

# **EXTENDED DETERRENCE AND THE TWO-WAR PROBLEM**

**Workshop Summary**

**April 6-7, 2022**

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**Center for Global Security Research**  
LAWRENCE LIVERMORE NATIONAL LABORATORY

## Workshop Summary

### Extended Deterrence and the Two-War Problem

Center for Global Security Research  
Livermore, California, April 6-7, 2022

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On April 6-7, 2022 the Center for Global Security Research (CGSR) at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory (LLNL) hosted a workshop to understand the impact of the need to deter two near-peer nuclear-armed powers simultaneously on extended deterrence. This session brought together participants drawn across the policy, military, and technical communities from the United States and allied countries in Europe and the Indo-Pacific region.

Discussion was guided by the following key questions:

1. What are the risks of opportunistic aggression in a world in which the United States faces two near-peer adversaries who are also strategic partners?
2. What are the associated challenges to US deterrence strategy, including extended nuclear deterrence?
3. What can and should the US and its allies do to ensure that extended deterrence is fit for purpose in 2030?

#### Key take-aways:

1. The two-war problem may take different forms. It may entail opportunistic aggression by one near-peer when the United States is in conflict with the other. The opportunist might instead be a regional challenger (such as North Korea). Alternatively, rather than simple opportunism, there may be collusion or coordination between two or more U.S. adversaries. The plausible scenarios for multi-vector aggression are growing more numerous. The canonical scenario involves opportunistic aggression by Russia against NATO when China moves to re-claim Taiwan.
2. The leaders of Russia, China, and North Korea are all opportunists. All appear to be increasingly risk-acceptant—a conclusion drawn from new military behaviors, new political statements, new military exercises, and newly fielded military capabilities. But to varying degrees, they are also deliberate in calculating when and how to use force. Putin may be the most inclined to opportunistic aggression and Xi the most calculating.
3. The two-war problem creates new challenges for regional deterrence strategies, the assurance of U.S. allies, the practice of extended nuclear deterrence, and the sharing of

deterrence burdens within alliances. It raises significant new questions about resource allocation, prioritization, planning, mobilization, and synchronization. It should also inform U.S. thinking about how strategic nuclear war might result from a failure of nuclear deterrence at the regional level of war.

4. War in the Indo-Pacific would bring with it a number of global deterrence challenges (which would vary as a function of the aggressor—China or North Korea—or both). Such a conflict would raise immediate questions about how NATO allies could compensate for the drawdown in Europe of U.S. conventional forces. It would also raise questions about what collective action NATO would take regarding the aggressor nation and what might be done to bolster deterrence in Asia by those European powers with a military presence or partnership there. Moreover, the test of extended nuclear deterrence would be watched by U.S. allies in Europe for insights into U.S. credibility and capability. The experience of U.S. allies in eliciting Washington's interest in their equities, vulnerabilities, and preferences would also be closely watched.
5. War in Europe between Russia and NATO would also bring a number of analogous global deterrence challenges. Russia's ongoing war against Ukraine has had a certain clarifying effect in this regard. So far, at least, China's leaders have not seen an opportunity to exploit as the first mover (Russia) discovers its chronic weakness, the second mover (China) rediscovers the difficulties of military success, and the United States and its allies rediscover their purposes and strengths. Of course, Russia's war against Ukraine has not concluded, and thus the long-term implications remain in flux. But it is certain to teach lessons to all about how to prepare for Round Two. Russia may well draw the lesson that nuclear weapons must play an even more direct role in its military operations. China may well draw the lesson that nuclear saber-rattling has its rewards in inducing restraint by an escalation-averse America.
6. The long-standing division of deterrence labor within U.S. alliances is giving way to new circumstances—but a new vision of a new division has not come together. The United States has asked more of its alliances and allies in this new circumstance and will likely ask much more as we together contend with the particular deterrence burdens of opportunistic aggression. A shared vision of the new appropriate mix of roles and capabilities is needed.
7. In addressing these new challenges, it would be useful to focus less on the different challenges of extended deterrence in Europe and Asia and more on the general challenge in a global security context. After all, in dealing with China, the United States and its allies in East Asia will need constructive action by U.S. allies in Europe just as much as the United States and its allies in Europe will need such action by U.S. allies in the Indo-Pacific to deal with Russia. Constructive action must also focus on the software of deterrence, not just the hardware. The United States and its allies in both regions must cooperate to update deterrence strategies, agree and articulate new policies, and align actions and consultation mechanisms. New intellectual capital is needed. New institutions may be needed.
8. New capabilities are also needed to successfully put at risk the way of war against the United States and its allies that Russia and China have developed. U.S. alliances in both Europe and

Asia must continue to adapt and strengthen deterrence; indeed, it is urgent that they accelerate their progress.

