

The U.S. Army, the Nuclear Posture Review and Nuclear Deterrence

A European Historical Context

by David R. Dorondo, PhD



LAND WARFARE PAPER 124 / MARCH 2019

PUBLISHED BY

THE INSTITUTE OF LAND WARFARE
AT THE ASSOCIATION OF THE UNITED STATES ARMY



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Land Warfare Paper No. 124, March 2019

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Preface

In February 2019, the United States and Russia suspended their mutual adherence to the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty of 1987. Following a critical six-month interim, a formal abrogation of the treaty is possible if Washington and Moscow do not resolve the controversy surrounding the Novator 9M729 intermediate-range missiles (NATO designation SSC-8) that Russia has developed, tested and deployed.* Notwithstanding Russian counter-charges that European-based U.S. missile-defense systems such as Aegis Ashore also violate the treaty, NATO has unanimously found Russia to be in long-standing violation. The political reaction to these events, on both sides of the Atlantic, brings into sharp focus the enduring fact of nuclear weapons' centrality in any serious discussion of strategic deterrence, a discussion already heightened by the United States' *2018 Nuclear Posture Review*.

Often overlooked in this discussion is the vitally important role that the U.S. Army has played since 1949 as an integral element of American strategic deterrence in Europe. From the 1950s to 1991, this deterrence mission included the Army's being equipped with a ground-based nuclear capability of truly devastating potential. That capability was maintained for the duration of the Cold War, even as the Army began a striking modernization of its conventional systems in the 1970s, particularly in the form of the M1 Abrams Main Battle Tank, the M2/M3 Bradley Infantry/Cavalry Fighting Vehicle and the AH-64 Apache helicopter. Though not now equipped with nuclear weapons, the Army remains the United States'—and therefore NATO's—first line of (noncyber) defense in Europe. One need only note the current European Deterrence Initiative to see how important the Army remains to the defense of U.S. and NATO interests in Europe. For precisely this reason, but also considering the heated discussion surrounding U.S. nuclear modernization and the possible, final demise of the INF Treaty, it is useful to revisit the larger historical context of the U.S. Army and nuclear deterrence in Europe.

* An important and related, though separate, matter is what to do about intermediate-range nuclear systems being developed by China, which is not a party to the treaty.

The U.S. Army, the Nuclear Posture Review and Nuclear Deterrence: A European Historical Context

Introduction

In the February 2018 issue of *ARMY* magazine, retired General Frederick J. Kroesen and retired Brigadier General John S. Brown contributed informative articles related to the matter of nuclear deterrence. Kroesen's essay does not directly address the subject, but he provides a critically important position: "Any president, secretary of defense or chairman of the Joint Chiefs considering the employment of military power must provide an understanding of the ultimate objective to be achieved." Kroesen is implying that even the *threat* of military action can itself determine a favorable geostrategic outcome between adversaries but only—and this is key—if the ultimate objective of deterrence and the probable consequences of any application of overt military force are clearly understood *before* the shooting starts. Senior leaders, whether civilian or military, abdicate their ultimate responsibility if they fail to develop such an understanding or, worse, if they are incapable of developing one. In the second piece, by contrast, Brown more directly addresses certain theoretical features of deterrence and its history and finishes with an understated but forceful admonition that the U.S. Army must once again become better prepared for the possibility of an actual nuclear confrontation. The admonition is fitting.

For more than a few years after the end of the Cold War, the national conversation about nuclear weapons largely faded into the background except in venues such as U.S. Strategic Command and the Air Force Global Strike Command. For much of the nation's armed forces, more immediately pressing matters intervened in the wake of the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States—not least the U.S. Army's massive commitments in Iraq and Afghanistan. However, this lack of attention to nuclear policy also arose on both sides of the Atlantic, which in turn led to a loss of what had been learned, often painfully, about nuclear weapons and nuclear deterrence. There is, as a former high-ranking British defense official put it, some risk attendant to that forgetting.¹

Of course, as renowned military historian Sir Michael Howard pointed out many years ago, some might well argue that anything having to do even indirectly with "the Bomb" should

best be “left to politicians, technologists and military analysts to solve, uncomplicated by the irrelevant intrusions of historians. On the other hand, if it is a matter of all hands to the pumps, the contributions of the historian are no more irrelevant than those of anybody else to a predicament which is as unique as it is dangerous for mankind: in which academic caution, if maintained for too long, becomes slothful timidity.”²

A discussion of nuclear weapons and their vital place in strategic deterrence is, arguably, a matter of “all hands to the pumps.” Consequently, the United States and the Army ought to take note of certain historical observations. What follows is a contribution to that discussion.

