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# Deterrence in a New Security Environment

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## Conclusions

- One cannot quarrel with those who seek the ultimate elimination of nuclear weapons, *provided the necessary preconditions are met . . . those prerequisites do not exist today.*
- Public debate on nuclear arms control tends to focus on numbers of weapons . . . the most important criterion in assessing prospective arms control measures is whether or not they contribute to stability and security.
- The United States and Russia have achieved many advances in arms control and strategic stability since the end of the Cold War.
- Radical reductions in forces or the wholesale removal of forces from alert may create situations which could be dangerously destabilizing in a crisis.
- States with the potential to threaten the United States and its allies continue to seek nuclear, biological and chemical weapons.
- The United States must be prepared to pose unacceptable risks to any potential adversary . . . at the moment, nuclear weapons are an indispensable part of that capability.
- In a way not always appreciated, America's nuclear forces also complement efforts to restrict nuclear proliferation by extending an important deterrent guarantee to our allies.
- The important issue is not the weapons with which one might fight the next major war, but to ensure that such a war does not occur . . . *deterrence will continue to be an indispensable element of national strategy.*

## The Role of Nuclear Weapons

The role of nuclear weapons in U.S. security policy following the Cold War has been the subject of much public discussion recently. The issues are complex-much more so than the headlines suggest. It's important that these issues be debated-it's essential that citizens in a free society understand them. The Cold War is over. It is important to recognize the many advances in arms control and strategic stability achieved by the United States and Russia in recent years. Following the 1993 Bottom-Up Review of our overall defense requirements, the Department of Defense embarked on a comprehensive review of the Nation's Nuclear requirements. That Nuclear Posture Review-completed in September 1994-noted "the reduced role nuclear weapons play in U.S. security" and held out the possibility of further arms control reductions. At the same time, the Review reaffirmed the importance of a triad of strategic nuclear forces-land-based intercontinental ballistic missiles, submarine-launched ballistic missiles, and strategic bombers-and stressed that, "as long as nuclear weapons remain a factor in international life" deterrence of attack on the United States and our allies "must be our objective."

A common criticism of the 1994 Nuclear Posture Review is that it appears to endorse the status quo by affirming many of the principles that existed in the Cold War. What has often not been appreciated is the extent to which America's nuclear posture has changed since the end of the Cold War. Consider, for example, the following:

- In September 1991, President George Bush took our strategic bombers off alert--up to that time, some 30% of those forces sat on strip alert, with weapons loaded on the aircraft and crews ready.
- Also in late 1991, President Bush announced that the United States was no longer developing any new nuclear weapons. The United States has not tested a nuclear weapon since that time and has signed the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT).
- President Bush also removed all nuclear weapons from America's ground forces, and put into storage the remaining non-strategic nuclear weapons. Following the recommendations of the 1994 Nuclear Posture Review, President William Clinton directed the Navy to abandon the capability of even employing nuclear weapons from its surface fleet. Overall, the United States has unilaterally reduced its non-strategic nuclear arsenal some 90% from Cold War levels.
- In 1993, Presidents Clinton and Boris Yeltsin agreed not to target each other's nations with ballistic missiles, an arrangement that went into effect in May 1994. That remains an important, albeit symbolic, characteristic of the changing U.S.-Russian strategic relationship.
- After signature of the START I Treaty in 1991, both the United States and Russia began dismantling and destroying missiles and aircraft to meet treaty limits, even though the treaty did not actually enter into force until December 1994.
- In that effort, the Nunn-Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction legislation has appropriated more than \$1.8 billion to assist in the dismantlement of former Soviet strategic systems.
- Under the START I Treaty, the United States and the former Soviet Union are reducing by half the 12,000 strategic nuclear weapons that were deployed in 1990. Both the United States and Russia are ahead of the START I reduction schedules.
- Indicative of those reductions, America's investment in its strategic offensive forces has declined 75% in real terms over the past decade. This compares with an overall reduction in defense spending over the last decade of approximately 33%.
- Today, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine are nuclear free.

