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# Regional Deterrence Strategies for New Proliferation Threats

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## Conclusions

- The deterrence of armed aggression against the United States, its vital national interests, or its allies has moved beyond the requirements of conventional force deterrence. The proliferation of nuclear, biological, and chemical (NBC) weapons requires a new strategy to ensure effective deterrence against their use by regional states that could not win in a conventional conflict with the United States.
- Because proliferation has expanded to a number of regional actors, a single strategy is unlikely to be sufficient in deterring states with varied motivations, and social, economic, religious, cultural, and political backgrounds.
- The Unified Commands--principally the Pacific, Central and European Commands--provide a ready-made framework in which general U.S. deterrence strategies can be tailored to each proliferant state. While the Unified Commands would shape the individual deterrence strategies, the national command authority (NCA) would retain control of key decisions.
- Guidelines for NBC regional deterrence should include developing credible counterproliferation postures, profiling potential adversaries, tailoring our military capabilities to specific threats, integrating NBC preparedness into exercises and warplans, and actively pursuing coalitions designed to deter regional proliferators from threatening to use or using NBC weapons.

## Regional NBC Proliferation Challenges Deterrence Policy

In his latest *Annual Report to the President and the Congress*, Secretary of Defense William J. Perry

stated that "earlier assumptions that conflicts not involving the Soviet Union would be fought solely with conventional weapons needed to be reviewed and new guidance issued." Deterrence is at the center of this unfolding strategy: if nonproliferation policies fail to stop nuclear, biological, and chemical (NBC) weapons acquisition, the United States needs to be able to deter use or threats of use by regional proliferators when our interests or those of our friends and allies are threatened. From another perspective, this means that we cannot allow potential aggressors to believe that having NBC weapons in their hands will deter the application of superior U.S. military power, conventional or nuclear. But developing a strategy for deterring a growing and disparate group of NBC-armed nations from using or threatening to use these weapons in ways contrary to U.S. security interests poses challenges that differ in kind from the problem of deterring Soviet aggression, which consumed our attention and resources for more than 40 years.

National security policy continues to be centered around the geographic regions--Europe, Pacific, Middle East and South Asia, and Latin America--consistent with the focus of our key security commitments, the nature of our coalitions, and the way we plan and deploy our military forces. Given the relatively small number of known and the potential proliferators, a country-by-country counterproliferation approach is clearly necessary. But practical results can be achieved only through developing country-oriented NBC deterrence policies within the substantive and organizational framework of U.S. regional security policies and programs.

### **The Role of the Unified Commanders-in-Chief (CINCs)**

In structuring NBC deterrence strategies, the roles of the regional CINCs--notably CINCPAC, CINCCENT, and CINCEUR, within whose areas of responsibility (AORs) fall all the NBC proliferators of near-term concern--should be given special attention. For example, the Office of Technology Assessment (OTA) identified 14 NBC proliferators who either are known to have or are suspected of having nuclear, biological, or chemical weapons programs, at least over the near-to mid-term. These proliferators include: India, Pakistan, and Algeria (nuclear); Egypt, Burma, and Vietnam (chemical); Libya, Syria, and Taiwan (biological and chemical); and China, North Korea, Israel, Iran, and Iraq (nuclear, biological, chemical).

The Goldwater-Nichols Act gives the regional CINCs operational responsibility for U.S. military forces in their AORs. In peacetime, the regional CINCs are continuously on the front line, manifesting physical presence and political commitments. In crises, these CINCs would command U.S. forces, whether joint task forces deployed to contain conflicts or large-scale forces conducting major military operations. A leadership role for the regional CINCs in countering proliferation is consistent with the principal recommendation of the recently issued report of the Commission on Roles and Missions (CORM), which states that "every DoD element must focus on supporting the operations of the Unified CINCs."

In shaping NBC deterrence strategies, the regional CINCs would continue to work closely with relevant functional commands (for example, STRATCOM, TRANSCOM, and SOCOM) and with other U.S. agencies (notably the U.S. missions in their region). Within each AOR, a CINC-led regional team would develop tailored approaches to deter particular countries with certain estimated NBC capabilities who might have reason to use or threaten to use these weapons in various

circumstances. In doing so, they would take into account (1) the location of a potential NBC crisis, (2) the balance of gains and risks a potential aggressor is likely to see, (3) the interests motivating U.S. responses and the risks we might be prepared to take, (4) the full range of military, diplomatic, and economic assets we could bring to bear, (5) the prospect of multinational action, and (6) possible conflicts between NBC deterrence and other U.S. objectives.

