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## EDITOR'S NOTE

Welcome to the first issue of the *Journal of Policy & Strategy* in 2025.

ADM Charles Richard, USN (Ret.) and Robert Peters open the Analysis section of this issue by discussing improvements to a Joint Professional Military Education (JPME). The authors highlight the need for JPME to focus on military solutions that align with U.S. goals rather than on non-military tools. Mark Schneider discusses the Biden Administration's November 2024 *Nuclear Weapons Employment Guidance Report* and proposes steps the Trump Administration ought to take to address U.S. strategic deficiencies given adversaries' nuclear programs. Kenton White analyzes the disconnect between academia and military practitioners and argues that to avoid irrelevance, academics ought to pose a constructive challenge to the thinking of the politicians and the armed forces. Masoud Kazemzadeh discusses options for U.S. strategy in the Middle East informed by his deep familiarity with the region.

The Analysis section also contains a Special Feature: three case studies on the pernicious effects of arms control on extended deterrence. These articles are adapted from an extensive study of the subject, including: the Presidential Nuclear Initiatives by Matthew Costlow; the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty by Michaela Dodge and Keith Payne; and, the impact of arms control misconceptions on extended deterrence and assurance by David Trachtenberg and Keith Payne.

This issue's Interviews section features an interview with Martin Kroupa, Head of Regional Development, Post Bellum Nonprofit Organization, who discusses Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and the role of nonprofits in supporting the Ukrainians. The Honorable James Anderson, former Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, offers his thoughts on countering China.

The Proceeding's section highlights speakers' presentations from National Institute for Public Policy's webinar in November 2024. Franklin C. Miller, Robert G. Joseph and Robert Soofer (moderated by David Trachtenberg) share their thoughts on what to expect and what should be done regarding the Trump Administration's nuclear and missile defense policy.

The Literature Review section offers thoughts on three contemporary publications: Dmitri Alperovitch's (with Garrett Graff), *World on the Brink: How America Can Beat China in the Race for the Twenty-First Century* reviewed by Michaela Dodge; Heather Williams's (et. al), *Project Atom 2024: Intra-War Deterrence in a Two-Peer Environment* reviewed by Matthew R. Costlow; and Julia Davis's, *In Their Own Words—How Russian Propagandists Reveal Putin's Intentions* reviewed by David J. Trachtenberg.

The Documentation section contains select excerpts from five significant publications: The Department of Defense's *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China* report; Mark Rutte's December 2024 speech "To Prevent War, NATO Must Spend More;" the Russian Federation's *Fundamentals of State Policy of the Russian Federation on Nuclear Deterrence* document; the Department of Defense's *Report on the Nuclear Employment Strategy of the United States*; and Marek Menkiszak's *Winning the War with Russia (Is Still Possible). The West's Counter-Strategy Towards Moscow*—a report detailing steps the West can take to defeat Russia's aggression in Ukraine.

Finally, the From the Archive section features select excerpts from the Intelligence Report by Team B on Soviet strategic objectives. The "Team B" report changed for the better the intelligence community's analysis of Soviet strategic intentions.

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







## ANALYSIS

### A MODEST PROPOSAL TO IMPROVE JOINT PROFESSIONAL MILITARY EDUCATION<sup>1</sup>

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

For upwardly mobile officers in America's military, a year at a Joint Professional Military Education (JPME) institution to acquire a Master's degree is very often necessary for promotion. These schools, located at the Army War College in Carlisle, PA, National Defense University in Washington, D.C. the Naval War College in Newport, RI, and elsewhere, are meant to prepare officers for the jump from tactics (commanding a battalion or a single ship) to the larger, operational levels of war, where they may command a brigade or a squadron of ships as part of a larger combat engagement.

Far too often, however, the JPME teaches topics in the wrong order. Very often, JPME overemphasizes the strategic level of war at the expense of the operational level of war. In this sense, they are asked to consider and ultimately understand the movement of entire armies and fleets as part of a broader conflict between nation states, often times before such considerations are required for their rank. An example would be a Navy Lieutenant enrolled in JPME I being asked to write a paper on the use of strategic ambiguity in the Indo-Pacific theater. A worthy topic this is—but perhaps not one for a Lieutenant.

The consequence of such a jump is that they do not receive the education they need to understand the role their brigade or naval squadron plays at the operational level of war and how they can best achieve operational effect with the forces assigned to them or a members of an operational staff.

This affects service training as well. One author, as Commodore of a ballistic missile submarine squadron, found one commanding officer training his wardroom on the political dynamics between the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) and Turkey and Iraq. Again, an important topic, but not the highest priority or most useful for the officers on an SSBN.

This must change—and JPME should dedicate itself to teaching rising officers the skills they will need to progress and succeed at the next level of warfare.

### The Rise of the DIME—Elements of National Power

One example of how JPME, at times, focuses on the wrong level of instruction is the DIME.

Anyone who has spent time in the Defense Department in the last two decades recognizes the term, "DIME," which represents four key elements of national power: diplomacy, information, military, and economics. American national security professionals, however, are increasingly focusing on the D, I, and the E, at the expense of the M. The authors are not

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<sup>1</sup> This analysis was originally published in, Admiral Charles Richard, USA (Ret.) and Robert Peters, "A Modest Proposal to Improve Joint Professional Military Education" *Information Series*, No. 613 (Fairfax, VA: National Institute Press, January 21, 2025).





arguing that defense professionals don't need to understand the DIME concept—far from it—but the full breadth of the DIME should not be the focus of their analysis. They instead must be the undisputed experts in the *military* instrument of power and understand enough of the rest of the concept to know how the military instrument fits in and underpins the rest of the instruments of nation power as part of an overall strategy.

The DIME as a concept became fashionable within the Defense Department during the Global War on Terror. It was taught at various JPME institutions and became a centerpiece of strategy courses not long after 9/11. Dissertations and term papers with titles such as “DIME Operations: The Ultimate Form of War for the United States in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century” became commonplace during this period.<sup>2</sup> By the late 2010s, even official Defense Department Joint Doctrine used the DIME as a central organizing principle.<sup>3</sup> By 2019, West Point's Modern War Institute was publishing papers that called for the DIME to be the organizing principle in how to prosecute a war: “In a real-world case of war, during the beginning of hostilities, the State and Defense Departments would assemble trained [DIME Planning Teams] that would immediately begin executing Army Design Methodology to achieve a comprehensive, DIME solution to achieve an optimal negotiated settlement.”<sup>4</sup> Indeed, it has even become fashionable in military publications to expand on the DIME concept, to tack on financial, intelligence, and law enforcement (DIMEFIL) to the elements of national power,<sup>5</sup> or tout new constructs such as “PESTEL” for political, economic, social, technological, environmental, and legal instruments of national power.

Indeed, the DIME has become so central that multiple JPME institutions teach it as a central core of their curricula. Washington, D.C.'s National War College's Primer for all incoming students uses the DIME as it's the central organizing construct of its teaching of “instruments of national power.” In this construct, the military is one of only four “co-equal” instruments of power.<sup>6</sup>

The “CAPSTONE” program within JPME, which rising generals and admirals are required to take, notes that the first learning objective of the program is to “Understand the Joint warfighting security environment and the relationships of all instruments of national power.” It goes on to note how CAPSTONE is meant to “ensure newly selected Generals and

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<sup>2</sup> LCDR Albert E. Rice, USN, “Dime Operations: The Ultimate Form of War for the United States in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century,” Air University, Maxwell Air Force Base, April 2003, available at [https://aul.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/discovery/delivery/01AUL\\_INST:AUL/](https://aul.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/discovery/delivery/01AUL_INST:AUL/).

<sup>3</sup> Vice Admiral Kevin Scott, USN, “Joint Doctrine Note 1-18,” The Joint Staff, April 2018, available at [https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/jdn\\_jg/jdn1\\_18.pdf?ver=2018-04-25-150439-540](https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/jdn_jg/jdn1_18.pdf?ver=2018-04-25-150439-540).

<sup>4</sup> Harrison Morgan, “Dropping DIMES: Leveraging All Elements of National Power on the Multi-Domain Battlefield,” The Modern War Institute, West Point, September 18, 2019, available at <https://mwi.westpoint.edu/dropping-dimes-leveraging-elements-national-power-multi-domain-battlefield>.

<sup>5</sup> Konstantin Khomko, “A Nation Needs More than a DIME,” *Defense.info*, April 3, 2019, available at <https://defense.info/williams-foundation/2019/04/a-nation-needs-more-than-a-dime>.

<sup>6</sup> Steven Heffington, Adam Oler, and David Tretler, “A National Security Strategy Primer,” National War College, Washington, D.C., 2021, available at [https://nwc.ndu.edu/Portals/71/Images/Publications/NWC%20NSS%20Primer%202021.pdf?ver=F2C\\_dWgjNc2G1hvOWob5wA%3d%3d](https://nwc.ndu.edu/Portals/71/Images/Publications/NWC%20NSS%20Primer%202021.pdf?ver=F2C_dWgjNc2G1hvOWob5wA%3d%3d).

Flag officers understand the fundamentals of joint doctrine and the Joint Operational Art; how to integrate the elements of national power in order to accomplish national security and national military strategies and how joint, interagency, and multinational operations support national strategic goals and objectives.”<sup>7</sup> CAPSTONE, which again, focuses on rising generals and admirals, is a better place for this analysis than the War Colleges which teaches more junior officers, but even CAPSTONE may be too early for such study. Indeed, a thorough understanding of the DIME is probably only required at the 3 and 4 star level—for generals responsible for prosecuting a broader conflict in concert with their colleagues in the Departments of State, Treasury, etc.

Without question, a nation enjoys more forms of power than simply military capabilities and prowess—but it is hard to overstate how much the DIME concept has come to dominate discussions about strategy, warfare, and influence among our national security professionals, in particular America’s corps of senior military officers. While it is good to conceptualize the utility of all tools, there is a danger in a Defense Department that diffuses its focus across ALL instruments of national power to the detriment of the one instrument of national power for which it is ultimately responsible: military power.

### **When to Use—and NOT Use—the DIME Framework**

As noted, the DIME as framework for coordinating instruments of national power is useful, but there are downsides.

The DIME inadvertently focuses attention on all four elements as if they are equal in effect—but the military underpins, or gives power to, the other three elements. As Frederick the Great said, “diplomacy without arms is like music without instruments.”<sup>8</sup> Put another way, unless an adversary is prevented from achieving its objectives by military force *outside* negotiations, it has no interest in taking seriously peaceful alternatives being offered *inside* negotiations.

The military does not act alone in furthering national goals, but it is indisputably the necessary foundation that the other elements of national power rely upon during times of acute crisis or conflict. Absent a sufficient and therefore credible military force that can impose costs on an adversary, diplomatic offers carry no weight, information cannot be acted upon, and economic well-being is held hostage by the more powerful military. In the final analysis, an actor’s economic power or information messaging capabilities are irrelevant if it has insufficient military power.

The DIME construct therefore should not be the central framework for JPME. Instead, JPME should first and foremost teach about the military instrument of power, while also

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<sup>7</sup> “Capstone: General and Flag Officer Course,” National Defense University, available at <https://capstone.ndu.edu/Home/Course-Overview/>.

<sup>8</sup> Linda Ochiel, “Which Way Forward? ‘Diplomacy Without Military Power is Like Music Without Instruments’: An Analytical Assessment of Tools of Diplomacy,” University of Nairobi, November 2013, available at [https://www.academia.edu/5287495/Which\\_Way\\_Forward\\_Diplomacy\\_without\\_military\\_power\\_is\\_like\\_music\\_without\\_instruments\\_AN\\_Analytical\\_assessment\\_of\\_tools\\_of\\_diplomacy](https://www.academia.edu/5287495/Which_Way_Forward_Diplomacy_without_military_power_is_like_music_without_instruments_AN_Analytical_assessment_of_tools_of_diplomacy).

giving exposure to the diplomatic, information, and economic instruments of power. The reason for this is that JPME teaches officers at the O5 (Lieutenant Colonel or Commander) and O6 (Captain or Colonel) level. Yet, their concentration should be on the transition from the tactical to the operational level of military art.

Within the Defense Department, the focus in America's officers' corps over the last twenty years on diplomacy, information, and economics has come at the expense of their understanding of how to employ military power to achieve favorable outcomes. Both authors of this paper have observed multiple instances when officers, confronted with difficult problems during a simulated conflict or crisis that has an obvious and difficult military challenge, focus their attention on all components of the DIME. Indeed, in such simulations, military officers discuss the need to identify diplomatic or economic solutions to *military-specific* challenges.

The focus of the DIME construct within JPME results in officers who talk about diplomacy, information, and economics, particularly as tools to employ during times of conflict. This raises an obvious question: *who is there to advise and advocate for the military aspect of national power if military officers diffuse their attention across all levers of national power?* Moreover, military officers will never be as proficient as State Department officials at employing diplomatic tools or Treasury Department officials at economic instruments of national power. At best, they will be modestly-informed amateurs.

The more time military officers spend thinking about non-military instruments of power, the less time they have to think about the military component of the DIME—which, at the end of the day, is what they are responsible for, particularly when it comes to escalation dynamics and achieving victory. Military officers and even civilian Defense policy makers should defer to officials who work in the State Department, Treasury Department, and elsewhere on the non-military aspects of the DIME.

## **Training Military Officers to Carry Out Military Functions**

If not the DIME, what should be the central focus of our nation's military officers? Military personnel should be trained to primarily examine the military instrument of power. Such an examination should be within the context of their current command or staff position and the associated missions and responsibility. While those officers need to be aware of the broader context into which their military operations will fit into, they must answer the following questions thoroughly:

- What can I do with my assigned forces and current authorities?
- What can I do with my assigned forces with additional authorities?
- What support can I request from another commander?
- What support can I offer another commander?

These questions should be the focus of instruction within the JPME system. In particular, these questions can help officers at the O5 and O6 level transition from the tactical to the

operational level of analysis. Such a shift in analysis is critical, as officers attending JPME should be shifting their analysis from individual unit engagements (such as a naval destroyer or a fighter squadron or a tank battalion meeting their peer on the field of battle) to fleet-level or corps-level engagements across a theater of operation.

None of this is to say that the DIME should be ignored or jettisoned by the Defense Department or from its JPME system. Indeed, at the strategic level of analysis—that is, at the four-star or Combatant Commander level—military officers must understand how the military component of national power aligns with the diplomatic, information, and economic instruments of national power. The construct of integrated deterrence—which focuses on the employment of all instruments of national power in order to deter adversary aggression, first unveiled in 2022—is the right means by which military power should be coupled with other instruments of national power. But this should be done at the strategic levels of analysis. The authors endorse the 2023 Congressionally-mandated and bipartisan Strategic Posture Commission, which states “The United States must develop and effectively implement a truly integrated, whole-of-government strategy to address the 2027-2035 threat environment, and must be able to bring all elements of American power to bear against these impending threats.”<sup>9</sup> And as a recent Lawrence Livermore report notes, our nation should “invest leadership’s political capital toward...integrated deterrence to advance a national and intra-alliance discussion of the emerging two-peer problem and its implications for deterrence.”<sup>10</sup>

For military officers seeking (or chosen by their military Services) the highest levels of command to understand the role that the military instrument of power can play within the broader DIME construct, there are a handful of excellent security studies Master’s degree programs across this country (and some within easy driving distance of the Pentagon) that offer just such an education. Officers on the track to getting three and four stars should be encouraged and supported to take advantage of such programs—but the Defense Department should question the continued organization of JPME curricula around the DIME analytic construct.

## Conclusion

Once the above operational-level questions have been answered, military officers should determine what the rest of the government must do as part of an integrated deterrence construct. They should focus their efforts on ensuring that military solutions align with broader strategic goals—but they should be very hesitant to take the lead on the non-military aspects of the DIME.

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<sup>9</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-strategicposture>.

<sup>10</sup> Brad Roberts, et al., “China’s Emergence as a Second Nuclear Peer: Implications for U.S. Deterrence Strategy,” Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory Center for Global Security Research, 2023, available at [https://cgsl.llnl.gov/sites/cgsl/files/2024-08/CGSR\\_Two\\_Peer\\_230314.pdf](https://cgsl.llnl.gov/sites/cgsl/files/2024-08/CGSR_Two_Peer_230314.pdf).

Failure to focus on the proper level of analysis—tactics for junior officers, operations for mid-level officers to early-grade generals and admirals, and strategy for the highest ranks—will leave our nation underprepared for military engagements that will ultimately decide the outcome of war. It also will undercut the potential utility of the other elements of national power that depend on the ultimate reliability of the military instrument. Given the deteriorating state of the world's security environment, now is the time for military officers to focus on their core functions: the profession of arms.

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



## ANALYSIS

# THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION'S NUCLEAR WEAPONS EMPLOYMENT GUIDANCE—INCREASED COST AND REDUCED DETERRENT EFFECTIVENESS

Mark B. Schneider

In August 2024, it was reported that, “President Joe Biden has approved revisions to a classified nuclear strategic document that redirects Washington’s deterrent strategy to focus on China’s nuclear arsenal expansion for the first time...”<sup>1</sup> In 2024, two senior Biden Administration officials spoke about the possible need to increase the number of U.S. nuclear weapons.<sup>2</sup> The new unclassified Biden Administration nuclear weapons employment guidance report, issued in November 2024, stated that “...it may be necessary to adapt current U.S. force capability, posture, composition, or size in order to be able to fulfill the three stated roles of nuclear weapons.”<sup>3</sup> When issuing this report, the Department of Defense indicated, “The Guidance also directs that the United States plan to deter multiple nuclear-armed adversaries simultaneously...”<sup>4</sup> The Biden Administration took no action to implement this important policy change; rather, it left the decision on increasing U.S. nuclear weapons to the incoming Trump Administration.<sup>5</sup>

## The Biden Administration’s Unclassified Nuclear Weapons Employment Guidance Report

To its credit, the Biden Administration report stated that, “The Guidance continues to emphasize the need to, first and foremost, hold at risk what adversaries value most. It also reiterates the need to maintain counterforce capabilities to reduce potential adversaries’

<sup>1</sup> “Biden’s Secret Nuclear Weapons Strategy: Everything We Know About New Plan,” *Newsweek*, August 20, 2024, available at <https://www.newsweek.com/bidens-secret-nuclear-weapons-strategy-everything-we-know-about-new-plan-1942076>.

<sup>2</sup> Pranay Vaddi, “Adapting the U.S. Approach to Arms Control and Nonproliferation to a New Era,” Arms Control Association, June 7, 2024, available at <https://www.armscontrol.org/2024AnnualMeeting/Pranay-Vaddi-remarks: '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/>.

<sup>3</sup> Department of Defense, “Report on the Nuclear Employment Strategy of the United States,” Department of Defense, November 2024, p. 4, available at <https://media.defense.gov/2024/Nov/15/2003584623/-1/-1/1/REPORT-ON-THE-NUCLEAR-EMPLOYMENT-STRATEGY-OF-THE-UNITED-STATES.PDF>.

<sup>4</sup> Department of Defense, “DOD Sends Report to Congress on the Nuclear Weapons Employment Strategy of the United States,” Department of Defense, November 15, 2024, available at <https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3966543/dod-sends-report-to-congress-on-the-nuclear-weapons-employment-strategy-of-the/>.

<sup>5</sup> Michael R. Gordon, “U.S. Must Be Prepared to Expand Nuclear-Weapons Force, Biden Officials Say,” *The Wall Street Journal*, November 15, 2024, available at <https://www.wsj.com/politics/national-security/u-s-must-be-prepared-to-expand-nuclear-weapons-force-biden-officials-say-3f317fc9>.



ability to employ nuclear weapons against the United States and its allies and partners, and does not rely on a counter-value or minimum-deterrence approach.”<sup>6</sup> It continued:

Updated elements of the Guidance evolved from prior iterations by:

- Requiring that planning accounts for the new deterrence challenges posed by the growth, modernization, and increasing diversity of potential adversaries’ nuclear arsenals;
- Directing that the United States be able to deter Russia, the PRC [China], and the DPRK [North Korea] simultaneously in peacetime, crisis, and conflict;
- Effectuating the 2022 NPR decision to rely on non-nuclear overmatch to deter regional aggression by Iran as long as Iran does not possess a nuclear weapon;
- Requiring the integration of non-nuclear capabilities into U.S. nuclear planning where non-nuclear capabilities can support the nuclear deterrence mission;
- Stressing the importance of managing escalation in U.S. planning for responding to limited strategic attack; and
- Enabling deeper consultation, coordination, and combined planning with NATO and Indo-Pacific allies and partners in order to strengthen U.S. extended deterrence commitments.<sup>7</sup>

The Biden Administration deserves credit for adopting conclusions concerning the new multipolar nuclear threats the United States faces similar to those reached by the bipartisan Congressional Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States. Its guidance report stated that “...the evidence of growing collaboration and collusion between Russia, the PRC, the DPRK, and Iran makes the situation even more challenging. There is a possibility of coordinated or opportunistic aggression by a combination of adversaries in a crisis or conflict, which requires U.S. strategists to think carefully about complex escalation dynamics and deterring multiple adversaries simultaneously, including in extended crises or conflicts.”<sup>8</sup> However, it took *none* of the Commission’s report recommendations on enhancing U.S. strategic nuclear deterrence capabilities.<sup>9</sup>

Since 1997, there has been a large reduction in U.S. strategic nuclear weapons numbers and no modernization of strategic delivery vehicles. Two of the three best Reagan-era counterforce weapons—the Peacekeeper ICBM and the Advanced Cruise Missile — were eliminated by the George W. Bush Administration without replacement. The Obama Administration eliminated the nuclear sea-launched Tomahawk land attack missile (TLAM-N) and decided on the eventual elimination of all U.S. nuclear bombs that could seriously

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<sup>6</sup> “Report on the Nuclear Employment Strategy of the United States,” 2024. op. cit., p. 3.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>9</sup> Mark B. Schneider, “The October 2023 Strategic Commission Report and U.S. Nuclear Weapons Requirements,” *Information Series*, No. 568 (Fairfax, VA: National Institute Press, December 1, 2023), pp. viii, 34, 35, 43, 45, 46, 48, available at [https://nipp.org/information\\_series/mark-b-schneider-the-october-2023-strategic-commission-report-and-u-s-nuclear-weapons-requirements-no-568-december-1-2023/](https://nipp.org/information_series/mark-b-schneider-the-october-2023-strategic-commission-report-and-u-s-nuclear-weapons-requirements-no-568-december-1-2023/).

threaten *very hard* and *very deeply* buried bunkers.<sup>10</sup> Without these weapons, U.S. nuclear forces cannot effectively threaten what President Putin values most—his life and well-being, which are protected by Russia’s new, deep underground bunkers.<sup>11</sup> The United States does not have sufficient deployed nuclear weapons with the right technical characteristics to deter multiple nuclear adversaries or, indeed, even to target effectively Russia or China alone.<sup>12</sup>

An analysis by the Federation of American Scientists authored by Adam Mount and Hans Kristensen denied that the new Biden guidance shifted emphasis from Russia to China and pointed out the limits in the changes it mandated. It stated that the guidance report does not require U.S. forces to: 1) maintain the capability to limit damage against multiple adversaries simultaneously; 2) “maintain the capability to perform other or all objectives against multiple adversaries...”; and 3) “limit damage against multiple peer adversaries...[or] restore deterrence in the event that it fails....”<sup>13</sup> They also said that the Biden guidance did “...not endorse the recommendation of the Strategic Posture Commission that China’s buildup demands that the United States follow suit.”<sup>14</sup>

Moreover, they pointed out, “The language of the employment strategy report does not clearly indicate whether U.S. forces are required to perform these more demanding objectives. The president could have stated, for example, that U.S. forces are not required to maintain the capability to limit damage against multiple adversaries simultaneously.”<sup>15</sup> The authors noted that the guidance “...does not explicitly use the ‘two peer’ description frequently used in the public debate by defense officials and others.”<sup>16</sup>

These omissions probably reflected the fact that the Biden Administration did not want to admit that it was allowing China to achieve nuclear parity and that the nuclear forces in the U.S. program of record could not achieve these objectives.

Even if one takes the Biden Administration’s description of its new guidance at face value, the mandated good changes can only partially deal with the rapidly growing multipolar nuclear threats. In 2022, then-STRATCOM Commander Admiral Charles Richard observed:

- “This Ukraine crisis that we’re in right now, this is just the warmup.”
- “The big one is coming. And it isn’t going to be very long before we’re going to get tested in ways that we haven’t been tested a long time.”

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<sup>10</sup> Department of Defense, *Nuclear Posture Review Report*, Department of Defense, April 2010, available at [https://dod.defense.gov/portals/1/features/defensereviews/npr/2010\\_nuclear\\_posture\\_review\\_report.pdf](https://dod.defense.gov/portals/1/features/defensereviews/npr/2010_nuclear_posture_review_report.pdf).

<sup>11</sup> Mark B. Schneider, “Biden’s NPR: Assured Survival for Vladimir Putin,” *Real Clear Defense*, April 21, 2022, available at [https://www.realcleardefense.com/2022/04/21/bidens\\_npr\\_assured\\_survival\\_for\\_vladimir\\_putin\\_828255.html](https://www.realcleardefense.com/2022/04/21/bidens_npr_assured_survival_for_vladimir_putin_828255.html).

<sup>12</sup> Schneider, “The October 2023 Strategic Commission Report and U.S. Nuclear Weapons Requirements,” op, cit.

<sup>13</sup> Adam Mount and Hans Kristensen, “Biden Nuclear Weapons Employment Guidance Leaves Nuclear Decisions to Trump,” Federation of American Scientists, December 5, 2024, available at <https://fas.org/publication/biden-nuclear-weapons-employment-guidance-leaves-nuclear-decisions-to-trump/>.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>16</sup> Loc. cit.



- “As I assess our level of deterrence against China, the ship is slowly sinking.”<sup>17</sup>

The key question that the Trump Administration will face is whether the Biden Administration’s changes are actually good ones, or to use Admiral Richard’s metaphor, are simply rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic.

Both the unclassified guidance report and the classified version of the Biden guidance should be carefully reviewed by the Trump Administration, even before initiating a full scale nuclear posture review. President Trump issued his own nuclear employment guidance report in 2020.<sup>18</sup> Much of it, even if dated, is significantly better, more comprehensive and informative than the Biden version. Some of the new Biden language should be adopted; the bad elements should be rejected.

## Deterring Iran

The Biden nuclear employment guidance report stated that, “The United States remains resolved to prevent Iran from developing a nuclear weapon and is prepared to use all elements of national power to ensure that outcome.”<sup>19</sup> However, in December 2024, White House Communications Advisor Rear Admiral (ret.) John Kirby acknowledged that the Biden Administration’s effort to prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons through diplomacy “...didn’t work....”<sup>20</sup> Reportedly, “Mohammad-Javad Larijani, a close aide to Iran’s Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, made a shocking statement, declaring that Iran could develop military nuclear capabilities within just one day.”<sup>21</sup> The statement in the nuclear employment guidance report that the United States will “...rely on non-nuclear overmatch to deter regional aggression by Iran as long as Iran does not possess a nuclear weapon,” appears to be dangerous wishful thinking.

The Biden Administration even sought to protect Iranian nuclear capabilities from an Israeli attack in response to the two large scale Iranian missile strikes on Israel, not to mention Iranian support of vicious terrorist attacks against Israel. When asked by reporters

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<sup>17</sup> C. Todd Lopez, “Stratcom Commander Says U.S. Should Look to 1950s to Regain Competitive Edge,” *DOD News*, November 3, 2022, available at <https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/3209416/stratcom-commander-says-us-should-look-to-1950s-to-regain-competitive-edge/#:~:text=Charles%20A.,been%20tested%20a%20long%20time.%22./>.

<sup>18</sup> Department of Defense, “Report on the Nuclear Employment Strategy of the United States—2020,” Department of Defense, November 30, 2020, available at [https://www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/FOID/Reading%20Room/NCB/21-F-0591\\_2020\\_Report\\_of\\_the\\_Nuclear\\_Employment\\_Strategy\\_of\\_the\\_United\\_States.pdf](https://www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/FOID/Reading%20Room/NCB/21-F-0591_2020_Report_of_the_Nuclear_Employment_Strategy_of_the_United_States.pdf).

<sup>19</sup> “Report on the Nuclear Employment Strategy of the United States,” 2024, op. cit., p. 2.

<sup>20</sup> Jan Hanchett, “White House: Our Attempts at Keeping Iran from Getting Nukes Through Diplomacy ‘Didn’t Work,’” *Breitbart.com*, December 14, 2024, available at <https://www.breitbart.com/clips/2024/12/14/white-house-our-attempts-at-keeping-iran-from-getting-nukes-through-diplomacy-didnt-work/>.

<sup>21</sup> “‘In 24 Hours, Nukes...’: Iran’s Shocking Nuclear Announcement After Russia’s Warning,” *The Times of India*, November 19, 2024, available at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/videos/international/in-24-hours-nukes-irans-shocking-nuclear-announcement-after-russias-warning/videoshow/115458978.cms>.

whether he would back an Israeli attack on Iranian nuclear sites, then-President Biden replied, “The answer is no.”<sup>22</sup>

Reportedly, even the rather weak 2001 *Nuclear Posture Review* applied nuclear deterrence to Iran.<sup>23</sup> The threat of chemical and biological attacks must be deterred because of their lethality. The United States and its allies lack any in-kind deterrent to address these threats. Conventional weapons are not an effective deterrent against these types of attacks because of the vast difference in lethality. Moreover, the U.S. stockpile of advanced conventional munitions was dramatically reduced by the Biden Administration’s budgets and the wars in Ukraine and the Middle East.<sup>24</sup>

## Dealing with Belarus

Despite joint nuclear strike exercises, Russian provision of tactical nuclear weapons to Belarus, and Belorussian nuclear threats, there was no indication in the unclassified Biden guidance report that the United States applied nuclear deterrence to Belarus.<sup>25</sup> In December 2024, President Putin stated that Russia may deploy the Oreshnik missile, which Russia had just launched against Ukraine, in Belarus in 2025.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko later indicated that ten Oreshnik missiles would be deployed in Belarus in 2025.<sup>27</sup> The U.S. Department of Defense stated the Oreshnik was “...an experimental intermediate range ballistic missile...based on Russia’s RS-26 Rubezh intercontinental

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<sup>22</sup> Trevor Hunnicutt, Matt Spetalnick and Jasper Ward, “Biden says US would not support Israeli strike on Iran nuclear sites,” *Reuters*, October 2, 2024, available at <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/biden-says-he-does-not-support-attack-irans-nuclear-sites-2024-10-02/>.

<sup>23</sup> Philipp C. Bleek, “Nuclear Posture Review Leaks; Outlines Targets, Contingencies,” *Arms Control Today*, April 1, 2002, available at <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2002-04/press-releases/nuclear-posture-review-leaks-outlines-targets-contingencies>.

<sup>24</sup> Bill Gertz, “Admiral warns Ukraine aid depleting U.S. missile stocks,” *The Washington Times*, November 22, 2024, available at <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2024/nov/22/adm-sam-paparo-warns-ukraine-aid-depleting-us-miss/>.

<sup>25</sup> “Putin Ally Issues Nuclear Warning to NATO,” *Newsweek*, September 27, 2024, available at <https://www.newsweek.com/putin-ally-nuclear-warning-nato-lukashenko-belarus-nato-1960339>.; “Belarusian missile crews practice operation of Iskander missiles carrying special warheads,” *TASS*, August 25, 2023, available at <https://tass.com/defense/1665627>.; “Russia, Belarus practice readying tactical nuclear forces and capabilities in joint drills,” *TASS*, June 13, 2024, available at <https://tass.com/defense/1802803>; Mark B. Schneider, “The Russian Non-Strategic (Tactical) Nuclear Exercise,” *Real Clear Defense*, September 17, 2024, available at [https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2024/09/17/the\\_russian\\_non-strategic\\_tactical\\_nuclear\\_exercise\\_1058803.html](https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2024/09/17/the_russian_non-strategic_tactical_nuclear_exercise_1058803.html); Jack Detsch, “Russia’s Nuclear Weapons Are Now in Belarus,” *Foreign Policy*, March 14, 2024, available at <https://foreignpolicy.com/2024/03/14/russia-nuclear-weapons-belarus-putin/>.

<sup>26</sup> “Russia ready to deploy Oreshnik in Belarus in 2025 — Putin,” *TASS*, December 6, 2024, available at <https://tass.com/politics/1883517>.

<sup>27</sup> “Lukashenko Reveals Plans For Russian Oreshnik Missile Deployment In Belarus,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, December 10, 2024, available at <https://www.rferl.org/a/lukashenko-russia-oreshnik-missile-deployment-belarus-putin-ukraine/33234767.html>.

ballistic missile model.”<sup>28</sup> The Oreshnik is nuclear-capable,<sup>29</sup> carrying six nuclear warheads.<sup>30</sup>

## Arms Control and Nuclear Deterrence

There are two important realities impacting the potential role of arms control on nuclear deterrence. As the bipartisan United States Strategic Posture Commission pointed out “...there is no prospect of a meaningful arms control Treaty being negotiated with Russia in the foreseeable future...” and that, “Over the past 20 years, Russia has either violated or has failed to comply with nearly every major arms control treaty or agreement to which the United States is or was a party.”<sup>31</sup> It continued, “...given Russia’s history of noncompliance and illegal treaty suspensions, and China’s continued intransigence on arms control dialogue, the United States cannot develop its strategic posture based on the assumption that arms control agreements are imminent or will always be in force.”<sup>32</sup> The November 2024 launch of the Oreshnik missile violated the Ballistic Missile Launch Notification Agreement, which is incorporated by reference in the New START Treaty. Deployment of the Oreshnik in Belarus in 2025 would further violate the New START Treaty.

Pranay Vaddi, then-Special Assistant to President Biden and Senior Director for Arms Control, Disarmament, and Nonproliferation at the National Security Council observed that, “Russia, the PRC and North Korea are all expanding and diversifying their nuclear arsenals at a breakneck pace—showing little or no interest in arms control.”<sup>33</sup> Despite these assessments, the Biden guidance report was unrealistic about the role of arms control in nuclear deterrence. The report stated that, “Arms control, risk reduction, and nuclear nonproliferation play indispensable roles as well.”<sup>34</sup> It failed to explain why.

Russia continues to violate the New START Treaty by: 1) denying the United States its critical on-site inspection rights, 2) ceasing to provide the legally required notifications, and

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<sup>28</sup> Department of Defense, “Deputy Pentagon Press Secretary Sabrina Singh Holds a Press Briefing,” Department of Defense, November 21, 2024, available at <https://www.defense.gov/News/Transcripts/Transcript/Article/3975265/deputy-pentagon-press-secretary-sabrina-singh-holds-a-press-briefing/>.

<sup>29</sup> “Meeting with the Defence Ministry leadership, representatives of the military-industrial complex and missile system developers,” *Kremlin.ru*, November 22, 2024, available at <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/75623>.

<sup>30</sup> Mark B. Schneider, “Military and Arms Control Implications of the New Russian Oreshnik Missile,” *Real Clear Defense*, December 17, 2024, available at [https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2024/12/17/military\\_and\\_arms\\_control\\_implications\\_of\\_the\\_new\\_russian\\_oreshnik\\_missile\\_1079036.html](https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2024/12/17/military_and_arms_control_implications_of_the_new_russian_oreshnik_missile_1079036.html).

<sup>31</sup> Madelyn Creedon and Jon Kyl, et al., Congressional Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States, *America’s Strategic Posture, The Final Report of the Congressional Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States*, Institute for Defense Analysis, 2023, p. 84, available at <https://www.ida.org/-/media/feature/publications/a/am/americas-strategic-posture/strategic-posture-commission-report.ashx>.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 109.

<sup>33</sup> Vaddi, “Adapting the U.S. Approach to Arms Control and Nonproliferation to a New Era,” *op. cit.*

<sup>34</sup> “Report on the Nuclear Employment Strategy of the United States,” 2024, *op. cit.*

3) illegally “suspending” its participation in New START.<sup>35</sup> While Russia made the self-serving claim that it is continuing to observe the limitations of the New START Treaty, the U.S. Department of State, starting in its 2023 annual report on the New START Treaty, said that it was unable to certify Russian compliance with the numerical limitations of the Treaty.<sup>36</sup> A November 2024 report by the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) confirmed that Russia was in violation of the New START Treaty’s deployed warhead limit of 1,550. It stated:

Russia has maintained the largest foreign nuclear stockpile in the world. Moscow maintains about 1,550 deployed strategic nuclear warheads on ICBMs and submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs), as well as a force of heavy bombers which are capable of carrying long-range air-launched cruise missiles (ALCMs). Under the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) counting rules, the heavy bombers count as one warhead each, but each bomber is capable of carrying eight or more air-launched cruise missiles.<sup>37</sup>

Thus, the loss of on-site inspections is vitally important as long as the United States imposes the substantive New START limitations on itself. Indeed, in 2020, former Under Secretary of State and chief New START Treaty negotiator Rose Gottemoeller wrote “...we discarded *reciprocal inspections*; in fact, we did not need telemetry measures to confirm compliance with the warhead limits in the new treaty.”<sup>38</sup> (Emphasis added). There has not been a New START Treaty on-site inspection since March 2020, more than enough time for Russia to have uploaded all or nearly all of its strategic missile force.<sup>39</sup> If Russia has uploaded its missiles, its number of deployed nuclear warheads would be much higher than the 1,550 warheads assessed by DIA.

The Biden Administration’s nuclear employment guidance rewarded Russia for violating New START by mandating U.S. compliance with a Treaty Russia is violating.

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<sup>35</sup> U.S. Department of State, Office of the Spokesperson, “Russian Noncompliance with and Invalid Suspension of the New START Treaty,” Fact Sheet, U.S. Department of State, June 1, 2023, available at <https://www.state.gov/russian-noncompliance-with-and-invalid-suspension-of-the-new-start-treaty/>.

<sup>36</sup> U.S. Department of State, “Report to Congress on Implementation of the New START Treaty Pursuant to paragraph (a)(10) of the Senate’s Resolution of Advice and Consent to Ratification of the New START Treaty (Treaty Doc. 111-5) NEW START TREATY ANNUAL IMPLEMENTATION REPORT,” U.S. Department of State, 2023, p. 5, available at <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/2022-New-START-Implementation-Report.pdf>.

<sup>37</sup> Defense Intelligence Agency, *NUCLEAR CHALLENGES - The Growing Capabilities of Strategic Competitors and Regional Rival* (Washington, D.C.: Defense Intelligence Agency, November 2024), p. IX, available at [https://www.dia.mil/Portals/110/Images/News/Military\\_Powers\\_Publications/Nuclear\\_Challenges\\_2024.pdf](https://www.dia.mil/Portals/110/Images/News/Military_Powers_Publications/Nuclear_Challenges_2024.pdf).

<sup>38</sup> Rose Gottemoeller, “The New START Verification Regime: How Good Is It?,” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, May 21, 2020, available at <https://thebulletin.org/2020/05/the-new-start-verification-regime-how-good-is-it/>.

<sup>39</sup> Mark B. Schneider, “The Death of the New START Treaty,” *Information Series*, No. 560 (Fairfax, VA: National Institute Press, August 7, 2023), available at [https://nipp.org/information\\_series/mark-b-schneider-the-death-of-the-new-start-treaty-no-560-august-7-2023](https://nipp.org/information_series/mark-b-schneider-the-death-of-the-new-start-treaty-no-560-august-7-2023).

## The Lack of a Programmatic Response to Implement the New Guidance

In June 2024, Pranay Vaddi stated that the United States had responded to the increased threat by: 1) pursuing the B61-13 nuclear bomb as a replacement for the “outdated” B83 nuclear bomb, 2) seeking to life extend certain Trident submarines, and 3) bolstering U.S. deterrence without increasing the number of nuclear weapons.<sup>40</sup> Despite these announced actions, the Biden Administration did little in reality to respond to the threats it assessed.

The B61-13 bomb while a useful addition to the U.S. capability is less capable than the B83 bomb against *very hard* and *very deeply* buried facilities—including the ones that President Putin depends on to keep himself alive in a nuclear war.<sup>41</sup> The first Trump Administration wisely reversed the Obama Administration’s decision to retire the B83 without replacement. The Chairman of the House Armed Services Committee Congressman Mike Rogers (R-AL) and Senator Roger F. Wicker (R-MS), Ranking Member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, correctly observed that the B61-13 “is only a modest step in the right direction. The B61-13 is not a long-term solution....”<sup>42</sup> Indeed, the B61-13 is *not a full replacement* for the B83. This is important because the last thing the United States should want is to have President Putin believe that he can initiate a nuclear war and survive in his deep underground bunkers. The United States actually needs a better weapon than the B83,<sup>43</sup> most likely a robust nuclear earth penetrator.

The Trident life extension was an emergency measure designed to prevent a decline in U.S. capability due to a delay in the Columbia class ballistic missile replacement program.<sup>44</sup>

In August 2024, then-Acting Assistant Secretary of Defense Dr. Vipin Narang stated that the Biden Administration had ended its opposition to the nuclear SLCM program.<sup>45</sup> In reality, the Navy is continuing to slow-roll it, even claiming that it will “require an entirely new industrial base.”<sup>46</sup> Its projected availability date is about 17 years after President Trump directed the program in the 2018 *Nuclear Posture Review*. Former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Dr. Robert Soofer has stated, “We have a missile, a Tomahawk missile,

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<sup>40</sup> Vaddi, “Adapting the U.S. Approach to Arms Control and Nonproliferation to a New Era,” op. cit., p. 5.

<sup>41</sup> Mark B. Schneider, “Putin’s New Assured Survival Nuclear Bunker,” *Real Clear Defense*, December 1, 2020, available at [https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2020/12/01/putins\\_new\\_assured\\_survival\\_nuclear\\_bunker\\_651424.html](https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2020/12/01/putins_new_assured_survival_nuclear_bunker_651424.html).

<sup>42</sup> “Wicker, Rogers Statement on B61-13 Gravity Bomb,” Press Release, October 27, 2023, available at <https://www.wicker.senate.gov/2023/10/wicker-rogers-statement-on-b61-13-gravity-bomb>.

<sup>43</sup> Bill Gertz, “U.S. Lacks Nuclear Weapon for Hardened Underground Targets,” *The Washington Free Beacon*, September 6, 2018, available at <https://freebeacon.com/national-security/u-s-lacks-nuclear-weapon-hardened-underground-targets/>.

<sup>44</sup> Creedon and Kyl, et al., *America’s Strategic Posture, The Final Report of the Congressional Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States*, op. cit., p. 44.

<sup>45</sup> Remarks by Acting Assistant Secretary of Defense for Space Policy Dr. Vipin Narang at CSIS,” Department of Defense, 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/>.

<sup>46</sup> Sydney J. Freedberg Jr., “Sub-launched nuclear cruise missile will need ‘an entirely new industrial base,’ warns Navy admiral, *Breaking Defense*, November 15, 2024, available at <https://breakingdefense.com/2024/11/sub-launched-nuclear-cruise-missile-will-need-an-entirely-new-industrial-base-warns-navy-admiral/>.

that has been upgraded continuously to the Block V. It's got the range that we need," and, "I guarantee you that the labs can put a nuclear warhead on that."<sup>47</sup>

The SLCM-N is vital because it: 1) enhances the survivability of U.S. nuclear forces; 2) provides the *only* survivable U.S. theater nuclear force, and 3) potentially could also form the basis of a survivable strategic reserve force.

## Combining Nuclear and Conventional Strikes

The Biden Administration's nuclear employment guidance stated:

While recognizing that nuclear weapons continue to provide unique deterrence effects that no other element of U.S. military power can replace, the Guidance places greater emphasis on the use of non-nuclear capabilities to support the nuclear deterrence mission, where feasible. Such integration allows the Joint Force to combine nuclear and non-nuclear capabilities in complementary ways that leverage the individual characteristics of diverse forces.<sup>48</sup>

Attempting to combine nuclear and conventional strikes into a single war plan in *which there is an attempt to substitute conventional for nuclear capabilities*, is a losing proposition. Conventional weapons cannot substitute for nuclear weapons in a combined war plan because: 1) there is a qualitative difference in lethality between nuclear and conventional weapons, which means that vast numbers of expensive conventional missiles would have to be procured; 2) the conventional systems would have to be given nuclear and electromagnetic pulse hardening, which the Electromagnetic Pulse Commission determined to be impractical for all conventional munitions because of the cost;<sup>49</sup> 3) the threat of GPS jamming and other forms of GPS denial, would make dependence on GPS guidance very risky;<sup>50</sup> 4) thousands of expensive conventional weapons would have to be withheld from the conventional war plans and somehow maintained in a survivable configuration (probably financially impossible) to have a significant deterrent impact against nuclear weapons first use; 5) since conventional earth penetrators cannot generally destroy targets any deeper than they can penetrate,<sup>51</sup> which is limited, conventional weapons generally have

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> "Report on the Nuclear Employment Strategy of the United States," 2024, op. cit., p. 3.

<sup>49</sup> Dr. John S. Foster, Jr. et. al., *Report of the Commission to Assess the Threat to the United States from Electromagnetic Pulse (EMP) Attack*, Volume 1: Executive Report, 2004, p. 47, available at [https://www.empcommission.org/docs/empc\\_exec\\_rpt.pdf](https://www.empcommission.org/docs/empc_exec_rpt.pdf).

<sup>50</sup> General Michael Hostage III, Commander, USAF Air Combat Command, "Future of the Combat Air Force." AFA - Air & Space Conference and Technology Exposition, September 16, 2014, available at <https://www.af.mil/Portals/1/documents/af%20events/Speeches/16SEP2014-Gen-Michael-Hostage-Future-of-the-Combat-AF-AFA-Conference.pdf>.

<sup>51</sup> "Summary," of *Effects of Nuclear and Earth Penetrator and Other Weapons*, National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (Washington, D.C.: The National Academies Press, 2005), available at <https://doi.org/10.17226/11282>.

little effect against *very hard* and *very deeply* buried targets, and 6) the effectiveness of the conventional strikes would be limited, as likely would be their deterrent effect.

To give some idea of how many expensive precision guided conventional missiles would have to be procured to substitute for a relatively small number of nuclear weapons, it is worth noting that during the recent Eisenhower carrier strike group deployment to the Middle East, 135 Tomahawk Land Attack Missiles were reportedly launched against Houthi terrorist targets and the carrier's aircraft dropped 420 air-to-ground weapons.<sup>52</sup> Despite these attacks, the Houthi terrorists were able to continue their missile attacks.<sup>53</sup>

Protracted conventional strikes of the type conducted in a conventional conflict are not practical if an adversary is using nuclear weapons against U.S. forces and U.S. adversaries know this. The U.S. inventory of precision conventional weapons is inadequate. Indeed, less than three weeks after the nuclear employment guidance had been made public, White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan stated that U.S. munitions would be exhausted in a China conflict "very rapidly."<sup>54</sup> Hence, the threat of conventional attacks is unlikely to have any significant deterrent effect against nuclear escalation.

