

Extended Deterrence and Extended Nuclear Deterrence in a Pandemic World

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**A Working Paper presented to
The 75th Anniversary Nagasaki Nuclear-Pandemic Nexus Scenario Project**

October 31-November 1, and November 14-15, 2020 (Japan Time)

Co-sponsored by Research Center for Nuclear Weapons Abolition, Nagasaki University (RECNA), the Nautilus Institute, Asia Pacific Leadership Network for Nuclear Non-proliferation and Disarmament (APLN)

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Abstract

‘Extended deterrence’ and ‘extended nuclear deterrence’, as US security guarantees provided to allies, are artefacts of over six decades of US-led policy and planning. No other Nuclear Weapon State offers such guarantees. In the early post-WW2 years, extended deterrence used the overwhelming conventional military power of the US to deter armed aggression (particularly from the USSR) against its allies. The development of atomic weapons by the USSR and China, and the potential threat that such weapons might have posed for allies, expanded the scope of “extended deterrence” to include deterrence of possible nuclear weapon threats.

Deterrence relies on an aggressor’s uncertainty whether the third party providing the deterrent will provide the overwhelming military power to defeat aggression, and whether the cost of defeat will outweigh the benefit of victory. In other words, is deterrence a bluff or a guarantee?

In recent decades, the credibility of extended deterrence, including extended nuclear deterrence, has continued to decline. The fragility of the deterrence doctrine was already evident before the appearance of the coronavirus. But President Trump’s mercurial approach to the coronavirus pandemic and international agreements has encouraged the allies of the US to look at their national security through the lens of his approach to the coronavirus. If the US cannot effectively protect itself against the coronavirus, how can it protect its allies?

Deterrence is a faith-based system. There is no evidence that it works. The logic of deterrence ultimately depends on its failure: the conduct of warfare on a massive scale.

Keywords

Nuclear weapons, extended deterrence, nuclear umbrella, credibility, trust, leadership, alliances

Summary

The COVID19 pandemic has reinforced two of the main contributing factors to the current age of disruption: the tendency of national leaders to act unilaterally; and the global decline in trust. Rather than acting collaboratively, national leaders everywhere, particularly in Europe and North America, have pursued a ‘go it alone’ policy towards both containing and managing the virus. Some might even describe it as a ‘dog eat dog’ approach. And President Trump’s attempt to corner the vaccine market by persuading Germany’s CureVac company to move its research facilities to the US, and to retain the Gilead company’s Remdesivir production for sole US usage, highlights the triumph of national over internationally collaborative approaches to what is fundamentally an international problem affecting humanity as a whole.

‘Extended deterrence’ and ‘extended nuclear deterrence’, as security guarantees extended to allies of the US, are artefacts of over six decades of US-only strategic policy and planning. No other Nuclear Weapon State (NWS) offers such guarantees. Their fragility was already evident before the appearance of the coronavirus. And given that the credibility of the deterrence doctrine, essentially a US-backed doctrine, has continued to erode in recent years, President Trump’s mercurial approach to the coronavirus pandemic and international agreements has encouraged the allies of the US to look at their national security through the lens of his approach to the coronavirus.

Ultimately, national defence cannot be built on a fiction. The allies and clients of the US will need to look to their own resources to guarantee their security. This is more likely to be a product of an energetic and invested diplomacy, constructive internationalism, the re-generation of trust, renewed regional and international efforts towards nuclear disarmament, renewed global progress on climate change mitigation and, of course, effective global mechanisms to manage and ultimately eliminate the COVID19 pandemic.

Introduction

The global community is slowly coming to accept that it may be living not in a post-COVID-19 world but in a world of rolling outbreaks where waves of infection and death afflict populations unpredictably. Along with climate change and nuclear weapons, this is the new threat to human security and, like the other two threats, may constrain humanity's existence in the absence of an effective vaccine. Ian Dunlop has pointed out that the pandemic itself is related “to human-induced climate change, which stems from our use of fossil fuels, agriculture and land-clearing”.¹ As we set about burning ever more fossil fuel, clearing ever more land, accelerating the decline of biodiversity, bringing human populations ever closer to wild animal populations, forcing animal species to seek refuge in conurbations for their very survival, we expose human beings to unheralded forms of zoonotic disease. In recent decades, these have included HIV, bird flu, SARS, MERS, and the Hendra, Ebola and Zika viruses.

Desertification and deforestation engender habitat loss that forces species that have never previously been in contact to migrate into shared refuges around new food resources. Anthropogenic changes to the global landscape and atmospheric warming are not only affecting weather patterns but also creating new forms of health threat. Climate change is a risk multiplier. It affects the well-being of populations, the availability of food resources, the security of communities and ultimately the stability of governments, all of which play into the causes of armed conflict and war.

Climate change and the coronavirus pandemic have both induced a potentially fatal paralysis in many world leaders and fatalistic inertia in many of the world's communities – and for the same basic reason. As a species, it appears that human beings are unable to accept the systemic interdependence between people, other animal species and the natural world in general. In the most morbid of senses then, the global community is currently facing two catastrophes for the price of one. And, what is more, the inter-connectedness of planetary systems places the three most pressing threats to human existence – climate change, pandemics and nuclear weapons – in

¹ See Ian Dunlop, “The really big and tough issue is the environment says Ken Henry”, *Pearls and Irritations*, 8 July 2020 <https://johnmenadue.com/the-environment-the-really-tough-one/>

the same decision space. Each of these threats constitutes a “wicked problem” where solutions are “messy”, iterative and constantly morphing.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on global security is yet to be seen. But what is clear from the so-called first wave is the massive debilitation of human populations in the US, India, Europe and parts of Central and South America. Even China, Japan and South Korea have been hard hit, though early controls reduced the relative levels of harm across the population. And at this stage of the pandemic’s evolution, the global economic cost is unknown – but it will be massive. Taken together, the health and economic consequences of the pandemic constitute a substantial challenge to national security, making populations less resilient, more vulnerable to military threats, and less able to invest in and sustain significant military operations. And where some states may regard the emerging weakness of other states as an opportunity for sabre-rattling and aggressive rhetoric (China and India have exchanged fire in the Galwan River valley, while President Trump and members of his cabinet have certainly engaged in rhetorical exchanges with China), others may respond in similar fashion by engaging in political warfare to exploit social divisions generated by the pandemic. Australian and US concerns regarding alleged Chinese cyber and information attacks are emblematic of the insecurity that attends COVID-19.

It is already evident that the COVID-19 pandemic is affecting the readiness of military forces. The US aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt was an early casualty, as was its captain who drew attention to the plight of the crew and was promptly dismissed from his command.² Over 20 percent of the carrier’s crew tested positive for the virus, and at least one died. The captain, who also succumbed to the disease, was subsequently dismissed from the US Navy, and the US Navy Secretary who dismissed him was also fired. A US marine on exercises in the Northern Territory was also diagnosed with the coronavirus infection, re-introducing the virus to the Northern Territory following a sustained period of no cases.³ The clear message is that military

² See ABC report “Sailor from USS Theodore Roosevelt dies of coronavirus after captain fired for raising concerns about outbreak”, ABC News, 14 April 2020 <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-04-14/us-navy-sailor-from-uss-theodore-roosevelt-dies-of-coronavirus/12147482> and Barbara Starr and Michael Nedelman, “US aircraft carrier hit by major coronavirus outbreak returns to sea”, CNN Politics, 21 May 2020 <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/05/19/politics/uss-roosevelt-return-to-sea/index.html>

³ See Steve Vivian, “US marine tests positive for coronavirus in the Northern Territory”, ABC News, 10 July 2020 <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-07-10/nt-coronavirus-update-new-case-confirmed-us-marine/12442232>

forces are as vulnerable to a pandemic as the civilian population, with unforeseeable consequences for operational readiness and effectiveness.

