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Perspectives on Deterrence Remarks by Amb. Robert Joseph

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Good morning...

Almost from the day of the first use of nuclear weapons in August 1945 until the end of the Cold War more than 40 years later, many of our nation's best and brightest thought about how to live with nuclear weapons and with the Soviet Union. Deterrence was at the center of our national strategy – across democrat and republican administrations alike. It was a vibrant, dynamic topic in which we invested a great deal of intellectual capital.

This investment was reflected in the evolution of nuclear doctrine from massive retaliation to flexible response in the earlier days, to the deterrent strategies incorporated in the presidential guidance of Presidents Carter and Reagan.

And throughout these decades, doctrine guided force development and deployments, most notably in the fielding of the strategic Triad that provided for escalation control and assured retaliation – which were both considered essential to deterrence success.

Since we declared an end to the Cold war more than twenty years ago, with the exception of deterring rogue states like North Korea by denying these regimes their objectives, there has been relatively little new thought devoted to nuclear deterrence, including in the Pentagon and the other national security agencies.

Since 9-11, the focus of attention has understandably been on combatting terrorism. This is one reason why – in the nuclear realm – we find ourselves today with both legacy thinking about deterrence and a legacy force posture.

My view is that we need to re-think our assumptions about deterrence in four cases. The first – and most urgent – is Russia – something I will talk about in more detail.

The second is China – a rising regional and global power that sees the United States as the principal barrier to its achieving its aspirations, beginning with becoming the dominant force in Asia. In the Cold War, we treated China as a lesser included case of deterring the Soviet Union. The same clearly does not apply today.

Like Moscow, I am convinced that Beijing is thinking about deterrence and nuclear coercion and that this thinking is guiding the development and deployment of its nuclear forces. The potential of limited nuclear use, notwithstanding its formal no first use policy, is at the upper end of China's asymmetric anti-access/area denial doctrine – a central component of a broader national security strategy.

How should we think about deterring China as it moves to acquire greater cyber, anti-space and hypersonic capabilities? What contribution could US deployment of missile defenses and advanced technologies such as directed energy make to deterrence? There are dozens more questions that we simply haven't thought about let alone answered.

The third case is deterring rogue states that acquire nuclear weapons for purposes of blackmail and coercion. In Bush 43, we did develop presidential guidance on this emerging challenge early in the administration. NSPD 4 served as a foundation for policy decisions – such as withdrawing from the ABM Treaty – and for deploying missile defenses against small scale ballistic missile attack.

However, much of the thinking about deterring rogues has atrophied in the past six years as the focus has shifted to what President Obama calls the Prague Agenda. And it's no accident comrades, as our Soviet friends used to say, that our missile defense capabilities – intended to deter and protect against rogue state threats to the homeland – have also atrophied.

All programs to keep up with the threat have been ended – such as the multiple kill vehicle MKV and the boost phase interceptor KEI. Even the deployment of Ground-based interceptors to Europe was cancelled for the sake of the ill-fated re-set with Russia and its hand maiden, nuclear disarmament. Its replacement would also meet the same fate and for the same reasons. This was the SM3 IIB – the only component of the European Phased Adaptive Approach with the capability to engage Iranian ICBM-class missiles now being developed.

The fourth case is one that is frequently found in the open literature – and that is deterrence in a world of many nuclear states. This may in the future become more than an academic construct, particularly if we continue to fail in stopping states like Iran from proliferating. If there is a cascade of proliferation, how will that affect US deterrence policy?

I don't know the answer but I do know that I am uncomfortable with the assertion that greater stability will result from greater numbers of nuclear weapon states who remain vulnerable to nuclear annihilation.

But my remarks today are on Russia, and specifically deterring Russia. While Ukraine is certainly an important part of the narrative, I see no indication that deterrence of Russian aggression there was ever a policy objective. My sense is we were caught totally off guard by Moscow's use of force – in large part because of our own mirror imaging and wishful thinking, or more accurately our lack of thinking.

In December 2013, I visited both SHAPE Headquarters in Mons and EUCOM in Stuttgart. In a luncheon discussion I asked whether we were giving any thought to Russia's possible use of force against Ukraine – you will recall that things were getting pretty hot at the time. I was clear to those sitting with me that I wasn't predicting a Russian military intervention but thought that it was possible and that it deserved at least some contingency planning. What would we do if Moscow decided to go down that path? Could we deter it?

