CDD Presentation Notes – 7.9.14

Limited Nuclear War

1) Definition:

Limited nuclear war is defined as “war in which each side exercises restraint in the use of nuclear weapons, employing only a limited number of weapons on selected targets. Selected targets could include enemy forces, command and control centers or particular sites of strategic importance.

2) Origins of Optimist/Pessimist Debate

*Advocates of LNW:*

Believed that such a war could be both controllable and winnable. It was further thought that the limited use of nuclear weapons in a small, regional war could lead to a swift political resolution of the conflict.

*Opponents of LNW:*

Argued that such a war would not necessarily be controllable and could easily escalate into a full-scale nuclear war.

3) Targets – Introduction of Counterforce vs. Counter-value Targeting

a. Counterforce: targets enemy military *forces*.

b. Countervalue: strategy is one that targets things upon which the enemy is likely to place a high value like enemy civilian population centers, or at least places with high concentrations of noncombatants.

4) Types of Weapons: Strategic vs Nonstrategic/Tactical

a. Non-strategic nuclear weapons are relatively small-yield and limited-range weapons designed for use within a theater of operations rather than for intercontinental, or strategic, employment. Non-strategic nuclear weapons are also referred to as tactical weapons due to their intended use on a limited scale. The tactical use of nuclear weapons has been defined as “the use of nuclear weapons by land, sea, or air forces against opposing forces, supporting installations or facilities, in support of operations that contribute to the accomplishment of a military mission of limited scope, or in support of the military commander’s scheme of maneuver, usually limited to the area of military operations.”

b. Large, strategic weapons would be disproportionate with the objectives of a limited war. Thinking here about high-yield, mobile warheads (ICBMs, SLBMS).

Places where means matter- all the means escalate to unacceptable level of punishment. Nuclear means matter explicitly. Means already started to matter – key distinction.

Counter force or Counter value -

5) Objectives:

a. Henry Kissinger and Robert Osgood both characterized limited war as being conducted for the purpose of achieving limited political objectives (i.e. response to provocation, deterring further escalation, small-scale conflict with narrow tactical aims)

b. there was debate concerning the limiting of resources applied to a limited war. It was thought that a war fought for limited objectives should not expend unlimited quantities of resources.

c. the role of bargaining with the adversary to determine established limits for a limited war. The opposing sides would need to agree to the limits by which they would pursue their respective objectives.

d. correlation between limited war as an instrument and the objective of achieving the goals of arms control.

Osgood: established five fundamental requirements for a policy of limited war: well-defined, limited objectives; a willingness to limit the means employed; appropriate military tactics, techniques and weapons; sufficient economic resources; and an unwavering national will.

Smoke On, Ruin Em – Target based on what the Soviets were doing. How they were targeted?

Limitations: geographical area; weapons; targets; manpower; number of belligerents; duration and intensity.

6) Implications for Regional Proliferators

a. Beyond the US/USSR paradigm 🡪 India and Pakistan; Israel and Iran; North Korea and US/South Korea?

Regional adversaries, at least in the near term, will likely not possess long-range delivery capabilities, rather short- and medium-range ballistic missiles capable of threatening targets within their own geographical region.

Regional adversaries could use the concept of limited war to deter the United States from intervening in a conflict or projecting military power into the region by threatening escalation. If the United States is not deterred by threats of escalation, might consider using its nuclear weapons to limit or defeat U.S. military operations. The adversary might seek to intimidate U.S. allies or friends within the region, or to split regional political coalitions apart.

The use of nuclear weapons in a regional setting could support a range of

objectives including coercion, war termination, regime preservation or even

revenge. Some states could view the use of nuclear weapons as last resort - only viable means to alter the status quo or to remedy a deteriorating regional security situation.

Tradeoffs between coercive bargaining and limited war: they are so capability sensitive .

7) Extension and Applications – Implications for CDD

a. Escalation or De-Escalation to other domains?

LNW now being fought at the cyber or drone level?

b. Different strategies across proliferators

Are some states more or less likely to pursue limited versus complete war objectives in deterring or compelling revision to status quo?

c. How can we think about limited war versus wars of attrition in other domains? What does that look like for cyber, space conflict?

d. How do we measure these constructs when ‘arsenals’ take on different meanings in these domains? What does it mean to have strategic versus non-strategic/tactical weapons?

e. How do the other themes - limited objectives/resources/bargaining/arms control - of LNW transfer to other domains? How would this, for example, operate in space?

LNW versus stability/instability paradox. Firebreak between nuclear and conventional use.

I/S paradox is predicated on never being there.

Assumption – is use even possible?

Asymmetric nuclear conflict – one side does have a pretty good side.

Breaking down the concept of limited.

Grand strategy – perception of limitedness of certain attacks. Who is the strategizer? Think about that in terms of grand strategy – LNW is more likely now with the advent of MD, lower yields. Part of our grand strategy to deal with these types of threats – is low-yield nuclear force.

Can conventional threshold approach low-yield nuclear threshold.

Is CDD better than LNW?

Microdynamics – what does this look like in a specific context?

Contain the downstream effects – if you are going to do it, this is the best way to do it.

Absolute war for one side – given US counterforce capability, its limited on our side.

No talk about strategic interaction with the North Koreans – we’re keeping it limited.

Bring down the nuclear threshold –the problem with massive retaliation.

Leverage for coercive diplomacy..

Aims reflect political objectives; use nuclear weapons, hard to convince other guys to not use nuclear weapons.

One substitute – conventional global strike on the tip of the ICBM.

Importance and distinguishing limited aims and damage limitations; contain fallout and impact on US forces.

How many of these cites are appropriate targets for LNW low-yield nuclear weapons

Deter vs compel change in behavior.

Both advertised how they were going to get down to 1500.

How does force structure change if we’re going for compellence versus deterrence.

Same can be said for CDD.

Are going to work better if explicit objective is deter versus compel. May escalate beyond initial point of compellence.