In view of the *Nuclear Posture Review 2018* and its lowering of the boundary between conventional and nuclear warfare, the threshold for nuclear use may well be reduced considerably if key elements of the US military were *hors de combat* due to the pandemic. For their part, China and Russia have exploited the uncertainties surrounding the coronavirus by stepping up their surveillance and associated military activities along their borders. The imperative to win, as distinct from survive, opens a Pandora's box of terrifying scenarios in times of pandemic.

As some commentators have noted, including a former Australian Prime Minister,⁴ the potential for the pandemic to provide a pathway to armed conflict has increased. And with the prospect of war, there is the possibility of nuclear exchange. The link between COVID-19 and Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) cannot be ignored, even if the relationship cannot be properly mapped. That is the nature of “wicked problems”.

The COVID-19 pandemic is also changing the way that nations think about the health security of their populations. Setting aside the defiant wilfulness of the Trump administration's response to the pandemic, matching only that of the Bolsonaro government in Brazil for its cavalier incompetence, most governments have looked to internal solutions to their pandemic management problems. *Mutatis mutandis*, they have instituted quarantine controls by closing their borders to international travellers, imposing strict controls on the social intercourse of their populations, locking down districts and regions, expanding their medical services, constructing ‘pop-up’ hospitals, establishing mobile testing facilities and generally imposing heavy costs on their economies as they try to maintain both services and incomes.

Apart from some formalised cooperative arrangements between individual laboratories and pharmaceutical companies that are otherwise competing to discover a vaccine, nations have not established international cooperative arrangements for the broader management of the pandemic.

⁴ See, for instance, Andrew Tillett, “US-China tensions could lead to hot war: Rudd”, *The Australian Financial Review*, 4 August 2020 <https://www.afr.com/politics/federal/us-china-tensions-could-lead-to-a-hot-war-rudd-20200804-p55ib9> See also Kevin Rudd, “Beware the Guns of August – in Asia”, *Foreign Affairs*, 3 August 2020 <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2020-08-03/beware-guns-august-asia>

No nation has contracted out its coronavirus management to any international agency or organisation (including the World Health Organisation), far less to another state. This is less because the WHO has not discovered or manufactured a vaccine (that is not its role), but rather a reflection on the unwillingness of many governments to accept and follow WHO pandemic advice.

Rather than acting collaboratively, many national leaders have pursued a ‘go it alone’ policy towards both containing and managing the virus. Some might even describe it as a ‘dog eat dog’ approach. And President Trump’s attempt to corner the vaccine market by persuading Germany’s CureVac company to move its research facilities to the US, and to retain the Gilead company’s Remdesivir production for sole US usage, highlights the triumph of national over internationally collaborative approaches to what is fundamentally an international problem affecting humanity as a whole.

It is curious that the ‘go it alone’ approach of so many of the US allies in managing their COVID19 responses has been in sharp contradistinction to their longstanding preparedness to transfer ultimate responsibility for their security to another power, which is the consequence of extended deterrence.

So, this paper questions why states might contract out fundamental aspects of their national security to more powerful states (‘extended deterrence’) and how credible is the so-called protection they might receive in return.

The Problem of Trust

The COVID19 world is one where trust is in retreat. Populations’ trust in their leaders and governments, already in the doldrums for many years,⁵ will continue to decline as citizens’ hopes of ‘a return to normal’ – frequently promised by their governments – remain unfulfilled.⁶ But trust is not only in decline within nations. It is in decline between nations. As The Lowy

⁵ See OECD, “Trust in Government”, <https://www.oecd.org/gov/trust-in-government.htm>

⁶ See Christopher Ingraham, “Coronavirus will undermine trust in government, ‘scarring body and mind’ for decades, research finds”, *The Washington Post*, 5 July 2020
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2020/07/05/coronavirus-pandemic-trust-government/>

Institute has reported, “in 2020, Australians are less trusting of most countries around the world than in the past”.⁷ Trust in China has more than halved over a two-year period, while trust in the US has declined from a high of 83 percent during President Obama’s administration to just over 50 percent in 2020.⁸

In a world where trust – both between citizens and the state, and between states – is in decline, the barking of the dogs of war grows louder. That doesn’t necessarily make war inevitable. But it does make it more likely, and it makes states feel more insecure, which in turn makes them look to their defences. For Non-Nuclear Weapon States (NNWS) such as Australia, Japan and South Korea, locked into alliances with the US, the comfort of the nuclear guarantee looks even more attractive. But is the guarantee to be trusted? More to the point, is the US to be trusted to deliver on that guarantee? And even more to the point, is President Trump to be trusted to put Chicago at risk to protect Canberra, or Washington to protect Tokyo?

Reliance on the nuclear deterrent capabilities of a major power is much more a statement of necessity than one of trust. But if, ultimately, that reliance is insufficient though necessary for national security, what’s the point? If it is not grounded in trust, then it is groundless. That is the dilemma on which extended nuclear deterrence rests for its credibility.

In important respects, the COVID19 pandemic has revealed that trust, or its absence, is the global community’s Achilles heel. Trust, and its absence, are pervasive qualities, affecting all aspects of individual, communal and national decision-making and behaviour. This is a matter to which we shall return in due course.

⁷ See Lowy Institute Poll 2020 at <https://poll.lowyinstitute.org/tags/trust-in-global-powers/>

⁸ *Loc.cit.*

Extended Deterrence and Extended Nuclear Deterrence

Ultimately, the doctrine of deterrence rests on fear: it is no accident that ‘terror’ is intrinsic to the very word.⁹

The theoretical principles underlying the doctrine of extended deterrence were well articulated by Paul Huth, writing in *The American Political Science Review* in 1988.¹⁰ With estimable caution, Huth ended his analysis with the following observation:

The defense of allies from external threats is an enduring feature of the competition between states for spheres of influence in the international system. Extended deterrence, however, can be a very difficult and demanding task for foreign policy leaders. . . . The credible threat of military force is required to convince the potential attacker that the military costs of changing the status quo are high, but skillful diplomacy is also required to assure the potential attacker that the political costs of continued peace are acceptable.¹¹

Therein one sees the fundamental problem with the doctrine of extended deterrence: what at one level appears to be a force-on-force solution to a force problem, dependent on the superior firepower and destructive forces of the deterring power, is at another level a political problem dependent on nimble management of the political and psychological uncertainties attendant upon Clausewitz’s dictum “war is the continuation of policy by other means”.

George Schultz, Secretary of State in US President Ronald Reagan’s administration, has put the nuclear deterrence dilemma with characteristic precision.

Nuclear weapons were, and are, the gravest threat to humanity’s survival. Their effect in preventing wars has been overrated and reports of the damage they cause tend to be brushed aside. New studies show the major impact of their use on the climate and agriculture beyond all the other effects that we knew about previously. To depend on

⁹ For an excellent examination of the modern evolution of deterrence, see Andrew Brown and Lorna Arnold, “The Quirks of Nuclear Deterrence”, *International Relations*, Vol. 24, No. 3, (2010), pp. 293-312

<https://www.belfercenter.org/sites/default/files/legacy/files/The-Quirks-of-Nuclear-Deterrence.pdf>

¹⁰ See Paul Huth, “Extended Deterrence and the Outbreak of War”, *The American Political Science Review*, vol. 82, No 2 (June, 1988), p. 424 https://www.jstor.org/stable/1957394?read-now=1&seq=2#page_scan_tab_contents

¹¹ Paul Huth, *art.cit.*, p. 439

nuclear deterrence indefinitely into the future, especially when other means of deterrence are available, is foolhardy.¹²

The more populist architects of extended deterrence were rather like the medieval scholastics whose philosophical presuppositions and axioms enabled them to explore the relationship between materiality and immateriality – the *reductio ad absurdum* encapsulated by the question “how many angels can dance on the head of a pin?” How does one ‘play with the mind’ of a potential adversary contemplating the materiality of war by confronting him with the immateriality of uncertainty as to whether a third party might apply overwhelming force? Extended deterrence assumes a linearity between armed aggression and its resolution that ignores both the non-linear character of warfare (Clausewitz’s ‘fog’ and ‘friction’) and the decision chaos that comes with uncertainty.¹³ Yet history confirms repeatedly that the immateriality of policy eventually overwhelms the materiality of war.