Because of the high stakes involved in deterring and dealing with NBC-armed adversaries, the President and the NCA would have to endorse this approach, empower the CINCs, and remain engaged to ensure that the strategy was implemented. The President, through the NCA, would retain control of key decisions.

### **NBC Deterrence Capabilities**

U.S. military forces represent the cutting edge of any NBC deterrence strategy, and regional strategies must rely on this capability to be effective. If U.S. forces are not prepared to deter and counter NBC proliferation--or are not perceived to have these capabilities--the strategy will not be credible. Recognizing this challenge, the CORM report proposes that the Under Secretary of Defense (Policy) set up a "combatting proliferation coordinating committee" and that the JCS "develop a procedure for integrating the capabilities of the functional CINCs into DoD's overall planning for combatting proliferation."

Recently, official U.S. policy has stressed the importance of counterproliferation. The President's National Security Strategy (NSS) of July 1994 stresses that U.S. forces must "be prepared to deter, prevent and defend against" NBC use; must retain the capacity "to retaliate against those who might contemplate the use of weapons of mass destruction, so that the costs of such use will be seen as outweighing the gains;" and must develop the capacity to "disable" an opponent's NBC arsenal before use occurs. The latest National Military Strategy (NMS) reinforces these policies and adds that the U.S. continues to "make preparations to operate effectively in environments marked by biological, chemical, or radioactive contamination."

The DOD Counterproliferation Initiative supports the NSS and the NMS. Some specific DOD initiatives related to deterring and countering NBC threats include:

- Issuing the so-called Deutch Report, which "identified 16 priority technologies and programs with the greatest potential for making a contribution to the U.S. non-proliferation and counterproliferation technologies" in such areas as detection and characterization of NBC threats, ability to destroy or neutralize NBC weapons, and passive and active defenses against these threats.
- Undertaking a review of missions and functions that proposes guidelines on CINC responsibilities and discusses how the services might organize, train, and equip their forces to support the counterproliferation missions of each combatant command.
- Establishing a Deputy Director for Military Support at the intelligence community's Non-

Proliferation Center (NPC), assigning additional military personnel to the NPC, and requesting the Defense Intelligence Agency to place a higher priority on counterproliferation military intelligence.

- Supporting NATO's Defense Group on Proliferation (DGP) in assessing proliferation risks, in evaluating the operational implications of proliferation, and in understanding the capabilities needed to deter and counter NBC use.

Despite this apparent commitment to respond to the NBC proliferation challenge, critics argue that proliferation is not taken seriously enough or given high enough priority when it comes to defense planning and procurement. The case is made that the United States is not zeroing in on what is needed to deter NBC use in the two major regional contingencies (MRCs) that drive our force structure and budget--one in Korea and the other in the Middle East, both volatile places where the NBC threat is real. Critics believe that neither Defense Planning Guidance (DPG) nor regional warplans reflect the detailed force requirements and concepts of operation needed to deter NBC use and fight effectively in the event deterrence fails. They contend that such emphasis on counterproliferation is seen as being too hard, too costly, or distracting from the traditional and more likely mission of deterring and fighting a conventional war. For these reasons, some critics claim that the military services may not be structuring their forces or developing doctrine to support peacetime deployments and operations in areas that fall under an adversary's "NBC shadow."

### **Guidelines for Regional NBC Deterrence**

Regardless of which side of the argument most accurately portrays U.S. counterproliferation readiness, there are steps that can be taken to enhance that readiness. A series of principles should be considered by the CINCs, operational commanders, and defense planners in formulating and implementing a regionally oriented NBC deterrence strategy. Four such principles come to mind:

1. **Adopt a Credible Stance.** Through policy statements and tangible defense decisions, the U.S. military should project an image that we will have the resolve and the capability to deter and counter regional NBC threats when our interests are challenged. In presenting our NBC deterrence strategy, we should be sensitive to the importance of balancing the need for clarity and credibility against the benefits of deliberate uncertainty and flexibility. While stressing the power of U.S. conventional forces in being able to impose deterrence, we should remain somewhat ambiguous as to the role we expect our nuclear weapons to play--suggesting that they are the ultimate deterrence instrument we have available. We should, however, discriminate as appropriate between nuclear, biological, and chemical use by potential adversaries. This basic posture should be conveyed globally as national policy, but the regional CINCs should tailor this message for maximum impact on the proliferators through declaratory statements and force posturing, including counterproliferation exercises in the region with joint and combined forces.
- **Profile the Adversaries.** Working closely with the intelligence community, the regional CINCs should institute a process for developing and continuously updating the capabilities and the "personalities" of the NBC proliferators in their AORs. Capability assessments should