The response was a truly incredulous look – as though I had just grown a second head right there at the table. It could never happen I was told – President Putin would never do it because of the economic costs and political consequences – what State Department officials often refer to as the dreaded threat of being isolated. I have added the word dreaded because the concept is just silly.

Only three months later, there was a complete reassessment of Russian behavior. Or saying it less diplomatically, we were dead wrong about Moscow's intentions. What a difference fourteen months can make.

Today, what we see in US and NATO Ukraine policy is more akin to compellence than deterrence – seeking to pressure Moscow through economic sanctions and political isolation to undo its ongoing intervention in Ukraine and, at least for a few holdouts, to reverse its annexation of Crimea.

My focus again is on deterrence of possible thinly veiled subversion and aggression – against both non-NATO states in Europe and Asia, such as Moldova and Kazakhstan, , and potentially against NATO allies protected under Article V – such as the Baltic states and Bulgaria

Let me begin with two general observations: First, when we talk about deterrence as a policy objective, we need to recognize that capabilities other than nuclear weapons are also important and in many cases essential. This was the case in the past, and is even more so today.

This may include conventional forces, economic capacity, intelligence collection and analysis, and, of course, the ability to deny the adversary his military goals through such means as missile defenses, cyber defenses and offenses, and prevailing in space – an increasingly contested environment.

Second, taking you back to deterrence 101, among other conditions, deterrence success relies on both capabilities and resolve – a perceived willingness to back up commitments with force if necessary. In his confirmation hearing earlier this month Ash Carter gave us an example of resolve through declaratory policy.

In response to a question for the record, Ash reportedly stated: “I reject the notion that Russia should be afforded a 'sphere of influence... If confirmed, I will continue to encourage US partners, such as Moldova, Georgia, and Ukraine, to build their security capacity and military interoperability with NATO.”

I think Dr. Carter is without doubt the best man for the job. I wish him the best of luck as he will surely need it.

President Putin's view of the United States and NATO as a threat to Russia is clear – he says so directly and often. His message has been consistent since his 2007 speech at the Munich security conference, when he denounced the United States for seeking to undermine global security through the illegitimate use of force. This was before Georgia, before Crimea, and before the unfolding downward spiral of events in Ukraine – a conflict Mr. Putin also attributes to the US attempting to impose its will on the world.

Today, many observers in the west and east see US-Russia relations heading toward a new cold war. In 2014, former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev said that: “The world is on the brink of a new cold war.” Earlier this year he went even further, reportedly stating that he is “unsure whether the cold war will turn into a hot one.” He warned that tensions between Russia and European powers over Ukraine “could result in a major conflict or even nuclear war.”

But my sense is that there is little merit in applying the term cold war to today's situation. The setting is much different from when the west and the east were implacable foes with thousands of nuclear weapons aimed at each other. The present does not include an ideological competition between communism and capitalism. There is no multi-million man Red Army dividing Europe into the NATO and Warsaw Pact blocs.

Another fundamental difference – one that has a direct impact on the success or failure of deterrence – is the different approaches toward nuclear weapons being taken by Russia and the United States. In the Cold War there was a determination by both sides to maintain parity – at a minimum. In the words of John Kennedy, the US would ensure it possessed an offensive nuclear deterrent second to none.

Today, one side is racing to build up its arsenal of modern missiles. The other side is reducing its forces while haltingly addressing its decaying infrastructure and debating and delaying the needed modernization of its delivery platforms. Further, it promotes the ratification of the CTBT – a fatally flawed treaty rejected fifteen years ago by 51 Senators but still used as a rationale to undercut modernization through such misguided policies as “no new nuclear capabilities.”

To quote the National Intelligence Council: “Nuclear ambitions in the US and Russia over the last twenty years have evolved in opposite directions. Reducing the role of nuclear weapons in US security strategy is a US objective, while Russia is pursuing new concepts and capabilities for expanding the role of nuclear weapons in its security strategy.”

We are all well aware of Mr. Putin's fondness for nuclear weapons, publicly welcoming each new weapon system, participating visibly in military exercises involving the employment of nuclear weapons, and often reminding everyone from small children to world leaders that Russia cannot be pushed around because of its nuclear weapons prowess. President Putin is also

presumably the authority behind the decision to take provocative actions with nuclear-capable Bear bombers in approaching the air space of the US, the UK, other NATO European partners, and most recently our Asian allies.

