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Missile Defense, Arms Control, and Deterrence: A New Strategic Framework

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Summary

The Bush Administration has argued that a "new strategic framework" should shape the U.S. relationship with Russia. The Administration states that the United States no longer faces the threat of global nuclear war, and must instead respond to emerging threats. In this environment, it argues, the United States must rely on both offensive and defensive weapons to deter and repel attacks. The Administration maintains that Russia is no longer an enemy, so the United States and Russia need not rely on formal arms control agreements to manage the nuclear balance. Each can reduce its forces unilaterally and alter its forces according to its own needs. Most critics doubt that the United States and Russia can manage their relationship without formal arms control. They also argue that the Administration's plans for missile defense could undermine the U.S. relationship with Russia and upset international stability.

During the Cold War, the United States pursued national security and defense policies to address the global threat posed by the Soviet Union. Deterrence of Soviet threats and attack against the United States and its allies rested, ultimately, on U.S. nuclear forces. Both nations maintained large arsenals of nuclear weapons. Therefore, in theory, neither would have an incentive to initiate a conflict that could escalate to nuclear war because each could inflict wide-scale destruction on the other in retaliation.

Although the United States and Russia reduced their nuclear stockpiles and introduced some modifications to their national security strategies during the 1990s, this "Cold War" strategic framework remained largely unchanged through the Clinton Administration.[1] The Bush Administration has argued that this framework does not reflect the realities of the current international security environment because it presumes an adversarial relationship between the United States and Russia and ignores other challenges

[1] The Clinton Administration conducted a Nuclear Posture Review in 1993-1994, and issued new guidance on nuclear weapons in 1997. These called for reductions in U.S. nuclear forces, which were blocked by Congress pending ratification of the START II Treaty, but they left largely unchanged the U.S. nuclear strategy for deterrence with Russia.

to U.S. national security. In particular, the arms control framework that has helped shape the strategic balance between the United States and Russia precludes the deployment of robust missile defenses, which, according to the Bush Administration, the United States needs to address emerging ballistic missile threats from other nations.

President Bush and officials in his Administration have frequently argued that the United States can deploy missile defenses without upsetting its relationship with Russia because a "new strategic framework" can now shape that relationship and determine U.S. national security and defense policies. The Administration has not offered a comprehensive description of this new framework, but it may do so when it completes its ongoing nuclear posture review in late 2001. Key elements of the framework are evident in the Administration's statements about deterrence, arms control, and missile defense. This report seeks to blend these statements into an integrated description of the new framework. It begins with a brief review of the relationship between the framework and the broader world view held by the President and his key advisors. It then outlines how the new strategic framework would identify the challenges to U.S. national security, define deterrence, and describe the role of arms control in U.S. security. Finally, it summarizes some criticisms and concerns that analysts and officials in other countries have raised about the Bush Administration's description of this new framework.

The Strategic Framework within the Broader View

During the campaign and early months of the Bush Administration, the President and his advisors were critical of the foreign policy of the Clinton Administration. Although a full review of this critique is not appropriate here, a few examples can help clarify the views that shape the Bush Administration's concept of a new strategic framework.

In an article in Foreign Affairs magazine in January 2000, Condoleeza Rice, the President's National Security Advisor, criticized the Clinton Administration for its "reflexive appeal to notions of international law and norms," to the extent that "humanitarian interests" and the interests of the "international community" replaced the "national interest" in the rationale for the use of U.S. power. She went on to state that the Clinton Administration was "so anxious to find multilateral solutions to problems that it has signed agreements that are not in America's interests." Furthermore, in Ms. Rice's view, the "United States has a special role in the world and should not adhere to every international convention and agreement that someone thinks to propose.[2] Other officials have indicated that the Administration will pursue a foreign policy that puts "U.S. national interest ahead of global compromise" and seeks to preserve the nation's "superpower status." Administration officials have referred to this as "exceptionalism," which means that the United States, with its special role in the world, should not always be bound by "the same rules as everybody else."[3] Although all members of the President's Administration may not ascribe to these views on the relative priority of power politics over international norms in U.S. foreign policy, most do seem to support specific policies on deterrence and arms control that are consistent with these views.

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[2] Rice, Condoleeza. Promoting the National Interest. *Foreign Affairs*. January/February 2000. v. 79. pp. 47-48.

[3] Diamond, John. Bush Putting U.S. Above Global Cooperation. Exceptionalism Bumps Isolationism. *Chicago Tribune*. July 20, 2001.

