

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE international environment in recent years has challenged the orthodoxies that guided U.S. security policy during the cold war. The international system heralded by President George Bush as the new world order in 1991 rested on the idea of significantly reduced international tensions. The material threat of concerted military aggression against the United States and its allies by an equal or superior adversary ceased to be a dominant public preoccupation. Former communist adversaries became recipients of Western assistance in their transition to democracy and market economies, and three have since become members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. In addition, an ambitious program to denuclearize three former Soviet republics (Kazakhstan, Belarus, and Ukraine) has been largely successful.

Multiple initiatives undertaken by the Bush administration and since supported by the administration of President Bill Clinton have moved to reduce the size of U.S. and Russian nuclear arsenals, to withdraw nuclear weapons from the battlefield and from most naval vessels, to take strategic bombers off alert, to cease nuclear testing, and to seek an international halt to the production of weapons-related fissile materials (see chapter 2). Whereas once the United States viewed Russia's conventional forces as capable of defeating the Western alliance, the United States now sees a state that could not successfully suppress a separatist insurgency on its own territory. As Admiral Henry G. Chiles, former

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commander of the U.S. Strategic Command (STRATCOM), summarizes it: “The Cold War is over. The strategic confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union has been replaced by a fundamentally new relationship with a different set of countries based on cooperative threat reduction and mutual downsizing of strategic forces.”¹

That said, it is now a cliché in Washington that the end of the ideological struggle with the Soviet Union was not necessarily good news. A predictable bipolar system, according to this view, has been replaced by the threat of global uncertainty—a world of complexity that makes the Soviet Union seem simple and manageable by comparison. Nor has the dissolution of the cold war paradigm, with its central focus on the antagonism between two rival superpowers, ushered in an era of domestic euphoria. Far from it. “We have slain the dragon,” says James Woolsey, former director of the Central Intelligence Agency, “but we live now in a jungle filled with a bewildering variety of poisonous snakes.”²

The relative optimism expressed in the latter part of the Bush administration about the promises of the post-cold war era seem to have been progressively overshadowed by a heightened sense of urgency about how the United States will cope with new or more complicated threats. The evolved, articulated codes of conduct and rules of engagement between the United States and its principal adversary are no longer a reliable foundation for security. Secretary of Defense William Cohen says that “as the new millenium approaches, the United States faces a heightened prospect that regional agressors, third-rate armies, terrorist cells, and even religious cults will wield disproportionate power by using . . . nuclear, biological, or chemical weapons against our troops in the field and our people at home. . . . Indeed, a paradox of the new strategic environment is that American military superiority actually *increases* the threat . . . by creating incentives for adversaries to challenge us asymmetrically.”³

Nearly ten years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, policymakers and experts struggle still to articulate an alternative catchword for U.S. involvement in this bewildering environment. What is the modern analogue of containment? Where is the brilliant Generation X “Mr. X” who will solve this dilemma? The United States needs a new set of legitimating beliefs and institutional arrangements to justify U.S. involvement in international problems, ranging from preventing Russian internal collapse to projecting force on the Korean peninsula—challenges that

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do not fit the standard definitions of intervention. The difficulties emerge in trying to reconcile popular and deep-seated conceptions of U.S. power with security challenges that require more complicated instruments. There is a vast difference between decisive technological supremacy over a coherent enemy and instruments that will prevent the spread of lethal biological agents, target terrorist organizations, or deploy troops to defuse instabilities or to counter unconventional means of warfare.⁴

Several official and quasi-official studies of the recent past highlight the degree to which the United States is unprepared for these new challenges. A report prepared by the Defense Science Board in October 1997, for example, argues that the Pentagon has yet to seriously address “the unconventional, or asymmetric, threats military planners and defense experts believe pose some of the greatest hazards to U.S. national security.”⁵ The United States’ halting and difficult adjustment is obvious, but the reasons for it are not well understood. Some think that the Clinton administration’s lack of leadership is to blame. Others see it as the result of a “natural” time lag in the process of adaptation to a new set of circumstances. Or it is said to be simply a reflection of the constraints imposed by the American public’s disinterest in international affairs.⁶

