
MISSILE DEFENSES AND NEW APPROACHES TO DETERRENCE

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In order to respond to contemporary and emerging threats, the United States must change the way it thinks about and practices deterrence, says Kerry M. Kartchner, Senior Adviser for Missile Defense Policy, Office of Strategic and Theater Defenses in the State Department's Bureau of Arms Control. "We must redesign deterrence to be proactive rather than reactive," he says.

STRATEGIC SETTING

The world has changed dramatically since the end of the Cold War. Then, the focus of our foreign and defense policy was on the regulation of an extremely dangerous military standoff between two heavily armed superpowers. NATO and the Warsaw Pact were locked into an implacably hostile relationship with tens of thousands of nuclear weapons on high state of alert pointed at each other. The United States and its allies depended on nuclear forces to deter not only Soviet nuclear forces but also the more than one million conventional troops in Europe. It was from this world that the concept of mutual assured destruction emerged.

Today's world is fundamentally different. Contemporary security conditions, including both challenges and opportunities, display little resemblance to those of the past. Russian strategic capabilities have suffered a decade of decline and the formerly formidable Soviet armed forces have severely deteriorated in all categories. For the first time in half a century, it is difficult to conceive of a situation in which our relations with Russia could deteriorate into armed conflict. In fact, former members of the Warsaw Pact are now members of NATO, Russia participates in Balkan peacekeeping and is, itself, a member of the Alliance's Partnership for Peace program.

Yet our security — and that of friends and allies in regions of vital interest — is threatened. We are confronted with a more diverse and less predictable

set of threats than in the past. This includes both terrorists and states that operate outside the boundaries of international law and seek to threaten and employ force to achieve their political, territorial and ideological objectives. While our conventional military capabilities have served for the past decade to deter aggression by such states, and have defeated it when it occurred, these adversaries are actively pursuing new means to further their goals. Perhaps the most significant threat comes from rogue states armed with growing arsenals of chemical, biological and, in the future, nuclear weapons, as well as increasingly capable ballistic missiles as a means of delivery.

In a speech at the National Defense University on May 1, 2001, President Bush stated that "deterrence can no longer be based solely on the threat of nuclear retaliation." He called for "new concepts of deterrence that rely on both offensive and defensive forces." These new concepts of deterrence should help underwrite a comprehensive strategy for combating the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missile technology. Such a strategy will require the following components:

- Maintaining and improving core alliance relations, and reassuring friends that we are committed to ensuring a stable international order and that our security interests are inseparable from their own;
- Resolving challenges, rather than postponing them in a way that delays but makes even more dangerous the threats we will face in the future;

- Recasting our foreign policy to better integrate all sources of influence available to us; and
- Dissuading adversaries from undertaking hostile courses of action while retaining the capability to defeat aggression.

To be effective, our strategy must encompass a broad range of policies and programs, including proactive nonproliferation and threat-reduction efforts, counter-proliferation measures, and effective response capabilities to mitigate the consequences of the use of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). One essential ingredient for the success of this strategy is reshaping our military doctrine and capabilities to be responsive to contemporary and emerging threats. This will require the transformation of our deterrence posture. The strategic concepts and military forces of the past are ill-suited to counter the more pressing elements of today's threats. As a result, it is imperative to manage the transition to a more stable security environment by changing the way we think about and practice deterrence. We must redesign deterrence to be proactive rather than reactive. Deterrence of new threats requires new and different concepts and capabilities. The Department of Defense's recently completed Nuclear Posture Review is an important step in this direction. It lays the foundation for a diversified approach to deterrence that incorporates both conventional offensive strike capabilities and missile defenses, thus reducing our reliance on nuclear weapons.

CHANGED NATURE OF THE THREAT

A number of factors make the deterrence of these new threats more complex and more problematic. First, the discipline that came from the bipolar structure of the Cold War is no longer operative. Regional states have more opportunity to acquire the technologies and expertise needed for weapons of mass destruction and missiles and are less constrained in their use of force against their neighbors.

