

Speeches

2009 Deterrence Symposium Opening Remarks

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General Chilton: Good morning. Thank you, General Helms, for your kind opening remarks and for making sure we're squared away in a good military fashion for this symposium which will be important, and I think it will be important that we gather on time for the agenda because we have so many good speakers joining with us today and it's going to be a very interesting day for us all.

General Helms, thank you for your leadership and for your team's leadership, assembling a group of this caliber. It's an enormous task to do that and your team has pulled it together superbly. Thank you very much, General Helms.

I would like to also recognize some special international guests who are with us here this morning. We are most honored to have the Russian Ambassador Sergey Kislyak with us here today. Mr. Ambassador, thank you very much. We welcome you. Thank you for coming and agreeing to participate in the symposium.

I'd also like to extend a warm welcome to the First Sea Lord and Chief of Naval Staff Admiral Mark Stanhope from the United Kingdom, who just took the reins less than a week ago and in his very busy schedule has found time to come join us here for this symposium. Sir Mark, thank you very much for that.

Welcome as well to Lieutenant General Paul Fouillard from France, Senior Colonel Yao Yunzhu from China, Brigadier General Feroz Khan from Pakistan, and Vice Admiral RN Ganesh from India. Welcome all of you to Omaha, and thank you for crossing the oceans to participate in this inaugural symposium on a subject that is certainly vital to us all.

I'm very pleased and honored to host STRATCOM's inaugural symposium on strategic deterrence. We have a wonderful venue here at the Qwest Center in a great heartland city of Omaha and an appropriately weighty topic for us to sink our teeth into over the next couple of days.

I think we would be hard-pressed to find anyone to disagree that strategic deterrence is important, if not vital, because preventing war is certainly preferable to waging it, and given today's global security environment, this gathering is certainly most timely.

Considering the stakes, let me take just a few moments at the outset of this symposium to give you my thoughts on what I'd like all of us to attempt to accomplish in the next couple of days. As I give you this introduction, though, I admit I'm more than a little concerned that I convey my thoughts in very clear terms. This, after all, is the challenge of any commander, expressing commander's intent and having it fully understood.

I'm reminded of a story of a recently retired Navy admiral who took up residence in a rather large estate, and decided to hire the services of a young Air Force Academy cadet who was on leave to perform a duty for him at his estate. He hired the cadet and instructed him, "Young man, I want you to go around to the back of the mansion and in the back you'll find a porch. Next to it, a bucket of paint that is battleship gray primer, and a brush. I would like you to paint the porch, including the windows. Do you understand this, cadet?" "Aye, aye, sir," he said in the most joint fashion, and off the Air Force cadet went to the back of the house.

The admiral was a bit surprised when only an hour later the young cadet returned with a big smile on his face and a thumbs up and said, "Job complete, sir." The admiral was so impressed in fact he not only paid the young cadet, he gave him a generous tip. But as the cadet departed, he turned back to look over his shoulder to the admiral and said, "By the way, sir, that wasn't a Porsche out back, in fact it was a Ferrari." [Laughter]. "But I want you to know, it looks great in battleship gray." [Laughter].

Lesson learned, I will be very clear in the remainder of my remarks about what I will ask all of us to focus on over the next two days.

However, since our business in deterrence includes hedging risk, you can be sure my family car is locked away in the garage and all paint cans at the Chilton residence are secure.

With that note aside, let me say frankly that it makes sense for STRATCOM to be your host for this symposium, in my view, if for no other reason, the President of the United States has charged STRATCOM with the mission of providing strategic deterrence planning for the United States of America. Of course this, along with our many other assignments, is a task we take most seriously. But in all humility, we at STRATCOM do not consider ourselves to have a corner on the market of serious and complete thought on the subject of deterrence. Indeed, truth be told, that is one of the reasons we invited all of you to join us here today.

We are fortunate to have among us a distinguished gathering of speakers,

panelists, and participants from around the world who I'm sure will both stimulate and enlighten the thought on the subject of deterrence. And why is it important that we stoke the intellectual fires on the study of deterrence? Well, here I must admit to perhaps at least a partially selfish reason. It is my view that it has been the better part of two decades, since most of us in the U.S. Department of Defense have invested the appropriate time, thought and consideration to studying the topic of deterrence.

Now I don't believe that this neglect was a conscious decision to take what some might describe as a vacation from the hard work required of the serious practitioner of strategic deterrence. I believe it was more an insidious drift away. At some point in the early 1990s, with the Cold War in the rear view mirror, I think perhaps we considered that given the experiences of the previous 45 years, we had learned, and at times relearned, all that there was to know about strategic deterrence. It was, after all, so central to the most serious national security problems we faced at the time, and which in the balance hung the prospect of national survival. It seemed to have worked.

