

Executive Summary Backgrounder

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Congressional Commission Should Recommend a “Damage Limitation” Strategy

Baker Spring

Section 1062 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008 created a congressionally appointed commission to review the strategic posture of the United States. The Congressional Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States is charged with assessing the entire strategic posture of the U.S., including offensive and defensive forces and conventional and nuclear forces. It is chaired by former Secretary of Defense William Perry and co-chaired by former Secretary of Defense and Secretary of Energy James Schlesinger. The commission’s initial report is due later this year.

The commission’s review comes at a perilous time for U.S. strategic forces. The U.S. nuclear arsenal and stockpile have been atrophying since the end of the Cold War. Strategic defenses, which were all but abandoned during the Cold War, continue to lag behind the threat resulting from the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) and their delivery systems. Congress has been reluctant to pursue conventional strategic strike programs, which are also referred to as prompt global strike systems.

However, the commission’s most pressing problem is adapting the U.S. strategic posture to maintaining national security and stability in the multipolar world that has replaced what commentator Charles Krauthammer has called the “unipolar moment” that immediately followed the end of the Cold War. This multipolar world has resulted from the post-Cold War proliferation of weapons

of mass destruction, particularly nuclear weapons and related delivery systems.

In this multipolar environment, the commission should recommend to Congress that the U.S. adopt a damage limitation strategy to replace the retaliatory deterrence strategy that dominated U.S. policy during the Cold War. A damage limitation strategy would seek to protect the peoples, territories, institutions, and infrastructure of the United States and its allies against attacks by defeating such attacks and, barring the outright defeat of such attacks, limiting their attendant damage to the greatest extent possible.

Three Schools of Thought. An engaged public debate on the proper U.S. strategic posture for the emerging multipolar world has yet to take place. The Strategic Posture Commission is designed to fill this intellectual vacuum. The three schools of thought that dominated the debate over the proper U.S. strategic posture after World War II and at the onset of the Cold War are reemerging in the context of today’s multipolar world. While these schools

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represent distinct alternative approaches—nuclear disarmament, multilateralized retaliation-based deterrence, and damage limitation strategy—particular policymakers may attempt to draw on certain aspects of each, despite the contradictions inherent in this approach.

Given today's multipolar world, the Strategic Posture Commission should recommend that Congress adopt a damage limitation approach. However, the commission will need to explain such a strategy to Congress.

A Damage Limitation Strategy for a Multipolar World. The best approach for explaining the damage limitation strategy, and by extension the strategic posture it advocates, is to describe the strategy's basic tenets in the context of today's multipolar world. Beyond describing these basic tenets, the Strategic Posture Commission could also suggest model legislative text to Congress, which would help Congress to codify the damage limitation strategy in law. The basic tenets of the damage limitation strategy are as follows:

1. The purpose of the U.S. strategic posture is to limit the damage from attacks on the U.S. and its friends and allies, particularly damage from attacks with nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons.
2. A retaliation-based deterrence strategy is inappropriate for today's multipolar world.
3. An effective damage limitation strategy relies on a mix of offensive and defensive forces.
4. An effective damage limitation strategy requires a global strategic target list that is constantly updated.
5. The U.S. must modernize its strategic posture.
6. The U.S. should promote international movement toward a damage limitation strategy.
7. The U.S. should pursue arms control in a way that focuses on the most difficult targets.
8. The U.S. should continue to pursue non-proliferation.

Conclusion. Since the end of the Cold War, Congress has operated in an intellectual vacuum regarding the policy governing the U.S. strategic posture. This was due partly to the less pressing demands during the "unipolar moment" that followed the Cold War and the Clinton Administration's policy of neglect toward U.S. strategic forces.

Now, at the dawn of a multipolar era, Congress needs to act. The Strategic Posture Commission's purpose should be to help Congress fill this intellectual vacuum.

The commission will need to choose from three options in making its recommendation to Congress. The first option is to establish a strategy based on U.S. nuclear disarmament in the hope that others will follow the U.S. lead. The second is to adapt the Cold War strategy of the balance of terror to a multipolar environment. The final and best option is for Congress to adopt a damage limitation strategy, which entails protecting and defending the United States and its allies against attack in service to a broader concept of deterrence than applied during the Cold War.

By recommending a damage limitation strategy, the Strategic Posture Commission will be urging that Congress honor its constitutional responsibility to provide for the common defense. The people of the United States expect the federal government to protect them. By adopting a damage limitation strategy, Congress can respond positively to that expectation.

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Background

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Congressional Commission Should Recommend a “Damage Limitation” Strategy

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Section 1062 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008 created a congressionally appointed commission to review the strategic posture of the United States.¹ The Congressional Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States is charged with assessing the entire strategic posture of the U.S., including offensive and defensive forces and conventional and nuclear forces. It is chaired by former Secretary of Defense William Perry and co-chaired by former Secretary of Defense and Secretary of Energy James Schlesinger. The commission’s initial report is due later this year.

The commission’s review comes at a perilous time for U.S. strategic forces. The U.S. nuclear arsenal and stockpile have been atrophying since the end of the Cold War. Strategic defenses, which were all but abandoned during the Cold War, continue to lag behind the threat resulting from the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) and their delivery systems. Congress has been reluctant to pursue conventional strategic strike programs, which are also referred to as prompt global strike systems.

However, the commission’s most pressing problem is adapting the U.S. strategic posture to maintaining national security and stability in the multipolar world that has replaced what commentator Charles Krauthammer has called the “unipolar moment” that immediately followed the end of the Cold War.² This multipolar world has resulted from the post–Cold War proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, particularly nuclear weapons and related delivery systems.