9. Allies that worry about the credibility and effectiveness of U.S. extended nuclear deterrence see the U.S. umbrella as leaky. That is, they see the United States as too timid in its nuclear policies and as dangerously reluctant to wield nuclear risk to the benefit of its alliances. These allies seek supplemental U.S. nuclear capabilities and new strategic initiatives from Washington. The new Nuclear Posture Review is perceived as “fiddling at the margins.” While adjustments to the practice of nuclear deterrence by the United States and its allies may be warranted, they should be considered only in the context of a coherent or integrated broader approach encompassing the full set of capabilities, conventional and strategic.
10. The Biden administration’s commitments to strengthening deterrence, to deterrence integration, and to deterrence campaigns provide the building blocks for a more effective U.S. response to the extended deterrence challenges of a two-war world. Top-down, whole-of-government approaches tailored to specific actors are needed. They are also unlikely, which increases the value of informal, ad hoc collaboration. In U.S. strategic policy, the prominence of extended deterrence must increase, while the taboo against new concepts and new capabilities must be broken.
11. To accelerate these efforts, improved understanding of the challenges, risks, and solutions is needed outside the nuclear community. Here too, a new division of labor is needed. Track 1 should ask more of Track 1.5 dialogues (and invest the needed fiscal and political resources). And allies should bring more to the table, substantively. The United States does not have the bandwidth it once did to lead in the development of new concepts, strategies, and capabilities. Allies are capable of picking up some of the slack while the United States picks up its game. In addition, cross-pollination of ideas and concerns needs to continue between U.S. allies in the two regions.

## Panel 1: Calibrating the Risks of Opportunistic Aggression

- Are leaders in Moscow and Beijing becoming less averse to the risks of direct armed confrontation of the United States and its allies?
- How plausible is aggression by one in time of war between the other and the United States?
- Which scenarios are most concerning? Least concerning? Why?

There is extensive evidence that the leaders of Russia and China (and also North Korea and Iran) are becoming less adverse to risk and more assertive in probing and challenging the regional and global orders. This is signified by their actions over the last decade, such as the two Russian invasions of Ukraine and increasing Chinese assertiveness in the South China Sea. It is also evident in the types of the capabilities they are investing in. Both competitors have pursued the types of capabilities tailored for deterring and defeating the United States. Beijing and Moscow have also had strong motivations to become more assertive as their leaders seek control over territories perceived as key to great power status. China's and Russia's growing assertiveness has also been fueled by the belief that the United States does not have the capability to impose significant costs on them, given relative decline in the U.S. conventional power and nuclear forces that are less suited to manage nuclear escalation.

The risk of opportunistic aggression against the United States and its allies is plausible – and is becoming more so because of the second mover advantages that such aggression provides. The most favorable circumstance for the second mover is a scenario in which the United States has substantially reduced its military capacity in one region due to engagement in the first theater of operations. Conversely, the least favorable scenario for the second mover would be one in which the conflict quickly cripples the first mover, without substantially weakening the United States. The plausibility of opportunistic aggression by the second mover does not require the first mover to be winning. Yet, the second mover may have an interest in not seeing the first mover lose catastrophically, as it would enable the United States to concentrate its attention and resources on the second mover.

In a time of war between the United States and the first mover, the second mover's decision to join would rely on the adversaries' strategy-making processes that may be influenced by a variety of factors. First, it would depend on the level of coordination between the adversaries and the extent to which the second mover would know of the first mover's plans in advance. Without sufficient warning, the second mover might be unable to organize, mobilize, and capitalize on the opportunity. Second, it would depend on the second mover's assessment of the scale and breadth of the U.S. capabilities and the extent to which the U.S. capabilities already engaged against the first mover could swing against the second mover. Third, it would depend on the scale of the planned aggression by the second mover as, for example, a small scale invasion might be contained by residual forces of the United States and its allies. Fourth, the decision to take advantage of the opportunity would depend on the urgency of the second mover to achieve its goals, its risk tolerance, and the extent to which the second mover is willing to pay any reputational costs of such aggression. Last but not least, any second mover would have to take into account that the aggression of the first mover would not go as planned. Russia's failure to achieve a quick victory against Ukraine is a case in point.

What should not be overlooked is that the two-war scenario is not only a problem of opportunistic aggression; there may be collusion or coordination between two or more U.S. adversaries. Also, the mere presence of a second adversary is likely to distract U.S. attention through exercises or troop mobilization. Even in the event that the second adversary does not act decisively, its presence would impact U.S. strategy – for example, the United States would have to honor and remain cognizant of Beijing’s presence and capabilities whilst engaged in a conflict with Russia, even if there are no indications that Beijing is planning an opportunistic invasion of Taiwan, or any other significant move against a U.S. ally in the region.