I believe strategic deterrence played a critical role in the successful, and more importantly peaceful, conclusion of the Cold War.

It was not arrogance that caused our minds to wander. Surely many other global events drew our attention away from thoughts of strategic deterrence to more conventional and more actual armed conflicts. From Desert Storm to Operations Northern Watch and Southern Watch, to operations in the Balkans, to the current conflicts which we find ourselves immersed in today. But whatever the reason, the result is, I believe, we've allowed an entire generation to skip class, if you will, on the subject of strategic deterrence.

Few who put on the uniform or joined our civil service corps of the Department of Defense after 1992 have been challenged with the imperative to be versant in the art of deterrence. When we consider that some will be eligible for retirement starting in the next three years you can understand why I maintain that we've lost a generation of thought.

I believe very strongly that we allowed our thinking and our understanding of deterrence to plateau. After an arduous climb up the torturous slopes of the Cold War, I believe that we have not reached the summit of thought on deterrence, but instead I believe the climb in front of us may be even more difficult than the one behind. The plateau, in fact, is a ledge. We have paused too long on the ascent.

We have had too little fresh thinking about deterrence in the last 17 years, yet the world has marched on and marched forward at an alarming pace toward

greater complexity. We see it economically, technologically, socially and militarily in ways that were unimaginable a generation ago.

While everyone recognizes that today's security environment is very different from when many of us began our careers, I believe I'm right to say our thinking about deterrence has not kept pace.

This is why we asked you to join us for this symposium. Some to teach, some to listen, some to postulate, some to reflect, but all to learn.

I would like us to infuse the international security community with fresh thinking about deterrence, with ideas that are suited to the complex and perhaps unpredictable, perhaps dangerous environment that surrounds us today. Because in the end, I believe it is vitally important not only for our nation but also for global security that we reinvigorate the thinking about strategic deterrence.

I'd like to begin this symposium not with a lecture on deterrence, for I recognize that many of you are equally, and certainly many more qualified to help lead us towards a summit and I trust you will. Rather, I should like to use my time to pose two central Questions from which certainly many more will derive, but I believe to help frame our discussions over the next two days.

The first is how should the practice of strategic deterrence differ today in the 21st Century environment from how it was practiced in the past?

I believe that the fundamental deterrence theorem has not changed. That is the postulate that a decision maker's behavior can be affected by holding at risk something he or she values, and by denying the benefits he or she seeks. The more valued the thing held at risk, and the more the decision maker believes we can deny what is sought, the more the behavior can be influenced.

The corollary notion that the decision maker's calculus is based at some level on consideration of the cost and benefit of either action or inaction. In fact I think these concepts are so core to deterrence theory and fundamental to human nature that we might even call them principles. But I do not believe that the enduring quality of these principles should allow us to leave our understanding of the practice of deterrence on that intellectually stagnant ledge.

Climb one step above the core principles, and so much is different today, leading us to the question how must the practice change given the verities of the world we live in today. We have a fundamental theory that we can even call a principle, and from that we must cross a broad intellectual divide to consider

how best to practice deterrence. Perhaps we should have invited Yogi Berra to the conference. For our international guests, Yogi is a Hall of Fame catcher in the baseball leagues who is noted for some of his sayings. The legendary baseball player and philosopher once said, "In theory, there is no difference between theory and practice. In practice, there is." [Laughter]. Not bad for a catcher.

Yogi was right. He seems to be always right. We must recognize that the players on the global stage are different and more diverse than they were during the Cold War, and include not only nation states, but transnational political and economic organizations, and non-state actors to include terrorists.

We have two new and growing domains to complicate the equations of deterrence – space and cyberspace. Space is no longer for a few major powers alone. So how do we deter misbehavior or just irresponsible behavior in the space domain? How does space fit into the broader strategic deterrence calculus? Cyberspace is also a domain of growing importance. Do the challenges of detection, attribution, and response diminish deterrence credibility in cyberspace? And what new challenges might we expect as this global totally manmade domain evolves?

Go back to that first question phrased in perhaps a different way. How do we wage deterrence in today's multipolar, complex world of multiple domains?

Wherever the answer leads, I think we'll find that understanding deterrence is as important today, if not more important than it ever was in the past.

