Increasing the Scope of Targets

Requirements and a Proposed Solution

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The Path to Zero

- The United States has reaffirmed its commitment to a world without nuclear weapons.

- The path to zero is likely to be gradual.

- Some observers believe that U.S. nuclear forces will need to modify employment policies to allow the stockpile to become substantially smaller
  - E.g., some U.S. senators worry that reductions lead to “minimum deterrence posture”
  - E.g., Kristensen, et al. (2009) advocate “infrastructure targeting”
    - Emphasizes economic importance instead of (or in addition to) military importance.
Outline

• A wider range of targets beyond military targets would increase flexibility.
  – Could help maintain credible deterrence as stockpiles reduce in size.

• Several requirements must be met for targeting changes to be credible and deterrence to be effective.
  – Difficulties in meeting these requirements may be a significant impediment to stockpile reductions

• A new strategy, “commercial targeting,” may meet these requirements, thereby facilitating the reductions
A Wide Range of Targets is Desirable

• At worst, an increased choice of targets allows the same targeting
• At best, it increases flexibility and the deterrent ability of the stockpile
  – Could choose higher-valued targets
• Deterrence of Counterforce may Decrease
  – Increased accuracy may decrease the collateral risk of counterforce targeting, reducing deterrence.
  – Improvements in non-nuclear capabilities may make counterforce targeting less credible
    • U.S. policymakers unlikely to use nuclear weapons for missions where non-nuclear weapons are available
    • Non-nuclear capabilities further reduce collateral risk
Countervalue Targeting is Not Credible

• Historically, U.S. leaders have emphasized military and industrial targets rather than countervalue targets like cities and civilians

• Counterforce has countervalue aspects due to collateral risk to civilians
  – Power of nuclear weapons
  – Inaccuracies in delivery
  – Uncertainties about targets

• Improvements in technology have reduced countervalue aspects

• The American public, their representatives, and the military will continue to be reluctant to target civilians
Some Requirements for Target Changes

1. New targets must be legal
2. Changes in targeting should not increase collateral risk to civilians
3. New targets should be chosen that cannot be reasonably held at risk by non-nuclear capabilities
4. To successfully deter, new targets should be valued highly by ourselves (credible) and adversaries (cost/benefit).
“Infrastructure Targeting”

- Kristensen, et al. (2009): Target relatively isolated assets that support war industries
- Reduces civilian risk
- Does not require nuclear capabilities (especially in a limited strike)
- Targets of limited relative value
Subset of Existing Targets

• Acton (2011) supports choosing from existing targets.

• Probably not legal if choices based on “the deterrent value of collateral damage”
  – Tradeoff of civilian risk and value

• Otherwise, default if existing targeting strategy remains viable
“Commercial Targeting”

• One possible option that may fill these requirements
  – Demonstrates difficulties of changing targeting
• Could be incorporated into flexible strategies
• Takes advantage of time afforded to 2nd strike
  – U.S. announces intention to hit unnamed target
  – Cause mass evacuations of adversary’s population
  – Produces large economic consequences
• Targets modern economic engines like central business districts, ports, and industrial areas
  – This capital drives economies and directly or indirectly enables a country’s war industries
  – Consistent with international norms (sanctions)
“Commercial Targeting”

• Probably legal
  – Perhaps not for civilian-owned targets?

• Reduces civilian risk
  – Maintains basic life-sustaining industries like agriculture
“Commercial Targeting”

- Nuclear weapons required
  - Increased psychological consequences (symbolic)
- Large economic impacts
  - Probably credible, but does this deter adversaries?
  - Spares civilians (“human capital”) dampening long-term economic impacts
    - Could reduce stability?

If existing targeting strategies are not viable as stockpiles shrink, the journey to zero could be halted. Developing credible and effective new strategies will be a challenge.