Looking at potential scenarios of war between the United States and its great power rivals, from most preferable to least preferable one, the most preferable scenario for the United States is a scenario of single theater war against the weaker rival only; second, a single theater war against the stronger rival only; third, a two theater war, sequenced so as the conflict with the weaker adversary plays out first; and finally, a dual theater war, where the stronger adversary is the first mover. So far, at least, Russia’s invasion against Ukraine make the United States and its allies better positioned to address the two-war problem in the near term. The first mover (Russia) discovers its chronic weakness and suffers heavy losses, the second mover (China) rediscovers the difficulties of military success, and the United States and its allies rediscover their purposes and strengths. Also, of the two near peer rivals of the United States, Russia is weaker conventionally and more prone to opportunistic aggression. By invading Ukraine, Putin is effectively sequencing the rivalries for the United States and is overplaying his hand well in advance of Xi’s timeline to move on Taiwan.

## **Panel 2:** The Global Deterrence Challenges of War in the Indo-Pacific

- In a war with China over Taiwan, what particular deterrence challenges would the United States and its allies face? In a war with North Korea?
- What interests would US allies in Europe perceive in such conflicts?
- In this context, what are the risks of opportunistic aggression by Russia in Europe? What are the particular deterrence challenges created by those risks?

Putin’s aggressive and prolonged campaign in Ukraine has raised questions about similar scenarios in the Indo-Pacific region. This particularly applies to China’s long-held ambition for Taiwan’s reunification. North Korea has also been a source of instability through its missile demonstrations, including recent intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) tests, and expansion of its nuclear warfighting options. While looking at war in Europe, allies and adversaries in the Indo-Pacific region have been monitoring the relative successes and failures of deterrence and nuclear diplomacy strategies of the United States and its allies versus Russia. At the same time, the continued conflict in Ukraine has also elevated concerns about a problem of two simultaneous wars in geographically distant regions. Prior to war in Ukraine, the allies in the Indo-Pacific confined the two-war problem to a simultaneous aggression of the North Korea against South Korea, and China against Taiwan.

Reinforcing extended deterrence in the Indo-Pacific region is becoming increasingly important, given China's conventional capability diversification and nuclear modernization efforts, as well as the fact that it is positioned to become the world's largest economy by 2027. With China's growing military and economic power, the Indo-Pacific is likely to face a "decade of danger" in the 2030s. China's strategic options against Taiwan will range from grey zone disruptions through to cyber attacks and interference, as well as more traditional military operations. These are likely to include limited missile strikes, naval blockades, and remote or mainland Taiwan island seizures. A diverse set of capabilities will be needed to deter initial acts of aggression through these multiple pathways of conflict, as well as to manage subsequent escalation.

In addition to China, North Korea might be using its qualitative and quantitative innovations in its strategic and theater capabilities to decouple the United States from the security of its allies. Russia would also remain a source of concern in Asia. Its exercises in and around Japanese territory, nuclear submarine base in the Sea of Okhotsk, activities in the High North, deepening strategic partnership with China, and its expanding cooperation with North Korea all provide justification for Asian allies' concerns.

War in the Indo-Pacific would bring with it a number of global deterrence challenges (which would vary as a function of the aggressor—China or North Korea—or both). Such a conflict would raise immediate questions about how NATO allies could compensate for the drawdown in Europe of U.S. conventional forces and possibly also long-range strike, mobile missile defenses, DCA, and ISR capabilities. Europeans continue to face capability gaps in dealing with Russia without U.S. support, and continue to rely on America for high-end capabilities. Moreover, the test of extended nuclear deterrence would be watched by U.S. allies in Europe for insights into U.S. credibility and capability. The experience of U.S. allies in eliciting Washington's interest in their equities, vulnerabilities, and preferences would also be closely monitored. America's alacrity in overcoming two decades of disengagement and disinvestment on these issues would also be tested.

Conflict in the Indo-Pacific would also raise questions about what collective action NATO would take regarding the aggressor nation and what might be done by European powers with a military presence or partnerships in Asia to bolster deterrence there. Over the last few years, European allies have been paying more attention to the Indo-Pacific region; France, the United Kingdom and Germany have depoloyed assets, and several countries are exploring reciprocal access agreements in the region. The U.S. Indo-Pacific allies have discerned the value of such European support. However, it is also valid to question the feasibility of European allies extending support to the U.S. allies in the Indo-Pacific region, especially at the same time as European attention is focused on the deteriorating security landscape in Europe. Also, European cohesion demonstrated in response to Russia's aggression against Ukraine does not have to translate to similar unity in responding to aggressive Chinese actions. A crisis in the Indo-Pacific may elicit a more mixed response across European allies, where each country's commitment would vary depending on different factors, including the core interests involved, the catalyst of the conflict,

and the duration of engagement. Furthermore, Xi may learn from Putin's mistakes and could make better-informed strategic decisions that foster disagreement among allies.

From the European perspective, a drawdown of Russian military resources or even a potential loss for Russia in Ukraine would not negate the possibility of the two-war problem, nor provide significant remedy for the problem of scarcity of the United States' military resources. Although Russia will have lower capabilities in the near term, they will still maintain some forces and they have demonstrated willingness to compensate for strategic and tactical gaps with aggressiveness and increased risk acceptance. Russia may also place even greater reliance on escalatory options – including nuclear weapons – with more limited conventional power at its disposal.

