

# If you want peace, prepare for peace

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Looking around today's world we see a growing crowd of nationalist authoritarian governments and leaders – including in nuclear-armed Russia, Israel, India, China, North Korea and, increasingly, the United States. In the other nuclear-armed states, Pakistan, the UK and France, we see powerful nationalist authoritarian factions and political parties waiting in the wings. All of them are busily preparing for war in the name of peace. The unprecedented fog of war and propaganda surrounding the Israeli war on Hamas and the Russian war on Ukraine, the aforementioned rising authoritarian nationalisms, and the conflation of national economic interests with “national security” compound the challenges of understanding the complexities of relationships among nuclear-armed states.

The Latin root of the word deterrence means to “frighten away, fill with fear.” In other words, to threaten. “Deterrence” undergirds entire military-industrial establishments and the national security states and elites they serve. It is an elastic ideology which has outlived its Cold War origins and is used by nuclear-armed states to justify the perpetual possession and threatened use – including first use – of nuclear weapons.

In a 2021 article, ‘Forging 21st-Century Strategic Deterrence,’ US Navy Admiral Charles Richard, then Chief of US Strategic Command, wrote:

“We must acknowledge the foundational nature of our nation's strategic nuclear forces, as they create the ‘maneuver space’ for us to project conventional military power strategically.”

With Russian and Israeli leaderships veiled and not-so-veiled nuclear threats, Russia and Israel have both been using their nuclear deterrents in this way – so far. But it is undeniable that the longer these wars go on, the greater the threats of wider regional conflict and the potential for nuclear escalation become.

Over half the world's population lives in countries whose national security postures explicitly depend on nuclear weapons and the doctrine of nuclear deterrence.” In my view, “nuclear deterrence” is the Gordian knot blocking the path to nuclear disarmament.

All of the nuclear-armed states are engaged in costly programmes to qualitatively and in some cases quantitatively expand their nuclear arsenals. A new nuclear arms race is underway – compounded by offensive cyber capabilities, Artificial Intelligence, developing hypersonic capacities, a return to intermediate-range delivery systems, and the production of delivery systems capable of carrying either conventional or nuclear payloads – thus blurring the distinction between nuclear and conventional weapons.

The speed and complexity of the interactions of all these technologies and the immense volumes of data involved increase the danger of miscalculation in a crisis, amid a global context that is generating crises involving nuclear-armed countries at an accelerating pace.

Recently, a Russian state-owned media channel reportedly aired footage of a hypersonic nuclear missile, the “Avangard,” being loaded into a launch silo. Avangard was unveiled by President Putin during a 2018 speech as one of six “next generation” weapons claimed to be invulnerable to interception by defence forces. Just three days after Putin signed legislation revoking Russia's ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty in order to establish parity with the United States, the Russian military announced it had successfully launched an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) from a new nuclear submarine.

France successfully test-fired an unarmed M51.3 long-range ballistic missile. According to the defence ministry, “The flight has allowed [us] to confirm a major improvement of the missile which will contribute to the lasting credibility of France's oceanic deterrence in coming decades.” The new M51.3 missile is expected to enter service around 2025.

The United States regularly tests unarmed land-based and submarine-based ICBMs to demonstrate the credibility of the US deterrent. Each one is a nuclear warning. In early November, North Korea lambasted the US for a recent Minuteman III ICBM test, and it vowed to respond to such “reckless” provocations with “prompt, overwhelming and decisive

counteraction.” North Korea, which withdrew from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in 2003, has been sanctioned by the UN Security Council for conducting its own nuclear missile tests.

According to an October 2023 Pentagon report, China is exceeding previous projections of how quickly it is building up its nuclear weapons arsenal and is “almost certainly” learning lessons from Russia’s war in Ukraine about what a conflict over Taiwan might look like. It warns that China may be pursuing a new intercontinental missile system armed with conventional warheads that, if fielded, would allow it “to threaten conventional strikes against targets in the continental United States, Hawaii and Alaska,” and finds that China is on pace to field more than 1,000 nuclear warheads by 2030. However, the Pentagon finds no indication that China is moving away from its “no first use” nuclear weapons policy. (The US rejects a “no first use” policy.)

In 2021, the United Kingdom announced that instead of decreasing its nuclear arsenal to 180 warheads, as previously planned, it would raise its stockpile cap to 260 warheads. This decision, a response to perceived threats from Russia and China, comes after 30 years of gradual disarmament since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

US Air Force budget documents dated March 2023 “strongly imply” that the US is in the process of re-establishing its nuclear weapons presence in Britain for the first time in fifteen years. This follows reports last year that Lakenheath airbase in Suffolk was added to a list of US-operated airbases in Europe slated to undergo multi-million dollar upgrades allowing for the storage of the new B61-12 guided nuclear bomb.

