



DOCA Virtual Conference Strategic Deterrence and National Security

“Nuclear Deterrence through the Nuclear Triad” Post Conference Report from June 26th, 2020 (All presentations were UNCLASSIFIED)

Informative. Balanced. Thought provoking. DOCA members were given an opportunity to expand their understanding about weapon modernization, its importance, and where the United States stands in the current “arms race” and overall strategy to deter global adversaries. Speakers utilized an analogy comparing the arms modernization to a track and field race, often saying that the U.S. just entered the stadium or had not yet tied their shoes. The historical perspectives, as to how the U.S. may have fallen behind but continues to develop technology and strategy, were critical in shaping the overarching message from the conference. The goal of nuclear deterrence is that every day adversaries look at their strategies and think about attacking the U.S. homeland, they respond with, “Not Today.”

“Russia and China: Threat Assessment and Strategic Balance”



Round Table Discussion - (left to right)

Mr. Richard D. Fisher, Jr., Senior Fellow, International Assessment and Strategy Center Advisory Board of the Global Taiwan Institute

Dr. Matthew Kroenig, Deputy Director of the Atlantic Council's Scowcroft Center for Strategy and Security and the Director of the Center's Global Strategy Initiative

Mr. Fisher began by briefing listeners on China's strategic nuclear modernization and confirmed that they are seeking strategic parity/superiority. The Chinese are amid a weapon system surge and Fisher detailed the known expansions. Despite their increased arsenal, China is challenged by its global power projection ambitions. They only have two major foreign bases, but Fisher found it important to note that they have the potential to quadruple their foreign base numbers around the globe by making some strategic advances. Some strategic advances include the six wars China felt they would need to win to accomplish global power, one of which is unification of Taiwan. As United States strategists come to understand such ambitions and advances, they can counter them with National Defense Strategies.



Dr. Kroenig published two books titled *The Logic of American Nuclear Strategy* and *The Return of Great Power Rivalry*, on which he focused his comments. He talked about how Russian Nuclear Strategy and threat has changed significantly from the Cold War. The current concern is a regional conflict that escalates into a strategic nuclear attack (i.e. against a NATO nation) that would instigate the United States to come to action, or rather surrendering because of unwillingness for a nuclear Armageddon. This strategy could be called “Escalate to De-escalate.”

Like China, Russian nuclear capabilities are improving because of years of modernization of their triad. They are creating more exotic nuclear weapons not covered in current arms treaties. Russia has thousands of non-strategic weapon systems in comparison to the hundreds of U.S. missions with comparable capabilities. Russia does have an advantage right now, and this is why the U.S. strategy has needed to change. There was a shift in the U.S. national strategy of 2018 focusing on the Escalate to De-escalate threat. Kroenig believes that even a modernized low yield capability weapon system will be beneficial to nuclear deterrence, and the Trump administration desires to prepare for an arms competition with China and Russia at the same time.

Throughout the question and answer portion of the presentation, there were thoughts shared about critical direct threats against U.S. and NATO security. Both Fisher and Kroenig opened up about the possibility of nuclear cooperation between China and Russia because they have already been running their race together. Like drafting off one another through gusts of wind, there would not be a direct alliance but a way for each to survive. Another emphasized threat included the “no first use” policy adopted by nuclear powers. Reevaluating China’s view on “no first use” in the Indo-Pacific would prove wise with their increasing nuclear capabilities. Additionally, the U.S. is going to face increasing pressure on the viability of our standing triad.

Fisher and Kroenig spoke of the possible reasons these threats are in play. They attribute such global ambitions to the economic/political progression of the Chinese Communist Party leading to desire for greater military influence, as well as Putin’s advanced weapon systems and knowledge that the United States decreased their arsenal of nuclear weapons in hopes the rest of the world would follow suit.

The U.S. is countering threats with mind over muscle, at this point. The tough strategic decisions that will face our leaders include “Should the U.S. intervene?” and “How should we respond?” questions. Without Chinese transparency, Fisher believes that there is no reason to think that China is not ready to use their nuclear weapons. If a war broke out between North Korea and China, it might force the U.S. hand. Fisher does not believe that the U.S. has the necessary fire power to battle both countries.

Kroenig stated that sometimes discussions of foreign nuclear strategy seem benign. However, in Kroenig’s eyes, Russia’s strategy should be called “Escalate to Win,” for they are likely willing to use nuclear war to achieve their objective of U.S. and NATO surrender. While Russian leaders are flexing their nuclear muscles, it becomes important for U.S. policy tools and decisions to act as bigger muscles of deterrence while we work to modernize weapons and advance strategy. Kroenig said that the U.S. does not need to do what the Russians (and Chinese) are doing. Qualitative advantages will supersede quantitative advantages. There just needs to be increased preparation for a nuclear challenge.