The logic gymnastics of deterrence can be seen in the confected binary between counter-value (the adversary’s cities and economic infrastructure) and counter-force (the adversary’s military systems). To imagine that an adversary will refrain from a counter-value defence on the grounds that the attack is counter-force is to ignore both history and human psychology. The destruction of Rotterdam, Cologne, Dresden, Hiroshima and Nagasaki – all counter-value targets – demonstrates that what might appeal to military planners in theory (destruction of industrial and military targets) does not conform to what happens in practice. Moreover, as Fred Kaplan points out in his remarkable history *The Bomb*, the internal logic of counterforce drives the dynamics of an inevitable arms race.¹⁴ Signal-giving and signal-reading are not the same thing.

Extended nuclear deterrence is an artefact of US alliance policy in the immediate post-WW2 years: the nations that ‘enjoy’ the extended nuclear deterrence that the US nuclear arsenal affords

¹² See George Schultz, in George P. Schultz and James E. Goodby (eds), *The War That Must Never Be Fought: Dilemmas of Nuclear Deterrence* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 2015), p. xv
https://www.hoover.org/sites/default/files/research/docs/goodby_shultz_-_the_war_that_must_never_be_fought_-_scribd.pdf

¹³ Uncertainty was embedded in Clausewitz’s analysis of war. See Vladimir Rauta, “Clausewitz’s Fog and Friction and the Military Transformation Fiction”, *Conflict and Security* (University of Nottingham), 2 December 2013
<http://nottspolitics.org/2013/12/02/clausewitzs-fog-and-friction-and-the-military-transformation-fiction/>

¹⁴ Fred Kaplan, *The Bomb: Presidents, Generals and the Secret History of Nuclear War* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2020), p. 78.

them are all joined to the US through a set of alliance arrangements that places the US at the centre of their national defence. Consequently, extended nuclear deterrence is very much a security preoccupation of the US and its allies. It is not something to which defence planners in Brazil or Indonesia, or China for that matter, turn their minds. The former Warsaw Pact members, for instance – the forced acolytes of the former Soviet Union that wasted no time in escaping the clutches of the Soviet Union following *glasnost* – did not enjoy a similar relationship with their dominant partner. They were not in any effective sense covered by a nuclear umbrella in the way that NATO members thought themselves to be. So in a strategically unbalanced world, only the allies of the US live in the security bubble of extended nuclear deterrence.

It is a curious phenomenon that most deterrence theorists are also deterrence enthusiasts. Like theology, deterrence theory takes on the guise of a faith-based discipline masquerading as an evidence-based science. Yet its foundation principles are axiomatic rather than observable facts. Its practitioners are often the ‘true believers’ providing a kind of theoretical basis that legitimises what military planners were probably intending to do anyway. The arguments for deterrence, especially nuclear deterrence, can be as ingenious and sophisticated as they are novel and specious. In a recent academic journal article, for instance, two Australian scholars argued that by signing on to the institutional arrangement that delivers US nuclear deterrence to safeguard Australia against an overwhelming aggressor – the ANZUS treaty – Australia acquires the ability to influence the direction of US nuclear policy, and defence policy more broadly.

In general, maximizing influence over U.S. strategic policy has been an important motive for U.S. allies seeking to participate in nuclear cooperation. For instance, Australia only began to highlight U.S. extended nuclear deterrence in its 1993 Strategic Review, due to an underlying anxiety that the United States was considering detaching itself militarily from the Asia-Pacific after the Cold War. . . . Moreover, Australia’s White Papers contain an implicit “sole-purpose” declaration that relates U.S. extended nuclear deterrence (in the case of Australia) exclusively to *nuclear* threats.¹⁵

¹⁵ See Stephan Frühling and Andrew O’Neil, “Nuclear weapons, the United States and alliances in Europe and Asia: Toward an institutional perspective”, *Contemporary Security Policy*, vol 38 (2017), issue 1 <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13523260.2016.1257214>

Whether the institutional frameworks that purportedly deliver deterrence are truly able to lend authority and credibility to a weaker party in their efforts to influence the policies of their major ally is moot - more an expression of hope than a reflection of experience.

A more agnostic approach to the place of deterrence in security planning was evidenced by Patrick Morgan in 2012.

Much of the discussion, indeed worry, about deterrence now has to do with familiar concerns: credibility, target rationality, fitting deterrence carefully to the situation (tailoring), possible/actual first-strike capabilities, and so on. More analysis is needed stressing what became, over time, the most important dimension of Cold War deterrence – system security management. This is management for a world now trying to reorder international politics and security to make deterrence steadily less relevant, with that management resting much less on nuclear deterrence in particular, and with ordinary deterrence more prominent and often meant to help sharply improve international politics.¹⁶

But keen interest in and re-evaluation of deterrence theory does in part explain why, in recent decades, the two terms of art – ‘extended deterrence’ and ‘extended nuclear deterrence’ – have tended to conflate.¹⁷ ‘Extended deterrence’ relied on the willingness of a third party ally with superior conventional forces to use those forces in the defence of the less militarily powerful ally against an aggressive third party. The proliferation of nuclear weapons encouraged the US and its allies to bring nuclear forces into the deterrence equation: the potential aggressor had to calculate whether he would be prepared to employ nuclear weapons in armed conflict with a Non-Nuclear Weapon State (NNWS) against the prospect of a nuclear sanction imposed by the US.

¹⁶ See Patrick M. Morgan, “The State of Deterrence in International Politics Today”, *Contemporary Security Policy*, vol. 33 (2012), issue 1, p. 98 <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13523260.2012.659589>

¹⁷ See, for instance, Steven Pifer, Richard Bush, Vanda Felbab-Brown, Martin Indyk, Michael O’Hanlon and Kenneth Pollack, “U.S. Nuclear and Extended Deterrence: Considerations and Challenges”, *Foreign Policy at Brookings*, May 2010, where the terms are used more or less interchangeably. https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/06_nuclear_deterrence.pdf

But the progressive withdrawal of US ground forces from Germany and the Republic of Korea,¹⁸ along with the re-drawing of nuclear-use thresholds in the *Nuclear Posture Review 2018*, has added considerable ambiguity to the use of nuclear forces to deter conventional attacks in Europe and Asia. Accordingly, ‘extended nuclear deterrence’ has come to dominate consideration of deterrence policy.

A surprising consequence of this conflation is that, for the US, the effectiveness of extended nuclear deterrence is increasingly judged in terms of allies’ expressions of reassurance rather than the absence or reduced likelihood of armed conflict.

Their conflation is due, in part, to the progressive legitimisation of nuclear weapons and their use resulting from long-term weapons production and possession by the NWS (as identified by the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, or NPT) and their unwillingness and inability to embark on nuclear arms elimination as required by the NPT. It is due in part to the intellectual laziness that has begun to characterise much of what passes for strategic policy analysis and formulation. It is due in part to an intellectual sleight-of-hand whereby the presuppositions and axioms underpinning the simpler concept of ‘extended deterrence’ have been manoeuvred into position as the conceptual foundations of the more complicated and elusive idea of ‘extended nuclear deterrence’. And it is also an inevitable consequence of the Trump administration’s *Nuclear Posture Review 2018*, which postulated a lowering of the nuclear-use bar by contemplating nuclear first-use in conventional warfare.

. . . Deterring nuclear attack is **not the sole purpose** of nuclear weapons. Given the diverse threats and profound uncertainties of the current and future threat environment, U.S. nuclear forces play the following critical roles in U.S. national security strategy.