### **Panel 3: The Global Deterrence Challenges of War in Europe**

- In a Russia-NATO regional war, what particular deterrence challenges would NATO face?
- What interests would US allies in the Indo-Pacific perceive in such a conflict?
- In this context, what are the risks of opportunistic aggression by China and/or North Korea? What are the particular deterrence challenges created by those risks?

Despite a strong, unified response to Russia's aggression in Ukraine, NATO continues to face challenges that could hamper further adaptation of its deterrence and defense posture. First, NATO needs to better understand Russian leadership's thinking, Moscow's security priorities, and the type of war that Russia would fight with NATO. The risk is that NATO allies may be learning the wrong lessons from analyzing Russia's invasion against Ukraine by assuming that Russia would approach war with the Alliance in the same way – that the war would be preceded by a long buildup, would be land-centric, and would not involve significant cyber, electronic warfare, or counter-space elements. Russia's "local war" against Ukraine is not the kind of "regional war" that Russia has prepared to fight with NATO. Incorrectly assuming a similar Russian approach might make it more difficult for the Alliance to balance investments into traditional conventional air-land battle capabilities such as tanks and to bolster capabilities needed for a multidomain battlespace, including long-range precision strike, cyber, and space. It might also lead to an incorrect assessment that NATO's deterrent has proven effective when in fact it has not been tested.

Second, NATO needs to overcome its political-military disconnect signified by sporadic interactions between its main political and military bodies. This disconnect may hamper NATO's deterrence by denial as political leaders may have insufficient understanding of requirements for military resilience in a war of attrition against an adversary such as Russia. Such disconnect may also impede integration of non-military elements into NATO's strategy for conflict, including leverage of global partnerships with like-minded states in the Indo-Pacific.

Third, the Alliance needs more capabilities for horizontal and vertical escalation with potential off-ramps that could be clearly signalled and would be understood by an adversary. Additional rungs in the escalation ladder for intra-war deterrence might include both kinetic and non-kinetic options, allowing for the disruption of Russia's kill chain. NATO also needs to improve its



strategic communication for escalation management, and in particular to overcome the tendency of taking some options off the table too early in a conflict. Preparation of political leadership for decision-making in multidomain conflict is also required to ensure effectiveness in the complex battle space that NATO allies may face in the future. With some exceptions, the political leaders of NATO do not have any experience in confronting peer strategic competitors.

Indo-Pacific countries have responded in a variety of ways to Russia's aggression against Ukraine. Key U.S. allies and partners, including Australia, Japan and South Korea joined Western sanctions against Moscow. This is a pattern of behavior that should also be expected in the case of direct NATO-Russia military confrontation. The neutral stance of India reflected the positions of many other states from the regions that chose not to take sides. While the passivity was disappointing, a cold shoulder from the United States and its NATO allies would do more harm than good, as countries like India will play a vital role in a long term competition with China. Rather, more effort should be made to engage these countries further in order to shape global competition in the future.

The U.S. allies in the Indo-Pacific have been paying close attention to the U.S. and NATO's reactions to Russia's invasion against Ukraine. Some regional observers were concerned by a pervasive narrative that Western reluctance to support Ukraine more robustly derived from a fear of Russia's nuclear use and World War III. Even if there were other more important reasons for Western restraint, this fostered public perception of a one-sided deterrence in which only Russia leverages its nuclear forces, while the U.S. and its European allies are self-deterred from acting. This is harmful to the U.S. allies in the Indo-Pacific, as it may suggest that it is impossible to deter a nuclear-armed challenger determined to change the status quo by force. What is therefore needed is more nuanced and more resolute messaging from NATO allies to counter Russian nuclear intimidation.

While the U.S. allies in the Indo-Pacific would like to see Russia deterred from certain actions against Ukraine and a direct attack against NATO, they do not want to see excessive U.S. involvement in Europe that would stress U.S. military resources and strategic attention. From this perspective, the prevailing concern is whether the U.S. support to Ukraine is politically aligned with the broader strategic objectives of the United States in the Indo-Pacific. That is, as Ukraine is not a NATO member state, approaching escalation risks demand extreme prudence. Another way of looking at this problem is that the WMD use by Russia would create new stakes in the conflict for the U.S. allies in the Indo-Pacific. While the conflict would continue to be about Ukraine, it may also transform into a conflict over defending global norms and preventing normalization of WMD employment.

