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Introduction

The time has come to consider U.S. nuclear force structure in terms of a new strategic rationale. The nation's security should not be premised on piecemeal nuclear force reduction in unrelated increments to satisfy a sense that we do not need as much as before the Cold War ended, or to save scarce defense dollars. Defining the parameters of the new strategic rationale and explaining it in persuasive terms to the Congress (and, hence, to the American people) are understandably complex tasks. Specific issues around which consensus should be constructed include: 1) the new role of nuclear deterrence in U.S. national security, 2) the role of U.S. nuclear forces in assuring our allies, 3) the relation of U.S. nuclear force structure and doctrine to arms control negotiations, and 4) fiscal status. These issues are at the heart of defining new U.S. nuclear strategy.

Thinking About the Future of Nuclear Forces

The U.S. nuclear arsenal grew, nuclear forces were structured against, and nuclear strategy was developed to deal with the expansive threat of Soviet imperialism during the Cold War. Strategic nuclear operations plans from the late 1940s to the late 1980s revolved around that fact. As the U.S.-Russian relation shifts from confrontation to budding cooperation (albeit with no guarantee against backsliding), the disengagement of U.S. nuclear forces from their Cold War strategy and posture requires hedges against political change. So long as the nuclear strike forces of the former Soviet empire remain largely intact, U.S. strategy must guard against their being put to use by a government hostile to the United States and its allies.

Hedging as a strategy means maintaining: 1) approximate strategic capability relative to extant nuclear forces in the former Soviet Union and 2) sufficient readiness on the part of U.S. nuclear forces to respond to the rapid pace at which adverse political change could take place. Hedging does not rule out bilateral deposing of nuclear forces or other stabilizing and confidence-building measures, consistent with the circumstances of the evolving political relationship. By shifting our focus to a potential rather than immediately existing threat, and by shifting priorities to identifying and cultivating points of mutual interest rather than exploiting points of vulnerability, the United States can seek to encourage additional cooperation in U.S.-Russian relations, in concert with the need to reassure our allies and friends against the threat of Russian revanchism. This is a strategy for flexibility to pursue confidence building measures.

This is not a proposal for standing down U.S. alert forces unilaterally. It is a strategy for sustaining an appropriate strategic deterrent as we continue to transition U.S. and Russian forces to a more stable nuclear posture. A key to a successful hedging strategy is to specifically identify the retention of offsetting force structure as a component of any stable relationship.

For the foreseeable future, a U.S. nuclear force sized against the residual nuclear forces of the former Soviet Union will provide a quantitatively sufficient force to deal with the emerging threats from weapons of mass destruction proliferating to the Third World. We should be far from sanguine, however, that we yet understand the dynamics of deterring serious regional threats posed by weapons of mass destruction to U.S. forces deployed abroad, to allies and friends that depend upon us for nuclear protection. Nor should we be quick to embrace the position that nuclear weapons should exist only to deal with other nuclear weapons. Those who argue that biological and chemical threats can always be safely deterred without requiring the last resort of U.S. nuclear force must bear the burden of proof for their arguments. Until they make a compelling case that nuclear force is not necessary for successful deterrence, it is not in the nation's interest to forswear the uncertainty as to how we would respond to clear and dangerous threats of other weapons of mass destruction. "Measured ambiguity" is still a powerful tool for the President trying to deter an intransigent despot. What strategies are appropriate for regional deterrence, and what nuclear postures and plans that best strengthen those strategies must continue to be addressed, within U.S. councils and with key U.S. allies.

The Role of Nuclear Deterrence in U.S. National Security

Nuclear weapons are a fact that cannot be explained away by a clever declaratory policy, and cannot be wished away by moving nuclear matters to the margins of the security agenda. As long as the U.S. retains nuclear weapons in its arsenal, those weapons necessarily cast a shadow over crises in which American military forces are engaged by design or otherwise. The nuclear shadow may be dim and diffused. It can work against U.S. interests if U.S. nuclear forces are seen as hollow, unsafe, unready, or incompetent.

Nuclear strategy should reflect the long-standing American conviction that nuclear weapons tend to be blunt instruments of last resort, most clearly relevant to extreme and compelling circumstances of enormous magnitude where other measures are inadequate to the purposes at hand. That is why deterrence rather than some other form of nuclear strategy remains most appropriate for the American military, and why operations plans should be designed to strengthen deterrence--and if deterrence fails, to yield results which make the ensuing world one in which stable deterrence can be satisfactorily reestablished.

Extended Deterrence

The assurances that the United States provides allies like Germany, Japan, Italy or the Republic of Korea that they are under the American nuclear umbrella helped solidify alliances during the Cold War and contributed to the fact that major industrial powers capable of acquiring nuclear status did not do so. During the past forty years, extended deterrence was understood principally in the narrower terms of specific alliance structures, and not in the broader sense of a nuclear guarantee associated with the vague wording of Security Council Resolution 255, the positive security assurance associated with the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT). As the Cold War was ending, however, American engagement with Ukraine and with the expressed interest of Ukrainian authorities in assurances against nuclear coercion from Moscow anticipated the more complex environment for thinking of security assurances that characterizes the post-

Cold War world. Next year this issue will almost certainly be part of the agenda for many of the non-nuclear weapons states party to the NPT.

