

Notes from the Director

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Greetings and thank you again for joining us for the 29th Issue of the *Countering WMD Journal*.

The theme for this issue, *Assurance and Deterrence*, are terms that many of us hear every day, especially members of the community working in support of the nation's priority theaters. These terms particularly resonate within our community. Deterring the unthinkable is at the very core of our profession.

My organization supports combatant commanders on a daily basis to assure our Allies and partners while deterring US adversaries from employing their most deadly capabilities. Deterrence is one of our Agency's most important core missions.

When terms are used often, it becomes easy to oversimplify them or apply them too broadly, potentially reducing a strategic objective to a mere slogan. There is a tremendous amount of nuance and deliberation underlying the activities that our enterprise supports as we strive to assist the Department to assure and deter.

With that in mind, it would first be useful to explain what assurance and deterrence means and how these concepts guide US policies and decisions both at home and abroad.

Assurance, which focuses inwardly, can be broken into **two separate categories: mission assurance and assurance to Allies and partners**. Mission assurance involves instilling confidence in Americans, particularly the leaders and members of the Armed Forces: confidence that we possess the education, training, and equipment necessary to survive any attack; that we have the capabilities to execute any mission; and that this readiness will ensure our

victory over any adversary. Assurance to Allies and partners entails a whole-of-government approach to partnership-building activities. In sum, the enduring message that no nation stands alone and that we are steadfast in our commitment to build and maintain capacity in pursuit of our collective goals.

In contrast, deterrence is focused on shaping and influencing adversary decision-making. Deterrence, specifically **integrated deterrence** as described in the 2022 National Defense Strategy, "means using every tool at the Department's disposal, in close collaboration with our counterparts across the U.S. Government and with Allies and partners, to ensure that potential foes understand the folly of aggression."¹ More specifically, strategic guidance calls for unified multinational campaigns and operations across the continuum of competition to dissuade adversary aggression.

The inescapable fact is that assurance and deterrence are inextricably linked, and each exists inside the mind of another. An action that deters an adversary may also assure a partner or an ally, *if* they are aware of the action, and *if* they perceive it in the way that we intended. Deterrence and assurance are difficult to measure, are constantly in flux, take dedicated effort to build, and can rapidly, significantly degrade.

When considering deterrence at the theater and regional levels, "The United States will continue to field flexible nuclear capabilities and maintain country-specific approaches that reflect our best understanding of adversary decision-making and perceptions."² Yet there is also a huge array of conventional military means that support integrated deterrence—to include force posture, forward presence, force projection capabilities, defensive

capabilities, and non-nuclear offensive capabilities. The mix of military means—nuclear and conventional—that the Department chooses to employ is tailored against each specific adversary, based on what is most likely to change that adversary's decision calculus.

The Army—indeed, all the Services—are critical to providing the military means of integrated deterrence. Service components work hand in hand with their combatant commands to plan and resource theater campaigns, and to put in place a robust theater architecture that complements host-nation capabilities and ensures the ability of the Joint Force to posture and project forces. Service headquarters develop, validate, and deploy combat-credible forces with demonstrated inherent survivability against WMD effects.

A pessimist may question whether increasing threats of WMD use in multiple theaters indicate that America's deterrence has faltered. Along the same lines, an optimist might note that those threats remain threats—and have not been actioned—because deterrence is working.

You will find many aspects to that same debate throughout the pages of this issue. You will see a historical case study reviewing several Service-level approaches to supporting nuclear deterrence during the Cold War which you may find are eerily similar to some of the discussions occurring today. You will see analysis of the future of multi-polar strategic competition, and an assessment of whether lessons from the Cold War are still instructive within globalized, fractured global security environment.

In this issue, you will also find a variety of articles that discuss deterrence and assurance from multiple angles, including an example of the analytical work done in the 2024 Functional Area 52 (FA52) Nuclear and CWMD Officer Qualification Course, and several other articles pertaining to past, present, and future assurance and deterrence considerations.

Wherever you may be reading this, I hope that the articles in this issue will encourage you to critically think about the importance of assurance and deterrence around the world. Think also about how you contribute, and how you are impacted by US's continual efforts to assure friends and deter adversaries, all while trying to ascertain the effectiveness of both. As always, I encourage you to contribute your own insights to future issues of the journal. Your experience and opinions are critical to helping our community advance our thinking. Of that, you can be assured! ■

Notes

1. U.S. Department of Defense, "2022 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America," 2022, IV.

2. U.S. Department of Defense, "2022 Nuclear Posture Review Fact Sheet | U.S. NUCLEAR DETERRENCE STRATEGY AND POLICY," 2022.