Second, while we assumed the Soviet leadership to be fundamentally risk-averse, the leaders of regional adversaries have shown a willingness to take substantial risks, even if such gambles have involved a major sacrifice of the lives of their people and their national treasure.

Third, the conditions we believed were necessary for successful deterrence in the past — such as mutual understandings and effective communications — may not be achieved easily with these states.

And finally, the symmetry of interests that existed in the U.S.-Soviet deterrent relationship, in which both sides put their very survival at stake, is not likely to exist in this new setting. Our potential adversaries may well believe that while their survival is at stake in a regional conflict, ours is not. As a consequence, they may calculate that we can and will back down when confronted with dire threats, such as WMD use, but that they cannot. This undercuts the effectiveness of using offensive threats alone to deter their decision-makers.

Such states see long-range missiles as especially valuable tools of coercion to deter the United States and its allies from coming to the assistance of their intended victims. The disparities in our favor in both conventional and nuclear forces are far less relevant in this type of desperate but rational calculation.

Adversaries may believe that they need hold only a handful of our cities or those of our allies at risk to prevent us from intervention. If they cannot win conventionally when the United States intervenes, and they are nevertheless determined to pursue goals that require the use of force, they must find a means of keeping the United States and other coalition members out of the fight and of overcoming their conventional military disadvantages. For this reason, WMD and missiles have become weapons of choice, not weapons of last resort as we formerly viewed them. As a result, the likelihood of the actual use of such weapons, including early in a conflict to shape the military and political battlefields, is much higher now than in the past.

ELEMENTS OF DETERRENCE

Effective deterrence will continue to depend on the perception by potential adversaries that the United States and its allies possess the capabilities and resolve to respond to aggression. However, the changed nature of the threats we face requires a fundamental realignment among the traditional elements of deterrence — reassurance (of friends and

allies), retaliation, denial and dissuasion. For the past 50 years each of these elements has supported our deterrence strategy. Although the relative contribution of each element fluctuated over time as a result of evolving political, military, and technological considerations, deterrence of the Soviet threat relied principally on a ready capability to retaliate massively with nuclear forces. We believed we understood what Soviet leaders valued and we held those assets at risk. Allies and friends, in turn, understood that our defense was inseparable from theirs and believed, accordingly, that deterrence was sound.

Exclusive reliance on offensive retaliation, while perhaps appropriate when our principal task was to deter Soviet expansion, is no longer appropriate. Deterring leaders of rogue states is much more dynamic: While we will seek to deter their use of force against neighbors and their use of weapons of mass destruction, they will try to use these very weapons to deter us from coming to the assistance of our friends and allies. To counter such threats, we can no longer rely on a posture founded primarily on the prospect of massive retaliation. Instead, we must seek to restructure the elements of deterrence, giving greater balance to denial and dissuasion. Such restructuring presents both challenges and opportunities.

The first challenge is to take advantage of technological opportunities to develop and deploy effective missile defenses that will devalue weapons of mass destruction and their delivery systems. The emergence of regional adversaries armed with chemical and biological weapons has already created a new emphasis on active and passive countermeasures. Acquisition by these adversaries of longer-range missiles capable of delivering nuclear weapons places an even greater premium on missile defenses, both to strengthen deterrence and to enable the United States and its allies to operate and prevail in theater conflicts if deterrence fails. Put simply, effective missile defenses can diminish the threat of missile attack against us or our allies by raising the costs required to make such an attack successful, and by threatening to defeat such an attack should it occur. Deterrence would be strengthened because an attack would be seen both as futile and as triggering a devastating response. A second challenge is to restructure U.S. nuclear capabilities — in numbers and characteristics — to

be responsive to today's threats. Moving to lower numbers will bring U.S. nuclear force levels in line with present-day requirements, while preserving the ability to respond to unexpected future events. This will be accompanied by a change in the way we think about nuclear weapons in particular and deterrence in general, while also providing a new foundation for the political relationship with Russia — one based on common interests and cooperative efforts to address shared threats.

A third challenge will be to examine advanced non-nuclear technologies which may enable the use of conventional weapons against targets that today can be destroyed only with a nuclear weapon.