Dr. Christopher Yeaw, a noted nuclear weapons expert and former senior government official, calculated that the U.S. attack on the Al Shayrat Airbase in Syria which used 58 Tomahawk cruise missiles could have been duplicated by three 7-kiloton nuclear weapons.<sup>55</sup> It is clear that if limiting collateral damage were not a major consideration, the base could have been completely destroyed with a single high-yield nuclear weapon. Dr. Yeaw pointed out that vast numbers of theater targets exist, creating a requirement for very large numbers of conventional cruise missiles. While he did not address this issue, the cost of repairing conventional weapons damage and the speed at which it can be accomplished is much greater for conventional than nuclear weapons because of the inhibiting impact of residual radiation.

In a conventional war, many targets that *are not very hard* and *not very deeply* buried can be destroyed by protracted conventional attacks. However, even if the United States had a large munitions stockpile, conducting protracted attacks would be impossible if an adversary is employing nuclear weapons against the United States and its allies. The threat of protracted conventional attack is not an effective deterrent because U.S. adversaries know that this is not feasible if they strike first with substantial numbers of even low-yield nuclear weapons.

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<sup>52</sup> Usman Ansari, "The Most Intense Sea Combat Since WW2," in Ian Ballantyne ed., *Guide to the US Navy 2025* (London: Sundial Magazines Ltd., September 13, 2024), p. 66.

<sup>53</sup> "Houthi Ballistic Missiles Impact Israel-linked Anadolu S Ship In Red Sea 'Accurate & Direct Hit,'" *Times of India*, November 20, 2024, available at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/videos/international/houthi-ballistic-missiles-impact-israel-linked-anadolu-s-ship-in-red-sea-accurate-direct-hit/videoshow/115475039.cms>.

<sup>54</sup> Bill Gertz, "Pentagon alert: U.S. runs out of missiles in a 'matter of days' in China war, can't match production," *The Washington Times*, December 5, 2024, available at <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2024/dec/5/congress-u-defense-industry-unable-supply-weapons-/>.

<sup>55</sup> Dr. Christopher Yeaw, "Geopolitical Nuclear Force Context with a Focus on China," National Strategic Research Institute University of Nebraska, 2024, mimeo.

The cost of conventional capabilities is high. The platforms that carry and deploy the conventional missiles (bombers, strike fighters, surface ships and submarines) are much more expensive than the missiles themselves. For example, the cost of a Tomahawk Block 5 missile is reportedly \$1,890,000 per round.<sup>56</sup> Ballistic and hypersonic missiles are usually far more expensive.

To *increase* the capability of U.S. conventional forces to launch non-nuclear missiles as an intended substitute for one-to-three nuclear missiles *after* a nuclear attack on the United States and its allies would cost billions. One-to-three nuclear SLCMs would require no additional ships to deploy them and could accomplish the same objective and do it more effectively.

Clearly, President Biden had no intention of increasing defense spending to fund a serious effort to substitute conventional for nuclear strike. (Similarly, the George W. Bush Administration never built its conventional “New Triad,” which supposedly was to substitute for the nuclear weapons reductions it made.)<sup>57</sup> Moreover, the seriously eroded U.S. military production base cannot support the increased reliance on conventional weapons that the Biden nuclear employment guidance report pretended to direct. In reality, the Biden guidance will be all but ignored by the military because it is economically prohibitive. Hence, the supposed enhanced reliance on conventional weapons was apparently a political fig leaf.

## Missing Elements in the Nuclear Employment Guidance

There are missing elements in the Biden Administration’s nuclear employment guidance that should be restored even on an interim basis. A good starting point would be elements from the Reagan Administration’s Nuclear Employment Guidance. These include:

- “The most fundamental national security objective is to deter direct attack—particularly nuclear attack—on the United States and its Allies. Should nuclear attack nonetheless occur, the United States and its Allies must prevail.”
- “Our nuclear forces (both the strategic Triad and theater forces), in conjunction with general purpose forces, must hold at risk the full range of enemy military capabilities that threaten the United States and its Allies.”
- “The United States must be able to deny the Soviet Union a military victory at any level of conflict and for it to seek the earliest termination of hostilities on terms favorable to the United States.”

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<sup>56</sup> Tyler Rogoway, “What The Navy’s Ship-Launched Missiles Actually Cost,” *The War Zone*, May 21, 2024, available <https://www.twz.com/sea/what-the-navys-ship-launched-missiles-actually-cost>.

<sup>57</sup> Donald H. Rumsfeld, *The Annual Report to the President and the Congress* (Washington, D.C.: Department of Defense, 2002), pp. 83-88, available at [https://history.defense.gov/Portals/70/Documents/annual\\_reports/2002\\_DoD\\_AR.pdf?ver=2014-06-24-153732-117](https://history.defense.gov/Portals/70/Documents/annual_reports/2002_DoD_AR.pdf?ver=2014-06-24-153732-117).



- There is a need for a “secure reserve force.”<sup>58</sup>

The exact Reagan language would need updating because it assumes capabilities that no longer exist (e.g., dual capability—combining nuclear and conventional warheads—has been nearly eliminated.) However, the concepts that underlie the Reagan guidance are still generally relevant.

Current U.S. nuclear forces cannot possibly win a nuclear war against a peer competitor much less two. However, U.S. nuclear employment guidance should not reinforce the current “no win” warfare mentality that exists in Washington (and adversary perceptions of it) which is resulting in defeat after defeat. U.S. adversaries should be made to believe that if they start a nuclear war, they just might lose. The unclassified employment report language is declaratory policy and it should be designed to influence adversary thinking. U.S. adversaries cannot ignore what it says.

As Admiral Richard and Robert Peters of the Heritage Foundation have pointed out, “Decisive victory ultimately deters a future war by changing the conditions that allowed a revisionist power to pursue conflict in the first place....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.”<sup>59</sup>

The Reagan Administration’s requirement that U.S. nuclear forces “must hold at risk the full range of enemy military capabilities that threaten the United States and its Allies” is significant. The Biden nuclear employment guidance report did not even mention dealing with chemical or biological weapons threats and other catastrophic threats. The need to deter these threats was a major element in the 2020 Trump nuclear employment guidance report.<sup>60</sup> These omissions should be addressed in the second Trump Administration.

The concept of a secure nuclear reserve force seems to have fallen out of U.S. planning. Yet, it is a key element in dealing with multiple nuclear-armed adversaries and should be reexamined.

The probability that nuclear attacks against the United States will be conducted consistent with the law of armed conflict is almost certainly zero. Exhibit one — President Putin’s war against Ukraine. Moreover, Russia has a very high-yield nuclear system called the Poseidon whose mission is the mass destruction of cities and civilians by massive blast and fallout.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Ronald Reagan, “NUCLEAR WEAPONS EMPLOYMENT POLICY,” NATIONAL SECURITY DECISION DIRECTIVE NUMBER 13, The White House, no date, available at <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/public/archives/reference/scanned-nsdds/nsdd13.pdf>.

<sup>59</sup> Admiral Charles Richard, USN (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), available at [https://nipp.org/information\\_series/admiral-charles-richard-usn-ret-and-robert-peters-on-victory-and-the-search-for-a-status-quo-ante-bellum-no-603-october-24-2024/](https://nipp.org/information_series/admiral-charles-richard-usn-ret-and-robert-peters-on-victory-and-the-search-for-a-status-quo-ante-bellum-no-603-october-24-2024/).

<sup>60</sup> “Report on the Nuclear Employment Strategy of the United States—2020,” op. cit., p. 8.

<sup>61</sup> Pavel Felgenhauer, “Russia Leaks Data About Doomsday Underwater Nuclear Drone,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor* Volume: 12 Issue: 206, November 12, 2015, available at <https://jamestown.org/program/russia-leaks-data-about-doomsday-underwater-nuclear-drone/>.

There is a fundamental right under international law of “belligerent reprisal.” Indeed, “Belligerent reprisals have been employed on the battlefield for centuries and are one of the few available sanctions of the laws of war.”<sup>62</sup> The nuclear-armed dictators must be made to believe that there will be the most serious consequences if they launch high-yield nuclear attacks against American cities with genocidal intent.

## **The Russian Reaction to the New Nuclear Employment Guidance**

The Russians appeared to be unimpressed by the Biden Administration’s nuclear weapons employment guidance report. State-run *TASS* paid little attention to the story. The report by state-run *RT* focused mainly on the Biden Administration’s announcement that with regard to nuclear forces it would continue to comply with the New START Treaty.<sup>63</sup> Russian state media didn’t even bother to attack it.

## **The Biden Administration’s Employment Guidance as a Constraint On President Trump**

Mount and Kristensen stated that, “When Donald Trump again takes custody of the nuclear codes in January, he will find no new guardrails on his ability to order use of U.S. nuclear weapons.”<sup>64</sup> While this appears in part to be a political attack on President Trump, he can sweep away any or all Biden executive orders on day one of his new Administration.

## **Suggested Near-Term Decisions on Nuclear Deterrence**

In light of the multiple serious crisis situations the United States now faces, the following actions should be taken:

- 1) Re-issue the Trump Administration’s 2020 unclassified Nuclear Employment Strategy report updated with the better elements of the Biden Administration’s 2024 unclassified guidance report (e.g., the scope of the nuclear threat and the need to deter multiple adversaries simultaneously).
- 2) Initiate a detailed review of the new classified Nuclear Weapons Employment Guidance, removing any imprudent, ill-advised elements.
- 3) Initiate a review of U.S. nuclear intelligence assessments of Russia, North Korea, Iran and, particularly, China. The Intelligence Community is probably underestimating all of their nuclear capabilities.

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<sup>62</sup> Shane Darcy, “THE EVOLUTION OF THE LAW OF BELLIGERENT REPRISALS,” *MILITARY LAW REVIEW*, Vol. 175, available at file:///C:/Users/aner/Downloads/444497-1.pdf.

<sup>63</sup> “Pentagon advises US Congress to abide by key nuclear arms control treaty,” *RT*, November 17, 2024, available at <https://www.rt.com/news/607771-us-pentagon-report-nuclear-treaty-russia/>.

<sup>64</sup> Mount and Kristensen, “Biden Nuclear Weapons Employment Guidance Leaves Nuclear Decisions to Trump,” op. cit.

- 4) Declare a material breach of the New START Treaty and begin an immediate upload of American strategic nuclear forces. In the current crises, such decisive action may just prevent World War III. It would cost very little<sup>65</sup> and it is the only step that the United States can undertake in the short-term.
- 5) Initiate a comprehensive Nuclear Posture Review. Just the increase in Chinese nuclear capability justifies this task.

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.: "The Potential Costs of Expanding U.S. Strategic Nuclear Forces If the New START Treaty Expires," Congressional Budget Office, August 2020, available at <https://www.cbo.gov/publication/56524>.



# ANALYSIS

## ACADEMIA AND THE ARMED FORCES: FORMAL COLLEAGUES OR PASSING ACQUAINTANCES?

Kenton White

“Quite frequently an uncomprehending gap has developed between academics writing within universities and serving officers within their staff colleges.”<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

Understanding and using strategic theory is not a superficial enterprise. It is based on the examination of complex relationships and the interactions between states, their allies, neutrals and enemies—and this understanding has practical consequences for policies a government or the armed forces pursue. Strategic theory is not always capable of accurately predicting future events, even in cases where the political and military situation is clear. This article critiques the disconnect between academic research and military practice in the field of strategy, war, and warfare. It argues that academic trends often prioritize the creation of new terminology and theoretical frameworks over practical utility, which diminishes their relevance and brings into question the ethics of such activities. To address this, it advocates for a more constructive relationship between academia and military practitioners, emphasizing the need for research that provides useful insights while accommodating the complexity and ambiguity inherent in military operations.

This piece examines and analyzes some of the current “fads” and new descriptions of war, warfare and strategy by the application of different terminology. The problem is addressed in two parts. First, are academics rewarded for work which is useful to practitioners? Second, does academic work enhance, reflect or complement the true state of practitioners’ understanding and practice? Lastly, the analysis proposes steps the strategic studies field can take to enhance the practitioners’ understanding of war in a manner that would increase the chances of formulating policies that advance the West’s objectives, mainly maintenance of the status quo in the face of increasingly belligerent, cooperating, and capable adversaries.

<sup>1</sup> Brian Holden Reid, ed., *Military Power: Land Warfare in Theory and Practice* (London; Portland, OR: F. Cass, 1997), p. 2.



## Strategic Thinking and Its Practical Application

The choice of words one uses carries significance; they shape one's comprehension of a subject and influence the perception of its mechanisms and impacts. In analyses of conflict in Ukraine or Syria the types of warfare are often entitled "hybrid" or "asymmetric."<sup>2</sup>

In 2015, graduate of the U.S. Military Academy and the U.S. Army War College, Professor Antulio Echevarria wrote,

While the original aim of such labeling or relabeling may have been to draw the attention of busy policymakers to emerging security issues, it has evolved into something of a culture of replication in which the labels are repeated more out of habit than reflection. As a result, we have an increase in claims about what contemporary wars are (or are not), but little in the way of strategic analysis to support those claims.<sup>3</sup>

What are the descriptions for? The intention is to allow practitioners and students of strategy to compare one event with another. Well-established descriptions should help one understand what is happening, and how he can overcome our opponents utilizing this knowledge. They provide an understanding of differences between events, and the ability to distinguish between dissimilar occurrences. But for what purpose? The purpose should be to inform policy and strategy makers, to inform those whose job it is to create policy and to implement it. Just as importantly it should allow the armed forces a better understanding of the threats they are facing, and the opportunity to develop counters and new doctrines.

The article argues that the current trend of dividing the theory and practice of the use of military force into smaller sub-categories, or "salami-slicing," is not only counterproductive, but also risks stifling originality and inventiveness in the field of strategy. Presenting a more holistic and simplified framework for understanding strategy would encourage greater creativity and innovation. As part of the process of strategy creation, one must also take account of the context in which he expects to use military force. Assessing the threat posed by a potential enemy and analyzing his capabilities enables one to shape the response. The trend to "salami-slicing" can in part be explained by the stagnation of strategic thinking in the West since the end of the Cold War. Has the West learned from its mistakes and, if so, how that has been implemented in the latest North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) *Strategic Concept*?

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<sup>2</sup> Janne Jokinen, Magnus Normark, and Michael Fredholm, "Hybrid Threats from Non-State Actors: A Taxonomy," *Hybrid CoE*, June 2022, available at <https://www.hybridcoe.fi/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Hybrid-Coe-Research-Report-6-WEB-EDS-20221121.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> Antulio J. Echevarria, "How Should We Think about 'Gray-Zone' Wars?," *Infinity Journal*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (Fall 2015), p. 16.

## What Is the Problem?

The intention of this article is to examine whether academic activity around the use and theory of military force helps the practitioners do their job. This will be assessed from a broad perspective. However, it has direct relevance given the changing global circumstances. With NATO having completed its new *Strategic Concept*, what has (has not) the West learned about how the thinking around strategy, war, and warfare is developed, particularly in NATO countries? If the West does not learn, why not? If the West does learn, how does it retain the capacity throughout peaceful periods? The latter is probably the most difficult part of sustaining a credible military force.

As demonstrated by Professor Echevarria, the narrowing definitions, applied to war and warfare as part of the process of strategy, have occurred in increasing numbers since the end of the Cold War. The categories that are proliferating now all describe styles of war and warfare which were present and understood *during* the Cold War, and before, summed up by de Wijk as “Old Wine in New Casks.”<sup>4</sup>

The aspects of war and warfare that are named and defined by academics have been previously recognized by many in military forces around the world, but without the necessity to name and catalogue them so closely.<sup>5</sup> Some academics fulfil their role by producing research which adds very little to the general understanding of strategy, war and warfare, but scores well in official rankings and improves their standing in academia. Academic success is measured, certainly in the United Kingdom (UK), by the “impact” research has. This “impact” is measured by the status of the journals in which the research is published, and how frequently it is read. It is far more difficult to measure how much “impact” the type of research under consideration here has on the practice of the military function. This problem is not confined to the Strategic Studies field. In the review of political theory, Dr Maeve McKeown argues that, “... these conditions [of impact rating] are stifling intellectual creativity ... and dissent ...”<sup>6</sup> Goodhart’s Law states, “When a measure becomes a target, it ceases to be a good measure.”<sup>7</sup> As applied to measuring academic output, the targets have unwittingly made it necessary for scholars to “produce” work, fulfilling Goodhart’s Law. Scholarly work is now regarded as any other type of product, manufactured as a means to an end, rather than to add to collective understanding of a particular problem or its solution. This is a waste of effort and time and expense which could be better employed providing the

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<sup>4</sup> Rob De Wijk, “Hybrid Conflict and the Changing Nature of Actors,” in Julian Lindley-French and Yves Boyer (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 359.

<sup>5</sup> Colin S. Gray, *Categorical Confusion? The Strategic Implications of Recognizing Challenges Either as Irregular or Traditional*, Strategic Studies Institute (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2012).

<sup>6</sup> Maeve McKeown, “The View from Below: How the Neoliberal Academy Is Shaping Contemporary Political Theory,” *Society*, 2022, available at <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12115-022-00705-z>.

<sup>7</sup> Alec Chrystal, “Goodhart’s Law: Its Origins, Meaning and Implications for Monetary Policy,” in Paul Mitzen (eds.), *Central Banking, Monetary Theory and Practice* (Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2003), available at <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781781950777.00022>.

practitioners with the support they actually need, rather than what academia believes they need.

The expert community should remove the academic dogma associated with theory and methodology in the study of strategy, war, and warfare. The activities are “fuzzy” in practice. As Professor Beatrice Heuser, ex of NATO and *Zentrum für Militärgeschichte und Sozialwissenschaften der Bundeswehr*, says in the conclusion to her most recent book, “... it is very difficult to draw the line between the state of war and the state of peace, but that we need to factor in these fuzzy boundaries and the spillage in both directions ...”<sup>8</sup> This problem of fuzziness needs to be reflected in theory and methodological approach. As Dr Michaela Dodge observed, “The issue is that some policy-makers are happy to take flawed analysis, or analysis from people who were ... repeatedly wrong on an issue in the past, and use that to justify their wrong-headed policies on that very same issue.”<sup>9</sup> This author realizes, as an academic, that this will send shivers through many colleagues.

In academic circles more time seems to be spent arguing the finer technical points of the use of terminology, or defining that terminology more closely, than is spent thinking whether the terminology is useful.<sup>10</sup> The increasing use of inappropriate business jargon and ideas to justify budget cuts within the armed forces has already been noted by this researcher.<sup>11</sup>

In the case of Ukraine, the current theoretical approach has complicated the situation by offering too many competing and ultimately flawed interpretations of events taking place in Ukraine, even prior to February 2022.<sup>12</sup> Before then, the West was collectively reluctant to respond to Russian expansionism and aggression. This was partly a function of its hope of a new relationship with Russia, a “new world order,”<sup>13</sup> partly an uncertainty over the workability or suitability of deterrence. Academic interpretations and its many theories offered to politicians and practitioners may have muddied the waters, contributing to NATO’s inability or unwillingness to act decisively, regardless of its military ability to respond. The invasion of Ukraine changed the perception of what had been happening in that country since 2014, but NATO members still have trouble agreeing on the severity of Russia’s threat and the best response to it. Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine illustrates the difference between peace-time thinking and the practical employment of military force in a

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<sup>8</sup> Beatrice Heuser, *War: A Genealogy of Western Ideas and Practices* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022), p. 398.

<sup>9</sup> Dr. Michaela Dodge is a Research Scholar at National Institute for Public Policy. E-mail to author, April 18, 2024.

<sup>10</sup> For example, see Alessio Patalano, “When Strategy Is ‘Hybrid’ and Not ‘Grey’: Reviewing Chinese Military and Constabulary Coercion at Sea,” *The Pacific Review* Vol. 31, No. 6 (November 2, 2018), pp. 811–39; and Rob Johnson, Martijn Kitzen, and Tim Sweijs (eds.), *The Conduct of War in the 21st Century: Kinetic, Connected and Synthetic* (London New York, NY: Routledge, 2021).

<sup>11</sup> Kenton White, “‘Effing’ the Military: A Political Misunderstanding of Management,” *Defence Studies* Vol. 17, No. 4 (2017), pp. 1–13, available at <https://doi.org/10.1080/14702436.2017.1351879>.

<sup>12</sup> Eliot A. Cohen and Phillips O’Brien, “The Russia-Ukraine War A Study in Analytic Failure,” Center for Strategic and International Studies, September 2024, available at [https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2024-09/240924\\_Cohen\\_Russia\\_Ukraine.pdf?VersionId=1YNnRnwS.6DkrwNcAkdb5Dbsfjclg0JR](https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2024-09/240924_Cohen_Russia_Ukraine.pdf?VersionId=1YNnRnwS.6DkrwNcAkdb5Dbsfjclg0JR).

<sup>13</sup> George H. Bush, *Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union*, January 29, 1991, available at <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/address-before-joint-session-the-congress-the-state-the-union-1>.

conventional, large-scale war. How can NATO continue to develop its thinking around strategy, war, and warfare in a period between peace and war?

The predictive and advisory position of academic debate has been called into question following the reaction of some to the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Political scientist John Mearsheimer has declared that NATO is responsible for the current war, but this conclusion shuns the rules-based international order and Westphalian system with sovereignty at its core so beloved of academic theory. Expectations are that other countries will operate by the “Rule of Law” in international relations when reality is that some nations have never accepted this decidedly Western interpretation. There must be an acknowledgement of this problem, and a willingness to see the world for what it is rather than how one wishes it to be. Whether NATO expansion or U.S. policy prompted the Russian invasion placed the debate over the reality of the situation.

### **What Do Academics Say? Buzzwords and Conforming to the Expectations of Academia**

If, as will be demonstrated, many, if not all, of definitions and words are attempts by academics to present “old wine in new casks,” what do they offer to practitioners? If, as is argued here, they offer very little to the benefit of practitioners, then academia needs to assess what can be done to provide useful support to the armed forces by way of research and novel ideas. The process of self-sustaining argument within academia may be very good for the careers of some academics, but without providing real value to wider users of that information.

An alternative to the iterations of refinement and more tightly defined buzzwords, Thomas Huber, research fellow at the Combat Studies Institute, proposed the use of “Compound Warfare” as an idea that was not claimed as a new phenomenon, but of a simple framework for analyzing a broad spectrum of warfare styles.<sup>14</sup> There is no single, all-encompassing definition of “Compound Warfare,” but Huber’s framework is based on the idea that warfare is a complex, systemic phenomenon that can be analyzed in terms of a variety of warfare styles: it has been, “... kept simple in hopes that it will serve as a convenient framework for analysis, readers should remember that enormous variety exists in the historical cases of compound warfare. As in most other realms of military thought, the theory is simple, but the reality is complex.”<sup>15</sup>

#### **A Rose by Any Other Name**

It is now possible to turn to those aspects of strategy that fall into the “ways” and “means” of strategy: How does one achieve his goal? In relation to post-Napoleonic wars, General Sir

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<sup>14</sup> Ofer Fridman, *Russian ‘Hybrid Warfare’: Resurgence and Politicisation* (London: Hurst & Company, 2022), pp. 24–25.

<sup>15</sup> Thomas Huber, *Compound Warfare, That Fatal Knot* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College Press, 2002), p. 5.



Rupert Smith suggests, “Time and distance, two of the factors in planning for war, had become much shorter.”<sup>16</sup> This, in essence, explains much of what the academic world is trying to wrestle with. Time relates to the fundamental differences between combatants in asymmetric warfare, as originally conceived by Professor Andrew Mack.<sup>17</sup> Time and distance are essential to hybrid warfare’s central concept of the mixing of “styles” of warfare and improvements in communications technology.

### Keep It Simple

In 1951, The Ministry of Defence Chiefs of Staff (COS) Committee issued a report ahead of a Commonwealth Defence Ministers’ Conference. This report, and its predecessors, summarized the strategy of the British Government as being an alliance effort to contain and, if necessary, combat the spread of Communism. In this document, the threat is assessed as, “... subversive and military action not amounting to total war, against a background of a threat of total war ...”<sup>18</sup> This description is concise, yet flexible. It contains no jargon.

As the use of “buzzwords” has gained traction, moving from business to the military, there is an accompanying expansion of the jargon, or complex writing style, which makes clear understanding quite difficult. Professor Kenneth Payne has employed artificial intelligence to process British military doctrine publications into simpler English.<sup>19</sup> The first is the original text:

Operational art seeks to clarify the situation, assess opportunities and risks, foster actions that continually gain advantage, and deliver logical solutions to complex problems. It enables detailed planning to take place and for the staff to write practical orders (plans). Operational art integrates ends, ways and means: it determines which forces conduct what actions in time and space to create effects and achieve objectives.<sup>20</sup>

And this is the AI simplified version:

Operational art is a way to figure out what to do in a complicated situation, how to take advantage of opportunities and avoid risks, and how to find solutions to complex problems. Operational art helps people figure out what forces to use and when and where to use them to achieve objectives.

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<sup>16</sup> Rupert Smith, *The Utility of Force: The Art of War in the Modern World* (New York, NY: Allen Lane, 2005), p. 69.

<sup>17</sup> Andrew Mack, “Why Big Nations Lose Small Wars: The Politics of Asymmetric Conflict,” *World Politics* Vol. 27, No. 2 (January 1975), pp. 175–200.

<sup>18</sup> The National Archives, “COS(51)353, 'Defence Policy and Global Strategy,'" June 8, 1951, DEFE 5/31.

<sup>19</sup> Kenneth Payne [@kennethpayne01], Could doctrine writers use AI? I think so. Here’s one cutting through the jargon on 'operational art'. [X formerly Twitter], 10:39 AM, September 17, 2022, available at <https://x.com/kennethpayne01/status/1571071386696974336>.

<sup>20</sup> NATO Standardization Office, *Allied Joint Doctrine for the Planning of Operations AJP-5*, May 2019, available at [https://www.coemed.org/files/stanags/01\\_AJP/AJP-5\\_EDA\\_V2\\_E\\_2526.pdf](https://www.coemed.org/files/stanags/01_AJP/AJP-5_EDA_V2_E_2526.pdf).

The results are a stark demonstration of the pseudo-complexity introduced into what should be clear and concise.

An explanation for the use of some of the definitions commented on below is academic “groupthink.” Described as, “... excessive concurrence-seeking,’ a behavior that explains ‘flaws in the operation of small, high-level groups ...’”<sup>21</sup> this is a self-reinforcing process for academics publishing in academic journals for academics. Does the introduction of “new and improved” definitions and descriptions of warfare help us when developing strategy? Phrases such as Asymmetric Warfare, “Effects Based Operations,” Hybrid, and Grey Zone warfare are the vocabulary of academic work, sometimes used by politicians, but less so by military planners and commanders. Is there utility in coining new names and phrases to describe existing or historical military and/or political phenomena?

In a Tweet the Chief of the General Staff of the British Army General Mark Carleton-Smith wrote, “In this data-driven age strategy is increasingly the art of creating and leveraging networks to achieve a position of relative advantage and dominance.”<sup>22</sup> Strategy has always been about achieving dominance, whether the age is driven by data or not.

A humorous take on the academic argument over the effectiveness of the deterrent effect of Alliances was put onto Twitter by Professor Paul Poast.<sup>23</sup> It demonstrates delightfully the way in which the data can be interpreted in different ways, ultimately proving almost worthless as an indicator for policy makers, strategist or other practitioners. It does, however, keep various academics employed.

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<sup>21</sup> Daniel Klein and Charlotte Stern, “Groupthink in Academia: Majoritarian Departmental Politics and the Professional Pyramid,” *The Independent Review* Vol. 13, No. 4 (Spring 2009), p. 587.

<sup>22</sup> The Chief of the General Staff [@ArmyCGS], In this data-driven age strategy is increasingly the art of creating and leveraging networks to achieve a position of relative advantage and dominance. #DSEI19 #CHACR #JSCSC #RCDS @BritishArmy @DSEI\_event, [X formerly Twitter], 12:15 PM, September 13, 2019, available at <https://x.com/ArmyCGS/status/1172544393615761411>.

<sup>23</sup> Paul Poast [@ProfPaulPoast], The “Lit Review” slide from my upcoming talk on whether alliances deter aggression, [X formerly Twitter], 7:40 AM, August 9, 2022, available at <https://twitter.com/ProfPaulPoast/status/1556968668856303616?s=20&t=pe2lA21BaaSgmQDbN777xg>.

### Deterrence and Alliances: The Quantitative Literature

- Russett and Huth (1984): “Alliances don’t deter.”
- Huth (1988): “Alliances still don’t deter.”

#### [Fearon enters the chat]

- Fearon (1994): “What about selection ? You need to look at entering crises.”
- Huth (1999): “That’s true, but hard to do.”
- Fearon (2002): “I don’t care. Do it.”

#### [Leeds enters the chat]

- Leeds (2003): “Guys, guys. I got this. And, by the way, alliances deter.”

#### [Vasquez enters the chat]

- Vasquez and Senese (2008): “Actually, alliances make crises worse.”
- Johnson and Leeds (2011): “No, alliances promote piece.”
- Vasquez, Kenwick and Powers (2015): “Wrong! Alliances don’t do much at all.”
- Johnson and Leeds (2017): “Yes, they do. They promote peace!”
- Vasquez and Kenwick (2017): “No, they don’t!”

## Hybrid

In his executive summary, defense expert Frank Hoffman describes hybrid warfare in the following manner:

There are a broadening number of challenges facing the United States, as the National Defense Strategy (NDS) noted in 2005. These include traditional, irregular, terrorist and disruptive threats or challengers. This has created a unique planning dilemma for today’s military planners, raising a choice between preparing for states with conventional capabilities or the more likely scenario of non-state actors employing asymmetric or irregular tactics. However, these may no longer be separate threats or modes of war. Several strategists have identified an increased merging or blurring of conflict and war forms. The potential for types of conflict that blur the distinction between war and peace, and combatants and non-combatants, appear to be on the rise. Indeed, the NDS itself suggested that the most complex challengers of the future may seek synergies and greater impact by combining multiple modes of war.<sup>24</sup>

What Hoffman describes as “... a unique planning dilemma ...” where strategists have, “... identified an increased merging or blurring of conflict and war forms ...” could not be further

<sup>24</sup> Frank Hoffman, *Conflict in the 21st Century: The Rise of Hybrid Wars* (Arlington, VA: Potomac Institute for Policy Studies, 2007), p. 7.

from reality. The COS Committee report mentioned above summarized the same type of situation using simple words. The styles of warfare described by Hoffman have been understood for decades, if not centuries. The character of war has changed; time, demonstrated in the speed of operations, and their extent, as mentioned above; communications technology has expanded exponentially; but the nature of war and its components have not changed, regardless of what one calls them.

In a 2015 NATO Defense College publication, the problem with defining hybrid warfare in NATO was that "... there is no common understanding on the use, relevance, or practical benefit of the hybrid warfare concept ..."<sup>25</sup> The Multinational Capability Development Campaign project "Understanding Hybrid Warfare" described hybrid warfare as "... asymmetric and uses multiple instruments of power along a horizontal and vertical axis, and to varying degrees shares an increased emphasis on creativity, ambiguity, and the cognitive elements of war."<sup>26</sup> However, the report goes on,

The international consensus on "hybrid warfare" is clear: no one understands it, but everyone, including NATO and the European Union, agrees it is a problem. Our common understanding of hybrid warfare is underdeveloped and therefore hampers our ability to deter, mitigate and counter this threat.

However, the overall view has been summed up thus: "Hybrid warfare remains a contested concept and there is no universally agreed definition of it."<sup>27</sup> If an organization such as NATO is unable to clearly express what Hybrid Warfare is, then the term is useless.

De Wijk points out that, "Mao Zedong ... provided the first coherent theory of revolutionary struggle using a mix of warfare techniques ... Mao argued the struggle is primarily a political one and not military ... thus without coining the term, hybrid warfare as a concept was born."<sup>28</sup> In this one section de Wijk unwittingly illustrates the drawback with the definition of hybrid warfare. First, all wars must have a political purpose, otherwise it is meaningless violence. The two cannot be separated. Second, the style of warfare that Mao expounded was a development of *centuries* of war, rather than a new theory. Indeed, it can be traced back at least to the French radical and revolutionary Auguste Blanqui.<sup>29</sup>

In an article published in 2016, Captain John Chambers of the Modern War Institute wrote that, "The gray zone is the 'space' between peace and war on the spectrum of

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<sup>25</sup> Guillaume Lasconjarias and Jeffrey Arthur Larsen (eds.), *NATO's Response to Hybrid Threats* (Rome: NATO Defense College, Research Division, 2015), p. 258.

<sup>26</sup> Patrick J. Cullen and Erik Reichborn-Kjennerud, "Understanding Hybrid Warfare," Multinational Capability Development Campaign Countering Hybrid Warfare Project, 2017, p. 8, available at [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a8228a540f0b62305b92caa/dar\\_mcdc\\_hybrid\\_warfare.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a8228a540f0b62305b92caa/dar_mcdc_hybrid_warfare.pdf).

<sup>27</sup> Arsalan Bilal, "Hybrid Warfare – New Threats, Complexity, and 'Trust' as the Antidote," *NATO Review*, November 30, 2021, available at <https://www.nato.int/docu/review/articles/2021/11/30/hybrid-warfare-new-threats-complexity-and-trust-as-the-antidote/index.html>.

<sup>28</sup> De Wijk, "Hybrid Conflict and the Changing Nature of Actors," p. 360, op. cit.

<sup>29</sup> Dan La Botz, "Understanding the Paris Commune on Its 150th Anniversary," *Class, Race and Corporate Power* Vol. 9, No. 2 (2021), available at <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48645499>.

conflict.”<sup>30</sup> He goes on to say that “gray -zone hybrid threats” pose challenges to the United States because of its acceptance of particular laws, norms and processes. The combination of two distinct buzzwords confuses the situation more than necessary. One officer commented that the language used to describe and analyze military problems must be clear, unambiguous and simple. This is most important in a multinational environment where confusion and misunderstanding can reign.

The “grey zone” or “hybrid war” classification is a recent separation of limited use and employment. The term has been (inappropriately) applied especially to Russian strategy promoted by General Valery Gerasimov, Chief of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces, although he was describing the Russian understanding of events in the Middle East and around Russia’s borders, especially Ukraine.<sup>31</sup> Continual refinement leads to the term being misused from the original intention, very much like the term “strategy.” Ofer Fridman, Director of Operations at the King’s Centre for Strategic Communications, wrote, “... Russian and Western military professionals now recognize that the term [hybrid] is next to useless for describing the real nature of contemporary conflicts ...”<sup>32</sup>

All military planning is unique. The distinction between war and peace is apparent in some contexts, much less so in others. However, this is not new. One only need look at history to see the existence of the style of warfare described by Hoffman as “hybrid.” All the challenges listed existed long before Hoffman “revealed” the rise of this type of warfare. We can look to the 19<sup>th</sup> century and before to see the employment of conventional and unconventional means, of terror attacks, propaganda, and the use of misleading information. Despite Hoffman overlooking historical examples, the evidence stands that “hybrid” warfare as he describes it is certainly nothing new. Rather, Hoffman’s view comes from a U.S.-centric interpretation of events. Dodge suggests,

... on one hand, we have picking over definitions, because it is much easier to pick over definitions rather than actually do something about a problem, and on the other, a culture of unaccountability regarding failures that might get us all killed eventually. “Hybrid warfare” is sinister because it makes us think we are not at war yet, and therefore are safer than we truly are, and off guard regarding the true nature of our adversaries.<sup>33</sup>

Other nations have seen the same problem and accepted it as a function of the calculus of war and warfare.

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<sup>30</sup> John Chambers, “Countering Gray-Zone Hybrid Threats: An MWI Report,” *The Modern War Institute at West Point*, October 18, 2016, p. 4.

<sup>31</sup> Molly McKew, “The Gerasimov Doctrine,” *Politico*, October 2017, available at <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2017/09/05/gerasimov-doctrine-russia-foreign-policy-215538/>.

<sup>32</sup> Fridman, *Russian ‘Hybrid Warfare,’* p. 157, op. cit.

<sup>33</sup> Dr. Michaela Dodge, e-mail to author, April 18, 2024.

## Asymmetric Warfare

In its original form, “asymmetric conflict” looked at war in a “post-colonial” framework, examining the simple asymmetry of “conventional” military power, focusing on Algeria and Vietnam.<sup>34</sup> Industrialized colonial powers with a superiority in conventional military capability were being forced to withdraw from a conflict by “inferior” nationalist forces. The idea of asymmetric warfare as presented by the conceptual descendants of Mack’s original work assumes that “symmetrical” war occurs between like units – in other words state against state. Yet, Mack himself warned of the limitations of examining conflicts, “... either temporally or spatially ...”<sup>35</sup> to provide an answer to current problems. He continued, “Finally, it should be obvious that my aim in this paper has not been to provide a ‘model’ which may then be ‘tested’ by applying it mechanically and ahistorically to a wide range of conflicts.”<sup>36</sup> This warning needs to be considered carefully.

General Sir Rupert Smith wrote that the title “asymmetric warfare” is,

... a phrase I dislike ... The practice of war, indeed its “art,” is to achieve asymmetry over the opponent. Labelling wars as asymmetric is to me something of a euphemism to avoid acknowledging that my opponent is not playing to my strengths and I am not winning.<sup>37</sup>

This use of asymmetry describes how a difference in capabilities can lead to an unexpected victory. However, this is not new. To call a war “asymmetric” is stating the obvious. All war is to some degree or another asymmetric. One only needs to look back to the Napoleonic Wars, especially that conducted in Spain and Portugal, to see a parallel. One can go back further to the Roman Empire to see strikingly similar circumstances of a difference in capability which led to the decimation of Varus’ legions in the Teutoburg Forest in 9AD, or the destruction of the IX Legion during the Battle of Camulodunum in 61AD.<sup>38</sup>

The asymmetry may be very small. At some point there may be an increase in the asymmetry. The strategy adopted by one side may be significantly superior to the opponents’. Even wars that are reduced to stalemate have their asymmetries. In World War I, German defenses and doctrine were generally superior to those of the Allies, even though Germany was ultimately defeated. The asymmetry is what Colin Gray referred to as the “Tactical Crisis.”<sup>39</sup> This crisis occurs in war when one combatant cannot achieve its goal with the forces and doctrines available, either through technological disparity or tactical and operational superiority of the opponent. In World War I, the stuttering development of

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<sup>34</sup> Andrew Mack, “Why Big Nations Lose Small Wars: The Politics of Asymmetric Conflict,” *World Politics* Vol. 27, No. 2 (1975), p. 196, available at <https://doi.org/10.2307/2009880>.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 199.

<sup>37</sup> Smith, *The Utility of Force: The Art of War in the Modern World*, pp. 3–4, op. cit.

<sup>38</sup> Tacitus, *The Annals of Imperial Rome* (London, UK: Penguin Classics, 1980).

<sup>39</sup> Colin S. Gray, *Strategy for Chaos: Revolutions in Military Affairs and the Evidence of History* (Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 2002), p. 123.

mobile armor and wireless communications, and the subsequent development of combined-arms combat, provided the breakthrough both literally and figuratively. A similar “tactical crisis” is developing in stalemate in Ukraine with the use of drones and similar devices for passive and active roles.

### Effects Based Operations (EBO)

Published by RAND in 2001, *Effects Based Operations* describes the subject of the study as:

... operations conceived and planned in a systems framework that considers the full range of direct, indirect, and cascading effects—effects that may, with different degrees of probability, be achieved by the application of military, diplomatic, psychological, and economic instruments.

Current methods of analysis and modeling are inadequate for representing EBO, and this reality should be considered by the analytical community to pose a grand challenge. Addressing the challenge will require changes of mindset, new theories and methods, and a new empirical base.<sup>40</sup>

In a similar vein to “hybrid” warfare, the paper is published from an exclusively U.S. standpoint as part of a “force transformation” project. General Mattis wrote,

I am convinced that the various interpretations of EBO have caused confusion throughout the joint force and among our multinational partners that we must correct. It is my view that EBO has been misapplied and overextended to the point that it actually hinders rather than helps joint operations.<sup>41</sup>

He went on to write, “The use of ‘effects’ has confused what previously was a well-designed and straightforward process for determining ‘ends’.”<sup>42</sup>

The advantage of the simpler “Ends, Ways and Means” approaches, such as the Lykke Model,<sup>43</sup> is precisely that they allow for straightforward development of strategy without limiting its flexibility through using confining definitions. The components of ends, ways, means and risks allows the strategist to employ the understanding of the contemporary context to enable thinking. This enabling benefits not only the strategist but the military forces that are employed.

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<sup>40</sup> Paul K. Davis, *Effects-Based Operations: A Grand Challenge for the Analytical Community* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2001), p. xiii.

<sup>41</sup> James Mattis, “USJFCOM Commander’s Guidance for Effects-Based Operations,” *Parameters* (Autumn 2008), p. 18.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, p. 22.

<sup>43</sup> The Lykke model conceptualizes strategy as a three-legged stool, where the legs represent ends (objectives), ways (methods), and means (resources), emphasizing that balance among these elements is essential for strategic stability and success. Arthur F. Lykke, *Military Strategy: Theory and Application* (Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army War College, 1983).

## Grey Zone

As one strategic commentator noted, “The current fad in terminology is *gray zone wars*.”<sup>44</sup> What is described as “grey zone” is simply activity that occurs below the threshold for war, or the invocation of Article 5 in NATO, or a United Nations Security Council resolution. In this way it mirrors the description from COS of “... action not amounting to total war ...”<sup>45</sup>

“Grey Zone” is often used, especially regarding Russia, as being a new form of warfare. The concept relies on keeping the level of a confrontation below the threshold at which state-level open warfare takes place. However, the level at which open warfare begins is context dependent and cannot be universally defined. Therefore, the concept of “Grey Zone” warfare is untenable. While there is no universal understanding of the transition from “peace” to “war” in any situation given that each one is unique, one can recognize a difference between war and peace. Thus, one cannot apply a universal definition to this highly context-dependent condition. Rather, the existing words describe what has existed, certainly for the last 100 years, in all sorts of confrontations and conflicts. It does not benefit the field to rename the phenomenon yet again.

## Time and Technology

The reaction to new technology tends to extremes within the expert community. Some assume that a new technology will change the face of warfare, and others credit the same new technology with no effect on the battlefield at all. In many academic works, the anticipated effects of technology run ahead of theory or, most importantly, practice, for example the concept of “drone warfare.”<sup>46</sup> There is an assumption that technology makes the difference to the outcome of a battle, or ultimately a war. In 1962 Arthur C. Clarke wrote, “Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic.”<sup>47</sup> As the capability of technology outstrips our ability to use its full potential, it appears as a magical solution to any given problem.

Today, the problem is not in the function of information gathering and dissemination, but the speed of those processes, aided by technology. Relatively speaking, there is little difference between the use of the Montgolfier balloon *l'Entreprenant* at the Battle of Fleurus in 1794 and that of drones for reconnaissance in Ukraine in 2022. This is captured well by the BBC journalist Quentin Somerville. He reported from a village near Izyum in Eastern Ukraine. “It could have been a scene from earlier wars, except it was pimped by technology. A widescreen TV showed live feeds from powerful spy cameras trained on Russian

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<sup>44</sup> Lukas Milevski, “Respecting Strategic Agency: On the Categorization of War in Strategy,” *Joint Forces Quarterly* No. 86 (June 2017), p. 35, available at [https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Portals/68/Documents/jfq/jfq-86/jfq-86\\_35-40\\_Milevski.pdf](https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Portals/68/Documents/jfq/jfq-86/jfq-86_35-40_Milevski.pdf).

<sup>45</sup> “COS(51)353, ‘Defence Policy and Global Strategy,’” *op. cit.*

<sup>46</sup> Dominika Kunertova, “Drones Have Boots: Learning from Russia’s War in Ukraine,” *Contemporary Security Policy* Vol. 44, No. 4 (October 2, 2023), pp. 576–591, available at <https://doi.org/10.1080/13523260.2023.2262792>.

<sup>47</sup> Arthur C. Clarke, *Profiles of the Future: An Inquiry into the Limits of the Possible* (California: Popular Library, 1977), p. 39.



positions.”<sup>48</sup> The information gathered by *l'Entreprenant* would provide the French army with a comparable advantage, given that the enemy did not possess the technology at all.

Regarding the relationship between time in war and the use of technology, it is apparent that as technology develops, the speed with which data is accumulated increases almost exponentially. Moore's law applies to data as much as it does to processing power.<sup>49</sup> The development of technology amplifies the speed at which some military operations can be carried out, and the accuracy with which kinetic weapons can be used. It allows drones to loiter for hours, providing high resolution images. At the tactical level, the use of cheap, commercially available technology makes a difference in Ukraine. Drones, with makeshift explosive devices, are deployed to great effect. Geo-location prompted a sudden explosion of image analysis in the early part of the war. Readily available and easy to use civilian technology has increased the effectiveness of small-unit operations.<sup>50</sup>

But the amount of data new technologies provide can be overwhelming. For example, even as far back as 1982,

... the flow of signal traffic during the Falklands War exceeded the capacity to handle all the data. Important signals were filtered out and acted upon, but less important signals were left, some unread to the end of the campaign.<sup>51</sup>

By making information instantly available, its overload has now found its way to the lower levels of command. The capacity for humans to absorb and interpret data is limited in war, especially when one factors in fear and fatigue. Further, the enemy will provide false data, mock targets and will take other deception measures in an attempt to overwhelm the analysts and available weapons systems. The reliance on digital systems and the data held within makes some military organizations especially vulnerable to attacks on the data itself. As in previous wars, the method of fighting will quickly fall to the lower common denominators of combat; firepower; mass; and a willingness to continue the fight. However, the reliance on digital systems does not change the nature of war.

Whilst all dimensions of war have a place in strategy, despite warnings about drone- and cyber-warfare, they can never become strategy itself. In the same way that air-power, initially thought to be a war winner on its own, has been integrated into the strategic panoply, so will cyber and space.

A brief comparison with the current trend of overstating methods and the approach to the advent of aerial bombing in the first half of the Twentieth Century is useful. In the early

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<sup>48</sup> Quentin Sommerville, "Pinned down by Russian Fire in Key Frontline Village," *BBC*, May 16, 2022, available at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-61460790>.

<sup>49</sup> John Shalf, "The Future of Computing Beyond Moore's Law," *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society A: Mathematical, Physical and Engineering Sciences* Vol. 378, No. 2166 (March 6, 2020), available at <https://doi.org/10.1098/rsta.2019.0061>

<sup>50</sup> For an example of such a website, see "Geoconfirmed," available at <https://geoconfirmed.org/>.