Talking Points

Of the three possible strategies—nuclear disarmament, multilateralized deterrence, and damage limitation strategy—the Strategic Posture Commission should recommend that Congress adopt a damage limitation strategy:

- Establish a strategic posture to protect the peoples, territories, infrastructure, and institutions of the United States and its allies against strategic attacks;
- Move away from the Cold War balance-of-terror strategy that relies on retaliation-based deterrence and a posture of vulnerability;
- Adopt a strategic posture that relies on a mix of offensive and defensive forces and capabilities;
- Use a “target driven” approach to determine U.S. strategic forces and capabilities;
- Urge other relevant states to adopt a damage limitation strategy;
- Pursue arms control on a selective basis; and
- Continue nonproliferation efforts to limit the spread of nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons and delivery systems.

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In this multipolar environment, the commission should recommend to Congress that the U.S. adopt a damage limitation strategy to replace the retaliatory deterrence strategy that dominated U.S. policy during the Cold War. A damage limitation strategy would seek to protect the peoples, territories, institutions, and infrastructure of the United States and its allies against attacks by defeating such attacks and, barring the outright defeat of such attacks, limiting their attendant damage to the greatest extent possible.

U.S. Strategic Posture After World War II

It is important that the Strategic Posture Commission remind Congress that the alternative postures available to the U.S. today were examined by the U.S. after World War II. At that time, the U.S. grappled with the problem of adjusting its security policy at the dawn of the nuclear age. Over time, the U.S. explored options that were derived from three strategies: nuclear disarmament under international control, damage limitation strategy, and retaliation-based deterrence strategy in a balance-of-terror relationship with the Soviet Union.

Initially, the U.S. explored the options for disarmament and international control of nuclear technology. The most prominent proposal was the Baruch Plan, named after Bernard Baruch, U.S. representative to the United Nations Atomic Energy Commission, who presented this U.S. disarmament plan to the commission on June 14, 1946.³ The Baruch Plan proposed putting all atomic energy activities under the control of an International Atomic Development Authority. The plan would have required the renunciation of atomic bombs and would have established a system for punishing violators. It envisioned ending the manufacture of atomic bombs, disposing of existing bombs, and limiting possession of the technological knowledge needed to produce bombs to the authority.

The Soviet Union rejected the Baruch Plan, and the U.S. turned to exploring plans for maintaining

its nuclear forces as the foundation of its strategic posture, along with less ambitious diplomatic options for limiting nuclear arsenals, specifically arms control and nonproliferation. In this context, two subsequent strategies emerged.

In the early 1960s, strategist Herman Kahn proposed that the U.S. adopt a damage limitation strategy to deter a possible Soviet attack on the United States and its allies. Kahn defined deterrence broadly to encompass both the goal of damage limitation and the defensive measures necessary to achieve that goal, along with nuclear forces. He summarized this strategy as follows:

I agree with our current national policy that the primary objective of our military forces is to deter war. However, I feel that there is a second but still very important objective: to protect life and property if a war breaks out.⁴

At roughly the same time, economist and game theorist Thomas Schelling proposed that deterrence be defined much more narrowly. He argued that the goal of damage limitation and the accompanying protective measures were at odds with deterrence. Schelling asserted that deterrence meant threatening to retaliate for an attack by targeting population centers. Specifically, he stated:

Thus, schemes to avert surprise attack have as their most immediate objective the safety of weapons rather than the safety of people. Surprise-attack schemes, in contrast to other types of disarmament proposals, are based on deterrence as the fundamental protection against attack. They seek to perfect and to stabilize mutual deterrence—to enhance the integrity of particular weapon systems. And it is precisely the weapons most destructive of people that an anti-surprise-attack scheme seeks to preserve—the weapons whose mission is to punish rather than to fight, to hurt the enemy afterwards, not to

1. National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008, Public Law 110–181, §1062.
2. Charles Krauthammer, “The Unipolar Moment,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 70, No. 1 (America and the World 1990/1991).
3. Bernard Baruch, “The Baruch Plan,” U.N. Atomic Energy Commission, June 14, 1946, at <http://www.atomicarchive.com/Docs/Deterrence/BaruchPlan.shtml> (July 16, 2008).
4. Herman Kahn, *On Thermonuclear War* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1961), p. 96.

disarm him beforehand. A weapon that can hurt only *people*, and cannot possibly damage the other side's striking force, is profoundly defensive: it provides its possessor no incentive to strike first.⁵

Schelling's retaliation-based deterrence strategy, which the Administrations of John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson fashioned into a policy of mutually assured destruction (MAD), eschewed defenses and relied on survivable offensive strategic nuclear forces to provide for U.S. security. In fact, Schelling's strategy asserted that strategic defenses would be destabilizing by undermining the capacity of the retaliatory force, at least in the context of the Soviet threat and its accompanying bipolar international political structure. It explicitly argued in favor of mutual vulnerability for the populations and industrial capacities of the U.S. and the Soviet Union.

During the remainder of the Cold War, debate between these two schools of thought continued. On balance, however, Schelling's strategy of retaliation-based deterrence proved more popular and was a more powerful driver of the U.S. strategic force posture.⁶

Both Kahn's damage limitation strategy and Schelling's retaliation-based deterrence strategy were designed to prevent nuclear war in the bipolar structure of the Cold War. Neither was designed to meet the security needs of the U.S. and its allies in today's multipolar world. While Schelling's strategy may have proved more popular during the Cold War, the Strategic Posture Commission should find that a variant of Kahn's strategy is better suited to meeting U.S. and allied security needs in a multipolar world marked by the proliferation of nuclear weapons and delivery systems.

