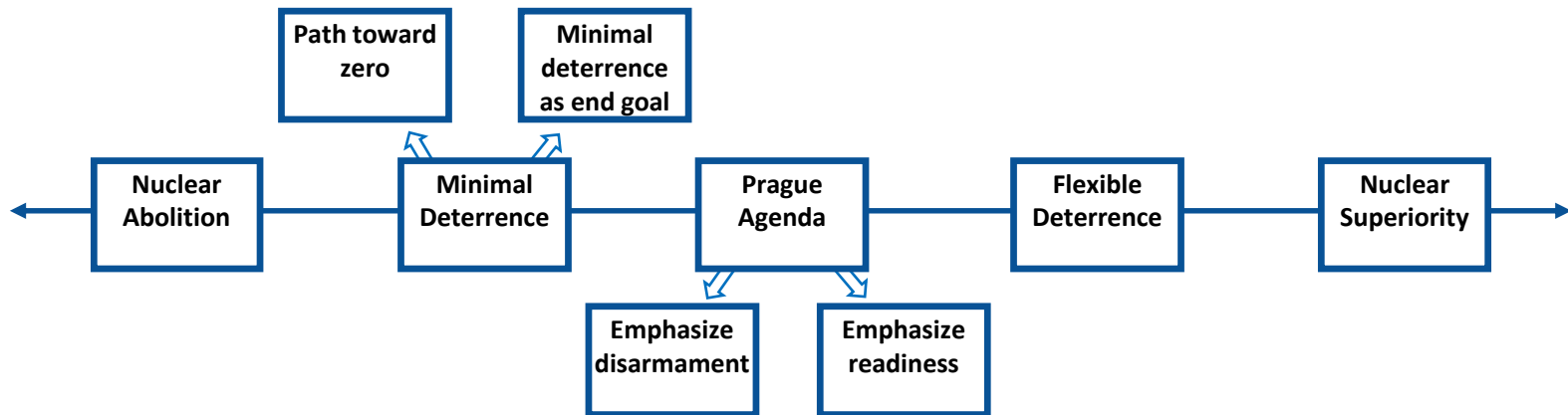


# Examining Nuclear Assumptions

## Five Schools of Thought

PONI 2016 Summer Conference  
Patrick AFB  
July 12-13



# Why study this?

- There is a fierce debate over almost every aspect of U.S. nuclear weapons, but seemingly little common ground
- As there are divergent starting points, the conversation around nuclear weapons usually involves participants talking past each other, not to each other
- Exploring the various belief systems and assumptions that practitioners hold can help move the conversation forward in a useful direction
- While interesting academic questions are concerned, this is ultimately a policy problem. In reality, the nuclear field is not having a useful discussion

# How are we studying nuclear assumptions?

	Nuclear Abolition	Minimal Deterrence	Prague Agenda	Flexible Deterrence	Nuclear Superiority
Geopolitics/ International Relations	✓	✓		✓	✓
Morality/Law	✓				
Nuclear Deterrence		✓	✓		✓
Military Strategy				✓	
Non-Proliferation			✓		

# Nuclear Abolition

Geopolitics/IR: It is possible to fundamentally alter the relationship between states, allowing for a more cooperative system

Morality/Law: Nuclear weapons are fundamentally immoral



“There is urgent need to work for a world free of nuclear weapons, in full application of the Nonproliferation Treaty, in letter and spirit, with the goal of a complete prohibition of these weapons.” – Pope Francis

# Minimal Deterrence

Geopolitics/IR: In the post-Cold War environment, there is no need for a force larger than a minimum deterrent

Nuclear Deterrence: Nuclear weapons have utility, but it is limited to “existential deterrence” and can be met with a small number of weapons



“When it comes to nuclear weapons, size does not matter.” – Jeffrey Lewis

# Prague Agenda

Nuclear Deterrence: The usefulness of nuclear weapons has decreased in the post-Cold War world

Non-Proliferation: The role the U.S. leadership in international institutions will be key to reducing and eventually eliminating nuclear weapons



“This goal will not be reached quickly, perhaps not in my lifetime. It will take patience and persistence.” – President Barack Obama

# Flexible Deterrence

Geopolitics/IR: No realistic way to escape the anarchic world order, and the end of the Cold War has not changed that

Military Strategy: U.S. nuclear weapons strategy must deter large scale nuclear use *and* control more limited escalation



“... the United States should adapt its nuclear forces to be able to fight a limited nuclear war more effectively than plausible adversaries.” – Elbridge Colby

# Nuclear Superiority

Geopolitics/IR: Possessing nuclear weapons, and specifically nuclear superiority, is useful in an anarchic world, regardless of other states' arsenals

Nuclear Deterrence: Nuclear inferiority, not superiority, is destabilizing, and could invite a disarming first strike



“The fact is that possession of nuclear weapons has moderated the behavior of the great powers toward one another.” – Frank Miller



# The LRSO Debate

Geopolitics/IR: “... statements by defense officials reveal a worrisome level of warfighting thinking behind the LRSO mission that risks dragging U.S. nuclear planning back into Cold War thinking about the role of nuclear weapons.” – Hans Kristensen

Morality/Law: “Minimizing civilian casualties if deterrence fails is both a more credible and a more ethical approach.” – Jim Miller

Nuclear Deterrence: “Because they can be launched without warning and come in both nuclear and conventional variants, cruise missiles are a uniquely destabilizing type of weapon.” – William Perry and Andy Weber

Military Strategy: “... bombers carrying ALCMs provide the president a level of flexibility that bombers carrying gravity bombs do not have.” – Adam Lowther

Non-Proliferation: “The United States, Russia and France are the only nations to currently deploy nuclear cruise missiles. However, China, Pakistan and others are working on nuclear-capable cruise missiles, and U.S. security would benefit if they stop.” – Tom Collina

# Conclusions

- Dialog in the nuclear policy community is stuck in a loop: we talk past each other because we base our arguments and interpretations of reality on very different assumptions and principals
- Understanding different schools of thought, and how they apply to contemporary nuclear policy debates, will not end this, but it could put us on a more productive path
- On some issues there will simply be disagreement, but for others there may be room for progress
- Before debating the specifics of nuclear policy, perhaps we should focus more on underlying assumptions and disagreements?

# Comments? Questions?

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