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The rise of hostile rogue states, new terrorist threats, and the proliferation of WMD have all highlighted our continuing need to deter attack. The importance of deterrence has survived the Cold War. The fundamental question now is *how* to deter *new* threats in a *new* strategic environment?

During the Cold War, deterrence typically was considered a relatively easy matter of posing a nuclear retaliatory threat to Soviet targets. Many officials and commentators mechanistically equated deterrence to our “Assured Destruction” nuclear capability. We hear echoes of this today, confident claims about deterrence linked to some specific number of weapons.

Unfortunately, most of what we believed we knew about deterrence during the Cold War now is of limited value. Today, there are no certainties about deterrence. Our traditional deterrent threat may not work predictably against opponents who are willing martyrs, desperate gamblers, incommunicado, misinformed, miscalculating, self-destructive, or motivated by unalterable, intangible goals such as honor, or ideological or religious devotion.

The list of provocations and opponents we now hope to deter has expanded, and the contexts within which we hope to deter them are far more variable. But the painful contemporary truth is that confident assertions about how deterrence will operate are guesses, usually poorly informed; no one knows whether or how deterrence will work across a wide spectrum of opponents, stakes and contexts.

This conclusion does not suggest that we discard deterrence. It does, however, explain why our Cold War views of deterrence “stability” based on offensive nuclear forces must be reconsidered. Our deterrence focus now must be broadened with regard to whom, how and with what we try to deter. In some cases, non-military approaches to deterrence may be adequate, in others, conventional or nuclear threats may be necessary; and in some cases, opponents may simply be “beyond deterrence” regardless of our threats.

To understand which may be the case for any contingency, we need first to understand the opponent’s mind-set and behavioral style, and the different ways opponents can perceive and respond to our deterrence threats. Deterrence now is first and foremost a matter of intelligence. It requires a much more focused, dedicated intelligence effort for this purpose than has been the case in the past. There is no substitute for understanding the specific how’s and why’s of opponents’ decision making; we no longer can presume to know the boundaries of their possible behavior. This is true whether we seek to deter the leadership of a rogue state or a terrorist organization.

With regard to the deterrence of terrorists, I strongly disagree with the common notion that all terrorists are undeterrable. The historical record on terrorists, anarchists, and other extremist groups is sufficient to conclude that they may be deterred, depending on the context and circumstances, which is all that can be said of state leaders.

Defensive capabilities must take on a new, higher priority when deterrence is recognized to be uncertain. Why?; because we can no longer rely on deterrence working reliably to provide protection. A popular Cold War line was that defensive capabilities were unnecessary and useless because deterrence was ensured by our “Assured Destruction” offensive nuclear threat. It should be recognized now that deterrence can fail unpredictably, and our only option may be to defend as well as possible our society, our expeditionary forces, and our allies. This is why various forms of strategic defensive capability against mass destruction weapons are now so important. President Bush’s decision to deploy strategic BMD against limited offensive missile threats was a reflection of this shift away from the old balance of terror deterrence policy. Much more remains to be done in this regard.

The Bush Administration’s 2001 Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) sought to assess how the dramatic changes since the Cold War should transform how we think about deterrence. This can be seen in its emphasis on having a much broader range of deterrent threat options than we inherited from the Cold War, and having the flexibility and knowledge of opponents necessary to tailor our deterrent efforts to a range of contingencies and opponent. I have included for the record a short article on the goals of the NPR, a document that remains widely misunderstood.¹

With regard to nuclear weapons, the NPR concluded that they remain essential in any prudent approach to deterrence; but, nuclear weapons alone may be unsuited to many of the deterrence contingencies of the 21st Century. Having a broader range of threats, including non-nuclear options, should better enable us to adapt our deterrence policies to a much wider range of opponents and contexts. Consequently, a major thrust of the NPR was to reduce reliance on nuclear weapons and place greater weight on non-nuclear capabilities.

The NPR also concluded that the immediate requirement for U.S. nuclear weapons could be met with far fewer deployed nuclear forces, and that our nuclear requirements may recede further as advanced conventional weapons and defenses mature. That conclusion was a basis for the deep nuclear reductions of the 2002 Moscow Treaty.

The NPR also focused on the need to assure allies, including via the extended U.S. “nuclear umbrella.” Most recently, some close allies have openly questioned whether long-standing U.S. extended deterrence guarantees remain credible. A 2006 Japanese study headed by former Prime Minister Nakasone, for example, concluded that Japan, “should study the nuclear issue to be prepared in the event of tremendous future change...” Mr. Nakasone noted that Japanese security is dependent on U.S. nuclear weapons, but that the future of the U.S. extended deterrent is unclear. Such Japanese concerns are understandable given North Korean nuclear and missile programs. Allies and friends in the Middle East increasingly express similar concerns as Iran moves toward a nuclear capability and expands its missile arsenal.

¹ Keith B. Payne, “The Nuclear Posture Review: Setting the Record Straight,” *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 28, No. 3 (Summer 2005), pp. 135-151.

Immediately following North Korea's nuclear test in October 2006, Secretary of State Rice traveled to Tokyo to reaffirm the U.S. nuclear commitment to Japan. Our extended nuclear deterrent is perhaps the most important and least recognized nuclear nonproliferation tool in existence. To risk understatement, nuclear proliferation will accelerate dramatically if close allies continue to lose confidence in the U.S. extended nuclear deterrent. This point has been made explicitly in recent conversations with Japanese officials. As various nuclear disarmament proposals emerge, we need to be conscious of this continuing importance of our extended nuclear deterrent.

Despite the NPR's call for more diverse U.S. capabilities to meet the needs of a new geopolitical environment, much remains to be done. There are three contemporary strategic programs that are particularly important to deterrence, extended deterrence and the assurance of U.S. allies: these are the Reliable Replacement Warhead (RRW); strategic and regional BMD; and, a new capability for non-nuclear, prompt global strike.

The RRW program is intended to provide safety and security improvements in the nuclear arsenal, the potential for increased long-term confidence without nuclear testing, long-term cost savings, and to sustain the U.S. nuclear technical and engineering communities. It will also support the U.S. extended nuclear deterrent and thus our nonproliferation goals by helping to sustain the confidence of our allies in our nuclear umbrella.

In an era of deterrence uncertainty, strategic and regional BMD are important for our own protection and for the assurance of key allies increasingly subject to emerging nuclear and missile threats. During the Cold War, many considered deterrence and BMD to be incompatible. Now, they are fully compatible, and continued support for our sea-based defenses, the multiple kill vehicle, and a new defensive site in Europe are particularly important.

Finally, progress toward non-nuclear strategic capabilities has been slow; the only prompt, U.S. global strike options now available are nuclear missiles. The U.S. capability to strike with non-nuclear weapons against high value or fleeting targets at global ranges could contribute significantly to deterrence, the assurance of allies, and directly to counterproliferation. I agree strongly with General Cartwright that it is important to move forward on a non-nuclear capability for prompt global strike.

In conclusion, there has been a significant shift away from the Cold War balance of terror concept consistent with a dramatically different geopolitical environment. It is true that all the details of this shift in thinking about deterrence and its implementation are not mature. But, recall that it took 25 years of intense debate before we achieved a working consensus on our Cold War strategic policies. We may not have 25 years of relative security to achieve a new working consensus this time around; we need to move forward thoughtfully and quickly.