<sup>51</sup> Kenton White, *Never Ready: Britain and NATO's Flexible Response Strategy, 1968-1989* (Warwick, UK: Helion and Company, 2021), p. 72.

part of the century, theorists wrote of aerial bombing of the enemy as being war winning.<sup>52</sup> This prompted Prime Minister Baldwin's famous quote that "... the bomber will always get through ..."<sup>53</sup>

The theoretical effects of strategic bombing meant that a large part of Britain's defense expenditure before and during World War II was concentrated on bomber aircraft. Royal Air Force aircraft production before and during the war was split 50/50 between single-engined fighters, and twin and four-engined aircraft. Britain invested perhaps as much as a third of its overall war production on the bomber offensive.<sup>54</sup>

However, in something of a paradox, Britain also developed a defensive system designed specifically to defeat enemy bombing attacks. The theoretical problem here is clear: an offensive arm designed to accurately strike the enemy; and a defensive arm designed specifically to defeat such an attack. In theory, the RAF Air Staff knew that defending against bombing was to some extent possible, but how successful defense would be was unknown. Casualties from aerial bombing were expected to be overwhelming in a very short period and some attempts were made to evaluate the potential injuries and other effects of bombing.<sup>55</sup> Harold Macmillan wrote in 1966 of the thinking in the Cabinet before World War II;

... expert advice had indicated that bombing of London and the great cities would lead to casualties of the order of hundreds of thousands, or even millions, within a few weeks. We thought of air warfare in 1938 rather as people think of nuclear warfare today.<sup>56</sup>

Strategic bombing failed to achieve the promise of the theorists. Technology did not allow bombers to hit their targets accurately at night, and enemy fighters inflicted unsustainable losses on daylight raids. It took the advent of rapidly developed radar and radio targeting to begin to enable bombers to successfully find and hit their targets, but the same technology also enabled a better response by the defenders. Thus, a balance was found which was only broken by the economics of war. The same is true of the current round of new technologies – for drones there is anti-drone technology; for cyber-attacks there are firewalls and other, more secret, methods.

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<sup>52</sup> For examples, see Alexander de Seversky, *Victory Through Air Power* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1942); and Giulio Douhet, *Command of the Air* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1998).

<sup>53</sup> Stanley Baldwin, *Speech to Parliament*, November 10, 1932, available at <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/1932-11-10/debates/4bccc63e-763c-4b01-ac54-9708217b3c57/InternationalAffairs>.

<sup>54</sup> Max Hastings, *Bomber Command* (London, UK: Joseph, 1987).

<sup>55</sup> *War Wounds and Air Raid Casualties: Articles Republished from the British Medical Journal* (London, UK: H K Lewis & Co Ltd., 1939).

<sup>56</sup> Harold Macmillan, *Winds of Change, 1914-1939* (London, UK: Macmillan, 1966), p. 575.

## What Do the Practitioners Say?

Echevarria stated,

Analysts, practitioners, and scholars alike have struggled to come to terms with [the different uses of military force], assigning labels such as “hybrid wars,” “new generation wars,” and “gray-zone” conflicts, among others, to distinguish contemporary practices from those of so-called traditional wars.<sup>57</sup>

Several eminent theorists and practitioners have criticized the use of titles such as ‘grey-zone,’ ‘asymmetric’ and ‘effects-based’ warfare. On a broader level, the practitioners, those who will put their lives at risk when the Government decides their deployment is necessary, have questioned the relevance of the academic discussion around military force and its application. International Relations and Strategic Studies have, in the opinion of some serving and retired personnel, lost their direct connection with those whose job it is to apply force at the behest of their respective Governments. Thus, the relevance of these fields of study diminishes in relation to the utility it provides.

Major General Jonathan Shaw wrote, “‘Strategy’ is only the most obvious of the many misused, abused and confused words in Whitehall. The ... error occurs ... when people have got so used to a set of manifestations of a word that they mistake the manifestations for the meaning.”<sup>58</sup>

The acceptance in academic circles that there has been a “traditional” mode of war is flawed, certainly as far as war over at least the last two and a half centuries is concerned. War has involved battle engagements of formed bodies of troops as well as irregular forces and civilian intervention certainly since the American War of Independence (1775 – 1783). To ignore these events in the search for clearer definitions of components of warfare is building castles on sand. Professor Beatrice Heuser wrote,

Such binary concepts may have their limited use for legal and for military training purposes, with classes constructed around themes such as major war and small war, regular war and hybrid war, and so on. But it is unhelpful to see them as mutually exclusive, or compartmentalizable in practice. Non-binary categories exist even in Western thinking (think of air, land, sea, cyber, space), but there again, one might see a particular proclivity in the West to compartmentalize. This stands in contrast with Chinese culture with its more holistic approach, or current Russian thinking.<sup>59</sup>

Because of the insinuation of buzzwords and practice from business and academia, serving personnel are judged on their ability to use the latest buzzwords rather than true understanding and practical application of the concepts. If the academia is promoting, in both senses, impractical thinking, then it is placing the armed forces at risk, and incorrectly informing the politicians in the use of armed force. This last point, in itself, raises questions

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<sup>57</sup> Echevarria, "How Should We Think about 'Gray-Zone' Wars?," p. 16, op. cit.

<sup>58</sup> Jonathan Shaw, *Britain in a Perilous World: The Strategic Defence and Security Review We Need* (London, UK: Haus Publishing, 2015), p. 6.

<sup>59</sup> Heuser, *War: A Genealogy of Western Ideas and Practices*, p. 399, op. cit.

of the morality of the actions of complacent academics and politicians towards the armed forces.

## Conclusion

This piece examines some of the current “fads” of salami-slicing definitions of war, warfare, and strategy. The new definitions are not particularly useful, and it would actually improve the quality of discourse to discard them.

The NATO member states’ strategies, with exceptions of limited conflict between 1945 and 2003, have not been field-tested. The Warsaw Pact did not invade Western Europe, and, thankfully, there have been no nuclear wars to analyze. Despite this, NATO members assumed success, and the process by which strategy is developed and implemented has become a self-supporting, self-reinforcing structure.

Colin Gray questioned whether soldiers or civilians could be taught strategy. He wrote, “Up to a point the answer must be ‘yes.’” They can be taught the theory of strategy, so they are, at least, familiar with what the strategic role requires.”<sup>60</sup> The function of defense and strategy has, to a large degree, been lost amongst the cacophony of noise around globalization and the interconnectedness of nations.

Academia must pose a constructive challenge to the thinking of the politicians and the armed forces. If the thoughts of academics have little or no significance or use to the real-world problems faced by armed forces, then they are irrelevant. Academia has become a self-sustaining structure, some parts of which have little bearing on the real world. An officer commented to this author that war is a muddle, and thus our thinking about it must allow for ambiguous problems and solutions. The most significant problem addressed in this article is not that academia is becoming out of touch with the armed forces, but that it has been for some time with little or no attempt to make itself useful.

Therefore, academics should ask themselves: are we beneficial to the armed forces?

In many academic fields there can be a disconnect between academic research and practical application. Academic rewards are often based on criteria like publications in peer-reviewed journals, citation counts, and theoretical contributions rather than the direct impact of their work on practitioners. Incentives in academia prioritize theoretical contributions over utility to practitioners. This results in research that is more about developing new terminology or framework, aligning with academic trends, rather than focusing on pressing practical needs. Academic research on war today predominantly focusses on novel theories, frameworks, or critiques that appeal to other scholars, but do not offer useful insights for those at the sharp end of military action.

Where academic research is deeply integrated with practitioner insights, the relationship can be productive. Historical studies, lessons from past conflicts, and insights into human behavior, logistics, and strategy can help refine today’s military thinking about future challenges. Additionally, cross-pollination between military professionals who enter

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<sup>60</sup> Colin S. Gray, *The Strategy Bridge* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 61.

academia and scholars who work closely with defense institutions can ensure that academic research remains relevant and reflective of current military practices. Military academies or defense universities ought to promote collaboration between scholars and practitioners, fostering a more direct link between theoretical work and real-world impact.

The answers to the problem can be framed thus:

Academia should aim to constructively challenge the thinking of politicians and military forces, offering new perspectives, critical analysis, and strategic insights. When properly engaged, academic work can broaden the understanding of warfare, policy, and strategy, providing depth and innovative approaches to complex issues.

Academic work must be tied to real-world problems faced by the military. If academic research does not address or reflect these challenges, it risks becoming irrelevant. There should be greater efforts to ensure that academic theories, models, and studies offer practical value to military practitioners dealing with ambiguous and rapidly changing situations.

The complexity and “muddle” of war, as noted by one officer, require academic thinking that is flexible and adaptable. War presents ambiguous problems that do not have clear-cut solutions. Therefore, academic contributions must acknowledge this complexity and offer frameworks that can accommodate uncertainty, rather than striving for overly simplified or theoretical answers.

The more significant problem is not of academia becoming out of touch with the armed forces, but rather that this disconnect has existed for some time without sufficient attempts to bridge the gap. To address this, both academia and military institutions need to create opportunities for collaboration, where academic insights can be tested and applied in practical contexts, and military feedback can inform academic research.

For academia to remain relevant it must engage directly with the practical, often ambiguous challenges faced by military practitioners, offering constructive, applicable solutions and fostering stronger connections between theoretical research and real-world military operations.

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# ANALYSIS

## U.S.-IRAN CONFRONTATION AFTER THE HAMAS-ISRAEL WAR: PROXY WARS, NUCLEAR STRATEGY, AND ESCHATOLOGY

Masoud Kazemzadeh

### Introduction

The grand strategy of the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) as stated in its foundational documents and articulated by its Supreme Leaders Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini (r. 1979-1989) and Ayatollah Ali Khamenei (1989-present) has included the goals of expulsion of the United States from the Middle East and elimination of Israel. The accompanying military doctrine includes proxy forces, missiles, drones, and nuclear weapons.<sup>1</sup>

The consequences of the Hamas terrorist attack on Israel on October 7, 2023, have drastically changed the contours and trajectory of the U.S.-Iran confrontation. The balance of forces in the Middle East in January 2025 is not what it was in October 2023. The IRI's proxies and allies have been either destroyed or substantially weakened. Israel (with assistance from the United States) was able to intercept virtually all of IRI's missiles and drones when Iran launched two massive attacks. Moreover, Israel carried out highly successful retaliation (against the advice and wishes of the Biden Administration), that clearly established Israel's escalation dominance, because of which the IRI so far refrained from a third response. The IRI has not invested in modernizing its armed forces (tanks, jetfighters), but the IRGC continues to possess substantial capabilities. However, the only major element left is its nuclear weapons program. In this article I analyze the consequences of the changes in the balance of forces in the region and the various options open for the United States.

### International Context

President Joe Biden's Middle East strategy collapsed on October 7, 2023. Biden's Middle East strategy was based on two main policies: first, appeasement of the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) through lax enforcement of sanctions and secret verbal agreements with the expectation that such policies would cause Ayatollah Ali Khamenei to stop IRI proxy attacks on American forces in the region and to freeze Iran's nuclear weapons program.<sup>2</sup> Second, his

<sup>1</sup> Masoud Kazemzadeh, "The Grand Strategy of the Islamic Republic of Iran," (forthcoming).

<sup>2</sup> Initially, the Biden Administration tried to coax Ayatollah Khamenei to return to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (Iran nuclear deal), that was concluded by the Obama Administration in July 2015, which the Trump Administration left in May 2018. The Biden Administration then released about \$16 billion of Iran's frozen funds in South Korea and Iraq, stopped strict enforcement of sanctions, and ignored the large-scale purchase of Iranian oil by Chinese firms. Then the IRI took a few minor steps in diluting its highly enriched uranium. It is widely believed that these are the results of secret unwritten agreements between the Biden administration and Khamenei. See "Iran Marginally Reduces Its Highly



strategy sought the expansion of the Abraham Accords and establishment of diplomatic relations between Saudi Arabia and Israel (while ignoring the Palestinians).<sup>3</sup>

Between October 17, 2023, and January 27, 2024, the IRI's proxies in Iraq attacked U. S. forces in Iraq and Syria over 160 times. <sup>4</sup> Although these proxies had attacked American forces before October 7, 2023, these attacks increased greatly after October 7. The Biden Administration's response was a few minor retaliations against the IRI's proxies and virtually nothing done to the IRI itself. The result has been increased attacks with greater lethality by the IRI and its proxies. The conflicts between the IRI's proxies and the United States reached a turning point on January 28, 2024, when the IRI's Iraqi proxy Kataib Hezbollah attacked an American military base in Jordan and killed three and injured about 40 military personnel.<sup>5</sup> The IRI's Yemeni proxy, the Houthis' Ansarullah, began successfully attacking shipping in the Red Sea and Bab al-Mandab Strait and sinking several ships in support of Hamas.<sup>6</sup> The IRI's most powerful proxy is Lebanon's Hezbollah, which began attacking Israel on October 8, 2023.<sup>7</sup>

A major inflection point occurred on April 1, 2024, when Israel bombed the IRI's consulate in Damascus killing seven members of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps-Qods Force (IRGC-QF) including two generals. Among those killed was IRGC Brigadier Gen. Mohammad Ali Zahedi, who was responsible for the IRGC-QF operations in Lebanon and Syria.<sup>8</sup> The IRI retaliated on April 13-14, 2024, with a massive drone and missile attack on Israel. According to various sources, the IRI used about 146 drones, 110-120 ballistic

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Enriched Uranium Stocks," *Iran International*, February 26, 2024, available at <https://www.iranintl.com/en/202402264079>.

<sup>3</sup> This was the continuation of the Trump Administration policy with the same name "Abraham Accords." President Trump arguably pursued the most pro-Israel policy of any American administration. For example, President Trump moved the U.S. embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, recognized Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights, ordered the closure of the Palestinian Authority office in Washington, D.C., and stopped U.S. financial assistance for Palestinians. See Karen DeYoung and Loveday Morris, "Trump administration orders closure of PLO office in Washington," *The Washington Post*, September 10, 2018, available at [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/trump-administration-orders-closure-of-plo-office-in-washington/2018/09/10/7410fe6c-b50c-11e8-a2c5-3187f427e253\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/trump-administration-orders-closure-of-plo-office-in-washington/2018/09/10/7410fe6c-b50c-11e8-a2c5-3187f427e253_story.html).

<sup>4</sup> United States Institute of Peace, The Iran Primer, "Timeline of Proxy Attacks: Iraq, Syria and Jordan," *USIP.org*, July 26, 2024, <https://iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2024/feb/01/timeline-proxy-attacks-iraq-syria-and-jordan>.

<sup>5</sup> Brad Dress, "US readies retaliatory strikes after Iranian proxy attack," *The Hill*, January 30, 2024, available at <https://thehill.com/newsletters/defense-national-security/4438511-us-readies-retaliatory-strikes-after-iranian-proxy-attack/>.

<sup>6</sup> "Houthi Attacks Continue As West Ramps Up Pressure," *Iran International*, February 17, 2024, available at <https://www.iranintl.com/en/202402170492>.

<sup>7</sup> Masoud Kazemzadeh and Penny L. Watson, "Israel Hezbollah War and the Islamic Republic of Iran," *Journal of Policy & Strategy*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (2024), pp. 55-64.

<sup>8</sup> "Suspected Israeli Strikes Killed 18 IRGC Commanders, Advisers Since October 7," *Iran International*, April 4, 2024, available at <https://www.iranintl.com/en/202404041741>. Israeli sources indicate that in addition to Syria and Lebanon, Zahedi also was responsible for the Palestinian sphere. Emanuel Fabian, "Iran's top commander in Syria killed in airstrike; Tehran blames Israel, vows revenge," *The Times of Israel*, April 1, 2024, available at <https://www.timesofisrael.com/top-iranian-irgc-commander-said-killed-in-alleged-israeli-strike-on-damascus/>.

missiles and 30-36 cruise missiles.<sup>9</sup> All drones and cruise missiles were apparently intercepted by the IDF, the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia.<sup>10</sup> Between five and seven ballistic missiles hit targets inside Israel: two to four missiles hit the Nevatim air force base, inflicting minor damages to the taxiway and minor damages to the wall of a hangar under construction; one missile fell into the Dead Sea; one hit an unpopulated area in the Golan Heights; and one hit an unpopulated area close to an air base in a desert in south Israel.<sup>11</sup>

From October 2023 to the last days of his administration, President Biden's policy was to prevent the spread of the conflict and put an end to the conflict as soon as possible while supplying Israel with assistance and munitions as well as engaging in limited kinetic actions. For example, the Biden Administration publicly opposed Israel incursion into parts of Gaza and an all-out assault on Hezbollah. Israel, however, successfully crushed Hezbollah and greatly weakened Hamas. Israel has had spectacular success in hitting the IRI's air defenses and other sensitive nuclear sites. The overthrow of Bashar al Assad's regime in Syria was a huge strategic defeat for the IRI. Since 2012, Assad's regime was kept in power by massive intervention by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and Hezbollah on the ground. Israel's attacks on the IRGC in Syria over the past several years had greatly weakened the IRGC. Between October 1 and November 26, 2024, Israel crushed Hezbollah's military power and killed its top leader as well as his presumed successor. On December 8, 2024, Assad's regime collapsed.

The Trump Administration faces a highly complex situation containing both grave dangers and great opportunities.

## U.S. Options

Since Hamas' October 7 attack on Israel, kinetic conflicts erupted on several fronts. On one front, there are conflicts between Israel and the IRI's proxies. On a second front, there are conflicts between Israel and the IRI itself. On a third front, there are conflicts between the United States and the IRI's proxies. On a fourth front, there are conflicts between the United States and the IRI. The conflicts between the United States and Iran may escalate out of control because Iran is very close to completing its nuclear weapons program and it may choose to go for a breakout.

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<sup>9</sup> "Government's Broadcasting Used Israeli and American Sources for Data on Drones and Missiles," *Iran International*, April 16, 2024, available at <https://www.iranintl.com/202404160108>; and, Navid Hamzavi, "Which Of Iran's Missiles Made It Through Israel's Air Defense?," *Iran International*, April 18, 2024, available at <https://www.iranintl.com/en/202404185258>.

<sup>10</sup> Ken Klippenstein and Daniel Boguslaw, "U.S., Not Israel, Shut Down Most Iran Drones and Missiles," *The Intercept*, April 15, 2024, available at <https://theintercept.com/2024/04/15/iran-attack-israel-drones-missiles/>.

<sup>11</sup> Jon Gambrell, "Satellite image analyzed by AP shows damage after Iranian attack on Israeli desert air base," *Associated Press*, April 20, 2024, available at <https://apnews.com/article/iran-attack-nevatim-base-israel-satellite-photo-c8bea9f43967457bd49b60a6fe1dcd42>; and, Júlia Ledur, Tim Meko, and Samuel Granados, "Mapping the wide-scale Iranian drone and missile attacks," *The Washington Post*, April 14, 2024, available at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2024/04/14/mapping-wide-scale-iranian-drone-missile-attacks/>.



The United States has been wrestling with policy options towards the IRI and their consequences. Scholars, government officials, and think-tank fellows articulate alternative policy options by analyzing various policies, their potential political outcomes, and consequences.<sup>12</sup> This article analyzes six policy options, their political outcomes, and consequences: (1) do nothing; (2) surgical strikes on proxies outside Iran; (3) major surgical strikes inside Iran; (4) regime change; (5) acquiesce to a nuclear IRI; and, (6) all-out war.

### Option 1: Do Nothing

The policy of doing nothing might work with cautious foes. If the opponent is highly bellicose, however, only superior force has a good chance of deterring it. For enemies who are extremely ideological, violent, and totalitarian, a lack of response is often interpreted as weakness of capability or will. Thus, doing nothing is an invitation to aggression. The fundamentalist regime ruling Iran is a totalitarian regime, which is an archaic form of fascism with an extremely jingoistic foreign policy, and therefore is likely to respond to U.S. restraint with continued or expanded aggression.<sup>13</sup>

### Option 2: Surgical Strikes on Proxies Outside Iran

This option includes surgical strikes on the IRI's proxies in Iraq, Syria, and Yemen. This option seeks to avoid spreading the conflict and beginning a war with the IRI on the one hand, yet it is significant to inflict enough pain to deter further attacks by the IRI's proxies on the other hand.

President Biden pursued this policy by ordering the bombings of seven facilities in Iraq and Syria on February 1, 2024.<sup>14</sup> Administration officials, however, used rhetoric that was confusing to many. On the one hand, the administration promised to punish those responsible for the death of the American troops and on the other hand the administration's mantras of "we are not seeking a war or conflict with Iran" and "the strikes would not include anything inside Iran" were signaling to Khamenei that these attacks were not meant as the beginning of war with the IRI.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Graham T. Allison, "Conceptual Models and the Cuban Missile Crisis," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 63, No. 3 (September 1969), pp. 689-718; and Graham Allison and Philip Zelikow, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (New York: Longman, 1999).

<sup>13</sup> Kazemzadeh, *Mass Protests in Iran: From Resistance to Overthrow*, op. cit.

<sup>14</sup> "US Launches Retaliatory Attacks On Iran-Linked Targets In Syria, Iraq," *Iran International*, February 2, 2024, available at <https://www.iranintl.com/en/202402020336>.

<sup>15</sup> "On-the-Record Press Call on U.S. Military Operations in the Middle East," *The White House*, February 2, 2024, available at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/press-briefings/2024/02/02/on-the-record-press-call-on-u-s-military-operations-in-the-middle-east/>; Daniel Byman, "Biden Walks a Fine Line With Airstrikes on Iran-Backed Militants: The U.S. hit more than 85 targets in Iraq and Syria—but not Iran itself," *Foreign Policy*, February 2, 2024, available at <https://foreignpolicy.com/2024/02/02/us-strikes-iraq-syria-iran-biden-response/>; and Helene Cooper, Eric Schmitt, and Julian E. Barnes, "U.S. Conducts Retaliatory Strikes Against Iranian Proxies as War Deepens," *The New York Times*, February 2, 2024, available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/02/02/us/politics/us-strikes-iranian-proxies.html>.

President Biden's intention was to show American military might and the will to use it to retaliate against those who killed Americans. Biden used the B-1B Lancer bomber, perhaps because of its reputation as one of the most fearsome tools in American arsenal. However, the results were so underwhelming that many Iranian analysts described the operations by the Persian proverb "*fil moosh zaid*" [elephant gave birth to a mouse].<sup>16</sup>

Many Republicans in the United States publicly criticized former President Biden's response as too weak and unlikely to deter Khamenei from further attacks on American forces in the region. Senator Tom Cotton's remarks are typical of such views: "Iran's proxies have attacked Americans in Iraq and Syria over 170 times. We have responded 8 times. Iran and its terror groups know President Joe Biden and Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin won't stand up to them."<sup>17</sup>

Top current and former American military officials responsible for the Middle East have publicly said that the Biden policy has failed to deter the IRI and its proxies.<sup>18</sup> Current CENTCOM Commander Gen. Michael Kurilla told the Senate Armed Services Committee on March 7, 2024, "Iran is not paying a cost."<sup>19</sup> When asked by Republican Sen. Dan Sullivan why he has not attacked the IRI's spy ships in the Red Sea (that provide intelligence to the Houthis to target vessels passing through the Red Sea), Gen. Kurilla said that he is not authorized by the President to do so.<sup>20</sup>

### **Option 3: Major Surgical Strikes Inside Iran**

This option includes attacking some IRGC or IRGC-QF facilities inside Iran. If President Donald Trump were to drastically escalate by bombing major facilities and military compounds inside Iran, then the IRI has to either do nothing or to respond.

#### ***Iran's Nuclear Weapons Option***

According to top U.S. officials, Iran became a nuclear threshold state by 2023.<sup>21</sup> The strategic objective of the IRI was not to be a threshold state; rather, the fundamentalist regime's

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<sup>16</sup> "Iranian Reactions Portray US Strikes As Inconsequential," *Iran International*, February 3, 2024, available at <https://www.iranintl.com/en/202402031960>.

<sup>17</sup> "Iran And Proxies Know US Won't Stand Up To Them - Sen. Cotton," *Iran International*, March 8, 2024, available at <https://www.iranintl.com/en/202403080469>.

<sup>18</sup> "Senior US General: 'Iran Not Paying A Cost,' Remains 'Undeterred'," *Iran International*, March 8, 2024, available at <https://www.iranintl.com/en/202403089767>.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> The U.S. officials include Gen. Mark A. Milley, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Colin Kahl. See Jim Garamone, "Milley Tells House Panel Joint Force Is at 'Inflection Point'," *Defense.gov*, March 23, 2023, available at <https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/3339444/milley-tells-house-panel-joint-force-is-at-inflection-point/#:~:text=%22The%20United%20States%20remains%20committed,develop%20an%20actual%20nuclear%20weapon.%22;Iran%20can%20make%20fissile%20material%20for%20a%20bomb%20in%20about%2012%20days%20-%20U.S.%20official,%20Reuters,%20February%2028,%202023>, available at <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/iran-can-make-fissile-material-bomb-in-about-12-days-us->

objective was to possess functioning nuclear weapons. The IRI's nuclear weapons program began in 1986 during the war with Saddam Hussein.<sup>22</sup> The regime engaged in secret negotiations with Pakistan to buy three nuclear warheads. Top IRGC admiral, Ali Shamkhani, flew to Pakistan in order to physically obtain the nuclear warheads and bring them back to Iran. Rather than giving him the warheads, Pakistani officials referred him to Abdul Qader Khan, the father of Pakistan's nuclear weapons program. In exchange for \$10 billion dollars, Khan gave the IRI nuclear weapons designs, nuclear centrifuge designs, centrifuge parts, a roadmap to construct nuclear weapons, and contacts to develop nuclear weapons.<sup>23</sup> Pakistan officially became a nuclear weapons state in May 1998, but had the capability much earlier.

The United States intelligence community underestimated the seriousness and extent of the IRI's clandestine nuclear weapons program until 1991-1992 when Dr. Masoud Nezami Naraghi, a top official in the IRI's nuclear program, defected to the United States. Naraghi gave the CIA information about the clandestine nuclear weapons program, including the materials that A. Q. Khan had provided to the regime.<sup>24</sup> Naraghi had been working on the IRI's clandestine nuclear program at least since 1985. Naraghi had a Ph.D. in physics from Case Western Reserve University in Ohio and was a professor at Sharif University of Technology. Naraghi stored intelligence on the IRI's clandestine nuclear program on his laptop, which his wife took to the U.S. Consulate in Istanbul. After his defection, the U.S. intelligence community became aware of the seriousness and extent of the IRI's clandestine nuclear weapons program.<sup>25</sup>

The fundamentalist regime has spent hundreds of billions of dollars and endured sanctions in order to acquire nuclear weapons. Nuclear latency might be an optimal state for many countries such as Japan, Germany, or even South Korea, because they have had the protection of the American nuclear umbrella and extended deterrence without the costs of acquiring a nuclear arsenal. For the fundamentalist regime, however, the nuclear threshold status has brought enormous costs and very little benefits. Because of the fundamentalist regime's highly aggressive foreign policy towards the United States, Israel, moderate Arab regimes, its use of terrorist proxies, and its Shia fundamentalist ideology, other states are extremely worried about Iran acquiring nuclear weapons. Other states, therefore, have

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official-2023-02-28/; and Andrea Stricker, "Top General Suggests Administration Would Tolerate Iran Having Nuclear Weapons," *Foundation for Defense of Democracies*, March 24, 2023, available at <https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2023/03/24/administration-would-tolerate-iran-nuclear-weapons/>.

<sup>22</sup> R. Jeffrey Smith and Joby Warrick, "Pakistani Scientist Khan Describes Iranian Efforts to buy Nuclear Bomb," *The Washington Post*, March 14, 2010, available at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/03/13/AR2010031302258.html>.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> "Oppenheimer Iran' va Jassosi Bename 'Dolfin'" ["Oppenheimer of Iran" and a Spy Named "Dolphine"], *Radio Farda*, June 25, 2010, available at [https://www.radiofarda.com/a/f3\\_nuclear\\_Iran\\_spygame/2082636.html](https://www.radiofarda.com/a/f3_nuclear_Iran_spygame/2082636.html); "Masool Barnameh Carterfuge Sazeman Energy Atomi Iran Dr. Masoud Naraghi Bood" [Dr. Masoud Naraghi Was the Head of Centrifuge Program at the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran], *Niloblog*, July 14, 2020, available at <https://msalahshorannaraghg.niloblog.com/p/606>.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. Naraghi passed away in the United States in 2020.

imposed harsh sanctions on the IRI for its nuclear activities as well as its support for terrorism. Moreover, being a threshold state has made others and the IAEA extremely concerned about the IRI and has placed it under great surveillance. In addition, the regime regularly endures sabotage of its nuclear facilities and assassinations of its nuclear scientists.<sup>26</sup>

The United States or Israel could in theory attack the fundamentalist regime because it does not possess nuclear weapons. In other words, possession of nuclear weapons might provide regime security to Iran, but being a threshold state does not. Indeed, being a threshold state is extremely dangerous because the United States or Israel may believe they must act to end Iran's nuclear potential before it becomes a reality. Stated otherwise, Israel and the United States have incentives to attack the IRI's nuclear facilities before Iran completes its weapons. Once the IRI crosses the line and completes its nuclear weapons then the risks of war may dramatically increase because if the IRI retains even one nuclear weapon and the ability to launch it, the costs of war could be enormous – both in people and infrastructure. Therefore, to remain a nuclear threshold state is a very perilous for the IRI.

It is highly advantageous for the IRI to attempt a nuclear breakout if it could do so successfully. Surgical strikes inside Iran by the United States might provide the fundamentalist regime the justification to opt for a breakout. The IRI could retaliate by expelling the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspectors. According to a report by the Institute for Science and International Security, one of the most reliable sources on nuclear proliferation, Iran could have weapons-grade uranium for one nuclear bomb in about one week and six nuclear bombs in about one month.<sup>27</sup> Since at least 2003, Iran has possessed the knowledge of how to build nuclear bombs, with only a few minor tasks remaining. The efforts to conduct research and obtain materials to build nuclear weapons have not remained frozen since 2003.<sup>28</sup>

On January 31, 2018, the Israeli intelligence agency Mossad broke into a warehouse in Turghoozabad on the outskirts of Tehran and seized substantial amounts of documents on the IRI's nuclear weapons program.<sup>29</sup> These documents show that the IRI has continued its nuclear weapons programs to the present day, lied to the IAEA, and has not revealed many of its nuclear sites and nuclear materials.<sup>30</sup> The post-AMAD programs have been titled

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<sup>26</sup> Masoud Kazemi, "How A Secret Atomic Workshop In Iran Went Up In Flames," *Iran International*, March 2024, available at [https://content.iranintl.com/how-a-secret-atomic-workshop-in-iran-went-up-in-flames/index.html?\\_gl=1\\*1dlmbvf\\*\\_ga\\*MTk3ODY0MTM4NS4xNzA5MjExMzUw#section-First-page-LkXxB5ulYR](https://content.iranintl.com/how-a-secret-atomic-workshop-in-iran-went-up-in-flames/index.html?_gl=1*1dlmbvf*_ga*MTk3ODY0MTM4NS4xNzA5MjExMzUw#section-First-page-LkXxB5ulYR).

<sup>27</sup> David Albright, "How Quickly could Iran make Nuclear Weapons Today?" *Institute for Science and International Security*, January 8, 2024, available at <https://isis-online.org/isis-reports/detail/how-quickly-could-iran-make-nuclear-weapons-today>.

<sup>28</sup> Masoud Kazemzadeh, "The Sources of the Middle East's Crises and American Grand Strategy," *Comparative Strategy*, Vol. 37, No. 1 (2018), pp. 56-72.

<sup>29</sup> David E. Sanger and Ronen Bergman, "How Israel, in Dark of Night, Torched Its Way to Iran's Nuclear Secrets," *The New York Times*, July 15, 2018, available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/15/us/politics/iran-israel-mossad-nuclear.html>.

<sup>30</sup> Aaron Arnold, et al., *The Iran Nuclear Archive* (Belfer Center, Harvard University, April 2019), available at [https://www.belfercenter.org/sites/default/files/files/publication/The%20Iran%20Nuclear%20Archive\\_0.pdf](https://www.belfercenter.org/sites/default/files/files/publication/The%20Iran%20Nuclear%20Archive_0.pdf); and David Albright et. al., *Highlights of Iran's Perilous Pursuit of Nuclear Weapons* (Washington, D.C.: ISIS, 2021), available at

SPAND and Project 110.<sup>31</sup> These programs apparently continue to attempt to develop nuclear weapons under the direction of IRGC Gen. Mohsen Fakhrizadeh. In the seized documents, Fakhrizadeh says that the objective was to develop five nuclear warheads by 2003.<sup>32</sup>

According to a report by the Institute for Science and International Security, the combination of the Israel-Hamas war, the IRI's expanded use of hostile rhetoric, the major escalation in violence between the IRI's proxies and the United States, decreased IAEA monitoring, and the continued advancement of the IRI's nuclear program, there is a very high likelihood of breakout.<sup>33</sup>

Top IRI officials have stated that they have all the necessary components and technology for assembling nuclear weapons.<sup>34</sup> For example, Ali Akbar Salehi admitted that the IRI has developed all the components for assembling a nuclear bomb. Salehi is one of the fathers of the IRI's nuclear weapons program: and was the head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (2009-2010 and 2013-2021), foreign minister (2010-2013) and the IRI's representative to the International Atomic Energy Agency (1998-2003). The regime's television reporter asked Salehi whether the IRI has the ability to assemble nuclear weapons, and he responded: "We have [crossed] all the thresholds of nuclear science and technology. Here's an example: Imagine what a car needs; it needs a chassis, an engine, a steering wheel, a gearbox. You're asking if we've made the gearbox, I say yes. Have we made the engine? Yes, but each one serves its own purpose."<sup>35</sup>

Kamal Kharrazi was Minister of Foreign Affairs between 1997 and 2005. He has since been Senior Adviser on Foreign Policy to Khamenei, which is an official position at the Office of the Supreme Leader. He is also the head of the Islamic Republic of Iran Strategic Council on Foreign Relations, which provides Khamenei with confidential policy recommendations on grand strategy. In May 2024, in an interview with al Jazeera, Kharrazi said:

If they [Israelis] dare to strike Iran's nuclear facilities, our level of deterrence will change. We have experienced deterrence at the conventional level so far. If they

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[https://isis-online.org/uploads/isis-reports/documents/Highlights\\_of\\_Irans\\_Perilous\\_Pursuit\\_of\\_Nuclear\\_Weapons\\_August\\_25%2C\\_2021.pdf](https://isis-online.org/uploads/isis-reports/documents/Highlights_of_Irans_Perilous_Pursuit_of_Nuclear_Weapons_August_25%2C_2021.pdf).

<sup>31</sup> AMAD and SPAND are the acronyms in Persian for particular secret nuclear weapons programs. "Site Hastei Marivan Dar Abadeh" [The Marivan Nuclear Site at Abadeh], June 8, 2022, *Iran International*, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9nV4qTWnGhU>.

<sup>32</sup> "Israel has tape of slain Iran nuke chief talking about building five warheads," *Times of Israel*, December 4, 2020, available at <https://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-has-tape-of-slain-iran-nuke-chief-talking-about-building-five-warheads/>.

<sup>33</sup> Institute for Science and International Security, *The Iran Threat Geiger Counter: Reaching Extreme Danger* (Washington, D.C.: ISIS, February 5, 2024), available at <https://isis-online.org/isis-reports/detail/the-iran-threat-geiger-counter-reaching-extreme-danger>.

<sup>34</sup> "Iran Signals It Is Closer To Building Nuclear Weapons," *Iran International*, February 12, 2024, available at <https://www.iranintl.com/en/202402123916>.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. The video of the television interview is available at MEMRI, "Former Iranian Nuclear Chief: Iran Has Crossed All Thresholds Necessary for Producing a Nuclear Bomb," *YouTube*, February 14, 2024, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BXeJ5kcM9Uo>.

intend to strike Iran's nuclear capabilities, naturally, it could lead to a change in Iran's nuclear doctrine.

Two years ago, in an interview with Al Jazeera, I announced that Iran has the capacity to produce a nuclear bomb. Today we still have that capacity, but we have not decided to produce a nuclear bomb. But if Iran's existence is threatened, we are forced to change our nuclear doctrine. Recently, military officials also announced that if Israel intends to attack the nuclear facilities, it is possible and conceivable to revise Iran's nuclear doctrine and policies and deviate from the previous declaration considerations.<sup>36</sup>

The major reasons the IRI has not advanced to a breakout posture appears to be the possibility of detection and military strikes by the United States and or Israel. Major escalation by the United States would provide the IRI the opportunity and incentive to order a breakout and the completion of nuclear weapons. Military conflicts in the region would increase the price of oil and potentially inflict casualties on Americans.

The fundamentalist regime feels extremely vulnerable after the huge changes in the balance of forces in the region. The Trump Administration includes many officials who strongly oppose appeasement of the IRI. A major option left for the IRI to prevent a forceful regime change is possession of nuclear weapons, which explains the numerous public calls by top officials about the changing of the IRI's nuclear doctrine.

#### **Option 4: Regime Change**

There is only one policy that could guarantee an end to the IRI's nuclear weapons program and its export of violence and war in the region: regime change before the fundamentalist regime completes its nuclear weapons program. This strategy could be accomplished by decapitation strikes (attacking leadership, command, control, and communication apparatuses) which include Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, top IRGC leaders, as well as bombing the IRGC bases inside Iran.<sup>37</sup> No American boots on the ground would be required. The fundamentalist regime is extremely weak and unpopular. According to a reliable opinion poll of Iranians, about 75% oppose the regime and only 16% support the regime.<sup>38</sup> In all likelihood, the regime would be overthrown by the Iranian people who have been oppressed and brutalized by it. The only thing that has kept the regime in power has been the ability of its coercive apparatuses to violently suppress and subjugate the people. The

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<sup>36</sup> "Kharazi: We have the capacity to produce bombs, but we don't have the decision. If the existence of Iran is threatened, we will have to change our nuclear doctrine," *Rouydad 24*, May 9, 2024, available at <https://www.rouydad24.ir/fa/news/369328>; and "Iran to Change Nuclear Doctrine if Sites Attacked, Says Official," *Iran International*, May 9, 2024, available at <https://www.iranintl.com/en/202405090972>.

<sup>37</sup> Masoud Kazemzadeh, "Foreign Policy Decision Making in Iran and the Nuclear Program," *Comparative Strategy*, Vol. 36, No. 3 (2017), pp. 198-214.

<sup>38</sup> Group for Analyzing and Measuring Attitudes in Iran, "Iranians' Attitudes toward the 2024 Elections," *GAMAAN*, February 16, 2024, available at <https://gamaan.org/2024/02/16/iranians-attitudes-toward-the-2024-elections/>.

substantial weakening of the IRGC would enable and empower the Iranian people themselves to overthrow the regime and determine their own future.

### **Option 5: Acquiesce to a Nuclear IRI**

One may argue that the United States should acquiesce to the IRI obtaining nuclear weapons. The option rests on a number of assumptions. One, the fundamentalist rulers of Iran make rational cost benefit calculations. However, the IRI's goals of eliminating Israel and expelling the United States from the Middle East are ideological and not consistent with the goals of a "rational actor"—at least as the West is accustomed to defining the term. Two, Mutual Assured Destruction would work and the IRI would not engage in nuclear war with either Israel or the United States. As will be discussed later, however, IRI officials have expressed policies contrary to the principles of MAD. Three, neither Israel nor the United States has the capability to destroy the IRI's nuclear facilities. If this assumption is true, then Israel or the United States have the only option of regime change if they do not want to acquiesce to a nuclear IRI. Four, the United States lacks the military capability to overthrow the fundamentalist regime. If this assumption is true, then the United States must acquiesce to a nuclear-armed Iran. If this assumption is false, the United States has the option of regime change in Iran.

### **Option 6: All-Out War**

The worst-case-scenario is for the IRI to complete its nuclear weapons program without detection. What would the United States do if the IRI sent the IRGC to Syria or Lebanon to overthrow their governments and place its proxies in power there? What would the United States do if the IRI sent the IRGC to take over Kuwait? What would the United States do if the IRI dropped nuclear bomb on the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia? In all likelihood, the end result might be an all-out war between the United States and Iran. The ideology, the grand strategy, the 46-year history of the IRI do not show consistency with the principles undergirding MAD and their aggression could easily spiral into general war in the Middle East.

### ***Iran's Nuclear Strategy***

The fundamentalist regime ruling Iran is a regime comprised of apocalyptic religious fanatics with an ideology and a history of suicidal martyrdom bent on exporting its rule.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Mehdi Khalaji, *Apocalyptic Politics: On the Rationality of Iranian Politics* (Washington, DC: Washington Institute for Near East Studies, 2008), available at <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/sites/default/files/pdf/PolicyFocus79Final.pdf>; Kasra Aarabi, *Beyond Borders: The Expansionist Ideology of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps* (London: Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, 2020), available at <https://www.institute.global/insights/geopolitics-and-security/beyond-borders-expansionist-ideology-irans-islamic-revolutionary-guard-corps>; and, Saeid Golkar and Kasra Aarabi, *Iran's Revolutionary Guard and the Rising Cult of Mahdism: Missiles and Militias for the Apocalypse* (Washington, D.C.: Middle East

Eschatological yearnings and tenets have become official ideology, the dominant discourse, and propaganda of the social base of the regime, particularly among the ruling clerics and the IRGC.<sup>40</sup>

There are very few public expressions of the IRI's nuclear strategy. Perhaps the most instructive is that of Ayatollah Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani. Rafsanjani's words are significant because he was: one of the founding fathers of the fundamentalist regime. For much of the war with Iraq, the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini had transferred his power as Commander-in-Chief to Rafsanjani. After Khomeini died in June 1989, Rafsanjani was able to orchestrate the selection of Ali Khamenei to become Supreme Leader by the Assembly of Experts.<sup>41</sup> Rafsanjani was president from 1989 to 1997. Between June 1989 and 1993, Rafsanjani was the most powerful regime figure and Supreme Leader Khamenei stayed in the background. Rafsanjani was the second most powerful member of the fundamentalist oligarchy until his suspicious death on January 8, 2017.<sup>42</sup>

Rafsanjani was one of the most pragmatic and least ideological leaders of the fundamentalist oligarchy.<sup>43</sup> His primary concern was the monopolization of power in the hands of fundamentalist Shia clerics. Rafsanjani was the father of the IRI's nuclear weapons program. In a major speech on December 14, 2001, Rafsanjani discussed the United States, September 11, 2001 attacks the American overthrow of the Taliban regime that took a week or so, Israel, and nuclear war between Iran and Israel.<sup>44</sup> Rafsanjani kept repeating that the swift U.S. overthrow of the Taliban may become the American strategy in the Middle East and how Muslims should respond to the United States and Israel. Rafsanjani said:

They have supplied vast quantities of weapons of mass destruction and unconventional weapons to Israel. They [The United States] have permitted it [Israel] to have them and they have shut their eyes to what is going on. They have nuclear, chemical and biological weapons and long-range missiles and suchlike.

If one day, the Islamic world is also equipped with weapons like those that Israel possesses now, then the imperialists' strategy will reach a standstill because the use of even one nuclear bomb inside Israel will destroy everything. However, it will only harm the Islamic world. It is not irrational to contemplate such an eventuality. If an independent Islamic country is thinking about acquiring other kinds of

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Institute, May 3, 2022), available at <https://www.mei.edu/publications/irans-revolutionary-guard-and-rising-cult-mahdism-missiles-and-militias-apocalypse>.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> The Assembly of Experts is an assembly of fundamentalist Shia clerics that chooses the Supreme Leader when the current one dies or otherwise leaves office.

<sup>42</sup> Masoud Kazemzadeh, "Ayatollah Rafsanjani's Death and Trump Policy on Iran," *Small Wars Journal*, January 18, 2017, available at <https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/ayatollah-rafsanjani%E2%80%99s-death-and-trump-policy-on-iran>; and, Maryam Sinaee, "Ex-President's Daughter Suggests Iran Succession As Motive For His Death," *Iran International*, January 12, 2024, available at <https://www.iranintl.com/en/202401126546>.

<sup>43</sup> Kazemzadeh, "Foreign Policy Decision Making in Iran and the Nuclear Program," op. cit.

<sup>44</sup> Ayatollah Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, "Qods Day Speech," *GlobalSecurity.org*, December 14, 2001, available at <http://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/library/news/iran/2001/011214-text.html>.



weaponry, then they will do their utmost to prevent it from acquiring them. Well, that is something that almost the entire world is discussing right now.<sup>45</sup>

In his prepared speech, in all likelihood, Rafsanjani was discussing some of the plans that he and other top leaders of the ruling fundamentalist oligarchy had been discussing on the strategic objectives of the IRI's nuclear weapons. Rafsanjani was signaling to the United States that if it tried to overthrow the fundamentalist regime ruling Iran like it did the Taliban in Afghanistan, the IRI has a nuclear option and would be willing to use it against Israel.

For Rafsanjani, nuclear weapons were to guarantee regime security from forceful American regime change. For Khamenei and other hardliners, nuclear weapons are the cover for the export of fundamentalist rule in the region and the defeat of Israel. For the ultra-hardline fundamentalist and apocalyptic hardline elements of the ruling oligarchy, nuclear weapons are necessary for the annihilation of Israel and the eschatological necessities of Shia Islam.<sup>46</sup> Nuclear weapons play major roles in the grand strategy of the IRI.<sup>47</sup>

Before August 2021, Supreme Leader Khamenei had sidelined only some members of the oligarchy (e.g., reformists, expedients, and hard-liners). These were case-by-case and episodic. Since August 2021, however, Khamenei has methodically and successfully engaged in wholesale sidelining of all members of the oligarchy who are not ultra-hardline or apocalyptic ultra-hardline from the major positions of power. The apocalyptic Shia fundamentalist rulers of Iran believe that they are the central cast in the events that will usher in the arrival of the 12<sup>th</sup> Imam (the Shia Islam's Messiah) and their violent activities will form part of the eschatological events of Shia Islam.<sup>48</sup>

The United States must decide whether to live with a nuclear armed fundamentalist regime. Some argue that the rulers of the IRI are rational, and the doctrine of mutual assured destruction (MAD) is as applicable to them as it was for the Soviet leaders during the Cold War.<sup>49</sup> Others argue that MAD works on those who value life on this earth. The doctrine of MAD will not deter those who crave mass martyrdom and eternal bliss in heaven.<sup>50</sup>

Sophisticated scholars of the Second Nuclear Age argue that Cold War deterrence theories (such as MAD) are not universal theories applicable to all systems, all countries, and all leaders. Rather, deterrence is what transpires in the minds of decision-makers. In other

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> "Taeb: Danesh Sakht Bomb Atom Baray Yari Imam Zaman Lazem Ast" [Taeb: The Knowledge for the Construction of the Atom Bomb is Necessary for Assistance for the 12<sup>th</sup> Imam], *Entekhab.ir*, December 31, 2015, available at <https://www.entekhab.ir/fa/news/245422/>; and Alireza Forghani, "Dalayel Foghahee Zerorrat Naboodi Israel" [Theological Reasons for the Annihilation of Israel], *Alef*, February 4, 2012, available at <http://old.alef.ir/vdcepw8zwh8ewi.b9bj.html?142262>. *Alef* is a hardline publication.

<sup>47</sup> Masoud Kazemzadeh, *The Grand Strategy of the Islamic Republic of Iran* (forthcoming).

<sup>48</sup> See the views of Hojatolislam Ali Saeedi, the Head of the Ideological-Political Bureau of the Armed Forces, in "The Prophet and Imam Kazim had Predicted the Islamic Revolution and the Leadership of Imam Khomeini / The Election of the Supreme Leader is done by God," *Didban Iran*, June 3, 2023, <https://www.didbaniran.ir/fa/tiny/news-156490>.

