

# Strategic Deterrence for the Future

Adm Cecil D. Haney, USN



Our nation's investment in effective and credible strategic forces has helped protect our country for nearly seven decades. That proud legacy continues today as we deter adversaries and assure our allies and partners of the US commitment to collective defense, even as our security environment is more diverse, complex, and uncertain than ever.

Other states are investing in their strategic arsenals, developing or modernizing nuclear forces as well as cyber and counterspace capabilities, and thus presenting real challenges to strategic stability. Nation-states and nonstate actors are seeking asymmetric capabilities and are preparing to employ them as options for achieving

**Disclaimer:** The views and opinions expressed or implied in the *Journal* are those of the authors and should not be construed as carrying the official sanction of the Department of Defense, Air Force, Air Education and Training Command, Air University, or other agencies or departments of the US government. This article may be reproduced in whole or in part without permission. If it is reproduced, the *Air and Space Power Journal* requests a courtesy line



their objectives during crisis and conflict. Perhaps most troubling are trends associated with proliferation of these advanced capabilities and how mobile, hardened, and underground they have become.

Russia is investing and modernizing across all legs of its nuclear triad and is demonstrating selective compliance with international accords and treaties. Russian military operations include the illegal occupation of Crimea and ongoing activities in Ukraine as well as routine demonstrations of its strategic forces. These actions, when considered along with an active information warfare campaign of provocative rhetoric and misinformation, are clear signals for the international community.

China is also seeking regional dominance militarily and economically, and for the first time in history, its gross purchasing power recently exceeded ours.<sup>1</sup> China is making significant progress on land reclamation projects in the contested waters of the South China Sea in an attempt to strengthen justification for its territorial claims. Simultaneously, China is modernizing its nuclear forces, which include silo-based intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBM), road-mobile ICBMs, and ballistic-missile submarines.

Both Russia and China are developing strategic capabilities beyond their nuclear forces and are exploiting vulnerabilities in the cyber domain. Both nations have stated their ambitions regarding counterspace capabilities that could threaten US space assets in multiple orbits. Given the international community's dependence on space, this is concerning not just to the United States but to like-minded space-faring nations that depend on unfettered access to space.

North Korea continues to advance strategic capabilities and to increase tensions with threats of more nuclear tests. It also claims to have possession of a miniaturized warhead and has been noted for parading a road-mobile ICBM KN-08 missile that it says is capable of reaching the western United States.

Iran's nuclear program remains a concern and provides an important impetus for the ongoing P5 + 1 negotiations to shut down Iran's pathway to a nuclear bomb.<sup>2</sup> Yet, even a successful resolution of Iran's nuclear file would not remove US concerns about other military capabilities such as its recent launch of a space platform that could be used for long-range strike, unsafe operations in the Strait of Hormuz, and increasingly sophisticated cyber attacks.

These concerns are further complicated by an operating environment flanked with violent nonstate actors, including some who have expressed desires to acquire weapons of mass destruction. Terrorist groups demonstrate through barbaric behaviors that they understand no boundaries and lack respect for international norms.

In a day-to-day context, the United States strives to deter regional aggression—specifically, military conflict. Its nine combatant commands are functionally or geographically focused and ensure that the combined posture, readiness, and partnerships enhance regional and transregional stability and deterrence efforts. My command, US Strategic Command, is unique in that it is additionally tasked with leading strategic planning and executing strategic deterrence operations. The command's primary mission is to detect and deter strategic attack against the United States and our allies and to provide military options to the secretary of defense and the president of the United States should deterrence fail. Our efforts are tailored to maximize senior leadership decision space.

While strategic deterrence is underpinned and reinforced by our nuclear capabilities, it is more than the nuclear triad. An effective twenty-first-century deterrent includes foundational intelligence, space- and ground-based radar sensors for necessary indications and warning, and systems that support national nuclear command and control. It also includes missile defense and cyber protection; a more efficient and responsive nuclear infrastructure that does not require explosive testing; the international arms control and nonproliferation regime, which includes verifiable and achievable treaties and policies; and synchronized plans that orient all of our assigned capabilities toward a common daily purpose.

US Strategic Command works its efforts very closely in coordination with other combatant commands, our interagency teams, and allies and partners to address the challenges across the spectrum of conflict. Although understanding an adversary's military doctrine and force composition is critical, it is only part of the equation. Our approach also includes emulation and war gaming so that we gain a deeper understanding of our adversaries' thought processes, perceptions, and probable next moves.

Conflict may occur along the spectrum at any point, in varying degrees of intensity, with more than one adversary, and in multiple domains. At all phases, whether in peacetime or crisis or conflict, our planning and operations are designed to deter and develop "off-ramps" to de-escalate the conflict at the lowest intensity level while dissuading our adversaries from considering the use of cyber attacks, counterspace activities, or nuclear weapons. Adversaries and potential adversaries alike must understand they cannot escalate their way out of a failed conflict; that they will not reap the benefits they seek; that our nation is prepared to manage escalation risk using a cross-domain, whole-of-government approach which may include all elements of national power; and that restraint is always the better option.

Given the diverse, complex, and uncertain world in which we live, we must ask how our nation can maintain a credible strategic deterrent for the foreseeable future. The answer to this critical question centers on how we have evolved over the decades and builds upon the groundwork done by revered strategic thinkers like Albert Wohlstetter, Bernard Brodie, Thomas Schelling, Herman Kahn, and Henry Kissinger. Their foundation for deterrence remains valid and is based on the premise of deliberate actors who consider the costs and benefits of decisions they are contemplating. To ensure that our deterrent remains effective for future generations, we must continue to apply those basic tenets of deterrence.