For the first time since the mid-1990s, Russia has stationed nuclear weapons on the territory of another country, in this case Belarus, which shares borders with Ukraine and NATO members Poland, Lithuania and Latvia. In response, Poland’s Prime Minister has declared his country’s interest in hosting US B61 nuclear bombs under NATO’s nuclear-sharing policy. *And so it goes.*

Amidst the Israel-Hamas war and Russia’s war on Ukraine, China and Russia are seeking to expand their influence in the Middle East. In late November, they hosted back-to-back visits in Beijing and Moscow by the foreign ministers of Egypt, Indonesia, Jordan, the Palestinian National Authority, Saudi Arabia, and the secretary general of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. While Chinese President Xi and Russian President Putin have established relationships with Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu, both China and Russia in recent years have also built close relations with Arab and Muslim nations. In March, China brokered an end

to Iran and Saudi Arabia's long diplomatic feud, and in May, Russia played a key role in arranging Syria's return to the Arab League.

At the same time, Russia and the US are bombing side by side, on opposite sides, in Syria. And, just one day before the China-brokered rapprochement between Saudi Arabia and Iran was announced, the *New York Times* reported that Saudi Arabia is seeking assistance from the United States with its civilian nuclear programme, in exchange for normalizing its relations with Israel — a goal long sought by Israel to help isolate Iran. Yet as recently as December 2022, Saudi Arabia's foreign minister fuelled speculation that the Kingdom is seeking a nuclear weapons capability, declaring, "If Iran gets an operational nuclear weapon, all bets are off."

The United States is already planning to spend at least \$1.5 trillion over 30 years to overhaul its nuclear arsenal by rebuilding each leg of the nuclear triad and its accompanying infrastructure including a new class of ballistic missile submarines, a new set of silo-based intercontinental ballistic missiles, a new nuclear cruise missile, a modified gravity bomb, a new stealthy long-range strike bomber, and accompanying warheads, with modified or new warhead pits, for each delivery system.

However, some elements in the US government don't think this is enough. Recently, the Congressional Commission on the US Strategic Posture issued a report calling for reinforcing and building up US nuclear forces, based on the alarmist view that the US could face *simultaneous* attacks by two peer nuclear adversaries, Russia and China.

The Commission recommends enhancing the US nuclear arsenal by expanding and accelerating current modernization plans, developing the capacity to produce additional nuclear warheads, developing "theatre-range" nuclear weapons to provide increased "flexibility," increasing the planned number of B-21 stealth bombers, Ohio-class nuclear ballistic missile submarines, and long range standoff stealth nuclear cruise missiles, preparing to place multiple warheads on land-based ICBMs, and considering the development of road-mobile land-based missiles. It is worth noting that nine of the twelve members of the Commission have direct financial ties to military contractors or are employed at think tanks funded in part by weapons manufacturers.

The recent meeting between Chinese President Xi and US President Biden on the margins of the Asia-Pacific Summit in San Francisco offered a glimmer of hope that the world's two largest economies can peacefully manage their competition. But it was subsequently reported that China's military had driven the guided-missile destroyer *USS Hopper* from China's territorial waters, claiming the vessel had entered illegally. China's state-

run *People's Daily* quoted a spokesman for the People's Liberation Army, who labelled the US action a "serious violation" of China's sovereignty and security. He described the United States as a "security risk maker in the South China Sea" and the "biggest destroyer" of peace and stability in the region, and said that Chinese troops in the region would remain on high alert.

Alexander Kmentt, director for Disarmament, Arms Control and Non-Proliferation for the Austrian Foreign Ministry, recently observed, "We are at an inflection point on the nuclear weapons issue with an increasing re-emphasis on nuclear deterrence coupled with highly irresponsible nuclear rhetoric." As Matt Korda of the Federation of American Scientists notes:

"[P]eople should be aware of the fact that countries ... are planning on maintaining nuclear weapons for the next 60, 70, 80 years ... They're planning on keeping nuclear weapons around longer than many of us are going to be alive."

The modernization programmes underway in the US, Russia, China, France, and the UK clearly violate their disarmament obligations under the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) and international law in general. The hard truth is that neither the NPT nor the TPNW can achieve disarmament for the foreseeable future because none of the nuclear-armed states are willing to reimagine a global system that puts universal human security above narrow "national security interests" enforced by nuclear coercion – euphemistically called deterrence.

As Daniel Ellsberg reminded us, "What is missing is the recognition that what is being discussed is dizzily insane and immoral."

We must find a way to fundamentally challenge the dominant paradigm of "national security" through military might at any cost.

In 1990, Olzhas Suleimenov, a revered poet, member of the Soviet Duma, and founder of the Nevada-Semipalatinsk anti-nuclear movement in Kazakhstan, declared: "It's time to reject the dictates of the Roman Empire: If you want peace, prepare for war. Instead, we must declare: if you want peace, prepare for peace."

**Notes** available at:

[cpdcs.org/cutting-the-gordian-knot-if-you-want-peace-prepare-for-peace/](http://cpdcs.org/cutting-the-gordian-knot-if-you-want-peace-prepare-for-peace/)