While these explanations have validity, there are deeper and more interesting factors to be examined. These have to do with the organization of U.S. institutions established during the cold war, the belief systems that have sustained an enduring consensus about national security, and the ways in which the system has coped, and continues to cope, with the need to protect authority for national security in a world in which public support of vital missions may no longer be ensured. The abrupt political changes brought about by the dissolution of the Soviet Union, in other words, pose challenges to the U.S. political system reminiscent of dilemmas described in Thomas Kuhn’s *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, in which the disintegration of a central paradigm forces a sudden and unexpected reexamination of the motivating assumptions and organizational arrangements that have defined national objectives for almost a half a century.⁷

This study analyzes the contemporary U.S. security debate by focusing on one of its core elements: the utility and missions of nuclear weapons after the cold war. The specific focus is on the experiences of the Clinton administration in trying to define and articulate the rationale for U.S. nuclear forces absent a Soviet adversary. The study examines the political and bureaucratic dynamics of two instances of policy for-

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mulation. The first is the 1993–94 Nuclear Posture Review, an effort to articulate a new foundation for U.S. nuclear deterrence to reflect changing strategic imperatives. The second is the debate about the role of nuclear weapons for managing regional security challenges, including the decision in 1996 to sign the Africa Nuclear Weapons-Free Zone Treaty, which led to a stated policy reserving the U.S. right to use nuclear weapons against nonnuclear third world adversaries.

The case studies examine the interplay between the influence of radical, exogenous change—the demise of the Soviet bloc, in particular—and the way in which U.S. policymakers interpret and reflect new realities in policy initiatives and institutional arrangements. Related policy debates—including, *inter alia*, the extension of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty in 1995, the cooperative threat reduction program with Russia and other former Soviet republics, the effort to achieve international limits on nuclear testing, and the debate over the desirability of missile defenses—also are discussed as they relate to the two main cases. The focus, however, is on the evolution of U.S. nuclear strategy. Although pertinent, a detailed examination of related policy struggles—including the debate over missile defense or the Comprehensive Test Ban—is beyond the scope of this study.

The design of security policies that can preserve U.S. global leadership and advance U.S. interests depends not only on the character and receptivity of the international environment but also on domestic politics. A successful U.S. transition to a post-cold war world will depend on forging an enduring domestic consensus, a challenge that is proving to be more intractable than was widely anticipated just a few years ago. The articulation of publicly compelling post-cold war policies is hindered not only by the greater complexity of security challenges but also by the process of domestic adaptation to policies that may challenge the familiar orthodoxies and institutional arrangements that preserved the national security consensus for more than four decades.

The post-cold war nuclear debate lacks the overt partisan tensions and public passions of the past. The end of the superpower nuclear rivalry seems to be an accepted reality among broad elements of the public and the media, and the threat of strategic nuclear war seems to be practically nonexistent in the public consciousness. Discussions of strategic nuclear weapons seem strangely passé even among many security experts, a throwback to a distant reality or the arcane preoccupation of specialists reluctant to turn to more pressing problems. As one

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Clinton administration official puts it, “On the worry list, arms control comes in somewhere between the strength of the Mexican peso and the fight against drugs.”⁸ There is a general perception that post-cold war nuclear arsenals are smaller, and their role is deemphasized accordingly. In the public mind, nuclear weapons are considered increasingly to be weapons of terrorism for lawless states or criminals, not a central priority, let alone a basis for calculated aggression, for the great powers. As indicated in public opinion data, a large majority of Americans now think of nuclear dangers in terms of potential threats posed by terrorists or irrational rogue leaders.⁹

The debate about the direction of U.S. nuclear policy is nonetheless still a significant factor in the U.S. security debate. Fundamental divisions remain among policymakers and experts over the role and importance of nuclear weapons for deterring past adversaries, including Russia and China, for extending deterrence to long-standing allies in Europe and Asia, for projecting deterrence globally against states well beyond traditional U.S. security perimeters, and increasingly, for dissuading or coercing states from acquiring or using nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons. The significant force-level changes implemented in recent years have not resolved fundamental dilemmas about the potential roles and missions of nuclear weapons, both as responses to emerging global challenges and as distinctly new threats to the United States.