<sup>49</sup> Stephen M. Walt, "The Day After Iran Gets the Bomb," *Foreign Policy*, May 14, 2024, available at <https://foreignpolicy.com/2024/05/14/iran-nuclear-weapon-strategy/>.

<sup>50</sup> Henning P. Duus, "Deterrence and a Nuclear-Armed Iran," *Comparative Strategy*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (2011), pp. 134-153.

words, every deterrence relationship is unique. One must understand the ideology, political culture, motivations, and objectives of those one is trying to deter.<sup>51</sup> To put it another way, the strategic culture of rulers of a country influences how deterrence might work with those leaders.<sup>52</sup> A threat that deters Brezhnev or Mao may not deter Ayatollah Khamenei or Osama bin Laden.<sup>53</sup>

If the United States decided not to attack the IRI after it became a nuclear weapon state, then, in all likelihood, there would be nuclear war between the IRI and Israel. Perhaps, the only way to convince Israel to not launch a first strike would be an American decision to attack the IRI's nuclear facilities. If the U.S. decision is to attack the IRI, then the United States would have the following sub-options:

- 1. Disarming Conventional Strikes.** The United States could attack and destroy the IRI's nuclear facilities with conventional weapons. If the American intelligence were flawless, there would probably be thousands of Iranian deaths and minimal nuclear fallout. If American intelligence failed to identify all the nuclear sites, or the attacks failed to completely incapacitate the sites, then the IRI might be able to retaliate and kill millions of people if it could deliver the nuclear bomb or bombs, with a particular danger to Israel.
- 2. Disarming Strikes with Nuclear Weapons.** The United States could conduct a nuclear strike using low yield weapons. Depending on the number, time, and location of the nuclear strikes, Iranian deaths could plausibly range from the tens of thousands to millions – in addition to the possibility of significant nuclear fallout. Israel also reportedly possesses a second strike capability and could use its submarine launched nuclear tipped cruise missiles to massively attack Iran.<sup>54</sup> There would likely be tens of millions of Iranian and Israeli deaths and massive nuclear fallout.

## Conclusion

The IRI became a nuclear threshold state by 2023. Since 1986, the strategic objective of the IRI has been to possess nuclear weapons. The United States, Israel, and European powers have pursued policies that have put obstacles in the path of the IRI's nuclear weapons

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<sup>51</sup> C. Dale Walton, "The Second Nuclear Age: Nuclear Weapons in the Twenty-First Century," in John Baylis, James J. Wirtz, and Colin S. Gray, eds., *Strategy in the Contemporary World*, 6<sup>th</sup> edition, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), pp. 202-219, see p. 206; and Keith B. Payne, *The Fallacies of Cold War Deterrence and a New Direction* (Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 2001), pp. 39-95.

<sup>52</sup> Jeffrey S. Lantis and Darryl Howlett, "Strategic Culture," in John Baylis, James J. Wirtz, and Colin S. Gray, eds., *Strategy in the Contemporary World*, 6<sup>th</sup> edition, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), pp. 89-107.

<sup>53</sup> Masoud Kazemzadeh, "Chapter 5: Strategic Culture of the IRI and Deterrence," in Kazemzadeh, *The Grand Strategy of the Islamic Republic of Iran* (forthcoming).

<sup>54</sup> "Israel's Deployment of Nuclear Missiles on Subs from Germany," *Spiegel*, June 4, 2012, available at <https://www.spiegel.de/international/world/israel-deploys-nuclear-weapons-on-german-built-submarines-a-836784.html>.

program. There is a very high likelihood that the IRI will cross the line and become a declared nuclear state.

The Trump presidency will begin with an international environment that contains both grave perils and fortuitous circumstances. Russia has been weakened due to the Ukraine war. China is suffering from serious economic crises.<sup>55</sup> The IRI is at its weakest point it has ever been. A sophisticated grand strategy could restore stability to the international system and greatly benefit American national interests. How to deal with the IRI is part of that strategy.

If Iran were to successfully test a nuclear device, it may take more time to miniaturize it into a deliverable warhead. It is true that the documents captured by Mossad show that the IRI has been working on miniaturizing nuclear bombs and placing them on missiles. However, this might lead to a false sense of security. For short-term emergency use, the IRI may use non-conventional methods of delivery such as transport aircraft or passenger airplanes to deliver clandestinely crude nuclear bombs.

If Israel was able to detect the IRI's breakout, there is a very high likelihood that it would militarily attack the IRI's nuclear sites. The United States likely has the capability to successfully overthrow the fundamentalist regime. The U.S. military, for example, succeeded in overthrowing Saddam's regime in about three weeks. The U.S. military was capable to overthrow the Taliban regime in less than two weeks. The U.S. military played a major role in the overthrow of Moamar Gaddafi in Libya.

Many believe that the United States has the capability to destroy the IRI nuclear facilities using conventional weapons.<sup>56</sup> Israel likely lacks the capability to overthrow the fundamentalist regime. According to both Israeli and American officials, Israel lacks the capability utilizing its conventional weaponry to eliminate the IRI's nuclear weapons program.<sup>57</sup> Israel could potentially eliminate the IRI's nuclear weapons program purportedly utilizing its own nuclear weapons as others estimate that Israel possesses about 90 nuclear weapons and materials to manufacture an additional 200.<sup>58</sup> According to the

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<sup>55</sup> Center for Strategic and International Studies, "China's Economy: Has THE Crisis Started?," *CSIS*, February 29, 2024, available at <https://www.csis.org/events/chinas-economy-has-crisis-started>; and Howard French, "The Reason China Can't Stop Its Decline," *Foreign Policy*, January 23, 2024, available at <https://foreignpolicy.com/2024/01/23/china-decline-economy-demographics-geopolitics-growth/>.

<sup>56</sup> Isabel Kershner, "Israel's President Criticizes Talk of Unilateral Strike on Iran," *The New York Times*, August 16, 2012, available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/17/world/middleeast/israels-peres-criticizes-talk-of-unilateral-iran-strike.html>.

<sup>57</sup> Isabel Kershner, "Israeli Strike on Iran Would Be 'Stupid,' Ex-Spy Chief Says," *The New York Times*, May 8, 2011, available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/09/world/middleeast/09israel.html>; "Former Mossad Chief: Israeli Strike on Iran Will Lead to Regional War," *Haaretz*, November 29, 2011, available at <https://www.haaretz.com/2011-11-29/ty-article/former-mossad-chief-israeli-strike-on-iran-will-lead-to-regional-war/0000017f-e80a-dc7e-adff-f8afa0f80000>; Elisabeth Bumiller, "Iran Raid Seen as a Huge Task for Israeli Jets," *The New York Times*, February 19, 2012, available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/20/world/middleeast/iran-raid-seen-as-complex-task-for-israeli-military.html>. For the argument that (at least in 2007) Israel possessed the capability, utilizing its conventional weaponry, to destroy Iran's nuclear weapons program see Whitney Raas and Austin Long, "Osirak Redux? Assessing Israeli Capabilities to Destroy Iranian Nuclear Facilities," *International Security*, Vol. 31, No. 4 (Spring 2007), pp. 7-33.

<sup>58</sup> Kelsey Davenport, "Nuclear Weapons: Who Has What at a Glance," *Arms Control Association*, July 2024, available at <https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/nuclear-weapons-who-has-what-glance>; Center for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation, "Israel's Nuclear Inventory," *ArmsControl.org*, (no date), available at

Institute for Science and International Security, as of 2014, Israel had at least 115 deployed nuclear weapons.<sup>59</sup>

What remains unknown is what the United States and/or Israel would do if the IRI was able to achieve a breakout without detection and announce that it possesses several nuclear bombs. Many American and Israeli policies appear to be based upon the assumption that the United States or Israel possess near-perfect intelligence and would be able to detect an order by Khamenei to assemble nuclear weapons and identify where all such weapons may be located.

Another assumption has been that the IRI would expel the IAEA inspectors and officially withdraw from the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) before it begins the breakout, actions that would provide the United States and/or Israel several weeks lead time to prepare for a rapid military response if they so wish. It is possible that the IRI might begin the breakout and only announce its withdrawal from the NPT and expulsion of the IAEA inspectors after it completes its nuclear bomb. This assumption is based on North Korea's experience. North Korea withdrew from the NPT in 2003, and then conducted its first nuclear test on October 9, 2006. North Korea had to do that because its breakout period was about three years and it could not successfully hide its nuclear bomb development for three years under IAEA inspectors' monitoring. Unlike North Korea, Iran is reportedly only few weeks away from completing its first nuclear bomb. Moreover, Iran is far larger than North Korea and Iran's nuclear facilities are more numerous than North Korea's. It is, therefore, plausible for the IRI to believe that it might be able to successfully complete its nuclear breakout without first expelling the IAEA inspectors and withdrawing from the NPT.

Wrong assumptions and faulty intelligence have caused poor policies and deterrence failure in the past.<sup>60</sup> The failure to detect Pakistan's and North Korea's nuclear breakouts as well as Hamas' surprise attack on October 7 may serve as cautionary histories. In the case of nuclear weapons and the IRI, faulty intelligence and wrong assumptions may lead to truly horrific and apocalyptic outcomes.

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<https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/nuclear-weapons-who-has-what-glancearmscontrolcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Israel.pdf>;

<sup>59</sup> David Albright, "Israel's Military Plutonium Inventory," *Institute for Science and International Security*, November 19, 2015, available at [https://isis-online.org/uploads/isis-reports/documents/Israel\\_Military\\_Plutonium\\_Stock\\_November\\_19\\_2015\\_Final.pdf](https://isis-online.org/uploads/isis-reports/documents/Israel_Military_Plutonium_Stock_November_19_2015_Final.pdf).

<sup>60</sup> Payne, *The Fallacies of Cold War Deterrence*, pp. 1-6.





## ANALYSIS

# THE 1991-1992 PRESIDENTIAL NUCLEAR INITIATIVES AND THE CASCADING EFFECTS ON U.S. ALLIANCES

Matthew R. Costlow

### Introduction

The end of the Cold War was marked by the rapid transformation of political relations between the United States and the Soviet Union that resulted in radical changes to each of their nuclear postures. The Presidential Nuclear Initiatives (PNIs) of 1991-1992 were radical in their scope (affecting both non-strategic and strategic nuclear forces), size (thousands of warheads), and nature (unilateral commitments with calls for reciprocal action). President George H. W. Bush saw the wholly transformed threat environment as an opportunity to adjust the U.S. nuclear posture in ways that many of his senior advisors already favored and which, if done quickly, could positively influence Soviet / Russian leadership decisions on their force posture. At the time, U.S. allies were generally quite supportive of the PNIs and hoped the vast nuclear reductions could further solidify improved political relations with Russia and usher in a “peace dividend” of fiscal savings.

Today, however, the roles have largely reversed between the United States and its allies. Instead of the United States leading a coalition of allies together through a dynamic security environment, allies are becoming increasingly vocal in their dissatisfaction with the U.S. commitment to maintaining the status quo regarding its nuclear posture. Where does this current inherent resistance to change originate from? Undoubtedly, some part of the U.S. reluctance to increase the capability or size of its nuclear forces can be attributed to the lingering post-Cold War attitude that nuclear weapons are increasingly irrelevant—an attitude Beijing and Moscow quite apparently do not share. The PNIs were a product, in part, of this U.S. perception and are thus worth studying for two reasons: first, how the PNIs affected U.S. allies in the years immediately following their announcement, and second, what the effects of the PNIs were on U.S. alliances over the long term, up to today.

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



## The Context and Substance of the Presidential Nuclear Initiatives

The months leading up to the first Presidential Nuclear Initiative in September 1991 were tumultuous in the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact. Indeed, as detailed in Susan Koch's foundational study of the PNIs, states were, in quick succession, declaring their independence from the Soviet Union and finding themselves burdened with loads of Soviet military equipment, even nuclear weapons, on their now-sovereign territory.<sup>1</sup> Since many of these nuclear weapons were designed for either the battlefield (landmines, artillery) or short-range engagements (tactical missiles), their relative size, weight, and transportability—plus the political instability of newly independent states—caused U.S. officials to worry about the possibility of “loose nukes” falling into the hands of terrorists or criminals on the black market. These concerns, plus the possibility of rogue Soviet military units with access to nuclear weapons, led President George H. W. Bush and his advisors to seek ways to encourage the consolidation and security of Soviet nuclear weapons. On September 27, 1991, President Bush announced in a television address to the nation a sweeping series of actions that were meant to publicly reassure and strengthen Soviet leaders against hardliners in their ranks towards a path of nuclear reductions and security, while privately accomplishing posture adjustments the United States was willing to undertake unilaterally, irrespective of the Soviet response.

The September 1991 PNI eliminated ground launched tactical nuclear weapons; withdrew tactical nuclear weapons from the Navy and eliminated all but the nuclear-armed Tomahawk (TLAM-N); de-alerted all strategic bombers; de-alerted Minuteman II missiles slated for elimination under the START Treaty; cancelled the mobility programs for the Peacekeeper and Small ICBMs; cancelled the short-range attack missile II (SRAM-II); and consolidated nuclear command and control under the newly formed United States Strategic Command (USSTRATCOM).<sup>2</sup> Additionally, President Bush called on the Soviet Union to work with the United States to eliminate ICBMs with multiple warheads and permit the “limited deployment” of non-nuclear defenses to protect against “limited ballistic missile strikes, whatever their source...”<sup>3</sup> The Soviet Union's response was generally positive and it undertook reciprocal action on most of President Bush's initiatives relating to non-strategic and strategic nuclear weapons.<sup>4</sup>

A little less than three months after President Bush's September 1991 announcement, the Soviet Union ceased to exist on December 25, 1991, with the Russian Federation taking

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

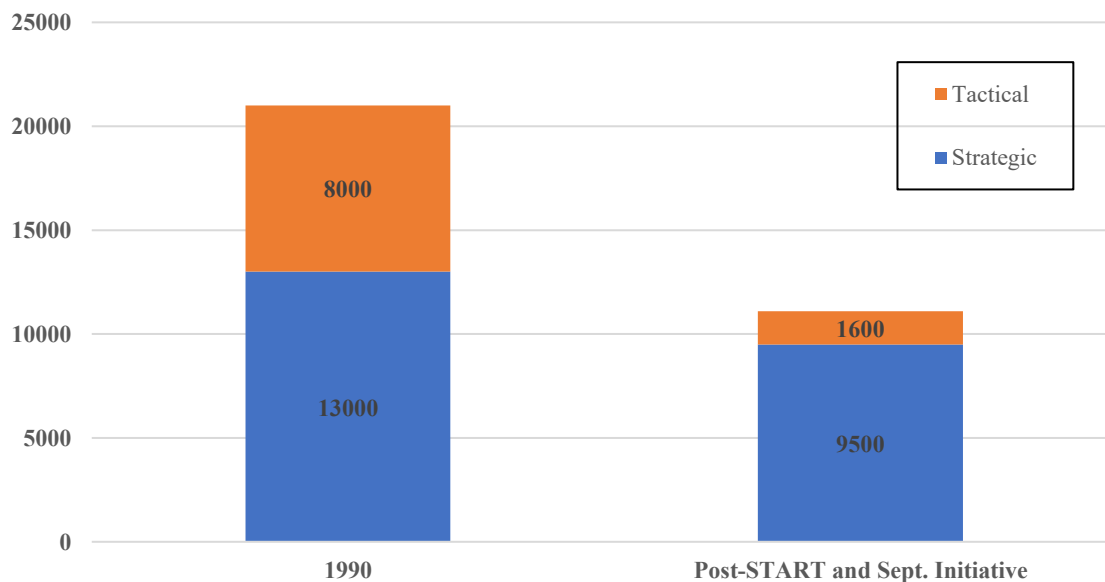
<sup>2</sup> For more details, see presentation of Greg Schulte, *President's Nuclear Initiatives* (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Secretary of Defense, 1992), available at [https://www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/FOID/Reading%20Room/NCB/09-F-0134\\_President's\\_Nuclear\\_Initiative.pdf](https://www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/FOID/Reading%20Room/NCB/09-F-0134_President's_Nuclear_Initiative.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> Koch, *The Presidential Nuclear Initiatives*, op. cit., p. 26.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 14-17.

its place. President Gorbachev resigned and President Yeltsin became Russia's leader, immediately receiving an invitation to meet President Bush in the United States to discuss further steps related to nuclear weapons.<sup>5</sup> On January 28, 1992, President Bush outlined in his State of the Union address some additional steps the United States was taking unilaterally, but again, with a call for reciprocal action from Russia. What became known as PNI II concerned strategic nuclear forces and ended production of the B-2 bomber at 20, cancelled the Small ICBM program entirely, ceased production of the Advanced Cruise Missile, ceased production of the Peacekeeper missile, and ceased production of the W-88 warhead for the Trident SLBM.<sup>6</sup> In response, President Yeltsin re-affirmed support for President Gorbachev's actions and further clarified how Russia would implement its unilateral proposals.<sup>7</sup> Additionally, President Yeltsin announced the cessation of production of Backfire and Blackjack bombers, current air-launched cruise missiles (ALCMs) and long-range sea-launched cruise missiles (SLCMs), among other actions.<sup>8</sup>

**Figure 1. Total U.S. Nuclear Warheads<sup>9</sup>**



In summary, the scope and scale of U.S. actions under the PNIs was, and remains, unprecedented. As seen in Figure 1, after 1990, U.S. non-strategic (or tactical) nuclear weapons were cut unilaterally by over 75% (with many of the remaining placed in storage) while strategic nuclear weapons were cut by about 25%. The difference would have

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>6</sup> Schulte, *The President's Initiatives*, op. cit., p. 5.

<sup>7</sup> For more details, see, Koch, *The Presidential Nuclear Initiatives*, op. cit., pp. 19-21, 34-39.

<sup>8</sup> Loc cit.

<sup>9</sup> Data and labels adapted from chart in Schulte, *The President's Initiatives*, op. cit., p. 7.



appeared even starker to allies at the time since only a few years before the PNIs, in 1987, the United States eliminated an entire class of weapons deployed in Europe under the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces Treaty.

These totals are also notable when compared to what the United States assessed at the time were the Soviet Union's totals: 17,000 tactical nuclear warheads, of which approximately 10,000 would be destroyed and 2,000 placed in storage if the Soviets acted reciprocally to the United States.<sup>10</sup> Within only a few years, however, U.S. officials were voicing their doubts publicly that Russia was following through on its commitments.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, U.S. and allied officials generally believed that improved political relations with Russia was the highest priority in the immediate post-Cold War era and a welcome reprieve from the tensions that plagued the Cold War only a few years earlier.

### Immediate Allied Reactions

U.S. allies in NATO were supportive of reductions in U.S. non-strategic weapons deployed in Europe, due in part to pressure from their domestic constituencies, and their preferences led to changes in the U.S. nuclear posture even before the PNIs. As documented by Susan Koch, "The NATO Allies... had begun discussing withdrawal of those [non-strategic] forces after the fall of the Warsaw Pact. Those changing Allied views led directly to President Bush's May 1990 decision to cancel Follow-On to Lance and nuclear artillery warhead modernization, and to the July 1990 NATO Summit call for a negotiated elimination of short-range nuclear artillery in Europe."<sup>12</sup> Thus, NATO allies were already primed for further U.S. action on non-strategic nuclear weapons when President Bush made his announcements of the PNIs.

Indeed, as Koch points out, NATO's Nuclear Planning Group decided in October 1991, shortly after the first PNI announcement in September 1991, that it would reduce the number of nuclear gravity bombs reportedly from 1,400 to 700.<sup>13</sup> This action, when paired with the U.S. elimination of intermediate-range nuclear forces under the INF Treaty, and the elimination of ground-launched non-strategic nuclear forces under the September PNI, left the United States with only a greatly reduced number of dual-capable aircraft delivered nuclear gravity bombs forward-deployed in Europe. In Asia, the effects were even more pronounced—a complete removal of all forward-deployed nuclear weapons from South Korea.<sup>14</sup> As with NATO allies in Europe, South Korea's political leaders supported and even

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<sup>10</sup> Dick Cheney, as quoted in, "Press Briefing," *Department of Defense*, September 28, 1991, p. 18, available at [https://www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/FOID/Reading%20Room/NCB/09-F-0134\\_Dick\\_Cheney\\_Press\\_Briefing.pdf](https://www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/FOID/Reading%20Room/NCB/09-F-0134_Dick_Cheney_Press_Briefing.pdf).

<sup>11</sup> Koch, *The Presidential Nuclear Initiatives*, op. cit., p. 21.

<sup>12</sup> Susan J. Koch, *The Presidential Nuclear Initiatives of 1991-1992* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 2012), p. 6, available at [https://ndupress.ndu.edu/portals/68/documents/casestudies/cswmd\\_casestudy-5.pdf](https://ndupress.ndu.edu/portals/68/documents/casestudies/cswmd_casestudy-5.pdf).

<sup>13</sup> Koch, *The Presidential Nuclear Initiatives*, op. cit., pp. 11-12.

<sup>14</sup> South Korean President Roh announced in December 1991 that "there does not exist any nuclear weapons whatsoever, anywhere in the Republic of Korea." James Kim, "Roh Declares South Korea is Free of Nuclear Weapons," *UPI.com*, December 18, 1991, available at <https://www.upi.com/Archives/1991/12/18/Roh-declares-South-Korea-is-free-of-nuclear-weapons/6592693032400/>; See also, Dick Cheney, *President's Initiative and Korea* (Washington, D.C.:

touted the U.S. decision to withdraw the weapons, although recently declassified documents indicate they may have sought “conventional enhancements” to offset the removal of nuclear weapons.<sup>15</sup>

## Long Term Effects of the PNIs

As U.S. officials grappled with the sweeping changes in the immediate post-Cold War, they made a conscious effort to effect prudent change, but they also stressed the importance of not being swept up in the moment and expecting the present good relations with Russia would necessarily become permanent. As Secretary of Defense Cheney stated at the time:

I want to emphasize that as we have put forward a sweeping package here and moved to dramatically change our overall nuclear posture, that here in the Department [of Defense] we have carefully considered the consequences of these reductions from the standpoint of being able to maintain the nation’s security. I am absolutely confident, based upon the work that we’ve done, that we can have confidence that our security and that of our allies is protected, even with these initiatives. That we will retain sufficient nuclear forces, and that we are committed to keeping them up to date and effective. The world has changed, but insurance is still a good idea. Under this plan, we believe we will have enough.<sup>16</sup>

Thus, U.S. officials generally struck a cautiously optimistic tone in the years after the PNIs about future military requirements, but, as seen below, not all of their assumptions held up over the long term.

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

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

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

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Department of State, October 15, 1991), pp. 1-4, available at [https://www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/FOID/Reading%20Room/MDR\\_Releases/FY18/FY18\\_Q1/The\\_Presidents\\_Initiative\\_10Oct1991.pdf](https://www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/FOID/Reading%20Room/MDR_Releases/FY18/FY18_Q1/The_Presidents_Initiative_10Oct1991.pdf).

<sup>15</sup> Paul Wolfowitz, *Consultations in Seoul* (Washington, D.C.: Department of Defense, November 1, 1991), p. 2, available at [https://www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/FOID/Reading%20Room/MDR\\_Releases/FY18/FY18\\_Q1/Consultation\\_1Nov1991.pdf](https://www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/FOID/Reading%20Room/MDR_Releases/FY18/FY18_Q1/Consultation_1Nov1991.pdf).

<sup>16</sup> Dick Cheney, as quoted in, “Press Briefing,” *Department of Defense*, September 28, 1991, p. 4, available at [https://www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/FOID/Reading%20Room/NCB/09-F-0134\\_Dick\\_Cheney\\_Press\\_Briefing.pdf](https://www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/FOID/Reading%20Room/NCB/09-F-0134_Dick_Cheney_Press_Briefing.pdf).

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

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

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

Furthermore, we think the planned reductions in stockpile size enable us to improve significantly the safety of the enduring stockpile. We are preferentially eliminating older weapons that don't possess the full suite of modern safety features.<sup>17</sup>

As the Soviet/Russian border receded away from NATO, and the newly independent states had not yet joined NATO, there was no apparent role for U.S. ground-based short-range non-strategic nuclear weapons in Europe. This consideration, plus the promise of a safer and smaller arsenal, with all the attendant fiscal savings, made the PNIs relatively uncontroversial.

That does not mean, however, that there were no negative long term consequences due to the shift in the threat environment and U.S. thinking. Department of Energy officials, for instance, were among the first to note the importance of maintaining the full range of nuclear weapons development, testing, and production capabilities. As one official reflected on the changed international environment and smaller U.S. nuclear posture, "... for the first time since 1945, the United States is not building any new nuclear weapons. The challenge this presents is to find ways to reduce costs, which we are doing, while at the same time maintaining a viable research, development, testing, and production capability, which will service a decreasing, but nonetheless vital stockpile of nuclear weapons."<sup>18</sup> Another Department of Energy official echoed this sentiment, stating, "As long as we rely on nuclear weapons for deterrence, it is an absolute necessity that our remaining nuclear stockpile be supported by a fully capable nuclear weapons complex that can perform all the tasks associated with maintaining a nuclear stockpile, from the design and testing stages, through producing nuclear materials and warheads and fixing problems as they occur, to dismantling the warheads once they have been retired."<sup>19</sup>

Yet the allure of financial savings proved too tempting for Congress which began cutting back DOE programs to the point where officials in charge of nuclear weapons production were publicly warning the cuts were too much too soon. As Assistant Secretary for Defense Programs Richard Claytor testified, "Indeed, I think we have cut back substantially and I

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<sup>17</sup> ADM David E. Jeremiah, Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, as quoted in, U.S. House of Representatives, *Hearings on National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1993—H.R. 5006 and Oversight of Previously Authorized Programs* (Washington, D.C.: Committee on Armed Services, April 30, 1992), p. 1005.

<sup>18</sup> Richard A. Claytor, as quoted in, U.S. House of Representatives, *Energy and Water Development Appropriations for 1993* (Washington, D.C.: Committee on Appropriations, March 10, 1992), p. 1490.

<sup>19</sup> Robert B. Barker, as quoted in, *Ibid.*, p. 1605.

would even say we might be teetering on the brink of losing our nuclear competence.”<sup>20</sup> When asked by then-Representative Jon Kyl to elaborate on “losing our nuclear competence,” Claytor responded that his worries were not confined only to nuclear weapon testing and laboratory experiments: “... we really are cutting back our production work force such that if we had to get into heavy production of a weapon it would probably take us a couple years to get up speed again. We can deal with individual problems, small problems. We simply don’t have capability to get back into quick production right now. We are down to that kind of level.”<sup>21</sup>

Clearly the PNIs are not alone responsible for the long-term deterioration of the U.S. nuclear infrastructure, including its workforce, but they are representative of how major changes in the U.S. nuclear force posture can produce unintended consequences. Specifically, some of the assumptions behind the PNIs, such as an improved political climate and diminished adversary military capabilities, proved transient. Today, the factors that combined at the right time and place in history to produce the PNIs are not present between the United States, Russia, and China. But, much like the late Cold War, allies are asking the United States to alter its nuclear posture in response to a dramatically changed threat environment. So far, the United States has done little in that respect, whether because of infrastructure constraints or the lack of political will.

The Presidential Nuclear Initiatives were among the most consequential arms control efforts of the Cold War and its immediate aftermath—not simply because they fundamentally reshaped the U.S. nuclear force posture, but also because they removed capabilities and options in U.S. nuclear strategy, both for deterrence and extended deterrence. With only one shorter-range forward based non-strategic nuclear capability in its arsenal, the U.S. strategic nuclear arsenal must now bear a greater extended deterrence burden in defense of its allies. The disparity in number and types between the U.S. non-strategic nuclear arsenal and Russia’s non-strategic nuclear arsenal is concerning for the United States and its allies as Russia’s coercive nuclear threats intensify. Indeed, it is an open question whether allies will perceive as credible a U.S. nuclear strategy that, by necessity, may resort to strategic nuclear employment in response to Russian non-strategic nuclear employment. The lack of U.S. non-strategic nuclear options in the Indo-Pacific only worsens the outlook for allies there, especially if, as seems likely, the United States will be relying more on its strategic nuclear arsenal to deter opportunistic aggression during a future potential conflict with Russia or China. And, to make matters even worse, U.S. conventional forces are not postured for two major regional wars overseas, much less in two distinct and geographically distant theaters.

The non-strategic nuclear capabilities covered under the PNIs were critical to extended deterrence and allied assurance during the Cold War, but as the threat they were built to deter disintegrated, so too did their role in U.S. nuclear strategy. Regrettably for the United

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<sup>20</sup> Richard Claytor, as quoted in, U.S. House of Representatives, *Hearings on National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1993—H.R. 5006 and Oversight of Previously Authorized Programs* (Washington, D.C.: Committee on Armed Services, April 30, 1992), p. 1012.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1013.

States and its allies however, their hopes for an enduring benign threat environment lasted longer than merited given the rapid pace of growing adversary nuclear threats. Now, with an aging nuclear infrastructure and no new non-strategic nuclear capability in the program of record until perhaps the mid-2030s, the United States faces a crisis of allied confidence in U.S. extended deterrence threats at a time when it is least able to offer credible assurances to strengthen its alliances.

For much of the Cold War, the United States forward deployed shorter-range nuclear weapons overseas to fulfill multiple roles, including: extending deterrence on behalf of allies, compensating for conventional inferiority, and assuring allies of U.S. credibility as a security partner. Today, allies once again see U.S. extended deterrence and assurance as irreplaceable, especially in the face of conventionally superior adversaries—but the long-lasting effects of the PNIs effectively prevents the United States from strengthening its regional nuclear deterrence capabilities in a timely manner. Given Russia's focused modernization and buildup of its theater nuclear capabilities and China's increasing commitment to the same, the relative lack of U.S. counters to these growing threats will be a growing concern for allies. In short, the gap between what is needed for U.S. extended deterrence credibility and what the United States can provide will widen over the next decade as adversary threats continue apace and the United States struggles to stand up a single regional nuclear program, SLCM-N—the culmination of many unintended consequences born of the PNIs.

## Conclusion

This article's purpose is not to render a net assessment of whether the PNIs on balance improved U.S. and allied security, it treats the PNIs as historical events and assesses their short term and long term impacts on the United States and its allies. In that sense the results are mixed. Certainly the removal and elimination of many U.S. nuclear weapons from Europe satisfied allies, produced fiscal savings, and strengthened the hand of democratic forces in Russia against the hardliners. On the other hand, the assumptions behind the PNIs about the international threat environment proved transient. Even while the security environment changed for the worse, the United States did not modernize its nuclear infrastructure accordingly—hopeful that better political relations would return, and conventional weapons could take on a greater role for deterrence.

U.S. allies were among the first to signal to the United States that these factors did not materialize as hoped and changes were necessary. Recent commentary on NATO's nuclear deterrence requirements, and the need for additional and more capable options, illustrates one of the unintended consequences of the PNIs.<sup>22</sup> At the time, no newly independent state that was once in the Warsaw Pact had joined NATO, and alliance unity was assured. Over the

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<sup>22</sup> See, for instance, Artur Kacprzyk, *NATO Nuclear Adaptation: Rationales for Expanding the Force Posture in Europe* (Warsaw, PL: The Polish Institute of International Affairs, November 2023), available at <https://www.pism.pl/publications/nato-nuclear-adaptation-rationales-for-expanding-the-force-posture-in-europe>.

next 30 years, however, former Warsaw Pact states joined NATO, even ones that bordered Russia, and they have sought changes to the U.S. nuclear posture—and yet, the requirement for anything more than nuclear gravity bombs delivered by DCA did not change.<sup>23</sup>

Perhaps unsurprisingly, a U.S. report that helped lay the foundation for NATO's "dual track" decision, pursuing theater nuclear modernization simultaneously with renewed arms control negotiations with the Soviets, presented one of the more comprehensive assessments of the benefits of NATO theater nuclear modernization. In June 1978, President Jimmy Carter tasked an interagency group led by National Security Council staff to study how "possible increased long-range theater nuclear force capabilities" might impact the prospect of arms control discussions with the Soviet Union.<sup>24</sup> The interagency group submitted its report in response to Presidential Review Memorandum 38 and stated that DCA are limited in important ways that affect both deterrence and assurance: "The DCA in the theater nuclear role are subject to attrition while carrying out their conventional missions, and subject to further losses when penetrating Warsaw Pact air defenses while executing long-range missions."<sup>25</sup>

On the other hand, the report found that land-based theater nuclear force (TNF) had unique advantages that included presenting a visible manifestation of political will and alliance unity. Additionally, it stated that land-based TNF provided "... additional options which can prevent the enemy from predicting with confidence NATO's specific response, thus encouraging him to conclude that an unacceptable degree of risk would be involved regardless of the nature of his attack."<sup>26</sup> This insight is especially pertinent for U.S. and NATO officials today as nuclear gravity bombs delivered by DCA are the only NATO nuclear response option available to the Alliance—a direct consequence of the PNIs. As such, while Russia may not be able to predict with certainty whether NATO would respond to a particular provocation with nuclear weapons, or with how many if it did, Russia could however easily anticipate it would likely involve DCA with gravity bombs and prepare accordingly. Russian confidence that it could predict (at least well enough) NATO's response to a Russian attack, and prepare itself in advance, would likely be detrimental to deterrence and potentially the source for allied concern.

Thus, one important lesson from the PNIs for U.S. and allied officials is that while nuclear reductions can, in some circumstances, satisfy allied requirements, they may inadvertently plant the seed for dissatisfaction in the future. This is not to say that nuclear reductions are

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<sup>23</sup> For example, Julian Borger, "Poland Suggests Hosting US Nuclear Weapons amid Growing Fears of Putin's Threats," *The Guardian*, October 5, 2022, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/oct/05/poland-us-nuclear-wars-russia-putin-ukraine>.

<sup>24</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Presidential Review Memorandum / NSC-38: Long Range Theater Nuclear Capabilities and Arms Control* (Washington, D.C.: NSC, June 22, 1978), available at [https://www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov/sites/default/files/pdf\\_documents/assets/documents/memorandums/prm38.pdf](https://www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov/sites/default/files/pdf_documents/assets/documents/memorandums/prm38.pdf).

<sup>25</sup> National Security Council, *PRM 38, Section II: Possible Long Range Theater Nuclear Modernization* (Washington, D.C.: NSC, August 16, 1978), p. 12, available at [https://www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/FOID/Reading%20Room/NCB/05-F-0738\\_DOC\\_16C\\_final\\_response-OCRD.pdf](https://www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/FOID/Reading%20Room/NCB/05-F-0738_DOC_16C_final_response-OCRD.pdf).

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, p. 16.

therefore never advisable, only that it is difficult to foresee how the factors that indicated nuclear reductions might be in the U.S. national interest at one point in time might change radically in the opposite direction at another point in time. The PNIs eliminated or restricted many U.S. nuclear options that were justifiably seen as unnecessary at the time, and many officials thought that if changes were necessary in the future, then the modernized U.S. nuclear infrastructure could produce the required capabilities. Instead, that assumption proved false and the United States today is hampered by decisions made 30 years ago—limiting its ability to adapt to shifting deterrence, extended deterrence, and assurance requirements. Today, U.S. strategic nuclear forces bear a far greater extended deterrence burden due to the relative lack of regional nuclear systems—a capabilities gap that widens every day as Russia and China improve and increase their non-strategic nuclear arsenals and allies perceive a growing need for more credible U.S. extended deterrence threats.

Naturally, this leads to a second “lesson learned” from the PNIs which is that U.S. officials should place a priority on building adaptability, and retaining that adaptability, in the U.S. nuclear infrastructure. NATO allies greatly valued the diversity of options provided by U.S. theater nuclear forces and they proved invaluable for both extended deterrence and the conclusion of arms control agreements. Indeed, the bipartisan and consensus report of the 2023 Strategic Posture Commission recognized this insight and recommended modifications to the U.S. theater nuclear force posture to “address allied concerns regarding extended deterrence.”<sup>27</sup> To aid in that effort, the Commission also recommended that the Department of Defense and Department of Energy / National Nuclear Security Administration “urgently expand strategic infrastructure” so that the infrastructure can “respond to emerging requirements in a timely fashion.”<sup>28</sup>

As noted above, however, the United States cannot currently respond rapidly to urgent calls for major modifications to the U.S. nuclear force posture. The PNIs, a perceived more benign threat environment, and the allure of a “peace dividend” of fiscal savings all combined to cut back on the U.S. nuclear infrastructure which leaves the United States unable to adjust its nuclear forces to meet dynamic allied extended deterrence and assurance requirements. Indeed, over 30 years since the PNIs, the Administrator of the National Nuclear Security Administration has described how the U.S. nuclear infrastructure remains “fragile,” making current modernization programs “difficult to produce.”<sup>29</sup>

One of the more significant consequences of a reduced U.S. nuclear infrastructure is the lack of margin to meet increased allied extended deterrence and assurance requirements in response to a shift in threat perceptions. For instance, China’s “breathhtaking” nuclear

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<sup>27</sup> Madelyn R. Creedon and Jon L. Kyl, Chair and Vice Chair, *America’s Strategic Posture: The Final Report of the Congressional Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Senate Armed Services Committee, 2023), p. 48, available at [https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/americas\\_strategic\\_posture\\_the\\_final\\_report\\_of\\_the\\_congressional\\_commission\\_on\\_the\\_strategic\\_posture\\_of\\_the\\_united\\_states.pdf](https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/americas_strategic_posture_the_final_report_of_the_congressional_commission_on_the_strategic_posture_of_the_united_states.pdf).

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60.

<sup>29</sup> Jill Hruby, “NNSA Administrator Jill Hruby Remarks at Strategic Weapons in the 21st Century Symposium,” *Department of Energy*, April 18, 2024, available at <https://www.energy.gov/nnsa/articles/nnsa-administrator-jill-hruby-remarks-strategic-weapons-21st-century-symposium>.

breakout took just a few years to manifest itself—but since the United States did not anticipate this development when it was planning its future nuclear force requirements in 2010, and had no margin in its nuclear infrastructure, it is forced to build capabilities such as the nuclear-armed sea-launched cruise missile in a manner that does not interfere with current modernization efforts, pushing SLCM-N till a 2034 deployment date.<sup>30</sup> One of the advantages of the short-range non-strategic nuclear weapons that were eliminated by the PNIs is that they were more easily deployable on relatively short notice—and thus could be shifted overseas based on changed allied threat perceptions.

As the United States develops its nuclear deterrence requirements to meet the emerging two nuclear peer threat environment, the prospect of major nuclear reductions in concert with either Russia or China appears incredibly unlikely. Nevertheless, a close study of the Presidential Nuclear Initiatives can yield valuable insights for U.S. and allied officials seeking to improve their security against growing threats. The U.S. and allied response will almost certainly produce unintended consequences in a future threat environment that nobody can predict with certainty. What the PNIs demonstrate, however, is the value of adaptability to meet unexpected requirements. The challenge, however, is retaining adaptability when it seems the least necessary—when the requirements for flexibility and responsiveness appear too costly and anachronistic. Even though the Presidential Nuclear Initiatives were the products of a far different time and security environment, their effects still linger today, offering lessons for those U.S. and allied officials willing to learn from them.

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<sup>30</sup> On the “breathtaking” pace of China’s nuclear breakout as assessed by then-Commander of United States Strategic Command, ADM Charles Richard, see, David Vergun, “China, Russia Pose Strategic Challenges for U.S., Allies, Admiral Says,” *Defense.gov*, August 12, 2021, available at <https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/2729519/china-russia-pose-strategic-challenges-for-us-allies-admiral-says/>; On the unanticipated nature of China’s nuclear developments, see, Creedon and Kyl, *America’s Strategic Posture*, op. cit., p. 38.; and, on SLCM-N’s initial operational capability date, see, Hruby, “NNSA Administrator Jill Hruby Remarks at Strategic Weapons in the 21st Century Symposium,” op. cit.







## ANALYSIS

### **THE 1972 ANTI-BALLISTIC MISSILE TREATY: WHEN STRATEGIC ARMS CONTROL UNDERCUTS U.S. EXTENDED DETERRENCE AND ASSURANCE GOALS**

**Michaela Dodge and Keith B. Payne**

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

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

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

#### **A Slow Crawl Toward a Missile Defense System**

In the 1960s, the “balance of terror” was the predominant guiding principle of U.S. strategic nuclear deterrence declaratory policy under Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara. It emphasized deterrence via a survivable U.S. nuclear retaliatory capability after an opponent’s first strike, and generally rejected active defenses to protect against a nuclear attack.<sup>1</sup> Secretary McNamara believed that the Soviet Union adhered to a similar approach to deterrence and thus, if the United States deployed a homeland missile defense system, the Soviet Union would react by increasing the number of its nuclear warheads to sustain its retaliatory capabilities. McNamara was convinced that U.S. deployment of missile defense

<sup>1</sup> Keith Payne, *The Great American Gamble: Deterrence Theory and Practice from the Cold War to the Twenty-First Century* (Fairfax, VA: National Institute Press, 2008).



would thereby simply instigate a mechanistic “action-reaction” arms race.<sup>2</sup> This would put the United States on the unaffordable side of the economic curve because the cost of an interceptor was more than the cost of an offensive missile (the value of defended area was unimportant in this calculation). This was referred to as a disadvantageous “cost exchange ratio,” which contributed to Washington’s rejection of strategic missile defense.<sup>3</sup>

NATO allies at the time worried that a U.S. homeland defense system would make it possible for the United States to “retreat” to “fortress America” in the event of a Soviet invasion of Europe.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, several allies also expressed opposition to U.S. strategic defenses. Yet, at the same time, U.S. homeland vulnerability to Soviet nuclear retaliation was the basis for the inevitable question of whether the United States would risk its own destruction by using nuclear weapons in the defense of allies, i.e., U.S. vulnerability led to doubts about the very basis of the U.S. extended nuclear deterrent.

Russian President Putin has most recently expressed this same doubt about the credibility of the U.S. extended deterrent: “The Europeans have to think: if those with whom we exchange such [nuclear] blows are obliterated, would the Americans get involved in such an exchange, on the level of strategic weapons, or not? I very much doubt it.”<sup>5</sup> Ironically, the U.S. “balance of terror” approach to strategic deterrence stability, deliberately enshrined by the ABM Treaty, made it difficult for some allies (and apparently some Russian officials) to believe in the credibility of U.S. extended deterrence—thereby undermining the assurance of allies.

The United States essentially abandoned its strategic missile defense deployment program in the 1970s; yet, the Soviets continued to build up their strategic offensive arms.<sup>6</sup> Despite this evidence that the arms race is not a mechanistic “action-reaction” process as believed by Secretary McNamara, many in Washington continued to label missile defenses as “destabilizing.” Not even the Reagan Administration, committed to rendering offensive

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<sup>2</sup> Remarks by Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara Before United Press International Editors and Publishers, September 18, 1967, available at <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP70B00338R000300100105-8.pdf/>. See also, David Trachtenberg, Michaela Dodge, and Keith Payne, *The “Action-Reaction” Arms Race Narrative vs. Historical Realities* (Fairfax, VA: National Institute Press, 2021), pp. 31-38, available at <https://nipp.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Action-Reaction-pub.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> Matthew Costlow, “A Curious Criterion: Cost Effective at the Margin for Missile Defense,” *Information Series*, No. 537 (Fairfax, VA: National Institute Press, October 21, 2022), available at [https://nipp.org/information\\_series/matthew-r-costlow-a-curious-criterion-cost-effective-at-the-margin-for-missile-defense-no-537-october-21-2022/](https://nipp.org/information_series/matthew-r-costlow-a-curious-criterion-cost-effective-at-the-margin-for-missile-defense-no-537-october-21-2022/).

<sup>4</sup> Robert C. Watts, “A Double-Edged Sword: Ballistic-Missile Defense and U.S. Alliances,” *Naval War College Review*, Vol. 73, No. 1 (Winter 2020), available at <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=8093&context=nwc-review>.

<sup>5</sup> “US wouldn’t rescue allies in nuclear war – Putin,” *RT*, June 7, 2024, available at <https://www.rt.com/russia/598987-us-allies-nuclear-war-putin/>.

<sup>6</sup> “Soviet spending has shown no response to U.S. restraint—when we build they build; when we cut they build.” In Testimony of Secretary of Defense Harold Brown before the U.S. Congress, United States Senate, Committee on the Budget, *The Federal Budget for 1980*, 96th Congress, 1st Session, Part 1 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1979), p. 14.

missiles “impotent and obsolete,”<sup>7</sup> was able to gather the political support needed to free itself of the Treaty restrictions—despite Moscow’s violation of it.<sup>8</sup>

Missile defense opponents criticized the Reagan Administration’s Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) program as destabilizing<sup>9</sup> and charged that it was impossible to pursue arms control and strategic missile defense at the same time.<sup>10</sup> These concerns were echoed in allied capitals at the time.<sup>11</sup> The United Kingdom and France also worried that U.S. strategic missile defenses would spur Soviet missile defense and thereby undermine their own nuclear forces. After some serious efforts by the George H. W. Bush Administration to develop a limited strategic missile defense program, Global Protection Against Limited Strikes (GPALS), the Clinton Administration showed no interest in advancing even rudimentary U.S. homeland missile defense. Subsequently, after the United States emerged victorious from the Cold War, few worried about resurgent great power antagonisms and the homeland missile defense program languished.

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

Yet, international developments, particularly the proliferation of missiles, were intruding upon the deterrence and arms control paradigm that deemed homeland missile defenses undesirable. Ultimately, the George W. Bush Administration gathered sufficient political support to withdraw from the ABM Treaty in 2002 and initiate a homeland missile defense “test bed” based on the rationale that rogue states were acquiring offensive strategic missile capabilities and might not be reliably deterred by traditional U.S. deterrence policies—making missile defense against their limited capabilities a prudent necessity.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Ronald Reagan, *Strategic Defense Initiative Address to the Nation*, March 23, 1983, available at <https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/ronaldreagansdi.htm>.

<sup>8</sup> See Ronald Reagan, *Message to the Congress Transmitting a Report on Soviet Noncompliance with Arms Control Agreements*, March 10, 1987, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum, available at <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/speech/message-congress-transmitting-report-soviet-noncompliance-arms-control-agreements-0>.

<sup>9</sup> Cited in Mark W. Davis, “Reagan’s Real Reason for SDI,” *Policy Review* (Palo Alto, CA: The Hoover Institution, October 1, 2000), available at <https://www.hoover.org/research/reagans-real-reason-sdi>.

<sup>10</sup> McGeorge Bundy, George Kennan, Robert McNamara, and Gerard Smith, “The President’s Choice: Star Wars or Arms Control,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 63, No. 2 (Winter 1984/85), *passim*.

<sup>11</sup> Aaron Bateman, “The secret history of Britain’s involvement in the Strategic Defense Initiative,” *The Space Review*, February 1, 2021, available at <https://www.thespacereview.com/article/4116/1>.

