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Trends. Unilateral Disarmament, Nuclear Deterrence, and Security: Psychological Support for the Nitze Option

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Paul Nitze, a long-time United States (US) arms control expert, has publicly advocated for the US to unilaterally "get rid of" its nuclear weapons. His advocacy has strong psychological support.

Are nuclear weapons necessary to support the deterrence of a nuclear attack by other countries? Not if other means are available. One such means is the heterogeneous combination of accurate and lethal conventional weapons maintained by the US. These weapons can deliver variations of so-called unacceptable damage--assuming the threat of unacceptable damage is a deterrent. It may not be, but the same problem would then be associated with nuclear weapons.

Are nuclear weapons necessary to support the deterrence of non-state actors? Many experts believe that such weapons have no deterrent value against such actors. If nuclear weapons do have deterrent value, the case must still be made that this value is any different from that afforded by the conventional arsenal mentioned above.

Are nuclear weapons necessary to destroy the nuclear weapons assets or any threat-related assets of some adversary? No: the US conventional arsenal is more than sufficient. Both are somewhat problematic in the absence of good intelligence collection and analysis.

Experts who argue that nuclear weapons do possess some surplus deterrent or destructive value for the security of the US have employed two rationales. The first is that giving up any military asset ineluctably results in a lessened resolve (to advance and protect security interests) and increased strategic weakness (through a lesser quantity of the asset that is given up.) This rationale ignores that the resources freed from ridding the US of nuclear weapons could still be applied to strengthening the country--militarily, economically, socially, and culturally. And resolve can then be maintained and even increased.

The second rationale is that even if some objective estimate of decreased resolve and increased weakness is not at Issue, there may be such an appearance. As far as perception is reality, the subjective can even induce the objective. To counter this rationale, one might note that holding oneself hostage to the perceptions of others quickly becomes a never-ending quest to meet what cannot be met. This may involve an ever-increasing attempt to meet an ever-increasing perception of decreased resolve and increased weakness. It may even involve the converse which ironically could precipitate an objective decrease in resolve and increase in weakness! Perhaps the only thing certain would be a strategic clinical psychosis.

A psychological analysis can support the notion that unilateral disarmament can support US security. Such disarmament by no means must be a pipe dream based on some pacific distortion of human motives but can be part of a hard headed calculus of strategic superiority. (Chibnall. J.T., & Wiener, R.L. (1988). Disarmament decisions as social dilemmas. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 18, 867-879; Cioffi-Revilla, C. (1983). A probability model of credibility: Analyzing strategic nuclear deterrence

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systems. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 27, 73-108; Nitze, P. (October 28, 1999). A threat mostly to ourselves. *The New York Times*, p. A25; Smoke, R. (1984). The "peace" of deterrence and the "peace" of the antinuclear war movement. *Political Psychology*, 5, 741-748; Tetlock, P.E. (1991). Psychological perspectives on nuclear deterrence. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 42, 239-276.) (Keywords: Deterrence, Disarmament, Nuclear Weapons, Security.)