

National Institute for Deterrence Studies & Peter Huessy Seminar

Deterrence in the Balance: Arms Control, Modernization, and Strategic Resolve

with Mike Albertson

8/22/2025 Time: 10:00-11:00 AM (Eastern)

Webinar Transcript

How to cite:

National Institute for Deterrence Studies. *Deterrence in the Balance: Arms Control, Modernization, and Strategic Resolve with Mike Albertson*. Huessy Seminar, August 22, 2025. <https://thinkdeterrence.com/events/deterrence-in-the-balance-arms-control-modernization-and-strategic-resolve-with-mike-albertson/>. <https://youtu.be/fc3mRtQhEIO>

Abstract

This Huessy Seminar, hosted by the National Institute for Deterrence Studies (NIDS), features Mike Albertson, a seasoned expert in arms control and strategic policy, discussing the evolving landscape of nuclear deterrence. Albertson offers a candid and comprehensive analysis of the collapse of traditional arms control frameworks, the challenges posed by Russian and Chinese strategic behavior, and the limitations of current treaty-based approaches. He emphasizes the importance of transparency, verification, and pragmatic engagement over rigid numerical limits, advocating for a renewed focus on managing deterrence through informed dialogue and realistic proposals. The seminar explores the implications of modernization cycles, tactical nuclear weapons, and extended deterrence, while calling for a revitalized coalition of arms control advocates and a new generation of policy experts. Albertson concludes with a call to action: to develop concrete, adaptable arms control proposals that reflect contemporary security realities and prepare for a future where strategic stability must be actively managed.

Executive Summary

In this Huessy Seminar hosted by the National Institute for Deterrence Studies (NIDS), Mike Albertson—a veteran arms control and strategic policy expert—delivers a comprehensive analysis of the current state and future trajectory of nuclear arms control. Drawing on two decades of experience in U.S. defense and diplomatic roles, Albertson outlines the collapse of traditional treaty-based arms control frameworks and the challenges posed by evolving Russian and Chinese nuclear strategies.

Albertson critiques the stagnation of arms control efforts, attributing the breakdown to outdated treaties, shifting geopolitical dynamics, and a lack of engagement from Russia and China. He emphasizes that while formal treaties have historically delivered significant security benefits—such as reductions in nuclear arsenals and enhanced transparency—their erosion has left a vacuum filled with uncertainty and mistrust.

Key themes include:

- The strategic value of arms control lies not in numerical limits but in **transparency, verification, and dialogue**.
- The U.S. must develop **realistic, technically sound proposals** that reflect current deterrence needs and are resilient to political shifts.
- **Tactical nuclear weapons, novel delivery systems, and China's opaque buildup** present complex challenges that require nuanced, incremental approaches.
- Albertson advocates for a **legally binding, flexible framework** that can manage near-term risks while laying the groundwork for future multilateral engagement.
- He calls for rebuilding the **arms control workforce**, fostering bipartisan support, and engaging allies to sustain strategic stability.

Albertson concludes that arms control should be viewed as a **management tool**—not a panacea—for navigating a multipolar nuclear environment. He urges the U.S. to lead with credible proposals, even in the absence of immediate reciprocity, to shape the global narrative and prepare for eventual re-engagement.

Unabridged Transcript

(Note: there will invariably be some word errors in the following transcript.)

00;00;03;03 - 00;00;30;18

Kimberly Cherington

Good morning, everyone. I'm Kimberly Cherington and on behalf of the National Institute for Deterrence Studies or NIDS, I want to welcome you to today's Huessy seminar. *Deterrence in the Balance, Arms Control, Modernization and Strategic Resolve*. And a special welcome to our featured guest, Michael Albertson. Don't miss next Friday's event as Dr Christopher Ford speaks on Iran, deterrence, and the Future of nonproliferation.

00;00;30;21 - 00;00;47;20

Kimberly Cherington

Go to thinkdeterrence.com on our events page to learn more and register you and your colleagues for upcoming events. During today's presentation, we encourage you to submit your questions in the chat or the Q&A at the top of the screen and at any time.

00;00;47;20 - 00;00;59;18

Kimberly Cherington

If you wish to address a question or show your support for it, you could put a little thumbs up in the chat box so that we can give that question priority.

00;00;59;20 - 00;01;15;28

Kimberly Cherington

Now, it's my pleasure to introduce our host for today's seminar, Mr. Peter Huessy, himself, President and Senior director of the Strategic Deterrence Studies at Geo Strategic Analysis and a senior fellow here at NIDS. Peter, over to you.

00;01;16;01 - 00;01;54;14

Peter Huessy

Thank you very much, Kimberly, and thank you to our audience for joining us today, including our president of medicine, Dr Jim Petrosky. And also want to welcome our guest today, Mike Albertson. Mike has served for 16 years in the federal government handling an extraordinary variety of mainly Russian related defense issues from 2018 to 2020. He was senior policy advisor in the office of the Secretary, Defense, and in the office there also nuclear missile defense policy.