Threats and Challenges to U.S. Security

The Bush Administration argues that the challenges facing the United States have changed from the threat of a global war with the Soviet Union to the threat posed by emerging adversaries in regions around the world. These adversaries include non-state actors and terrorists, as well as "rogue" nations. Administration officials further emphasize that "Russia is not our enemy." Hence, the two nations no longer have to focus on the balance of nuclear weapons and should no longer base their relationship on a framework characterized by "Cold War antagonism and mutual assured destruction." Instead, the United States should "deal with Russia as we deal with other countries."[4]

Furthermore, instead of trying to prevent "one hostile power from using an arsenal of weapons against us..." the challenge is to "deter multiple potential adversaries not only from using existing weapons but also to dissuade them from developing new capabilities in the first place."[5] These potential adversaries include nations such as China[6] and a number of other states, such as North Korea and Iran, "for whom terror and blackmail are a way of life."[7] These adversaries might threaten U.S. allies and interests, U.S. forces advancing U.S. interests, and U.S. territory in an effort to blackmail the United States to retreat from its interests around the world.

The Clinton Administration (and the first Bush Administration before it) also recognized that the international security environment had changed after the demise of the Soviet Union and end of the Cold War, but officials in the current Administration and some analysts outside government have argued that the Clinton Administration did not alter U.S. national security objectives or its military posture in ways that respond to this changing environment. The current Administration, in contrast, has indicated that these changing threats and challenges provide both the opportunity and the necessity for the United States to alter its approaches to deterrence and arms control. In this view, the attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon on September 11, 2001 served to indicate just how vulnerable the United States can be to a determined adversary.

Deterrence

President Bush has stated that "we need new concepts of deterrence that rely on both offensive and defensive forces. Deterrence can no longer be based solely on the threat of nuclear retaliation. Defenses can strengthen deterrence by reducing the incentive for proliferation."[8] Offensive nuclear weapons would continue to play a role in deterrence. According to Secretary of State Powell, "you keep enough weapons so that you will always be able to deter anyone else who is planning to strike you."[9] However, because

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[4] Rumsfeld, Donald H. Toward 21st Century Deterrence. *Wall Street Journal*. June 27, 2001.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Rice, Promoting the National Interest. p. 56.

[7] President George W. Bush. Remarks at the National Defense University. May 1, 2001.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Wright, Jonathan. Powell Says MAD is Indispensable. Washington Times, June 21,2001. p. 11.

Russia is no longer an enemy to be deterred by the threat of nuclear destruction, the United States can "change the size, composition, and character of our nuclear forces."[10]

This concept of deterrence envisions two roles for missile defense. First, defenses might discourage nations from acquiring ballistic missiles that can threaten the United States, its forces, or its allies. According to this view, some nations have made ballistic missiles their "weapons of choice" because they know the United States has no defense against them and they expect that, if they can threaten the United States with even a limited attack on U.S. cities, the United States would withdraw its forces or support from their region. Missile defenses, would, however, undermine this calculus by removing the "free ride" for ballistic missiles. Second, even if these nations still chose to acquire ballistic missiles, U.S. defenses could deter their use, or threat of use, in a crisis. Theoretically, a nation's leaders would decide whether to threaten or attack the United States by balancing the costs and benefits of such an action. With only offensive weapons (conventional and nuclear) in its deterrent strategy, the United States would seek to *raise the costs* of such an action by threatening to inflict unacceptable damage on an adversary if it attacked the United States with its missiles or weapons of mass destruction.[11] But, with missile defenses in the mixture, the United States could also *reduce the potential benefits* of such an action by intercepting attacking missiles. Furthermore, according to this theory, the missile defense system need not be perfect. Even an imperfect defense could raise enough doubts in an adversary's mind to discourage an attack.

Arms Control

During the Cold War, arms control negotiations and agreements often played a key role in the U.S.-Soviet relationship. Although most of the treaties and agreements may have done little to reduce weapons, many analysts believe that they helped shape the arms race, added predictability to force postures and the strategic environment, and provided a measure of openness and transparency between the two sides. Multilateral nonproliferation agreements also played a role in establishing international norms of behavior, with little effect on U.S. forces or national security strategy.[12]

Some Members of Congress, the Executive Branch, and analysts outside government have long questioned the value of arms control agreements in limiting threats to the United States. However, since the mid-1980s, many have accepted the role that these agreements can play, with their detailed definitions and comprehensive verification measures, in

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[10] Bush. Remarks at National Defense University.

[11] The United States, in its declaratory policy, neither specifically threatens or rules out nuclear retaliation. Some have questioned the credibility of nuclear threats, particularly in retaliation for non-nuclear attacks. If an adversary doubted that the United States would cross the "nuclear threshold," threats of retaliation might not deter aggression. On the other hand, some have argued that an adversary could not be certain that the United States would not use nuclear weapons and would, therefore, be less likely to use weapons of mass destruction.