It is still unclear what conclusions U.S. adversaries in the Indo-Pacific region will draw from the conflict in Ukraine. China is closely watching the developments in Europe, even though there is no simple linkage between the Russian invasion against Ukraine and Beijing's position on Taiwan. Western unity and unprecedented sanctions imposed on Russia in response to its aggression against Ukraine, Russia's conventional losses, and demonstration of U.S. intelligence capabilities might undermine Chinese confidence that it can win quickly and without significant political and economic costs. This might force China to think twice before attempting an aggressive move against Taiwan. Yet, another lesson that China and North Korea might draw

from conflict in Ukraine is that nuclear threats could be useful in deterring external intervention. This might be the case even though the United States makes a clear distinction between risk acceptance levels for nuclear escalation on behalf of its allies and non-allies. Russia's military struggle against Ukraine might also trigger an adjustment in the Chinese strategy and approach to the reunification of Taiwan.

North Korea has already returned to its provocative behavior by testing its missiles, some of which represent a substantial improvement in capability. North Korea's actions can be explained by calculations that Russia's war against Ukraine provides it with greater room for brinkmanship as it does not have to fear more UN sanctions. North Korea's actions seem, however, aligned with the DPRK's original capability development plan and are a reminder that Pyongyang's missile capabilities continue to steadily improve. While the main priority for the United States concerning revisionism in the Asia-Pacific remains combating Chinese opportunistic aggression, the recent tests by North Korea reinforce their risk to stability in the region.

#### **Panel 4: Rethinking the Division of Deterrence Labor**

- How well do existing U.S. and allied capabilities map against new deterrence requirements?
- What is the existing division of labor among the United States and its allies on deterrence?
- How can and should it be adjusted to reflect new realities?

The legacy division of labor between the United States and its allies assumed a simple differentiation of conventional and nuclear deterrence, with the former a shared responsibility and the latter largely a U.S. responsibility. The arrival of new technologies with strategic implications (missile defense, hypersonic strike, counter-space, even cyber) has cluttered this landscape, as has the need to respond to the more integrated approaches to strategic deterrence of Russia and China and now to the two-war problem.

The two-war problem has implications for the existing division of deterrence labor among the United States and its allies. This problem raises significant new questions about resource allocation, prioritization, planning, mobilization, and synchronization. This is because the regional divisions of deterrence labor in Europe and the Indo-Pacific have transregional ramifications. The United States cannot commit its forces to one regional contingency without impacting the deterrence posture in the other region. U.S. allies' investments into their own capabilities also transcend into the other theater. As allies focus more on their own security requirements and ensuring some degree of strategic autonomy, the United States will have more flexibility to pivot as a reserve/backup force in both theaters. If the U.S. extended deterrence is seen from the global perspective – as a single extended deterrence theatre – the U.S. allies in different regions have to care not just about the weakest link in their own theater, but also the weakest link in the other theater.

There is a wide recognition among the U.S. allies that the existing division of labor, in particular with regards to non-nuclear capabilities, has to change and the U.S. allies in Europe and the Indo-Pacific should contribute more. The problem of the two-front war only amplifies this need. Still, to more effectively divide deterrence labor across its regional allies, the United States should start with conducting a detailed analysis about what the U.S. forces would have to do in a scenario of a two-front war; what capabilities are lacking to achieve these objectives; and what the allies should do on their own to ensure that the United States would be able to help them in the most effective way if the U.S. forces are tied down in the other region. A shared vision of the new appropriate designation of roles and capabilities is needed.

NATO allies can enhance deterrence and defense in Europe in a way that also enhances deterrence against opportunistic aggression. One option for doing so is by reducing dependence on naval reinforcements across the Atlantic Ocean. This can be achieved by pre-positioning more stocks of the heavy U.S. equipment in Europe and by investments of NATO allies in heavy military capabilities. Reducing NATO dependency on a sea lift would not only shorten NATO's reaction time and reduce Russia's time-space advantage but would also free the sea lift capabilities for military contingencies in the Indo-Pacific. To reduce burden on the United States, NATO allies should also continue to invest in tactical aircraft that are interoperable with the U.S. forces and increase the stocks of precision-guided munition. They should also invest into ground-based precision strike capability that is of particular significance in early stages of a conflict and integrated air and missile defense (IAMD) to defend critical military and civilian infrastructure. Some improvements in anti-submarine warfare may be also necessary.

One of the important takeaways for U.S. allies in the Indo-Pacific from Ukraine's self-defense is the significance of conventional capabilities. This particularly applies to long-range precision strike options, including conventional, ground-based precision strike capabilities, which are cheaper, easier to conceal, and can operate in a broader area with sufficient range. Unmanned systems may also yield advantages early in a conflict in rolling back adversary's anti-access area-denial (A2AD).

In contrast to conventional capabilities, there is less agreement on the appropriate adjustments for nuclear capabilities and a feasible division of labor. One school of thought contends that no major changes are needed, but instead calls for incremental strengthening of existing regional extended nuclear deterrent arrangements. From this perspective, new U.S. capabilities could backfire politically and would not resolve a core problem of allies' doubts about U.S. political commitment. This is built around the notion that nuclear deterrence failure is highly unlikely, but that in the event it occurs, nuclear escalation would be nearly automatic. The second school of thought argues that nuclear adjustments are needed because Russia and China are likely to further increase their reliance on nuclear weapons as a tool for coercion and war termination and that current capabilities are inadequate to deter nuclear escalation.