We look forward to further reductions, consistent with U.S. interests. Under the START II treaty-which the Russian Duma has yet to ratify-those levels will further reduce to no more than 3,500.

In November 1996, I accompanied then-Defense Secretary William Perry when he met with Russian Defense Minister Igor Rodionov. We found a recognition-at least within the Ministry of Defense and on the part of the military leadership of Russia's strategic forces-that ratification of START II made political, economic, and military sense for Russia. As we stressed the benefits of START II, we reaffirmed an American willingness to consider further reductions once START II enters into force.

The future of nuclear arms control remains very hazy-much depends on the decisions that Russia makes. The United States has been actively discussing future arms control alternatives, in the event the Russian Duma agrees to ratify START II. Most of the public discussions about nuclear arms control tend to focus on numbers, but increasingly the real issues lie behind those numbers. The most important criterion in assessing prospective arms control measures is not whether it reduces the numbers of weapons, but whether they contribute to the stability of the relationship.

The United States does not view Russia as an enemy. Furthermore, both countries agree that the stability of the relationship must be preserved so that neither state fears that the other will seek strategic advantage. Over the past few years, a constructive relationship has been built between U.S. and Russian military officers who deal with strategic weapons-not just at the most senior levels, but also among field grade officers-visiting each nation's respective headquarters and operational and training facilities. These officers are the seed corn of tomorrow's leaders who can help break down distrust and old assumptions about our relationship. In December, Strategic Command had the privilege of hosting a seminar on strategic stability with officers of the Russian General Staff. It was an unprecedented and candid discussion-providing a good foundation for the future.

The Cold War may be over, but deterrence still rests on these perceptions:

- First-that aggression poses unacceptable risks . . .
- Next-that no potential adversary will have the opportunity to inflict a disarming strike . . .
- Finally-that any potential adversary will face an assured, significant and credible retaliatory capability.

Unfortunately, many proposals for radical reductions in forces or for the wholesale removal of forces from alert may create situations which-in a crisis-could prove destabilizing. Many, in fact, call for the ultimate elimination of nuclear weapons. One cannot quarrel with those who seek the ultimate elimination of nuclear weapons, provided the necessary preconditions are met. Indeed, the United States is committed in the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty to move toward nuclear disarmament, but this is part of broader obligations on the part of all states-such an objective can be achieved only after the political problems which produce violent conflict are solved, as well as a number of technical and

verification issues. The prerequisites for further reductions do not exist today.

For the foreseeable future, nuclear weapons will remain instruments of war prevention. In that respect, their function is not *solely* to deter nuclear use by others but to restrain war itself. Consider the following:

- Between the years 1400 and 1900, the world witnessed an estimated 4.5 million fatalities in war . . . about 1.5 % of the total world's population over those five centuries.
- In World War I, there were some 9 million fatalities—about twice that of the previous 500 years in the space of 4 years.
- In World War II, estimated fatalities numbered about 55 million—about 2.5 % of the world's population in a single conflict.
- In the 50 years since the end of World War II—and the beginning of the nuclear age and nuclear deterrence—less than one half of 1 % of the world's population has died in wars.

Throughout the Cold War, there have been numerous opportunities for major military conflict between the most powerful states, but those conflicts did not materialize. Clearly, the number of fatalities would have been horrific if we had not succeeded in deterring such major conflicts. As Sir Michael Quinlan of Britain's Ditchley Foundation recently noted in a bulletin published by the Atlantic Council, *"There can never again be a major war between states without nuclear risk."*

## **U.S. National Security Strategy and Nuclear Weapons**

The United States deters aggression by having nuclear weapons—with appropriate plans for their use, and a force posture with the flexibility, survivability, and responsiveness to provide the President with credible options. At about 3.5 % of our defense budget, America's strategic offensive forces represent what General John Shalikashvili, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, called "America's ultimate insurance policy." The President's Annual National Security Strategy states that the United States will *"maintain a triad of forces sufficient to deter any future hostile foreign leadership with access to strategic nuclear forces from acting against our vital interests, and to convince it that seeking a nuclear advantage would be futile."*