U.S. Nuclear Weapons: Policy Evolution, 1944–1987

Virtually from the moment the first atomic weapon detonated in the desert of New Mexico in 1945, arguments have swirled among political leaders, soldiers and scientists over the employment of these weapons. In *The Making of the Atomic Bomb*, author Richard Rhodes notes that as early as October 1944, the administrator of the bomb’s development, Harvard president James B. Conant, suggested that the uranium design, known as “Little Boy,” be regarded as a strategic weapon while the plutonium design, known as “Fat Man,” be regarded as a tactical weapon.³ His argument rested on the then-projected explosive yield of the two configurations. However, not everyone involved in the Manhattan Project agreed with Conant. Some of the Project’s staff said that the nature of atomic weapons made any distinction between “strategic” and “tactical” moot; others, including the 1922 Nobel laureate and Los Alamos physicist Niels Bohr, became openly opposed to the use of atomic power as a weapon. Such arguments continue to this day.

It should come as no surprise that the *2018 Nuclear Posture Review (NPR)*⁴ elicited a great deal of discussion on topics ranging from renewed Great Power competition, to so-called mini-nukes, to putative U.S. nuclear responses to non-nuclear strategic attack by adversaries’ cyber-weapons or hypersonic conventional systems. In an early 2018 testimony before the House Armed Services Committee, Secretary of Defense James Mattis, the *NPR*’s author of record, stated: “I don’t think there is any such thing as a ‘tactical nuclear weapon.’ Any nuclear weapon used any time is a strategic game-changer.” The *NPR* asserts that the U.S. nuclear arsenal can, within limits, effectively deter both nuclear and various types of non-nuclear threats and, if deterrence fails, can offer one of several options for a devastating response. Here is where consternation arises concerning “mini-nukes,” those possessing a relatively low explosive yield, by nuclear standards, of between 0.3 and 20 kilotons. By way of comparison, the bomb dropped on Hiroshima generated an approximate explosive yield of 15 kilotons (with a margin of error of 20 percent, according to a history published by Los Alamos National Laboratory in 1985).⁵

In light of the public debate arising from the *NPR*, it bears remembering that U.S. nuclear weapons have always been intended to deter both nuclear and non-nuclear threats. Following V-E Day on 8 May 1945, U.S. forces in Europe faced drastic reductions from redeployments for an anticipated invasion of Japan as well as from force reductions. From a strength on V-E Day of almost 2 million troops in Europe, numbers fell to a mere 290,000 by May 1946. From that point, lasting well into the 1950s, numbers of American occupation forces in western Germany remained weak.⁶

Partially as a function of these reductions, President Harry Truman had already begun to consider using nuclear weapons as a possible counterweight to continuing and massive Soviet numerical superiority in both Central Europe and Eastern Europe. However, Truman’s consideration ran afoul of prevailing technical circumstances. In the spring of 1947—at the time of his

notable “Truman Doctrine” speech—the U.S. atomic arsenal was essentially illusory (seemingly unbeknownst to the president). David Lilienthal, appointed by Truman to be the first chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission, told the president that there was no deployable arsenal. Instead, there existed merely a collection of unassembled, disorganized and unusable components left over from the Manhattan Project.⁷