In addition to redefining the division of military labor, the United States and its allies have to rethink the role of their political cohesion in strengthening extended deterrence in both theaters. Presenting unity across allies, not just in one theater but in both theaters, will be vital in successfully deterring China and Russia. For example, as the use of sanctions becomes more regularized, Europe will need the United States and Asian allies to help deter Russia, and Indo-

Pacific allies will need Europe to adequately deter China. New institutional arrangements could be used to share best practices and further strengthen cohesion across the U.S. alliance network. This could include enhancement of NATO partnerships with Japan, South Korea, and Australia (NATO+3) or a deterrence-oriented G7 to leverage economic sanctions. New institutional arrangements and closer transregional interactions may also help to foster intellectual burden-sharing needed for reinvigorating deterrence for the long haul. The particular role of the United States is to ensure that its integrated deterrence fosters integrated alliances.

### **Panel 5: The Legacy Nuclear Umbrella in an Era of Major Power Rivalry**

- Can U.S. nuclear weapons contribute more to the needed strengthening of deterrence?
- Is the legacy U.S. nuclear posture for extended deterrence adequate for emerging requirements? Why? Why not?
- Are radical changes to the nuclear division of labor warranted?

The U.S. practice of extended nuclear deterrence is a legacy of decisions made in very different times. In 1991, the United States decided to bring home all of its nuclear weapons from East Asia and most of its weapons from Europe. Also in 1991, it put the nuclear Tomahawk missile into storage for possible future redeployment aboard attack submarines in times of crises—a capability it then retired in 2010 while committing to make available to support allies anywhere its small fleet of nuclear-capable fighters. Nearly two decades ago it committed to modernize that fleet; although the process is underway, no modernized capability is in operation today.

As a result, the legacy extended nuclear deterrence posture has heavily relied on U.S. strategic forces; these forces have become the option of first resort for prompt retaliation to nuclear use or signaling, but also for nuclear campaigning in peacetime. Regional-based capabilities, like the forward deployed DCA capability in Europe, have played an auxiliary role. Such capabilities have also never been operationalized in Asia, reinforcing Allies' views that the legacy U.S. extended deterrence was tailored solely to the needs of Europe. In roughly the same timeframe, Russia has entirely modernized its regional forces and China has launched a regional build up, dashing U.S. hopes that they would join in the project to further reduce nuclear roles and numbers.

Nuclear weapons are not so much the solution to, but more a part of, the complexity of the two-war problem. Worries about the fleeting U.S. conventional superiority have been accompanied with concerns about the credibility and effectiveness of U.S. extended nuclear deterrence. Some allies see the U.S. nuclear umbrella as leaky, that is, they see the United States as too timid in its nuclear policies and as dangerously reluctant to wield nuclear risk to the benefit of its alliances. For them, the position taken by the Biden Administration looks to be too inert in contrast to the policy decisions seen elsewhere. These allies seek supplemental U.S. nuclear capabilities and new strategic initiatives from Washington that do more than just “fiddling at the margins.”

The legacy nuclear posture is also inadequate because it does not account for future trends that might hamper extended deterrence and assurance. These trends include further quantitative and qualitative shifts in the regional nuclear balances in Europe and the Indo-Pacific; growing uncertainty at the strategic level given Chinese nuclear expansion and an unclear future of nuclear arms control with Russia; and the intensification of the two nuclear peer problem for the United States. If unaddressed, these trends would increase risk of miscalculations by allies and adversaries about the U.S. nuclear capabilities and resolve, as well as the indivisibility of security for the United States and its allies that underpin the credibility of nuclear umbrella.

One solution to address this problem could be the re-regionalization of extended nuclear deterrence that would entail shifting responsibility for its credibility from strategic to regional level. This would involve strengthening regional nuclear postures with more credible forward-deployed assets. Potential changes to current regional nuclear capabilities include reviving sea-launched nuclear cruise missiles (SLCM-Ns), an option that was proposed by the 2018 Nuclear Posture Review but was cancelled by the Biden Administration. This option would afford greater regional nuclear deterrence capability to the United States and its allies, improved survivability in contrast to dual capable aircraft (DCA), and promptness of response. Other options include pursuit of a stand-off nuclear air-launched cruise missile that could be delivered by allied dual capable aircraft (DCA) or a ground-launched nuclear cruise missile capability (a highly controversial option for many of the U.S. allies). In rebalancing extended nuclear deterrence to the regional level, allies could also be more closely involved in adaptive nuclear planning, operations and signaling, strengthening the perception that allies are integrated in U.S. nuclear decision-making, thus building confidence.