The Three Schools of Thought

An engaged public debate on the proper U.S. strategic posture for the emerging multipolar world has yet to take place. The Strategic Posture Commission is designed to fill this intellectual vacuum. The three schools of thought that dominated the debate over the proper U.S. strategic posture after World War II and at the onset of the Cold War are reemerging in the context of today's multipolar world. While these schools represent distinct alternative approaches—nuclear disarmament, multilateralized retaliation-based deterrence, and damage limitation strategy—particular policymakers may attempt to draw on certain aspects of each, despite the contradictions inherent in this approach.

Nuclear Disarmament. The most prominent adherents of the nuclear disarmament school are former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, former Senator Sam Nunn (D-GA), former Secretary of Defense William Perry, and former Secretary of State George Shultz. They first wrote in favor of nuclear disarmament in a *Wall Street Journal* op-ed on January 4, 2007.⁷ They reiterated their support for this option in a second op-ed on January 15, 2008.⁸

The call for nuclear disarmament is not new. In fact, Kahn's and Schelling's proposals are based on the conclusion that by the 1960s, disarmament was not possible. Today, the positive contribution of this proposition is its recognition that the Cold War strategy of a balance of terror cannot work in the current environment. Regrettably, the myriad dangers of this proposition far outweigh this single contribution.

While the difference between the disarmament proposals of the 1940s and those that are being advanced today are significant, they share an important shortcoming: It is not apparent that

5. Thomas C. Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 1960), p. 233 (emphasis in original).

6. For a meticulous description of the evolution of the theory and practice of deterrence from the 1960s to the present, see Keith B. Payne, *The Great American Gamble: Deterrence Theory and Practice from the Cold War to the Twenty-First Century* (Fairfax, Va.: National Institute Press, 2008).

7. George P. Shultz, William J. Perry, Henry A. Kissinger, and Sam Nunn, "A World Free of Nuclear Weapons," *The Wall Street Journal*, January 4, 2007, p. A15.

8. George P. Shultz, William J. Perry, Henry A. Kissinger, and Sam Nunn, "Toward a Nuclear-Free World," *The Wall Street Journal*, January 15, 2008, at http://online.wsj.com/public/article_print/SB120036422673589947.html (August 9, 2008).

disarmament can be achieved. In this sense, the nuclear disarmament proposition is more a sentiment than a strategy.

An examination of the ramifications of any attempt to turn the nuclear disarmament sentiment into a coherent strategy reveals the weakness of the proposition. While Kissinger, Nunn, Perry, and Shultz couch their proposal in the language of comprehensive global nuclear disarmament, the reality is that no U.S. Administration has the power to achieve this outcome. In the 1940s, the Soviet Union's opposition doomed the Baruch Plan. Today, as in the 1940s, the U.S. can control only whether or not the U.S. itself pursues nuclear disarmament. Despite their internationalist rhetoric, these four prominent former officials are really talking about unilateral U.S. nuclear disarmament.

The unilateral nature of this proposition, as supported by the broader disarmament movement, is revealed by the proposed interim steps. These steps include continuing the unilateral moratorium on explosive nuclear testing, de-alerting deployed U.S. strategic nuclear weapons, withdrawing U.S. tactical nuclear weapons deployed abroad, and unilaterally altering existing operational plans for nuclear weapons. Even worse, these interim proposals come at a time that the U.S. nuclear force is atrophying.⁹ If this atrophy continues, the U.S. nuclear force will no longer be able to contribute materially to meeting U.S. security needs.

Clearly, the broader disarmament movement welcomes this marginalization of the U.S. nuclear force.¹⁰ The problem is that they are betting the physical survival of the U.S. on nothing more than the hope that other nuclear-armed states and any states or nonstate actors that join the nuclear club will follow suit by disarming. This gamble involves the highest possible stakes and has an exceedingly low likelihood of success.

This proposition based on nuclear disarmament treats other aspects of the overall U.S. strategic posture—specifically, conventional strike systems and defenses—as derivative. The two op-eds by Kissinger *et al.* do not speak to these issues in great detail. Nevertheless, implementing a nuclear disarmament strategy would have negative implications for both U.S. conventional superiority and U.S. defensive options.

U.S. conventional superiority is inconsistent with the proposition of global nuclear disarmament because other nuclear-armed states will insist on retaining nuclear weapons to offset U.S. conventional advantages as long as these advantages persist. Thus, the U.S. could not achieve global nuclear disarmament without curtailing its conventional systems. In essence, a U.S. policy that sought global nuclear disarmament would require the U.S. to jettison its conventional advantages simultaneously.

A greater U.S. reliance on defenses is also incompatible with a nuclear disarmament policy, despite contrary assertions by some proponents of nuclear disarmament. This incompatibility, unlike with conventional capabilities, is a matter of perception, not logic. For a drive toward global nuclear disarmament to become a strategy, it would need to put an extraordinary amount of faith and credit in the disarmament process. Most disarmament advocates, both here and abroad, would inevitably see U.S. pursuit of defensive capabilities as a lack of faith in that process. Political forces would pay as much attention to preserving the integrity of the disarmament process as they paid to the ultimate outcome. Thus, if the U.S. pursued effective defensive capabilities at any point along the way, it would be charged with undermining the disarmament process.