While it is premature to anticipate the full dimensions that extended deterrence will play in future U.S. nuclear strategy (and possible new arrangements for multi-party nuclear assurances), it is not premature to speculate that it will continue to have some important role or roles. And regardless of what those roles are, if extended deterrence is to be credible, it must be based upon perceptions of the adequacy and excellence of American nuclear forces. We cannot measure our nuclear forces solely against standards that satisfy our immediate purposes; we must also consider the standards applied by those to whom we wish to extend a credible assurance.

Arms Control Considerations

There is no tangible arms control benefit from accelerating our force structure dismantlement schedule beyond that which will be necessary to meet the START agreements. Accelerated reductions are not necessary to advance American purposes at the 1995 NPT extension conference, nor to reinforce U.S.-Russian relations. Indeed, pressuring the Russians to accelerate dismantlement could well have the reverse effect. We should expect the pace of bilateral U.S.-Russian arms control to slow down through the next decade as START I and START II reductions are implemented, once those treaties are ratified. The physical dismantlement capabilities both in the United States and Russia will be fully tasked to safely meet the negotiated limits. The U.S. already is well on the way to unilaterally building down to START I force structure levels considerably ahead of the Russians. We project that the U.S. will be below accountable limits substantially before treaty requirements take effect. The U.S. also is projected to meet START II limits (both Phase I and Phase II) well before the times mandated by the treaty, if the current rate of dismantlement continues.

Unilateral force reductions below the START limits do not serve to encourage the Russians to move to future negotiations, nor should they be considered without addressing the wider issue of when and how strategic nuclear reductions must become a multi-party rather than bilateral exercise. Until some sense of that issue is obtained, there is no basis for assessing the military or political sufficiency of remaining U.S. nuclear forces.

Apart from the question of numbers, there are many other aspects of American nuclear strategy which intersect the new arms control agenda. Positive and negative security assurances are part of the NPT process which must be engaged by the time of the NPT extension conference in the spring of 1995. Nuclear weapon free zones are another part of the international agenda which can impinge on U.S. nuclear strategy.

Arms control is an important element of a wider national security strategy, and the intersection of nuclear arms control and nuclear strategy can only be correctly gauged in terms of the specifics of that wider strategy. We should not be negotiating with ourselves in a vacuum, but must carefully think through how we will enter the next phase of nuclear arms control (especially reductions) in ways that reinforce the overall strategy.

We face a very different world than that faced by American policy planners in the late 1940s. Then the nuclear weapon was a new phenomenon whose physics were poorly understood and whose numbers were severely limited by the scarcity of special nuclear materials. Today, how to build a nuclear weapon is public knowledge available to any reasonably competent post-graduate physicist, and special nuclear materials, although restricted in the short-term from many potential aggressors, exist in massive quantities around the world. More than 1,000 metric tons of plutonium (growing annually) are present, largely in the nuclear wastes of power reactors with only about 50 tons in the U.S. Whether arms control alone can cope with that massive problem is highly problematic. It is even more imperative today than it was in the late 1940s that we adjust our nuclear force structure and strategy wisely and with careful forethought to arms control regimes. Otherwise we run the very real danger of creating a less stable world.

Additional Considerations: Fiscal Requirements and Targeting policy

Our planned START II compliant force structure of ICBMs, B-52H bombers, B-2 bombers and Trident SSBNs is affordable. U.S. nuclear forces represent a relatively small portion of the total U.S. defense budget (less than 3% of FYDP). However, the nation has invested heavily over the years to build a robust deterrent force and we need to continue to reap benefits from that investment. Because of this past investment, we can sustain this force for some time to come on a funding reduction glide slope of about three times the overall rate of Department of Defense reductions (-3.6% per year). Since the existing forces are already paid for, the near-term cost of eliminating these platforms would probably exceed the near-term operations and maintenance costs.

It is unlikely the American public will support a strategic force construction program in the near-term, whatever the logic of hedging against an uncertain future. Therefore, it is important to take the long-term view that current force structure will be required to support U.S. objectives well into the 21st century. Given the bloody record of this century and the inherent uncertainties of the future, the incremental investment required to maintain these forces is a low price to pay for safeguarding our fundamental national security interests.

An appropriate targeting policy is another key to safeguarding our national security. Russia is in a transitional phase that is far from complete and whose outcome remains highly uncertain. Russia's military strategy is changing but retains traditional Soviet emphasis on at least nuclear parity. The new military doctrine in Moscow actually increases reliance on nuclear weapons to compensate for the deterioration of conventional forces. At the political level, Russian authorities also are sensitive to the fact that nuclear weapons continue to give them a semblance of superpower status.