Currently the U.S. counters the nuclear threat by continuing the New Start treaty and other arms treaties, and pushing for China to join. Fisher and Kroenig believe that leaving INF was a huge step, as well. Being the first to build commercial presence on the moon would also be a great deterrent. Fisher hopes that such programs will continue no matter who enters the White House in November. One struggle with countering, at this point, is that the U.S. is responsible for protecting and defending most of the free world. Strategies developed are incredibly important for not only U.S. safety but global safety. Also, strategic is no longer just “nuclear.” Within some of the other domains (i.e. hypersonic missiles), there needs to be investments in the future forces.

Fisher pointed out that the U.S. has been reacting very poorly to recently nuclearized countries, like when China nuclearized Pakistan or North Korea. There needs to be increased communication with Japanese allies and building of other relationships. Kroenig would not be surprised if India became a strategic partner against Russia, China, and North Korea. The expansion of NATO has been successful following the end of the Cold War, but Russia keeps thwarting opportunities of Ukraine and Georgia to join.

More direct questions were asked about what would happen in specific situations. China has been preparing for invasion of Taiwan for 30 years. Within a month, China could move more than a million troops and smother Taiwan. Yet, China holds back because of the possibility that the U.S. would come to Taiwan’s aid, even though there is not a contract or promise to do so. If Russia did attack the Baltic States, there would be a war because of the strong need to defend them and to not repeat their mistakes. There could be an end to the presence that the U.S. has in being the Global big brother IF the U.S. were to not step up and step in.

Since 2017, the resolve to defend our interests has been on the rise. More is being done to advance the U.S. national security. The only problem would be whether future administrations continue the current progress. Russia and China may think that their times have come because of the polarity and vulnerability in the current administration. Elites need to remember that they are responsible for portraying the importance of U.S. foreign engagement in keeping us freer, richer, and safer.

“Connecting Strategic Modernization and Arms Control”



Round Table Discussion - (left to right)

Peter R. Huessy, *Director of Strategic Deterrent Studies at the Mitchell Institute*
Major General Roger W. Burg, *United States Air Force, Retired*

There is an importance to balancing nuclear modernization and arms control. Genuine work in arms control is challenging. Also, the history of arms control has been met with controversy.



Huessy gave a historical timeline of arms control and weapon system building, starting with what happened in the Reagan administration to the treaties created by the Obama administration. Huessy posed the question, “What is next in arms control?” There is a challenge because each global power can dabble in the grey areas of treaties and stretch the definitions of weapons and/or build systems (like the theatre nuclear system) that are not covered by treaty.

For the first time in history, the Congress, House, and Senate committees approved full funding of the President's budget request for strategic bombers, cruise missiles, class submarines, and the entire GBSD proposal. Huessy finds the approval significant due to the procurement holiday that the U.S. has taken. Following an advanced history lesson on the procurement practices of past administrations, Huessy concluded that Russia and China are likely 90% through the modernization race, and the U.S. just showed up to the track. Getting into the race late and facing financial hang ups create arms issues. The GBSD budget splits the funding $\frac{1}{3}$ to modernization and $\frac{2}{3}$ to sustainment and maintenance of what the U.S. already has.

As a nuclear deterrent practitioner, Major Gen. Burg understands that the use of a weapon as a deterrent requires credibility in the eyes of the enemy. Credibility is built when the capabilities of the weapon is matched with the knowledge of the people. Declaratory policies are far more effective when the U.S. does what they say they will do. Deterrence rests on ready, secure and reliable capabilities.

When asked about what we need when it comes to modernization, Huessy replied simply, “Systems that last a long time.” Burg emphasized that if we modernize in addition to continuing with significant reductions, we will no longer be a great enough force of deterrence. There needs to be an ample number of weapons on the bench. Because Burg is least worried about the bomber leg of the triad, he thinks there should be focus on the other two legs first. Our current structure is about as small as it can get without great consequences. Huessy said, “There is peace through strength.”

There is no question that the pandemic has affected the capability of this country. The money that the U.S. has borrowed to keep the economy afloat will be a major discussion when fulfilling the funding of the GBSD proposal. There may be a need to reshape the robust package. However, there is no higher priority of the military than this modernization. If modernization is given up, the U.S. can give the bad guys an open shot at vulnerabilities. Burg gave more history regarding the de-emphasis of modernization throughout the years. Due to the fact that the U.S. chose to delay modernization in hopes of increasing arms control, re-capitalizing on previous capabilities might be the best alternative.

