extended deterrence now logically demands active and passive homeland defenses against Russian, Chinese and North Korean *coercive, limited nuclear threats*. In addition, imperfect homeland defenses can help render opponents’ strategic attack plans so uncertain as to make them untenable for any sentient opponent – thereby strengthening deterrence.

President Trump appears to have taken a first step in this direction.<sup>26</sup> Strategic deterrence will continue to be essential to protect against large-scale strategic threats for the foreseeable future. However, the logical credibility of extended deterrence *demands* a U.S. homeland defense capability, and the need for such defenses, even if imperfect, is overwhelming given the reality that deterrence is not foolproof.

### **With Regard to Strategic Strike Forces?**

The proper pacing factor for deterrence is *not* to match the combined number of Russian and Chinese nuclear forces. A deterrence need is for sufficient survivable, flexible, and controlled strategic retaliatory forces to reliably cover Russian, Chinese, North Korean and potentially Iranian target sets. That is the pacing factor for deterrence purposes. How those numbers are calculated is a complicated process, but the general idea is to identify opponents’ highest values and hold at risk the targets associated with those values. This is not an insoluble problem, but adequacy requirements have become more complex with an autocratic and nuclear-armed entente that is at war with the West. Given the decades-long U.S. drive to reduce nuclear weapons and slow nuclear modernization programs, using and uploading legacy U.S. strategic platforms now probably is a necessary and practicable step for this purpose; few other options exist in the near future.<sup>27</sup>

### **With Regard to Theater Strike Forces?**

A frequent quip is that, for the target, there is no difference between strategic and theater nuclear weapons. Perhaps, but the difference is likely profound in terms of their credibility for extended deterrence. As of now, given the decades-long U.S. drive to reduce nuclear weapons and their role in strategy, the United States has no obvious non-strategic nuclear options in



## INFORMATION SERIES

Issue No. 616 | February 10, 2025

---

Asia and minimal capabilities in Europe. As was fully recognized during the Cold War, this reality is wholly *inconsistent* with the U.S. extension of credible nuclear deterrence for allies.

Part of the solution to this reality is the expansion of theater nuclear options in support of extended deterrence. These capabilities could take several forms; but, at this point, the new SLCM-N – long opposed by the Biden Administration – may not be available any time soon. If not, more readily available options may include a TASM, TLAM Block V, or a new hypersonic missile (LRHW – Dark Eagle) armed with an existing nuclear weapon.

### **With Regard to the Application of an Idealistic Worldview to Arms Control**

Regardless of the manifest evidence, Washington has yet to acknowledge the frequent harm that its arms control enthusiasms – predicated on an illusory worldview – have caused. They have contributed to the unprecedentedly dangerous contemporary threat context. What could go wrong when harsh realities are dismissed because they do not fit the favored idealistic narrative? President Trump has indicated his willingness to pursue arms control with Moscow and Beijing.<sup>28</sup> If so, Washington must move away from the common but demonstrably false expectation that arms control agreements will meaningfully ameliorate political hostilities. They typically do not, and when the strategic value of armaments is subordinated to the pursuit of an illusory political goal, arm control enthusiasms can degrade or eliminate U.S. capabilities that are needed because of political hostilities. This frequently has been the case to date. In short, arms control advocates often place priority on the pursuit of a goal that arms control does not serve, and subordinate the practical effects of agreements to that end. This mode of thinking needs to end.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

What went wrong with deterrence? The practical consequences of Washington's enduring strain of idealistic thinking have harmed the U.S. deterrence position. This idealism and reluctance to call out harsh realities is not the fault of one political party or decision, and the harmful effects of this thinking and related U.S. arms control initiatives are now manifest in an unprecedentedly dangerous world.

At long last, America may be emerging from its decades-long strategic holiday rationalized by self-deception. Allies should be particularly pleased with this development. But they too must step up; the years of their free-riding are over.<sup>29</sup> They often point to the tone of President Trump's policy statements as the basis for contemporary concerns about the credibility of the U.S. extended deterrent. But it is the darkening character of the correlation of forces, and the associated risks of extending deterrence, that undermine the apparent credibility of America's extended deterrent. If that eroding correlation is addressed, the tone of related U.S. policy statements will be of minor import; if it is not addressed, the tone of U.S. policy statements will be irrelevant. "Ironclad" commitments to allies can only be real if they are supported by a





## INFORMATION SERIES

Issue No. 616 | February 10, 2025

---

correlation of forces that enables such commitments. The needed correlation of forces has eroded badly.

What can be done in the near term to strengthen deterrence? The strategic force posture is largely limited in the near term to uploading existing platforms. The degree to which that should be done depends on the target coverage and timing deemed necessary for credible deterrence.