track NBC programs in terms of timing, scope, ability to inflict damage, location of sites, survivability, command and control, and economic viability. Central to this approach is neither to assume that potential NBC opponents are undeterrable nor that our architecture of deterrence will automatically work. Instead, we need to try to develop an understanding of how regional adversaries might think about deterrence and how we might best deter them from NBC threats or use. These assessments should cover such factors as motivations for acquisition, scenarios for use, willingness to take risks, and sophistication in understanding strategic concepts. Complete and accurate analyses of all those features cannot be expected, but new focus and higher priority might improve our understanding. A related objective would be to develop country-specific operational plans for regional NBC adversaries, giving the NCA a full menu of choices for applying U.S. military force against NBC targets with associated effectiveness estimates, confidence levels, collateral effects, and political constraints.

- **Adjust Military Capabilities and Strategy.** With the regional CINCs in the lead, defense planning, procurement, training, and doctrine should be systematically reviewed and modified as necessary to deter NBC use, respond to such use, and fight in an NBC environment. This not only should be done on a national level to develop generic counterproliferation capabilities, but should be evaluated vis-a-vis specific NBC adversaries over a wide range of scenarios. An annual counterproliferation "Net Assessment" should be conducted to determine the relative U.S. military position against changing NBC threats in each region. As part of this process, a serious commitment should be made to integrate the NBC threat into the plans for fighting the two MRCs that presently drive our force structure. These assessments should identify new technologies, doctrinal changes, and training requirements needed to ensure effective power projection and in-country operations against NBC-armed adversaries. Among the initiatives that might flow from such analyses are: (1) new strategies for dispersal of forces and operating from a distance; (2) preparation of forces to function with protective gear; (3) greater reliance on out-of-area basing, (4) incorporating response to NBC threats in the Joint Assessment processes and POM recommendations; (5) creative uses of special forces; (6) issuance of an updated and particularized series of doctrinal publications on NBC operations; and (7) establishment of joint task force packages prepared to deal with NBC threats in the various regions. These military initiatives should be designed to deal separately with nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons threats, with common approaches taken only when justified. Finally, defensive systems, notably theater missile defenses but also air defenses capable of defeating advanced cruise missiles, need to be pursued vigorously as elements of our evolving counterproliferation strategy.
- **Actively Form Coalitions.** The United States should not bear responsibility for deterring regional NBC adversaries alone. Other nations, in and outside of these regions, may well have even greater stakes than the United States in preventing NBC weapons from being used. Coalition support may increase the likelihood that deterrence will work. Warnings from multiple governments targeted against an NBC-armed "troublemaker" could not easily be ignored by a regional adversary. Although NATO is beginning to move forward in developing collective counterproliferation strategies, alliances move slowly and slip to least-common-denominator policies. While supporting NATO's efforts, the United States should

develop strategic alliances with key countries who share our NBC deterrence interests, focussed on particular proliferators. The UK and France, as nuclear powers with regional interests, represent crucial allies in this common effort. Russia is another candidate, along with key allies located in or near regions of concern--notably Japan, South Korea, Israel, Egypt, and our friends in the Persian Gulf. The CINCs should lead this effort, coordinating with other defense and civilian agencies. We should pursue with each potential ally a systematic series of strategy discussions, wargames, intelligence exchange exercises, and contingency planning sessions. The goal of these efforts should be to develop common bilateral principles and procedures that can make NBC deterrence more effective. Perhaps trilateral or multinational NBC deterrence coalitions can be formed among likeminded states.

Although regional strategies make the most sense, solutions to the problem of deterring NBC nuclear threats are not obvious. To move toward effective solutions, DoD must pay far more attention to this problem than it has in recent years. There needs to be a recognition that the military challenges posed by the proliferation of NBC weapons create differences in kind, not simply differences in degree, compared with both the Cold War nuclear challenges and the conventional contingencies currently driving our strategic planning. The stakes, risks, constraints, and uncertainties associated with this emerging problem are unique. Mistakes could be costly and potentially irreversible, even if limited NBC use occurs in a distant regional setting. It is time to think seriously about the "*new unthinkable*."

Mr. Kahan is Director of Regional Issues at the Center for Naval Analyses. This article is excerpted from a paper prepared and presented to a National Defense University (NDU) Working Group on "New Approaches to WMD Proliferation" and was presented at the final workshop session on June 19, 1995.

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