[12] Although the 1968 Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty contains a long-term goal of nuclear disarmament, the United States and other nuclear powers view this as an admonition to reduce, not eliminate nuclear arms. The United States agreed to ban chemical weapons in the Chemical Weapons Convention, but Congress had already legislated the elimination of U.S. chemical weapons.

ensuring predictability and transparency in the U.S. nuclear relationship with Russia. However, many of these same officials and analysts are again questioning the value of formal, negotiated arms control agreements. They argue that the agreements can take too long to negotiate and go too far in constraining U.S. military forces and activities. Furthermore, they argue that rogue nations who threaten the United States are unlikely to abide by the norms established by the agreements, so they will do little to improve U.S. security. Consequently, instead of spending the time negotiating agreements, the United States should size its forces according to its own needs. In a benign environment, this could lead to reductions in forces, but the United States should also have the flexibility to restore forces if the environment were to change.[13]

Some have also argued that the U.S.-Soviet model of strategic nuclear arms control is not consistent with the new U.S. relationship with Russia. If Russia is not our enemy, the two nations should not engage in lengthy, detailed negotiations in an adversarial environment. Instead, they could each size their forces according to their own needs, and meet occasionally to inform the other of their plans. This would allow for predictability and transparency in a more cooperative environment. The President has stated that he intends to pursue this type of arms control approach. He has indicated that he will reduce U.S. nuclear forces unilaterally, while holding consultations with Russia to discuss plans for offensive nuclear weapons and ballistic missile defenses.

The Administration has also stated that it will use its discussions and consultations with Russia to convince that nation to understand and accept the U.S. view of the threats and challenges in the new strategic environment, the U.S. view of the value of and need for ballistic missile defenses in the deterrence framework, and the absence of a need for formal, lengthy arms control negotiations in the relationship between the United States and Russia. According to the President, these two nations should develop a "new cooperative relationship" that "looks to the future, not to the past."[14] Specifically, the Administration wants to convince Russia to agree to move beyond the 1972 ABM Treaty in cooperation with the United States. But the President and his advisors have been clear in their recent statements; if Russia does not accept the U.S. approach, the United States will exercise its right to withdraw from the Treaty unilaterally.

Contrasting Views and Criticisms

Officials in other nations and analysts outside government have raised several questions and concerns about the assumptions and policies in the new strategic framework. For example, although the Administration has declared that Russia is no longer an enemy, the relationship between the two nations remains complicated. The recent attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon have opened unexpected channels for cooperation, but both nations continue to maintain nuclear forces to deter an attack by the other. This is unlikely to change even if both sides reduce their forces to 1,500-2,000 warheads. Therefore, nuclear deterrence will likely remain relevant, and could continue to play a role in an environment where political relationships might change rapidly. According to one Russian analyst, "the two powers may no longer consider each other enemies and may not

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[13] See, for example, Rationale and Requirements for U.S. Nuclear Forces and Arms Control. Executive Summary. National Institute for Public Policy, January 2001. pp 15-16.

[14] Bush. National Defense University. May 1, 2001.

be preparing in earnest for war, but relations of latent mutual deterrence remain between them since they are still a long way from being allies."[15]

Furthermore, in spite of years of cooperation in weapons reductions, many doubt that the two sides would be confident in their assessments of the other without the transparency and predictability offered by the detailed provisions in arms control agreements. Russian officials do not agree with the Administration's claims that arms control negotiations are a relic of the Cold War relationship between the two sides and that Russia should be treated like any other nation. They believe that, as a nuclear superpower, Russia deserves a greater degree of respect and consideration and that the arms control relationship with the United States shows that measure of respect.

Some have also questioned the Administration's assertion that missile defenses "threaten no one, except those who would threaten the United States." They note that nations would not be likely to threaten the United States with missile attacks unless they were already involved in a conflict with the United States. And such a conflict, most suggest, would occur if the United States were interfering in areas where other nations sought to defend their interests. Therefore, for many analysts in other nations, U.S. missile defenses are not a reaction to emerging threats to U.S. security, but a means to preempt challenges that other nations might impose to U.S. hegemony around the world. If the United States would stay away from other nations' conflicts, it would have nothing to fear. Furthermore, analysts in Russia and China have both noted that the United States has never intervened in the internal affairs of nuclear armed nations. This could change, and these two nations in particular fear they could be at risk, if the United States could protect itself from retaliatory attacks.

Many analysts also disagree with the view that the United States has little to gain from arms control and international norms. They argue that all nations in the international community benefit from the transparency and predictability offered by arms control. And all benefit from the norms established by multilateral agreements. Even if U.S. security is not enhanced by the specific provisions and prohibitions of individual agreements, U.S. security would benefit if the international community were more secure and stable. The absence of conflict and arms races around the world benefit all nations, even those that could expect to prevail if a conflict or arms race occurred.

Finally, in the wake of the attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon, some analysts have questioned whether the United States should commit so much of the Pentagon's resources to missile defense. They note that the terrorists who attacked the United States did so with conventional airliners; they did not devote time or resources to the development of ballistic missiles. So, even if the emerging threats in the post-Cold War era argue for a new strategic framework, the appropriate response may not be one that places a high priority on missile defenses and excludes future negotiated arms control agreements with Russia.

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[15] Arbatov, Aleksei. Once More on Missile Defense; Is Stability Formula Attainable?" Moscow, Nezavisimaya Gazeta. July 4, 2001. Translated in FBIS Document CEP20010704000171.