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

As early as 1991, President Richard Nixon's former National Security Advisor and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger observed that, "Limitations on strategic defense will have to be reconsidered in light of the Gulf War experience; no responsible leader can henceforth leave his civilian population vulnerable."<sup>13</sup> In 1998, the Baroness Margaret Thatcher stated that "[t]he preservation of this Cold War relic [the ABM Treaty] is bizarre, and I am somewhat baffled when spokesmen for the United States government describe it as the cornerstone of strategic stability."<sup>14</sup> She considered Ronald Reagan's original decision on the SDI to be "the single most important of his presidency."<sup>15</sup> The problem this "cornerstone of arms control" spurred for extended deterrence and allied assurance was becoming increasingly obvious, if largely ignored, in Washington.

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

Even though the ABM Treaty was negotiated with the objective of severely limiting strategic missile defense development and deployment, the U.S. interpretation of the Treaty's restrictions affected the U.S. theater missile defense program at a time when allies grew increasingly exposed to adversaries' ballistic missiles. For example, due to the Treaty-based limitations on radars, the United States would not build certain radars to provide theater-range interceptors with the best possible data while the ABM Treaty was in force, thus decreasing the potential for theater missile defense systems on the basis of a Treaty that was not intended to limit theater defenses. As the need for theater missile defenses became more obvious, the United States started to press against its interpretation of arms control restrictions that originally had nothing to do with theater missile defense systems.

The Clinton Administration's general rejection of strategic missile defense in favor of maintaining the ABM Treaty contributed to its cancelling GPALS in December 1993.<sup>16</sup> GPALS was also opposed by many in Congress who desired to reap the post-Cold War "peace dividend" and, with a few exceptions, maintain the ABM Treaty. The new administration also discontinued the Bush Administration's Ross-Mamedov talks on missile defense cooperation with the Russian Federation. These talks, named after U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Dennis Ross and Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Georgiy Mamedov, were aimed at creating opportunities to cooperate on missile defense and overcome the specter of the "balance of

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<sup>13</sup> Kissinger's observation is particularly intriguing given his role in bringing about the ABM Treaty. "A Sea Change in U.S.-Soviet Relations," *The Washington Post*, 12 April 1991, p. A-13.

<sup>14</sup> Margaret Thatcher, *Special Issue: A Speech by the Rt. Hon. the Baroness Thatcher LG OM FRS, Deterrence is Not Enough: Security Requirements for the 21st Century (December 3, 1998)*, Information Series, No. 518 (Fairfax, VA: National Institute Press, March 23, 2022), available at <https://nipp.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/518.pdf>.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Donald Baucom, "The Rise and Fall of Brilliant Pebbles," *The Journal of Social, Political and Economic Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (Summer 2004), p. 184, available at <http://highfrontier.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/The-Rise-and-Fall-of-Brilliant-Pebbles-Baucom.pdf>.

terror.” The Russians were highly receptive to the idea. In his 1991 speech to the United Nations, President Yeltsin went so far as to say:

I think the time has come to consider creating a global defence system for the world community. It could be based on a reorientation of the United States Strategic Defense Initiative, to make use of high technologies developed in Russia’s defence complex. We are ready to participate actively in building and putting in place a pan-European collective security system – in particular during the Vienna talks and the upcoming post-Helsinki-II talks on security and cooperation in Europe. Russia regards the United States and the West not as mere partners but rather as allies.<sup>17</sup>

The Ross-Mamedov talks were reportedly progressing well when the Clinton Administration effectively cancelled them,<sup>18</sup> contributing to acrimony in a relationship between the two countries that would continue for years. A part of the problem was that the Russians who supported missile defense cooperation with the United States and advocated for it in Russia became marginalized after the Clinton Administration decided instead to preserve the ABM Treaty as an important component of “strategic stability.”<sup>19</sup> The United States did not prove to be a reliable partner, and the Russian officials would remember.<sup>20</sup> Andrei Kortunov, President of the Moscow Public Science Foundation, stated years later that, “However, some Western actions and attitudes, for example, the NATO expansion, START II, as well as U.S. activities in the BMD area, particularly including U.S. discontinuation of the Ross-Mamedov talks, substantiate the position of those in Moscow expressing a fairly high level of acrimony and suspicion.”<sup>21</sup>

The Clinton Administration also tried to expand the scope of the ABM Treaty in a manner that would have affected theater missile defenses. The Administration argued for a formal “demarcation” distinguishing strategic from theater missile defenses. The subsequently negotiated demarcation agreements named the Soviet Union successor states Belarus, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan parties to the Treaty in addition to the Russian Federation. These agreements (depending on which version would end up being accepted) could impose limits

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<sup>17</sup> United Nations Security Council, *Provisional Verbatim Record of the Three Thousand and Forty-Sixth Meeting*, January 31, 1992, S/PV.3046, p. 46, available at <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/RO%20SPV%203046.pdf>.

<sup>18</sup> Ambassador Henry F. Cooper, *Global Defense: Return from Indifference to Rational Assessment?*, Prepared for the conference on Expeditionary Missile Defense, The Strand Palace Hotel, London, March 26, 2001, pp. 4-5, available at <https://highfrontier.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Cooper-NATO-010326.pdf>. See also, “‘Cold Peace’ or Cooperation? The Potential for U.S.-Russian Accommodation on Missile defense and the ABM treaty,” *Comparative Strategy*, Vol. 16, Issue 2 (1997), available at <https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/ucst20/16/2>.

<sup>19</sup> *Remarks by President Bill Clinton On National Missile Defense*, September 1, 2000, available at <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2000-09/remarks-president-bill-clinton-national-missile-defense>.

<sup>20</sup> Wayne Curtis Weldon, *America’s National Security*, U.S. House of Representatives, Congressional Record (Bound Edition), Vol. 146 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Publishing Office, 2000), Part 13, pp. 18059-18066, available at <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CRECB-2000-pt13/html/CRECB-2000-pt13-Pg18059-6.htm>.

<sup>21</sup> Andrei Kortunov, Hearing before the Subcommittee on International Security, Proliferation, and Federal Services of the Committee on Governmental Affairs, U.S. Senate, 105<sup>th</sup> Congress, First Session, March 13, 1997, p. 13, available at <http://www.bits.de/NRANEU/BMD/documents/ABM130397.pdf>.

on theater missile defense interceptors to be compliant with the ABM Treaty, thus subjecting them to restrictions originally not intended by the Treaty itself.<sup>22</sup> This meant that the United States would be limited in designing its theater missile defense systems to shoot down this class of regional missiles.<sup>23</sup>

The Clinton Administration tried to amend the Treaty without congressional approval, but while congressional opposition to strategic missile defense remained strong, theater missile defenses had considerable support, partly due to the advancement of regional ballistic missile threats. Mindful of its institutional prerogatives, the Senate compelled the Administration to submit the memorandum of understanding between the United States and the Russian Federation for advice and consent.<sup>24</sup> The Administration's effort became obsolete by events as it ran out of time and regional missile challenges became more pressing.

### The ABM Treaty and Extended Deterrence

The vulnerability of the U.S. homeland to strategic missiles ensured by the ABM Treaty degraded the credibility of U.S. extended deterrence and thus U.S. assurance goals, and its impinging on theater missile defense constrained the potential for defending key regional targets. With regard to the former issue of credibility, for example, during a 1996 discussion of U.S. support for the security of Taiwan, a Chinese official suggested that U.S. extended deterrence could not be credible. He argued that, "In the 1950s, you three times threatened nuclear strikes on China, and you could do that because we couldn't hit back. Now we can. So you are not going to threaten us again because, in the end, you care a lot more about Los Angeles than Taipei."<sup>25</sup> This was a variation of a decades-old problem the United States faced with respect to its extended deterrence credibility and assuring allies and partners. French President Charles de Gaulle famously doubted that the United States would be willing to trade New York for Paris during discussions about U.S. credibility in the face of a Soviet threat to the U.S. homeland.<sup>26</sup> Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev similarly challenged the U.S. Secretary of State Dean Rusk regarding the credibility of the U.S. extended nuclear deterrent in Europe when the Soviet Union could retaliate against the U.S. homeland. Rusk was

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<sup>22</sup> One of the later proposals stated that interceptors tested with velocities of less than 3 km/sec would be considered Treaty-compliant; they could not be tested against targets with velocities over 5 km/sec and ranges over 3,500 kilometers. In a final form, the Clinton Administration also banned space-based theater missile defense. See Amy Woolf, *Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty Demarcation and Succession Agreements: Background and Issues*, Congressional Research Service Report, No. 98-496, April 27, 2000, pp. 12-13, 20, available at <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/nuke/98-496.pdf>.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>25</sup> Barton Gellman, "U.S. and China Nearly Came to Blows in '96," *The Washington Post*, June 21, 1998, available at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1998/06/21/us-and-china-nearly-came-to-blows-in-96/926d105f-1fd8-404c-9995-90984f86a613/>.

<sup>26</sup> U.S. Department of State, "Memorandum of Conversation: President's Visit," in Charles S. Samson, ed., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963*, Volume XIV, Berlin Crisis, 1961-1962 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1993), available at <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v14/d30>.

reduced to replying that Moscow should fear that Washington might foolishly be self-destructive.<sup>27</sup> Years later, Henry Kissinger explained that allies should *not* expect the United States to do something so foolish.<sup>28</sup> This problematic credibility of extended deterrence was codified by the “cornerstone of arms control,” the ABM Treaty, and remains given the continuing absence of U.S. homeland defenses against Russian and Chinese strategic missiles.

A 1994 study on this subject pointed out that absent homeland defenses, “the United States could find itself paralyzed from responding forcefully to extreme proliferation problems, thereby undercutting the credibility of U.S. diplomatic efforts and all military counterproliferation options; missile defense may be critical to U.S. and allied decisions to project power in response to proliferation or aggression by a regional bully.”<sup>29</sup> Since 1994 this problem for the United States and Asian allies has worsened because adversaries’ missile and nuclear capabilities have grown, most notably with North Korea detonating its first nuclear device in 2006 and advancing ballistic missile capabilities, including launching a solid-fueled intercontinental-range ballistic missile.<sup>30</sup>

The ABM Treaty intentionally codified the vulnerability of the U.S. homeland to Soviet strategic missiles. At the time, this was deemed necessary to end the “spiraling” arms race and ensure deterrence “stability.” As noted, however, this supposedly “stabilizing” vulnerability degraded the credibility of U.S. extended deterrence and thus U.S. assurance goals by cementing the question of whether the United States would risk intercontinental nuclear war, and thus its own destruction, in support of a distant ally in jeopardy. Some U.S. and allied officials find the credibility of that commitment to be suspect given the risk to a fully vulnerable U.S. homeland. Washington’s continued willful perpetuation of unmitigated homeland vulnerability to Russian and Chinese missiles—a legacy of the thinking behind the ABM Treaty—magnifies the coercive power of their limited nuclear threats. As the 2023 *Strategic Posture Commission Report* observed, adversaries limited coercive nuclear threats to the U.S. homeland are designed to “dissuade and deter the United States from defending or supporting its Allies and partners in a regional conflict; keep the United States from participating in any confrontation; and divide U.S. alliances.”<sup>31</sup> The Commission pointed out that countering these types of threats to provide deterrence credibility could well require missile defense capabilities beyond the rudimentary system intended to protect only against

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<sup>27</sup> Dean Rusk, *As I Saw It* (London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1990), p. 228. See also, Arnold Beichman, “How Foolish Khrushchev Nearly Started World War III,” *The Washington Times*, October 3, 2004, p. B 8.

<sup>28</sup> Henry Kissinger, “The Future of NATO,” in *NATO, The Next Thirty Years*, Kenneth Myers, ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1981), p. 8.

<sup>29</sup> Keith Payne, et al., *Proliferation, Potential TMD Roles, Demarcation and ABM Treaty Compatibility* (Fairfax, VA: National Institute for Public Policy, October 1994), p. 3, available at <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/ADA344594.pdf>.

<sup>30</sup> Soo-Hyang Choi and Kantaro Komiya, “North Korea fires ICBM after condemning US ‘war’ moves,” *Reuters*, December 18, 2023, available at <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/north-korea-fires-ballistic-missile-south-korea-says-2023-12-17/>.

<sup>31</sup> Madelyn Creedon and Jon Kyl, et al., *America’s Strategic Posture* (Alexandria, VA: Institute for Defense Analyses, 2023), p. 63.



rogue missile threats.<sup>32</sup> This is hardly a new observation, but benefits from the bipartisan makeup of the Strategic Posture Commission.

In addition to undermining U.S. credibility and freedom of action, an adversary's missiles aimed at U.S. allies can disrupt U.S. alliances in several ways. For example, during the First Gulf War, Saudi Arabia reportedly waited four days to request U.S. intervention in Iraq following the fall of Kuwait, partly due to the Saudi lack of confidence that the United States would be able to shield it from a ground and air, including a missile, attack.<sup>33</sup> That it ultimately did so was, in part, thanks to the deployment of a U.S. Patriot theater missile defense system to the region.

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

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

## Post-ABM Treaty Missile Defense and Allied Cooperation

In its December 2001 ABM Treaty withdrawal announcement, the Bush Administration pointed to risks stemming from ballistic missile proliferation in the hands of terrorists and rogue states.<sup>34</sup> The Administration's missile defense policy explicitly stated that, "The defenses we will develop and deploy must be capable of not only defending the United States and our deployed forces, but also friends and allies."<sup>35</sup> In withdrawing from the Treaty upon six months' notice, as provided for in the Treaty's language, pundits and proponents of arms control argued at the time that "America's friends and allies would react with horror" to

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 63.

<sup>33</sup> Michael W. Ellis and Jeffrey Record, "Theatre Ballistic Missile Defense and US Contingency Operations," *Parameters*, Vol. XXII, No. 1 (Spring 1992), pp. 11-12, available at <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/tr/pdf/ADA246696.pdf>.

<sup>34</sup> The White House, *ABM Treaty Fact Sheet*, December 13, 2001, available at <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/12/20011213-2.html>.

<sup>35</sup> Office of the White House, *National Security Presidential Directive/NSPD-23*, December 16, 2002, available at <https://irp.fas.org/offdocs/nspd/nspd-23.pdf>.

withdrawal, which “would complicate any efforts to build a missile defense.”<sup>36</sup> None of this came to pass.

The Bush Administration kept allies informed and sought to explain the merits of missile defense and the decision to withdraw.<sup>37</sup> While some U.S. allies, long accustomed to the U.S. rejection of homeland defenses under a “balance of terror,”<sup>38</sup> reportedly opposed the development of even a limited U.S. homeland defense system, the United States was able to establish robust missile defense cooperation programs with numerous allies and partners.<sup>39</sup> Japan, for example, was one of the first states to embrace missile defense cooperation with the United States.<sup>40</sup> This has included the joint development of the *Aegis* sea-based missile defense system that became the focal point of allied cooperative missile defense efforts.

Russian President Vladimir Putin’s immediate response to the withdrawal announcement was, “... I fully believe that the decision taken by the president of the United States does not pose a threat to the national security of the Russian Federation.”<sup>41</sup> Within a month of the ABM Treaty formally ending in June 2002, representatives of 10 allied countries, including the Czech Republic, Hungary, Italy, the United Kingdom, Poland, Romania, Spain, Slovakia, Australia, Japan, and NATO Secretary General George Robertson, issued statements supporting the U.S. missile defense program.<sup>42</sup>

Under U.S. leadership, allied governments became convinced of missile defense as a net positive and international cooperation has since flourished. A NATO study completed in 2005 concluded that missile defense for Alliance populations and territory is needed and technologically feasible.<sup>43</sup> NATO developed an Active Layered Theatre Ballistic Missile Defence Program, and a missile defense command and control “backbone” to which national missile defense assets can “plug in.” NATO’s *2022 Strategic Concept* identifies missile defense as an integral part of its force posture—stating that “NATO’s deterrence and defence posture

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<sup>36</sup> Ivo Daalder and James M. Lindsay, “Unilateral Withdrawal From the ABM Treaty Is a Bad Idea,” *Brookings Commentary*, April 30, 2001, available at <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/unilateral-withdrawal-from-the-abm-treaty-is-a-bad-idea/>.

<sup>37</sup> Lynn Rusten, *U.S. Withdrawal from the Antiballistic Missile Treaty* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, January 10, 2010), p. 4, available at [https://ndupress.ndu.edu/portals/68/documents/casestudies/cswmd\\_casestudy-2.pdf](https://ndupress.ndu.edu/portals/68/documents/casestudies/cswmd_casestudy-2.pdf).

<sup>38</sup> “U.S. Steps up Missile Defense Marketing Abroad,” *Arms Control Association*, September 2002, available at <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2002-09/us-steps-up-missile-defense-marketing-abroad>.

<sup>39</sup> Stephen Rademaker, “America’s Cooperative Approach to Missile Defense,” *Remarks to the American Foreign Policy Council’s 2004 Conference on “Missile Defenses and American Security,”* December 17, 2004, available at <https://2001-2009.state.gov/t/isn/rls/rm/39920.htm>.

<sup>40</sup> Watts, “A Double-Edged Sword: Ballistic-Missile Defense and U.S. Alliances,” op. cit., pp. 64-65.

<sup>41</sup> Terence Neilan, “Bush Pulls Out of ABM Treaty; Putin Calls Move a Mistake,” *The New York Times*, December 13, 2001, available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2001/12/13/international/bush-pulls-out-of-abm-treaty-putin-calls-move-a-mistake.html>.

<sup>42</sup> *The Administration’s Missile Defense Program and the ABM Treaty*, Hearing before the Committee on Foreign Relations, U.S. Senate, 107<sup>th</sup> Congress, First Session, July 24, 2001, available at <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-107shrg74505/html/CHRG-107shrg74505.htm>.

<sup>43</sup> Peppino DeBiao, “Missile Defense and NATO Security,” *Joint Forces Quarterly*, Issue 51 (4<sup>th</sup> Quarter 2008), p. 50, available at <https://ndupress.ndu.edu/portals/68/documents/jfq/jfq-51.pdf>.

is based on an appropriate mix of nuclear, conventional and missile defence capabilities, complemented by space and cyber capabilities.”<sup>44</sup>

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

U.S. and allied missile defenses have not appreciably caught up with expanding offensive missile threats. This is by Washington’s conscious choice at the strategic level. As adversaries’ capabilities continue to advance, an inadequate U.S. ability to defend its homeland against even limited Russian and Chinese missile threats will continue to fan doubts about the credibility of U.S. extended nuclear deterrence, including among opponents and allies. In Europe, these concerns are likely strengthened by Russia’s numerous nuclear missile threats and extensive missile use in Ukraine. Since February 2022, Russia has attacked Ukraine with more than 7,400 missiles of various types.<sup>45</sup> The casualties from these attacks would be much higher absent the measure of protection provided by Western theater defense systems.<sup>46</sup>

## Conclusion

Wartime experience now underscores the importance of missile defense systems for both the protection of people and assets, and the credibility of extended deterrence—yet, more than two decades since the U.S. withdrawal from the ABM Treaty, Washington remains under that Treaty’s shadow and its underlying Cold War rationale. The homeland missile defense system remains severely limited and is not intended to address the Chinese or Russian limited missile threats that undermine the credibility of U.S. extended deterrence efforts. This credibility problem will grow as adversaries continue to advance their missile programs, aggressive agendas and coercive threats. Expanded U.S. defenses capable of addressing such coercive missile threats would, finally, move Washington beyond its Cold War thinking regarding missile defense and the corresponding ABM Treaty, and provide a

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<sup>44</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organization, *Strategic Concept*, June 29, 2022, p. 6, available at <https://www.nato.int/strategic-concept/>.

<sup>45</sup> Liliana Oleniak, “Number of Russian missiles launched at Ukraine since February 2022 counted,” *RBC-Ukraine*, December 28, 2023, available at <https://newsukraine.rbc.ua/news/number-of-russian-missiles-launched-at-ukraine-1703755020.html>.

<sup>46</sup> The first of two recent large attacks reportedly cost Russia over \$1.2 billion. See “Today’s Massive Attack on Ukraine Cost Russia Over \$1.2 Billion,” *Kyiv Post*, December 29, 2023, available at <https://www.kyivpost.com/post/26109>; and Eero Epner, “Human Life Has No Value There’: Baltic Counterintelligence Officers Speak Candidly About Russian Cruelty,” *Eesti Ekspress*, October 2022, available at <https://ekspress.delfi.ee/artikkel/120083694/human-life-has-no-value-there-baltic-counterintelligence-officers-speak-candidly-about-russian-cruelty>.

potentially critical level of societal protection against limited threats, strengthen extended deterrence, and contribute to the viability of U.S. alliances.

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## ANALYSIS

### **THE IMPACT OF ARMS CONTROL MISCONCEPTIONS ON EXTENDED DETERRENCE AND ASSURANCE**

**David J. Trachtenberg and Keith B. Payne**

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

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

This manifest U.S. reluctance is not simply a matter of leadership will in a vacuum; it follows from changing military realities and risk. The military balance has shifted in favor of opponents, as U.S. military capabilities—both nuclear and conventional—have declined relative to those of opponents and U.S. global power projection capabilities have contracted. Under Washington's general arms control mandate to reduce the role and number of nuclear weapons, the United States has eliminated or rejected select nuclear capabilities, particularly including theater nuclear forces. And the contemporary U.S. nuclear modernization program of record remains lethargic and unfulfilled since initially proposed by the Obama Administration nearly a decade and a half ago, in part to facilitate arms control ratification by the U.S. senate. Allied leaderships must make large or small decisions, virtually on a daily basis, that are affected by their judgments as to whether Washington is gaining or losing strength vis-à-vis the foes that threaten them—whether they should continue to side with the United States or hedge their bets. A trend toward decisions based on the latter judgment will ultimately prove fatal to U.S. alliances.

Continuing U.S. efforts to reduce the role of nuclear weapons—in a threat environment that sees opponents emphasizing nuclear weapons in their expansionist strategies that threaten allies—have contributed to conditions that undermine the credibility of extended deterrence, and thus allied assurance. These conditions include: America's unmitigated vulnerability to Russian and Chinese coercive nuclear threats, and the deep reduction of U.S. non-strategic nuclear capabilities vis-à-vis opponents who are heavily nuclear-armed,



cooperating, and explicitly threatening U.S. allies and partners. The challenges these conditions pose for the continuing credibility of the U.S. extended deterrent and allied assurance cannot be “papered over” by robust words and makeshift gestures from Washington because they are, in large part, based on material realities.

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

## A Checkered History

### Limitations on Strategic Defenses

The initial U.S.-Soviet strategic arms limitation treaties in 1972, the SALT I and the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty, were hailed by advocates at the time as stabilizing accords that would help preserve a “balance of terror” between the United States and the Soviet Union and reduce the risk of nuclear conflict. The ABM Treaty, in particular, was considered the “crown jewel” of arms control and prohibited a nationwide territorial defense of the United States, essentially giving Soviet intercontinental-range ballistic missiles (ICBMs) a “free ride” to their American targets.<sup>1</sup> Mutual vulnerability was equated with strategic stability; yet the codified vulnerability of the U.S. homeland carried increased risks for extended deterrence and assurance. It raised the logical question of whether Washington could credibly extend nuclear deterrence on behalf of distant allies when the U.S. homeland itself was vulnerable to Soviet nuclear forces. Correspondingly, a publication of the Chinese Communist Party recently seemingly endorsed a Chinese “expert” regarding the credibility of the U.S. extended deterrent: “In American logic, US’ homeland security takes precedence... The interests of US allies rank fourth. That says, if defending Japan with nuclear weapons poses any risk to US homeland security, Washington will think twice... The US’ nuclear umbrella only protects itself.”<sup>2</sup>

One of the most influential strategic thinkers during the Cold War, Herman Kahn, argued that leaving the American homeland vulnerable to Soviet missile attack was not only imprudent for U.S. security, but would negatively impact the U.S. ability to extend deterrence credibly to U.S. allies. As he stated in 1960, without some means of protecting the homeland,

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<sup>1</sup> Statement of Henry A. Kissinger, cited in Brad Knickerbocker, “US prepares new concessions, new initiatives on arms. ABM debate revived as both sides seem poised to break treaty,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, September 20, 1984, available at <https://www.csmonitor.com/1984/0920/092021.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Editorial, “Will US Defend Japan With Nukes or Turn it Into the Line of Fire,” *Global Times* (Japan), July 23, 2024, p. 5.

“...it is hard for me to visualize the Soviets’ believing that the United States would willingly commit suicide” on behalf of an ally.<sup>3</sup>

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

Before 1960, when the Americans were out of reach... we had no doubt in our minds that they would use atomic weapons from the onset of any serious attack against any country of Europe, because they were out of reach themselves. The risks were, risks were small, after all. But, it was easy to foresee that ten years later, the situation would change and that America being the first lines, in the same position vis-à-vis the enemy than Europe, they would change their strategy, and try to reduce the atomic commitments.<sup>4</sup>

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

If missile defense is deployed to counter ballistic missile attacks from rogue states, the U.S. can then pursue military operations against these countries without fearing retaliation against its mainland or forces stationed overseas. Military commitments to allies and the performance of extended deterrence will become more credible and reliable.... Key to increasing the credibility of the threat of nuclear use and subsequent nuclear escalation is the damage-limitation capability of the country providing the nuclear umbrella and the strength of political relations between the country providing the nuclear umbrella and its protege.<sup>5</sup>

Despite the fact that the United States withdrew from the ABM Treaty more than two decades ago, U.S. policy continues to reject missile defense capabilities vis-à-vis Russian and Chinese strategic ballistic missiles. Indeed, there have been continuing domestic calls for negotiated restrictions on U.S. missile defenses to ensure continuing American vulnerability to Russian and Chinese missiles as part of a broader arms control agenda.<sup>6</sup> Yet, as Herman

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<sup>3</sup> Herman Kahn, *The Nature and Feasibility of War and Deterrence* (Santa Monica, CA: The RAND Corporation, January 20, 1960), p. 16, available at <https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/papers/2005/P1888.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> Interview with Pierre M. Gallois, *War and Peace in the Nuclear Age*, June 11, 1986, available at [https://openvault.wgbh.org/catalog/V\\_A5E2A43ED3F84292B85F66FE35C38F90](https://openvault.wgbh.org/catalog/V_A5E2A43ED3F84292B85F66FE35C38F90).

<sup>5</sup> Shinichi Ogawa, “Missile Defense and Deterrence” (Tokyo, Japan: National Institute for Defense Studies, 2001), pp. 32, 34, available at [https://www.nids.mod.go.jp/english/publication/kiyo/pdf/bulletin\\_e2001\\_2.pdf](https://www.nids.mod.go.jp/english/publication/kiyo/pdf/bulletin_e2001_2.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> Steven Pifer, “Enhancing Strategic Stability: New START and Beyond,” *Arms Control Today*, January/February 2021, available at <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2021-01/features/enhancing-strategic-stability-new-start-beyond>.



Kahn noted, constraints on U.S. strategic missile defense capabilities render U.S. extended deterrence credibility and corresponding allied assurance goals problematic.

### **Offensive Nuclear Arms Reductions**

Offensive nuclear arms reductions have also impacted extended deterrence and assurance. The deployment of non-strategic nuclear weapons in Europe has traditionally been seen as a way to “couple” European security to that of the United States by providing a crucial deterrence means between conventional forces and America’s strategic nuclear arsenal. However, in the 1990s, under George H. W. Bush’s Presidential Nuclear Initiatives (PNIs), the United States eliminated most of its non-strategic nuclear weapons, including nuclear artillery shells, nuclear warheads on short-range ballistic missiles, and naval anti-submarine nuclear capabilities. Unfortunately, the Soviet Union (and later Russia) ultimately did not follow suit. This asymmetry in non-strategic nuclear forces has created heightened allied anxiety over the credibility of the U.S. extended nuclear deterrent as the possibility of a U.S. nuclear response to a limited nuclear attack on American allies largely receded to a highly escalatory, and thus potentially incredible, strategic nuclear exchange. As noted, most recently in Ukraine, Washington has repeatedly demonstrated great caution with regard to escalatory steps that might provoke Moscow. As Henry Kissinger much earlier stated, “...we must face the fact that it is absurd to base the strategy of the West on the credibility of the threat of mutual suicide...because if we execute, we risk the destruction of civilization.”<sup>7</sup>

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

Continued Russian expansion of its non-strategic nuclear delivery systems provides Moscow with numerous theater nuclear options with which to threaten or strike NATO Europe. The lack of comparable U.S. theater capabilities can only diminish allied confidence in the willingness of the United States to threaten limited, non-strategic nuclear escalation (or a limited, non-strategic response) on behalf of distant allies, including NATO members.

U.S. allies in the Indo-Pacific have also expressed growing alarm over the credibility of Washington’s security assurances as a result of the reductions in U.S. nuclear capabilities that underpin American extended deterrence guarantees. For example, the decision by the Obama Administration in 2010 to retire and eliminate the Tomahawk Land Attack Missile-Nuclear (TLAM-N), a regional, non-strategic nuclear capability, caused consternation among Asian allies, who saw the decision as evidence of a weakening U.S. commitment to extended nuclear deterrence as the threats grew. The 2009 Strategic Posture Commission warned, “In

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<sup>7</sup> Henry Kissinger, “The Future of NATO,” in Kenneth Myers, ed., *NATO, the Next Thirty Years* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1979), p. 8.

Asia, extended deterrence relies heavily on the deployment of nuclear cruise missiles on some Los Angeles class attack submarines—the Tomahawk Land Attack Missile/Nuclear (TLAM/N).... In our work as a Commission it has become clear to us that some U.S. allies in Asia would be very concerned by TLAM/N retirement.”<sup>8</sup>

Subsequently, in its 2018 *Nuclear Posture Review* (NPR), the Trump Administration called for the development and deployment of a new nuclear sea-launched cruise missile (SLCM-N), noting that it would provide an important non-strategic, regional deterrent capability.<sup>9</sup> In addition, the 2018 NPR stated that the SLCM-N would help tailor deterrence and enhance assurance by providing greater “flexibility and diversity”—attributes that would be responsive to extended deterrence requirements given changes in the strategic environment “in the near term and beyond.”<sup>10</sup>

Despite the likely extended deterrence and assurance value of restoring a regional sub-strategic nuclear capability, the Biden Administration refused to support the SLCM-N, arguing that the deterrence capabilities it would provide are unnecessary, redundant, costly, and unlikely to “provide leverage to negotiate arms control limits” on Russia’s extensive non-strategic nuclear forces.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, Congress has continued to provide modest funding to sustain the program.<sup>12</sup>

### Strategic Arms Control Efforts

Historically, nuclear arms control treaties have generally focused on reducing and capping the number of nuclear launchers or weapons at fixed ceilings over an extended period of time. Such an approach essentially presumes the continuation of the conditions that led to the agreements. Yet, international threat conditions can worsen quickly and, correspondingly, the requirements for extended deterrence can change rapidly. Understandably, as an analyst has noted, in a dynamic threat environment: “As [U.S.] numbers go down, extended deterrence concerns go up.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> William J. Perry, James R. Schlesinger, et al., *America’s Strategic Posture: The Final Report of the Congressional Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2009), p. 26, available at [https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/America's\\_Strategic\\_Posture\\_Auth\\_Ed.pdf](https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/America's_Strategic_Posture_Auth_Ed.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> Department of Defense, *Nuclear Posture Review*, February 2018, p. 55, available at <https://media.defense.gov/2018/Feb/02/2001872886/-1/-1/1/2018-NUCLEAR-POSTURE-REVIEW-FINAL-REPORT.PDF>.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Department of Defense, *2022 Nuclear Posture Review*, p. 20, available at <https://media.defense.gov/2022/Oct/27/2003103845/-1/-1/1/2022-NATIONAL-DEFENSE-STRATEGY-NPR-MDR.PDF>.

<sup>12</sup> See, in particular, Section 1640 of the *National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2024*, Public Law 118-31, December 22, 2023, available at <https://www.congress.gov/118/plaws/publ31/PLAW-118publ31.pdf>.

<sup>13</sup> Chris Jones, “The Shades of Extended Deterrence,” Center for Strategic and International Studies, January 4, 2010, cited in David J. Trachtenberg, “US Extended Deterrence: How Much Strategic Force Is Too Little?,” *Strategic Studies Quarterly*, Summer 2012, p. 86, available at <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26270524>.

A notable exception to a lengthy arms control commitment to a specific lowered ceiling was the 2002 Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty (SORT, aka, the “Moscow Treaty”), which allowed for a range of between 1,700 and 2,200 deployed strategic nuclear weapons, consistent with the U.S. reductions announced in the 2001 NPR. The ability to move between the higher and lower quantitative limits of the Treaty allowed for an atypical degree of flexibility in deployment numbers given the possibility of significant changes in the international security environment. The Treaty’s range of 1,700-2,200 was agreed to, in part, to accommodate allied concerns regarding the credibility of U.S. extended deterrence guarantees. As then Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and then Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Richard Myers informed the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, the permissible range of operationally deployed strategic nuclear weapons was, in part, based on “an assurance-related requirement for U.S. nuclear forces that they be judged second to none.”<sup>14</sup>

### Washington’s Policies and Preferences

The credibility of extended deterrence is shaped by Washington’s apparent willingness to accept risks on behalf of allies, and on U.S. nuclear capabilities that backstop the U.S. willingness to do so. Reducing the role of nuclear weapons has been a recurring U.S. arms control theme for decades, and is again emphasized repeatedly in the 2022 NPR.<sup>15</sup> Yet, as executed, Washington’s continuing drive to reduce the role and number of nuclear weapons has undermined extended deterrence and the assurance of allies. As noted above, there is a striking inconsistency between this U.S. enthusiasm and that of opponents. Indeed, Russia, China, North Korea, and Iran have all been moving in the *opposite* direction, increasing emphasis on (or, in Iran’s case, seeking the capability to acquire) nuclear weapons for the coercive role they can play in deterring the United States and its allies from challenging their aggressive behavior. Russia, in particular, has made extensive and unprecedented nuclear threats against the West in connection with its illegal and unprovoked invasion of Ukraine.

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

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

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<sup>14</sup> Written response for the record in Senate Foreign Relations Committee, *Treaty on Strategic Offensive Reduction: The Moscow Treaty*, S. Hrg. 107-622, 107th Cong., 2nd sess. (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 2002), p. 117, available at <https://www.congress.gov/107/chrgr/CHRG-107shrg81339/CHRG-107shrg81339.pdf>.

<sup>15</sup> 2022 *Nuclear Posture Review*, op. cit., pp. 1, 3, 7, 11, 16, 25.

nuclear attack.<sup>16</sup> This “sole purpose” statement tracked with his earlier comment that the United States should adopt such a policy with respect to nuclear weapons.<sup>17</sup> Such a policy, if it were adopted, would clearly increase fears among U.S. allies in Europe and Asia about the credibility of the U.S. extended deterrent. As one analyst noted, foreswearing the first use of nuclear weapons by the United States would be “cold comfort for countries like Japan, Taiwan, and Australia all of which would have to contend with superior PLA [People’s Liberation Army] conventional forces in the event of hostilities with China.”<sup>18</sup> The 2022 NPR ultimately rejected a “sole purpose” policy, but also likely disturbed allies by highlighting a continuing U.S. aspiration for it.<sup>19</sup>

## Conclusions and Recommendations

U.S. arms control goals, agreements and proposals, including the continuing policy limitations on U.S. strategic ballistic missile defense, the near elimination of non-strategic nuclear options, and Washington’s continuing aspiration for a No First Use policy—intentionally or not—have contributed to allied concerns about the credibility of repeated “ironclad” U.S. extended deterrence commitments.

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

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

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<sup>16</sup> Joseph R. Biden, Jr., “Why America Must Lead Again: Rescuing U.S. Foreign Policy After Trump,” *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2020, available at <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2020-01-23/why-america-must-lead-again>.

<sup>17</sup> The White House, “Remarks by the Vice President on Nuclear Security,” January 11, 2017, available at <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2017/01/12/remarks-vice-president-nuclear-security>.

<sup>18</sup> Andrew O’Neil, “A ‘No-First-Use’ doctrine would undermine American nuclear deterrence,” January 21, 2021, available at <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpretor/no-first-use-doctrine-would-undermine-american-nuclear-deterrence>.

<sup>19</sup> See the discussion in, Michaela Dodge and Keith B. Payne, “No First Use: Threatening Alliance Cohesion, Assurance and Non-Proliferation,” *Information Series*, No. 588, June 6, 2024, p. 507. See also, Department of Defense, *2022 Nuclear Posture Review*, op. cit., p. 9.

control, must be to facilitate the policy and force *flexibility* that best supports U.S. deterrence and assurance goals.

Some senior U.S. officials continue to tout arms control as a realistic solution to contemporary threats to U.S. and allied security and have been reluctant to move in ways inconsistent with past arms control endeavors. For example, the Biden Administration's 2022 *Nuclear Posture Review* repeatedly emphasizes the continuing priority attributed to arms control—asserting against all reason in the contemporary era that, "... arms control offers the most effective, durable, and responsible path to reduce the role of nuclear weapons in our strategy and to prevent their use."<sup>20</sup> With this in mind, the United States should adopt the following principles in order to ensure that any future agreement or initiative serves U.S. national security interests and helps to assure allies via a credible extended deterrent:<sup>21</sup>

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

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<sup>20</sup> 2022 *Nuclear Posture Review*, op. cit., p. 17; and, more recently, "Japanese, U.S. ministers discuss deterrence under nuclear umbrella," *Asahi Shimbun Online* (Japan), July 29, 2024, available at <https://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/15366617#:~:text=Japanese%2C%20U.S.%20ministers%20discuss%20deterrence%20under%20nuclear%20umbrella,-THE%20ASAHI%20SHIMBUN&text=Japan%20and%20the%20United%20States,China%2C%20North%20Korea%20and%20Russia.>

<sup>21</sup> Some of the recommendations that follow are addressed in more detail in Dr. Keith B. Payne, Dr. John S. Foster, Jr., et al, *A New Nuclear Review for a New Age* (Fairfax, VA: National Institute Press, April 2017), available at [https://nipp.org/monographs\\_cpt/a-new-nuclear-review-for-a-new-age/](https://nipp.org/monographs_cpt/a-new-nuclear-review-for-a-new-age/). See also, Keith B. Payne and Michaela Dodge, *Stable Deterrence and Arms Control in a New Era, Occasional Paper*, Vol. 1, No. 9 (Fairfax, VA: National Institute Press, September 2021), pp. 52-53, available at <https://nipp.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Payne-Dodge-OP-9.pdf>.

necessary prerequisite to help ensure arms control aligns with national security requirements.<sup>22</sup>

3. No arms control initiative should hinder the U.S. force posture flexibility that enables the quantity and characteristics of U.S. forces needed to adapt to changing strategic circumstances, including rapidly worsening political conditions. In a harsh threat context, an agreement that enables the United States to possess a wide range of deployed and reserve systems is preferable to one that locks the United States into a reduced static number over a period of many years.
4. U.S. extended deterrence and allied assurance requirements, including the prospect for changes in those requirements, must shape any arms control negotiations. An agreement that erodes the credibility of America's extended deterrence, assurance, and nonproliferation goals will undermine U.S. security.
5. Any future arms control negotiations should focus on removing those areas of Russian and Chinese advantage that directly undercut the credibility of U.S. extended deterrence. This includes seeking to reduce Russia's enormous advantage in non-strategic nuclear systems that pose a direct threat to NATO Europe. Unless, as seems implausible at this point, the verifiable, deep reduction of Chinese and Russian nonstrategic options occurs, the United States should strengthen, not further constrain, its conventional and nuclear extended deterrent capabilities against their aggression. Specifically, U.S. non-strategic nuclear options must be expanded in Europe and the Indo-Pacific; realistic U.S. moves in this direction may, in fact, be necessary to move Moscow and Beijing to more moderate behaviors.
6. Arms control limitations on missile defenses must be avoided. Improved and expanded homeland missile defenses would help bolster the credibility of U.S. extended deterrence by helping to deny Moscow and Beijing the power over Washington of their limited coercive nuclear threats, expand the decision space for a possible response, and could help reduce the level of damage should deterrence fail.
7. Given the ample history of Moscow's blatant noncompliance with arms control agreements and Beijing's purposeful lack of transparency, thorough verification and enforcement protocols, and an exit provision, are essential for any future arms control agreement. If Washington is to engage in arms control seriously, it must develop a clear compliance and enforcement policy in consultation with U.S. allies. This high bar for verification and enforcement is likely impossible given Moscow's and Beijing's contemporary goals and actions.

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<sup>22</sup> See the discussion in Madelyn R. Creedon, Jon L. Kyl, et al, *America's Strategic Posture: The Final Report of the Congressional Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States*, in particular, pp. 84-86,110-111, available at <https://www.ida.org/-/media/feature/publications/a/am/americas-strategic-posture/strategic-posture-commission-report.ashx>.

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

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## INTERVIEWS

In this issue of National Institute's *Journal of Policy & Strategy*, we present two interviews. The first is an edited version of the interview with Martin Kroupa, Head of Regional Development of the Post Bellum Nonprofit Organization, which runs the Memory of Nations nonprofit organization. This organization collects eye-witness accounts of people who lived through totalitarianism and war, and ensures their stories are not forgotten within the general public. From the start of Russia's full-scale invasion, Mr. Kroupa has been active in several campaigns supporting Ukrainian defenders and often travels to the frontline. Also included is an interview with James Anderson, former Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, and Assistant Secretary of Defense for Strategy, Plans, and Capabilities. Dr. Anderson comments on China's military buildup, its apparent drive toward nuclear superiority over the United States, and the dangers of Beijing's growing military cooperation with Moscow. He argues that the United States must confront China's increasingly aggressive behavior by strengthening overall U.S. military capabilities to deter potential Chinese aggression in the Indo-Pacific and elsewhere.

### **An Interview with Martin Kroupa, Head of Regional Development Post Bellum Nonprofit Organization (Czech Republic)**

***Q. There is a popular narrative emerging within the U.S. discourse that helping Ukraine is a distraction from countering China. Why is helping Ukraine important for the United States?***

A. In Ukraine, Russia is testing the collective West, and especially the United States as its leader. Russia wants to change the status quo, and it wants to deny the neighboring states' opportunity to choose a system of government. Countries in Central and Eastern Europe (perhaps with the exception of Hungary and Slovakia), perceive Russia's attack on Ukraine as an attack against themselves, even though we have the added security of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization membership.

China is observing what is happening in Ukraine. It is plausible to argue that had Ukraine not fought Russia so valiantly for so long, China would have already invaded Taiwan. Thankfully, the West's reaction was very fast, surprisingly for Russia and China. The lesson that China has taken away from Russia's experience in Ukraine since February 2022 is that the invasion of Taiwan must be a *fait accompli*, and that will be relatively more difficult, which gives us more time to prepare and strengthen deterrence.

Cooperation between Russia and North Korea would not be happening without China's blessing. In Kursk, we are seeing its first test, and it is a dangerous moment for Ukraine and for the West. North Korea will be able to gain combat experience, including latest in the use of drones and their incorporation into modern warfare. It provides Russia with much needed





manpower and material help, and if it is true that there are as many as 120 thousand North Koreans ready to fight for Russia, it will make a difference on the battlefield and worsen Ukraine's situation.

China has firmly planted its flag with Russia. It is lowering drone imports to Europe making it more difficult to supply Ukraine with an asset that is essential to prosecution of today's war. It is helping Russia circumvent sanctions. While we tend to think Russia, China, and North Korea as separate problems, there is no doubt that there is now an integrated anti-Western block and states in this block are coordinating among themselves against us. In contrast, we are still not as unified as we should be. Our enemies wish to rewrite rules of the international system and perceive the current power constellation as an opportunity of a century to remake the world order to their liking. They see us as enemies because of our values. That is why Russia invaded Ukraine and that is why China wants to invade Taiwan. These countries cannot stand the idea of prosperous democracies on their borders, because they are a vivid reminder of a failure of their own system. And that is also why the path to countering China successfully begins with Russia's defeat in Ukraine.

While Ukraine is much closer to U.S. allies in Europe than it is to the United States, Europe today cannot meet Ukraine's defense needs. But should U.S. withdraw its support and Ukraine was defeated, the U.S. alliance system would likely crumble. Global alliances are what makes the United States a superpower and benefit its economy. It would be much harder for the United States to pursue its interests in a world without alliances.

***Q. That said, governments in European states can undoubtedly do more in a conflict that is much closer to their borders than it is to U.S. borders. What can the United States do to facilitate them helping more? And what can these governments do realistically?***

A. Many in Europe understand why President Trump is unhappy about allies' unwillingness to appropriately fund their defense. Some of us see value in the United States and President Trump pushing the governments in European countries to do more on defense, but we also want to continue to see the United States as a global leader, including a global leader present in Europe. We've tried the multipolar system in the nineteenth century, and it didn't work out that great for us.

In addition to continuing to push leaders of European countries to spend more on defense and make the case to the public why doing so is important, the United States ought to formulate a vision for victory and a plan of accomplishing it. Our way of life is under threat, and we are slow to wake up to the danger, including in the United States. It is clear who are our enemies, and it is past the time became more unified in countering them. In the face of brutality and corruption that we see Russia and China bring with them wherever they are, we know which system of government we would choose, and so do the Ukrainians.

Countries in Europe ought to wean themselves off their dependence on China, including with regard to key medicines. In a positive sign, the European Union has recently agreed that it would not negotiate with China bilaterally, but that countries will approach China together. That is a large step. But they are still not using their economic leverage as effectively as they

could. Perhaps there is room for compromise, in which countries in Europe help the United States with countering China, and the United States continues to help with Ukraine.

***Q. You have been in touch with soldiers in the Ukrainian military from the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion almost three years ago. How have needs of the Ukrainian military changed over time?***

A. That depends on which needs. With regard to the nonprofit sector, the Ukrainians first needed bulletproof vests, then weapon optics, and eventually more sophisticated equipment. They always need drones and vehicles to get to their positions on the front.<sup>1</sup> We also get specific requests from specific units we support. The nonprofit sector can help on the lower end of the spectrum, even though we are relatively close to purchasing a Black Hawk helicopter for the Ukrainian defenders. We just can't do it at a scale that governments can.

Nonprofits can also help to facilitate contacts between people from the West and Ukrainians on the frontlines. I have travelled to the frontlines many times, and the Ukrainian defenders are always touched when one makes an effort to go further than Kiev and shake their hands. The knowledge that someone is thinking about them and appreciates their work does wonders for their morale.

On the government level, the Ukrainians need air defense assets, long-range weapons (e.g. German Taurus), and antipersonnel landmines. Modern anti-personnel landmines are designed in a way that will not pose a threat to civilians once the war is over and are critical for securing access routes and Ukrainian positions because the Russians now changed tactics to send small assault groups that will not trigger anti-tank landmines.

Ukraine also needs countries to be consistent in their fulfillment of aid promises. Ukraine can currently stand up more brigades than the West is willing to equip. A lack of equipment is a serious challenge to recruitment because people fear they won't be properly equipped if they join the military.