- Deterrence of nuclear **and non-nuclear** attack;
- Assurance of allies and partners;
- Achievement of U.S. objectives **if deterrence fails**;
- Capacity to hedge against an uncertain future.

¹⁸ For a particularly insightful analysis of nuclear security issues on the Korean peninsula, see Paul K. Davis, Peter Wilson, Jeongeun Kim and Junho Park, “Deterrence and Stability for the Korean Peninsula”, *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*, vol. 28 (1), March 2016, pp. 1-23.

<https://www.kida.re.kr/frt/board/frtBoardJatsxmlPop.do?idx=2>

These roles are complementary and interrelated, and we must assess the adequacy of U.S. nuclear forces against each role and the strategy designed to fulfill (sic) it.¹⁹

The review continues:

The United States would only consider the employment of nuclear weapons in extreme circumstances to defend the vital interests of the United States, its allies, and partners.

Extreme circumstances could include significant non-nuclear strategic attacks.

Significant non-nuclear strategic attacks include, but are not limited to, attacks on the U.S., allied, or partner civilian population or infrastructure, and attacks on U.S. or allied nuclear forces, their command and control, or warning and attack assessment capabilities.²⁰

The credibility of extended deterrence rests on the supposition that the superior forces of a powerful state would come to the aid of the forces of a less powerful state (generally a NNWS) were it subject to armed aggression by an opposing powerful state. It is the basic assumption on which the North Atlantic (NATO) Treaty, the still contested Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between the United States and Japan,²¹ and the ANZUS Treaty rest – that the US would come to its allies’ assistance in the event of an armed attack by an opposing state, with or without the implied threat of nuclear weapons use.

There are, however, three intrinsic disjunctions in the extended deterrence formula: that the interests of the more powerful deterring state would necessarily align with those of the less powerful state; that the more powerful state would in any circumstance be prepared to expend blood and treasure on behalf of the less powerful state; and that the benefits of confronting an opposing powerful state would outweigh those costs. “My enemy’s enemy is my friend” might

¹⁹ Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Nuclear Posture Review February 2018*, p. 20
<https://media.defense.gov/2018/Feb/02/2001872886/-1/-1/1/2018-NUCLEAR-POSTURE-REVIEW-FINAL-REPORT.PDF> Emphasis is by the author.

²⁰ Office of the Secretary of Defense, *op. cit.*, p.21. A curious reader might wonder how France and the United Kingdom regard their inclusion under the US extended nuclear deterrence umbrella. Emphasis by the author.

²¹ While it is a major advocate of nuclear nonproliferation, Japan continues to pursue a hedging policy that retains the possibility of nuclear weapons development by preserving the ability both to enrich uranium and to reprocess plutonium. As is the case with other US allies, there remains a reservoir of doubt about the effectiveness and reliability of the extended nuclear deterrence provided by the US-Japan Treaty. See, for instance, Mark Fitzpatrick, “How Japan Could Go Nuclear”, *Foreign Affairs*, 3 October 2019
<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/asia/2019-10-03/how-japan-could-go-nuclear>

resonate with some, but “my friend’s enemy is my enemy” may not be true in most circumstances.²²

There is a superficial attractiveness in rationalising hope. The hopeful press for deals from the powerful, often without realising the extent to which the powerful are driven by self-interest. Concessions come at a price. And the powerful deploy their policy sales agents who confect all kinds of sophistries to persuade the customer to buy their wares, particularly when the customer is gullible. In pressing Australia to accept a ‘soft’ treaty with Japan in the immediate post WW2 period, the US was prepared to accept Australia’s demand for a security guarantee against the possibility of Japan’s eventual re-armament. So the ANZUS treaty, which is scarcely more than an agreement to consult, provided Australia with the ‘extended deterrence’ that an insecure and nervous Australia demanded.²³

Yet, so far as this author has been able to determine, none of the contemporary negotiators envisaged the use of the US nuclear strike capability to defend Australia against any putative Japanese aggression. Australia’s insecurity pathologies continued to infect its strategic concerns during the 1950s and 1960s – dominoes in South East Asia and deep worries about Indonesian aggression during *Konfrontasi* (1963-66). But the assistance provided to the UK to develop its nuclear weapons (the provision of the Monte Bello and Maralinga test sites) and its own ambitions to develop a nuclear capability notwithstanding, Australian planners seem not to have given serious contemplation to a nuclear defence of Australia by the US.

Konfrontasi, of course, brought Australia a serious reality check on the real strategic utility of Australia’s extended deterrence expectations provided by the ANZUS treaty. In 1963, Prime Minister Robert Menzies decided to test the waters. Australia’s commitment of forces to the defence of Malaysia against Indonesian ‘Confrontation’ in 1963 was made on the assumption that, were Australian forces to come under direct attack by Indonesian forces, the US would commit forces to support Australia. Discussions between the US Under-Secretary of State for

²² The logical anomaly inherent in these two propositions was explored by Thomas Schwartz in “The friend of my enemy is my enemy, the enemy of my enemy is my friend: Axioms for structural balance and bi-polarity”, *Mathematical Social Sciences*, vol. 60, Issue 1, July 2010, pp. 39-45.

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/journal/mathematical-social-sciences/vol/60/issue/1>

²³ For an excellent and concise analysis of the negotiating history of the ANZUS Treaty, see Joseph M. Siracusa, “The ANZUS Treaty Revisited”, *Security Challenges*, vol. 1, no. 1. Pp.89-104

<https://www.regionalsecurity.org.au/Resources/Files/vol1no1Siracusa.pdf>

Political Affairs Averell Harriman and the Australian government in June 1963 skirted around US policy in South East Asia, with Harriman apparently taking a broader interpretation of the ANZUS treaty than President Kennedy subsequently adopted in his conversations with Prime Minister Menzies and Treasurer Holt, and the Australians apparently hearing what they wanted to hear.

So when Menzies met Kennedy in July 1963, the key topic of conversation was the applicability of the extended deterrence assumed by Australia's interpretation of the ANZUS treaty to an Australian force under attack in Malaysia. Menzies was confident that ANZUS applied in such a situation. Kennedy was equivocal.²⁴ In a subsequent conversation with Treasurer Harold Holt, Kennedy was more forthright: the US was not going to be the backstop behind UK and Australian forces in Malaysia. Kennedy is recorded as saying, "We have not said 'if you [Indonesia] do so and so [attack British or Australian forces] the result will be war with the United States'".²⁵

As the record shows, there was no "blank check [sic]" extended to Australia. The limits of the ANZUS treaty, and consequently the limits of extended deterrence, were clearly established. Consultation did not mean contribution. The US certainly had the military mass to deter Indonesia had it chosen so to do, but it was not prepared to encourage Australian reliance on Indonesia's possible uncertainty concerning US intentions.

The nail in the extended deterrence coffin was driven home by President Nixon with the enunciation of the Guam Doctrine in 1969. The US sought to ensure that nations expecting US military support in times of tension or conflict at a minimum provided for their own self-defence.