Multilateralized Deterrence or Balance of Terror. The multilateralized deterrence school emerged to challenge the proponents of disarmament. Its

9. For a technical description of the atrophy of the U.S. nuclear force following the Cold War and circumstantial evidence of problems with the weapons in the stockpile, see John S. Foster, Jr., "Enhancing the Reliability of Our Nuclear Deterrent," presentation before the Congressional Breakfast Series, June 25, 2008.
10. Arms control and disarmament advocates have talked about "de-valuing" and "de-emphasizing" the role of nuclear weapons in national security. For example, see George Perkovich, Jessica Tuchman Mathews, Joseph Cirincione, Rose Gottemoeller, and Jon Wolfsthal, *Universal Compliance: A Strategy for Nuclear Security* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2005), pp. 130 and 137.

most prominent adherents are former Secretary of Defense Harold Brown and former Director of Central Intelligence John Deutch. They have noted that:

[T]he goal, even the aspirational goal, of eliminating all nuclear weapons is counterproductive. It will not advance substantive progress on nonproliferation; and it risks compromising the value that nuclear weapons continue to contribute, through deterrence, to U.S. security and international stability.¹¹

To this school, the essentials of the deterrence, balance-of-terror dynamic of the Cold War remain pertinent in the multipolar world. As Center for Strategic and International Studies Senior Adviser Clark A. Murdock recently stated:

Although the risks of deterrence failure increase as the number and types of nuclear powers increase, it seems to be the case that, *to date*, possession of nuclear weapons has made the possessor, and its adversaries, much more cautious about embarking on courses of action that could escalate to nuclear use.¹²

Indeed, according to an outside report, no less an authority on the utility of retaliation-based nuclear deterrence than Schelling himself has affirmed the continuing applicability of the principle in the multipolar world.¹³

The strength of this school is that it clearly sees the extraordinary risks of attempting to execute a strategy based on nuclear disarmament and understands that attaining this goal is exceedingly unlikely. Further, this school is appropriately concerned about the negative security implications of

the U.S. continuing on its current path of nuclear weapons atrophy.¹⁴

The weakness of this school is that it is overly optimistic about the resiliency of the Cold War nuclear stability dynamic in today's multipolar world.¹⁵ It also underestimates the potential contributions of both strategic defenses and strategic conventional strike capabilities to security and stability.¹⁶ Regarding defenses, extending Schelling's Cold War strategy to today's multipolar world would logically mean organizing the U.S. strategic posture around targeting civilian and industrial areas with nuclear weapons and, as during the Cold War, would assume that strategic defenses are destabilizing because they risk undermining the caution that accompanies the circumstance of vulnerability to large-scale destruction.

This second school also labors under an adverse political dynamic. First, U.S. policy has moved away from accepting vulnerability after the attacks of September 11, 2001, and has become increasingly concerned with the possibility that terrorist organizations could obtain nuclear weapons. The U.S. has undertaken a monumental effort, even if not effectively in every instance, to defend itself against the terrorist threat and not to rely on nuclear retaliation.

More broadly, the American people will likely not be satisfied with a posture that relies predominantly on retaliation in response to a large-scale attack by a state actor because they intuitively recognize that today's and tomorrow's nuclear-armed state actors will not necessarily behave as cautiously as the Soviet Union behaved during the Cold War.

11. Harold Brown and John Deutch, "The Nuclear Disarmament Fantasy," *The Wall Street Journal*, November 19, 2007, p. 19.

12. Clark A. Murdock, "The Department of Defense and the Nuclear Mission in the 21st Century," Center for Strategic and International Studies *Beyond Goldwater-Nichols Phase 4 Report*, March 2008, p. 1, at <http://www.csis.org/media/csis/pubs/080305-murdock-nuclearmission.pdf> (August 9, 2008) (emphasis in original).

13. Thomas P. M. Barnett, "Peace Provided by Nuclear Weapons," *Knoxville News-Sentinel*, September 9, 2007, p. 81, at <http://www.knoxnews.com/news/2007/Sep/09/barnett-peace-provided-nuclear-weapons> (August 9, 2008).

14. Murdock, "The Department of Defense and the Nuclear Mission in the 21st Century," pp. 4-5.

15. The Heritage Foundation has developed a tool for examining nuclear stability in a proliferated world, which shows that nuclear deterrence on the Cold War model is tenuous in such a circumstance. See Nuclear Stability Working Group, *Nuclear Games: An Exercise Examining Stability and Defenses in a Proliferated World*, Heritage Foundation Ballistic Missile Defense Technical Studies Series Study No. 4, 2005, at <http://www.heritage.org/upload/NuclearGames.pdf>.

16. Murdock, "The Department of Defense and the Nuclear Mission in the 21st Century," p. 20.

This same dynamic also pertains to U.S. allies under the policies of extended deterrence. For example, Japan accepted its vulnerability to attack by the Soviet Union during the Cold War, but it does not seem similarly prepared to accept its vulnerability to attack by North Korea today.

In the U.S. and abroad, people appear to be demanding protection. They seem to prefer that their governments work to defend them rather than posturing themselves to seek revenge for an attack. These admittedly inchoate public demands strike at the foundation of the proposition that the U.S. should adapt the balance-of-terror deterrence strategy to the multipolar world.

Damage Limitation Strategy. The third school of thought has been obscured by the more visible debate between the adherents of the first and second schools. Further, while proponents of this school draw on the earlier work of Herman Kahn, they are still working to apply the strategy to today's circumstances. The foundation for this school of thought is found in the Bush Administration's Nuclear Posture Review (NPR), as described by the Department of Defense in early 2002.¹⁷ The chief architects of the NPR included then-Assistant Secretary of Defense J. D. Crouch and then-Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Keith Payne. More recently, prominent commentator Charles Krauthammer has expressed views consistent with a damage limitation strategy.¹⁸

Supporters of the damage limitation strategy share the first school's skepticism about the reliability of the Cold War nuclear deterrence strategy in today's multipolar world and share the second school's concern about the risks and achievability of nuclear disarmament and the negative implications of the ongoing atrophy of U.S. nuclear weapons. They seek a balanced strategic posture that rejects the first school's nuclear disarmament and downplays the contributions of conventional and defensive strategic forces as accepted by the second school.