In the wake of a resumption of nuclear weapons production in the United States, President Dwight Eisenhower’s administration subsequently adopted the “New Look” defense policy. This policy officially viewed nuclear weapons as an effective means of deterring Soviet-led conventional and nuclear threats.⁸ Weapons encompassed by the New Look would come to include various battlefield systems. The New Look initially gave primary, heavy emphasis to the concept of massive retaliation against any possible Soviet aggression. The policy dictated that U.S. Air Force bombers of the Strategic Air Command (B-29 and B-50 Superfortresses, B-47 Stratojets and, eventually, B-52 Stratofortresses) deliver the retaliation. Before deployment of effective intercontinental ballistic missiles, these strategic bombers constituted the most readily effective means to deliver nuclear weapons over intercontinental ranges between 1947 and the early 1960s. The Jupiter and Thor intermediate range ballistic missiles would have been launched from European bases, including in the United Kingdom and Italy. The threats these nuclear weapons were intended to counter seemed to be particularly acute in a divided Europe, specifically at the soon-to-be-famous Fulda Gap and at the border dividing East and West Germany.

Many planners in Washington also believed that the preferred reliance on strategic nuclear forces, as well as their eventual tactical counterparts, would help the United States to avoid ruinous financial obligations that might accompany any continuation of pre-1945 levels of conventional arms. Such force levels found their way into Eisenhower-era policy documents, including National Security Council document NSC 149/2 “Basic National Security Policies and Programs in Relation to Their Costs,” which essentially detailed the New Look.⁹

Not surprisingly, given President Eisenhower’s concerns about both national fiscal health and the implications of the possession and possible use of U.S. nuclear weapons, NSC 149/2 proposed a significant expansion of the U.S. Air Force, primarily Strategic Air Command, and concomitant reductions in both the Army and Navy.¹⁰ In part, the object was to get more bang for the proverbial buck both monetarily and militarily, made explicit by NSC 162/2, 30 October 1953. The defense of the United States, according to this document, rested on the development and maintenance of a “strong military posture, with emphasis on the capability of inflicting massive retaliatory damage by offensive striking power.”¹¹ The lion’s share of the resultant \$30 billion defense budget went to the Air Force and the Navy (\$12 billion and \$10 billion, respectively) with \$8 billion allocated for the Army.¹²

Taken in conjunction with the requisite reductions in the size of the Army, any proposal to greatly increase the nation’s reliance on weapons that were by their very nature indiscriminate was a view with which Army Chief of Staff (CSA) General Matthew Ridgway strenuously disagreed. For him, the New Look reduced warfighting to the absurdity of leaving no place for the Army, indeed for any army, in a world in which the only responses to a possible Soviet threat in Europe seemed to be either early capitulation or nuclear annihilation. Not only did such a situation create an unbalanced military force structure, but also set the precedent for what he called “an all or nothing” proposition.¹³ Furthermore, the phrase “offensive striking power” in NSC 162/2 appeared implicitly to exclude tactical nuclear systems that the Army might eventually possess, unless, of course, NATO planned to start a war.

Ridgway had been sworn in on 15 August 1953. He followed Eisenhower, who had appointed Ridgway as CSA, as NATO's supreme allied commander in Europe. Ridgway was possessed of deeply held convictions about the value of military professionalism and the respect he believed was owed to it by civilian leadership. For all of these reasons, his relations with his commander in chief, and more particularly Eisenhower's civilian staff who strongly advocated the New Look, were fraught at both personal and professional levels.¹⁴

Nevertheless, the position taken by the United States in the New Look was one soon shared in Great Britain and *mutatis mutandis* in the newly-established Federal Republic of Germany (FRG).¹⁵ In the United Kingdom, Minister of Defence (and later Chancellor of the Exchequer) Harold Macmillan firmly held that an independent British nuclear deterrent force was essential to postwar British sovereignty and the keeping of the peace. He also believed that it was a cost-effective alternative to massive conventional forces for a then cash-strapped Treasury, particularly given that "[i]t has now become quite clear that there is really no protection against a nuclear attack, certainly in these islands. The only protection is the deterrent of the counter attack. What then is the purpose of spending these immense sums [on conventional defenses]?"¹⁶ Furthermore, in Germany, given the geostrategic status of the FRG as a literal frontline state in what was clearly a European Cold War by that date, the question of its position regarding nuclear arms also necessarily assumed great importance, even while the country was still legally occupied by the United States, Great Britain and France.