The Purpose of the Study

To illustrate these policy dilemmas and how they are being addressed, this study develops detailed narratives of two sets of policy deliberations based on extensive interviews with participants and close observers. In addition to describing how these debates evolved, the purpose is to explore how and to what degree domestic political factors—including presidential leadership, bureaucratic disputes, congressional opinion, protection of institutional prerogatives, and the advice of private experts—influenced the outcome of national security decisions. The fundamental question has to do with how political consensus in support of national security is being formed after the cold war.

The case studies illustrate a policy process involving protracted bureaucratic and partisan conflict in which the difficulties of reconciling

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competing views among the individuals and agencies involved supplant or significantly modify the original goal of achieving a stated alteration in national policy. Despite a perceived need by leaders to accommodate changed security circumstances, policy initiatives are quickly deflected by competition among rival agencies to retain traditional missions and rationales, fueled by political influences in the Congress and in the private sector. The resulting policy decisions reflect complex compromises among competing factions, which for the most part ratify existing policies as a way to defuse controversies over alternatives.

These phenomena are not new, nor are they unique to the cases under consideration. Understanding the way in which key decisions are formed, by whom, and to what end, however, helps demonstrate the process of U.S. adaptation after the cold war. The objective is not to recommend either an abrupt break with the past or a set of radically new proposals. The focus is on the evolving policy process and how it affects the latitude of senior leadership to make critical choices for future security. Although it is customary in studies of nuclear strategy to advance proposals for different force postures, such analyses are rarely concerned with the factors that affect the implementation of change, radical or otherwise. This study is focused on the process of decisionmaking, which any major innovation would have to take into account.

Domestic Politics, International Policies

Even casual observers of national security policy formulation understand that bureaucratic and political conflict, whether it originates in the inter- and intra-agency executive branch context, between the executive branch and the Congress, or more diffusely between governmental and outside interest groups, is endemic in policymaking.¹⁰ Different organizations and decisionmakers, it is obvious, represent certain biases and act in particular ways to advance those biases, some more powerfully than others. Each key national security agency developed during the cold war—from the National Security Council, to the civilian leaders of the State and Defense Departments, to the Joint Chiefs and their subordinate commands—brings perspectives to the table that reflect distinct institutional origins, mandates, and agendas. Leadership

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in a dynamic democratic system is defined at its core as the ability to adjudicate conflicting views and to supersede parochialism in order to design coherent policies that reflect the national interest. Competing political interests and bureaucratic agendas may make it difficult to arrive at optimum solutions, but they also make it difficult for a minority opinion to undertake policies that reflect narrow or misguided interests.

Domestic divisiveness over foreign policy has ebbed and flowed over time but has many precedents, particularly in periods in which international conditions have changed markedly. In a 1984 book by I. M. Destler, Leslie H. Gelb, and Anthony Lake, for example, the authors conclude, "For two decades, the making of American foreign policy has been growing far more political—or more precisely, far more partisan and ideological. The White House has succumbed, as former Secretary of State Alexander Haig . . . put it, to 'the impulse to view the presidency as a public relations opportunity and to regard Government as a campaign for reelection.' And in less exalted locations, we Americans—politicians and experts alike—have been spending more time, energy and passion in fighting ourselves than we have in trying, as a nation, to understand and deal with a rapidly changing world."¹¹

