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**PROTECTING US SECURITY BY STRETCHING AND REDUCING THE
PLANNED NUCLEAR MODERNIZATION PROGRAM**

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U.S. security depends mainly on our global political leadership, diplomacy, and economic instruments of power -- private and public. It also depends critically on our conventional military superiority – superiority which has been hard-earned through the scale and longevity of the American taxpayers' investments in advanced technologies and systems, through the maintenance of very large armed forces, and by investing the resources necessary to ensure the high quality and training of our service men and women. Maintaining U.S. conventional superiority is key to U.S. security; China and Russia are advancing their relative capabilities, but they remain both quantitatively and qualitatively inferior, and will likely remain so for many years so long as the American people remain willing to continue to invest significantly in advanced military technologies and forces.

U.S. conventional forces can never substitute, however, for nuclear weapons in one critical role: deterring nuclear attacks on ourselves or our allies. This is the one vital role played by nuclear weapons in US security and the reason why our nuclear forces must remain effective and reliable.

In assessing our needs for nuclear forces, therefore, two questions are relevant: (i) How many and what types of nuclear weapons are required to deter adversaries in various situations; and (ii) Given the limits on overall U.S. discretionary spending, including defense spending, a situation that will likely worsen as the nation's overall fiscal situation deteriorates in the 2020s, how should we set priorities among defense needs?

Deterrence and requirements for nuclear weapons

As I have said, nuclear weapons remain indispensable to deter other nations from contemplating nuclear attacks on the U.S. and its allies. U.S. leaders must make clear – through words and actions – that any nuclear attack will be met with an appropriate nuclear response.

But deterrence is an uncertain proposition, especially during crises or wars, as it assumes informed and rational decision-makers, effective communications, and a host of other enabling conditions. Deterrence also depends on circumstances – on the relative stakes perceived by the two sides and how the crisis had evolved. How many and what types of nuclear weapons are required for deterrence in any given situation can never be known, only speculated upon.

In the 1960s and 1970s, a cottage industry grew up developing theories of nuclear war-fighting and escalation. These theories are now being revived, with the main theme being that the U.S. must be able to match adversaries' nuclear arsenals, weapon for weapon, yield for yield, or face a risk of a foe gaining "escalation dominance" and the U.S. side being forced to withdraw during a crisis or war. There is no empirical basis for this theory. It is a matter of belief, or faith. Fortunately for the world, no crisis has ever developed to a point at which it could be tested. In the few crises in which there was a possibility of nuclear use, however, there is no record of political leaders being concerned with details of the weapons that might be used. The enormity of a possible use of a weapon was sufficient to induce resolution of the situation.

We must recognize that even "small" nuclear wars can have disastrous consequences. In the Fall of 2015, as part of a larger study, the [Stimson Center conducted simulations](#) of two Russia-NATO conflicts in the Baltic region involving the use of nuclear weapons. In the smaller scenario, a war confined to Estonia, the U.S. and Russia each made two nuclear strikes against military targets; prompt fatalities came to 100,000, 70 percent of which were civilians. In the larger scenario, a regional conflict ranging from Poland into Belarus, each side struck 10 military targets. In this case, there were roughly one million prompt fatalities, and large areas rendered uninhabitable.

Moreover, why would the war end after an exchange of 20 weapons? How would political leaders know what was happening on the battlefield? How would they communicate to their military commanders and to each other? I think it is way too risky to base plans to defend exposed NATO nations on what can only be *theories* of escalating, limited nuclear wars.

In my view, the U.S. can and should make clear that it will respond to any nuclear use, no matter how small the yield, what the target, or the range of the launcher, with an appropriate response against military targets utilizing its strategic nuclear forces. Long-range bombers, of course, would be the most appropriate weapon in most circumstances and, in fact, could be deployed in or closer to the potential theater of operations during the crisis to signal American resolve and determination to respond to a nuclear attack. I know that NATO doctrine calls for the immediate nuclear response to a limited attack to be carried out with tactical fighters, but this doctrine was forged when 20 Soviet divisions were deployed on the intra-German border. I believe it would be foolhardy to assume that West European nations would permit their forces to conduct nuclear strikes against Russian troops attacking a Baltic nation. Moreover, given Russian air defenses, stealthy long-range bombers are more likely to be effective in conducting the strikes.

Even more important, to my mind, is for NATO to have the conventional forces in place, or close at hand, and the intelligence resources necessary to detect the very beginnings of a Russian mobilization, so that Russian leaders can never be tempted to begin a war in Eastern Europe because they believe it would be possible that a quick strike could be successful before NATO mobilized and the Alliance would be forced to surrender or fight its way back into the occupied area.