Coming as it did during the Vietnam War, when the US was both stretched and stressed, the Guam statement made it clear that the US was not some kind of global saviour. Speaking during a stopover in Guam, Nixon said that the US "is going to encourage and has the right to expect" that "military defense . . . will be handled by, and responsibility for it taken by, the Asian nations

²⁴ See note 3 to the Memorandum of Conversation between US President Kennedy and Australian Treasurer Harold Holt, 2 October 1963 in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963, Volume XXIII, Southeast Asia*, document 337 <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v23/d337>

²⁵ This statement is quoted in the document cited above.

themselves”.²⁶ The message was not lost on either Australia or New Zealand.²⁷ And, for his part, President Trump drove the message home in his remarks at the NATO Headquarters in Brussels in May 2017, when he upbraided NATO members for not paying “their fair share”, a situation he saw as being “not fair to the people and the taxpayers of the United States”.²⁸ And not one to let a bone go without chewing on it a bit more, President Trump reiterated his views in London in December 2019 when he said “[The NATO budget] was going down for close to 20 years . . . you wouldn’t have had a NATO if you kept going that way”.²⁹

NATO members might want to consider the credibility of both extended deterrence and extended nuclear deterrence in the contemporary strategic circumstances of Europe, especially in the light of French President Macron’s description of NATO as “brain dead”.³⁰

Bluff, Double Bluff, and Reverse Bluff

The origins of extended deterrence theory in modern times lie in the dominant and overwhelming military force of the post-WW2 US. Try as it did, the Soviet Union was no match (witness the 1962 Cuban missile crisis, a near-run thing but ending in a Soviet back-down), and no other power, including China after its acquisition of a nuclear weapon, had any chance of staring down the US. So the threat of an armed US intervention on behalf of its NATO, Japan, ANZUS or SEATO allies, and the certainty that the US *could* use its military power with impunity (even when there was no certainty that the US *would* actually use its military power) was enough to deliver effective deterrence, at least until the late 1950s.

²⁶ See Document 29 (editorial note), *Foreign Relations of the United States 1969-1976*, Vol. 1, “Foundations of Foreign Policy, 1969-1972” <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v01/d29>

²⁷ See Hugh White, “A very unreassuring bombshell: Richard Nixon and the Guam doctrine, July 1969”, *The Strategist*, 25 July 2019 <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/a-very-unreassuring-bombshell-richard-nixon-and-the-guam-doctrine-july-1969/>

²⁸ President Trump, remarks at the unveiling of the 9/11 and Article 5 Memorial and Berlin wall Memorial, 25 May 2017 <https://nato.usmission.gov/may-25-2017-president-trumps-remarks-911-article-5-memorial-unveiling/>

²⁹ President Trump after the 1:1 Meeting, London, 3 December 2019 <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-nato-secretary-general-stoltenberg-11-meeting-london-united-kingdom/>

³⁰ See “A president on a mission”, *The Economist*, 9 November 2019. Also, “Emmanuel Macron warns Europe: NATO is becoming brain-dead”, *The Economist*, 7 November 2019 <https://www.economist.com/europe/2019/11/07/emmanuel-macron-warns-europe-nato-is-becoming-brain-dead>

More than that, it delivered comfort to the more apprehensive allies of the US – the European NATO member with their concerns about the Soviet Union, and Australia and New Zealand with their generalised insecurity about China and potentially Indonesia – that their defence would be guaranteed by the US.

Yet doubt has lain at the heart of deterrence theory from the beginning. It was elegantly summed up by Henry Kissinger in 1979. “. . . European allies should not keep asking us to multiply strategic assurances that we cannot possibly mean or if we do mean, we should not want to execute because if we execute we risk the destruction of civilization”. He went on to say:

If there is no theatre nuclear establishment on the continent of Europe, we are writing the script for selective blackmail in which our allies will be threatened, and in which we will be forced into a decision whereby we can respond only with a strategy that has no military purpose but only the aim of destruction of populations. I ask any of you around this conference table: If you were Secretary of State or Security Adviser, what would you recommend to the President of the United States to do in such circumstances? How would he improve his relative military position? Of course, he could threaten a full-scale strategic response, but is it a realistic course? It is senseless to say that dilemma shows that Americans are weak and irresolute. This is not the problem of any particular administration, but it is a problem of the doctrine that has developed.³¹

Strategic change, however, has transformed the credibility of force-based ‘extended deterrence’. Russia’s changed force posture, and President Putin’s confidence and assertiveness in the face of the decline of US influence in both Europe and the Middle East, have brought a revised capability and psychological alignment that challenges the US (and President Trump) directly, changing the calculation balance from the preponderance of US force to the credibility and reliability of US intent.

Moreover, China’s rise as a strategic power in Asia and the relative decline in US dominance have begun to concern the treaty allies of the US, particularly Japan and the Republic of Korea. Australia is not immune from this concern. The issue here is the automaticity of a US force

31 Henry Kissinger, “NATO – The Next Thirty Years”, speech at the Palais d’Egmont, Brussels, 1 September 1979, pp. 11-13) http://findit.library.yale.edu/images_layout/fullviewnoocr?parentoid=11781220

response to the threat of armed aggression – a confidence that the treaty might be expected to provide – as distinct from the uncertainty (in the minds of both the aggressor and the threatened party, as it happens) generated by deterrence. The credibility of US commitment to the defence of its Asian (and antipodean) allies rested on US conventional dominance and the belief that China would not initiate the use of nuclear weapons. The change in the conventional balance has diminished the credibility of the US extended deterrence.

So, for Australia, Japan and the Republic of Korea, reliance on the US *preponderance of force* to guarantee deterrence of possible armed aggression by China has also given way to a reliance on the *intent* of the US to honour its treaty arrangements. In other words, in both Europe and North Asia, reliance on strategic bulk has been replaced by a reliance on strategic bluff. Just how reliable is that?

The answer to that, in contemporary circumstances, is probably not very. The tension between materiality and immateriality was well captured by Steve Fetter and Jon Wolfsthal in 2018.

If we are fighting and likely to prevail in a conventional war on the Korean peninsula, using nuclear weapons could lead to a more devastating nuclear attack by the North on South Korea and stalemate any conventional conflict. Yet, failing to respond could expose past commitments to use nuclear weapons as a bluff and the call into question the credibility of the United States on all security and military matters. That is why President Obama and many past presidents have sought to limit the conditions under which the United States might use nuclear weapons so as to not create a commitment trap that may force it into an unnecessary use of nuclear weapons.³²

It is curious that something as fundamental to the survival of humanity as the avoidance of nuclear war should now be premised on techniques employed by gamblers to enhance their chances of winning. It is important to note in this context that gamblers are usually not concerned with or interested in other players' losing. They are interested in winning, even when their position appears weak. They maximise their position by imposing psychological uncertainty on their opponents, causing them to 'fold' or otherwise to lose. In games of chance, bluff can condition the choices and decision of opponents without materially changing the intrinsic odds.

32 Steve Fetter and Jon Wolfsthal, "No First Use and Credible Deterrence", *Journal for Peace and Nuclear Disarmament*, Vol. 1, Issues 1, 9 April 2018
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/25751654.2018.1454257>

Bluff is intrinsic to certain games of chance. But the randomness in a game of chance is known and predictable following the laws of probability, whereas armed conflict is characterised by ambiguity, discontinuity and decision-making that, as in games of chance, cannot always be assumed to be rational. Accordingly, the threat calculus assumed by extended deterrence and extended nuclear deterrence is never stable, but rather exists in the world of Clausewitz's "fog" and "friction". So for the beneficiary of extended nuclear deterrence in particular, the assumption that any US President, especially President Trump, would trade New York for Tokyo, San Diego for Seoul or Cleveland (Ohio) for Canberra is to pin a security hope on an improbability.

And the improbability, of course, cuts at least three ways: the aggressor's uncertainty that the US will contemplate such a trade; the uncertainty of the state subject to attack that the US will defend it; and the uncertainty that the US would accept a nuclear attack on behalf of an allied state.

It might be suggested that the apparent fragility of both the extended deterrence and extended nuclear deterrence doctrines and their increasing reliance on bluff has been addressed by *The Nuclear Posture Review 2018*, cited above. By lowering the nuclear use threshold to contemplate nuclear strike in the circumstances of conventional war, it might be argued that the bluff has been replaced by the double bluff – the pretence to have less power (because of assumed constraints on possible use) than is actually the case, but the determination to use that power if and when necessary.