The trend toward domestic politicization of foreign policy sets the broader context for the issues being examined in this study. One difference is that past debates were conducted when the basic framework for U.S. security defined by the primacy of the Soviet threat was not seriously in question. In the current climate, uncertainty about the future has sparked pointed debate about security interests and policy options that tests the ability of policymakers to preserve consensus. Defining the basis for U.S. nuclear security is more complex, and the policy process often more adversarial, in the absence of commonly accepted interpretations of international threats and appropriate instruments. The management of domestic divisions, accordingly, is an increasingly important determinant of policy choices. Representative Curt Weldon (R-Pa.) says that "we have allowed ourselves to become polarized as policy-makers. We have a group of people that wants to re-create Russia as the evil empire, and they largely exist in my party. That's totally wrong. I don't for a minute think that Boris Yeltsin or his senior advisers want an all-out attack on America. I think that's the farthest thing from their mind. But on the other hand, we have the more liberal elements in the Congress, and that's typically the other party, who want to

deny reality. . . . [They] think that by signing a few pieces of paper, that will resolve all the problems."¹²

In both of the case studies, the clash of views among midlevel officials and the effort to deflect political opposition from critics in the Congress or public narrow the choices available to senior leaders to marginal modifications of existing policies. Even if "the only constant is change," as the new Pentagon axiom puts it, choosing policies that refer back to the premises and practices of the past seems critical in eliciting consensus. These dynamics have been clearly evident in other areas of policy deliberations, including the Clinton administration's efforts to conduct comprehensive reviews of defense priorities in the 1993 Bottom-Up Review and the congressionally mandated Quadrennial Defense Review in early 1997. Although initiated to reorient U.S. defense priorities in light of changed security circumstances, both studies essentially reaffirmed existing force levels, defense programs, and budgetary priorities, albeit with reference to the new demands of a changed security environment. Both reviews have been widely criticized for their lack of vision.¹³ These criticisms ignore the systemic constraints on visionary analysis in a process that relies on bureaucratic consensus to set the parameters of the debate—a direct parallel to the cases under consideration here.¹⁴

Democracy and Delegated Authority

The difficulties in forging a consensus for a post-cold war nuclear agenda raise questions about the role of presidential leadership, the importance of institutional self-preservation, and the level of influence exerted by advocates of different points of view in the executive branch, the Congress, and the private sector. The quest for a new consensus also raises some critical questions about the management of national security in U.S. democracy. Examining the delegation of authority to craft nuclear security policies illuminates how and why the process of adjustment may test fundamentally important elements of U.S. institutions.¹⁵

The U.S. government is uniquely designed to protect against the concentration and abuse of power. The founding fathers established an elaborate system of checks and balances, with the sanctity of this principle in mind. An open democratic system, however, makes it inherently difficult to shape coherent policies based on widespread public

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participation, especially in areas that require complex judgments and expertise, such as nuclear security. One way to resolve the tension between democratic processes and the need for stable security arrangements is to grant significant authority to institutions that can be protected from systematic disruption by external influence, including the vagaries of partisan politics and public sentiment. This is particularly (although not uniquely) the case for matters involving not only a high level of technical expertise but also access to information that is restricted even among policymakers and elected officials.¹⁶ Throughout the cold war, a system of “guardianship,” articulately described by Robert Dahl, worked effectively to delegate day-to-day authority for nuclear plans and operations to a relatively small number of civilian and military officials.¹⁷ Guidance provided by political authorities to nuclear planners is within the purview of very few individuals; and nuclear targeting and attack planning has evolved over time into a highly specialized occupation based on specific skills, computer models, and data bases, which limit the field of expertise to only a very few.

Domestic policy—from taxation to fiscal policy—also requires complex expertise and a delegation of decisions to expert judgment. The key difference between these concerns and nuclear planning is the more limited role of both interest groups and elected officials in discussions about nuclear operations, for reasons of secrecy as well as of complexity, to say nothing of the stakes involved in the management of nuclear forces. This is not to suggest that disagreements never arise in the planning of nuclear operations or in selecting nuclear requirements. It is rather to emphasize that participation in such discussions is circumscribed and, notwithstanding discussions about details of the plans (such as targeting priorities, which have shifted over time), that the core rationales guiding these plans have not been subject to wide debate. There is, however, an important distinction between authority for setting nuclear policy—defining the broad outlines of nuclear strategy or conducting arms control negotiations, for example, which typically involve a wider array of participants—and authority for operational policy—the procedures, organizations, and instruments used in planning nuclear operations, or what some call command authority.¹⁸

