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Nonproliferation, Arms Control and Disarmament and Extended Deterrence in the New Security Environment

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With the end of the Cold War, in a dramatically changed security environment, the advances in nonnuclear strategic capabilities along with reduced numbers and roles for nuclear forces has altered the calculus of deterrence and defense, at least for the United States. For many, this opened up a realistic possibility of a nuclear-free world.

It soon became clear that the initial post-Cold War hopes were exaggerated. The world did change fundamentally, but it did not become more secure and stable. In place of the old Soviet threat, there has been growing concern about proliferation and terrorism involving nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction (WMD), regional conflicts, global instability and increasingly serious new and emerging threats, including cyber attacks and attacks on satellites.

For the United States at least, in this emerging environment, the political rationales for nuclear weapons, from deterrence to reassurance to alliance management, are changing and less central than during the Cold War to the security of the United States, its friends and allies. Nuclear weapons remain important for the US, but for a far more limited set of roles and missions. As the Perry-Schlesinger Commission report reveals, there is a domestic US consensus on nuclear policy and posture at the highest level and for the near

term, including the continued role of nuclear arms in deterring WMD use and in reassuring allies.

Although the value of nuclear weapons has declined for the United States, the value of these weapons for Russia, China and so-called “rogue” states is seen to be rising. The nuclear logic of NATO during Cold War—the need for nuclear weapons to counter vastly superior conventional capabilities of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact—is today heard from Russians and even some proliferants. Moreover, these weapons present a way for rogues to achieve regional hegemony and possibly to deter interventions by the United States or others.

While the vision of a nuclear-free world is powerful, both existing nuclear powers and proliferators are unlikely to forego nuclear weapons entirely in a world that is dangerous and uncertain. And the emerging world would not necessarily be more secure and stable without nuclear weapons. Even if nuclear weapons were given up by the United States and other nuclear-weapon states, there would continue to be concerns about the proliferation of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons, which would not disappear and could worsen. WMD terrorism would remain a concern that was largely unaffected by US and other nuclear-weapon decisions. Conventional capabilities would not disappear and the prospects for warfare could rise. In addition, new problems could arise if rogue states or other non-status-quo powers attempted to take advantage of moves toward disarmament, while friends and allies who are not reassured as in the past could reconsider their options if deterrence declined.

To address these challenges, non- and counter-proliferation and counterterrorism—including defenses and consequence management—are priorities, especially in light of an anticipated “renaissance” in civil nuclear power. The current agenda of the United States and others includes efforts to:

- Strengthen International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and its safeguards system;
- Strengthen export controls, especially for sensitive technologies, by limiting the development of reprocessing and enrichment technologies and by requiring the Additional Protocol as a condition of supply;
- Establish a reliable supply regime, including the possibility of multilateral or multinational ownership of fuel cycle facilities, as a means to promote nuclear energy without increasing the risks of proliferation or terrorism;
- Implement effectively UN Security Council Resolution 1540; and
- Strengthen and institutionalize the Proliferation Security Initiative and the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism.

These and other activities are important in themselves, and are essential to maintaining and strengthening the Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) bargain by bolstering two of its pillars—nonproliferation and peaceful nuclear energy cooperation. There is no alternative, and little prospect for a better deal.

The need to strengthen the NPT bargain today also requires renewed political attention to nuclear disarmament, the third pillar of the treaty. There is, of course, no direct linkage between US or other NPT nuclear-weapon state's arm and proliferation threats. Moreover, any assertion of a link between disarmament efforts and nonproliferation cooperation is unsupported by the evidence and questionable. Nonetheless, the political requirement for moves towards disarmament in the NPT context is indisputable.¹ This may not have been the understanding of the negotiators of the treaty, but it is today's reality.

The security environment that highlights the importance of nonproliferation, arms control and disarmament also points to the continuing need for deterrence and its extension to friends and allies. What are the relations between extended deterrence, arms control and disarmament and nonproliferation?

Last October, Secretary of Defense Gates highlighted the continuing need for nuclear weapons in the emerging security environment for the United States as well as friends and allies. He stated that proposals for the elimination of nuclear weapons "have come up against the reality that as long as others have nuclear weapons, we must maintain some level of these weapons ourselves to deter potential adversaries and to reassure over two dozen allies and partners who rely on our nuclear umbrella for their security, making it

¹ It is important to recall that arms control and disarmament efforts have a rationale independent of nonproliferation and the NPT, as discussed in the classic by Thomas Schelling and Morton H. Halperin, *Strategy and Arms Control* (New York: The Twentieth Century Fund, 1961).

unnecessary for them to develop their own.”² He recognized that some argue there is no “real nuclear threat” to the United States, but highlighted the fact that “our friends and allies perceive different levels of risk within their respective regions. Here our arsenal plays an irreplaceable role in reducing proliferation.”³

Even though these remarks were made when Secretary Gates was serving in the Bush Administration, they are different in emphasis and tone but fully consistent with those espoused by President Obama in Prague.