The Nuclear Posture Review 2018 depends, for its strategic foundations, on the *2018 National Defense Strategy*, which proposed both modernising the nuclear triad and strengthening alliances.³³ It may be, of course, that *The Nuclear Posture Review 2018* envisages the possibility of a significant increase in defence spending by the allies and client states of the US, as demanded by President Trump and as recommended by numerous national strategic commentators, thereby reducing the likelihood of a call on the extended (nuclear) deterrence capabilities of the US. But in either scenario – a lower first-use bar or a lower likelihood of

³³ See "Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy", US Department of Defense, p. 6 and 8 <https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>

demand – the fact remains that extended deterrence continues to rest on a foundation of bluff and variations of bluff. That is no basis for national or population survival.

Survival depends on the ability of citizens and their governments to act in concert to mitigate and eliminate threats. Whether those threats arise from the inability of mankind to understand that it is as subject to the laws of nature and the as other beings are, or the preference of so many of the world’s leaders for nationalism and ideology in place of vision and hope, their mitigation and elimination depends on common purpose and a shared moral compass based on the dignity and value of each human being by virtue of our shared humanity. Whether it is survival in the face of climate change, pandemics or nuclear weapons, human agency is key.

In the immediate post WW2 years, the US exercised some of that agency. But as America’s moral and strategic superiority continue to erode, the United States runs a higher risk that it might simply be unable to make good on its military commitments. The relative erosion of the conventional military dominance of the US exacerbates the declining confidence of allies, and perhaps of the US itself, that the US will win a conventional war. Its global strategy is increasingly likely to be exposed as an extended nuclear deterrence bluff masquerading as a certainty – that the preponderant nuclear forces of the US will provide the reverse bluff that persuades the state contemplating a conventional attack to desist because of its certainty that nuclear weapons will overwhelm its superior conventional forces. But, as with the double bluff, the state of certainty rests not with the state providing extended nuclear deterrence, but with the ‘aggressor’ state contemplating the conventional attack, confident that the unwinnability of a nuclear exchange will prevent its occurrence. Here again, all forms of bluff fail, destroying the intrinsic credibility of deterrence. The intention of the deterring state remains ambiguous and uncertain, while the aggressor state will remain reasonably confident that a nuclear response to a conventional attack is too subject to escalation to be more than a bluff. The position of the dependent ally or client state is precarious at best.

This is a situation that Hal Brands and Eric Edelman contemplated, at least in passing, in their *Avoiding a Strategy of Bluff: The Crisis of American Military Primacy*. “As American superiority erodes . . . the United States runs a higher risk that it might simply be unable to make

good on its military commitments; its global strategy is increasingly likely to be exposed as bluff”.³⁴

While expressing their confidence in the continuing extended nuclear deterrence posture of the US, they identified the fundamental flaw in the applicability of the doctrine.

Yet like geopolitical retrenchment, the idea of substituting risk for cost contains serious liabilities. Simply hoping that exposed commitments will not be challenged might work—for a while. But this strategy carries an enormous risk that at some point those guarantees will, in fact, be tested and found wanting, with devastating effects on America’s reputation and credibility. The United States could experience its version of the “Singapore moment”—an episode, as when the Japanese captured that supposedly formidable British redoubt and sank much of its Far Eastern battle fleet along the way, when a great power’s strength and promises are revealed to be an empty shell, and its image as a strong and capable actor in a key part of the world never recovers. Along the way, a strategy of bluff would likely weaken deterrence and reassurance on the installment plan, as allies and adversaries perceive a shifting balance of power and understand that U.S. guarantees are increasingly chimerical. The United States could therefore end up with both the destabilizing consequences of retrenchment, along with the risk of conflict that comes from hanging on to preexisting obligations.³⁵

This flaw has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, where the US has retreated further from global engagement, shredding and shedding its credibility along the way.

Consequently, both the putative adversary and the ultimate security guarantor, as well as its ally or client, are caught up in the same world of strategic uncertainty that renders extended deterrence (of any form) itself uncertain and ultimately inoperable.

Extended nuclear deterrence theory has gradually morphed into a kind of deterrence theology – a belief system founded on a codified set of indemonstrable doctrines. The validity of the system

³⁴ Hal Brands and Eric Edelman, *Avoiding a Strategy of Bluff: The Crisis of American Military Primacy* (Washington: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2017), p. 12
https://csbaonline.org/uploads/documents/Strategic_Solvency_FINAL.pdf

³⁵ *Loc. cit.*, pp. 21-2.

rests on five implausible and ultimately unprovable propositions: that the guarantee is absolute and unconditional; that nuclear exchange escalation can and will be controlled; that the guarantor will accept the fact and consequences of a nuclear attack on behalf of the client state to which deterrence is extended; that the decision maker will make rational choices based on the logic of the guarantee; and that any possible aggressor will make its decisions based on the same strategic mindset as the guarantor. But each of these propositions is unsupportable.

- The guarantee can never be absolute and unconditional: war and the threat of war takes place in time and space, and is consequential upon political developments over which the guarantor may have no control or input. If, for instance, the guarantor considers that the client state has contributed to its own misfortune, it may sanction both the client state and the adversary, but may not commit to armed conflict itself.
- Escalation cannot be controlled because the decision space is essentially chaotic. The fact that tactical planners can think about and design control mechanisms does not mean that in the circumstances of war things go as planned. Discontinuities and the associated crises are intrinsic to the conduct of war.
- The guarantor will not write a blank cheque for the client whereby the guarantor takes total liability for the consequences of a nuclear exchange, including directs attacks upon and destruction of its people and property.
- The logic of the guarantee implies that the guarantor decision-maker will accept the consequences of a nuclear strike, which is not a rational thing to do.
- The stability that extended nuclear deterrence is intended to establish depends on all parties accepting the same nuclear use, response and escalation rules, sharing the same strategic mindset, an impossibility when neither the strategic intent nor the strategic objectives can be the same or even converge.

Since none of these propositions is necessarily true, the validity of extended nuclear deterrence is ultimately dependent on irrationality - the irrationality of the guarantor decision maker accepting unimaginable consequences on behalf of a third party. The fact that the dynamics of war, which are instinctive and visceral, can be considered and analysed rationally does not render them rational. And the obverse is true: while it may be comforting, it is irrational for the client state to regard extended nuclear deterrence as an ultimate guarantee of national security.

‘The logic of nuclear war’ is perhaps the most dangerous oxymoron ever devised. The ability to conceptualise the inconceivable and to construct analytical structures does not create reality or substantiate validity. Any decision, on whatever grounds, that may lead to the annihilation of humanity, is tantamount to auto-anthropophagy: self-consumption that can be contemplated as a

dystopian concept but cannot be executed sanely or rationally. Earlier in this paper, reference was made to Fred Kaplan's *The Bomb*. An enthralling, powerful and ultimately shocking journey through the nuclear age, Kaplan sums up the insanity of nuclear deterrence and nuclear war.

With the spread of the bomb came a logic – a stab at a strategy – on how to deter its use in warfare. The logic involved convincing adversaries that you really would use the bomb in response to aggression; part of that involved convincing yourself that you would use it, which required building certain types of missiles, and devising certain plans, that would enable you to use them – and before you knew it, a strategy to deter nuclear war became synonymous with a strategy to fight nuclear war. And when crises arose, the logic encouraged, almost required, escalating the cycle of threats and counterthreats, just up to the point where deterrence and war converged, in order to maintain credibility. The compelling, and frightening, thing about the logic was that, once you bought into its premises, you fell into the rabbit hole; there seemed no exit. The [US] presidents who fell into this hole, who faced the abyss where the logic led, avoided its end point – avoided war – by scrambling out of the hole, snapping out of the logic, like snapping out of a bad dream.³⁶

The logic of deterrence, if there is one, ultimately depends on the use of force, whether conventional or nuclear, to sanction an adversary's actions when deterrence has failed. The logic of deterrence is self-annihilating.