NATO had been established by the Treaty of Washington in April 1949, immediately before the FRG's inauguration. There followed six years of acrimonious international and (West) German domestic debate over any kind of rearmament for the FRG and, if so, whether the FRG should be included in a proposed European Defense Community (EDC) along with France, Italy and the Low Countries. Although the EDC was essentially a French idea, the plan collapsed in 1954 when the French Parliament refused to ratify the treaty. In any case, Macmillan characterized it as a treaty "more calculated to alleviate the fears of the French than to strike terror into the Russians," and Winston Churchill acidly called the EDC's proposed army nothing more than a "sludgy amalgam."¹⁷

A West German contribution to any successful Western European defense was nonetheless considered essential, and if the EDC would not work, NATO might. Intense negotiations followed between the governments in Paris, London, Bonn and Washington, and on 9 May 1955, the FRG acceded to NATO. This was four days after the Western Allies had formally ended the postwar occupation and declared the country fully sovereign. If a European war had erupted, it would likely have started on the FRG's border with the neighboring German Democratic Republic (GDR) to the east. Unlike the FRG, the GDR was neither democratic nor a republic. Instead, it was (and would remain until its demise in 1990) a one-party communist dictatorship under Soviet hegemony. The GDR also became a member of the newly formed and Soviet-led Warsaw Pact when that organization was announced in the Polish capital on 14 May 1955. An involuntary military association, the Warsaw Pact, also included the rest of Moscow's European satellites states.

However, around the same time that the FRG joined NATO and the Warsaw Pact was established, the New Look was already beginning to shift. At the highest levels of the U.S. government, the reality of Soviet atomic and thermonuclear weapons had made itself powerfully clear. There also existed the perception that, either by strategic bombers or missiles, Moscow possessed the capability to deliver such weapons to targets in the continental United States.¹⁸ A

reliance on massive nuclear retaliation against the Soviet Union now seemed to make less sense if indeed Moscow had the ability to reciprocate in kind.

In place of the cruel dilemma of either capitulating to putative Soviet threats against Western Europe or disappearing in an intercontinental nuclear firestorm, there developed the concept of reliance on an increasingly graduated mix of conventional and nuclear capabilities. These would initially permit a sort of theoretical discourse to arise in accordance with which various types of Soviet threats could be met with varied types of military responses. That theoretical discourse shaped both political and military thinking in such a way as to create new military-technological requirements and capabilities. The result—what came to be called “Flexible Response—was an idea welcomed by the new CSA, General Maxwell Taylor.¹⁹

Reminiscent of the position taken earlier by General Ridgway, Taylor’s position reaffirmed the importance of the U.S. Army’s role in Europe. Taylor believed that the Army could not play the part of a mere tripwire to nuclear apocalypse. While it may be too simple to maintain that Taylor simply “wanted to bring battle back to the battlefield,”²⁰ such an outcome might have been the result. In his advocacy of new unit structures and weaponry for the Army, he was attempting to keep the organization relevant in a world that appeared destined to be permanently dominated by nuclear weapons; he also wanted to ensure that the Army was not starved of funding.²¹

An emerging policy of Flexible Response, beginning in the late 1950s, soon meant that tactical nuclear weapons would be added to the mix of required capabilities for U.S. forces and possibly others on both sides of the Atlantic. For the Army, the policy brought with it significant changes to tables of organization and equipment. During General Taylor’s tenure as chief, the Army began adapting to the possibility of combat on the nuclear battlefield through the establishment of the “Pentomic Division.”²² A series of battlefield nuclear tests had already taken place at the Nevada Proving Ground between March and June 1953. Codenamed Operation Upshot-Knothole, the series included 11 detonations. One of the operation’s main purposes was to determine how U.S. ground personnel could effectively execute missions in immediate proximity to and, in the aftermath of, actual nuclear explosions. Arguably the most important event during the test series was shot Grable on 25 May 1953. Grable was fired from a 280 mm cannon and generated 15-kiloton yield (i.e., Hiroshima-scale). The Artillery Test Unit from the Artillery Center based at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, fired the cannon.²³

Upshot-Knothole seemed to demonstrate—at least in theory—that the Army might be able to operate on a nuclear battlefield. Such thinking naturally affected the Army, which found itself very much a part of what appeared to be a permanent transformation from purely conventional to a mixed conventional-nuclear force. Particularly noteworthy at this time was the establishment of the Pentomic Division’s general-support artillery battalion. It included a battery of M115 203 mm towed howitzers and an Honest John missile battery, both of which could fire nuclear warheads.²⁴ This combination of nuclear-capable artillery and rockets was indicative of an increasingly broad range of nuclear systems that the Army was employing in Europe as the New Look evolved into Flexible Response. Not only did the variety of nuclear systems broaden, but so too did the yields of the warheads those systems fired or carried.