There is no evidence that Russia has abandoned traditional launch options. During this transitional phase, we therefore believe in the need to not abandon the core of U.S. targeting policy, nor its strategic rationale: to threaten that which the Russian leadership values most and to limit damage to the extent possible should deterrence fail. There is a strong likelihood that future Russian governments in the short- to mid-term will be far less reformist, more conservative, and more nationalistic than the Yeltsin regime. Such governments would be even more likely to have

value systems more congruent to those of the former Soviet Union than to liberal Western parliamentary democracies. From this, and our belief that the most effective targeting policy is one which holds what an adversary values at risk, we believe that continued targeting of national leadership and strategic forces provides the most credible and potent deterrent.

Implications for the Future U.S. Strategic Nuclear Force Structure

As we shift our focus from deterring an imminent Soviet attack to hedging against potential threats originating from the former Soviet Union or from hostile regional powers, our past experiences in adapting to a changing world suggest that we proceed in a cautious, deliberate fashion, and that we avoid the temptation to demobilize deeper than prudence would allow. From a force structure perspective, hedging emphasizes retaining the ability to reconstitute sufficient platforms/delivery systems (**ICBMs, a flexible bomber force level, and Trident SSBNs**) rapidly enough to counter a resurgent Russian threat. Given the speed with which this could occur, our reconstitution/regeneration timelines may be very short (weeks to months). (The exact time used as a planning assumption should be based on intelligence estimates of the time it would take for a hostile Russian regime to emerge and return its strategic nuclear forces to a more threatening posture.) As the Russian state stabilizes and relations with the FSU improve, these timelines may be extended, but initially the key is to maintain a regeneration capability that matches a resurgent Russia's ability to reposture its strategic forces.

To keep this number of platforms available in a fiscally constrained environment, it may be necessary to forego near-term upgrades to these assets; however, it is essential that the platforms be retained. Elimination of the platforms can prove to be (likely is) irreversible. Minuteman III silo inventory and life extension funding and bomber inventory levels are key force structure decisions we must make soon. Other than that, there are no near-term critical decision points which, if missed, result in retired platforms or significant additional investment. **We can afford to wait (and should) to make decisions on the missile backfit and refueling of the older Trident submarines.**

As we reduce the size of our nuclear force structure, the type and mix of forces we retain becomes crucial in maintaining force effectiveness. In the near- to mid-term (including START II), a triad of strategic nuclear forces (i.e., ICBMs, SSBNs, and bombers) provides the appropriate mix of capabilities for a credible deterrent, whatever the measure applied to it. This mixture of forces provides planning and execution flexibility, balances capabilities against potential reversals in Russia, hedges against technical or intelligence failures, and complicates enemy first-strike planning in a crisis. The triad provides the requisite capabilities to balance Russian forces as both sides pursue bilateral arms reductions, and it yields flexibility for deterrence in regional crises. This second factor may be especially critical as we better come to understand the requirements of nuclear deterrence in its regional setting.

In the short-term, it would be unwise to consider a significant reduction to a single leg of the triad. Specifically, as one looks at options to reduce Minuteman III to very low levels, the implications become especially complex and the risks outweigh the savings. First, the U.S. prompt retaliatory capability is severely reduced; and second, Russian targeting of remaining U.S. forces

is greatly simplified. When faced with the near-term Russian ICBM force, such reduced levels could destroy the logic of the balance of the triad. In the long-term, implementing arms control agreements and continuing a dialogue with the Russians may permit a reexamination of nuclear triad force structure needs. The START II mandated transition to single-RV ICBMs, for instance, the increasing conventional role for our dwindling bomber force, and the political consequences of generating nuclear forces in a crisis all can influence the value of triad weapon systems relative to one another. But now is not the time to shift the underlying assumptions. START ratification and implementation should come first.

Conclusions

Even with a less visible and central role in overall security policy, strategic nuclear forces inescapably remain instruments of national power, not just military power. Unilateral nuclear force reductions, a strategy whose nuclear requirements visibly outrun capabilities, or a nuclear force posture seen either in endless piecemeal reduction or in a state of erosion from benign neglect can weaken the American security posture across the board by leading potential adversaries to misjudge resolve and to run risks they otherwise would not consider.

A near-term strategy of hedging provides a sound basis to proceed while working out the longer-term rationale and requirements for American nuclear forces in the 21st century. It balances our desire to pursue confidence-building measures and improve relations with Russia against the need to be cautious about the still formidable capabilities of the Russian nuclear arsenal. It reassures our allies and friends of U.S. resolve to manage the transition in a stabilizing manner. It does not give to future Saddam Husseins the dangerous impression that American nuclear weapons are not credible deterrents to dangerous provocations, or that we are self deterred. It does offer potential cost savings through negotiated posture reductions and the deferment of weapon system upgrades. And it is consistent with a forward-looking arms control policy.

Overall, hedging provides a rationale for our nuclear force structure that realistically addresses our broad national security concerns, reassures our allies, and is relevant to the post-Cold War world. It focuses the nuclear debate in a fashion that supports rather than undercuts our security interests. To paraphrase an earlier Chairman of the JCS, it is the right strategy, at the right time, against the right set of potential adversaries.