Apart from the logical, policy and systemic disfunction of deterrence theory, Kaplan also identifies a fundamental institutional flaw in the exercise of deterrence and the decision to initiate a nuclear strike. The decision and responsibility rests solely with the President of the US. There are no checks and balances. At a time when the US President's handling of the coronavirus pandemic has displayed confusion, impulsiveness, indecision, panic and vacillation, there are no grounds for confidence that the President is capable of determining a strategically credible and morally appropriate course of action in the face of nuclear brinkmanship. To apply a moral calculus, or even a strategic calculus, one must understand what it is.

³⁶ Fred Kaplan, *op. cit.*, pp. 297-8

If there is a single lesson that the coronavirus pandemic might deliver to the citizens of the US, the allies of the US and the global community at large, it is this: the US Congress must address this fundamental flaw in US decision-making by developing a robust protocol determining precisely the powers exercisable by the President, the mechanism by which key decisions are reviewed, and the limits on Executive authority. The issue here is not to cloud or distribute decision-making. Much has been written about the complexity and compression of crisis decision-making,³⁷ with group decision-making models appearing even more fraught than those where there is a single point of decision. But, following President Truman's instinct, the US President needs civilian counsellors that might at least include the Vice President (as President of the US Senate), the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the Chief Justice.

While a "no first use" policy may serve to constrain a delusional or 'Madman' President from initiating a first strike on an adversary, it does not assist a decision-maker acting to respond to an adversary's first strike, where early warning systems may or not be reliable, early warning signals may or may not reach the decision-maker in immediate real-time, and the decision-maker may or may not have time to deliberate on the consequences of decisions taken or not taken.

Morton Halperin has proposed a bold solution to this problem. The US should adopt a firm policy of no strike based only on warning. Rather, it would contemplate nuclear weapons retaliation only after nuclear weapons have exploded on the US homeland, on US forces wherever they might be, or, perhaps, on allied forces.³⁸

While US nuclear war plans have contemplated response to unprovoked attack, there are in reality no 'black swans' – unpremeditated nuclear attacks without indicators and/or warnings. Even nuclear terrorism would have indicators. Whether the indicators and warnings are detected and heeded is another matter. This is where gaming, scenario planning and rehearsal come to the fore, allowing decision-makers to practise the doomsday art. But given that the decision to use or

³⁷ See, for instance, John R. Harvey, "US Nuclear Command and Control for the 21st Century," *NAPSNet Special Reports*, 24 May 2019 <https://nautilus.org/napsnet/napsnet-special-reports/u-s-nuclear-command-and-control-for-the-21st-century/>, Alex Wellerstein, "NC3 Decision Making: Individual versus Group Process", *NAOSNet Special Reports*, 8 August 2018 <https://nautilus.org/napsnet/napsnet-special-reports/nc3-decision-making-individual-versus-group-process/> and Jeffrey G. Lewis and Bruno Tertrais, *The Finger on the Button: The Authority to Use Nuclear Weapons in Nuclear-Armed States*, James Martin Centre for Nonproliferation Studies, February 2019 <https://www.nonproliferation.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Finger-on-the-Nuclear-Button.pdf>

³⁸ Morton H. Halperin in correspondence with the author of this paper.

not to use nuclear weapons is the most politically and strategically consequential decision a President may ever make, and that the US democracy is what gives the President the authority and power to take such a decision, the counsel of the highest national office holders would seem appropriate.

Accidental nuclear war would be a total rejection of civility and rationality in the conduct of relations between states. The global community has a deep and abiding interest in ensuring that it never happens, and its survival depends on it. Is it too much to demand of the NWS, even those like Russia that appear willing to use nuclear weapons for coercion as well as deterrence, that they negotiate NC³ protocols to ensure that they are bound by the same decision rules, and that they subsequently force the other states possessing nuclear weapons to follow the same protocols? If it was possible for the P5 plus Germany and the EU to negotiate a nuclear deal framework with Iran in 2015 (sadly abandoned by the Trump Administration) there may be hope that controls on the possible acquisition of a nuclear weapons capability by one state could inspire the negotiation of controls on nuclear weapon use by states that already possess them.

While this should have been done in 1968 when major powers signed the NPT, it is never too late to return to the negotiating table. Perhaps the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons will provide the stimulus needed to that end.

The Alternative to Extended Deterrence and Extended Nuclear Deterrence: Nuclear Disarmament

The sudden appearance of the COVID19 pandemic has been a stark reminder of humanity's vulnerability to massive shocks. In a world of nuclear weapons, the existential threat to humanity deriving from their use far outweighs whatever benefit small states might seek to derive from hiding under the nuclear umbrellas of powerful states. The domains of pandemic management, climate change mitigation and adaptation and nuclear arms control and disarmament are remarkably similar. In each case, the world is at risk because of the denialism of some world leaders, the intransigence of others and the chronic inertia of the world's citizens. And again, in the case of nuclear disarmament and climate change, the major treaty that underpins global efforts towards disarmament and the mitigation of global warming has been undermined by the

constant shift of the “middle ground” away from high aspiration towards the lowest common denominator as key players erode the substance of earlier agreements.

It might be argued that extended nuclear deterrence is a way of balancing the uncertainties attaching to the continued presence of nuclear weapons in the arsenals of the Nuclear Weapon States (NWS), and the security costs incurred by the Non-Nuclear Weapon States (NNWS) in the ‘twilight zone’ between a nuclear armed world and a nuclear disarmed world. This would be analogous, however, to aiming for a kind of ‘nuclear herd immunity’: let the pathogen proliferate until there is an immunity equilibrium. But ‘extended nuclear deterrence’ is not some kind of nuclear security vaccine. At best, it is a prophylaxis. At worst, it is delusory, the security equivalent of ‘snake oil’.

The NPT is often described as “the cornerstone of the global non-proliferation regime”.³⁹ The problem is that the non-proliferation edifice is essentially a façade resting on a single corner, and that corner is crumbling. The question that faces the parties to the NPT is whether they want to strengthen the edifice – and the cornerstone – or whether they are prepared to see the NPT go the way of the New-START – desuetude.

Either way, there is much at stake. Reinvigorating the NPT will take enormous diplomatic effort on the part of the NNWS, and significant concessions (and diplomatic sensibility) on the part of the NWS, especially those states that implicitly provide protection to the break-out states like Iran, Israel and North Korea. Would it be too much to ask the NWS – all of them – to revitalise the 1994 Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances so as to provide greater confidence to each other and the NNWS that nuclear weapon use could be prohibited and the weapons themselves eliminated? Desuetude, on the other hand, is the easy way out where blame can be allocated, the finger pointed at disarmament idealists and so-called nuclear weapon realists alike, and the global community left captive to a dangerous stalemate. The parallels with the UN Climate Change Commission’s Conference of the Parties (COP) are uncanny.

³⁹ See, for example, John Carlson, “Is the NPT Still Relevant? – How to Progress the NPT’s Disarmament Provisions”, *Journal for Peace and Nuclear Disarmament*, Vol. 2, 2019 Issue 1
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/25751654.2019.1611187>

Yet the abandonment of the NPT, like the abandonment of the Paris Accords and President Trump's abandonment of the WHO in as time of pandemic, would sound the death knell for both the legitimacy and the effectiveness of the measures that are already in place pursuant to the treaty. The nuclear proliferation restraints and the nuclear fuel cycle safeguards, along with the institutions that manage them, that have taken the global community half a century to construct would be in the gravest jeopardy. The danger here is less with the mavericks and pariahs of the kind that have broken away previously from the global consensus, dangerous though they be, than it is with the 'break out' of major economic and political powers that may feel that there is no strategic option in an unconstrained world but to be similarly unconstrained. Turkey and Saudi Arabia are two states that appear already to be reviewing their options.

The perceived and real failure of extended nuclear deterrence is exactly the kind of development that could encourage the so-called defence realists in Germany, Japan, the Republic of Korea and Australia to follow the path chosen by Israel, India, Pakistan, North Korea and potentially Iran – the development of a nuclear weapon capability.

