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**THE LOGIC OF
AMERICAN NUCLEAR
STRATEGY**

why strategic
superiority matters



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***The Logic of American Nuclear Strategy:
Why Strategic Superiority Matters***

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Question and Answer

Question:

What kind of nuclear posture does the United States need to protect itself and its allies?

Answer:

The United States needs a robust nuclear posture, with capabilities designed to limit damage in the event of nuclear war. It has always pursued meaningful strategic superiority over rivals and desired a nuclear arsenal “second to none.”

Outline

- 1) Conventional Wisdom: Second-Strike theory***
- 2) The Logic of American Nuclear Strategy***
- 3) The Advantages of Nuclear Advantages***
- 4) The Disadvantages of Nuclear Advantages?***
- 5) Conclusions***

1) Conventional Wisdom: Second-Strike Theory

- ***The Logic of Second-Strike Theory***
 - ***Second-Strike Capabilities***
 - ***Mutually-Assured Destruction (MAD)***
 - ***Brinkmanship and the balance of stakes***

- ***This leads to a puzzle:***
 - ***Why has the United States always retained a robust nuclear posture?***

- ***Two possible answers:***
 - ***1) US nuclear strategy is illogical (Jervis, Glaser, etc.)***
 - ***2) We need a better theory***

2) The Logic of American Nuclear Strategy

What is unique about American Nuclear Strategy?

- ***Counterforce Targeting***
 - ***Legal and ethical motivations***
 - ***Damage limitation***
 - ***Force requirements***

- ***Extended Deterrence***
 - ***Washington extends its nuclear umbrella to over thirty formal treaty allies in Europe and Asia.***

2) The Logic of American Nuclear Strategy: The Superiority-Brinkmanship Synthesis Theory

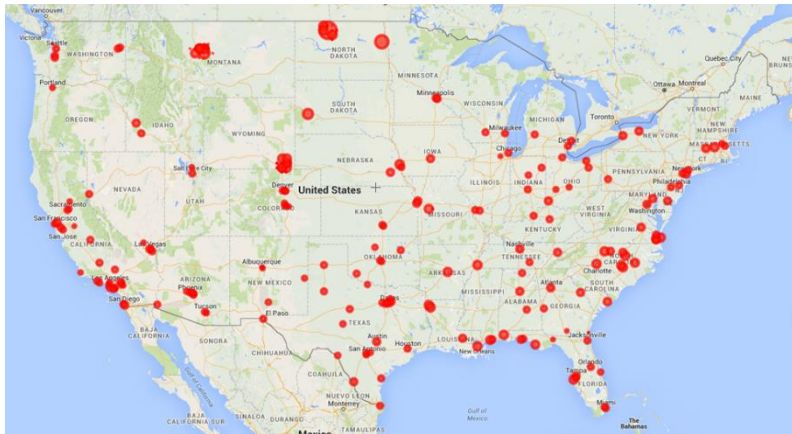


In a game of chicken, we might expect the smaller car to swerve first even if a crash is devastating to both.

3) The Advantages of Nuclear Advantages

Hypothesis 1: In the event of a nuclear war, nuclear superior states suffer less damage.

Nuclear Exchange Simulation Results



Russia First-Strike on the United States



China Second-Strike on the United States

3) The Advantages of Nuclear Advantages

Hypothesis 2: Nuclear superior states are more likely to get their way in high-stakes nuclear crises.

Table 3. Cross Tabulations of Nuclear Crisis Outcomes, 1945-2001

		Outcome			
		Win	Loss	Total	
Superiority	Yes	14 (54%)	12 (46%)	26 (100%)	
		No	4 (15%)	22 (85%)	26 (100%)
		Total	18 (35%)	34 (65%)	52 (100%)
		$X^2 = 8.497$ (p=0.004)			

The Cuban Missile Crisis, 1962



Sino-Soviet Border War, 1969



1973 Arab Israeli War



1999 Kargil War



The Cuban Missile Crisis, 1962



3) The Advantages of Nuclear Advantages

Hypothesis 3: Nuclear superior states are less likely to be targeted with military threats in the first place.

List of Compellent Threats by Nuclear-Armed States, 1945-2001

Country	Threats against Nuclear Superior States	Threats against Nuclear Inferior States
United States	0	17
Soviet Union	0	7
Great Britain	0	9
France	0	3
China	0	3
Israel	0	3
South Africa	0	6
India	0	1
Pakistan	0	0
Total	0	49

4) The Disadvantages of Nuclear Advantages? Strategic Stability

The Claim: Nuclear superiority undermines strategic stability and increases the risk of nuclear war.

The Reality:

- ***The United States still has a 2nd Strike capability.***
- ***The enemy can always back down.***
- ***The evidence doesn't support this view.***

4) The Disadvantages of Nuclear Advantages? Arms Races

The Claim: The pursuit of nuclear superiority provokes costly and unnecessary arms races

The Reality:

- ***States often unable or unwilling to match US developments.***
- ***The United States has always maintained meaningful superiority over rivals.***
- ***States design nuclear postures for many other reasons.***
- ***Sometimes arms races are necessary.***

4) The Disadvantages of Nuclear Advantages? Nonproliferation

The Claim: If the United States pursues nuclear superiority, nonnuclear states will build nuclear weapons.

The Reality:

- ***States build nuclear weapons for other reasons.***
- ***A strong U.S. nuclear arsenal is an important force for stopping the spread of nuclear weapons.***
- ***Quantitate and qualitative evidence supports my view.***

4) The Disadvantages of Nuclear Advantages? The Defense Budget

The Claim: The United States cannot afford a robust nuclear posture.

The Reality:

- ***Ashton Carter, Obama's Secretary of Defense, "nuclear weapons don't actually cost that much."***
- ***U.S. nuclear modernization costs 5-7% of the defense budget.***

3) Conclusions

Implications for international relations theory:

- ***A new theory of nuclear deterrence: superiority-brinkmanship synthesis theory.***
- ***Second-strike theory is not wrong, but it is incomplete.***

Implications for U.S. foreign policy:

- ***U.S. leaders are not illogical.***
- ***The US could scale back commitments. If not, then...***
- ***The US should maintain a robust nuclear posture.***

Thank You