This system depends on the tacit acquiescence of the public and elected officials to the superior expertise and authority of professionals to determine the content and character of nuclear plans. Such acquiescence effectively deflects excess interference from the outside

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and, moreover, discourages internal divisiveness. The demands for un-failing loyalty and cohesiveness among officials charged with managing and executing war plans distinguish nuclear operations from other areas of public policy. Russell Dougherty, commander of the Strategic Air Command in the 1970s, describes an incident in which a Minuteman missile control officer expressed some hesitation in a training exercise about whether he would “turn keys” in response to orders to launch missiles. As the commander remembers it, the officer answered, “Yes, he would turn keys upon receipt of an authentic order from proper authority; if he thought the order was legal; if he thought the circumstances necessitated an ICBM [intercontinental ballistic missile] launch; if he was convinced that it was a rational, moral necessity.” In what was to become a highly publicized and controversial decision, Dougherty dismissed the officer from the air force. Dougherty drew a sharp distinction between public perceptions of responsibility, which may accept the legitimacy of individual dissent based on conscience, and the kind of discipline needed to ensure nuclear security: “The U.S. military has no place for officers, noncommissioned officers or other enlisted persons who apply their own subjective conditions to the decision to act on a valid order from proper authority.”¹⁹

Efforts by appointed officials to become involved in operational issues also illustrate the degree to which intrusion into this area of decisionmaking is discouraged and often unsuccessful. Richard Stillwell, a deputy to Fred Ikle, undersecretary of defense for policy in the Reagan administration, drafted guidance that included precise directives about nuclear targeting, including details about how and where to allocate weapons to specific targets. The draft was part of an ongoing effort by political appointees and career professionals, including Frank Miller (currently the acting assistant secretary of defense for international security and policy), to impose higher levels of political oversight and to force greater flexibility in targeting plans. The response from General Jack Merritt, then director of the Joint Chiefs, is forthright: “Penny ante civilian bureaucrats getting involved,” he says. “It was full of targeting packages, options, how to do targeting, even where and when to launch. It was all just done in the interest of imposing bureaucratic will. We got it much abbreviated, to get at least some of the baloney out.” Merritt continues: “You start talking about targeting or strategic command and control and, baby, that’s the family jewels. Anyone outside the unformed military who tried this, the Chiefs told them to jump in the lake.”²⁰ Such

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episodes provide insight into the political complexities of managing nuclear operations, an area of long-standing tension between professionals and “outsiders.” These are not turf battles, at least not exclusively. As Dougherty argues, signs of discord in the national command authority about nuclear objectives could threaten national cohesion, whose preservation “may depend critically on keeping the fact of such debate from the public.”²¹

During the cold war, decisionmakers were not called upon by the Congress or the public to articulate clear guidelines about what should be targeted, for what reason, with what level of destructive force, or for what specific political and military objective. Decisions by elected officials about funding for nuclear weapons were then, as now, not linked systematically to empirical judgments about what was needed to achieve deterrence or even to carry out official targeting policy. Few ever questioned why exactly one hundred M-X missiles or exactly one hundred B-1 bombers were required, not more or less, to uphold operational requirements, which few elected officials understand. As Louis Henkin notes, “When Congress appropriates funds for particular weapons, it acquiesces in the strategy which those weapons imply.”²² Deference to professional judgments in such matters may be appropriate, but the lack of interest or active involvement among elected officials inhibits informed discourse and the responsibility for oversight required by the Constitution.

The assumptions and criteria guiding the planning of nuclear operations remain among the most closely guarded areas in U.S. defense policy. Comprehensive concepts such as containment and deterrence served as immensely flexible rationales for a variety of security objectives, which, especially in the nuclear arena, could be pursued with a minimum of controversy. Although subject to periodic outbursts of elite and public criticism of specific policies, the debate about nuclear weapons never posed a significant challenge to the rationales and planning priorities underlying nuclear weapons development, force structures, and overall strategy. The threat of virtual annihilation by a determined and at least equal Soviet adversary was not in dispute. The need to deter massive Soviet aggression against allies in NATO or Asia, including the initiation of nuclear weapons in conflicts that could escalate to strategic confrontation, was largely an accepted tenet of Western survival.