President Obama has directed steps that reduce the role of nuclear weapons in our national security strategy. At the same time, the president made clear in his 2009 Prague speech and on other occasions since then that as long as these weapons exist, the United States will maintain a safe, secure, and effective arsenal to deter any adversary and to guarantee that defense to our allies.<sup>3</sup> In 2011 the "Four Horsemen" (former secretaries of state Henry Kissinger and George Shultz, former secretary of defense William Perry, and former senator Sam Nunn) called for a similar stance.<sup>4</sup>

In reference to the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START), the same four individuals stated in 2013 that "the progress in the strategic field has been considerable. Washington should carefully examine going below New START levels of warheads and launchers, including the possibility of coordinated mutual



actions. Such a course has the following pre-requisites: strict reciprocity; demonstrable verification; and providing adequate and stable funding for the long-term investments required to maintain high confidence in our nuclear arsenal.<sup>5</sup> In his June 2013 Berlin speech, President Obama announced his assessment that we can ensure the security of America and our allies and maintain a strong, credible strategic deterrent while reducing our deployed strategic nuclear weapons by up to one-third. He also stated his intent to seek negotiated cuts with Russia to move beyond Cold War nuclear postures.<sup>6</sup> However, Russia has shown little inclination to pursue such negotiations.

To prevent extreme circumstances and to ensure a safe, secure, effective, and credible strategic deterrent for the future, we must sustain and modernize our nuclear, space, and cyber forces and their associated delivery platforms—many of which have been in service far longer than was originally planned or designed. The president's fiscal year 2016 budget request calls for sizeable investments necessary to pursue our plans to fully modernize our strategic deterrent and enhance space and cyber security.<sup>7</sup> Through investments in the enduring deterrent and supporting infrastructure, we can maintain an effective deterrent while not developing new nuclear warheads. In the coming years, our budget strategy should continue careful and deliberate investments in strategic deterrent concepts and capabilities. This effort is critical and must match the current and future strategic security environment if we are to build upon the stable foundation that benefits us all.

As the commander of US Strategic Command, I am proud to lead the dedicated professionals, both military and civilian, whose courageous service deters our adversaries, assures our allies, and enables our democratic way of life. For seven decades, they and others before them have been the heart of our nation's strategic deterrent forces. I salute their service. ✪

## Notes

1. Mike Bird, "China Just Overtook the US as the World's Largest Economy," *Business Insider*, 8 October 2014, <http://www.businessinsider.com/china-overtakes-us-as-worlds-largest-economy-2014-10>.

2. The P5 + 1 includes the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council (United States, United Kingdom, France, Russia, and China) plus Germany.

3. "Remarks by President Barack Obama, Hradcany Square, Prague, Czech Republic" (Washington, DC: White House, Office of the Press Secretary, 5 April 2009), [http://www.whitehouse.gov/the\\_press\\_office/Remarks-By-President-Barack-Obama-In-Prague-As-Delivered](http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-By-President-Barack-Obama-In-Prague-As-Delivered).

4. George P. Shultz et al., "Deterrence in the Age of Nuclear Proliferation," *Wall Street Journal*, 7 March 2011, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052748703300904576178760530169414>.

5. George P. Shultz et al., "Next Steps in Reducing Nuclear Risks," *Wall Street Journal*, 5 March 2013, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424127887324338604578325912939001772>.

6. "Remarks by President Obama at the Brandenburg Gate—Berlin, Germany" (Washington, DC: White House, Office of the Press Secretary, 19 June 2013), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/06/19/remarks-president-obama-brandenburg-gate-berlin-germany>.

7. Office of Management and Budget, *Fiscal Year 2016 Budget of the U.S. Government* (Washington, DC: Office of Management and Budget, 2015), 3, 16, 45, 48–50, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/budget/fy2016/assets/budget.pdf>.



### **Adm Cecil D. Haney, USN**

Admiral Haney (BS, US Naval Academy; MS, National Defense University; MS, Naval Postgraduate School) is the commander of US Strategic Command (USSTRATCOM), responsible for the global command and control of US strategic forces to meet decisive national security objectives and for providing a broad range of strategic capabilities and options for the president and secretary of defense. Before taking command at USSTRATCOM, he was commander of US Pacific Fleet and served as deputy commander of USSTRATCOM. Admiral Haney also commanded a submarine group, two submarine squadrons, three submarines, a submarine tender, and a fleet ballistic missile submarine. Additionally, he served as director of the Naval Warfare Integration Group and of the Submarine Warfare Division; deputy chief of staff of plans, policies, and requirements, US Pacific Fleet; congressional appropriations liaison officer for the Office of the Secretary of Defense (Comptroller); and administrative assistant for enlisted affairs at Naval Reactors. The admiral's decorations include the Navy Distinguished Service Medal (two awards), Defense Superior Service Medal (two awards), Legion of Merit (four awards), Navy Commendation Medal (three awards), Navy Achievement Medal (two awards), and various campaign and unit awards. In addition, he was the recipient of the 1998 Vice Admiral James Bond Stockdale Leadership Award.

**Let us know what you think! Leave a comment!**

**Distribution A: Approved for public release; distribution unlimited.**

<http://www.airpower.au.af.mil>