In Russian military doctrine and in procurement, nuclear weapons are the self-declared first priority of the state. This has been reaffirmed multiple times in recent military publications and in Russian military exercises. In both, strategic nuclear weapons provide for deterrence of nuclear or conventional attack on Russia. Beyond this, increasingly explicit Russian nuclear threats to US allies reflect the additional goal of coercion.

Theater weapons, and limited nuclear use against military targets, can compensate for conventional weakness and are seen as a means to deescalate a conventional conflict on favorable terms. Here Russia's doctrine assumes an asymmetry of interests and a lack of willingness on the part of the enemy to risk nuclear war.

For some, these assumptions appear to be taken as facts. You may have seen John Mearsheimer's op-ed in the New York Times a week ago Sunday. In it, he argues that we should not provide military assistance to Ukraine because, and I quote, "Such a step is especially dangerous because Russia has thousands of nuclear weapons and is seeking to defend a vital strategic interest."

Two observations on this argument: first, it seems that – at least for some in the American academic community – nuclear weapons – at least Russian nuclear weapons – actually do matter, and large numbers are meaningful. Apparently, only American nuclear weapons have little if any purpose and therefore we can continue to reduce to very low numbers. Second, the University of Chicago has come a long way since the days of Hans Morgenthau and my first graduate advisor, Albert Wohlstetter. Perhaps we might learn something of value if we were to read again *Politics Among Nations* and *The Delicate Balance of Terror*. But that is a whole other topic.

Let me just say that we may not like what Russian defense experts are thinking, and we may or may not agree with them, but they are thinking – and have been doing so in earnest since NATO's intervention in Kosovo.

And Russian deterrence thinking is backed by an expansion of nuclear capabilities across the spectrum – heavy and mobile ICBMs, new SSBNs and SLBMs, upgrading of Bear Hs and Backfire bombers, and of course, the maintenance of vastly superior theater nuclear forces. Just days ago the chief of Russia's armed forces (General Gerasimov) – pointing to a large-scale military modernization plan through the next 5 years – said that "a strong nuclear arsenal will ensure military superiority over the West."

The latter apparently includes INF-range missiles in violation of the INF Treaty that are reminiscent of Cold War days. Their purpose may be same as then – when the Soviet Union

deployed hundreds of SS-20 missiles in an attempt to sever the deterrence of Western Europe from that of the United States. But today who could possibly believe that the alliance will respond with the same determination it demonstrated in 1983 with the fielding of ground-launched cruise missiles and Pershing IIs? No one I think – especially Russian leaders who doubt both NATO’s resolve and strong US leadership – two vital conditions for success.

So what guides Mr. Putin? In his words, and I quote: “We should not tempt anyone by allowing ourselves to be weak.” In other words Russian weakness would be provocative. Perhaps the reverse is also thought to be true: the weakness of Russia’s enemies is a temptation – an opportunity. May be it is his KGB background, perhaps it is classic Russian policy to expand outward at times of internal weakness, perhaps it paranoia grounded in history and reflected in centuries old efforts to secure the European and Asian borders. Whatever it is, it’s about power.

Contrast this with the view articulated in the new US national security strategy published less than two weeks ago. At a time when Ukraine is in crisis, the Middle East is in turmoil, and the Iran negotiations are at an impasse, the President’s introduction mentions “aggression by Russia” giving “rise to anxieties about global security” – but it does so in the same sentence that includes the challenges of climate change and the spread of infectious diseases. The emphasis is on limitations of US resources and – I quote – “embracing constraints on our use of new technologies like drones.”

If we are lucky, maybe Moscow and Beijing will discount what we say as clever propaganda.

What stands out in the President’s message is the reaffirmation of his 2009 Prague speech – as though conditions have not changed. It seem fitting that – in the same paragraph that President Obama asserts that the Joint Plan of Action has halted Iran’s nuclear program – he doubles down on the need to take steps toward a world without nuclear weapons.

This is a dangerous illusion. After six years of failed policies across the globe, with Russia, with Syria, with Iran, and most recently in Yemen, the President holds to the principle of leading by example through what amounts to unilateral disarmament as we saw in disguised form with the New START agreement under which US forces go down and Russian forces mainly go up. And, while declaring victory in the face of all evidence to the contrary may be self-satisfying, it is in fact merely self-deluding. Mr. Putin, I am sure, sees it for what it is – weakness and provocative.