The need to maintain forces for “parity,” “essential equivalence,” “escalation dominance,” or other technical-numerical renderings of the

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struggle to deny the Soviet Union perceived advantages from military aggression confined debates about the desirable expansion or modernization of the U.S. nuclear posture to details, not core assumptions. The exceptions have been limited and largely irrelevant in influencing policy, including normative objections to nuclear war plans, such as the 1983 pastoral letter of the U.S. Catholic bishops, questions about the legality of nuclear arsenals (most recently the 1996 advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice claiming that the legal status of nuclear weapons is in question in light of the obligations undertaken as part of article 6 of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty), and the ongoing opposition to nuclear weapons by pacifist groups and disarmament lobbies.²³ One could also argue that President Ronald Reagan's 1983 vision for a strategic defense initiative challenging the core assumptions of nuclear deterrence based on "mutual assured destruction (MAD)," which he repeatedly decried as morally bankrupt, was equally ineffectual.

The Current Debate

Since the early 1990s, negotiated arsenal reductions and a host of accompanying initiatives aimed at halting the U.S.-Russian nuclear competition have imposed changes in nuclear policy, including nuclear operations. Bombers are no longer on alert, and missiles have been detargeted away from Russian territory, albeit as a symbolic measure that is readily reversible. (The agreement reached in May 1994 between the United States and Russia retargeted ballistic missiles toward the Arctic Ocean, but neither side has been interested in undertaking steps, such as changing the target sets programmed in the missiles' computer memories, that would obviate the ability to retarget the missiles in a matter of minutes.)²⁴ Formal guidance adopted during the Reagan administration calling for the ability of U.S. nuclear forces to "prevail even under the condition of a prolonged war" similarly has been amended—for the first time since 1981. This guidance now states that forces are for "detering nuclear wars or the use of nuclear weapons at any level, not fighting with them."²⁵

The notion of prevailing in a nuclear war was widely considered a chimerical mission even with massive nuclear forces, but this criticism became more pointed by the reductions in forces envisioned in the arms

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control agreements initiated by the Bush administration. The change in the formal guidance reportedly was prompted by General Eugene Habiger, commander of STRATCOM, and General John Shalikashvili, chairman of the Joint Chiefs, who informed the president in February 1996 that existing directives for nuclear strategy could not be implemented with the force level of 3,000–3,500 weapons envisioned under the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) II, which was signed by Bush in 1992.²⁶ As articulated by Robert Bell, senior director for defense policy and arms control in the Clinton administration’s National Security Council, the new guidance shifts the emphasis from winning a nuclear conflict to deterring a nuclear conflict, although it does not alter existing requirements to be prepared to launch large- or small-scale nuclear strikes in response to a warning of a nuclear attack. The directive also retains the option of initiating the use of nuclear weapons against aggressors—now modified to include nonnuclear nations that have “prospective access” to nuclear capabilities.²⁷

As the deliberations over recent guidance suggest, changes in the strategic nuclear force posture of recent years have been accepted and implemented in a way that ensures continuity in the basic construct of nuclear strategy. Streamlined target lists reflect the decline in the number of Russian and former Soviet forces and installations, while planners develop new types of targeting against emerging “rogue” states. These modifications notwithstanding, the objective that has informed strategy for more than four decades—to target Russian command centers and nuclear forces with high levels of damage expectancy—remains intact. The nuclear posture ratified by the Clinton administration is consistent with that of his predecessors and is predicated on the belief that “many thousands of targets must be held at risk with nuclear warheads to achieve deterrence.”²⁸ As Admiral Chiles put it: “Our mission reflects continuity with the past: to deter major military attack against the United States and its allies and, if attacked, to employ forces.”²⁹