***Q. What has been your experience with respect to the public's willingness in meeting Ukraine's needs, given that arms policy is usually domain of a state?***

A. The nonprofit sector plays an indispensable role in helping the Ukrainian defenders. In the Czech Republic, this cooperation happens in coordination with the Czech Army, which noticed at the beginning of war that the nonprofit sector could respond much faster to specific Ukrainian needs, perhaps due to less bureaucracy. That permitted specialization that leads to more efficiency. As a general rule, nonprofit organizations are also better than government institutions in communicating with the public and showing how Ukrainian soldiers utilize help.

The public needs to see that the help reaches individuals and supports specific units. People realize that weapons win war, and they do not hesitate to contribute to fund them.

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<sup>1</sup> The Russians target Ukrainian soldiers' vehicles with drones.

This is a departure from a small donor's traditional focus on humanitarian needs, and is happening in, e.g. Poland and Slovakia, too. For example, our Memory of the Nation<sup>2</sup> public collection for bulletproof vests, drones, optics, or military health care is currently worth about \$25 million. The initiative Weapons for Ukraine<sup>3</sup> fundraises for specific military systems (drones, artillery pieces, plastic explosive, a tank, and even a Black Hawk helicopter), and has raised more than \$38 million to date. We have raised another \$8.5 million for drones through our "Nemesis" initiative.<sup>4</sup> These are impressive numbers for a country with a relatively small donor pool. And even though we are all concerned about the "war fatigue" and have seen poll numbers indicating a fall in support for aid for Ukraine among the general population, thankfully our fundraising remains strong, and we will be finishing this year in a better place than the previous one. That is a testament to the public understanding of the importance of defeating Russia in Ukraine.

The Ukrainians are culturally closer to the Czechs than the Russians, and Ukrainian is older than Russian and therefore easier for the Czechs to understand.<sup>5</sup> Czechs admire the Ukrainian willingness to defend their own country, a part of it stems from the Czechs' own regret that most of their own ancestors were not brave enough to fight when they ought in the past.<sup>6</sup> That inspires them to support Ukraine.

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine has increased the Czechs' appreciation for the Czech Army and its importance for Czech security. It has also led to a broader mobilization within the society. For example, there are now more Czechs interested in joining the Reserve component today than in the past.

***Q. Do you sense a greater willingness on Ukraine's part to negotiate with Russia in anticipation of President Trump's return to the White House? Do you think there is any compromise solution that would be acceptable to both Kyiv and Moscow?***

A. Putin cannot be trusted to abide by any treaties. Prior to Russia's full-scale invasion, the Ukrainian society was polarized. It unified in the face of Russia's aggression and brutality. Who would imagine that in the twenty-first century, an aggressor will target almost all energy infrastructure of a different country thus plunging its population into darkness and subjecting it to coldness? Let alone the Russian Army's atrocities against the civilians in conquered territories.

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<sup>2</sup> The link to the initiative's web site and the collection can be found here:

[https://www.darujme.cz/projekt/1205934?fbclid=IwAR2\\_R19dP8vFn444fECozohunb66AdhUYtmNu8E4Tj2thr5ywuwnwfI0Ndjw%23prispevatele#informace](https://www.darujme.cz/projekt/1205934?fbclid=IwAR2_R19dP8vFn444fECozohunb66AdhUYtmNu8E4Tj2thr5ywuwnwfI0Ndjw%23prispevatele#informace) and here: <https://www.memoryofnations.eu/en/about-project>.

<sup>3</sup> The link to the initiative's web site can be found here: <https://www.weaponstoukraine.com/>.

<sup>4</sup> The link to the "Nemesis Drones" campaign can be found here: <https://www.dronynemesis.cz/en>.

<sup>5</sup> Czech, Ukrainian, and Russian are Slavic languages.

<sup>6</sup> For example, most Czechs did not fight after the now infamous 1938 Munich Agreement, which led to the Nazis occupying territories with German-speaking Czechs. Most Czechs did not fight when the Soviets invaded Czechoslovakia in 1968.

President Trump's unpredictability concerns Europe, even if it can be beneficial in small doses. He prefers to deal with countries in Europe on a bilateral basis, but the current mood within the Ukrainian society will not permit any agreement in which Ukraine is not an active participant. The Ukrainians' suffering and trauma caused by and endured under Russian aggression also preclude any agreement that would make the loss of Ukrainian territory permanent or make it seem permanent. Especially the military could have a difficult time accepting any such agreement, because it would make it seem like the tremendous sacrifice it has been enduring has come to naught.

The Ukrainians are very pragmatic about U.S. elections. They told me they will continue to fight, and they will look for partners wherever they can.

***Q. You are active in a nonprofit that documents and spreads awareness about the Communist regime's historical crimes, a topic that was a taboo in captive nations during the Cold War and has not been taught at schools properly until relatively recently. Russia and its authoritarian regime today echo the past. What would be the consequences of Ukraine's defeat for the Ukrainians and for other countries in Europe?***

A. Russia itself is not a unified state. There are ethnic tensions. In 1989, few wanted the breakup of the Soviet Union because we were afraid of the consequences. We should not be afraid of the breakup of Russia. Russia's imperialism is dangerous. We have to be prepared for a potential change of leadership in Moscow, which could also cause the fall of the Belarussian dictatorship.

I am extremely worried about Russia winning or even being perceived as a winner in Ukraine. Russia's victory will lead to increases in authoritarianism in European countries, because Russia's political system will be seen as victorious one. That would mean a failure of our values and cooperation, and for the United States loss of allies in Europe. A world without U.S. allies makes the pursuit of U.S. interests much more difficult, including against China.

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**An Interview with  
James Anderson, former Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Policy,  
and Assistant Secretary of Defense for Strategy, Plans, and Capabilities**

***Q. The Department of Defense has referred to China as the "pacing threat" for U.S. national security. Do you believe the United States is doing enough to deal with this pacing threat and to deter possible Chinese aggression?***

A. No, the United States is not doing enough to deter China. In fact, China is currently *outpacing* the United States in key areas, to include ship building and the deployment of hypersonic weapons. China's unprecedented military buildup presents a twofold danger.

First, it increases the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP's) coercive leverage in peacetime. This includes browbeating U.S. allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific, to include the Philippines and Taiwan, with gray zone activities designed to advance the CCP's hegemonic ambitions. Second, if deterrence should fail, China's military buildup will put the U.S. military at increased risk of defeat in the event of conflict.

***Q. Chinese leader Xi Jinping has declared that “no one can stop” Taiwan’s “reunification” with China, calling it “inevitable.” Some analysts believe Beijing will be in a position to take Taiwan by force by 2027. How likely do you believe this scenario is?***

A. President Xi would prefer to subjugate Taiwan with political intimidation given the risks and costs associated with using military force. But he realizes this may not work, so he has commanded the People's Liberation Army to “be ready by 2027 to conduct a successful invasion of Taiwan,” according to former CIA Director William Burns. This does not mean that President Xi has already decided to invade Taiwan or that he will actually make such a decision in 2027. But President Xi's directive reflects the strong emphasis the CCP places on reunification, which, combined with China's military buildup, indicates that the risk of an actual invasion is real and increasing.

To reduce this risk, Taiwan must do more to enhance its own self-defense capabilities. This means, among other things, increasing its defense budget and enhancing its overall combat capabilities. For its part, the United States should expedite the delivery of previously approved arms sales to Taiwan, and provide further arms packages to help Taiwan defend itself.

***Q. What additional measures should the United States take to deter China from engaging in military aggression, either in the Indo-Pacific or against the United States directly?***

A. The United States needs to bolster its military presence in the Indo-Pacific. This means deploying more aircraft, ships, drones, and theater-range missiles and rockets to hold key PLA targets at risk. At the same time, the United States must do a better job protecting its key military assets in the region, as well as those of its allies. This means, among other things, hardening airfields and improving our military's ability to repair them quickly in the event of conflict. The United States should also deploy more THAAD and PAC-3 missile systems to the region to help protect key U.S. military bases in Guam and Japan from missile attack.

Complicating these efforts to protect U.S. interests overseas is that fact that the China threat now extends to the homeland. As former FBI Director Christopher Wray has emphasized in Congressional hearings, China has infiltrated U.S. critical infrastructure and prepositioned cyber assets to inflict panic-inducing “low blows” against the populace in the event of conflict. The U.S. Intelligence Community has also publicly acknowledged Chinese efforts to influence the 2022 and 2024 elections. The Trump Administration should emphasize that such actions are unacceptable for any power that seeks normal relations with the United States and that further meddling along these limits will result in painful sanctions.

Preparing better defenses against the Chinese threat at home and abroad will take time, effort, and a sense of urgency. Specifically, this requires the new administration to review its military requirements across-the-board, update its war plans, and increase its defense spending.

***Q. How do you interpret China's involvement in supporting Russia's military aggression against Ukraine? How broad is the Sino-Russian "no limits" friendship and in what other areas might it manifest itself?***

A. China's diplomatic, economic, and military support of Russia has been harmful to Ukraine and undermined U.S. and allied security interests in Europe. With its gray zone activities, China carefully calibrates its efforts to avoid crossing the threshold of outright military aggression against the United States. These efforts are nonetheless harmful to U.S. security on several fronts. They include China's global information campaign to undermine America's credibility as leader of the free world by promoting the narrative that China's rise and the U.S.'s decline are inevitable.

China and Russia's "no limits" friendship is more than just rhetoric. Despite a history of mutual suspicion and occasional tension, China and Russia have begun to cooperate more fully with joint military exercises in the Indo-Pacific. These include increasingly sophisticated naval and aerial exercises. The trendline of enhanced cooperation is likely to deepen in functional areas going forward, to include intelligence, cyber, and space activities, as well as in new geographic domains, such as the Arctic.

***Q. What are some of Beijing's weaknesses and how might the West exploit them in order to deter China from pursuing its hegemonic ambitions?***

A. China has overstepped its bounds with heavy-handed attempts to extend its power and influence in the Indo-Pacific and beyond. For example, China's preference of hiring Chinese workers instead of locals to work for its companies based overseas has engendered resentment in some African and South American countries. Similarly, China's use of debt traps to secure long-term leases to overseas infrastructure, such as ports and mines, have caused further concern among would-be borrowers in the Global South.

The United States must do a much better job exposing these and other malevolent Chinese activities around the globe. Simply shining a spotlight upon them can help undermine their effectiveness.

Further, the United States should also keep a laser focus on President Xi's anti-corruption campaign and harsh treatment of its minority populations, including the Uyghurs. The more the CCP is forced to defend its actions at home, the more difficult it will be for them to undermine U.S. interests abroad.

**Q. You have written that the great power rivalry between the United States and China “almost certainly will last for decades to come” and that “most great power rivalries ultimately end in bloodshed.” Do you believe a conflict between the United States and China is inevitable?**

A. It is important not to buy into Chinese narratives about historical determinism. There is nothing set in stone about China’s rise or America’s decline, though Chinese leaders and propagandists relentlessly push these narratives. Nor is military conflict with China inevitable. But armed conflict will become increasingly likely absent stronger U.S. and allied measures to deter China.

**Q. China has been dramatically expanding its nuclear capabilities well beyond its self-proclaimed “minimal deterrence” posture. Former USSTRATCOM Commander Adm. Charles Richard has called China’s nuclear expansion “breathtaking” and a “strategic breakout.” Do you agree with this assessment? To what do you attribute China’s significant buildup of its nuclear weapons capabilities? Is China engaged in a “race to parity” with the United States?**

A. Yes, I agree with Admiral Richard’s assessment. China is clearly casting aside its longstanding policy of minimal deterrence in favor of a far more expansive and assertive posture.

The conventional wisdom among most Western analysts is that China is seeking “parity” with the United States. As an abstraction, parity does not sound particularly threatening. Indeed, many strategists believe that parity is conducive to stability. But the strategic landscape the United States will face in the future will be more far complex—and far more dangerous—than what it faced during the Cold War given future projections regarding Russia’s and China’s nuclear arsenals.

The conventional wisdom that China will seek nuclear “parity” is no more than an assumption. *Based on other Chinese military developments, it may well be that China’s ultimate aim is to exceed U.S. capabilities and achieve nuclear superiority.* In this vein, it is worth recalling that China was not satisfied with achieving numerical parity with the U.S. navy. In fact, the PLA now has a larger navy than the United States—and one that is currently projected to extend its numerical lead ever further given China’s ship building capacity.

**Q. As a former Deputy and Acting Under Secretary of Defense for Policy in the first Trump Administration, what advice would you give to President Trump regarding the importance of confronting China?**

A. U.S. efforts to “compete” with China are no more likely to succeed in the near future than they have in the recent past. The United States is engaged in a long-term systemic rivalry with a determined and powerful foe. A more confrontational approach is thus necessary to reverse China’s increasingly aggressive behavior. For this approach to be credible, the United

States must increase its military capabilities and induce key allies and partners to do the same.

The sooner President Trump releases his National Security Strategy, the better. By clearly outlining his strategic priorities and intent, the President can help ensure that key departments and agencies with national security responsibilities will row in the same direction regarding China.

Likewise, the sooner the incoming Secretary of Defense issues his National Defense Strategy, the better. This document should be squarely aligned to support the president's National Security Strategy. To be useful, it should dispense with bland rhetoric and outline specific priorities and actions the Department of Defense must take to enhance deterrence and enhance its warfighting capabilities.

On this theme, I recently had the good fortune to co-edit a volume entitled *Confronting China: US Defense Policy in an Era of Great Power Competition* (Praeger Security International, 2024). This book is chock-full of practical recommendations, written by experienced and senior-level former national security officials, to improve U.S. deterrence posture and military capabilities across a range of functional and geographic areas. I hope incoming administration officials will find this book timely and helpful.

**Q. Some have argued that the United States should shift resources away from Europe and support for Ukraine and toward bolstering deterrence against China. Do you support such a shift?**

The United States does not need to shift resources from Europe to the Pacific. In fact, many shorter-range U.S. weapons systems prepositioned in Europe would be ill-suited to the Pacific theater, which requires longer-range systems given its geographic vastness. The United States needs to bolster its defenses in the Pacific *and* get its European allies to increase their military support for Ukraine to help strengthen Kyiv's leverage for eventual peace negotiations.

More broadly, it should be emphasized that there is no either-or choice between defending U.S. interests in Europe and the Pacific if the United States intends to remain a superpower. Washington must counter aggression on both fronts, whether it involves Russia's overt military intervention in Ukraine or China's relentless gray zone activities targeting the United States and its security partners in the Pacific.







## NUCLEAR AND MISSILE DEFENSE POLICY IN THE SECOND TRUMP ADMINISTRATION: WHAT TO EXPECT AND WHAT SHOULD BE DONE

*The remarks below were delivered at a symposium on “Nuclear and Missile Defense Policy in the Second Trump Administration: What to Expect and What Should be Done” hosted by the National Institute for Public Policy on November 20, 2024. The symposium discussed how a second Trump Administration should adapt U.S. nuclear and homeland missile defense policies and programs in the face of growing nuclear threats by adversaries and how to overcome the likely impediments to such change.*

**David J. Trachtenberg (moderator)**

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

The election of Donald Trump to a second term as U.S. president presents an opportunity to recalibrate U.S. nuclear weapons and missile defense policy. The Trump 2018 *Nuclear Posture Review* (NPR) called for augmenting the existing nuclear program of record with two supplemental capabilities: a low-yield ballistic missile warhead and a nuclear-armed sea-launched cruise missile (SLCM-N).<sup>1</sup> The low-yield ballistic missile warhead was deployed on submarines; however, the SLCM-N was opposed by the Biden Administration, which argued in its 2022 NPR that the system was too costly and unnecessary.<sup>2</sup> Despite the Biden Administration’s opposition to SLCM-N, the Democratic Congress continued to fund it, supporting the Trump Administration’s contention that it would provide “a needed non-strategic regional presence, an assured response capability,” “a valuable hedge against future nuclear ‘break out’ scenarios,” and enhance “the flexibility and diversity of U.S. nuclear capabilities to help address emerging deterrence requirements in the near term and beyond.”<sup>3</sup>

Last year, the bipartisan Strategic Posture Commission concluded that “the current U.S. strategic posture will be insufficient to achieve the objectives of U.S. defense strategy in the future due to the rapid advancement of the threat, particularly the nuclear threat of two peer adversaries,” and that U.S. nuclear capabilities should be “supplemented to ensure U.S. nuclear strategy remains effective in a two-nuclear-peer environment.”<sup>4</sup> Among other things, it called for preparing to upload hedge warheads on ICBMs and SLBMs, deploying a MIRVed Sentinel ICBM, considering road-mobile ICBMs, and reassessing continued adherence to New

<sup>1</sup> Department of Defense, *Nuclear Posture Review*, 2018, pp. XII, 54-55, available at <https://media.defense.gov/2018/feb/02/2001872886/-1/-1/1/2018-nuclear-posture-review-final-report.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Department of Defense, *2022 Nuclear Posture Review*, p. 20, available at <https://media.defense.gov/2022/Oct/27/2003103845/-1/-1/1/2022-NATIONAL-DEFENSE-STRATEGY-NPR-MDR.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> *Nuclear Posture Review*, 2018, op. cit., pp. XII, 55.

<sup>4</sup> Madelyn R. Creedon, Jon L. Kyl, et al., *America’s Strategic Posture: The Final Report of the Congressional Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States*, October 2023, pp. viii, 35, 47, 99, available at <https://www.ida.org/-/media/feature/publications/a/am/americas-strategic-posture/strategic-posture-commission-report.ashx>.



START limitations. Whether the Trump Administration will act on these recommendations remains to be seen.

In addition, the Trump 2019 *Missile Defense Review* continued to emphasize homeland defense against rogue nation threats, noting that “the United States relies on deterrence to protect against large and technically sophisticated Russian and Chinese intercontinental ballistic missile threats to the U.S. homeland.”<sup>5</sup> Yet, a policy that allows the U.S. homeland to remain vulnerable to coercive nuclear threats from Russia and China seems incongruous with repeated statements that defending the homeland is DoD’s “top priority.”<sup>6</sup> Apparently it’s okay to actively defend the homeland against lesser threats but not more substantial ones.

There have been increasing calls to reconsider this homeland vulnerability, especially in light of escalating nuclear threats and the growing military entente between Russia and China. Deploying additional ground-based missile defense interceptors, accelerating the Next Generation Interceptor program, developing the Glide Phase Interceptor, moving forward with space-based kinetic and non-kinetic defensive systems, expediting cruise missile defense, and building a third missile defense site in the United States are among some of the recommendations that have been suggested by experts. The Congress has also weighed in with multiple provisions in last year’s National Defense Authorization Act, including reaffirming that it is U.S. policy to rely on nuclear deterrence to deter Russian and Chinese nuclear threats—a policy statement that I believe needs revision.

In addition, I suggest it is time to reconsider the so-called Nitze criteria that argues missile defense capabilities must be “cost-effective at the margin”—in other words, that the cost of adding to the defense must be less than the cost of adding offensive missiles to overcome it. The cost of missile defenses pales in significance to the cost of rebuilding an American city should deterrence fail. As my colleague Matt Costlow has written, “since 1985, the so-called ‘Nitze criteria’ have been central to the debate on U.S. homeland missile defense.” Yet, “the supposed inviolability of the ‘Nitze criteria’ has placed unworthy constraints on the U.S. debate about missile defense to the detriment of both policies and capabilities.”<sup>7</sup>

Again, as the Strategic Posture Commission concluded, “the currently planned U.S. homeland [missile defense] capability does not adequately defend against coercive attacks from China and Russia.... To defend against a coercive attack from China or Russia, while

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<sup>5</sup> Department of Defense, *Missile Defense Review*, 2019, p. III, available at [https://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Interactive/2018/11-2019-Missile-Defense-Review/The%202019%20MDR\\_Executive%20Summary.pdf](https://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Interactive/2018/11-2019-Missile-Defense-Review/The%202019%20MDR_Executive%20Summary.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Department of Defense, *2022 Missile Defense Review*, p. 6, available at <https://media.defense.gov/2022/Oct/27/2003103845/-1/-1/1/2022-NATIONAL-DEFENSE-STRATEGY-NPR-MDR.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> Matthew R. Costlow, *A Curious Criterion: Cost Effective at the Margin for Missile Defense*, Information Series No. 537 (Fairfax, VA: National Institute Press, October 21, 2022), available at [https://nipp.org/information\\_series/matthew-r-costlow-a-curious-criterion-cost-effective-at-the-margin-for-missile-defense-no-537-october-21-2022/](https://nipp.org/information_series/matthew-r-costlow-a-curious-criterion-cost-effective-at-the-margin-for-missile-defense-no-537-october-21-2022/).

staying ahead of the North Korean threat, “the United States will require additional [missile defense] capabilities beyond the current POR [program of record].”<sup>8</sup>

This also provides a credible, bipartisan benchmark for the incoming Trump Administration to reevaluate and reassess the continued vulnerability of the U.S. homeland to peer nation nuclear threats and the implications such continued vulnerability is likely to have on the credibility of the U.S. deterrent posture.

This is the backdrop for today’s discussion.

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### **Franklin C. Miller**

***Honorable Franklin C. Miller is a Principal of the Scowcroft Group and former Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director for Defense Policy and Arms Control on the National Security Council staff.***

Thanks to David and NIPP for inviting me.

So, it’s fallen to me to talk about nuclear deterrence in this new multi-peer world.

I want to divide the issue into three parts: policy, programs, and execution. For those of you who have seen the article Madelyn Creedon and I published today in *Foreign Affairs Online*, come back in a few minutes when I’m done speaking.

As far as deterrence policy is concerned, I believe we are in a good place. Some of us might recall what we call the “second Carter Administration,” when Jimmy Carter moved from timidity in the face of Soviet bluster to signing out PD-59. In the same general vein, this summer we entered the “second Biden Administration” in terms of deterrence policy. With a little help from its friends on the Strategic Posture Commission (tip of the hat to my fellow panelist today and SPC Commissioner Matt Kroenig), the administration changed the U.S. deterrence and targeting policy focus on Russia to having to deter simultaneously Russia, China and North Korea. They got it right. And I believe that a new, time-consuming, NPR is therefore both unnecessary and indeed counterproductive. The Trump Administration will need to do a quick review of U.S. policy, but it should not fall into the proverbial trap of “new NPR, new Presidential Guidance, new Nuclear Weapons Employment Policy (NUWEP), new Joint Strategic Capabilities Plan (JSCP) and finally three and a half years later, new planning.”

As far as the programs are concerned, Sentinel, Columbia-class, D-5 Life Extension Program (LEP), B-21 (in sufficient numbers), Long-Range Stand-Off missile (LRSO), and the nuclear sea-launched cruise missile (SLCM-N) are the right answer. We need a rebuilt and modern Triad and a flexible effective regional nuclear deterrent.

The administration will want to look at the outyear buys—it’s well known I favor more than 12 Columbias and more than 100 B-21’s and more LRSOs than the Air Force wants to buy to load in the B-21s. The administration will also want to review the Air Force’s

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<sup>8</sup> Madelyn R. Creedon, John L. Kyl, et al., *America’s Strategic Posture: The Final Report of the Congressional Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States*, op. cit., p. 63.

scandalous lack of tankers—a shortfall which jeopardizes our ability to deter simultaneously at the conventional and the nuclear level.

But the real issue confronting the administration will be the combined failure of government and industry to execute: to produce these new systems at a pace which is relevant to the threat. All of the programs are running behind. Part of this is that the Service Secretaries and their staffs have no sense of urgency. They have shown time and again that they do not understand how the world has changed. It is inconceivable and totally unacceptable for the three Combatant Commands most affected to point to near-term threats towards the end of this decade while the Navy and Air Force plod along in a business-as-usual mode promising new capabilities in another ten years.

The new Secretary of Defense must take personal charge of the nuclear modernization program. He must hold the Services to account as Cap Weinberger did. Weinberger held quarterly reviews of the key Reagan Strategic Modernization Programs—MX, Ohio-class SSBN and D-5 missile, and B-1 bomber. He required the Service Secretary, Service Chief, and the flag officer in charge of the program (as well as his principal OSD subordinates) to be present. And deficiencies discussed in month 1 had better be fixed by month 4. And he must fire people—Service Secretaries, Assistant Secretaries, and program managers—if things don't improve. Relying on "the system" just doesn't work.

And the new SecDef should expand this to cover other critical programs: nuclear attack submarine (SSN) production, conventional prompt strike, and SLCM-N. He should demand an immediate program to increase our air tanking capability. He might also call for regular updates on ship and submarine overhauls and yard availabilities and Air Force depot maintenance. And he must demand major increases in our war reserve munitions stocks—one can't talk about periods of real danger towards the end of this decade without having enough missiles, torpedoes, and artillery rounds to deter if possible and fight if necessary. All of this will require money—and I would call on the Secretary and the president to provide what is needed. These are not normal times, and we cannot act as if we are not under threat. We are.

The Secretary must also work with industry as a trusted partner. It doesn't work to publish a Defense Industrial Base Strategy (however good) and then do relatively little for a year only to issue an update just before the election. DoD must become a good customer. You cannot ask industry to expand its workforce and facilities on the promise of expected orders which then never materialize. The story of the FY 25 second Virginia-class SSN is the poster child for this.

On the flip side, the way in which General Dynamics has been working with DoD to ramp up 155 mm shell production is a success story. The Secretary needs more and regular engagement with Defense Industry leaders. The Polaris submarine and missile went from concept to first deployment in five years. The same was true for Minuteman. The U-2 went from concept to first flight in one year. We need to return to those kinds of time cycles—but it can only happen with close cooperation and with steely oversight from the SecDef. Obviously, Congress needs to do its share.... But that's the SecDef's responsibility too.

One final word before I get off the stage. There is one policy issue which is unresolved, and that is arms control. New START will expire in February 2026 and must be allowed to die: no extensions, no “no undercut agreements.” New Start—RIP. The administration must be ready to move the day the treaty is over to begin uploading Minuteman and beginning to return to nuclear service the B-52s and Ohio tubes neutered under New START. And while I believe any arms control deal is not in our interest with the untrustworthy and murderous thug now running Russia, any thinking about future agreements must cast off the dead hand of the Cold War and include all deployed nuclear weapons, not merely intercontinental ones: wars start regionally, not over the poles. And any agreement should provide the United States sufficient weapons to support with high confidence the simultaneous deterrence policy.

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### **Robert G. Joseph**

***Ambassador Robert G. Joseph is Senior Scholar at the National Institute for Public Policy, former Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security and former Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director for Proliferation Strategy, Counterproliferation, and Homeland Defense.***

David, thank you for the invitation to be part of this distinguished panel on an important and timely topic. In fact, and I will come back to this, this may be a unique time for the prospects of homeland missile defense—a time of opportunity which—if not seized—maybe the last time for achieving the defenses we need for deterrence and defense.

David has asked me to address what I expect on homeland missile defense in the 2nd Trump Administration. I know David appreciates the classics so let me begin with a quote from *The Tempest*. What is past is prologue. In other words, to understand the prospects of the Trump Administration’s missile defense policies and programs, it is useful to look at previous administrations.

I will briefly touch on the checkered history of missile defense going back to the Reagan Administration as Reagan was the first President to challenge the prevailing dogma concerning defenses—and he did so on both moral and strategic grounds. He rejected the central concept that mutual assured destruction provided the best means of deterrence. He saw the possibility that defending the American homeland could, in fact, be a stabilizing factor in the balance of terror we shared with the Soviet Union.

It was on this basis that he proposed the Strategic Defense Initiative and challenged the American science and technology sectors to explore the potential for developing an effective defense of the US territory and population. The intended contribution of such capabilities to deterrence was reflected in the JCS Phase One Requirements. And here I quote: “The military objective of Phase I would be to enhance the US deterrence posture by being able to deny the Soviets their objectives in an initial ballistic missile attack.” The goal would be to “decrease the Soviets’ confidence that the objectives of its initial attack would be met.”

Bush 41—operating in a vastly different strategic environment with the fall of the Soviet Union—continued the pursuit of strategic defenses through the GPALS program—the global protection against limited strikes. This was a program of record that envisioned both ground-based interceptors and 1000 small satellites with sensors and kinetic kill capabilities for intercepting enemy missiles in space.

With Bill Clinton you find the emergence of a distinct Republican-Democrat pattern. On day one, Secretary of Defense Les Aspen announced the end of GPALS, or as he put it, taking the stars out of Star Wars. The ABM treaty—which both Reagan and Bush 41 questioned—was upheld time after time for the next 8 years as the “cornerstone of strategic stability.”

Bush 43 entered office committed to withdrawing from the ABM treaty and deploying missile defenses to protect against small scale attacks from rogue states like North Korea. IOC was reached in October 2004 and further built out in the next four years. NSPD 4 and Bush’s first address on national security issues provided the strategic rationale for basing deterrence on both offense and defense—punishment and denial.

The Obama Administration did what the Clinton Administration did before it. While it was inconvenient to openly seek a revived ABM Treaty, defenses were seen as a bargaining chip to achieve offensive reductions. The number of ground-based interceptors was reduced (such as through the cancellation of the 3rd site in Europe) and all of the programs intended to keep pace with the Korean threat were killed: KEI, ABL, and MKV.

The first Trump Administration—and here I may risk the wrath of our distinguished moderator—was mostly all hat and no cattle. The President said all the right things but the results—in terms of capabilities—were pathetic. When the President went to the Pentagon to introduce the 2019 *Missile Defense Review*, he said “We are committed to establishing a missile defense program that can shield every city in the U.S.” He emphasized that “space is a new warfighting domain” and that “my upcoming budget will invest in a space-based missile defense layer” and that, “regardless of the missile type or the geographic origins of the attack, we will ensure that enemy missiles find no sanctuary on earth or in the skies above.”

The disconnect was with what was actually in the MDR and the DoD budget—focused almost solely on North Korea with spending on a space-based interceptor capability amounting to what was likely less than DoD spending on potatoes. The wrong answer—in the form of the next generation land-based interceptor—became the program of record despite not strengthening deterrence against coercive threats or even keeping pace with the North Korean threat.

The fact that the Biden Administration continued the next generation interceptor tells you everything you need to know. The Biden MDR explicitly ruled out defenses as a means of strengthening deterrence against Russia and China. Perhaps Frank and Matt can elaborate on the recommendations of the Strategic Posture Commission on this point.

The Biden White House also ruled out any space-based interceptors based on the stated view that such capabilities would “weaponize space.” Given the militarization of space by Russia, China and other adversaries, and given the creation of our own Space Force, I find the White House statement to be both ridiculous and dangerous because it denies us the

capabilities we need to deter and defend against both rogue state threats and coercive threats from Moscow and Beijing. It cannot be done from the ground alone—unless of course we change the laws of physics.

So, what should we expect from the second Trump Administration? Certainly, there will be—in my view—the right policy statements emphasizing the priority of defending the U.S. homeland from attack. In the campaign, President Trump spoke of building an Iron Dome to protect against all missile threats.

The real question is whether he will succeed this time around—or will the antibodies, especially those in uniform, in the services, in the budgeting offices of the Pentagon, and at the State Department prevail once again. My bet would normally be on the antibodies as they have a long record of success. The U.S. government has simply proven itself unable to build an effective defense of the homeland against the threats we face.

But there is another possible path. First, President Trump should be told that the vision he laid out in his first term was not just ignored (as it was by his own Pentagon leadership) but actually repudiated by the Biden Administration. He should be informed of what I believe is a national scandal—in 2004 we deployed a rudimentary capability against North Korean missiles; 20 years later we still have a rudimentary capability against North Korean missiles—despite spending tens of billions of dollars on the program.

Second, the President needs to restate during this transition period the priority of homeland defense. If he is to succeed, he must move quickly—and achieve the key milestones within the first 18 months. Any major initiative by a new administration that challenges the way the government has operated must be undertaken before the bureaucracies reassert themselves. This is what Bush 43 did in exiting the ABM treaty.

Third, and most important, the President needs to assign the task to someone capable, with the needed authorities and budget authorizations. This is not a cost issue or a technology issue—as a robust space-based defense would likely cost a fraction of what is being spent on NGI and the advances in the needed technologies have been achieved. This is a straightforward leadership issue.

Three years ago, I was at dinner with several colleagues—all advocates of homeland missile defense, and all agreed that space capabilities—sensors and killers—are essential. I said then that, if I were king, I would put Elon Musk in charge. Think about it. Here is a brilliant guy who has changed the world by delivering real capabilities in different sectors. Through Space X, he is putting up thousands of satellites at a cost that was thought to be unimaginable in the world of government. But in any case, my suggestion was not adopted by the others—until now.

If Musk is willing to take on the task, I am confident he could succeed. No one has a better track record. And what's in it for President Trump? Most important, he delivers on the promise to protect America from missile attacks. And he fulfills the promise of Ronald Reagan made 40 years earlier.

When I saw the images of President Trump and Elon Musk at yesterday's Space X launch, I couldn't help but thinking if Trump would only ask Musk to take on the task of homeland missile defense, we would have the best—perhaps only—chance to succeed.



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## **Robert Soofer**

***Dr. Robert Soofer is Senior Fellow at the Atlantic Council's Scowcroft Center, adjunct professor in Georgetown University's Security Studies Program, and former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Nuclear and Missile Defense Policy.***

### **Challenges and Opportunities**

The incoming Trump Administration faces unique challenges and opportunities with respect to nuclear and missile defense policy. The central challenge is posed by the expansion of China's nuclear arsenal, along with the continuing growth of Russian and North Korean nuclear forces. These nuclear forces pose a regional threat to U.S. forces and allies as well as new threats to the U.S. homeland. Most important, these new challenges must be deterred together—China and North Korea are no longer a lesser-included case to the Russia problem set. A nuclear and missile defense posture that was deemed sufficient to deter only Russia and defend only against North Korean ICBMs may not be adequate to prevent opportunistic aggression from China and North Korea.

The incoming administration also enjoys a unique opportunity to hit the ground running, avoiding the post-Cold War tradition of lengthy nuclear and missile defense posture reviews. This is because the reviews conducted in the first Trump Administration are still relevant. If anything, the threat has grown more acute, perhaps demanding additional capabilities to execute the policies and strategies well established by the earlier assessments.

To make these decisions, the administration has lots of help: bipartisan studies conducted over the past few years by the Center for Global Strategic Research, The National Institute for Public Policy, the Atlantic Council, the Center for Strategic and International Studies, and the congressionally mandated Strategic Posture Commission have all reached the same conclusion: the current and planned nuclear weapons and missile defense posture is necessary but not sufficient to address the emerging strategic environment. These studies provide recommendations for bolstering U.S. strategic and regional nuclear forces, enhancing extended deterrence and assurance for our allies, and modernizing the ailing nuclear enterprise, including weapons, production facilities, and the human capital necessary to prepare for an uncertain future. The administration merely needs to decide on which options to pursue based on existing analysis.

Likewise, the Biden Administration has been studying the problem. Open congressional testimony from current and former STRATCOM commanders refers to the challenge of deterring two-plus nuclear powers at the same time and, in some instances, these commanders already have indicated a change in nuclear posture. The November 2024 *Report on the Nuclear Employment Strategy of the United States* suggests the Department of Defense has been thinking through the requirement to “be able to deter Russia, the PRC, and the DPRK simultaneously in peacetime, crisis, and conflict.” It's not a far stretch to assume STRATCOM has examined what it would take—in terms of delivery systems and warheads—

to execute this guidance. The analysis is there such that early decisions can be taken with sufficient leadership attention.

The *2022 Nuclear Posture Review* suggested that changes in the nuclear posture may be necessary in the future. That future is now nearly upon us and outgoing Biden Administration officials allude to the need to increase the number of U.S. nuclear weapons. Vipin Narang, former Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense, has noted that the Trump Administration “will be inheriting some rigorous homework and options, so they can pick up the ball and run with it.”

The upshot of all this is that the administration does not have to begin from scratch: it can build on its previous reviews, supplemented by the extensive analyses conducted by government and non-governmental experts. In fact, it would be policy malpractice to waste another year studying the problem, when options are likely readily available. The president can issue direction and guidance through the National Security Council to prepare a set of recommendations and options that can be included in the president’s first budget request to Congress in the late spring or summer.

Also providing a sense of urgency is the expiration of the New START Treaty in February 2026. While it is not clear whether negotiations with Russia will be desirable or possible, the administration will want to consider what form a follow-on agreement might take and what new nuclear force levels would be consistent with U.S. national security. In other words, the administration must decide early on how many additional nuclear warheads will be needed (and available) to address the new security landscape (China and North Korea in particular) and build these requirements into any proposals presented to Russia. Most of the analysis has been done—what’s left is to make decisions.

To be sure, this is a daunting task, but key decisions can and must be taken early to impact the FY 2026 budget cycle, while other less pressing choices can await further analyses. What follows are a few key issues that need to be at the top of the administration’s early agenda.

## **Nuclear Deterrence and Arms Control**

Needless to say, an important priority is continuing the modernization of the nuclear Triad begun by the Obama Administration, affirmed by the first Trump Administration, and reaffirmed by the Biden Administration. Costs will likely continue to rise and competition for resources within the Department of Defense will remain as fierce as ever. Senior leadership attention from the Secretary of Defense, through the Service Secretaries, and to the program managers will be essential to maintain schedules.

An important piece of unfinished business from the 2018 *Nuclear Posture Review* is the recommendation to “pursue a nuclear-armed Sea Launched Cruise Missile, leveraging existing technologies to help ensure its cost effectiveness.” Congress has established a fielding date of 2034, but the Navy program office assigned to execute the program does not think it can meet this date due to constraints in “the industrial base.” It really is difficult to imagine why it should take ten years to reconstitute a nuclear weapon capability employed by the Navy and the Air Force during the Cold War. The nuclear-armed Ground Launched

Cruise Missile (GLCM) deployed to Europe in response to the Soviet SS-20 missile threat began development in 1977, with the first unit operational in 1981. It may have taken only five years because the GLCM was a modified version of the Navy's Tomahawk sea-launched cruise missile—not a new missile. Why can't that be achieved today with a variant of the Block V Tomahawk missile now in operational use by the Navy?

Even under the best of conditions, fielding of the SLCM-N could come too late if adversary regional nuclear capabilities continue to expand. In this case, the administration will want to look to the National Security Laboratories for near-term options to fulfill emerging defense requirements. As suggested by the 2018 NPR, "US nuclear capabilities and the ability to quickly modify those capabilities can be essential to mitigate or overcome risk, including the unexpected." Accordingly, the president should direct the NNSA, through the Department of Energy, to prepare the labs to respond quickly to emerging military requirements. For example, designing a reserve nuclear device to fit an existing conventional missile system or aircraft to provide additional theater nuclear options. This requires appropriate design skills, a nimble production capability, and freedom from potentially restrictive regulations and laws.

The most fundamental requirement for nuclear deterrence is survivable nuclear retaliatory forces. The president should direct the Department of Defense to examine and bring forth near-term measures to enhance the survivability and endurance of U.S. nuclear forces against any combination of aggressors. Recommendations may include changes in basing modes, alert levels, early dispersal, mobility, and defenses to enhance the protection of U.S. nuclear forces and nuclear command and control.

Also, in the near-term, the president should direct the Secretary of Defense, in consultation with the Secretary of State, to determine the number of additional strategic and non-strategic nuclear warheads necessary to address the expansion of Chinese nuclear capabilities, including possible forward deployment with key allies. With this requirement in mind, the administration can formulate a negotiating position with Russia for a follow-on agreement to New START, should that become feasible. At the same time, the president should direct the Department of Defense and the Department of Energy to take all necessary steps to prepare reserve warheads for upload onto existing bombers, ICBMs, and SLBMs, as soon as the New START Treaty expires in February 2026.

## **Homeland Missile Defense**

The president will want to take immediate steps to fulfil his campaign pledge to build an "Iron Dome for America," which in essence means the protection of the United States against missile threats from any potential adversary. Here, again, the policies and recommendations of the 2019 *Missile Defense Review* remain operative but require senior leadership attention and additional funding to execute.

To defend against the ICBM threat from North Korea, the administration should dust off plans crafted during the first administration to provide additional layers of protection for the homeland with the Standard Missile 3 (SM-3) and THAAD. Additional SM-3 and THAAD

missiles can be procured and integrated with the Ground-based Midcourse Defense System to increase the number of interceptors protecting the United States from 44 Ground-Based Interceptors to perhaps over 100 GBIs, SM-3s and THAAD missiles within a few years. Though the SM-3 and THAAD do not provide the same protective coverage as the GBI, they can be deployed at 3-5 sites in the United States to provide complete underlayer protection.

To address the Russian and Chinese ballistic and cruise missile threat to the homeland, significant new funding will be necessary to continue development and deployment of space-based sensors, while exploring new ways of intercepting the more sophisticated Russian and Chinese missile threat. The Department of Defense should be directed to bring forth options to develop space-based interceptors as well as boost-phase intercept capabilities using aircraft armed with conventional missiles or directed energy weapons. U.S. Northern Command has an established plan for defending critical infrastructure in the United States against the Russian and Chinese cruise missile threat that deserves immediate attention and funding.

### **Maintaining Senior Leadership Focus**

A lesson learned from the first Trump Administration is that strategic programs such as nuclear weapons and missile defense lose their urgency without senior leadership focus and support. For example, in the first year, President Trump personally directed Secretary of Defense Mattis to do something about North Korea's emerging ICBM threat. In response, Secretary Mattis directed the DoD Comptroller to pull together what became a \$4 billion supplemental funding request for missile defense and missile defeat activities, including 20 additional ground-based interceptors to supplement the existing 44. Yet, despite the president's personal involvement in the rollout of the 2019 *Missile Defense Review*, the budget request for the Missile Defense Agency declined during the last two years of the Trump Administration.

Likewise, despite the decision taken during the *Nuclear Posture Review* to field a nuclear sea-launched cruise missile, the Department of Defense was unable to establish an acquisition program for this key nuclear program before the end of the term, some three years later. As the forgoing suggests, translating nuclear and missile defense priorities into programs will, without a doubt, require the direct support and involvement of the president and the Secretary of Defense from start to finish.





# LITERATURE REVIEW

**Dmitri Alperovitch (with Garrett Graff), *World on the Brink: How America Can Beat China in the Race for the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Public Affairs, 2024), 400 pp.**

Dmitri Alperovitch's *World on the Brink: How America Can Beat China in the Race for the Twenty-First Century* (co-written with Garrett Graff) makes a valuable contribution to the discussion on countering China and successfully posturing the United States to deter China's invasion of Taiwan. The book opens with a scenario of China mounting an attack on Taiwan, which the United States pledged to defend publicly on several occasions, and which is home to most of the world's advanced microchip production. Alperovitch argues that microchips are an unparalleled source of economic prosperity and growth for future economies. This makes it an imperative for the United States to prevent China's takeover of Taiwan. The best way of doing so is through posturing the United States to win what the author calls "Cold War II" and deterring China from attacking in the first place. The inspiration of the Cold War is not a coincidence, even if the authors miss an opportunity to learn lessons from policies the United States did not pursue so well, like arms control. The book discusses historical background of the U.S.-Soviet competition and U.S.-China relations, and then draws parallels to the competition between the United States and China that the United States only recently begun in earnest.

Russia and China, Alperovitch and Graff say, face difficulties in the future that will make it harder for them to compete effectively against the United States, if the United States plays its cards right. Russian and Chinese populations face significant aging and decline. Russia will have to live with the consequences of its full-scale invasion of Ukraine, including sanctions, loss of military power (U.S. government officials have since stated that Russia's army is stronger today than it was at the beginning of the full-scale invasion<sup>1</sup>), and a shrinking male population. China's population will age and generate unprecedented strain on China's spending. Its economy could face challenges stemming from debt, including on the regional level, and a shaky real estate market. China's rising bellicosity and aggressive diplomacy are already undermining its international diplomacy and incentivizing coalitions to frustrate its designs.

The authors have a unique appreciation for U.S. strengths, including upward mobility and ability to attract talented people from abroad. These strengths transcend often fierce arguments within the political system. Indeed, Alperovitch's experience as a Russian immigrant-turned-businessman in the cybersecurity field are an essential part of the story. The United States is a great place to innovate, and its rule of law ensures that an inventor will be able to enjoy the fruits of his labor, unlike in Russia or China where arbitrary rules may land an inventor in jail anytime. Enabling innovation further is a key component in the book's four-step "game plan to victory," the other three being defending innovation, saying yes to America's friends, and saying no to distractions.

<sup>1</sup> See for example Carla Babb, "US Air Force general: Russia military larger, better than before Ukraine invasion," *VOA*, September 17, 2024, available at <https://www.voanews.com/a/us-air-force-general-russia-military-larger-better-than-before-ukraine-invasion/7788601.html>.



Alperovitch's practical experience make his thoughts on innovation and the tech sector, particularly regarding microchips, the most compelling part of this game plan. Because the West's way of life and future economic growth depend on advanced microchips, they argue that the United States should diversify chip manufacturing away from Taiwan and reduce its dependence on critical minerals (necessary for their creation) from China.

The book is comparatively weak when it considers policy matters related to the U.S. defense budget and arms control. The authors resort to cliches, e.g., the United States spends more than the next ten countries combined. The defense budget reflects the country's global responsibilities. The United States makes most sophisticated conventional weapons in the world and pays its military personnel and civilians more than countries like China or Russia. Few would argue that the Pentagon's acquisition system needs change, yet the hard part has always been how to get there, because the process is legislated by Congress. Generic recommendations ("we will have to make tough choices" or "we need to be thoughtful about the military resources we are sending to Ukraine") are not particularly helpful and obscure the trade-offs and consequences of making one choice over another. The United States has had the luxury of some problems not being considered existential today because the nation paid attention to them and U.S. policies minimized them, often in cooperation with allies. Yet, they would rise to the top of the agenda quite rapidly should U.S. officials deprioritize them, because U.S. adversaries push where they think the United States and its allies are weak.

Similarly, the authors contend that should the United States and Russia be "unable to showcase leadership in the area of nuclear weapons arms control and adhere to their commitments to ban the testing of nuclear weapons," then "the world will become a much more dangerous place." Yet, this is just not so. U.S. nuclear weapons are not a problem to the same degree as Russia's or China's. These weapons matter because they provide the backdrop that allows countries to pursue their national interests. Consequently, they are more dangerous in hands of countries that pursue belligerent revisionist policies, such as Russia and China, than in U.S. hands. The authors are blind to the fact that adversarial countries such as Russia, China, and Iran will use arms control to restrain the United States and create advantages for themselves, just like the Soviet Union did during the Cold War. Moreover, they will disregard arms control agreements when it suits their interest without much blowback, as has repeatedly been the case with Russia. Despite these shortcomings, the book is a thoughtful and interesting contribution to the national security debate.

*Reviewed by Michaela Dodge  
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**Heather Williams, Reja Younis, Lachlan MacKenzie, Christopher A. Ford, Rebecca Davis Gibbons, Ankit Panda, Melanie W. Sisson, and Gregory Weaver, *Project Atom 2024: Intra-War Deterrence in a Two-Peer Environment* (Washington, D.C.: CSIS, November 2024), 94 pages, available at <https://www.csis.org/analysis/project-atom-2024-intra-war-deterrence-two-peer-environment>.**

Nobody can claim to have experience in how to fight a nuclear war, and yet, should that scenario ever arise, the American people will expect U.S. officials to have considered and planned for the possibility. Toward that end, the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) asked five former U.S. officials to consider two scenarios involving limited adversary nuclear strikes. The participants responded to a scenario involving near simultaneous battlefield nuclear use by Russia and China and CSIS asked them to elaborate on U.S. strategic objectives, the assurance to allies, and possibly military and non-kinetic responses.