President Obama reiterated the pledge of the United States to defend the Czech Republic and its other NATO allies. He stated: “I am here to say that the United States will never turn its back on the people of this nation. … We are bound by shared values and shared history and the enduring promise of our alliance. NATO’s Article V states it clearly: An attack on one is an attack on all. That is a promise for our time, and for all time.”⁴ It was in this context that he spoke of “America’s commitment to seek the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons.”⁵ He recognized that this objective “will not be reached quickly -- perhaps not in my lifetime. It will take patience and persistence. But now we, too, must ignore the voices who tell us that the world cannot change.”⁶

As he began to outline “concrete” steps, he stated: “To put an end to Cold War thinking, we will reduce the role of nuclear weapons in our national security strategy, and urge

² Robert Gates, “Nuclear Weapons in the 21st Century,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, October 28, 2008.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Remarks by President Barack Obama, Hradcany Square, Prague, Czech Republic, April 5, 2009.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

others to do the same. Make no mistake: As long as these weapons exist, the United States will maintain a safe, secure and effective arsenal to deter any adversary, and guarantee that defense to our allies -- including the Czech Republic. But we will begin the work of reducing our arsenal.”⁷

The direct, concrete steps to which he committed as this “beginning” are a Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) follow-on, ratification of the Comprehensive test Ban Treaty (CTBT) and negotiation of a verifiable Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty (FMCT). He stated:

To reduce our warheads and stockpiles, we will negotiate a new Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty with the Russians this year. President Medvedev and I began this process in London, and will seek a new agreement by the end of this year that is legally binding and sufficiently bold. And this will set the stage for further cuts, and we will seek to include all nuclear weapons states in this endeavor.

To achieve a global ban on nuclear testing, my administration will immediately and aggressively pursue US ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. After more than five decades of talks, it is time for the testing of nuclear weapons to finally be banned.

And to cut off the building blocks needed for a bomb, the United States will seek a new treaty that verifiably ends the production of fissile materials intended for use in state nuclear weapons. If we are serious about stopping the spread of these

⁷ Ibid.

use in state nuclear weapons. If we are serious about stopping the spread of these weapons, then we should put an end to the dedicated production of weapons-grade materials that create them.⁸

Other proposals put forward in Prague included strengthening the NPT and nonproliferation, as well as counterproliferation and counterterrorism initiatives.

There has been some anxiety from some US allies under the nuclear umbrella about the interest in a world free of nuclear weapons. There is also widespread support for the goal on political and on security grounds.

It seems clear that like George Schultz and his colleagues, whose proposals inspired him, the president is offering a bold vision that is to be pursued, at least at the outset, with incremental, practical steps. Whether one agrees or disagrees with every step, each was US policy in the Bush or Clinton administrations, or in both. The specific proposals of the Obama Administration can be fully discussed without raising the critical issues that have dominated the nuclear disarmament debate since the dawn of the nuclear age. The program does not amount to a call for a Nuclear Weapon Convention or agreement on outlawing nuclear weapons, or for renouncing deterrence. Indeed, achieving the steps proposed would not appear to threaten nuclear deterrence or its extension to allies and friends, which were reiterated in the call for a nuclear free world. As reassurance requires addressing the security concerns of allies, to the extent that Russian and possibly other arsenals are drawn down, and especially if Russian nonstrategic forces are addressed, the proposed steps would reduce at least some of the nuclear threats that confront the alliance

⁸ Ibid.

and thereby enhance its security. A positive turn in US- and NATO- Russian relations would also provide security benefits.

Several areas that might adversely affect extended deterrence could come into play in the near to medium terms. The first involves the related issues of nonstrategic nuclear forces and the presence of US nuclear weapons in Europe. Will US nuclear weapons in Europe ~~are to~~ be maintained and modernized? If not, how and in what context are they to be removed? What will be the impact on extended deterrence? What is to be done about Russian nonstrategic forces? Will they be addressed in strategic reductions negotiations? Or will they be handled in separate negotiations with the United States, with US weapons in Europe on the table?

US nuclear weapons in Europe have been central to the credibility of extended deterrence and burden sharing. In the last decade, however, nuclear-sharing arrangements have come under criticism in the NPT review process, and some abolitionists have called for their removal as a symbol of decreased dependence on nuclear weapons. The president did not raise the issue of US forces in Europe, but Secretary Gates has expressed his support for continuing the current arrangements.