With regard to non-strategic capabilities, there appear to be some available options; these should be pursued immediately, and allies should be supportive – unless they believe that the “Europeanization” of France’s nuclear deterrent actually holds promise. If so, bon chance with that.

<sup>1</sup> “Xi says no one can stop China’s ‘reunification’ with Taiwan,” *Reuters*, December 31, 2024, available at <https://www.reuters.com/world/china/xi-says-no-one-can-stop-chinas-reunification-with-taiwan-2024-12-31/>.

<sup>2</sup> Mark B. Schneider, “The Implications of Russia’s New Nuclear Doctrine,” *Information Series*, No. 615 (Fairfax, VA: National Institute Press, February 5, 2025), available at [https://nipp.org/information\\_series/mark-b-schneider-the-implications-of-russias-new-nuclear-doctrine-no-615-february-5-2025/](https://nipp.org/information_series/mark-b-schneider-the-implications-of-russias-new-nuclear-doctrine-no-615-february-5-2025/).

<sup>3</sup> As described in the unparalleled critique by Nadia Schadlow, “The End of American Illusion,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 99, No. 5 (September/October 2020), p.37.

<sup>4</sup> Madelyn Creedon and Jon Kyl, et al., *America’s Strategic Posture* (Alexandria, VA: Institute for Defense Analyses, 2023), available at <https://www.ida.org/research-and-publications/publications/all/a/am/americas-strategic-posture>.

<sup>5</sup> See, President George H. W. Bush, “Bush Defines the New World Order,” C-SPAN, Clip, 4524400, September 11, 1990, video available at <https://www.c-span.org/clip/joint-session-of-congress/user-clip-george-bush-defines-the-new-world-order/4528359>.

<sup>6</sup> See, “A Conversation With Secretary Antony Blinken,” Council on Foreign Relations, June 28, 2023, available at <https://www.cfr.org/event/conversation-secretary-antony-blinken>.

<sup>7</sup> General James Cartwright (Ret.), et al., *Global Zero U.S. Nuclear Policy Commission Report, Modernizing U.S. Nuclear Strategy, Force Structure and Posture*, May 2012, pp. 6-7, available at [https://www.globalzero.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/gz\\_us\\_nuclear\\_policy\\_commission\\_report.pdf](https://www.globalzero.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/gz_us_nuclear_policy_commission_report.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>9</sup> See, Colin S. Gray, *The Second Nuclear Age* (London: Lynn Reiner Press, 1999), pp. 39-41.

<sup>10</sup> Quoted in, John Vandiver, “US Army’s last tanks depart from Germany,” *Stars and Stripes*, April 4, 2013, available at <https://www.stripes.com/migration/us-army-s-last-tanks-depart-from-germany-1.214977>. Thanks to Dr. Michaela Dodge for this telling quote and reference.

<sup>11</sup> See the discussion in Bill Gertz, “Pentagon alert: U.S. runs out of missiles in a ‘matter of days’ in China war,” *The Washington Times*, December 5, 2024, available at <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2024/dec/5/congress-u-defense-industry-unable-supply-weapons-/>.

<sup>12</sup> Department of Defense, *2022 Nuclear Posture Review*, October 2022, pp. 3, 7, available at <https://media.defense.gov/2022/Oct/27/2003103845/-1/-1/1/2022-NATIONAL-DEFENSE-STRATEGY-NPR-MDR.PDF>.



## INFORMATION SERIES

Issue No. 616 | February 10, 2025

---

<sup>13</sup> “A Conversation With Secretary Antony Blinken,” *op. cit.*

<sup>14</sup> Robert Gates, “We face unprecedented peril,” *The Washington Post*, September 24, 2024, available at <https://www.google.com/search?q=We+face+unprecedented+peril.+The+Pentagon+and+Congress+must+change+their+ways.&oq>.

<sup>15</sup> See the discussion in, Keith B. Payne, *Deterrence in the Second Nuclear Age* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1996), pp. 77-78.

<sup>16</sup> See Beatrice Fihn, “Nuclear Weapons Are Not a Fact of Life,” *New York Times Online*, December 26, 2024, available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/12/26/opinion/nuclear-weapons.html>.

<sup>17</sup> Department of Defense, *Nuclear Posture Review Report* (Washington, D.C.: Department of Defense, April 2010), pp. iii, V, VI, 15, 45; see also, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates’ included cover letter (April 6, 2010).

<sup>18</sup> See, Mark B. Schneider, *Current and Projected Growth of China’s Nuclear Arsenal, Occasional Paper* (Fairfax, VA: National Institute Press, October 2024), available at <https://nipp.org/papers/current-and-projected-growth-of-chinas-nuclear-arsenal/>.