00;01;54;16 - 00;02;18;18

Peter Huessy

From 2015 to 2018, he was at the Department of State's Office of Strategic Stability and Deterrence Affairs, part of that on the National Security Council from 2013 to 2014, as a director for Russia, and then from 2010 to 2012, he was a policy advisor to the Senior Advisor for Arms Control and Strategic Stability to the Undersecretary of Defense Policy.

00;02;18;20 - 00;02;49;01

Peter Huessy

And there he participated in negotiation, ratification, and implementation of the new Start treaty. Now, prior to that, in the six years between 2004 and 2010, he was an intelligence analyst and then a senior intelligence analyst in the Department of Defense studying Russian military capabilities and doctrine. We have asked him to come today to talk about not just arms control, but also strategic modernization and strategic stability, kind of the whole ball of wax which he covers in his current position.

00;02;49;03 - 00;03;07;28

Peter Huessy

Michael, thank you for coming. I know you're coming here from California, which means you got up at the crack of dawn. Well, thank you very much. We appreciate that. But over to you, sir. And thank you again. On behalf of nets, I want to thank you for taking the time to come to talk to us again, and we look forward to your remarks.

00;03;07;28 - 00;03;09;22

Peter Huessy

Over to you, sir.

00;03;09;24 - 00;03;33;14

Mike Albertson

Well, thank you to Peter for that kind introduction. And thank you to Kimberly and Jim for the invitation. It's a great honor. It's a great podcast. I've enjoyed following the conversation. It's good to see a lot of friends and former colleagues in the audience. Just a disclaimer. I'm speaking for myself. That way I can be open and frank with you about how I see that the topic Peter asked me to cover a lot of ground.

3

00;03;33;16 - 00;03;51;24

Mike Albertson

And I really feel it's my job to do my best to try to add to the conversation that we're already having in this field. But I approach this with, with some degree of humility and any criticism I offer about sort of how we got to where we are equally self-criticisms. Right? I've worked in this field for two decades.

00;03;51;26 - 00;04;10;25

Mike Albertson

Just look at the state of it. So, take what I say with as big a grain of salt as you would like. One of the topics I was asked to cover was, was the collapse of the traditional arms control frameworks. If the 1990s were the golden ages for arms control. And in 2000 were the Silver Ages.

00;04;10;25 - 00;04;36;07

Mike Albertson

I guess some people would call this sort of the Dark Ages. Where a lot of people see arms control is, is outdated, problematic, maybe even dangerous. So, let's do a quick postmortem on how we got to where we are. One treaty. Treaties aged out. They were not adapted, updated or replaced, despite a lot of effort by the United States to do just that.

00;04;36;10 - 00;04;55;25

Mike Albertson

And like any legal document, the longer an agreement goes on, the more likely they are to be problems and the security environment changes, and you have to adapt accordingly to changes in the security market. So, things that made sense ten, 15, 20 years ago might not make sense today in terms of agreements, in terms of formats, in terms of ideas.

00;04;55;28 - 00;05;16;26

Mike Albertson

And over the course of time, it's forgotten that, you know, many of these treaties did amazing things. Treaties got rid of whole classes of missile systems that were deemed to be problematic. They moved to reduce thousands of tactical nuclear warheads in the European theater. They counted eliminated huge numbers of conventional systems. They did. They did amazing things.

00;05;16;28 - 00;05;44;14

Mike Albertson

But a lot of them held on too long. They didn't get replaced, despite effort trying, with the Russians. And in the end, the way things intend to leave a bad taste in people's mouths about sort of formal treaty-based arms control and what it can do, the Russians are as difficult. There's always they have seen little incentive, either positive or negative, to engage in a U.S. proposed arms control agenda, either proposed by Republicans or Democrats.

00;05;44;16 - 00;06;01;28

Mike Albertson

I think here in the US, in our communities of interests, we all understand the lack of progress can squarely be placed on Russia and China for not engaging. But elsewhere in the world, Russia and China don't get a lot of blame for this. The US gets the blame. The US gets

pressure from the disarmament community for the state of the world.

00;06;02;00 - 00;06;27;12

Mike Albertson

And a lot of the world, including with our allies, the IC on arms control has gone down. Ten years ago, when I was working the IAAF treaty experience, the Russian violation of the INF treaty, people had to be reminded about what the IMF treaty was. I was told by European allies that this was a US problem and not their concern, which of course ignores a fair amount of history on, on IMF.