The principle of this emerging operational doctrine was not to have to rely solely on strategic nuclear weapons to deter something less than a strategic nuclear attack. Instead, varying combinations of nuclear *and* conventional responses could be tailored to whatever type

of attack was launched or threatened against the United States or its allies. As the shift in deterrence doctrine progressed from primarily strategic nuclear retaliation to flexible response, the Army continued to be intimately involved. Therefore, for much of this period, the Army deployed other iterations of nuclear systems, including the MGM-5 Corporal tactical missile²⁵ and the short-range M28/M29 Davy Crockett recoilless rifle system, which fired a very small warhead between 1.25 and 2.5 miles with a yield of between 10 and 20 tons of TNT. The warhead was sometimes called the “atomic watermelon” because of its size and shape.²⁶ Other Army nuclear systems that eventually saw service and whose operational histories sometimes overlapped included the MGM-29 Sergeant,²⁷ MGM-52 Lance,²⁸ MGM-31 Pershing I and MGM-31C Pershing II missiles,²⁹ and even nuclear demolition charges.

In contrast to the general trend of Eisenhower’s policy, from about 1960 to 2010, every president from John Kennedy to Barack Obama committed resources to develop not only newer generations of strategic nuclear weapons but also smaller, lower-yield variants. Many of the latter systems’ deployments in Europe were eventually eliminated by a combination of often massive protests there in the 1970s and 1980s (particularly in Germany and the United Kingdom); the inherent difficulties of the systems’ operational use on a densely populated European continent; and international arms-reduction agreements, such as the INF Treaty of 1987. Equally remarkable were the presidential nuclear initiatives of President George H.W. Bush, Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev and, somewhat later, Russian President Boris Yeltsin.[†]

Modern Developments and Considerations

In the past 60 years, and particularly since the INF Treaty’s ratification, the term “flexible response” has been supplanted; there have been many technological and operational modifications. Nevertheless, the policy has never really disappeared. The *2018 NPR* does not fundamentally alter this longstanding concept, nor does it advocate publicly for the reintroduction of tactical nuclear weapons into the Army’s doctrine or tables of organization and equipment.³⁰ That is not its purpose. Instead, it recognizes the concept’s continuing validity and takes into account new threats, including cyberattacks and hypersonic conventional weapons. It also explicitly acknowledges the critical need to replace certain weapon systems dating to the 1970s (LGM-30 Minuteman III missiles) and even to the 1960s (B-52H nuclear-capable bombers), not to mention the nuclear establishment’s production infrastructure and the critically essential systems of nuclear command, control and communication.

There is a great deal of catching up to do. Much standard research and development permitted under existing arms-control restrictions seems to have been sidetracked by more than 15 years of war in Afghanistan and Iraq. After the Soviet Union’s collapse in 1991, there also arose a popular, though erroneous, assumption in the United States and Europe that the end of the Cold War would lessen nuclear weapons’ centrality in defense policy. In part (and in a fashion reminiscent of the Vietnam era), the diversions caused by the United States’ wars since 2001 allowed for the opening of a strategic space in which a revanchist post-Soviet Russia, an increasingly assertive China and a totalitarian North Korea could modernize or develop their nuclear capabilities. U.S. Air Force General John Hyten, head of U.S. Strategic Command, made this point in congressional testimony in April 2017.³¹ The United States was busy

[†] For a full examination of the efforts by Bush, Gorbachev and Yeltsin, see Susan J. Koch, *Case Study Series 5: The Presidential Nuclear Initiatives of 1991–1992* (Washington, DC: Center for the Study of Weapons of Mass Destruction, National Defense University Press, September 2012), http://wmdcenter.ndu.edu/Portals/97/Documents/Publications/Case%20Studies/cswmd_cs5.pdf.

expending vast sums of money, limited political capital and thousands of lives on seemingly endless wars elsewhere—wars in which the Army has borne a tremendous share of the burden, both human and otherwise. This consideration does not even address the current threats of catastrophic cyberattacks, nuclear terrorism and possible nuclear “breakout states,” such as Iran.

