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# Nuclear Deterrence in a Disordered World

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**WHOEVER TAKES OFFICE IN JANUARY 2017 IS LIKELY TO INHERIT A NUCLEAR LANDSCAPE OF GREATER RISK, COMPLEXITY, AND CHALLENGE THAN ANY TIME SINCE THE COLLAPSE OF THE FORMER SOVIET UNION.**

In the roiling Middle East, Iran's nuclear weapons capability may be delayed, but its malign influence continues to spread as it takes clever advantage of the surrounding chaos in Iraq, the Levant, and Yemen. Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Israel remain concerned about Iran's nuclear ambitions, raising the stakes for proliferation and extended deterrence in the region.

In Asia, North Korea's continued expansion and diversification of its nuclear arsenal and associated delivery platforms combined with Kim Jong-un's penchant for provocation and bravado, raises the risk of nuclear coercion, and undermines confidence in current deterrence approaches. Meanwhile, nuclear competition be-

tween Pakistan and India continues to grow, spurred on by Pakistan's now-open acknowledgement of a range of "tactical" nuclear weapons as part of their "full spectrum deterrence." And China, unabashed in its desire to assert greater regional dominance, is modernizing its nuclear fleet, diversifying and hardening its nuclear arsenal, and rapidly enhancing complementary capabilities in space, cyber, and advanced missile systems.

Finally, Russia is demanding an expanded sphere of influence—rejecting further arms control efforts, embracing and modernizing its nuclear weapons program, and expanding territorial claims. Russia's highly provocative "signaling" of its nuclear capabilities to nonnuclear weapons states on its periphery coupled with proxy-warfighting in Ukraine have brought the nuclear policy and deterrence underpinnings of the NATO alliance to the fore in ways not seen since in more than 20 years.

The picture at home is daunting as well. Following a series of scandals and missteps, the U.S. nuclear enterprise again came under scathing criticism in 2014, prompting reviews that pointed to a demoralized operational climate, demotivating personnel practices, insufficient leadership and oversight, and persistent budget crises as eroding the health and sustainability of the nation's nuclear enterprise writ large.

The path to reducing and managing these risks will involve a delicate balancing of interests and players. In the Middle East, the challenge will be to suppress the nuclear appetites of state and nonstate actors as instability and conflict grow across the region and

Iran's economic and conventional military powers expand. In an increasingly nuclearized Asia, the United States must reinforce confidence in extended deterrence while countering nuclear competition and any related lowering of the nuclear-use threshold. And in Europe, this balancing act requires a reinvigoration of NATO deterrence and defense posture while deescalating the nascent Russian nuclear brinkmanship currently underway. At home, Congress and the executive branch must work together to ensure a healthy and sustainable nuclear

enterprise despite extraordinary budgetary pressures, a highly politicized policy climate, and an international community skeptical about U.S. motives and intentions.

That balancing act requires a coherent and compelling strategy for the role of nuclear weapons in U.S. national security that has so far proven elusive. A strategy that preserves stability without provocation, builds confidence rather than

prompting fear, and preserves the highest possible threshold for nuclear use while encouraging all other nuclear weapons possessors to do likewise. A strategy that acknowledges the United States as the global champion of nuclear nonproliferation and the fundamental guarantor of security against nuclear intimidation, coercion, or use. This role requires a nuclear force and posture that is not only safe, secure, and effective but also credible, demonstrable, and sustainable. And it will require American leadership—at home, with allies, and in the face of potential adversaries—for whom the disordered world ahead may be a very scary place. ▣

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