Most important, a damage limitation strategy would seek to harness this balanced strategic posture to protect and defend the U.S. and its allies against strategic attacks, as opposed to relying on either the good will of potential enemies through the disarmament process or the threat of revenge against those same potential enemies. It argues for a strategic posture in which deterrence is defined broadly enough to find room to accommodate protective measures.

Given today's multipolar world, the Strategic Posture Commission should recommend that Congress adopt a damage limitation approach. However, the commission will need to explain such a strategy to Congress.

A Damage Limitation Strategy for a Multipolar World

The best approach for explaining the damage limitation strategy, and by extension the strategic posture it advocates, is to describe the strategy's basic tenets in the context of today's multipolar world. Beyond describing these basic tenets, the Strategic Posture Commission could also suggest model legislative text to Congress, which would help Congress to codify the damage limitation strategy in law. (See the model legislative text in the Appendix.)

The basic tenets of the damage limitation strategy are as follows:

Tenet #1: The purpose of the U.S. strategic posture is to limit the damage from attacks on the U.S. and its friends and allies, particularly damage from attacks with nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons.

Specifically, U.S. strategic forces should protect and defend the peoples, territories, infrastructure, and institutions of the U.S. and its allies against attack. They should do so by dissuading potential enemies from obtaining WMDs and the means to deliver them. Where nonproliferation efforts fail, they should deter these enemies from using such weapons, defend against any attempted attacks, and

17. J. D. Crouch, "Special Briefing on the Nuclear Posture Review," U.S. Department of Defense, January 9, 2002, at <http://www.defenselink.mil/transcripts/transcript.aspx?transcriptid=1108> (August 9, 2008).

18. Charles Krauthammer, "Deterring the Undeterrable," *The Washington Post*, April 18, 2008, p. A27, at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/04/17/AR2008041703165.html> (August 9, 2008).

blunt the impact of attacks that do get through the defenses.¹⁹ In all circumstances, the damage limitation strategy should set a very high hurdle for those who might be tempted to try to achieve their political or military aims by attacking the U.S. or its allies.

As noted, the overall damage limitation posture cannot be a perfect defense that eliminates all risk of damage or destruction to the peoples of the U.S. and allied countries. Hence, it is called a *damage limitation* strategy, not a *damage elimination* strategy. In fact, all three strategy options available to the Strategic Posture Commission, as well as hybrids of the three, have inherent limitations and carry significant risks. There is no risk-free approach, and a requirement for a risk-free posture is doomed to failure. Adopting a damage limitation strategy would be the least risky of the three alternatives.

The damage limitation strategy is fundamentally defensive in purpose. It is a clear step away from a strategy that could be fashioned to serve aggressive purposes. Appropriately applied, it is thoroughly consistent with just war principles, which emphasize the just purposes of protecting and defending noncombatant populations.

Tenet #2: A retaliation-based deterrence strategy is inappropriate for today's multipolar world.

One of the three strategy options is to multilateralize the balance-of-terror deterrence policy of the Cold War. This strategy would effectively carry over the dominant strategy of the Cold War. It would have the U.S. and its allies seek a posture that leaves them vulnerable to an unknowable number of potential adversaries.

A posture of vulnerability is risky in an environment with many participants, each with different outlooks and strategic goals, particularly when non-state actors are included in the mix. While these risks can be demonstrated quite compellingly at the theoretical level, the theory is confirmed by practical judgments.

The scalding experience of the attacks on September 11, 2001, has taught both policymakers and the U.S. population at large that Cold War deterrence—preventing attacks by threatening overwhelming counterattacks—is a fragile concept in today's world and subject to failure. Since 9/11, the U.S. has predictably put in place defensive policies and programs that seek to reduce its overall vulnerability to attack.²⁰ In fact, at some levels, the U.S. is already pursuing a damage limitation strategy, even if it does not recognize that it is doing so. This is a tacit acknowledgment that the strategy of multilateralizing MAD is inherently more risky than a damage limitation strategy.

The judgment about the inappropriateness of a multilateralized MAD strategy also extends to the moral dimension. Both the Bush Administration and the American people as a whole were uncomfortable with the morality of the proposition that the proper response to the 9/11 attacks was to launch an overwhelming attack on the population and industrial infrastructure of a target state or community. Clearly, they prefer defense over retaliation and prefer that any retaliation be focused on diminishing the likelihood of successful attacks in the future.

The moral and prudential arguments for retaliation-based deterrence to counter a single rogue state are only slightly stronger than the arguments for countering terrorist organizations. At best, for example, it is a morally dubious proposition that the U.S. should respond to a nuclear attack by the North Korean regime by incinerating a large number of half-starved North Korean peasants who are also victims of the regime. Given that the North Korean regime is not particularly concerned about the well-being of the North Korean population, it is not likely to be deterred by retaliatory threats against that population.

Finally, even a state-based multipolar world raises serious questions about the effectiveness of a retali-

19. This prescription for the damage limitation strategy has much in common with the four principles at the core of the 2001 Quadrennial Defense Review's recommendations of reassurance, dissuasion, deterrence, and defeating attacks. See U.S. Department of Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review Report*, September 30, 2001, p. iv, at <http://www.defenselink.mil/pubs/pdfs/qdr2001.pdf> (August 1, 2008).