Former Secretary of Defense Mattis has himself publicly, and characteristically bluntly, said that the United States enjoys no God-given right to victory, a view also explicitly endorsed in the *2018 National Defense Strategy*: “America’s military has no preordained right to victory on the battlefield.”³² This same view was pointedly reiterated by Air Force General James M. Holmes, head of Air Combat Command. In closing the 2018 Air Force Association’s Air Warfare Symposium in February, Holmes put the matter baldly: “Hubris kills.” If one considers the losses suffered by U.S. forces in the period of World War II from Pearl Harbor to the Battle of Kasserine Pass in February 1943; the first year of the Korean War; the battles of LZ Albany (1965) and Fire Support Base Ripcord (1970) in Vietnam; or the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States, then it becomes clear that if hubris kills, so can complacency. The United States and the Army have been surprised and even defeated before. They could be again. But could either happen again in Europe? That remains to be seen.

The United States should not rest easy, especially in light of political and military events since 2014 from the Arctic to the Black Sea to Ukraine. Since 2001, the Russian government has increasingly equated the United States, NATO and the European Union as a single concept of the “West” rather than pursuing a differentiated diplomatic strategy among the three.³³ Such an approach appears to be a simple, potentially deadly, zero-sum calculation by Moscow of winners and losers. Vladimir Putin’s rhetoric and video in his annual state-of-the-nation address on 1 March 2018 seemed indicative of this thinking when he displayed on the big screen what he called new generations of “invincible” nuclear weapons, even if some of what he said could be discounted at the time as bluster in an electoral campaign in which his victory was pre-ordained. Indeed, so pre-ordained was the outcome that by the time of his swearing-in for a fourth term (of six years) on 7 May 2018, not a few Russians were beginning to refer openly to him as “Vozhd,”[‡] a loanword from Russian Church Slavonic meaning “Leader.” This heretofore unofficial title was last assumed by Joseph Stalin.³⁴

From a historical perspective, increases in the force structure of Russian non-strategic nuclear weapons appears, at least based on Moscow’s public statements, to be aimed partially at offsetting NATO’s conventional technological superiority.³⁵ This harkens back to the New Look of the 1950s and Flexible Response in later decades—but effectively in reverse. These nonstrategic weapons also allow Russia to maintain essential nuclear parity with the combined nuclear forces of the United States, the United Kingdom and France.³⁶

Given the implications of such developments, the U.S. Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine Corps are all once again vested, as is NATO, in the proposition that anything now seems possible in Europe. European states also seem well-aware of such a possibility, as evidenced by recent Franco-German statements at the 2018 Munich Security Conference and the Baltic States’ notable, ongoing efforts to bolster their defenses. Of potentially great significance, the European Union decided in November 2017 to create a Permanent Structured Cooperation among post-Brexit EU members in matters related to defense planning and materiel acquisition. This cooperation is particularly evident between Germany and France. Berlin and Paris

[‡] Cognates for “Vozhd” include both “Führer” and “Duce.”

are actively discussing both a common Franco-German main battle tank acquisition and a common replacement for the Luftwaffe's Panavia Tornado and the French Air Force's Dassault Rafale multirole strike fighters.³⁷

As part of that cooperation, the EU is also beginning to address a longstanding desire of NATO: significant improvements to the physical infrastructure (bridges, roads, railways, rolling stock, tunnels) required by large, heavy formations to move more rapidly and efficiently across EU members' borders to respond to possible threats on the EU and NATO's eastern flank.³⁸ Perhaps not surprisingly, NATO's new logistics command center will be in Ulm, in southwestern Germany, where the Bundeswehr already has its command for the coordination of missions with the EU and the United Nations. Germany remains the obvious assembly area and transshipment corridor for any significant ground forces moving from Western Europe to NATO's eastern flank.³⁹