The alliance has undertaken significant unilateral nuclear reductions in the past. In the early 1990s, the United States and its NATO allies in the context of the Presidential Nuclear Initiatives (PNIs) unilaterally retire all nuclear artillery shells, all nuclear warheads for short-range ballistic missiles and all naval nuclear anti-submarine warfare weapons. These unilateral actions reduced nonstrategic nuclear forces in NATO by nearly

90 per cent, reduced the types of US nuclear weapons based in Europe from five to one and reduced nuclear weapon storage sites in Europe by 80 percent.

Since then, there have been calls for codification of the PNIs or the further reduction or elimination of non-strategic nuclear forces in the context of strategic reductions or independently. This would involve difficult and complex negotiating issues, including scope and verification, especially if warheads are a unit of account. Any movement on nonstrategic forces could have potentially significant effects to the extent it makes the remaining US nuclear arms in Europe central to a contentious negotiation. It is argued by many that these forces should be removed from Europe in exchange for Russian reductions in the number of their non-strategic nuclear weapons. However, the Russians attribute utility to their nonstrategic nuclear weapons for reasons other than the US nuclear presence in Europe and would not likely consider such a deal. Consequently, separate negotiations on NSNF do not seem likely.

Secretary Clinton has made clear that the US commitment to further nuclear-weapon reductions included nonstrategic systems. This will not occur in the new START to which the United States and Russia have committed themselves to negotiate. NSNF will possibly not be included in any follow-on that may be pursued in its aftermath. However, it will be critical to address these weapons at some stage if significant additional reductions are to be possible. Doing so in bilateral strategic negotiations seems more likely than separate nonstrategic talks.

If this is correct, it is possible that US forces would not *need* to be removed from Europe via a negotiated agreement. But should this action be undertaken unilaterally? The risks to burden sharing and consultations among the allies, and to the transatlantic linkage in extended deterrence, have been raised. In contrast, it is argued that this move would provide significant benefits, including demonstrating NATO's commitment to disarmament, contributing to NPT diplomacy and to a successful Review Conference in 2010 or after, strengthening the commitment of nonnuclear weapon-states to nonproliferation and influencing Russian NSNF deployments. These benefits appear overstated or unrealistic.

In any case, whether or not to continue the current nuclear-sharing arrangements should be an alliance decision, and many who advocate change believe that it should not be undertaken precipitously and that it should be preceded by extensive consultations and full coordination within the Alliance. Any decision should be taken in a manner that prevents any perceptions of transatlantic de-coupling to the extent possible, avoids any sense that the decision was driven by external or internal pressures and maintains the credibility of deterrence.⁹

The second involves ballistic missile defense (BMD), which is increasingly a factor in alliance deterrence calculations. The Russian reaction to the decisions by Poland and the Czech Republic to host elements of a BMD system directed at Iran has been severe. However, Russia opposes US BMD development globally and will raise the issue in the

⁹ It is important to recall that these weapons are not the only means by which the United States extends deterrence to its NATO allies, and their removal would not necessarily end the nuclear umbrella.

START follow-on negotiations. There have been calls for a new Antiballistic Missile (ABM) treaty, and Presidents Obama and Medvedev agreed to look at offense-defense relations. The issue will be whether arrangements will be reached and their impact on extended deterrence. In this area, there are options consistent with NATO deterrence needs, including NATO-Russian cooperation on defenses targeted at Iran or other Middle Eastern threats.

A third involves conventional capabilities. US conventional force capabilities, especially strategic conventional capabilities referred to by the Bush administration as Prompt Global Strike (PGS), are increasingly being singled out as a problem for bilateral US-Russian strategic nuclear reductions as well as for the longer term goal of a nuclear-free world. This response to US conventional superiority, at a time when US conventional capabilities will be increasingly relied upon for deterrence and defense of the United States and its allies, could be a problem for the Alliance and its efforts to promote nuclear disarmament and nonproliferation while maintaining US extended deterrence. Here too the issue will be whether arrangements will be reached and their impact on extended deterrence. Options consistent with NATO deterrence needs are possible, including counting any PGS-type systems as nuclear under a START follow-on.

The fourth involves calls for reducing the role of nuclear weapons, which has occurred in the United States and NATO and was called for in the President's Prague speech. This does not pose a problem at current or foreseeable force levels and with a commitment to extended deterrence. When these calls involve moving away from deterrence altogether,

as has been demanded by some states and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), there is a threat to the nuclear umbrella. There is a need to ensure that potential adversaries do not view any such efforts as an invitation to threaten the alliance. There is also a need for consultations on the meaning and means of extended deterrence to discuss the desirability and nature of any further actions to reduce reliance and to ensure allies that any actions taken remain compatible with defense needs.

Beyond these issues, none of which need have a negative impact on extended deterrence if handled well, at some point along the path to a nuclear free world that President Obama and others envision, the potential for the direct impact of reduced forces and capabilities on extended deterrence would be raised.