In terms of rebalancing, consultations on nuclear issues between NATO and with Asian allies would be beneficial in ensuring greater coherence of nuclear strategies in both regions. Making re-regionalization possible would, however, require a change of mindset in the United States and its allies. The change will also not happen overnight and requires a long-term process. But the alternative would leave the United States and allies in Europe and Asia unprepared to meet the challenges of the next decade.

Potential adjustments to the practice of nuclear deterrence by the United States and its allies should be considered only in the context of a coherent or integrated broader approach encompassing the full set of capabilities, conventional and strategic. Nuclear adjustments should clearly address specific capability gaps identified by the United States and its allies, and also should meaningfully address allies' doubts about U.S. credibility and perception of adversaries. If allies and adversaries have doubts about the U.S. credibility no matter what the United States does, new investments in nuclear capabilities would not solve the problems. These new measures could be also counter-productive if met with domestic opposition in the allies' capitals. If changes are needed, limited U.S. capacity to add new capabilities must be recognized. Addressing gaps might require looking for more synergies and opportunities within existing arsenals. Near-term options that can be prioritized include peacetime demonstration of the U.S. capability to deploy its DCAs globally, including in the Indo-Pacific. Crisis stability is an important consideration here, but with more regularized deployments of DCAs, less destabilizing effects may be felt. The heightened risks that DCAs bring may increase deterrence, thereby providing a

stabilizing presence. Regional adaptations of extended nuclear deterrence campaigning could also include more visible regional presence of strategic assets.

## **Panel 6: Extended Deterrence and Deterrence Campaigning**

- As the United States prioritizes campaigns to strengthen deterrence, how should it campaign to strengthen extended deterrence?
- Are adjustments to U.S. policy and strategy required to ensure extended deterrence remains fit for purpose in 2030? If so, which ones? Does the answer differ by domain?
- Would adjustments to U.S. and allied capabilities be beneficial? If so, which ones?
- How can the United States and its allies accelerate their improved understanding of these issues?

Extended deterrence has remained at the margins of U.S. thinking about deterrence campaigning. The focus has been primarily on the U.S. strategic forces and central deterrence, while little has been done to address particular requirements of peacetime activities to support extended deterrence. The aspirations for more coherent extended deterrence campaigns envisaged more than a decade ago were not transformed into real actions. The approach to strengthening extended deterrence have relied on an ad hoc process that worked well episodically – when inter-agency goals were aligned.

The Biden administration’s commitments to strengthening deterrence, to deterrence integration, and to deterrence campaigns provide the building blocks for a more effective U.S. response to the extended deterrence challenges of a two-war world. Top-down, whole-of-government approaches tailored to specific actors are needed. They are also unlikely, which increases the value of informal, ad hoc collaboration. In U.S. strategic policy, the prominence of extended deterrence must increase, while the taboo against new concepts and new capabilities must be broken.