20. For example, see The White House, "National Strategy to Combat Weapons of Mass Destruction," December 2002, p. 3, at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/12/WMDStrategy.pdf> (August 9, 2008).

ation-based deterrence policy based on mutual vulnerability. Here the problem is one of complexity and unpredictability. When many state actors, even if eminently rational, are confronting each other at various levels of intensity, applying the deterrence dynamic in a reliable fashion becomes increasingly difficult as additional actors are added to the mix.²¹

On this basis, the Strategic Posture Commission should recommend that Congress explicitly acknowledge that the U.S. is moving away from the balance-of-terror policy of the Cold War.

Tenet #3: An effective damage limitation strategy relies on a mix of offensive and defensive forces.

A damage limitation strategy is fundamentally a defensive strategy. However, an effective damage limitation strategy, just like other effective defensive strategies, cannot rely exclusively on defensive forces at the tactical level. It will require a mix of offensive and defensive forces. Thus, the U.S. will need offensive forces that are capable of destroying the enemy's attacking forces before they can be employed effectively. Defensive forces will serve both to destroy the attacking forces of the enemy following their employment and to limit the impact of these attacking forces.

As a part of the broader U.S. strategic posture, the overall mix of U.S. offensive and defensive forces and capabilities would fall into three baskets: offensive strategic nuclear forces; offensive strategic conventional forces (frequently referred to as prompt global strike); and defenses. The specific weapons and programs to include in this mix should be determined by targeting requirements. The proper approach for establishing these targeting requirements is discussed in Tenet #4.

The mix of forces and capabilities could include:

- Nuclear-armed intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs);
- Conventionally armed long-range and short-range ballistic missiles;
- Nuclear-armed submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs);
- Conventionally armed SLBMs;

- Conventionally armed sea-based cruise missiles;
- Nuclear-armed sea-based cruise missiles;
- Bombers armed with conventional bombs and cruise missiles;
- Bombers armed with nuclear bombs and cruise missiles;
- Ballistic missile defenses;
- Cruise missile defenses;
- Air defenses;
- Counterterrorism defenses; and
- Civil defenses.

However, the review of the proper mix of forces should not be limited to these systems, because development efforts under the damage limitation strategy may reveal that systems not listed here could make important contributions to executing the strategy.

Tenet #4: An effective damage limitation strategy requires a global strategic target list that is constantly updated.

The mix of forces in the overall U.S. strategic posture should be tied to specific targeting requirements and a target set. The President should establish the targeting requirements by issuing a classified strategic targeting directive that assigns the task of identifying the global list of strategic targets to the intelligence community and the military. The global target list should include strategic-class weapons that could be used to attack the U.S. and its allies and the organizations and infrastructure necessary to support those weapons.

Today's multipolar world requires this worldwide target list. While the targeting directive should be drafted so that it can govern the strategic posture for years to come, the target list itself will require continuous updating.

The targeting directive should task the military with allocating the target list across the three baskets of strategic forces: offensive nuclear, offensive conventional, and defenses. The target allocation should optimize the damage limitation strategy's chance of success, the quantity of forces used, the

21. Nuclear Stability Working Group, *Nuclear Games*.

level of the civil defense effort, and the timeliness for execution. These assignments should include appropriate redundancy. For example, an enemy ICBM in a hardened silo could be assigned to the offensive nuclear force basket, while the same ICBM after it is launched would be assigned to the defensive basket.

Strategic Command should take the lead in allocating the targeting assignments, but other combatant commands should be permitted to make recommendations. Essentially, the size and structure of the overall strategic force and civil defense posture should be driven by the target set.

Tenet #5: The U.S. must modernize its strategic posture.

The current U.S. strategic force structure is not adapted to the requirements of the damage limitation strategy. In fact, it consists almost entirely of weapons and programs held over from the Cold War and its balance-of-terror strategy. The civil defense element of the posture needs a broader focus.

On the offensive side of the strategic force structure, the picture is bleak. The nuclear triad remains as it was in 1991, only smaller. This is in a context where the U.S. nuclear weapons infrastructure and human capital have been permitted to atrophy to an alarming extent. At the same time, Congress has been reluctant to add conventional prompt global strike weapons to the strategic force posture.

The defensive side of the strategic force posture also has serious shortcomings. The ballistic missile defense program is moving forward, but 30 years spent under the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty—which prohibited the development, testing, or deployment of effective ballistic missile defenses—have left U.S. ballistic missile defense capabilities lagging behind the threat. Cruise missile defenses for U.S. ships exist, but land-based defenses are nonexistent.

U.S. air defenses at the end of the Cold War were pathetic, a casualty of the era's balance-of-terror strategy. The 9/11 Commission's report revealed the

inadequacy of the air defense system, and it has improved only marginally since then.²² U.S. civil defenses also atrophied during the Cold War, although the civil defense program has improved since September 11, 2001. However, the improvements have focused narrowly on countering terrorist threats.

Adopting a damage limitation strategy will require a thorough review of the options for modernizing all elements of the U.S. strategic posture. While targeting requirements would determine the overall size of the force structure, initial modernization efforts can start now. The U.S. could also begin immediately to broaden its civil defense effort. The review of weapons modernization should extend both to the weapons themselves, particularly nuclear weapons, and to the delivery systems. While the weapons currently in the arsenal can likely be adapted to the requirements of the damage limitation strategy, new weapons will need to be created to meet other targeting requirements.

Proponents of U.S. nuclear disarmament will oppose virtually all steps to modernize the strategic force posture. Those who favor multilateralizing the balance-of-terror strategy will support selective modernization of the strategic nuclear force, but little else.

Tenet #6: The U.S. should promote international movement toward a damage limitation strategy.