We have already seen glimmerings of this malaise. Paul Dibb, one of Australia's best-known defence commentators, coyly raised the question in late 2018, neither advocating the development of a nuclear weapon nor dismissing it on either moral or strategic grounds. While the subliminal strategic concern was China's massive expansion of its conventional military capabilities to "threaten us seriously" (invoking a kind of antipodean *force de frappe*),⁴⁰ Dibb surprisingly puts the question in terms of our alliance with the United States.

. . . We face a stark dilemma: increasing uncertainty about US extended nuclear deterrence versus the daunting alternative of acquiring our own nuclear deterrent. The other alternative is to simply accept (as we did in the Cold War) that we are a nuclear target and take our chances. My view is that Australia should at least be looking at options and lead times. Doing so doesn't commit us to proliferating.⁴¹

⁴⁰ The French *force de frappe* doctrine is a policy based on dissuasion and retaliation in the event of a conventional war threat, as well as the threat of a nuclear war.

⁴¹ See Paul Dibb, "Should Australia develop its own nuclear deterrent?", *The Strategist*, 4 October 2018 <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/should-australia-develop-its-own-nuclear-deterrent/>

Another leading Australian defence commentator, Hugh White, is no less adamant that the nuclear weapons question is one “we will not be able to avoid over the decades to come”.⁴² The fact that two of Australia’s leading defence thinkers should revisit an issue that Australia’s ratification of the NPT might have been thought to have resolved is noteworthy. And that their so doing caused barely a ripple, except for an elegant rebuttal by Ramesh Thakur, is also noteworthy.⁴³ But these developments are not simply a sign of the uncertainty that distinguishes the contemporary world. They are also a sign that the ‘extended nuclear deterrence’ has failed, and that the NPT has failed to deliver the confidence and security that it was intended to do. As Andrew Brown and Lorna Arnold noted a decade ago,

The effectiveness, extravagance and risks of nuclear deterrence need to be carefully reassessed, because, unlike deterrence in the animal kingdom, it contains the seeds of species destruction rather than promoting individual preservation. Whenever a state decides to acquire or renew nuclear weapons in the name of deterrence, it feeds nuclear proliferation.⁴⁴

The return to consideration of the acquisition of nuclear weapons by NNWS is also, of course, a sign that defence commentators are more inclined to view the nuclear weapons issue through the lens of military force than through the lens of securing and maintaining the peace. That, they might say, is their job. But whether contemplating nuclear war – a war that ultimately cannot be won – and building the systems to conduct such a war is a morally defensible way to maintain the peace is the core strategic question, because it contemplates annihilation as preferable to defeat. As President Reagan said, “A nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought”.⁴⁵ The peace, however, can be won, and that is the job of an engaged and sustained international diplomacy. Winning the peace is the task that the global community now confronts in more

⁴² See Hugh White, *How to Defend Australia* (Melbourne: Latrobe University Press in conjunction with Black Inc, 2019), p. 231.

⁴³ See Ramesh Thakur, “The bomb for Australia? (Parts 1-3)”, *The Strategist*, 17 January 2018, 19 January 2018 and 22 January 2018 <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/bomb-australia-part-1/>; <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/bomb-australia-part-2/>; <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/bomb-australia-part-3/>

⁴⁴ See Andrew Brown and Lorna Arnold, *art.cit.*, p. 308.

⁴⁵ President Ronald Reagan, *Address before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union*, 25 January 1984 <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/federal-records>

urgent terms than ever before, and a more active and focused diplomacy is the task that governments must now sign up to more than ever before.

Rebuilding Trust, Leadership, and Confidence

This essay began with the lugubrious observation that, in the COVID19 world, trust is in retreat. It is imperative that the western democracies embark on rebuilding global trust as a matter of urgency. Uncertainty can breed fatalism. Christopher Clark's magisterial *The Sleepwalkers* described how short-termism, unsubstantiated assumptions, carelessness and a measure of deviousness led the global community into the catastrophe of WW1. Europe's leaders may have been well-meaning, but they were incompetent. There was a trust deficit that matched both their leadership incompetence and their complacency.

Building trust is the business of diplomacy, and the COVID19 world demands a significant reinvestment in diplomacy by all nations, but particularly by the world's leading economies (the G20).

And if trust is in short supply, so too is leadership. It is no longer adequate to look to the world's great powers to provide the leadership to which the global community has become accustomed since the end of WW2. The much-vaunted international rules-based order did not happen by accident: it was an artefact of post-WW2 leadership, not just by Presidents Truman and Eisenhower, but by the leaders of countries large and small who wanted to avert the possibility of the cataclysm that was WW2. Remarkable people like Dag Hammarskjöld and U Thant, from Sweden and Burma (Myanmar) respectively, were able to provide the leadership that the global community so needed.

And with that leadership came the confidence that marked the second half of the twentieth century, the Cold War notwithstanding. Through cooperation, the global community can manage the consequences of the COVID19 pandemic, just as it can reduce the threat of nuclear war through disarmament negotiations and the effects of climate change by setting and meeting agreed targets. And that, as history shows, is easier and less costly than reconstruction and rehabilitation after catastrophic events.

So, quite simply, the nations represented at this Covid-19 Pandemic-WMD Conference have no alternative but to take up the challenge of a sustained disarmament campaign. As the evolutionary biologist and psychologist David Barash has written, “undoing the ideology – verging on theology – of deterrence won’t be easy, but neither is living under the threat of worldwide annihilation”.⁴⁶ None of the nations represented here have the power to recreate the past. But they can ride on its back to shape the future. They need to follow as five-point program:

- As a high priority, they must reinvest in their negotiating capacity – the people and the domain expertise necessary to push the disarmament agenda forward. Each nation represented here has power. But they need to appreciate the force of Hans Morgenthau’s observation that the quality of national diplomacy is the most important of the factors that make for the power of the nation.⁴⁷
- They must re-engage with like-minded countries to create the community of nations necessary to give body and ballast to the constructive and convergent policies that must be at the centre of a new set of rules to disarm the world effectively. This is not a recall to the ‘usual suspects’ – the well-intentioned Western countries – but the newly emerging powers like Indonesia and Vietnam, Nigeria and Kenya.
- They must militate to ensure that Russia and the US rekindle the New-START negotiations, and bring China into their dialogue.
- Those that are allies of the US, particularly Australia and Japan, must leverage their historical defence relationships to persuade the US that nuclear war is never in the interests of the US or its allies.
- And it is of critical importance that the members of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the other nations of Asia – the economic powerhouse of the 21st century – play their part in building a safer world. Indonesia, Vietnam, Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore must be heard.

⁴⁶ David Barash, “Nuclear deterrence is a myth. And a lethal one at that”, *The Guardian*, 14 January 2018 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jan/14/nuclear-deterrence-myth-lethal-david-barash>

⁴⁷ Hans J. Morgenthau with Kenneth Thompson, *Politics Among Nations: The Pursuit of Power and Peace*, 6th ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986): 105. See also Anthony Lang, “Phronesis, Morgenthau and Diplomacy”, *E-International Relations*, 7 November 2013 <https://www.e-ir.info/2013/11/07/phronesis-morgenthau-and-diplomacy/>

At this point, the prospects of advance and sustained progress may look bleak. That is precisely why collective action is needed. For the NNWS, there are three issues that need early resurrection: the proposed cut-off of the production of fissionable material; the proclamation of a 'no first use' by the NWS and the other states possessing nuclear weapons; and the further strengthening of the IAEA safeguards and inspections regime, and their application to the NWS. It must be understood that the NWS are not special cases, but rather deviant cases that have failed to honour their obligations under the NPT.

This is the challenge facing all nations represented at this conference. Failure to meet this challenge is to fail the generations to come.