Both speakers talked about current arms control treaties and how there really is no way to verify just how many systems there are just because of a treaty. Huessy thinks there should be amendments to the New Start treaty to better keep the checks and balances. When Russia was violating the Open Skies treaty, the U.S. was unable to give consequences. Open Skies is a good treaty, by way of foreign relationships during verifications, until we do not know what to do when someone breaks it. Burg supports arms control treaties, but emphasized that treaties are meaningless without verification and follow-through.

An interesting part of the discussion in arms control had to do with understanding culture as the clash of civilizations. Gen. Burg recommended *Carnage and Culture*, a book about historical wars and some analysis of public accountability of leaders of countries. Burg posed the



question, “What is the culture of Russia?” The example that was given about doing the right thing when no one is looking showed that the Russians focus more on what is their advantage and what is their risk. Therefore, Russia takes arms control very seriously. Within China’s culture, they claim they cannot be transparent because they are too weak and too embarrassed, but in reality their culture eats strategy for breakfast. Ultimately, the U.S. needs to go into arms control open eyed, because the cultures are not the same as they were in the past. The U.S., too, is being perceived differently based on culture and not upon what is said.

“Importance of Education in Nuclear Deterrence”



*Lieutenant General Jack Weinstein, United States Air Force Retired
Professor of the Practice of International Security*

Weinstein finds that the education piece is extremely important when talking about nuclear deterrence. Weinstein teaches a class called *21st Century Deterrents, Nuclear, Space, and Cyber* that is being taught in the fall of 2020.

He gave a deep history of the U.S. and nuclear power, including the background of the development of the atomic weapon. Even in the late 1940’s and early 1950’s there were real discussions about using these nuclear weapons in a World War III situation, or are they too powerful and should never be used again. Weinstein believes that to not use a nuclear weapon in combat is success.

“Thus far the chief purpose of the military establishment has been to win wars and from now on the chief purpose must be to avert them.”-Bernard Brodie.

Weinstein continued to brief us as to why we were a low nuclear power. Russia always puts nuclear weapons first. Without them, and due to their economy and population, Russia was a 3rd world nation. Weinstein dove into the historical actions of Russia and it is his belief that Russia is acting normal, today, and that their behaviors in the 90’s were abnormal.

A definitive point that Weinstein made was to say that no matter what DOCA members read or hear, there was a study done by the Office of Science technology that gave irrefutable evidence that there cannot be a replacement/re-weaponizing of the minuteman missiles. There needs to be new modernized ground based systems. This supports the statements from the previous speakers that modernization should be a priority.

With further vigor, Weinstein said that the first step in modernization is updating the nuclear command control communications capability (NC3). NC3 is a piece of the modernization puzzle that most leaders can agree upon. Second step is to say that the U.S. cannot be a nuclear



nation without the capability to build new nuclear weapons faster than other countries. He stated that nuclear capability is the insurance we need above all other capabilities.

When asked about current treaties, Weinstein's perspective was generally positive. Like Huessy and Burg, he agrees that the New Start treaty allows important relationship building and transparency. Weinstein's office handled many of the arms treaties and he stated that extending New Start is a good choice.

There was more talk of NC3 systems and how the U.S. is not leading the industry in NC3 technology. A cell phone does not need to perform in a nuclear environment, but some systems do. Most problems regarding the modernization of NC3 systems have to do with technological consolidation. As discussed in the conference about Energy Resilience and how they were finding there were no longer consistencies between the missions and systems, the NC3 systems would need to be more consistent to ensure resilience.

Weinstein brought up the question, "Who are the current role models to upcoming generations related to STEM education?" When his generation was growing up they were following the footsteps of the moon walkers, and he worries that there is not enough being done to inspire upcoming generations to become engineers/scientists. This is also why it is smart to build NEW nuclear weapons. It is not the fact that there is a NEED for new nuclear weapons, but building a new nuclear weapon is different from sustaining old ones. This country needs kids to want to get degrees and study physics and engineering. It is about exercising the workforce. He believes that the weapons work, but building new weapons when needed will be the responsibility of new generations.

Lastly, Weinstein mentioned that DOCA members can be involved in educating those around them. He said that not everyone understands the threats the country is facing. DOCA members need to talk to people that might not agree with them. You might not be able to change their minds but you can open the discussion.