The U.S. and its NATO allies are beginning to take some steps toward this goal, but these are baby steps. Only \$3.2 billion was requested in the fiscal year 2017 budget for the so-called European Reassurance Initiative, and these funds were included in the budget for Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO), because they could not fit into the regular DoD budget. Placing them in OCO makes long-range planning difficult and puts the programs potentially at risk.

In addition, far more is required. On the U.S. side, I endorse recommendations that grew out of war games and other studies conducted by RAND over the past few years, including: (i) return of a U.S. armored division to Germany; (ii) deployment of the equipment for one Brigade Combat Team (BCT) in each Baltic nation, supported by heel-toe rotational deployments of battalions to operate the equipment and train with local forces; (iii) location of the division headquarters for those BCTs and supporting units in Poland; and (iv) as Middle East requirements decline, as I believe they will over the next year, enhancement of rotational deployments of Air Force tactical units to Eastern Europe.

Implications for nuclear forces

In short, I believe our budget priorities are misplaced, *in part* because the nuclear modernization program now envisioned is needlessly synchronous, too rapidly paced, and too ambitious in size. Neither I, nor anyone else knows its total cost, given the early stages of most components, but we do know that current nuclear modernization plans will place a real and growing burden on acquisition budgets over the next 15-25 years, making it impossible to fund essential steps to maintain conventional superiority. How could the nuclear modernization program be modified to reduce this problem?

First, I should be clear that I believe the U.S. should maintain a triad of strategic forces – each has unique capabilities and serves as hedge against catastrophic failure of the other legs.

Second, to my mind the highest priority is the new B-21 bomber – because of its flexibility and ability to be recalled, as well as its importance in conventional, as well as nuclear roles, and because, as I have noted, it would be the best weapon with which to respond to any Russian small-scale use of nuclear weapons on the battlefield. As the new bomber enters the force, I believe we should end the nuclear roles of tactical fighter units (U.S. and European) and remove the roughly 200 U.S. nuclear weapons now deployed in Europe. This means that the B-61 service life extension program can be reduced in size, limited only to those weapons that would be utilized by long-range bombers.

Third, there is insufficient, reliable information in the public domain to reach a firm judgment on the immediate need to develop a nuclear-capable Long Range Stand-off (LRSO) weapon to replace Air-Launched Cruise Missiles (ALCMs) immediately. This problem has been compounded by the Air Force's recent decision not to release cost data on the new bomber – a decision which may haunt the Service if "sticker-shock" down the road causes a sharp cut-back in the number of bombers purchased. As a result, we cannot firmly predict how many B-21s will be purchased and when they will enter the force, meaning how long older non-penetrating bombers that rely on ALCMs will have to be

retained. We do know that precision conventional weapons can substitute for nuclear ALCMs in many roles in some scenarios. What also do not know from public information how rapidly Chinese and Russian air defenses may improve and if, indeed, they will negate the ability of stealthy aircraft to penetrate to their targets. My inclination at this point, given the budgetary situation, would be to slow down the LRSO program and await new developments.

Fourth, U.S. strategic submarines (SSBNs) and their missiles clearly need to be modernized, but the question is whether we need twelve of them, as is now planned. The force goal is driven by STRATCOM's "requirement" for a certain number of warheads to be on-station for prompt response. But since the SSBNs' mission is guaranteed retaliation, and their justification is their survivability, why is promptness so important? I believe we can get by with ten SSBNs, and reducing the "requirement" for warheads at sea ready to fire promptly would permit delaying the introduction of the first new submarines and the expenditures associated with them.

Fifth, I believe retaining a viable ICBM force is also essential, but with only modest investments for replacement parts and a reduction to two wings (300 missiles), I believe the US can maintain the viability of the current Minuteman ICBMs into the 2040s and thus delay the start of the Ground-based Strategic Deterrent replacement program and stretch out associated expenditures.

Finally, I believe the resources saved by these reductions in the nuclear modernization program should be diverted to other military capabilities, including, most importantly: (i) the conventional capabilities listed above for deterring a Russian attack on the Baltic states or elsewhere in Eastern Europe; (ii) the survivability of U.S. command, control, and communications systems; (iii) continued R&D on missile defenses, and deployments of new defense systems as technologies mature; (iv) development and deployment of advanced conventional technologies to counter China's advances in conventional air and naval warfare; (v) and, of course, cyber and electronic warfare capabilities.

Conclusion

With the important exception of deterring nuclear attacks on the U.S. and its allies, nuclear weapons cannot achieve the U.S. security objectives; our dominant conventional forces, along with other instruments of power, are far more important. The U.S. interest lies in minimizing the importance of nuclear weapons, not playing the Russians' desperate game of stressing them. After 70 years of indulging fantasies of what nuclear weapons can do, it is high time to acknowledge that they do very little and adapt U.S. nuclear policy, strategy, and forces to those facts.