The scenario envisions potentially coordinated near-simultaneous actions by both Putin and Xi in Ukraine and Taiwan respectively. Russia strikes NATO with multiple low yield nuclear weapons while China conducts a 50 kt strike on a U.S. base in the Philippines.

Dr. Heather Williams, Ms. Reja Younis, and Mr. Lachlan MacKenzie, write a helpful introductory chapter that summarizes and analyzes each subsequent chapter, which consists of long form analysis by Dr. Christopher Ford, Dr. Rebecca Davis Gibbons, Mr. Ankit Panda, Dr. Melanie Sisson, and Mr. Gregory Weaver. Each author provides enough nuances and caveats with their analysis that any proper engagement with their arguments would require a chapter-length treatment; so, instead, this review will simply identify important themes and notable divergent opinions among the authors.

On the broad topic of a strategy for intra-war deterrence in the scenarios described above, the authors all agree on the importance of avoiding a general nuclear war when considering how the United States should respond to an adversary's limited nuclear employment. For some, this objective ultimately overrides other objectives, such as assuring allies and defeating aggression, to the point where they recommend a greatly restrained U.S. response, such as limited conventional strikes and heavy use of non-kinetic tools, such as cyber attacks—even if it means failing to achieve other objectives. For others, while avoiding a general nuclear war might be termed the “overriding” priority, they believe that objective might be better secured by a more forceful U.S. response that achieves other political and military objectives at the same time, such as large-scale conventional or limited nuclear employment. Relatedly, another dividing line between the authors is on the relative importance of addressing why deterrence failed in the first place when considering U.S. response options; for some, this is merely a consideration whereas for others it is the foundation on which they decide their response.

The authors broadly agree on the importance of assuring allies, the second major category of considerations in this report, but there are differences in the relative weight they attach to this objective and the likely difficulty of achieving it. The authors generally agree that allied reactions to a limited nuclear strike could range from an overriding concern about



avoiding escalation to a demand for retaliation, especially from the state that was the target of the initial attack. Some authors relegate allied concerns to secondary status in the face of the potential consequences of a U.S. response triggering uncontrolled escalation, whereas others see both long- and short-term allied concerns as in the realm of vital U.S. national interests, and therefore worthy of a higher priority.

In the third category of intra-war deterrence considerations, military response options, the authors' recommendations diverge most dramatically. Ford, for instance, leans toward conventional response options supplemented by non-kinetic attacks (cyber, electronic warfare), while holding the nuclear response in reserve for a second adversary nuclear attack. Gibbons and Panda recommend limited conventional strikes on the military units that launched the initial nuclear attack in order to signal non-maximalist U.S. aims. Sisson recommends continuing the ongoing conventional conflicts in both theaters and specifically avoiding any alert or posture changes to U.S. nuclear forces as a demonstration of restraint. Weaver is the only author to recommend limited nuclear responses in both scenarios as a form of escalation control, while also achieving U.S. political and military objectives.

The fourth and final category of considerations in this report concerned non-kinetic response options, both military and political. Ford emphasizes cyber and electronic warfare measures that could degrade adversary forces in theater while conducting a diplomatic push on all fronts to demonstrate unity and resolve against aggression. Gibbons, Panda, and Sisson recommend cyber operations paired with diplomatic campaigns and economic sanctions to isolate Russia and China. Weaver does not discuss cyber or electronic warfare but instead focuses on information operations and economic sanctions, and their targets, as means to help the United States and allies achieve their objectives.

It is interesting to observe that among the 52 total endnotes among the authors, only around five of them directly reference U.S. government leaders or policy documents and the rest are overwhelmingly academic in character. No doubt that is due in part to the classified nature of many current U.S. government discussions of intra-war deterrence in a nuclear conflict, but there are enough declassified and unclassified documents, such as the *Nuclear Weapon Employment Strategies* of the Obama, Trump, and Biden Administrations, that the authors' relative lack of engagement with past policy is somewhat concerning. Although examining intra-war deterrence in a nuclear conflict is a theoretical exercise thankfully, the chapters would have benefitted from a better grounding in Cold War policy considerations by engaging with NSSM-169 (the "Foster Panel"), the 1978 Nuclear Targeting Policy Review ("Sloss Report"), and President Carter's PD-59, to name a few.

Overall, this report is a valuable contribution to the fairly sparse, but slowly growing, think tank literature on intra-war deterrence.<sup>2</sup> Nuclear deterrence is only just now receiving the attention it deserves in this threat environment from government and non-government officials, but intra-war nuclear deterrence still remains criminally understudied in the post-

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<sup>2</sup> For my own contribution to this literature, see, Matthew R. Costlow, *Restraints at the Nuclear Brink: Factors in Keeping War Limited* (Fairfax, VA: National Institute for Public Policy, July 2023), available at <https://nipp.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/OP-Vol.-3-No.-7.pdf>.

Cold War. This CSIS report should help drive further discussions on the topic and, one must hope, prompt U.S. officials to give the requisite attention to intra-war nuclear deterrence in their own plans and policies.

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**Julia Davis, *In Their Own Words: How Russian Propagandists Reveal Putin's Intentions* (Hannover, Germany: ibidem-Verlag, 2024), 451 pp.**

To understand how a country views others and what motivates a foreign leadership's behavior, it is useful to consider the statements of that country's officials and opinion leaders. Analysts and scholars seeking to understand Russia's views of the United States and the West, as well as Moscow's views of its brutal invasion of Ukraine, need look no farther than Julia Davis' impressive chronicling of statements from leading Russian commentators and officials.

*In Their Own Words: How Russian Propagandists Reveal Putin's Intentions* is a compilation of articles written by the author published in *The Daily Beast* and by the Center for European Policy Analysis between 2019 and 2024. They detail the views of Russian propagandists as expressed publicly in various forums and media outlets, most notably, on the popular television talk show, *Evening With Vladimir Solovyov*. The chronology provides a fascinating look at how the views of Kremlin propagandists shifted as Russia's official narratives shifted. They provide an eye-opening account of how the Russian government and its supporters in the media engage in propaganda, disinformation, and explicit threats to bolster Russia's interests at the expense of the West. Given the extensive quotations used in the book, it is worth citing a number of them here.

Russian propagandists clearly believe they are on the right side of history, that they are in a war with the West, and that the United States is a nation in decline ("a dying empire"). For example, as the director of the Center for Middle Eastern and Central Asian Studies in Moscow stated, "The United States is the enemy. It is our enemy. It is a hostile state that aims to destroy our country... We are at war!" This sentiment was reinforced by a member of the Russian Federation Council's Defense and Security Committee, who declared, "They are our enemies, 100 percent." And as Margarita Simonyan, editor-in-chief of Russia's state-controlled *RT* and *Sputnik* media outlets proclaimed, "War [with the U.S.] is inevitable," adding, "of course it will start in Ukraine."

Indeed, it is now well known that Russia seeks to divide Americans and sow chaos in the United States in order to fracture American unity in ways that benefit Russian policy and objectives. But to hear Russian analysts openly admit this is somewhat chilling. As one put it: "...we should be influencing public opinion in America... of course!... I will cynically tell you: whatever harms them benefits us." Another commented, "With America, we should be working to amplify the divisions and... to deepen the polarization of American society."

Russian media often portray developments in the United States in the worst possible light, suggesting that American society is in a state of decay. And the propagandists who peddle such commentaries understand that exploiting internal domestic divisions within the United States is a valuable tactic in the war of ideas. As one analyst stated on Russian television, "If we say this is war, then using the analogies of WWII... we need to work behind enemy lines, where they least expect us." As for its perceived effectiveness, as a member of Russia's parliament put it, "There isn't a single country in the world that is as easily manipulated as America."

Foreign policy is also seen as a zero-sum game, where America's failures equate to Russia's successes. As Davis recounts, Russian propagandists trumpeted the disastrous American withdrawal from Afghanistan as "beneficial for us" and evidence that "America no longer matters." As one Russian defense official put it, "American greatness is over... Russia's hands are untied to do whatever is necessary."

Russian propaganda about Ukraine has also been a staple of the average citizen's disinformation diet. Statements by Russian media commentators that Russia should use nuclear weapons in Ukraine or against the United States for supporting Ukraine have been commonplace, with one TV commentator warning that "Russia is the only country in the world that is realistically capable of turning the United States into radioactive ash." Ukraine, he argued, "poses an existential threat to Russia" that is "a matter of life and death." Similar language was used by Putin himself to defend Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, and his nuclear threats have been played up by Russian propagandists. As a Duma deputy declared, "Nuclear mushroom may rise over Ukraine, but the NATO flag may not." And Russia's leading talk show host, Vladimir Solovyov, has repeatedly agitated for the use of nuclear weapons against the West, asking "why the heck do we have a stockpile of tactical and strategic nuclear weapons? To be afraid to use it?... I believe that the use of tactical nuclear weapons is unavoidable."

In addition, Russian state media and commentators parroted Putin's baseless assertions that Ukraine was committing "genocide" against its Russian-speaking population, that it needed to be "denazified," and that Kyiv (and the United States and NATO) were responsible for starting the war. When the Russian invasion began, RT's editor-in-chief described her "overwhelming sense of euphoria," stating, "I've been waiting 8 years for this... It finally happened. This is true happiness." And a military expert openly declared, "It's time for militarily coercive diplomacy on the part of Russia." Propagandists have also opined about a post-Ukraine change to Europe's borders. As Solovyov stated, "I don't think that the European borders in their current configuration will continue to exist much longer."

Clearly, there is a symbiotic relationship between Putin's positions and the public statements of his propagandists, lending credence to the subtitle of Davis' book. She notes that "Russian state media remains an extremely good predictor of what the Kremlin really intends." For example, she notes that in August 2022, Solovyov opined that North Korean troops should join Russian forces fighting in Ukraine. And in fact, this has occurred, with thousands of North Korean troops now fighting (and dying) on the front lines in Ukraine. As

Davis notes, “Putin’s propagandists... articulate the ideas contemplated by the regime they serve, with whom they socialize, and from whom they take orders.”

*In Their Own Words* is a rich smorgasbord of eyebrow-raising quotes that would be unimaginable if spoken by Western analysts, commentators, or government officials. Even American efforts to lower the temperature in U.S.-Russian relations and find areas of peaceful cooperation are treated with disdain and as a sign of weakness. As one Moscow State University dean openly declared, “Nothing in the history of the world ever happens without military force... Pacifists don’t determine world politics.”

While the book provides a fascinating account of the propagandistic statements and disinformation used by Russian commentators, it is more a journalistic than an academic account—to wit, the collection of published articles contains no footnotes or citations referencing any of the extensively quoted material. For research purposes, citing sources for some of the quotations, such as from *TASS* or *Izvestiya*, might have provided a more scholarly rendering. But if the reader wants to find the exact source of a quotation the author cites, it will likely be futile given the difficulty of finding online translations of Russian TV shows. (One can only reminisce over the CIA’s long-defunct Foreign Broadcast Information Service and its extensive translations of foreign media broadcasts.) Thankfully, Davis’ fluency in Russian and her expertise in monitoring what is broadcast on Russia’s state-controlled airwaves provide readers with the perspective of Russian propagandists “in their own words” otherwise unavailable to Western audiences.

In addition, the author’s anti-Trump biases and antipathy toward conservative U.S. media outlets like Fox News are evident throughout the various articles included in this compendium. For example, she writes that Fox News’ “messaging during the Trump years became almost indiscernible from Kremlin-controlled state media outlets.” In addition, her commentaries include statements that “Trump is essentially fulfilling Putin’s wishes,” that he is “the Kremlin’s unlikely comrade at the White House,” and that Russian propagandists exploit his “rabidly anti-American statements and false claims.”

There is no doubt that any statements by the president that are perceived as what Davis calls “subservience to Putin” or supportive of Moscow’s position regarding Ukraine are gleefully exploited by Russia to bolster their own narrative and foster domestic dissent in the United States. Yet, despite the repeated concerns by some, including Davis, that Trump is playing into Putin’s hand, some of the harshest and most sweeping sanctions were placed on Russia by President Trump during his first term, including tightening export controls; targeting and freezing the financial assets of Russian entities, oligarchs, and officials; expelling dozens of Russian intelligence officers operating under diplomatic cover; and closing the Russian consulate in Seattle.

At times it is difficult to know who the author blames more for the sad state of affairs she chronicles—Russian propagandists or Donald Trump. For instance, she notes that “Russian propagandists find comfort in knowing that their favorite U.S. president’s divisive rhetoric and deliberate disinformation have inflicted lasting damage on America—and cast a dark shadow in democracy, which used to be an example for other countries.” Indeed, Donald Trump’s reelection to the presidency in 2024 has been seen by many in Moscow as a

favorable turn of events. It remains to be seen, however, whether their hopes will be confirmed or dashed.

Nevertheless, the outrageous statements and quotations Davis highlights in her book provide sobering insight into the minds of Russian officials and those who seek to advance Russian interests at the expense of the United States and its Western allies. While some may see this as nothing more than propaganda intended for internal Russian audiences, the brazenness of the commentaries chronicled by Davis provides an important window into the thinking of the Russian leadership and should not be discounted or summarily dismissed by U.S. policy makers. The stakes are simply too great.

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National Institute for Public Policy*



# DOCUMENTATION

This issue's Documentation section features, first, select excerpts from the Department of Defense's 2024 *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China* report, with a special focus on changes in China's nuclear strategy and posture. Following that, we highlight NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte's December 2024 speech that urges alliance members to make urgent changes to their threat perceptions and right size their spending levels. Documents three and four offer contrasting nuclear policy statements by Russia and the United States, both recently published in an unclassified setting: Russia's *Fundamentals of State Policy of the Russian Federation on Nuclear Deterrence* and the U.S. 2024 *Report on the Nuclear Employment Strategy of the United States*. Finally, document five features select excerpts from a Centre for Eastern Studies report titled, *Winning the War with Russia (Is Still Possible): The West's Counter-Strategy Towards Moscow*.

**Document No. 1. U.S. Department of Defense, *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China* (Washington, D.C., Department of Defense, December 2024), select excerpts.<sup>1</sup>**

## NUCLEAR CAPABILITIES

### Key Takeaways

- Over the next decade, the PRC probably will continue to rapidly modernize, diversify, and expand its nuclear forces. The PLA seeks a larger and more diverse nuclear force, comprised of systems ranging from low-yield precision strike missiles to ICBMs with multi-megaton yields to provide it options at every rung of the escalation ladder.
- Beijing continued its rapid nuclear expansion. DoD estimates the PRC has surpassed 600 operational nuclear warheads in its stockpile as of 2024.
- DoD estimates that the PRC will have over 1,000 operational nuclear warheads by 2030, much of which will be deployed at higher readiness levels, and will continue growing its force to 2035 in line with its goal of ensuring PLA modernization is "basically complete" that year, an important milestone on the road to Xi's goal of a "world class" military by 2049.
- The PRC probably will use its new fast breeder reactors and reprocessing facilities to produce plutonium for its nuclear weapons program, despite publicly maintaining these technologies are intended for peaceful purposes.

The PRC probably continues to arm solid-propellant silo fields, which consist of 320 silos across its three new silo fields. The PLA is more than doubling the size of its DF-5 liquid-silo force, which probably will have about 50 silos by the end of the effort. The large growth of the PLA silo force suggests Beijing is making progress in establishing its "early warning counterstrike" posture to increase the survivability and responsiveness of these launch sites. [p. 101]

<sup>1</sup> This report is available at <https://media.defense.gov/2024/Dec/18/2003615520/-1/-1/0/MILITARY-AND-SECURITY-DEVELOPMENTS-INVOLVING-THE-PEOPLES-REPUBLIC-OF-CHINA-2024.PDF>.



The PRC probably is developing advanced nuclear delivery systems, in part due to long-term concerns about United States missile defense capabilities. The PRC monitors U.S. and Russian nuclear weapons programs and probably has developmental efforts for additional PLA advanced nuclear capabilities if Beijing elects to progress these efforts through fielding.

The PLA's expanding nuclear force will enable it to target more U.S. cities, military facilities, and leadership sites than ever before in a potential nuclear conflict. While PRC leaders have historically judged that being able to inflict even limited damage during a nuclear counterstrike was sufficient for deterrence—an “assured retaliation” capability—the PRC's force modernization suggests that it seeks to have the ability to inflict far greater levels of overwhelming damage to an adversary in a nuclear exchange as well as engage in multiple rounds of counterstrike, including through more discriminate forms of nuclear employment, such as with lower-yield weapons.

### **Strategy**

The PRC's approach to using nuclear force is based on PLA “deterrence” of an enemy first strike and “counterstrike” when deterrence fails, threatening retaliation against an adversary's military capability, population, and economy. The PRC's nuclear weapons policy prioritizes maintaining a nuclear force able to survive a first strike and respond with sufficient strength to conduct multiple rounds of counterstrike, deterring an adversary with the threat of unacceptable damage to its military capability, population, and economy. The PLA probably selects its nuclear strike targets to achieve conflict de-escalation and return to a conventional conflict with a remaining force sufficient to deter its adversary. PLA planners would probably avoid a protracted series of nuclear exchanges against a superior adversary and state that the scale and intensity of retaliatory force needs to be carefully controlled.

The PRC's approach to nuclear force includes a declaratory no-first-use (NFU) policy, stating it will never use nuclear weapons first at any time under any circumstances, including unconditionally not using or threatening to use of nuclear weapons against any non-nuclear weapon state or in nuclear-weapon-free zones. Despite publicizing this policy, the PRC's nuclear strategy probably includes consideration of a nuclear first strike in response to nonnuclear attacks that PRC leaders perceive as threatening the viability of the PRC's nuclear forces or C2, or that approximate the strategic effects of a nuclear strike. Beijing probably would consider nuclear first use if a conventional military defeat in Taiwan gravely threatened CCP regime survival.

The PRC's commingling of some of its conventional and nuclear missile forces during peacetime and ambiguities in its NFU conditions could complicate deterrence and escalation management during a conflict. If a comingled PRC missile launch is not readily identifiable as a conventional or nuclear missile, it may not be clear what the PRC launched until it detonates. Furthermore, potential adversary attacks against the PRC's conventional missile

force-associated C2 centers could inadvertently degrade the PRC's nuclear C2 and generate nuclear use-or-lose—the pressure to use weapons before they are targeted. Once a conflict has begun, the PRC's dispersal of mobile missile systems to hide sites could further complicate the task of distinguishing between nuclear and conventional forces and, thus, increase the potential for inadvertent attacks on the nuclear forces. PRC leadership calculus for responding to conventional attacks on nuclear forces remains a key unknown. [p. 102]

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### **Nuclear Warhead Stockpile**

In 2020, DoD estimated the PRC's operational nuclear warhead stockpile was in the low-200s and was expected to at least double by 2030. However, Beijing has accelerated its nuclear expansion, and DoD estimates this stockpile has surpassed 600 operational nuclear warheads as of 2024, on track to exceed previous projections. The PRC is establishing new nuclear materials production and reprocessing facilities very likely to support its nuclear force expansion. Although these efforts are consistent with the PRC's goals to increase nuclear energy generation and close its nuclear fuel cycle, Beijing likely considers this dual-use infrastructure as crucial to supporting its military goals, judging from PRC nuclear industry reporting and think tank publications. The PRC has not produced large quantities of plutonium for its weapons program since the early 1990s and probably will need to begin producing new plutonium this decade to meet the needs of its expanding nuclear stockpile. Despite its public support for a Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty, the PRC has rejected calls for a moratorium on production of fissile material for use in nuclear weapons. It is likely that Beijing intends to produce nuclear warhead materials for its military in the near term.

**Weapons-Grade Material Production.** The PRC has probably completed constructing one of its two CFR-600 sodium-cooled fast breeder nuclear reactors at Xiapu and continues to construct the second. Russia is assisting with these reactors, providing highly enriched uranium (HEU) nuclear fuel assemblies. Each reactor can produce enough plutonium for dozens of nuclear warheads annually from blankets surrounding the core (referring to natural uranium around the fuel core for breeding plutonium), according to think tank estimates and informed by PRC state media and nuclear industry reporting. The PRC originally planned to use Russian-sourced mixed-oxide (a blend of uranium and plutonium) fuel for these reactors but changed the order to HEU fuel through 2030, according to nuclear industry reporting. By using HEU fuel, the PRC has the potential to generate additional weapons-grade plutonium. PRC officials claim the CFR-600 reactors are intended to help the PRC achieve its civilian nuclear power and carbon neutrality objectives but the PRC has described the CFR-600s as a “national defense investment project” subject to military nuclear facility regulations. By December 2022, Russia delivered the first three batches of HEU nuclear fuel assemblies to the PRC for the first core loading and the first refueling of the CFR600. In early 2023, think-tank reporting indicates the quantity of HEU transferred from Russia to the PRC for its CFR-600 reactors is more than the entire amount of HEU removed



worldwide under U.S. and International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) auspices in the last three decades. In [p. 107] March 2023, the PRC and Russia signed an agreement with commitments for continued cooperation on fast reactor and reprocessing technology development, extending this relationship for “the decades ahead.”

**Plutonium Extraction.** The PRC could extract the WGPu at its 50-ton per year reprocessing plant at Jiuquan (Plant 404) or one of the 200-ton per year reprocessing plants under construction at the CNNC Gansu Nuclear Technology Industrial Park in Jinta, Gansu Province, the first of which is expected to be operational by 2025. The PRC has reduced transparency in its nuclear program as its capabilities are increasing and has not reported its stockpile of separated plutonium to the IAEA since 2017, according to a Western think tank. The PRC has a Voluntary Offer Agreement that makes some of its civilian nuclear facilities eligible for IAEA safeguards but the IAEA has applied safeguards only to one enrichment plant and one reactor in the PRC.

**Uranium and Tritium.** In the past several years, the PRC’s organization traditionally associated with military uranium enrichment has expanded production capacity and likely will continue to do so. The PRC is also working to expand and diversify its capability to produce tritium by methods, such as using tritium production targets in reactors and extraction from tritiated heavy water, according to PRC nuclear industry reporting.

**Nuclear Warhead Production.** The PRC is expanding its nuclear warhead production infrastructure. This infrastructure enables the PRC to produce, maintain, and refurbish a greater number of warheads in support of its nuclear stockpile expansion. [p. 108]

**Nuclear Testing.** The PRC’s possible preparation to operate its Lop Nur nuclear test site yearround and lack of transparency on its nuclear testing activities have raised concerns regarding its adherence to the U.S. “zero yield” standard adhered to by the United States, the United Kingdom, and France in their respective nuclear weapons testing moratoria.

### **Future Nuclear Force**

The PRC has not publicly or formally acknowledged or explained its nuclear expansion and modernization. The buildup almost certainly is due to the PRC’s broader and longer-term perceptions of progressively increased U.S.-PRC strategic competition. The PLA’s nuclear expansion and modernization very likely are tied to its overall military strategy—seeking to close capability gaps and become a competitive global power. As a result, the PRC probably perceives that a stronger nuclear force is needed to deter U.S. intervention, check potential nuclear escalation or first strike, and will allow for increased control of the scope and scale of escalation during a conflict in a way its previously smaller and less diverse nuclear force could not.

The PLA seeks a larger and more diverse nuclear force, comprised of systems ranging from low-yield precision strike missiles to ICBMs with multi-megaton yields to provide it options at every rung of the escalation ladder. Developing robust nuclear strike options likely is intended to predominantly deter against a “strong enemy” as well as to deny an adversary victory if a war escalates to the nuclear domain. The PLA’s expanding nuclear force will enable it to target more U.S. cities, military facilities, and leadership sites than ever before in a potential nuclear counterstrike. While PRC leaders have historically judged that being able to inflict even limited damage during a nuclear counterstrike was sufficient for deterrence—an “assured retaliation” capability—the PRC’s force modernization suggests that it seeks the ability to inflict far greater levels of overwhelming damage to an adversary in a nuclear exchange.

**Stockpile Size.** By 2030, DoD estimates that the PRC will have over 1,000 operational nuclear warheads, most of which will be fielded on systems capable of ranging CONUS. Beijing has not declared an end goal nor acknowledged the scale of its expansion, has resisted calls bilaterally with the United States and in multilateral fora for efforts to practically manage nuclear risks and increase transparency, and has declined to engage in substantive arms control discussions. The PRC’s long-term nuclear requirements—and the relationship between the PRC’s nuclear requirements and its national strategy and goal to field a “world-class” military by mid-century— remain unclear from public sources.

**Hypersonics and Fractional Orbital Bombardment.** The PRC probably is developing advanced nuclear delivery systems, such as a strategic HGV and a FOB system, in part due to long-term concerns about United States missile defense capabilities as well as to attain qualitative parity with future worldwide missile capabilities. A “long-range” DF-27 ballistic missile is deployed to the PLARF and likely has a HGV payload option as well as conventional land-attack, conventional antiship, and nuclear capabilities. Official PRC military writings indicate this range-class spans 5,000–8,000 km, designating the DF-27 as an IRBM or ICBM, and PRC media indicates that it can potentially range as far as Alaska and Hawaii. In 2023, a PRC-based commentator stated that the DF-27 can be used to strike high-value targets on Guam, indicating that the DF-27 would primarily be used for regional conventional strikes during a conflict. On July 27, 2021, the PRC tested an ICBM-range HGV that travelled 40,000 km. The test likely demonstrated the PRC’s [p. 109] technical ability to field a FOB system, which can facilitate difficult to track attacks on the U.S. homeland. The PRC does not appear to have tested a FOB system in 2022 or 2023.

**Lower-Yield Nuclear Weapons.** The PRC probably seeks lower yield nuclear warhead capabilities for proportional response options that its high-yield warheads cannot deliver. PRC strategists have highlighted the need for lower-yield nuclear weapons to increase the deterrence value of the PRC’s nuclear force, though they have not defined specific nuclear yield values. A 2017 defense industry publication indicated a lower-yield weapon had been developed for use against campaign and tactical targets that would reduce collateral damage.

By late 2018, PRC concerns began to emerge that the United States would use low-yield weapons against its Taiwan invasion fleet, with related commentary in official media calling for proportionate response capabilities. The DF-26 is the PRC's first nuclear-capable missile system capable of precision strikes and, therefore, is the most likely weapon system to field a lower-yield warhead in the near term.

**Launch on Warning.** The PLA is working to implement a launch on warning (LOW) posture this decade, called “early warning counterstrike” (预警反击), where warning of a missile strike leads to a counterstrike before an enemy first strike can detonate. PLA writings suggest multiple manned C2 organs are involved in this process, warned by space- and ground-based sensors. This posture is broadly similar to the U.S. and Russian LOW posture. The PRC probably seeks to keep at least a portion of its force, especially its new silo-based units, on a LOW posture. Since 2017, the PLARF has conducted exercises involving early warning of a nuclear strike and LOW responses.

The PRC's desire to attain a LOW posture date back to the 1970s and 1980s, when the PRC considered using land-based ballistic missile early warning radar to support a LOW posture for its silo-based CSS-4 ICBMs but, apparently, this early warning system was unreliable. In recent years, the PRC has been able to make advances in early warning needed to support a LOW posture. The PRC has several ground-based, large-phase array radars—similar in appearance to U.S. PAVE PAWS radars—that could support a missile early warning role. Progress has likely been made in space-based early warning as well. As of 2022, the PRC likely has at least three early warning satellites in orbit. In 2019, President Putin of Russia stated that Russia is aiding the PRC in developing a ballistic missile early warning system.

Despite these developments, the PRC has called on other states to abandon similar LOW postures to enhance strategic stability while declining to engage in substantive dialogue on risk reduction. The PRC seems to believe a LOW posture is consistent with its NFU policy, given that it involves a retaliatory strike that occurs after warning of an inbound first attack from an adversary. At the same time, PRC military writings note that C2 systems—including early warning systems—can be a source of accidental nuclear war. In November 2023, China engaged with the United States in discussions on issues related to arms control and nonproliferation but since has refused to return to arms control talks. The PRC has refused to join the Hague Code of Conduct or participate in other confidence-building measures (CBMs), such as a launch notification arrangement with the United States, to reduce the risk of accidental nuclear war. However, the PRC does have a bilateral missile and carrier rocket launch notification agreement with Russia called the Russian-PRC intergovernmental agreement signed in 2009, which was extended for 10 years in 2021—though little additional information regarding the implementation of the agreement is known. [p. 110]

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**Document No. 2. Speech by NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte at the Concert Noble, Brussels, “To Prevent War, NATO Must Spend More,” December 12, 2024 (as delivered).<sup>2</sup>**

Thank you very much Rosa, and many thanks to Carnegie Europe for organising this event today in this spectacular venue.

And it’s great to see so many people here in the room and I know many more join us online, from all over the world.

So good morning, afternoon, evening to you all!

I’m very honoured to start a crucial conversation with the citizens living in NATO countries, especially in Europe and Canada.

It’s you I’m talking to.

It’s your support I need.

It’s your voices and actions that will determine our future security.

I’ll be honest: the security situation does not look good.

It’s undoubtedly the worst in my lifetime.

And I suspect in yours too.

From Brussels, it takes one day to drive to Ukraine.

One day –

That’s how close the Russian bombs are falling.

It’s how close the Iranian drones are flying.

And not very much further, the North Korean soldiers are fighting.

Every day, this war causes more devastation and death.

Every week, there are over 10.000 killed or wounded on all sides in Ukraine.

Over 1 million casualties since February 2022.

Putin is trying to wipe Ukraine off the map.

He is trying to fundamentally change the security architecture that has kept Europe safe for decades.

And he is trying to crush our freedom and way of life.

His pattern of aggression is not new.

But for too long, we did not act.

Georgia in 2008.

Crimea in 2014.

And many did not want to believe he would launch all-out war on Ukraine in February 2022.

How many more wake-up calls do we need?

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<sup>2</sup> This speech can be accessed at [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions\\_231348.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_231348.htm).

We should be profoundly concerned.  
I know I am.

Russia's economy is on a war footing.  
In 2025, the total military spending will be 7 to 8% of GDP, if not more.  
That's a third of Russia's state budget – and the highest level since the Cold War.

And Russia's defence industry is producing huge numbers of tanks, armoured vehicles, and ammunition.  
What Russia lacks in quality, it makes up for in quantity – with the help of China, Iran and North Korea.

This all points in one clear direction:  
Russia is preparing for long-term confrontation.  
With Ukraine.  
And with us.

Hostile actions against Allied countries are real and accelerating.  
Malicious cyber-attacks on both sides of the Atlantic.  
Assassination attempts on British and German soil.  
Explosions at an ammunition warehouse in Czechia.  
The weaponization of migrants crossing illegally into Poland, Latvia, Lithuania and Finland.  
Jamming to disrupt civil aviation in the Baltic region.

These attacks are not just isolated incidents.  
They are the result of a coordinated campaign to destabilise our societies and discourage us from supporting Ukraine.  
They circumvent our deterrence and bring the front line to our front doors.  
Even into our homes.

Putin believes that “a serious, irreconcilable struggle is unfolding for the formation of a new world order.”  
These are his own words.  
Others share his belief.  
Not least China.

We need to be clear-eyed about China's ambitions.  
China is substantially building up its forces, including its nuclear weapons – with no transparency and no limitations.  
From 200 warheads in 2020, China is expected to have more than a 1,000 nuclear weapons by 2030.  
Its space-launch investments are skyrocketing.

China is bullying Taiwan, and pursuing access to our critical infrastructure in ways that could cripple our societies.

Russia, China, but also North Korea and Iran, are hard at work to try to weaken North America and Europe.

To chip away at our freedom.

They want to reshape the global order.

Not to create a fairer one, but to secure their own spheres of influence.

They are testing us.

And the rest of the world is watching.

No, we are not at war.

But we are certainly not at peace either.

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I want to be clear:

There is no imminent military threat to our 32 Allies.

Because NATO has been transforming to keep us safe.

Defence spending has gone up.

Innovation has accelerated.

We have more forces at higher readiness.

Larger and more frequent military exercises.

More troops and hardware on our eastern flank.

And, with Finland and Sweden, more NATO Allies.

With all this, our deterrence is good – for now.

But it's tomorrow I'm worried about.

We are not ready for what is coming our way in four to five years.

Danger is moving towards us at full speed.

We must not look the other way.

We must face it:

What is happening in Ukraine could happen here too.

And regardless of the outcome of this war, we will not be safe in the future unless we are prepared to deal with danger.

We can do that.

We can prevent the next big war on NATO territory.

And preserve our way of life.

This requires us all to be faster and fiercer.  
It is time to shift to a wartime mindset.  
And turbo-charge our defence production and defence spending.

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On defence production, I am absolutely convinced that ramping it up is a top priority.

Since starting at NATO, I've been to Ukraine and seen what they need to fight for freedom. I have visited engineers at Thales in France, a Rheinmetall factory –no, not in Germany, in Italy and Turkish Aerospace Industries in Türkiye and I saw the capabilities they provide. And I have met with industry representatives who have told me that they require –what they require, to increase their production.

I can tell you:

There is a lot that needs to be done to ensure long-term deterrence and restore peace.  
We are not where we want to be.

Our defence industry, here in Europe, has been hollowed out by decades of underinvestment and narrow national industrial interests –  
when our continent was at peace, and defence became an optional extra.  
As a result, our industry is too small, too fragmented and too slow.

Meanwhile, Russian arms factories are churning out war equipment around the clock.  
And despite the heroic efforts of our Ukrainian friends,  
Russia is reconstituting its forces much quicker than we had anticipated.  
They are learning fast from the battlefield.

China's military industrial base is also growing.  
According to some sources, China is acquiring high-end weapons systems and equipment five to six times faster than the US.  
It is heavily investing in munitions, accelerating space capabilities and expanding its nuclear arsenal – I repeat – without any transparency or limitations.  
China is also challenging our technological edge – by investing massively in the disruptive technologies of tomorrow, including AI, quantum and space.  
All this will help China with planning, command and control, and targeting.

Russia and China are racing ahead.  
We risk lagging behind.  
This is very dangerous.  
But it does not have to be.  
If we boost our industry, we can outpace our competitors.

So what are we waiting for?

We already have robust defence plans in place.

We know exactly how we will defend our Alliance and what future assets and capabilities we need –

from ships, tanks, jets, munitions and satellites to new drone technologies.

Ukrainians are fighting against Russian swarms of drones.

That's what we need to be prepared for.

We also already have committed to accelerating the growth of defence industrial capacity and production across the Alliance.

Now, we must deliver – I repeat deliver – on our commitments.

We all have a part to play to make this happen.

To governments I say:

Give our industries the big orders and long-term contracts they need to rapidly produce more and better capabilities.

Buying only big-ticket items that are delivered too late will not keep us safe.

We also need modern capabilities that use the most advanced technologies. And we need them now.

So embrace risk and invest in the pool of innovators across our countries.

Embracing risk requires you, governments, to change outdated procurement rules.

And to reconsider your detailed national requirements.

With a million casualties on our doorstep, you have no time to waste.

As an example, related to armoured personnel carriers:

One nation needs to have the rear door opening to the left.

Another needs it to open to the right.

And a third one needs it to open upwards.

All these requirements are mandatory.

Is this how we define our needs and priorities, especially when time is of the essence?

This has got to change!

I also say to governments:

Stop creating barriers between each other and between industries, banks and pension funds. Instead, tear these barriers down.

They only increase production costs, stifle innovation and ultimately hamper our security.

To the defence industry I say:

You need to do everything you can to keep us safe.



There's money on the table, and it will only increase.  
So dare to innovate and take risks!  
Come up with solutions to the swarms of drones and other new war tactics.  
Put in the extra shifts and new production lines!

And finally, to the citizens of NATO countries, especially in Europe, I say:  
Tell your banks and pension funds it is simply unacceptable that they refuse to invest in the defence industry.  
Defence is not in the same category as illicit drugs and pornography.  
Investing in defence is an investment in our security.  
It's a must!

And this brings me to my main point.  
Defence spending.

It is true that we spend more on defence now than we did a decade ago.  
But we are still spending far less than during the Cold War.  
Even though the threats to our freedom and security are just as big – if not bigger.

During the Cold War, Europeans spent far more than 3% of their GDP on defence.  
With that mentality, we won the Cold War.  
Spending dropped after the Iron Curtain fell.  
The world was safer.  
It is not anymore.

A decade ago, Allies agreed it was time to invest in defence once again.  
The benchmark was set at 2%.  
By 2023, NATO Allies agreed to invest 'at least' 2%.  
At least...  
I can tell you, we are going to need a lot more than 2%.

I know spending more on defence means spending less on other priorities.  
But it is only a little less.  
On average, European countries easily spend up to a quarter of their national income on pensions, health and social security systems.  
We need a small fraction of that money to make our defences much stronger, and to preserve our way of life.

Prioritising defence requires political leadership.  
It can be tough and risky in the short term.  
But it's absolutely essential in the long term.  
Some people will tell you otherwise.

They think strong defence is not the way to peace.  
Well, they are wrong.  
Because without strong defence, there is no lasting security.  
And without security, there is no freedom for our children and grand-children.  
No schools, no hospitals, no businesses.  
There is nothing.

Those who lived through the Second World War know this.  
And our Ukrainian friends are living it every day.

When I was in Kharkiv earlier this year, I saw so many buildings completely destroyed.  
I stood in rubble where homes used to be.  
Where families used to live.  
I saw schools moved underground, into metro stations.  
It was very moving to see children so eager to learn, and teachers so eager to teach...despite their lives being completely disrupted.  
I visited the wounded in hospitals.  
Soldiers that lost limbs.

War is brutal and ugly.

War is also very costly in economic terms.

Ukraine, as we speak, is allocating nearly a quarter of its GDP for defence next year.  
That is more than 10 times what European NATO Allies spend.  
A harsh reminder that freedom does not come for free.

If we don't spend more together now to prevent war, we will pay a much, much, much higher price later to fight it.  
Not billions, but trillions of euros.  
That's if we come out on top...and that's if we win.

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In politics, there is a time to talk, a time to decide, and a time to act.  
I know politicians talk – a lot.  
That's what I do here today!  
They make decisions, when needed.  
Sometimes difficult ones.  
But to act, people must support those decisions.  
It's in your hands.  
Today, I call for your support.

Action is urgent.

To protect our freedom, our prosperity, and our way of life, your politicians need to listen to your voices.

Tell them you accept to make sacrifices today so that we can stay safe tomorrow.

Tell them they need to spend more on defence so that we can continue to live in peace.

Tell them that security matters more than anything.

I am confident that collectively at NATO, we can continue to keep our one billion people safe.

We have enormous advantages.

We are 32 Allies strong.

Together, NATO Allies represent half of the world's economic and military might.

We have exceptional intelligence services.

Innovative industries and businesses.

Some of the best universities and research institutions in the world.

And we have many partners across the globe.

When we put our minds and political will to it, there is nothing we cannot do – Europe and North America together.

Our adversaries think they are tough, and we are soft.

They invade other countries, while we uphold international rules.

They oppress their people, while we cherish freedom.

They should remember that there is no greater power than democracies coming together.

When we are attacked, our response is fierce.

To ensure no one ever considers attacking us, we must maintain long-term deterrence.

We can do this.

We have done it before.

We can do it again.

Thank you very much.

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**Document No. 3. President of the Russian Federation, *Fundamentals of State Policy of the Russian Federation on Nuclear Deterrence* (Moscow, RU: The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, December 3, 2024).<sup>3</sup>**

## **Fundamentals of State Policy of the Russian Federation on Nuclear Deterrence**

### **I. General Provisions**

1. These Fundamentals are a strategic planning document in the area of ensuring defence that reflects official views on the essence of nuclear deterrence, identifies military risks and threats intended to be neutralized by the implementation of nuclear deterrence, as well as defines the principles of nuclear deterrence and the conditions for the transition of the Russian Federation to the employment of nuclear weapons.
2. Assured deterrence of a potential adversary from aggression against the Russian Federation and (or) its allies is one of the highest state priorities. Deterrence of aggression is ensured by the totality of the military might of the Russian Federation, including nuclear weapons.
3. The state policy of the Russian Federation on nuclear deterrence (hereafter referred to as “state policy on nuclear deterrence”) is a set of coordinated political, military, military-technical, diplomatic, economic, information, and other measures, unified by a common concept and implemented with reliance on nuclear deterrence forces and means to prevent aggression against the Russian Federation and (or) its allies.
4. The state policy on nuclear deterrence is defensive in nature, aimed at maintaining the capabilities of nuclear forces at a level sufficient to ensure nuclear deterrence, and guarantees the protection of sovereignty and territorial integrity of the state, deterrence of a potential adversary from aggression against the Russian Federation and (or) its allies, and – in the event of an outbreak of a military conflict – the prevention of the escalation in hostilities and their cessation on terms acceptable to the Russian Federation and (or) its allies.
5. The Russian Federation considers nuclear weapons as a means of deterrence, the employment of which is an extreme and compelled measure, and makes all the necessary efforts to reduce the nuclear threat and prevent aggravation of interstate relations that could trigger military conflicts, including nuclear ones.

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<sup>3</sup> This report can be accessed at available at [https://www.mid.ru/en/foreign\\_policy/international\\_safety/1434131/](https://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/international_safety/1434131/).

6. The statutory legal basis of these Fundamentals consists of the Constitution of the Russian Federation, generally recognized principles and norms of international law, international treaties of the Russian Federation, federal constitutional laws, federal laws, and other statutory legal acts and documents regulating defence and security matters.

7. The provisions of these Fundamentals are binding on all federal government authorities and other government bodies and organizations involved in ensuring nuclear deterrence.

8. These Fundamentals may be adjusted to account for external and internal factors that shape defence requirements.

## **II. The Essence of Nuclear Deterrence**

9. The Russian Federation exercises nuclear deterrence toward a potential adversary, defined as individual states and military coalitions (blocs, alliances), that consider the Russian Federation as a potential adversary and possess nuclear and (or) other types of weapons of mass destruction or significant combat capabilities of general purpose forces. Nuclear deterrence is also exercised toward states that provide territory, air and (or) sea space under their control, as well as resources for preparing and committing aggression against the Russian Federation.

10. Aggression by any state from a military coalition (bloc, alliance) against the Russian Federation and (or) its allies is considered as the aggression by this coalition (bloc, alliance) as a whole.

11. Aggression against the Russian Federation and (or) its allies by any non-nuclear state with the participation or support of a nuclear state is considered as their joint attack.

12. Nuclear deterrence is aimed to ensure that a potential adversary realizes the inevitability of retaliation in the event of aggression against the Russian Federation and (or) its allies.

13. Nuclear deterrence is ensured by the presence in the structure of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation of combat-ready forces and means capable of inflicting assured unacceptable damage on a potential adversary under any circumstances through the employment of nuclear weapons, as well as by the readiness and resolve of the Russian Federation to employ such weapons.

14. Nuclear deterrence is implemented continuously in peacetime, during the period of immediate threat of aggression, and in wartime, up to the beginning of nuclear weapons employment.

15. The main military risks that, depending on changes in the military-political and strategic situation, can evolve into military threats to the Russian Federation (threats of aggression) and that are intended to be neutralized by the implementation of nuclear deterrence are as follows:

- a) possession by a potential adversary of nuclear and (or) other types of weapons of mass destruction that can be employed against the Russian Federation and (or) its allies, as well as of delivery means for these types of weapons;
- b) possession and deployment by a potential adversary of missile defence systems and assets, intermediate- and shorter-range cruise and ballistic missiles, high-precision non-nuclear and hypersonic weapons, unmanned combat vehicles of various basing modes, directed energy weapons that can be used against the Russian Federation;
- c) buildup by a potential adversary on the territories contiguous to the Russian Federation and its allies and in adjacent waters of general purpose forces groupings, which include nuclear weapons delivery means, and (or) military infrastructure ensuring the employment of such means;
- d) development and deployment by a potential adversary of missile defence and anti-satellite warfare assets, as well as of strike systems in space;
- e) deployment of nuclear weapons and their delivery means on the territories of non-nuclear states;
- f) establishment of new or expansion of existing military coalitions (blocs, alliances), leading to the advancement of their military infrastructure to the borders of the Russian Federation;
- g) actions by a potential adversary aimed at isolating a part of the territory of the Russian Federation, including blocking access to vital transport communications;
- h) actions by a potential adversary aimed at defeating (destroying, eliminating) environmentally hazardous facilities of the Russian Federation that may lead to technogenic, ecological or social disasters;
- i) planning and conduct of large-scale military exercises by a potential adversary near the borders of the Russian Federation;
- j) uncontrolled proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, their means of delivery, technologies and equipment for their manufacture.

16. The principles of nuclear deterrence are as follows:

- a) continuity of activities ensuring nuclear deterrence;
- b) adaptability of nuclear deterrence to military risks and threats;
- c) uncertainty for a potential adversary in terms of scale, time, and place of the possible employment of nuclear deterrence forces and means;
- d) centralization of state governance over the activities of federal executive authorities and organizations involved in ensuring nuclear deterrence;

- e) rationality of the structure and composition of nuclear deterrence forces and means, as well as their maintenance at a level sufficient to fulfil the assigned tasks;
- f) maintaining constant readiness of a designated part of nuclear deterrence forces and means for combat employment;
- g) centralization of the command over the employment of nuclear weapons, including those located outside the territory of the Russian Federation.

17. The nuclear deterrence forces of the Russian Federation include land-, sea- and air-based nuclear forces.

### **III. Conditions for the Transition of the Russian Federation to the Employment of Nuclear Weapons**

18. The Russian Federation reserves the right to employ nuclear weapons in response to the employment of nuclear and (or) other types of weapons of mass destruction against itself and (or) its allies, as well as in the event of aggression against the Russian Federation and (or) the Republic of Belarus as participants in the Union State with the employment of conventional weapons, which creates a critical threat to their sovereignty and (or) territorial integrity.

19. The conditions that enable the possibility of nuclear weapons employment by the Russian Federation are as follows:

- a) receipt of reliable data on the launch of ballistic missiles attacking the territories of the Russian Federation and (or) its allies;
- b) employment of nuclear or other types of weapons of mass destruction by an adversary against the territories of the Russian Federation and (or) its allies, against facilities and (or) military formations of the Russian Federation located outside its territory;
- c) actions by an adversary affecting elements of critically important state or military infrastructure of the Russian Federation, the disablement of which would disrupt response actions by nuclear forces;
- d) aggression against the Russian Federation and (or) the Republic of Belarus as participants in the Union State with the employment of conventional weapons, which creates a critical threat to their sovereignty and (or) territorial integrity;
- e) receipt of reliable data on the massive launch (take-off) of air and space attack means (strategic and tactical aircraft, cruise missiles, unmanned, hypersonic and other aerial vehicles) and their crossing of the state border of the Russian Federation.

20. The decision to employ nuclear weapons is made by the President of the Russian Federation.

21. The President of the Russian Federation may, if necessary, inform the military-political leadership of other states and (or) international organizations about the readiness of the Russian Federation to employ nuclear weapons or of the decision taken to employ nuclear weapons, as well as of the fact of their employment.

