

U.S. Nuclear Weapons in the 21st Century: Aiming for the Midterm

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Planning Perspective

- Even a single nuclear weapon detonating is unacceptable
- Risks are real and some critical knowledge is lacking
 - Re: today e.g., North Korean nuclear capabilities, what deters China
 - Re: future, e.g., Number of nuclear weapons states, what would deter a nuclear Iran
- U.S. power to shape environment is limited
- Despite challenges, meeting US strategic objectives possible and essential
- Rapid change/surprise is possible
 - U.S. nuclear posture including infrastructure must consider risks of wild cards

Future Security Environment – Some “Baseline” Planning Assumptions

- U.S. remains preeminent conventional military power
- Continued impetus to de-legitimize nuclear weapons (NWs) globally
 - U.S. NWs don't address highest priority nuclear threats – terrorism, loose nukes – but regimes constraining NWs and material may
 - Constraining North Korea and Iran, plus increasing reliance on nuclear energy globally adds to priority of non-proliferation
 - Taboo against nuclear use remains strong and unbroken
- Regional deterrence and assurance remain key for coping with North Korea and Iran – conventional capabilities and defenses as important as NWs
- MAD relationship w/ Russia continues
 - Further nuclear reductions likely
- Rising China: ambiguous Sino-American nuclear

Future Security Environment – U.S. Nuclear / Non-Nuclear Capabilities

- U.S. non-nuclear capabilities continue to substitute for nuclear militarily – adequate potency, much greater credibility
 - NWs have greater capability vs. declining number of targets
- U.S. will want to remain “second to none” in NW capabilities
 - Due in part to role as security provider, in part to history
 - Recognition that potential adversaries may use nuclear weapons (and other means) to counter U.S. military power
- U.S. will continue to need to consider nuclear employment
 - For credible deterrence and assurance... and if deterrence fails
- U.S. long-range non-nuclear strike capabilities & missile defenses create friction in Sino-US, Russian-US

Some Wildcards – Not Part of Baseline Case but Possible and Significant

- Iran and/or North Korea breakout w/ NW programs
- Pakistan collapse
- Revanchist Russia
- Sino-American conflict
- Terrorist acquisition and use of NW
- Cascade to highly proliferated world
- Cooperation to minimum deterrence world
- Assertive global push for abolition
- Botched attempt at abolition – major instabilities & war

Wildcards are Not So Wild

- Biggest 20th century strategic shift (USSR collapse) a surprise
- Most major U.S. wars started w/ surprise
 - WWII, Korean War, Gulf War 1991, OEF/OIF after 9/11
- Ends of some U.S. wars precipitated by surprise attack
 - WWII (only nuclear use in war), Vietnam, Somalia
- Nuclear/missile surprises (Iraq '91 vs. '03, AQ Kahn network, India test, North Korea Taepodong test)
- OIF a series of surprises (no WMD, insurgency, civil war)
- Stronger U.S. conventional power =
greater adversary incentives to surprise

Expect the Unexpected:

Nuclear posture must be robust to

“surprise”

Missions for US NWs (Affect Force Size, Posture, Doctrine)

Reduce Risk that Nuclear Weapons are Used

- Basic deterrence of WMD attack on US
- Extended deterrence of WMD attack on US allies
- Assurance of allies
- Crisis stability (esp. vis-à-vis Russia)
- Arms race stability (esp. vis-à-vis Russia)
- Dissuasion
- Non-proliferation, including fissile material/weapons control

Limit Consequences if Nuclear Weapons are Used

- Intra-war deterrence of escalation
- War termination on relatively favorable terms

Other Nuclear Weapons Missions?

2 Other Cases Where NWs May be Relevant

- Nation state attacks U.S. w/ genetically modified BW (and threatens “re-load” and repeated attacks)
- Nation state attacks U.S. computers and satellites, bringing U.S. economy to halt, degrading U.S. conventional capabilities

**Defense is first priority;
non-nuclear responses likely to be second...
But should nuclear weapons be seen as
relevant for deterring and if necessary
responding to non-nuclear catastrophic**

U.S. Domestic Context

- NWs low-priority/bill-payers to military, off radar scope for public
- Goal of nuclear-free world may help non-proliferation but further undercut case for nuclear spending including infrastructure
- Talk of nuclear war-fighting (e.g., RNEP) on Right reinforces anti-nuke views of Left
- NW mafia risks being polarized and isolated -- not a recipe for success

What's Needed

- Working consensus on mid-term vision
 - Analogous to but much broader than small, secure, survivable triad goal of late 80s/early 90s
 - Focused on reducing risks of nuclear terrorism, proliferation
 - That can support other NW missions
 - Achievable at low cost

Should U.S. Aggressively Pursue Global Nuclear Abolition?

- **Under what conditions might U.S. foreswear NWs as did CBW?**
 - If others have reduced to zero
 - If verification and enforcement are deemed sufficient
 - After major nuclear exchange may be most likely impetus (but gradual progress may also be possible)
- **A More Useful Question: What is a mid-term vision that can gain support in the U.S. & internationally?**
 - Proposal: Let's try to define and get to the mid-term vision and see what the path to abolition looks like