So what does this mean for deterrence – something that is increasingly discussed by NATO military leaders, including General Breedlove and Lt. General Hodges, commander of US army forces in Europe? In a recent interview, General Hodges stated his belief that “the Russians are mobilizing right now for a war that they think is going to happen in five or six years – not that they are going to start a war in five or six years but I think they are anticipating ...that there will be a war.”

And let's not forget that, while NATO Europe's military capabilities have declined sharply, Russian conventional modernization has intensified since the poor performance of Russian troops in the Georgia conflict. The reported goal is to expand precisely the type of conventional capabilities and so-called hybrid warfare we are witnessing in Ukraine. There well may be a sense that victory over Kiev is the model, the test case for further consolidation.

For Hodges and a growing number of others, including the leaders of Poland and the Baltic states who are decrying what they call appeasement of the Kremlin in Ukraine, there is a clear need to deter Russia from further coercion and aggression, perhaps against Latvia and Estonia. Both are NATO members with large ethnic Russian populations and historically, from Moscow's perspective, in the Russian sphere of influence.

But talking points to the contrary, the alliance is not united. In the name of strategic patience, the leaders in Berlin, Paris and Washington continue to strive for a purely political solution – one that they say will not provoke Russia and lead to escalation. For now, at least, they draw the line at imposing additional economic sanctions and reject providing lethal assistance to Ukraine.

I will let you speculate as to the impact of that message on the Kremlin. My view is that the message is the same as that when the US failed to respond with force when Assad crossed a bright red line drawn by the President to deter the use of chemical weapons in Syria.

Let me conclude with five points:

First, if in fact Russia is not the Soviet Union, if the correlation of forces – some of you will remember that term – is different from that of the Cold War, and if Russian doctrine has changed, are we – the US and NATO – prepared to implement an effective policy of deterrence? Do we have the right doctrine, the right forces – nuclear and conventional – and the right declaratory policy?

Deterrence didn't just happen in the past. This was a national priority for most of the second half of the 20th century. It was an essential part of our alliance relationships. It guided defense planning and industry priorities.

And deterrence won't come back with the simple flick of the switch. We have not thought about nuclear weapons and the deterrence of Russia in any systematic way for 25 years. It's imperative that we do so now.

Second, Russia has moved beyond Cold War deterrence. They have thought strategically about the role of nuclear weapons in today's security setting. They have considered the relationship between conventional and nuclear forces. They have thought about what deters the threats they believe they face. And they have concluded that the role nuclear weapons is even greater than in the past.

My concern is that – because we aren't thinking strategically about nuclear weapons – we raise the risk of misunderstanding and miscalculation in our relationship with Russia. As President Obama has stated, as long as nuclear weapons are needed, they need to be safe and reliable. But safety and reliability – while essential – are not sufficient. We must also have the right doctrine to guide capability development and deployments.

Third, we are taking a number of important steps in the modernization of our strategic platforms and in addressing the deterioration of our nuclear weapons infrastructure. But we are doing so in an uncertain and piecemeal fashion – and most importantly in the absence of a coherent strategic framework that is vital to guide our planning and investments.

This is not nostalgia for the good old days. We live in a much different world, geopolitically and technologically – a much more complex world in which we face multiple nuclear threats and in which we lack the relative simplicity of the Cold war. It is a less predictable world and a less stable world. But we must recognize the world as it is, not as we hope it might be.

Fourth, our nuclear doctrine must be part of a broader national security strategy – as I believe it is with Russia and China. This broader strategy should define our national level goals and outline the means to achieve them through the integration of all instruments of statecraft – diplomatic, economic, intelligence, strategic communications and others. In the Cold War, that policy was containment and our nuclear deterrence was a key component. Today, nuclear issues – and nuclear modernization in particular – are often treated as an impediment to the achievement of the preferred goal of nuclear disarmament and ultimately a nuclear free world. The result in my view will be the opposite – a more dangerous and more proliferated world.

Fifth, we need to have the resolve to stand up to aggression; the resolve to develop and deploy the forces required for an effective deterrent against the major threats we face; and the resolve to reject policies built on fantasies and illusions. If we fail, deterrence will falter and fail.