An Elusive Consensus

The cold war nuclear consensus was not easily achieved and may be even harder to relinquish. In the absence of a widely accepted and coherent nuclear threat and new challenges on the horizon, it is proving difficult to advance clearer or different rationales to guide future nuclear

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missions. An active debate among security specialists is under way. Some of these discussions are beginning to touch on what long have been considered taboo or far too arcane subjects: questioning the logic that drives the targeting and alert status of the force posture, for example, or questioning whether a triad of strategic forces maintained in a high state of readiness is even necessary in light of new security circumstances. Establishment organizations like the Council on Foreign Relations and the National Academy of Sciences have undertaken studies of whether the United States could consider the objective of global elimination of nuclear weapons.³⁰ The many issues under consideration include the potential for substituting advanced conventional weapons for nuclear forces, the role of nuclear weapons to deter nonnuclear states that possess chemical or biological weapons, and whether the United States should abrogate the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty in favor of immediate deployment of national missile defenses.³¹

Opinion about alternative options is widely divided, but the ongoing debate is qualitatively different from its cold war predecessors. It is no longer exclusively the purview of specialists or activists with singular agendas. Former officials, senior military officers, and recognized defense experts, including conservatives who manned the ramparts of the cold war, are involved in detailed studies that intrude on issues of operational sensitivity. In perhaps the most dramatic example, General George Lee Butler, former STRATCOM commander, began in 1996 to publicly question the safety and wisdom of nuclear operations, highlighting instances in which accidents or mistakes posed severe risks to Americans. The excoriation of nuclear weapons by a former nuclear commander in chief has no clear precedent. Many question his judgment, but no one can dispute his extensive expertise.³²

Whether and how these discussions will affect internal policy formulation is yet to be fully revealed. Key questions, however, are whether nuclear planning and the formation of strategy will continue to rely on a system of closely guarded authority or, conversely, whether the quest for a new consensus will impose greater openness in a way that could intrude on current institutional alignments. An editorial in the *Washington Post* criticizes the Clinton administration for attempting to amend nuclear guidance in secret: "Mr. Clinton made this latest nuclear policy decision behind closed doors. No doubt that's easier. But he loses the public understanding and support that could flow from an open process. 'Rocket science' has become a metaphor for intellectual challenge,

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but rocket science in the sense of nuclear policy has shown itself to be well within the perimeter of public discussion. Mr. Clinton owes the public—where is Congress, anyway?—a nuclear word.³³ This is a distinct departure from what has long been a fairly constrained discussion among elites. The idea of more open deliberations about nuclear plans may be misguided or illusionary; it is certainly heretical for those who are directly involved. Public discussion of plans for nuclear operations has been carefully, if not always successfully, avoided. This is one reason that a formal distinction was made among the four elements of strategic doctrine, separating declaratory policy—what is said publicly—from the employment, acquisition, and deployment policies that make up the actual plans for nuclear operations.

The increased scrutiny of the premises of nuclear policy, however, may be inevitable. The arms control initiatives of recent years have been initiated and concluded without the laborious negotiations of the past and have been conducted in relatively open discussions among senior political leaders. Consideration of new nuclear options for third world aggressors, in turn, has prompted media commentary and may prompt wider debate as new policies are implemented. The rise of new nuclear risks, especially terrorism, also has captured public attention, including Hollywood thrillers. A poll of 800 registered voters in September 1997, for example, elicited responses about issues such as de-alerting nuclear forces (favored by 66 percent), increasing security at nuclear sites (favored by more than 80 percent), assisting with the dismantling of weapons in Russia (favored by more than 80 percent), and reducing all nations' arsenals to a few hundred (favored by more than 66 percent). Results of public opinion polls are obviously imprecise, and answers vary according to the way questions are asked. It is still unusual by cold war standards to engage the public at this level of technical detail.³⁴