As you ponder the first question let me offer a word of caution. Please do not assume that deterrence means only nuclear deterrence. That was not always the case in history, nor should it be in the future. Nor should our thoughts on the practice be so constrained.

My second central question is a corollary to this cautionary note. We should ask ourselves what is the role of nuclear weapons in the 21st century strategic deterrence era? Fortunately it's been 64 years since nuclear weapons were used to terminate a world war. And fortunately, we have successfully avoided direct nuclear confrontation in the interim. Let me also highlight that the world has not seen a major conventional conflict between major powers, a World War III if you will, since the dawn of nuclear weapons. Is this simply a coincidence, or do nuclear weapons have a special and perhaps useful quality that inhibits large-scale war, both nuclear and conventional? And even if they do, is that quality worth the risk of nuclear exchange?

There are other related questions. What role do nuclear weapons play in

efforts to curb their own proliferation? In the contemporary environment, North Korean and Iranian aspirations to acquire nuclear weapons, understandably cause the United States and others who are represented here today, great concern, and highlight the criticality of U.S. extended nuclear deterrence to support nonproliferation. So has the possession of nuclear weapons in some arsenal caused or discouraged proliferation? Or both? Or has an imbalance in conventional power been a more decisive element in the calculus?

Can we define a rule set for what discourages and what encourages proliferation? Then can we act on that rule set?

Regardless of whether you believe the idea of a nuclear weapons-free world is a possibility, the reality is that nuclear weapons will be with us for the foreseeable future. And if for no other reason, our consideration of their utility in the strategic deterrence equation is one that we should not allow to stagnate.

Now given these two context-setting questions of how is the practice of strategic deterrence different today than it was in the past, and what is the role of nuclear weapons in 21st century strategic deterrence, let me give you the framework for my thinking.

The primary focus of strategic deterrence is at its heart one of political decision-making. Thus we can conclude that a purely military approach to planning and conducting deterrence is insufficient and that effective deterrence should include, in my view, a whole of government approach.

In this context, both hard and soft power must have a role in deterrence strategy. Further, there must be opportunities to date, some unexploited opportunities, to collaborate more effectively between nations and to leverage all elements of international power toward a more consistent and effective global deterrence strategy, one that benefits and brings greater security to all of us.

For the foreseeable future we in the United States believe our security environment will likely continue to be defined by a global struggle against violent extremist ideologies. And we know that terrorists and their networks supporting these ideologies seek nuclear weapons and other mass destruction capabilities.

As the threats have broadened to these new actors, should our application of deterrence be different from what we employed during the last century? What are the new ways to deter these new actors?

Ladies and gentlemen, I concede that my two central questions and my

framework have expanded to many more related questions. I think you'd agree as we depart our intellectual ledge and climb higher into the concepts of strategic deterrence both in theory and in practice in the 21st century, we will not be wanting for content, but over the next few days we will be wanting for time.

In large part, the success of this symposium will be measured by the extent of an unquantifiable but very real re-stimulation of serious and enthusiastic thought and discussion on the subject of strategic deterrence. We need to take a very hard, critical look not only to understand how better to track strategic deterrence in this environment, but also to prepare and to motivate the next generation of leaders whose challenges will most certainly be even more complex than those that we face today.

Before I join you as an eager participant in this symposium, let me reiterate it isn't often that we assemble such an august group of national and international experts. This is truly a unique opportunity to interact with some of the finest minds in the field. Don't miss the opportunity. Please use your time here to challenge each other on this complex topic. Don't be afraid to be provocative, but don't be afraid to listen, either. Just as important, I would encourage you to get to know one another. And let me ask you to resolve to stay in touch, long after you depart America's heartland. If you thought you were coming to Omaha to enjoy our renowned hospitality and world class steak, well, let me tell you right up front, you will. But we're going to ask you to do a little work in return.

If I may conclude, in a moment you'll hear from Dr. Keith Payne, CEO and President of the National Institute for Public Policy and author of the book, "The Great American Gamble: Deterrence Theory and Practice from the Cold War to the 21st Century." Having studied his book I'll leave you with his insight about why we are assembled here, and I quote:

"The agenda with regard to deterrence and strategic forces should not be to protect old verities and adages, especially when contemporary conditions are so far removed from the environment that spawned them." Keith, I don't think Yogi Berra could have said it so well, and I could not agree more.

Let us find our path to a higher plane, for successful deterrence strategies in the 21st century because the security of our interconnected world is at stake.

Again, I'm most grateful to have the opportunity to work with each of you, and I wish you all a successful and productive symposium. Thank you very much.