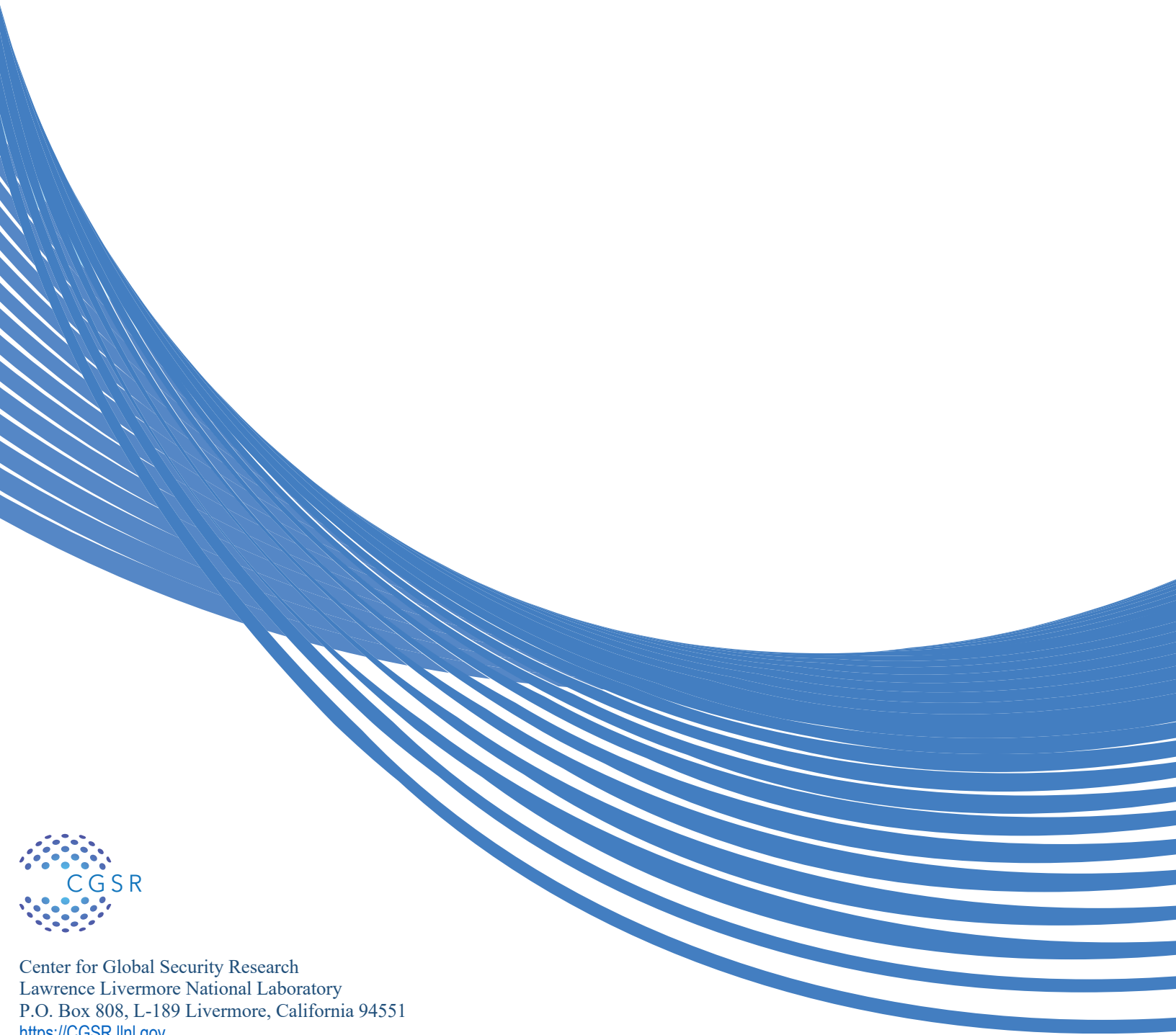
To start campaigning for extended deterrence, the United States should be more explicit about the threats that the United States and its allies are facing. Over the last decade, U.S. strategic documents such as Nuclear Posture Reviews have not mentioned the role of extended nuclear deterrence in deterring China. There is also value in clear articulation of extended deterrence implications for the two nuclear near peers problem. Given that the United States is still formulating its thinking on these issues, there is resistance to engaging in dialogues with allies on these issues.

For extended deterrence campaigning, software matters as much as or more than the hardware. Consistency across the U.S. government in factoring alliances into decisions is of significant importance, but remains an area of difficulty across different relevant branches. Negative examples include the messaging that accompanied the end of the continuous bomber presence in the Indo-Pacific. Positive examples include the extent to which the United States shared its intelligence with allies before the Russian invasion against Ukraine.

Adjustments in U.S. and allied military hardware for the purpose of deterrence campaigning depends on the domain. U.S. reluctance to share its conventional strike capabilities with the allies is not consistent with the goal of extended deterrence campaigning. One reason for this reluctance was concern that allies may use their purchased or indigenously developed capabilities earlier than the United States and potentially preemptively, leading to U.S. entrapment in a conflict. However, reluctance has weakened, as the United States now recognizes positive aspects of improved ally strike capabilities. This is demonstrated by collaboration on hypersonic weapons in the framework of AUKUS, for example. Cyber and space adjustments are also needed. This will require greater consideration of how to split investments among the United States and its allies in order to more effectively use available resources. For example, sharing by the United States of early warning capabilities with some allies has helped them to acquire their own capabilities while lowering the barrier for their entry.

To accelerate understanding of software and hardware associated with extended deterrence campaigning, the United States and its allies needs to improve their institutional capacity for generating new thought. Many institutions that were responsible for doing so in the past were harvested out. There is also a need for strengthening existing analytical tools, including net assessment and strategic wargaming, to develop metrics and scenarios that would help to assess whether the overall and regional deterrence postures are fit for purpose. Progress has also been hampered by the habit of the allies to wait for the United States to develop intellectual capital, and the expectations of the United States that others wait until the United States delivers its conclusions. To accelerate progress, the focus should be on outthinking potential competitors together.

Improving understanding on how to enhance extended deterrence campaigning also requires continued and more in-depth staff level discussions between the United States and its allies. This includes a need for 1.5 Track dialogues and table top exercises that force the discussions on – and preparations for – difficult decisions related to nuclear weapons use. This may also include establishing additional leader-to-leader consultation mechanisms that would enable the U.S. President to better understand what allied counterparts in the most affected region would think about the nuclear use decision. While contemplating different forms of consultations with the allies, the United States has to be aware that consultations may not always be assuring to allies but rather contribute to their anxieties. Careful considerations must be made as whether some forms of consultations would lead to desired ends. Still, allies could contribute substantively to discussions that are sensitive and new division of labor is needed.



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This work was performed under the auspices of the U.S. Department of Energy by Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory under Contract DE-AC52-07NA27344. LLNL-MI-835471