The heightened interest in nuclear dangers may pose implications not just for the rationale that has long guided nuclear planning but, as suggested, for the way in which authority is delegated. The unique status accorded to the nuclear command and its cadre of civilian overseers, along with the high degree of secrecy and complex expertise needed to plan nuclear operations, creates distinct disincentives to widen participation—to say nothing of the sensitivity of public reactions to discussions of nuclear war plans. The most recent revision of the guidance, for example, was carefully protected among a handful of indi-

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viduals, deliberately excluding agencies and individuals with responsibility for nuclear policy, including the Department of Energy and senior arms control officials in the Department of State.³⁵

A key question for this study is how the institutions and individuals currently responsible for nuclear operations will calibrate pressure for a new consensus with the need to devise policies that involve highly sensitive decisions and activities. Judging from the case studies, this challenge will require extremely careful management. Whether or how systemic changes in institutional arrangements may be considered and implemented will in part depend on the receptivity of professionals who have been involved in the day-to-day management of nuclear matters. In an interview in early 1997, General Habiger may have anticipated challenges of this kind when, in response to the question, If there is a START III, what would you like to see it address? he answered, "Number one, that as responsible Commander in Chief, I get to play in that process."³⁶ Conversely, it will depend on the degree to which the desire to maintain current arrangements conflicts with desired policy changes in ways that leaders may not fully appreciate.

The resistance of institutions to certain innovations is a well-documented phenomenon in public policy.³⁷ The degree to which it may influence or limit national choices in the national security sphere, however, is not well understood. Efforts to expose sensitive areas of decisionmaking to higher levels of public scrutiny goes to the heart of a dilemma posed by Dahl about the nature of democracy: "That decisions on nuclear strategy and other complex issues are made by the few rather than the many—quite likely even by the meritorious few—is not simply a consequence of an effort to prevent discussion and participation by a broader and more representative selection of the *demos*, though that may be part of the explanation. If only that were true, however, solutions would be much easier to suggest. But it is instead mainly a consequence of the fact that the democratic process is not equipped to deal with questions of exceptional complexity."³⁸

Can a new consensus be formed and protected without some system of guardianship? Can this be achieved in a manner that avoids protracted controversies, which can be divisive to the body politic? The doctrinal, political, and bureaucratic conflicts sparked by the 1993–94 Nuclear Posture Review are by no means inevitable, but they are at least informative about the tensions and divisions to be avoided. As General Butler noted in 1992, "What matters now is the manner in which

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victory [in the cold war] is consolidated, the orderly quest for a new paradigm, the patient reconstruction of consensus, the intelligent transition from old postures into new, and the preservation of an environment which will continue to attract and retain a quality force of volunteers."³⁹ His invocation for patience and orderly evolution may strike Butler's critics as ironic in light of his call for the abolition of nuclear forces in 1996; his description of the challenges, however, rings no less true.⁴⁰

The Scope of Book

Chapter 2 provides an overview of the political-military context in which the new Clinton administration undertook efforts to craft U.S. nuclear policy for the post-cold war era, setting the stage for the two case studies. The determination of the Bush administration to recast the foundations of nuclear security proved under Clinton to be highly constrained by domestic divisions both about the desirability of change and about the correct interpretation of external events.

Chapters 3 and 4 present the case studies. Both are based on primary sources and, in almost all cases, interviews with participants. The objective is to provide a narrative analysis of decisionmaking as it actually took place, revealing the competing perspectives, power alignments, and interests that fought the policy battles and that, ultimately, account for the policy outcomes. The episodes under examination are very recent, and they contain elements of continuing debates. Due to the sensitivity of the decisions and the real-time nature of the process, many sources have asked to remain anonymous. The depiction of events contained in the cases are based on the corroboration of at least two or more observers, and disputed interpretations are presented as comprehensively and fairly as possible.

Chapter 5 is concerned with lessons learned and with policy prescriptions, including options for the adaptation of U.S. policies in a changed security environment and an examination of whether there are clear parallels to other areas of security planning that may provide insights. A fundamental question is whether institutional arrangements and the resulting policy choices support long-term U.S. security objectives in a way that will allow the United States to maintain its position of leadership in a changing world order.