This would involve getting to, or very near, the end point of a nuclear-free world, however, which is difficult to imagine. It may not require a new Eden or even General and Complete Disarmament. It may not require, as suggested in the Acheson-Lilienthal report and the Baruch plan, an end to war. It would seem to require a fundamental change in the relations among states. Progress would be desirable and probably needed at least in:

- Reducing further the role of conflict and war in international affairs;
- Improving regional conflict management;
- Reducing nonnuclear armaments in some fashion;
- Strengthening nonproliferation and other threat reduction efforts, and resolving outstanding proliferation cases; and

- Arriving at greater agreement, if not a full consensus, on acceptable verification measures and on enforcing compliance—because verification cannot be perfect and stakes are high.

Although controversial, there may also be a need for some type of international force or suitable military arrangements, as well as cooperation on defenses, both active and passive, to deter and respond to breakout scenarios. As noted, these needs raise issues themselves.

It is not clear we will get to this stage. If we do not, the disarmament project will not be completed and could possibly but not necessarily be reversed. If these conditions are met, disarmament may be possible but it would take decades to realize. In this event, the need for security alliances would not necessarily go away, but they would likely shift over time to global or regional efforts to prevent “breakout.” Extended deterrence requirements would not necessarily disappear but would certainly be less pressing and perhaps handled in very different ways with different means.

What will be critical if we believe reaching this point is possible is the establishment of a step-by-step process that ensures the security of the United States along with its friends and allies at every step. This requires full consultations among the allies, their inclusion in broader strategic dialogues with the nuclear powers and others and attention to their security concerns at the regional, subregional and national levels at every point in the process.

Ensuring security requires dealing with current realities as well as future aspirations and possibilities. During any transitional period, nonproliferation is essential. As suggested, moves toward disarmament will not change the nature of global cooperative nonproliferation efforts, but they should help efforts within the alliance to maintain a credible nuclear policy. They may aid the near-term requirement to modernize NATO's dual-capable aircraft. This is essential. If we are on the path to a nuclear-free world, nuclear deterrence will be essential during the transition and cannot be replaced as is at times put forward by nonnuclear deterrence or virtual nuclear deterrence. Both may have a role to play, but are highly questionable.

Some hold that conventional deterrence will allow the United States to forego nuclear deterrence, at the very least in most contingencies. Conventional weapons can replace certain nuclear missions and will increasingly figure in future deterrence calculations. However, the historical record of conventional deterrence is not encouraging and the experience of recent years is mixed at best. If advanced conventional capabilities are used decisively, and successfully, in battle, they could have a deterrent effect. But they may not. Moreover, conventional forces sufficient to deter a threat may not be available in a region of concern in time to prevent aggression. Even if the United States and its allies could accept its conventional capabilities as a hedge to reduce the risks of disarming, other nuclear-weapon states do not and will not be able to do so. It would make disarmament less likely, not more.

Virtual deterrence also has problems and uncertainties. It is based on a reality. Virtual capabilities will exist in a nuclear-free world. Shutdown programs can be reconstituted;

civil nuclear programs can be used, or misused, to make weapons. The implicit assumption that one can choose whether or not to rely on virtual capabilities is only partially true. Moreover, to argue that they will have a positive deterrent effect without forces in being is not clear. Capabilities may cast a deterrence “shadow,” but an effective virtual arsenal would almost certainly require, among other things, human capital and facilities that cannot just be “mothballed” and will need to be exercised if they are to have any real deterrent value. This may appear threatening and raises questions about crisis and arms control stability at the least. The acceptance of such a strategy as disarmament by nonnuclear-weapon states and NGOs is by no means certain. It has been criticized by abolitionists.

With the calls of President Obama and others for a world without nuclear weapons, there is growing interest in, and hopes for, nuclear disarmament in governments and NGOs around the world. The path to a nuclear free world is difficult to imagine, which has led Bill Perry and others to advocate establishing a “base camp” or reaching a “vantage point” before critical decisions on disarmament can be taken. The political, military and technical feasibility and impacts of disarmament will all need to be addressed. Would a world without nuclear weapons be more stable and secure? How could this be assured? What are the conditions in which nuclear weapons might be eliminated? How would we ensure nuclear weapons were given up? Is a world without nuclear weapons verifiable? How would compliance be assured? These and other questions/issues about the path toward and the shape of a nuclear-free world are significant, and will all need to be addressed. The challenges are immense and the prospects for success are uncertain.

The pursuit of deterrence, nonproliferation and arms control in the context of a vision of a nuclear-free world is possible and, most probably, a political necessity. It will be critical to consult within the alliance and to move in a way that does not undermine deterrence, as deterrence offers order, stability and nonproliferation benefits along the path and may even make the possibility of the goal of a nuclear free world more realistic. Navigating this path will be difficult, but it can result in near-term security benefits and NPT diplomatic successes.