

NUCLEAR ATTACK AND CONVENTIONAL RETALIATION

Small States, Proliferation, and Nuclear War

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Senator Glenn: I get lost in what is credible and not credible. This whole thing gets so incredible when you think about wiping out whole nations...

Secretary Brown: That is why we sound a little crazy when we talk about it.

U.S. Senator John Glenn and
Defense Secretary Harold Brown
during Senate hearings, 1980

Deterrence and retaliation

- ⦿ How to deter, or if need be, retaliate against, small nuclear powers?
- ⦿ Cold War solutions no longer workable
- ⦿ Need to reform Cold War doctrine
- ⦿ Conventional retaliation and regime change
 - Preventive war
 - A word about “zero”

U.S. nuclear doctrines

● Cold War

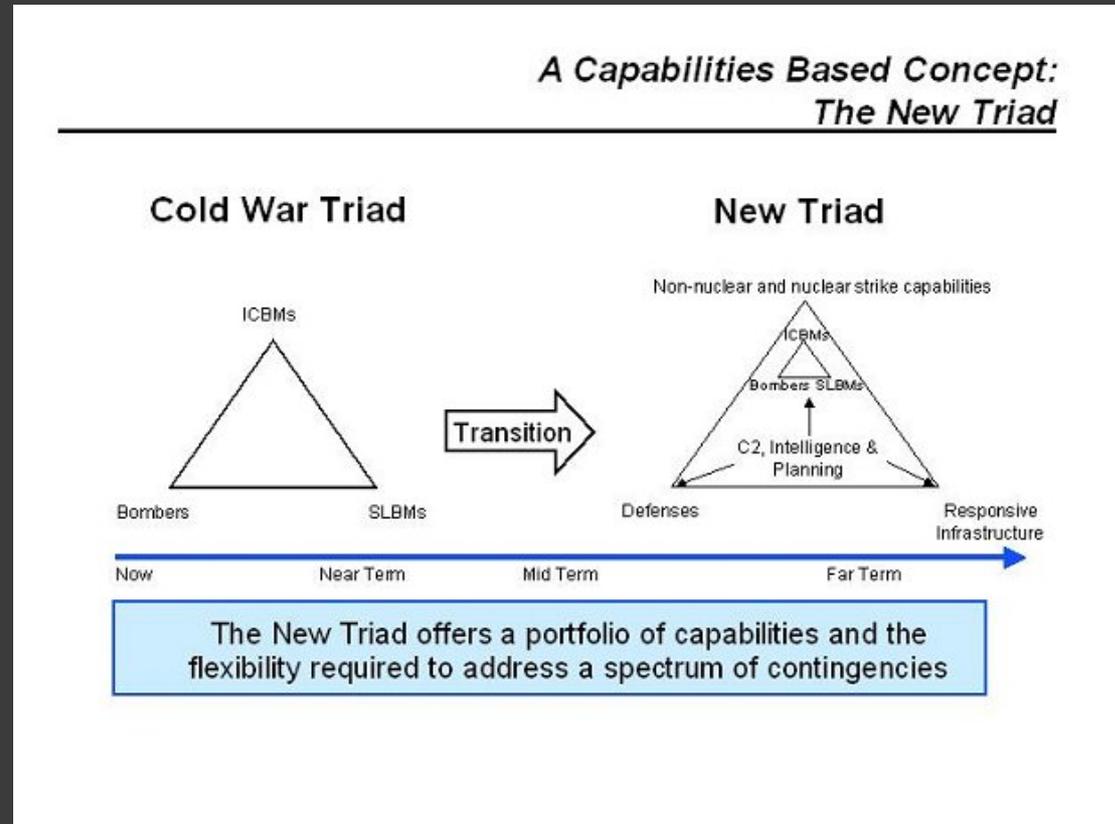
- Major doctrinal debate: MAD vs counterforce (warfighting)
 - Missile defenses as a deterrent

● The 1990s: “Calculated Ambiguity”

- Attempt to adapt the nuclear deterrent to non-nuclear threats

2001: The Nuclear Posture Review

- Mandated by Congress



This is a consulting contract, not a doctrine

2010: The Nuclear Posture Review

- Softens language, but still no clarity on the purpose of nuclear weapons
- Exempts states that observe the NPT from nuclear attack
 - So what?
 - Same promise made 15 years ago
- Leaves loopholes, especially for North Korea and Iran or anyone else who harms the U.S.
- **U.S. nuclear policy remains essentially unchanged and aimless, except for a hazy commitment to “zero”one day**