REQUIREMENTS FOR DETERRENCE

The mix of offensive and defensive forces will vary depending on the different challenges ahead and will be guided by the following considerations:

Regional Challengers

Our relationship with states like North Korea, Iraq, and Iran will be defined largely by the threats they pose to U.S. interests, friends and allies. While there is substantial diversity among these states, they share a number of important characteristics. These states define the United States as their enemy and believe it stands as a major barrier to the accomplishment of their goals. One clear trend among these states is their aggressive pursuit of biological and chemical weapons, and in some cases nuclear weapons. Each of these states is also seeking longer-range ballistic missiles and each sponsors international terrorism.

In addition to strengthening deterrence, defenses contribute to dissuasion. A clear commitment to deploying defenses against ballistic missiles of all ranges makes evident that their intended intimidation and military use is likely to fail. This, in turn, could prompt regional challengers to forego their ballistic missile programs. Moreover, and perhaps most important, missile defenses could provide indispensable insurance against deterrence failure — a prospect of much greater likelihood than in the past. Missile defenses also could provide the means to defeat a missile attack once it is launched and to limit the damage which an enemy would seek to inflict.

The prospect of overwhelming response makes a critical contribution to the deterrence of today's threats from WMD. Forces that are visible and deployable offer perhaps the best prospect of influencing the calculation of adversaries and reassuring allies in the theater of conflict. The number of weapons required for this task is small even if the challengers were to act in concert.

Russia

Our political relationship with Russia involves a broad spectrum of activities — political, economic and military. This was formally registered in the Joint Declaration signed by Presidents Bush and Putin at the May 2002 Summit in Moscow. The United States will seek further integration of Russia into the international community and its full adherence to international norms and regimes. The U.S. goal — rather than accepting the legacy of an adversarial relationship based on weapons counts, decade-long arms control negotiations, and mutual hostility — will be to build a more positive relationship based on common objectives and mutual interests. Therefore, U.S. nuclear requirements today differ greatly — both in terms of numbers and posture — from those needed to deter the Soviet Union. These greatly reduced requirements are reflected in the Treaty on Strategic Offensive Reductions signed in Moscow on May 24, 2002.

China

China is an ascending power in Asia. Like Russia, China highly values and will continue to possess a significant nuclear capability, even though the size of its strategic nuclear forces will likely remain very small.

The United States will seek to avoid an adversarial relationship with China and instead will try to build affirmative political, economic and cultural relations. However, the outcome of these efforts will depend largely on Chinese choices.

China has adopted a “wait-and-see” attitude toward U.S. missile defense developments, and has chosen

not to react negatively to the U.S. decision to withdraw from the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty. The United States intends to use this opportunity to continue consulting with Chinese officials. U.S. officials hope to convince them that missile defenses are not directed at China and to urge them not to overreact as missile defense plans evolve.

ALLIANCE DIMENSIONS OF DETERRENCE

Throughout the Cold War the United States structured its deterrence and defense posture to reflect the central importance of meeting commitments to allies in Europe and Asia. The United States extended an explicit security guarantee to its allies, backed by large nuclear and conventional capabilities and the forward deployment of hundreds of thousands of U.S. troops. Nuclear weapons were an indispensable basis for achieving stability in the alliance context. The participation of allies in nuclear risk and burden sharing and, in some cases, in nuclear roles themselves, was a critical component of our collective determination to deter common threats.

Today, although the threats are fundamentally different, allies remain an essential element of our deterrence posture. As demonstrated in the Persian Gulf War, our ability to conduct military operations in regions of interest will depend on allies, both as hosts and as coalition partners. Regional adversaries are aware of this vital relationship and perceive WMD and ballistic missiles as their best means to break coalitions poised against them. By placing friends and allies in Europe and Asia at risk, adversaries may believe they can coerce our prospective partners from supporting our military operations, either through denying permission to use critical facilities or opting out of participation in military combat. For this reason, our missile defenses must be capable of protecting not only U.S. forces and territory, but also those of our allies. And our nuclear offensive forces must continue to provide assurances to allies that our collective security is indivisible. ©