<sup>19</sup> Department of Defense, *2022 Nuclear Posture Review*, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

<sup>20</sup> See, for example, James M. Acton, “The U.S. Exit From the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty Has Fueled a New Arms Race,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, December 13, 2021, available at <https://carnegieendowment.org/posts/2021/12/the-us-exit-from-the-anti-ballistic-missile-treaty-has-fueled-a-new-arms-race?lang=en>; and, Steven Pifer, “Enhancing Strategic Stability: New START and Beyond,” *Arms Control Today*, January/February 2021, available at <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2021-01/features/enhancing-strategic-stability-new-start-and-beyond>.

<sup>21</sup> See the discussion in, Robert Kelly and Min-hyung-Kim, “Why South Korea Should Go Nuclear,” *Foreign Affairs* (January/February 2025), available at <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/north-korea/why-south-korea-should-go-nuclear-kelly-kim>.

<sup>22</sup> See Matthew R. Costlow, “The 1991-1992 Presidential Nuclear Initiatives and the Cascading Effects on U.S. Alliances,” *Journal of Policy & Strategy*, Vol. 5, No. 1, forthcoming 2025, pp. 58-67.

<sup>23</sup> Commentators continue to press for a No-First-Use policy. See for example, Andreas Kluth, “Why is the US Fighting Nuclear Threats Behind Closed Doors?” *Bloomberg News*, August 23, 2024, available at <https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2024-08-23/biden-and-harris-must-talk-publicly-about-the-nuclear-risk-with-china-russia>.

<sup>24</sup> Quoted in Francis Sempa, “Avoiding the McNamara Trap With China,” *The American Spectator*, January 6, 2025, available at <https://spectator.org/avoiding-the-mcnamara-trap-with-china/>. (Emphasis added).

<sup>25</sup> See Keith B. Payne, John R. Harvey, Franklin C. Miller and Robert Soofer, “The Rejection of Intentional Population Targeting for ‘Tripolar’ Deterrence,” National Institute for Public Policy, *Information Series*, No. 563, September 26, 2023, available at [https://nipp.org/information\\_series/keith-b-payne-john-r-harvey-franklin-c-miller-and-robert-soofer-the-rejection-of-intentional-population-targeting-for-tripolar-deterrence-no-563-september-26-2023/](https://nipp.org/information_series/keith-b-payne-john-r-harvey-franklin-c-miller-and-robert-soofer-the-rejection-of-intentional-population-targeting-for-tripolar-deterrence-no-563-september-26-2023/).

<sup>26</sup> The White House, Executive Order, “The Iron Dome for America,” January 27, 2025, available at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/the-iron-dome-for-america/>.

<sup>27</sup> See Keith B. Payne and Mark B. Schneider, “U.S. Nuclear Deterrence: What Went Wrong and What Can Be Done,” National Institute for Public Policy, *Information Series*, No. 601, October 7, 2024, available at [https://nipp.org/information\\_series/keith-b-payne-and-mark-b-schneider-u-s-nuclear-deterrence-what-went-wrong-and-what-can-be-done-no-601-october-7-2024/](https://nipp.org/information_series/keith-b-payne-and-mark-b-schneider-u-s-nuclear-deterrence-what-went-wrong-and-what-can-be-done-no-601-october-7-2024/).

<sup>28</sup> See Laura Kelly, “Trump wants nuclear reduction talks with China, Russia,” *The Hill Online*, January 23, 2025, available at <https://thehill.com/homenews/5102798-trump-urges-nuclear-talks-russia-china/>.



## INFORMATION SERIES

Issue No. 616 | February 10, 2025

---

<sup>29</sup> See Michael Rühle und Keith Payne, “Die Kultur des Trittbrettfahrens ist vorbei,” *Welt am Sonntag*, July 21, 2024, p. 9.

This *Information Series* is adapted from a presentation by the author to the Mackinder Forum, January 8, 2025.

The National Institute for Public Policy’s *Information Series* is a periodic publication focusing on contemporary strategic issues affecting U.S. foreign and defense policy. It is a forum for promoting critical thinking on the evolving international security environment and how the dynamic geostrategic landscape affects U.S. national security. Contributors are recognized experts in the field of national security. National Institute for Public Policy would like to thank the Sarah Scaife Foundation for the generous support that made this *Information Series* possible.

The views in this *Information Series* are those of the author(s) and should not be construed as official U.S. Government policy, the official policy of the National Institute for Public Policy, or any of its sponsors. For additional information about this publication or other publications by the National Institute Press, contact: Editor, National Institute Press, 9302 Lee Highway, Suite 750, Fairfax, VA 22031, (703) 293- 9181, [www.nipp.org](http://www.nipp.org). For access to previous issues of the National Institute Press *Information Series*, please visit <http://www.nipp.org/national-institutepress/informationseries/>.

© National Institute Press, 2025