Russia remains the only nation capable of destroying America's way of life—which is why management of our strategic relationship with Russia remains such an important security objective. By most estimates, Russia retains some 20,000-25,000 nuclear weapons. The United States remains hopeful that Russia will continue to develop as a strong democracy, as well as a constructive partner in dealing with international crises, as in Bosnia today. At the same time, Russia's future is uncertain, and many in Russia remain unconvinced that continued cooperation with the West is in Russia's national interests.

China is another country with a substantial nuclear capability. As with Russia, the United States does not view China as a threat, but we recognize that the relationship is an important one that has to be managed carefully, lest the United States and China become adversaries in decades to come. Unfortunately, the

United States has not yet had the opportunity to engage with the Chinese in such extensive military-to-military discussions as it has with the Russians. The United States looks forward to the opportunity for building increased confidence, openness and trust.

## **Deterring Aggressive Regimes**

Several states have taken advantage of the end of the Cold War to seek to position themselves as regional powers with ambitions that threaten their neighbors as well as U.S. and allied interests. They seem to have decided that biological and chemical weapons, as well as nuclear weapons, may offer power and stature to leverage their relationships. Moreover, unlike the nuclear powers of the Cold War, those states now seeking weapons of mass destruction may actually decide to use them.

With these new threats in mind, the United States must be prepared to pose unacceptable risks to any potential adversary. Nuclear weapons are one-but not necessarily the only-means of doing that. As then-Defense Secretary Perry noted on more than one occasion last spring, *"Anyone who considers using a weapon of mass destruction against the United States or its allies must first consider the consequences. We would not specify in advance what our response would be, but it would be both overwhelming and devastating."*

America's nuclear forces also extend an important deterrent guarantee to U.S. allies-many of whom would otherwise face disturbing and potentially destabilizing questions about whether they needed their own nuclear weapons for their security against both regional and global threats. Thus, in a way not often appreciated, America's nuclear forces complement efforts to restrict nuclear proliferation. At the moment, there is no alternative.

## **What of the future?**

The United States has no new strategic systems and no new nuclear weapons under development. Having made some very wise investments during the Cold War, our systems will remain viable for at least 20 more years. The United States must ensure, however, that the industrial and technological capacity to sustain those systems over the long term is maintained.

The continuing safety and reliability of the nuclear weapons stockpile is a necessity. The President has termed this a "supreme national interest" -- one that could be the basis for withdrawing from the CTBT if a nuclear test were to be necessary to ensure a weapon's safety and reliability

But DOD is also looking at ways in which it can accomplish what it needs to do without relying as much on the retaliatory threat posed by nuclear weapons. At the moment, nuclear weapons are an indispensable part of that capability. In the future nuclear weapons may fade away as the cornerstone of deterrence, which may or may not, incidentally, be good news. The French scholar Raymond Aron called the 20th Century "the century of total war." In this century, warfare-or the threat of warfare-affected whole societies rather than just military forces. In the future, weapons may take different forms-perhaps energy,

perhaps information-but these new weapons may be just as devastating as nuclear weapons in their impact.

The important issue is not the weapons with which one might fight the next major war, but to ensure that such a war does not occur. Clearly, the world is seeing a lot of changes in the structure of international relationships-but not all of those changes necessarily bode well. Despite our best efforts, it's likely that future international relationships will be characterized by conflict. In that case, deterrence will continue to be an indispensable element of national strategy to ensure that conflict does not take its most violent, destructive forms.

General Habiger is the Commander-in-Chief of the U.S. Strategic Command. This paper is the result of a speech delivered to the Atlantic Council on February 10th in Washington, D.C. For more information contact Major Rod Gregory at (402) 294-2411 or DSN 271-2411.

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