As the U.S. moves to adopt a damage limitation strategy, it should welcome similar steps by other states. Insofar as the damage limitation strategy is a defensive strategy, it is rooted in the twin principles of nonaggression and individual and collective self-defense. In this context, the U.S. should not object when other states take military steps to defend themselves as long as these steps are firmly linked to the principle of nonaggression.

During the Cold War, measures to defend the population were considered destabilizing, and reliance on offensive nuclear forces was promoted in service to the narrow definition of deterrence and its

22. National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2004), p. 352, at <http://www.9-11commission.gov/report/911Report.pdf> (August 9, 2008).

reliance on retaliation. Those who support multilateralizing the balance-of-terror strategy would continue to rely on retaliatory forces. In a multipolar world, the retaliation-based deterrence strategy is misplaced because it assumes the bipolar international structure of the Cold War.

U.S. foreign policy needs to return to first principles—specifically, government's obligation to defend the population. On this basis, the U.S. should welcome similar steps by other states to protect and defend their populations, territories, infrastructure, and institutions as long as these steps are rooted in the principle of nonaggression.

On the other hand, U.S. security policy should identify the offensive forces of foreign states, particularly those that are geared to targeting population and industrial centers as aggressive and destabilizing and/or wedded to non-status quo foreign policies. Those who favor U.S. nuclear disarmament are likely comfortable with the principle of nonaggression but unlikely to support defensive measures. Thus, neither those who favor multilateralizing the balance of terror nor those who favor U.S. nuclear disarmament will be in a position to use diplomacy that serves U.S. security interests effectively.

U.S. diplomacy to encourage broader international acceptance of the damage limitation strategy should begin with the other nuclear weapons states identified by the Nonproliferation Treaty: China, France, Russia, and the United Kingdom. The five states should consider a joint statement that they will posture their strategic forces in ways to protect and defend their populations, territories, infrastructure, and institutions against foreign attack, particularly with WMDs. The joint statement could also state that they will not target foreign population and industrial centers and that their strategic force postures will reflect this pledge. This diplomatic initiative could then be expanded to other states.

Tenet #7: The U.S. should pursue arms control in a way that focuses on the most difficult targets.

Arms control can play an important supporting role in the damage limitation strategy. As the military allocates the targets on the target list among the three baskets, some targets will be difficult to hold at risk with offensive forces and difficult to

defend against directly for the purpose of damage limitation. These foreign weapons should be considered the most destabilizing under the damage limitation strategy.

Arms control provides a possible means to remove these difficult targets from the target list. However, the U.S. will need to exercise care and restraint in pursuing arms control. It should resist any proposals that would undermine the military capabilities needed to execute the broader damage limitation strategy.

Of course, those who favor U.S. nuclear disarmament will oppose the process of arms control in favor of the disarmament process. Ultimately, this group wants to return to the era of the Baruch Plan that preceded arms control.

Those who favor the multilateralization of the balance of terror will support selective arms control policies, but not as a way to support the damage limitation strategy. They will want to use arms control to restrict counterforce strategic weapons and strategic defenses. They will continue to argue that arms control should serve the purpose of keeping U.S. and foreign populations vulnerable to attack.

Tenet #8: The U.S. should continue to pursue nonproliferation.

The rise of the multipolar world is largely due to the proliferation of WMDs and delivery systems. Thus, the U.S. must be prepared to provide for its security in this proliferated environment.

However, this does not mean that the U.S. should abandon the Nonproliferation Treaty's promise of limiting nuclear arms to the five states identified by the treaty. The cases of Belarus, Kazakhstan, South Africa, and Ukraine demonstrate that rolling back nuclear weapons programs and capabilities is possible given the right circumstances. The U.S. should be prepared to take advantage of such opportunities when they arise. Likewise, the damage limitation strategy is designed to provide for the security of U.S. allies in a way that discourages them from proliferating nuclear weapons.

The U.S. also needs to recognize that an imperfect nonproliferation regime is better than none at all. The multipolar world is a frightening and dan-

gerous place because of its complexity and unpredictability. Nonproliferation policies, even in these imperfect circumstances, can limit this complexity and the attendant dangers at the margin.

Those in favor of U.S. nuclear disarmament, while seldom admitting it, believe that the nonproliferation process has run its course. They see even the existing level of proliferation as intolerably dangerous and would abandon nonproliferation for a direct path to global nuclear disarmament that is prompted by unilateral U.S. disarmament.

Those in favor of multilateralizing the balance of terror seem rather accommodating of nuclear proliferation. In some cases, they seem outright dismissive of the nonproliferation enterprise.²³ Under their policy, the coin of the nuclear realm will be to achieve an assured destruction capability, which all but invites current and potential proliferators to achieve this capability. Further, this group is rather too confident that the balance-of-terror policy can comfortably accept additional nuclear proliferation and still maintain stability.

Conclusion

Since the end of the Cold War, Congress has operated in an intellectual vacuum regarding the policy governing the U.S. strategic posture. This was due partly to the less pressing demands during the “unipolar moment” that followed the Cold War and the Clinton Administration’s policy of neglect toward U.S. strategic forces.

Now, at the dawn of a multipolar era, Congress needs to act. The Strategic Posture Commission’s purpose should be to help Congress fill this intellectual vacuum.

The commission will need to choose from three options in making its recommendation to Congress. The first option is to establish a strategy based on U.S. nuclear disarmament in the hope that others will follow the U.S. lead. The second is to adapt the Cold War strategy of the balance of terror to a multipolar environment. The final and best option is for Congress to adopt a damage limitation strategy, which entails protecting and defending the United States and its allies against attack in service to a broader concept of deterrence than applied during the Cold War.