Of course, any plans are simply words until money starts to flow. Therefore, it is of some interest that the European Commission, the EU's collective executive arm, proposed in June 2018 a fund of some €13 billion to equip partner states of EU members, principally in Africa, for European research and development. The latter portion of the funds would not be accessible to U.S.-based or controlled firms and is intended to strengthen the EU's strategic autonomy.⁴⁰

Under the aegis of U.S. Army Europe, Soldiers have been heavily involved at the ground level in these matters as witnessed by heel-to-toe Armored (and Combat Aviation Brigade) Combat Teams' rotations as part of the European Deterrence Initiative, a vital non-nuclear component of any successful, overarching deterrence strategy. As far as the Army is concerned, adjusting its thinking to a renewed national interest in and emphasis on nuclear deterrence does not necessarily require organizational change because of the service's long history of operating within a nuclear construct. This is provided that there comes no push to re-equip units with tactical nuclear systems—something that would be highly unlikely (if not impossible) under existing arms control agreements.

Nonetheless, the Army cannot bring its superior weight of numbers and currently dominant battlefield capabilities fully to bear without once again rehonoring its full-strength mobilization skills via Army Materiel Command and Military Surface Deployment and Distribution Command. This, in turn, requires extensive, intensive cooperation of the Navy and the Air Force within the broader context of U.S. Transportation Command, particularly if numbers of U.S. troops in Europe increase after 2019.⁴¹ Without the latter two services, the Army's (and the Marine Corps' and Special Operations') strategic landpower cannot fully reach Europe, just as it cannot fully reach the Asia-Pacific⁴² or anywhere beyond continental North America.

Conclusion

Ensuring the success of the Army's efforts within the framework of non-nuclear deterrence will require an all-forces approach that not only avoids wasteful and time-consuming stovepiping among the individual services but also ensures combat readiness across all U.S. forces.⁴³ Civilian leadership from the White House to Capitol Hill must also support and clearly articulate the public case for such an undertaking, whether regarding nuclear or conventional forces.⁴⁴

The new *NPR*, therefore, constitutes an overdue redressing of the balance. For the Army, that redressing is a sort of "back-to-the-future" moment, at least intellectually if not yet organizationally. The *NPR* attempts a public reckoning with the decades-long implications of the

current strategic environment for continued, successful deterrence and the protection of the United States. To the degree that the review is transparent, credible and reflective of rational decision-making among U.S. leaders, it contributes to international nuclear stability rather than to instability, notwithstanding the ongoing need for some matters to remain classified.

Other nuclear states should follow suit in producing such documentation to help avoid catastrophic miscalculation and confrontation. The most desirable objective of such a degree of openness would be the elimination of nuclear arsenals altogether, a goal that may have come tantalizingly close in the now famous meeting of U.S. President Ronald Reagan and Soviet Secretary General Mikhail Gorbachev at Reykjavik in October 1986. Failing nuclear weapons' elimination, however, the only viable path forward would seem to be achieving the greatest conceivable reduction in both numbers and types of nuclear systems consonant with national security and iron-clad, international verifiability.

In 1946, Herbert Marks, the personal representative of U.S. Under Secretary of State Dean Acheson to a board tasked with developing a plan to control a possible nuclear arms race, noted trenchantly that those weapons possessed "a peculiar sovereignty, one that could bring about the end, peacefully or violently, of all other sovereignties."⁴⁵ That peculiar sovereignty looms over Europe to this day, as it does over the United States, Russia, China and the entire world. In the final analysis, possession of a nuclear deterrent by the United States, or indeed by any country, continues to mean that humankind has a wolf by the ears. Whether the wolf may yet be tamed remains an open question. But until all nuclear-armed nations can agree to let that wolf go, the United States had better hold on tight. By its very nature, the U.S. Army remains integral to any such consideration, for in Europe, it constitutes NATO's, Europe's and, therefore, the United States' first line of defense.

Endnotes

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