A SIMPLER AND MORE
RELIABLE DOCTRINE:

NO USE/CONVENTIONAL
RETALIATION

No Use/Conventional Retaliation

◎ Two-tiered doctrine

1. Existential threats from peers:

- Minimum deterrence

2. Rogues, either as owners of nuclear arms or hosts to terrorists

- Conventional retaliation

“No Use:” Minimum Deterrence

- ⦿ *Only a threat to the existence of the United States justifies the use of nuclear weapons of any kind*
- ⦿ Minimum deterrence can work at the smallest level
 - ⦿ How many Katrinas or Chernobyls does it take to deter? Ten? Five? *One?*
- ⦿ Overly complex scenarios for major nuclear never made sense in the first place (and should have long ago been abandoned).

Conventional Retaliation

Renounce nuclear retaliation against rogue states...

and instead affirm that use of any WMD—even nuclear weapons—against the United States, its allies, or military forces, will result in major conventional attack with the eventual goal of regime change

Conventional Retaliation

- ◉ Goliath vs. David threats are not only incredible, but *immoral* and counter to American and Western values
 - Massacre 22 million Koreans (and poison thousands more in Japan, South Korea, Russia and even the U.S.) if Kim uses or sponsors a nuclear weapon?
 - Nuclear retaliation is discretionary, and American use of nuclear weapons will be *the* issue, no matter what the initial provocation
 - Once nuclear attack is accomplished by rogues/terrorists, there is no immediate need for response
 - 9/11 retaliation took a month

Conventional Retaliation and Deterrence

- ⊙ Major objection:
 - Without threat of nuclear reprisal, would smaller actors be deterred?
- ⊙ Answer: are they deterred *now* (and are they even *deterrable*)?
 - What do such regimes value?
 - ***Their continued existence in power***
 - ***Their own lives***

Near-term policy implications

- ⦿ A major, unilateral reduction in the U.S. nuclear inventory
 - Maintain land-based forces for deterrent purposes (i.e., force an enemy to attack the U.S. homeland to attack the deterrent)
 - Sea-based forces for survivability
 - The future of the nuclear bomber force is less clear (and already changing)
- ⦿ Cancellation of missile defenses
- ⦿ Greater investment in conventional forces
 - Long-range strike *and* projection-intervention capacity

“This is, of course, impossible.”

--Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy

- ◎ While reductions in nuclear inventories are popular (and were part of Obama's campaign)...
 - Unilateralism is a difficult sell
 - Missile defenses (largely due to public misperception as a “peace shield”) are actually popular
 - Significant institutional inertia in the military bureaucracy
 - The enduring need for “triads”
 - Conventional alternatives will be considerably more expensive

THE PRICE:

TWO STRATEGIES

1. COERCIVE NON-PROLIFERATION

2. PREVENTIVE STRIKES AGAINST ROGUE
MISSILE PROGRAMS

The price of U.S. unilateral disarmament

- ◉ U.S. commitment to military destruction of rogue programs if all else fails
 - Neither the American public nor Congress (regardless of party) will accept major reductions without a firm warning to proliferators
- ◉ U.S. commitment to destruction of rogue delivery systems
 - The United States will forego missile defense because there will be no missiles against which defenses would matter
 - ***“...if North Korea persists in its launch preparations, the United States should immediately make clear its intention to strike and destroy the North Korean Taepodong missile before it can be launched.”***

--William Perry and Ashton Carter, “If Necessary, Strike and Destroy,” June 2006

A related (and at present, unnecessary) problem: Controversy over “Zero”

- “The general view out there when you get behind the scenes, even with some of our allies, is, ‘We don't like Iran and North Korea, but what kind of hypocrites are you?’ ”
--Sam Nunn
- “An unserious idea espoused by serious people.”
--Robert Jervis

I argue that this is the right debate, but at the wrong time; the key to “zero” is to undermine the utility of nuclear arms, not to assert their uselessness or to make “zero” a goal in itself—but that is an argument for another day.