By recommending a damage limitation strategy, the Strategic Posture Commission will be urging that Congress honor its constitutional responsibility to provide for the common defense. The people of the United States expect the federal government to protect them. By adopting a damage limitation strategy, Congress can respond positively to that expectation.

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23. Kenneth N. Waltz, “The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: More May Be Better,” *International Institute for Strategic Studies Adelphi Paper No. 171*, 1981, at <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/waltz1.htm> (August 1, 2008).

APPENDIX

MODEL LEGISLATIVE TEXT

The following is model legislative text that the Strategic Posture Commission could recommend to Congress for codifying the damage limitation strategy. It is formatted for easy inclusion in a broader piece of legislation, such as a future defense authorization bill.

Sec. #. Statement of Policy

- (a) It shall be the policy of the United States to establish a damage limitation strategy to protect and defend the United States and its vital interests in a multipolar world that includes unpredictable states and nonstate actors, including terrorist organizations, which are able and willing to perpetrate large-scale acts of violence.
- (b) The central tenets of this strategy are as follows:
 - (1) The purpose of the damage limitation strategy is to protect the people, territory, institutions, and infrastructure of the United States against large-scale acts of violence perpetrated by both states and nonstate actors by defeating attempted attacks and, barring the outright defeat of such attacks, by reducing to the greatest extent possible the likelihood that the perpetrators will achieve their political and military aims.
 - (2) An additional purpose of the damage limitation strategy is to develop cooperative efforts with the allies of the United States for protecting their peoples, territories, institutions, and infrastructure against such acts of violence.
 - (3) Although a perfect defense against such acts of violence is unobtainable, the damage limitation strategy is most likely to succeed if it lessens the incentives for both states and nonstate actors to acquire nuclear, radiological, biological, chemical, and certain more powerful conventional weapons and their means of delivery; lessens the incentives to use such weapons in attacks; and limits the impact of the attacks that do occur.
 - (4) By establishing the damage limitation strategy, the United States is making a determined decision to abandon the retaliation-based deterrence strategy of the Cold War.
 - (5) In abandoning the retaliation-based deterrence strategy and its posture of mutual vulnerability to attack, the United States recognizes that this earlier strategy was designed for the strictly bipolar international structure of the Cold War era, which no longer exists, and if applied to the multipolar world of today, which is inhabited by state and nonstate actors that in some cases have unpredictable leaders, would lead to unstable and dangerous outcomes.
 - (6) The United States is abandoning the retaliation-based deterrence strategy of the Cold War and its posture of mutual vulnerability at this time in recognition of the fact that it has already taken irreversible steps to lessen its vulnerability to attack in responding to the threats posed by extremist Islamist organizations willing and able to perpetrate large-scale acts of violence, even in the absence of a damage limitation strategy.
 - (7) While the damage limitation strategy is fundamentally a defensive strategy, the United States recognizes that its proper execution will require tactical military capabilities that draw on a mix of offensive and defensive forces.
 - (8) The tactical military capabilities required by the damage limitation strategy shall be designed to hold at risk a worldwide set of targets that constitute the means to attack the United States and

its allies, which include the weapons themselves, their delivery means, command and control structures, leadership structures, and supporting infrastructure, with a special emphasis on weapons of mass destruction, in a way that meets the defensive purpose of the strategy.

- (9) Given the targeting requirements necessary to support the damage limitation strategy, the President of United States, no later than one year following the date of enactment of this act, shall issue a new strategic targeting directive, in classified form, that distributes the target set across offensive, defensive, conventional, and nuclear forces with an appropriate level of redundancy.
- (10) The United States does not assume that its military forces designed and built during the Cold War will meet the requirements of the damage limitation strategy or the derived targeting directive; therefore, following the adoption of the targeting directive, the Department of Defense shall commence to design, build, and where appropriate adapt the nation's military forces to meet the requirements of the damage limitation strategy and its targeting directive.
- (11) Given that the damage limitation strategy and the targeting directive will establish new military requirements, the Department of Defense is expected to design and build both conventional and nuclear forces that are thoroughly modernized.
- (12) Energetic diplomacy is necessary to the proper execution of the damage limitation strategy.
- (13) Given that global stability in the multipolar world will require regional stability and security, the Department of State shall use the tool of diplomacy to maintain the solidarity of the worldwide alliance structure led by the United States, specifically by extending the protective purpose of the damage limitation strategy to the allies of the United States.
- (14) Given the fundamentally defensive nature of the damage limitation strategy, its adoption and appropriate interpretation by other states will pose no danger to the United States; therefore, the State Department shall seek to use the tool of diplomacy to persuade other states, including allies, friends, and even potential enemies, to adopt the same strategy.
- (15) Arms control may play an important supporting role in the execution of the damage limitation strategy.
- (16) Under the damage limitation strategy, arms control policy should place a special emphasis on controlling the military capabilities in potential enemy states, giving priority to controlling weapons of mass destruction, which are assessed as presenting the targets that are the most difficult to hold at risk with the military forces of the United States and its allies, and to do so in a way that does not undermine the ability of the military forces of the United States and its allies to meet the broader requirements of the strategy.
- (17) The United States recognizes that pursuing arms control directly with nonstate actors is not practical, but that arms control agreements with state actors can serve to limit the access to weapons by nonstate actors.
- (18) Nonproliferation initiatives may play an important supporting role in executing the damage limitation strategy by limiting the scope and complexity of the multipolar international structure and thereby simplify the task of managing stability.
- (19) Nonproliferation initiatives, as with arms control initiatives, may play an important supporting role in executing the damage limitation strategy by reducing the complexity of performing the military task of effectively holding at risk the targets that otherwise may be on the targeting list.