#### **IV. Tasks and Functions of Federal Government Authorities, Other Government Bodies and Organizations on the Implementation of State Policy on Nuclear Deterrence**

22. The state policy on nuclear deterrence is directed by the President of the Russian Federation.

23. The Government of the Russian Federation takes measures to implement economic policy aimed at maintenance and development of nuclear deterrence means, as well as shapes and implements foreign and information policy in the nuclear deterrence area.

24. The Security Council of the Russian Federation sets the main directions of military policy in the nuclear deterrence area, as well as coordinates the activities of federal executive authorities and organizations involved in the implementation of the decisions by the President of the Russian Federation related to ensuring nuclear deterrence.

25. The Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation, acting through the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, directly plans and implements organizational and military activities in the nuclear deterrence area.

26. Other federal executive authorities and organizations participate in the implementation of the decisions by the President of the Russian Federation related to ensuring nuclear deterrence in accordance with their authority.

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**Document No. 4. U.S. Department of Defense, *Report on the Nuclear Employment Strategy of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Department of Defense, November 15, 2024).<sup>4</sup>**

### **Report on the Nuclear Employment Strategy of the United States**

#### **Introduction**

On behalf of the President, and in accordance with 10 U.S.C., section 491 (Section 491), the Secretary of Defense is submitting this report on the Nuclear Employment Strategy of the

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<sup>4</sup> This report can be accessed at <https://media.defense.gov/2024/Nov/15/2003584623/-1/-1/1/REPORT-ON-THE-NUCLEAR-EMPLOYMENT-STRATEGY-OF-THE-UNITED-STATES.PDF>.



United States. With the President's issuance of new nuclear weapons employment guidance, and in advance of implementation of this guidance through Department of Defense (DoD) military guidance and updated plans, this report fulfills the requirements of Section 491.

## **Background**

The 2022 Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) established the Biden Administration's nuclear policy and posture. Building on the NPR, the President issued updated Nuclear Weapons Employment Planning Guidance of the United States (Guidance). This Guidance directly informs DoD's development of nuclear employment options for consideration by the President in extreme circumstances and establishes requirements that shape U.S. nuclear weapons capabilities and posture. Updating U.S. nuclear employment guidance is critical to ensuring that the Nation's nuclear forces, plans, and posture continue to adapt to a changing world.

## **Security Environment**

The United States confronts multiple nuclear competitors, with each adversary presenting unique challenges for U.S. strategists to confront, stressing strategic stability in diverse ways, and complicating deterrence challenges around the globe. Russia poses an acute threat with its large, modern, and diversified nuclear arsenal of strategic and theater-range weapons as well as its pursuit of novel nuclear systems. It has demonstrated its willingness to brandish nuclear weapons to shield its illegal and dangerous behavior. The People's Republic of China (PRC) has embarked on an ambitious expansion, modernization, and diversification of its nuclear forces and established a nascent nuclear triad. The PRC's lack of transparency and growing military assertiveness raise questions regarding its intentions, nuclear strategy, and doctrine. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) also continues to expand, diversify, and improve its nuclear, ballistic missile, and non-nuclear capabilities.

Any one of these nuclear challenges would be formidable itself, but the evidence of growing collaboration and collusion between Russia, the PRC, the DPRK, and Iran makes the situation even more challenging. There is a possibility of coordinated or opportunistic aggression by a combination of adversaries in a crisis or conflict, which requires U.S. strategists to think carefully about complex escalation dynamics and deterring multiple adversaries simultaneously, including in extended crises or conflicts.

## **Updated Guidance**

Because U.S. nuclear strategy and the U.S. nuclear deterrent remains flexible and resilient, the President's Guidance reflects more continuity than change with the approach of previous Administrations. Among other examples, the Guidance reaffirms that the President remains the sole authority to direct U.S. nuclear employment, and that the fundamental role of nuclear

weapons is to deter nuclear attack on the United States or its allies and partners. As the NPR notes, the United States would consider employing nuclear weapons only in extreme circumstances to defend the vital interests of the United States and its allies and partners.

Updated elements of the Guidance evolved from prior iterations by:

- Requiring that planning accounts for the new deterrence challenges posed by the growth, modernization, and increasing diversity of potential adversaries' nuclear arsenals;
- Directing that the United States be able to deter Russia, the PRC, and the DPRK simultaneously in peacetime, crisis, and conflict;
- Effectuating the 2022 NPR decision to rely on non-nuclear overmatch to deter regional aggression by Iran as long as Iran does not possess a nuclear weapon;<sup>5</sup>
- Requiring the integration of non-nuclear capabilities into U.S. nuclear planning where non-nuclear capabilities can support the nuclear deterrence mission;
- Stressing the importance of managing escalation in U.S. planning for responding to limited strategic attack; and
- Enabling deeper consultation, coordination, and combined planning with NATO and Indo-Pacific allies and partners in order to strengthen U.S. extended deterrence commitments.

## **Guiding Principles**

The Guidance is consistent with U.S. declaratory policy as articulated in the 2022 NPR. As long as nuclear weapons exist, the fundamental role of U.S. nuclear weapons is to deter nuclear attack on the United States or its allies and partners. The roles of nuclear weapons in United States strategy are to deter strategic attack, assure allies and partners, and enable achievement of national objectives in extreme circumstances if deterrence fails.<sup>6</sup> These roles are interrelated and complementary and provide the basis for developing and assessing U.S. nuclear strategies, policies, and capabilities. They also undergird all U.S. national defense priorities.

The United States will not use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapon states that are party to the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) and in compliance with their nuclear non-proliferation obligations. For all other states, there remains a narrow

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<sup>5</sup> The United States remains resolved to prevent Iran from developing a nuclear weapon and is prepared to use all elements of national power to ensure that outcome.

<sup>6</sup> Strategic attack is defined as a nuclear attack of any scale as well as a significant, high-consequence, non-nuclear attack that has strategic-level effect.

range of contingencies in which U.S. nuclear weapons may still play a role in deterring attacks that have strategic effect against the United States or its allies and partners.

U.S. nuclear strategy can best be described as tailored deterrence with flexible capabilities. Deterrence is at its core an effort to influence an adversary's decision calculus. As such, U.S. strategy to deter a potential adversary is a function of the unique characteristics of that adversary - from its geopolitical goals to leaders' perceptions, to strategy, doctrine and capabilities.

### **Planning Guidance**

Planning for nuclear operations supports deterrence on a daily basis, and provides options to the President in extreme circumstances. The Guidance continues to direct that DoD planning focus on only those objectives and missions that are necessary in the evolving security environment. It also instructs that the United States seek to end any conflict at the lowest level of damage possible on the best achievable terms for the United States and its allies and partners.

The Guidance requires DoD to conduct both deliberate and adaptive nuclear planning. Deliberate nuclear plans are tailored to deter and, if necessary, achieve objectives against specified nuclear-armed adversaries that pose a potential strategic threat to the United States and its allies and partners. All deliberate nuclear employment plans must contain the flexibility to tailor each response to the unique circumstances that would surround any nuclear crisis. Adaptive nuclear planning would be implemented as needed in a crisis or conflict to tailor deterrence operations and employment options in accordance with the emerging circumstances of a contingency.

Adaptive nuclear planning is required to facilitate integration with non-nuclear planning; support a flexible, responsive, and tailored nuclear strategy; and enable effective employment of nuclear weapons in a conflict. Deliberate plans are routinely reviewed by DoD's senior leadership, and adaptive planning is regularly exercised.

The Guidance continues to emphasize the need to, first and foremost, hold at risk what adversaries value most. It also reiterates the need to maintain counterforce capabilities to reduce potential adversaries' ability to employ nuclear weapons against the United States and its allies and partners, and does not rely on a counter-value or minimum-deterrence approach. The Guidance also requires that all nuclear plans must be consistent with the Law of Armed Conflict, which regulates the conduct of war. It reaffirms that the United States will continue the practice of not targeting any country on a day-to-day basis and instead relies on open-ocean targeting. It also instructs DoD to continue to minimize the number of nuclear weapons needed to achieve objectives.

While recognizing that nuclear weapons continue to provide unique deterrence effects that no other element of U.S. military power can replace, the Guidance places greater emphasis on the use of non-nuclear capabilities to support the nuclear deterrence mission, where feasible. Such integration allows the Joint Force to combine nuclear and non-nuclear capabilities in complementary ways that leverage the individual characteristics of diverse forces. Further, allies can contribute to nuclear deterrence by alleviating burdens on U.S. conventional or dual-capable forces, or by augmenting their own conventional support to enable U.S. nuclear operations in a contingency.

The Guidance requires that all plans for responding to limited nuclear attack or significant, high-consequence non-nuclear attack that has strategic-level effect include an associated concept for favorably managing escalation, including reducing the likelihood of a large-scale nuclear attack against the United States or its allies and partners. This escalation management is increasingly important as the operating environment becomes more complex and creates the possibility of pathways for conflict escalation that may not be well understood or easy to predict.

### **Nuclear Force Levels and Posture**

The requirement to develop and maintain a tailored deterrence strategy in support of both deliberate and adaptive nuclear planning in a dynamic security environment requires nuclear capabilities that are highly flexible and that can support a wide range of employment options.

To enable this tailored strategy, the United States is committed to retaining a nuclear Triad of strategic systems, capabilities suited to deter and respond to limited nuclear employment, and a modern and enduring nuclear command, control, and communication (NC3) system. The Triad provides mutually supporting attributes that, taken together, best maintain strategic stability while mitigating programmatic, technical, geopolitical, or operational risk. The United States also retains capabilities, such as dual-capable fighter aircraft, that contribute to deterrence of regional conflict and limited nuclear employment.

Modern, flexible, and tailorable U.S. nuclear forces are key to assuring allies and partners that the United States is committed to and capable of deterring the range of strategic threats that they face, and contribute to U.S. nonproliferation goals by convincing allies and partners that they do not need to pursue their own nuclear capabilities. Meeting this goal requires continuing to modernize U.S. nuclear forces and NC3 capabilities, and to sustaining legacy nuclear capabilities and NC3 systems until their modern replacements are fielded. It also requires a nuclear enterprise capable of managing geopolitical, technological, operational, and programmatic risks.

The United States will retain nuclear forces at current readiness levels unless circumstances warrant a change: intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) on day-to-day alert, and a portion of ballistic missile submarines at sea day-to-day. Other nuclear forces, including nuclear-capable bombers, remain in various stages of readiness. This combination of alert postures and capabilities contributes to strategic stability.

All U.S. nuclear systems are subject to multiple layers of control, and the United States maintains rigorous procedural and technical safeguards to prevent misinformed, accidental, or unauthorized launch. In all cases, the United States will maintain a human "in the loop" for all actions critical to informing and executing decisions by the President to initiate and terminate nuclear weapons employment.

While the United States maintains the capability to launch nuclear forces under conditions of an ongoing nuclear attack, it does not depend on a launch-under-attack policy to ensure a credible response. The Guidance instructs DoD to continue to prioritize reducing any potential pressure to launch nuclear forces while under attack.

In an evolving security environment with multiple adversaries who are making nuclear weapons more central to their national security strategies, it may be necessary to adapt current U.S. force capability, posture, composition, or size in order to be able to fulfill the three stated roles of nuclear weapons. The Guidance instructs DoD to continuously evaluate whether adjustments should be made, considering a number of relevant factors, and, when appropriate, make recommendations to the President.

### **Arms Control, Risk Reduction and Strategic Stability**

The Guidance reinforces that deterrence alone will not address strategic dangers. Arms control, risk reduction, and nuclear nonproliferation play indispensable roles as well. Together, these are mutually reinforcing tools for preserving stability, increasing predictability, deterring aggression and escalation, reducing the consequences if deterrence fails, and mitigating the risk of nuclear arms racing and nuclear war.

The United States will abide by the central limits of the New START Treaty for the duration of the Treaty as long as it assesses that Russia continues to do so. The United States is also committed to future arms control with its nuclear-armed competitors, understanding that progress requires willing partners who are committed to reducing risks and who understand that managing rivalry through arms control is preferable to unrestrained competition.

The types of limits that the United States will consider in future negotiations will be influenced by the actions and trajectories of other nuclear-armed actors. Future bilateral agreements or arrangements with Russia, for example, will need to account for U.S. deterrence requirements and other strategic threats globally.

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**Document No. 5. Marek Menkiszak, *Winning the War with Russia (Is Still Possible)*. *The West's Counter-Strategy Towards Moscow*, Centre for Eastern Studies, October 2024, select excerpts.<sup>7</sup>**

### **Main Points**

- Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 is not an escalation of a local conflict over limited territory. It is an armed aggression aimed at subjugating or destroying an important European state, and simultaneously a stage in Russia's long-standing war against the Western community. At stake is an overturning of the current political and security order in Europe and the implementation of a fundamental revision of the global order by replacing democratic leadership with a coalition of dictatorships, including Russia. This conflict is systemic and there is no chance of de-escalation, at least as long as the dictatorial Putin regime remains in power in Moscow.
- Although Russia has regained the tactical initiative at the front, it still faces failure at the strategic level. [...] However, there are no signs that Moscow is abandoning its maximalist and hostile goals towards the West. Putin has become a hostage to the conflict, and thus making the entire Russian state and society hostages to it. The Kremlin is counting on the resolve of countries supporting Ukraine waning due to the protracted nature of the confrontation and its increasing human, economic, and political costs, as well as the Russian threats of escalation. If Ukraine does not face complete defeat or cease to exist as a state, it should at least be forced to accept Russian conditions for a temporary freeze of the conflict, which would severely limit its sovereignty. This would allow Russia to reconstitute and prepare for the next phase of the conflict, not just with Ukraine, but primarily with the West.
- Therefore, it is crucial to maximally weaken Russia's ability to wage war against Ukraine and the West, and in the long term, create conditions conducive to regime change, to replace the current dictatorial Putin regime. There are no easy or cost-free solutions in this regard. Measures should be taken in three stages. In the first phase, over the course of the next several months, it will be necessary to amass military support for Ukraine to stabilise the front and prepare for a future Ukrainian offensive. Its successes would open the way to political negotiations and a ceasefire on terms relatively favourable to Kyiv. In the second phase (over the course of several years), the goals would be to strengthen Ukraine through reconstruction, reform, and accession to Western structures, while simultaneously weakening Russia to the highest extent possible, primarily by intensifying sanctions. The third phase (over the next 15 years at least) would aim to achieve the strategic defeat of the Russian regime

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<sup>7</sup> This report can be accessed at [https://www.osw.waw.pl/sites/default/files/OSW-Report\\_Winning%20the%20war%20with%20Russia%20is%20still%20possible\\_net.pdf/](https://www.osw.waw.pl/sites/default/files/OSW-Report_Winning%20the%20war%20with%20Russia%20is%20still%20possible_net.pdf/).

through systematic pressure, the deepening of long-term trends unfavourable to Moscow, and the strengthening and correction of the global order.

- To maximise the chances of success, Western policy should be based on several pillars of political, economic and security actions, summarised as the five “D’s”: (1) **denying Russia the possibility of victory in the war** and ensuring Ukraine’s success, (2) **denying the Putin regime political legitimacy**, (3) **decoupling Russia economically from the West** and applying economic pressure, (4) **detering** Moscow, and (5) **defending** the NATO and partner states. There are no magical solutions, and political will is essential.
- For this strategy to succeed, the continued consolidation of the Western community in the political, security and economic spheres is especially important. Its objectives must be consciously accepted by the public. Additionally, it is necessary to build the broadest possible global coalition of states defending the fundamental principles of the international order against the countries that violate them, such as Russia. [...]

The primary goal of this text is to challenge the false belief that there is no alternative to the swift freezing of the armed conflict in Ukraine, which would, in practice, have to occur on terms dictated by the Kremlin. [...] In reality, entering peace negotiations with Russia now – essentially from a position of Ukrainian weakness – would almost exclusively benefit Moscow. [...]

Achieving this [victory] requires, above all, the recognition of the necessity to pursue a long-term, multi-faceted strategy – one that is calculated to span years, or even decades, of systemic conflict, likely to be more brutal than the Cold War era. This also entails accepting the need to bear the various costs of such a confrontation, costs that are certainly more advantageous than the alternative: facing the consequences of Moscow’s strategic success and that of its allies. [...]

Russia’s minimum objective is to gain strategic political control over the entire Ukrainian state. Conversely, the Ukrainian government and society (the latter being, unlike Russian society, a genuine political actor) will not, in the long term, accept any settlement that significantly limits their sovereignty or formally and permanently violates the territorial integrity of the state. [...]

The nature of the Russian power system – with its centralisation, personalisation of authority and traditional political and strategic culture, which values strong and determined leadership – has made Putin a hostage to the war in Ukraine, and the Russian people hostages to Putin. A clear defeat for Russia in this conflict would deal a massive blow to the regime’s reputation, potentially leading to internal destabilisation and, ultimately, the regime’s collapse.

However, a Russian success – achieving victory in Ukraine through a combination of military and diplomatic actions – would lead, if not to the destruction of the Ukrainian state, then at least to a significant limitation of its sovereignty [...]. This success would also likely push Moscow, perhaps after a brief pause, towards the implementation of further aggressive plans. [...]

The Kremlin seems to believe that the decisive factor for the outcome of the war in Ukraine is the level (more in terms of quality than quantity) of Western (especially American) military support. [...] **Moscow's immediate (short-term) goal**, therefore, is to deter and discourage the West from providing Ukraine with enough support to allow Kyiv to stabilise the front line and, at a later stage, even move to a counteroffensive. In the short- to medium-term, the Kremlin's next objective is to push for a revision of the current US and EU policies towards Ukraine, aiming for them to pressure Kyiv into accepting Russian terms for a ceasefire (or, ideally for Russia, a partial settlement of the conflict).

Russia's main intention is to convince the West that its own resources, determination, resilience, and willingness to bear the costs of the war exceed those of the West. This would mean it is in the West's interest to seek a quick freezing of the conflict at the cost of concessions to Moscow, which Ukraine would have to pay. In this scenario, at least some of the original goals of Russia's plan would be achieved, the Putin regime would be significantly strengthened, and the temptation to continue its aggressive policy towards the West would grow. [...]

The key to political stability in Russia, however, is not the mood of the masses but the views and attitudes of the political and business elites. [...] It appears that the relative stability of Putin's regime is based on two main factors. First is the longstanding fear among Russians (likely heightened in wartime) of the personal security consequences of opposing the Kremlin. For ordinary citizens, this includes a range of repressive measures stemming from draconian laws and their enforcement (job loss, expulsion from universities, fines, imprisonment, or even long-term detention). Disloyal members of the political-business elite risk not only losing their positions, financial benefits and a significant portion of their wealth and assets but, in extreme cases, also their lives and those of their loved ones. As long as this fear outweighs frustration over personal and collective losses, and the risk of taking active action against Putin and his associates is subjectively perceived as too high, it is unlikely that the current situation will change. [...]

The second key factor behind this status quo is the still-prevailing, though difficult to quantify, belief among at least part of the elite in the official propaganda's promise of a future "victory" for Russia in its confrontation with Ukraine and the West. [...] It seems that a growing portion of Russia's elite shares the belief that Ukraine's ability to resist and the West's willingness to provide long-term support are inevitably declining, and that there is a worsening crisis within the Western alliance and its member states. As long as this belief



persists, along with entrenched Russian stereotypes about the West (especially Western Europe) being weak, risk-averse, and prone to intimidation and corruption, the Kremlin may be able to maintain this confidence, thus ensuring the survival of the regime.

Ongoing **demographic crisis** is having a negative impact on internal stability. [...]

All of these factors and trends suggest that **in the next few years** (at least until 2026) – if Ukrainian resistance and Western pressure remain at current levels – **Russia will likely retain the ability to wage a high-intensity war without the threat of internal destabilisation. However, the longer the conflict drags on, the more the costs and risks will accumulate for Russia**, especially if Western support for Ukraine increases and sanctions on Russia are tightened. This is why Moscow prefers a relatively quick resolution to the conflict with Ukraine in its favour. [...]

**Putin's aggressive Russia poses a direct and serious threat to the security of the Euro-Atlantic region, as well as a challenge to global security.** For Ukraine and the majority of Central, Eastern and Northern European states, especially those bordering the Russian Federation (as well as those in the South Caucasus and Central Asia), this threat is existential [...] For other Western states, the danger lies in the negative consequences of Russia's ongoing aggressive policy, which could lead to the weakening or disintegration of key political, economic, and security structures (particularly NATO and the EU). Russia may also attempt to destabilise internal situations through political and economic subversion, acts of sabotage, cyberattacks and other hostile actions.

Globally, the Kremlin's policies increase the risk of regional crises, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and the continued threat of energy, food and trade crises, as well as the further erosion of international law and the basic principles of state interaction. [...]

The root of these threats is the current Russian regime itself – its dictatorial, neo-totalitarian nature, the composition of the narrow ruling group, and its perception of reality, its political objectives, and methods of achieving them. As long as this regime exists, and Putin – the chief instigator of the war with Ukraine and the West – remains in power along with his closest collaborators, who share his views and are actively involved in planning and leading the war, this threat will persist. [...]

[T]he main goal of the West and other countries that share its values and commitment to defending freedom should not merely be to halt Russia's ongoing aggression and minimise its damage. Of equal importance is the **creation of conditions that will lead to the removal of members of Putin's regime from power and enable a deep systemic change in the Russian Federation**, providing hope for a positive revision of its foreign policy [...]. Of course, this process will not be a direct result of Western actions, as the West does not

possess the tools to enact it. It will rather involve a series of political, economic, and informational measures designed to shape circumstances conducive to internal Russian actors (opposition activists, but primarily members of the broader elite) bringing about this change themselves. Achieving this goal will be very difficult [...]. However, the alternative – the continuation of the regime and its further pursuit of aggressive policies, likely with escalation – would be even worse for Western security and, more broadly, the international community. [...]

### **1. Short-term: stop Russia**

**In the short-term** (up to mid-2026), the primary objective of Western policy should be to concentrate and maximise political, economic, and military efforts, a strategy referred to as a “**surge**”. The goals of this surge should be: first, halting the current minor advances of Russian forces on the Ukrainian front; stabilising the front line; strengthening Ukraine’s overall resilience, especially to survive the winter of 2024/2025; and, in the meantime, equipping Ukrainian forces to launch offensive operations between summer 2025 and spring 2026. The success of these offensive actions would create a favourable backdrop for diplomatic talks, aiming – by 2026 – for a ceasefire and a temporary freezing of the conflict.

At this stage, it would be crucial to provide maximum support to Ukraine through the supply of both offensive (particularly continued provision of long-range missiles such as ATACMS and Storm Shadow/SCALP, as well as fighter jets in numbers that would bear a significant impact on the battlefield) and defensive weaponry (especially air defence systems), artillery ammunition (through increased production in Western countries by 2025), tanks, infantry fighting vehicles, and emergency assistance in the energy sector (electricity, fuel, heating materials, generators, and other energy-related equipment). Another critical element of this policy would be the **removal of existing restrictions on the use of advanced Western weapons against military and critical infrastructure targets (especially energy facilities) deep inside Russia**. It would also be essential to resist Moscow’s pressure – using both threats of escalation and pseudo-offers of “peace” (on its terms) – to rush into negotiations that would weaken support for Ukraine and ease pressure on Russia.

The political goal of this phase would be to convince Russian elites that achieving the Kremlin’s political objectives in Ukraine is impossible in the near future – whether by military or diplomatic means – and that the costs for Russia (in political, economic and security terms) are rising sharply, especially if large-scale fighting were to extend onto Russian territory. [...]

Continuing the war, even in a limited form, is necessary for the Putin regime to maintain a sense of threat, an instrument of social control and disciplining the elites, while also justifying economic difficulties. It thus seems likely that Russia will aim to initiate “peace talks” without halting military actions, maintaining pressure on both Ukraine and the West,

hoping that increasing war fatigue will improve its chances of negotiating the most favourable terms for a temporary freezing of the conflict. Simultaneously, we can expect the Kremlin to attempt to intimidate key Western states further and push them to accept Russian demands by escalating hybrid warfare against the West in a limited fashion.

## **2. Medium-term: weaken Russia**

It is important to understand that the ceasefire agreement outlined in the previous phase would not signify the end of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, much less the hybrid war that Russia is waging against the West. [...] Its inevitable consequences would include reducing the burdens and costs for Russia from intense military operations and increasing the efficiency of its preparations for a future armed confrontation, not only with Ukraine but also with NATO states. [...] Furthermore, this would likely coincide with a similar process being undertaken by China, and by around 2030, both Russia and China would have developed the capability to launch significant offensive actions against the West in their respective theatres (Moscow in Europe and Beijing in East Asia). This would substantially increase the risk of either the opportunistic exploitation of one power's offensive by the other for its own strategic gains or even fully coordinated action by both states in a quasi-alliance. [...]

On the other hand, this would reduce Ukraine's substantial current costs of waging high-intensity warfare (including human and material losses), enabling the implementation of an ambitious economic recovery plan for Ukraine with Western support, while it would also make significant progress in its integration into Western structures [...]. This would strengthen Ukraine's state, economy and military, giving it several years to build up its military potential in cooperation with the Western countries. In particular, the rebuilding and training of Ukrainian reserves and specialised personnel, as well as the creation of efficient logistics chains to support the armed forces, would be crucial. For the West, this scenario would also slightly reduce the current economic burdens and lower the internal political risks associated with an increasingly unpopular war. Most importantly, it would provide time for the development of its own industrial potential, including the defence sector (such as weapons and ammunition production both for internal needs and support for Ukraine), and the implementation of plans to enhance military capabilities.

While Western military support for Ukraine would be essential in the short-term phase, in the medium-term (up to around 2030), economic pressure on Russia would take on greater significance. The primary political goal during this period would be to weaken the Putin regime as much as possible by maximising Russia's socio-economic and political problems, and particularly by hindering the development of its military potential [...].

At the same time, the aim would be to strengthen Ukraine and other countries threatened by Russia's neo-imperial policies (such as Moldova) to the point where, with Western support, they can effectively defend themselves. Other key objectives would include maximising the

resilience of the West itself, skilfully managing the political challenges, boosting economic capacity and, above all, expanding defensive capabilities – particularly in European countries. The political goal of these actions would be to reach a sufficiently high level of deterrence to prevent Russia from resuming large-scale aggression against Ukraine or NATO member states. This would be served especially by the potential accession of Ukraine to NATO and the EU. [...]

### **3. Long-term: defeat Russia**

Given the systemic nature of the conflict with the Russian Federation, the West must be prepared for a **prolonged and exhausting confrontation with Russia**, especially if the aforementioned strategy of a surge does not lead to a turning point. In this scenario, economic pressure tools, particularly **sanctions** and measures aimed at gradually isolating the Putin regime internationally, will become increasingly important. Simultaneously, a deeper consolidation and strengthening of the West's capacity and resilience will be necessary. [...]

**The long-term goal (over the next several decades) of Western policy towards Russia should be to deliver a strategic defeat to Russia** – understood primarily as the maximal weakening of its ability to conduct aggressive foreign policy and the prevention of the Kremlin's ambitions to fundamentally revise or destroy the regional and global order.

**The optimal scenario would involve a profound political transformation in Russia [...].**

However, the realisation of this scenario would likely require several significant factors to occur simultaneously, including a serious shock triggered by external circumstances (such as losing a war and/or a deep economic crisis) and the loss of system stability due to internal tensions. Although this situation is not impossible (it is difficult to predict), a more probable scenario at present seems to be the **gradual decay of the neo-totalitarian Putin system until it reaches a crisis or implosion** due to growing internal problems, largely driven by external pressures. [...]

In the long term, maintaining or – optimally – systematically increasing sanctions pressure on Russia, as well as Western countries refusing to return to pre-2022 trade and economic cooperation (especially in energy and technology), is of particular importance.

The greatest challenge to this policy is, on one hand, the direct and indirect costs borne by the West, which are causing growing resistance in some countries [...], and on the other, the actual support Russia receives from non-Western states. [...] It is therefore crucial to clearly define a “red line”, the crossing of which would result in sanctions against any third-party entities (including those in Western countries) that violate it. Furthermore, large-scale economic cooperation with Russia, especially in the energy sector (such as the import of

Russian resources, transportation, and insurance), remains problematic. Dialogue and persuasion, including offering alternative cooperation projects, play a vital role in addressing this issue. [...]

## **V. WESTERN POLICY TOOLS TOWARDS RUSSIA: THE FIVE “D’s” [...]**

### **1. Denying Russia a chance for victory**

A key factor legitimising the Putin regime and maintaining the political loyalty of the broader elite to the Kremlin – apart from the fear of repression – is fostering the belief in a future victory (even if distant and achieved at great cost in lives and sacrifices). Depriving these elites of hope for Russia’s success in the war (optimally through delivering a spectacular defeat to Russian forces, humiliating Putin and his associates, and exposing their inefficiency and impotence), which would compound the rising costs of isolation and sanctions is essential and the only way to create strong incentives for internal conflicts within the Russian elite. [...]

One alternative is to achieve a similar effect by intensifying long-term political, economic and security pressure on Russia, while continuing support for Ukraine. This will systematically increase the costs of Russian aggression, while simultaneously denying Moscow any hope of achieving its strategic objectives regarding Ukraine and the West. [...]

Preventing Ukraine’s defeat and, even more so, increasing the chances of a convincing victory, would require an increase in the already significant military, financial-economic, and political efforts of the Western community. [...]

It is crucial to avoid statements that suggest a lack of confidence in the long-term resilience and effectiveness of Ukraine’s resistance or Western support for it, as well as any indication of serious concern about Russia’s capabilities, its willingness to escalate and the potential consequences. Furthermore, the West should avoid rhetoric that encourages self-restraint, particularly in military security. Declarations of unwillingness to seriously harm Russia, setting “red lines” for Western policy (rather than for Russia’s), or suggesting a time frame for the end or freezing of the conflict are politically and psychologically harmful.

Statements of this kind reinforce the Kremlin’s belief (and that of the broader Russian elite) that the West is not sufficiently determined to endure the current confrontation, especially in the long term, and thus can be “waited out” until a final success is achieved. This strengthens the belief in the future effectiveness of Russia’s aggressive policies and discourages any potential revision of these policies by the Kremlin. It also increases the temptation for further escalation on Russia’s part and bolsters its image in the eyes of the domestic elite, thereby enhancing the cohesion of the regime. [...]

It [effective Western strategic communication] should emphasise confidence and a lack of hesitation or concern, convey calm determination, highlight the inevitability of fulfilling previous commitments, and focus on the negative consequences for Russia that result from the use of these measures. At the same time, Western communication should ignore Russian threats. [...]

## **2. Denying the Putin regime political legitimacy**

It is crucial to continue active diplomacy and efforts aimed at maximising Russia's political isolation. It is important to remember that any high-level dialogue with Moscow, regardless of the stated intentions or content, is used by the Kremlin and Russian state propaganda to bolster Putin's prestige and convince the Russian elites and society that Russia cannot be isolated. This dialogue also reinforces the belief that the West still fears Russia and is willing to make concessions to de-escalate the conflict, as it has grown tired of it. [...]

## **3. Decoupling Russia from the West and economic pressure**

In the economic sphere, it is crucial to pursue a rapid and complete decoupling from economic cooperation with Russia, particularly in importing energy resources and other strategic materials (e.g. rare earth metals, noble gases, etc.). This process is already underway but needs to be accelerated and made irreversible. This necessitates significant investments in diversifying both the sources and routes of raw material imports, including energy, and in securing alternative energy sources. Additionally, it will be vital to further support the development of energy-saving technologies, renewable energy sources (RES), and nuclear energy. This effort also requires a shift in the economic model (especially in industry) in the EU and other Western countries towards being less energy-intensive and more technologically advanced, thereby enhancing competitive advantages in these areas.

**Western policy should not only focus on maintaining but also on increasing pressure on Russia, primarily through sanction mechanisms** (and this should equally apply to Belarus, as Lukashenka's dictatorial regime is a co-participant in the aggression against Ukraine and lacks political independence). It is essential to prevent the Russian elite from perceiving that the West is growing weary of the costs of sanctions and might gradually withdraw from them under some pretext, even without concessions from Moscow.

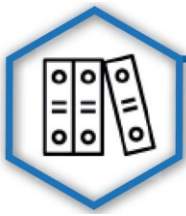
Although the current Western sanctions have not caused a collapse of the Russian economy, they have condemned it to a prolonged crisis, gradual de-modernisation, a decline in living standards, and a weakening of its international position. However, to achieve the desired effect, long-term actions will be required. [...]

#### **4. Deterrence and defence**

There is no indication that Putin's Russia has abandoned its aggressive strategic objectives, not only towards Ukraine but also against the Western community. Therefore, it is crucial to deprive the Kremlin of any hope of achieving these goals in the foreseeable future and to deter Russia from further escalation of aggression against Ukraine and NATO member states.

Maintaining and enhancing Western military capabilities, especially NATO's collective defence, is essential to prevent any miscalculation by Moscow. Strengthening defensive and deterrent measures through robust military deployments, strategic planning, and effective coordination among Western allies must continue to be a central priority. Additionally, ensuring long-term support for Ukraine to bolster its defensive capabilities remains critical to countering Russia's expansionist agenda. [...]

Ukraine is today the place where not only its own fate and that of Eastern Europe, the European continent, Russia and the so-called post-Soviet space are being determined. The ongoing war will largely decide the future of the West as a political community based on shared or converging values, interests and institutions and, ultimately, the global balance of power and the principles of the international order. [...]



## FROM THE ARCHIVE

By the late 1970s, the disconnect between the U.S. intelligence community's assessments of the Soviet military programs and their actual trajectory became so divorced from reality that the Ford Administration agreed to pursue an independent assessment of Soviet air defense, missile accuracy, and strategic objectives. The "Team B" report changed how the Central Intelligence Agency evaluated the Soviet threat, pointing out pitfalls stemming from mirror-imaging, interpreting data without regard for Soviet cultural and political context, political pressures and consideration, inter-agency rivalry, and the habit of viewing each Soviet weapons' program, or other developments, in isolation from the others. Decades later, some of these analytical pitfalls still continue to permeate U.S. assessments of its adversaries, to the detriment of U.S. national security.

**U.S. Department of State, "Intelligence Report of Team B," *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976, Vol. 35, December 1976, select excerpts.*<sup>1</sup>**

### **SOVIET STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES: AN ALTERNATIVE VIEW REPORT OF TEAM B NOTE**

This document is one part of an experiment in competitive analysis undertaken by the DCI [Director of Central Intelligence] on behalf of the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board. The views expressed are those of the authors and do not represent either coordinated National Intelligence or the views of the Director of Central Intelligence.

### **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS**

The mandate of Team "B" was to take an independent look at the data that go into the preparation of NIE [National Intelligence Estimate] 11-3/8, and on that basis determine whether a good case could be made that Soviet strategic objectives are, in fact, more ambitious and therefore implicitly more threatening to U.S. security than they appear to the authors of the NIEs. [...] However, the Team made every endeavor to look objectively at the available evidence and to provide a responsible, non-partisan evaluation.

[...] The Report concentrates on what it is that the Russians are striving for, without trying to assess their chances of success. [...]

A certain amount of attention is given to the "track record" of the NIEs' in dealing with Soviet strategic objectives, in some cases going back to the early 1960's. The purpose of these historical analyses is not recrimination, which, given the Team's advantage of hindsight, would be pointless as well as unfair; rather, Team "B" found certain persistent

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<sup>1</sup> This report is available at <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v35/d171>.





flaws in the NIEs that do not disappear with the change of the teams responsible for drafting them. [...]

### **ANNEX: SOVIET STRATEGIC NUCLEAR FORCES AS PERCEIVED BY THE NIEs, 1962–1975: SUMMARY**

Team “B” found that the NIE 11–3/8 series through 1975 has substantially misperceived the motivations behind Soviet strategic programs, and thereby tended consistently to underestimate their intensity, scope, and implicit threat.

This misperception has been due in considerable measure to concentration on the so-called hard data, that is data collected by technical means, and the resultant tendency to interpret these data in a manner reflecting basic U.S. concepts while slighting or misinterpreting the large body of “soft” data concerning Soviet strategic concepts. The failure to take into account or accurately to assess such soft data sources has resulted in the NIEs not addressing themselves systematically to the broader political purposes which underlie and explain Soviet strategic objectives. Since, however, the political context cannot be altogether avoided, the drafters of the NIEs have fallen into the habit of injecting into key judgments of the executive summaries impressionistic assessments based on “mirror-imaging,” i.e., the attribution to Soviet decision-makers of such forms of behavior as might be expected from their U.S. counterparts under analogous circumstances. This conceptual flaw is perhaps the single gravest cause of the misunderstanding of Soviet strategic objectives found in past and current NIEs.

A fundamental methodological flaw is the imposition on Soviet strategic thinking of a framework of conflicting dichotomies which may make sense in the U.S. context but does not correspond to either Russian doctrine or Russian practice: for example, war vs. peace, confrontations vs. détente, offense vs. defense, strategic vs. peripheral, nuclear vs. conventional, arms limitations vs. arms buildup, and so on. In Soviet thinking, these are complementary or mutually supporting concepts, and they by no means exclude one another.

One effect of “mirror-imaging” is that the NIEs have ignored the fact that Soviet thinking is Clausewitzian in character, that is, that it conceives in terms of “grand strategy” for which military weapons, strategic ones included, represent only one element in a varied arsenal of means of persuasion and coercion, many of them non-military in nature.

Another effect of “mirror-imaging” has been the tendency to misconstrue the manner in which Soviet leaders perceive the utility of those strategic weapons (i.e., strategic nuclear forces) to which the NIEs do specifically address themselves. The drafters of NIE 11–3/8 seem to believe that the Soviet leaders view strategic nuclear weapons much as do their U.S. analogues. Since in the United States nuclear war is generally regarded as an act of

mutual suicide that can be rational only as a deterrent threat, it is assumed that the USSR [Union of Soviet Socialist Republics] looks at the matter in the same way. The primary concern of Soviet leaders is seen to be the securing of an effective deterrent to protect the Soviet Union from U.S. attack and in accord with the Western concept of deterrence. The NIEs focus on the threat of massive nuclear war with the attendant destruction and ignore the political utility of nuclear forces in assuring compliance with Soviet will; they ignore the fact that by eliminating the political credibility of the U.S. strategic deterrent, the Soviets seek to create an environment in which other instruments of their grand strategy, including overwhelming regional dominance in conventional arms, can better be brought to bear; they fail to acknowledge that the Soviets believe that the best way to paralyze U.S. strategic capabilities is by assuring that the outcome of any nuclear exchange will be as favorable to the Soviet Union as possible; and, finally they ignore the possibility that the Russians seriously believe that if, for whatever reason, deterrence were to fail, they could resort to the use of nuclear weapons to fight and win a war. The NIEs tendency to view deterrence as an alternative to a war-fighting capability rather than as complementary to it, is in the opinion of Team "B", a grave and dangerous flaw in their evaluations of Soviet strategic objectives.

Other manifestations of "mirror-imaging" are the belief that the Russians are anxious to shift the competition with the United States to other than military arenas so as to be able to transfer more resources to the civilian sector; that they entertain only defensive not offensive plans; that their prudence and concern over U.S. reactions are overriding; that their military programs are essentially a reaction to U.S. programs and not self-generated. The NIEs concede that strategic superiority is something the Soviet Union would not spurn if it were attainable; but they also feel (without providing evidence for this critical conclusion) that Russia's leaders regard such superiority as an unrealistic goal and do not actively pursue it.

Analysis of Soviet past and present behavior, combined with what is known of Soviet political and military doctrines, indicates that these judgments are seriously flawed. The evidence suggests that the Soviet leaders are first and foremost offensively rather than defensively minded. They think not in terms of nuclear stability, mutual assured destruction, or strategic sufficiency, but of an effective nuclear war-fighting capability. They believe that the probability of a general nuclear war can be reduced by building up one's own strategic forces, but that it cannot be altogether eliminated, and that therefore one has to be prepared for such a war as if it were unavoidable and be ready to strike first if it appears imminent. There is no evidence that the Soviet leadership is ready, let alone eager, to reduce the military budget in order to raise the country's standard of living. Soviet Russia's habitual caution and sensitivity to U.S. reactions are due less to an inherent prudence than to a realistic assessment of the existing global "correlation of forces;" should this correlation (or the Soviet leaders' perception of it) change in their favor, they could be expected to act with greater confidence and less concern for U.S. sensitivities. In fact, there

are disturbing signs that the latter development is already taking place. Recent evidence of a Soviet willingness to take increased risks (e.g., by threatening unilateral military intervention in the Middle East in October 1973,<sup>2</sup> and supporting the Angola adventure<sup>3</sup>) may well represent harbingers of what lies ahead.

Soviet doctrine, confirmed by the actions of its leadership over many decades has emphasized—and continues to emphasize—two important points: the first is unflagging persistence and patience in using the available means favorably to mold all aspects of the correlation of forces (social, psychological, political, economic and military) so as to strengthen themselves and to weaken any prospective challengers to their power; the second is closely to evaluate the evolving correlation of forces and to act in accordance with that evaluation. When the correlation is unfavorable, the Party should act with great caution and confuse the enemy in order to gain time to take actions necessary to reverse trends in the correlation of forces. When the correlation of forces is favorable, the Party is under positive obligation to take those actions necessary to realize and nail down potential gains, lest the correlation of forces subsequently change to a less favorable position. (It is noteworthy that in recent months one of the major themes emphasized in statements by the Soviet leadership to internal audiences urges the “realization” of the advances brought about by the favorable evolution of forces resulting from détente and the positive shift in the military balance.)

We are impressed by the scope and intensity of Soviet military and related programs (e.g., proliferation and hardening of its command, control and communications network and civil defense). The size and nature of the Soviet effort which involves considerable economic and political costs and risks, if long continued in the face of frustrated economic expectations within their own bloc and the possibility that the West may come to perceive the necessity of reversing current trends before they become irreversible, lead to the possibility of a relatively short term threat cresting, say, in 1980 to 1983, as well as the more obvious long range threat.

The draft NIE’s do not appear to take any such shorter range threat seriously and do not indicate that the threat itself, or its possible timing, have been examined with the care which we believe the subject deserves.

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<sup>2</sup> In response to Israel’s violations of the United Nations ceasefire resolution ending the 1973 Arab-Israeli War, Brezhnev, on October 24, 1973, sent Nixon a letter threatening unilateral Soviet intervention into the conflict to enforce the ceasefire provisions. “I’ll say it straight,” he told Nixon, “If you find it impossible to act jointly with us in this matter we should be faced with the necessity urgently to consider the question of taking appropriate steps unilaterally.” Brezhnev’s letter to Nixon is Document 267 in *Foreign Relations, 1969–1976*, Vol. XXV, Arab-Israeli Crisis and War, 1973.

<sup>3</sup> For Soviet involvement in Angola, see Documents 221, 233, 238, 241, and 242 in *Foreign Relations, 1969–1976*, Vol. XVI, Soviet Union, August 1974–December 1976.

Although in the past two years the NIEs have taken a more realistic view of the Soviet military buildup, and even conceded the possibility that its ultimate objective may well exceed the requirements of deterrence, they still incline to play down the Soviet commitment to a war-winning capability. Three additional factors (beside those mentioned above) may account for this attitude:

1. Political pressures and considerations. On some occasions the drafters of NIE display an evident inclination to minimize the Soviet strategic buildup because of its implications for détente, SAL [Strategic Arms Limitation] negotiations, congressional sentiments as well as for certain U.S. forces. This is not to say that any of the judgments which seem to reflect policy support are demonstrably directed judgments: rather they appear to derive mainly from a strong and understandable awareness on the part of the NIE authors of the policy issues at stake.

2. Inter-agency rivalry. Some members of Team "B" feel that the inclination of the NIEs to downplay military threats is in significant measure due to bureaucratic rivalry between the military and civilian intelligence agencies; the latter, being in control of the NIE language, have a reputation for tempering the pessimistic views of military intelligence with more optimistic judgments.

3. The habit of viewing each Soviet weapons' program, or other development, in isolation from the others. The NIEs tend to assess each Soviet development as in and of itself, even when it is evident that the Russians are pursuing a variety of means to attain the same objective. As a result, with each individual development minimized or dismissed as being in itself of no decisive importance, the cumulative effect of the buildup is missed. [...]

As concerns the first, Team "B" agreed that all the evidence points to an undeviating Soviet commitment to what is euphemistically called "the worldwide triumph of socialism" but in fact connotes global Soviet hegemony. Soviet actions give no grounds on which to dismiss this objective as rhetorical exhortation, devoid of operative meaning. The risks consequent to the existence of strategic nuclear weapons have not altered this ultimate objective, although they have influenced the strategy employed to pursue it. "Peaceful coexistence" (better known in the West as détente) is a grand strategy adapted to the age of nuclear weapons. It entails a twin thrust: (1) stress on all sorts of political, economic, ideological, and other non-military instrumentalities to penetrate and weaken the "capitalist" zone, while at the same time strengthening Russia's hold on the "socialist" camp; and (2) an intense military buildup in nuclear as well as conventional forces of all sorts, not moderated either by the West's self-imposed restraints or by SALT [Strategic Arms Limitation Talks].

In its relations with the United States, which it views as the central bastion of the enemy camp, the Soviet leadership has had as its main intermediate goals America's isolation from

its allies as well as the separation of the OECD [Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development] nations from the Third World, which, it believes, will severely undermine “capitalism’s” political, economic, and ultimately, military might.

With regard to China, while the spectre of a two-front war and intense ideological competition have to an important degree limited the Soviet Union’s freedom of action in pursuance of their goals against the West, it has not proved an unlimited or insuperable limitation. Further, given current trends in the growth of Soviet military power, the U.S. cannot confidently anticipate that concern with China will deter the USSR from increasingly aggressive policies toward the West.

As concerns the more narrowly defined military strategic objectives, Team “B” feels the USSR *strives for effective strategic superiority in all the branches of the military, nuclear forces included*. For historic reasons, as well as for reasons inherent in the Soviet system, the Soviet leadership places unusual reliance on coercion as a regular instrument of policy at home as well as abroad. It likes to have a great deal of coercive capability at its disposal at all times, and it likes for it to come in a rich mix so that it can be optimally structured for any contingency that may arise. After some apparent division of opinion intermittently in the 1960’s, the Soviet leadership seems to have concluded that nuclear war could be fought and won. The scope and vigor of Soviet strategic programs leave little reasonable doubt that Soviet leaders are indeed determined to achieve the maximum possible measure of strategic superiority over the U.S. Their military doctrine is measured not in Western terms of assured destruction but in those of a war-fighting and war-winning capability, it also posits a clear and substantial Soviet predominance following a general nuclear conflict. We believe that the Russians place a high priority on the attainment of such a capability and that they may feel that it is within their grasp. If, however, that capability should not prove attainable, they intend to secure so substantial a nuclear war-fighting advantage that, as a last resort, they would be less deterred than we from initiating the use of nuclear weapons. In this context, both détente and SALT are seen by Soviet leaders not as cooperative efforts to ensure global peace, but as means more effectively to compete with the United States. [...]