00;06;27;14 - 00;06;55;21

Mike Albertson

When we brought up the fact that Russia was violating the INF treaty, we had to have a lot of rounds of talks with, with allies, with our with our closest allies about what Russia was doing, trying to convince them that what we were saying was, was accurate. We had challenges. Are people bringing up, you know, Iraq, WMDs as an analogy for what we were trying to tell them about Russia, because to them, this was one more problem with Russia when they didn't want Russia to be a problem and they were worried about domestic pressures.

00;06;55;24 - 00;07;24;00

Mike Albertson

They were worried about going back to 1979. To be fair, I think NATO recognizes this. There are people working hard at NATO, on getting that community smart again on arms control. But there's a long way to go, to get allies, smart on this issue. People have tried alternatives to formal treaty-based arms control, thinking that this was lower hanging fruit or this might be easier to get done that they've tried things like risk reduction, transparency, political agreements.

00;07;24;03 - 00;07;43;08

Mike Albertson

None of those have gained a lot of traction, with, with the Russians or the Chinese. So, we haven't had real momentum behind any alternative to formal treaty based arms control. And there are a lot of ideas out there in the arms control space, some of which were floated just last week before the Putin Trump Alaska summit.

00;07;43;10 - 00;08;07;05

Mike Albertson

That don't really stand up. Today's reality, people talk about, you know, a moratorium on INF missiles when Russia's been violating a treaty on INF, missiles for ten years. They talk about sort of reviving this idea from the end of the first Trump administration about a warhead freeze, a freeze on tactical warheads when the United States feels the need to sort of modernize its tactical nuclear forces.

00;08;07;08 - 00;08;25;29

Mike Albertson

There's demands, you know, that Russia stop building novel systems, demands that China come to the table on some of these sort of the ship has sailed. On others, I don't think we're not really sure what we want, and we aren't really prepared to pay the high price for some of the assets that we seem to be making in this space.

00;08;26;01 - 00;08;50;11

Mike Albertson

Disarmament folks, I think, have sort of stood and watched, this collapse, there's always been a tension historically between arms controllers and disarmament. This goes back to sort of, you know, writings in the late 50s, early 60s. So don't put everyone in one basket. Rather than putting pressure on Russia and China, they focus attention on the US and, and the West for not doing enough.

00;08;50;13 - 00;09;09;23

Mike Albertson

They come up with treaties, aimed at nuclear abolition that don't really have a practical pathway for implementation or verification. And they ignore sort of 50 years of experience and how to do this right, which is sort of a practical step by step approach that deals with real security realities. And this collapse, I think, has led to some, some narratives, right?

00;09;09;23 - 00;09;28;25

Mike Albertson

Many of which are just modern recitations of old accusations. But something as someone proposing arms control agreements, you have to be sort of aware of the criticisms out there, and you have to be prepared to sort of take them head on and not dismiss them. These criticisms, you know, one is that sort of arms control never works.

00;09;28;27 - 00;09;48;00

Mike Albertson

It doesn't do any good. Again, you have to be able to cite examples to the contrary, that good things did happen. Bad things that people predicted didn't happen. Problems were avoided. And that sort of, you know, the information, insights and conversations we had with the other side were valuable. You have to sort of defend the track record of what arms control has done.

00;09;48;02 - 00;10;05;19

Mike Albertson

Another, another sort of narrative out there is that sort of arms control does nothing but hold us back. You saw this with the ABM treaty. So as with the IAAF treaty, we see this with the new Start treaty. Again, I posted I sort of post as a counterfactual, you know, what have we done since we got to the ABM treaty?

00;10;05;19 - 00;10;24;21

Mike Albertson

What have we got done since we got to the IAAF treaty? You know, we have limitations. And those limitations aren't necessarily arms control. We have real industrial base problems that we need to address. And getting out of arms control agreements introduces new risks that we didn't have before, and we just have to address them.

00;10;24;23 - 00;10;42;13

Mike Albertson

There are also criticisms that sort of arms control doesn't tackle all of the problems. And it's sort of it isn't fair when a treaty doesn't do everything that we think it should. We saw this with INF where, you know, Russia has tacked on nuclear weapons. Why? As a new start, address this.

Russia's developing novel systems. Why doesn't New Start address this?

00;10;42;13 - 00;11;05;04

Mike Albertson

China is not involved. Why aren't they, arms control? There's some things, it doesn't do other things. You just have to be aware. There are areas of sort of cooperation and then there's areas of sort of open competition. You have to be prepared to openly compete. And the last one, which, you know, probably is a longer conversation than I can have today, is, is sort of Russia cheats on everything and violates everything.

00;11;05;06 - 00;11;26;18

Mike Albertson

And so why do anything with them? I think you just have to be really careful. And I say this as somebody who's worked on compliance issues and dealt with sort of the legal gray areas of any agreement, there are clear cut violations, to be sure. Right. Russia building a giant radar in the 80s that violated the ABM treaty, Russia producing a ground launched cruise missile in violation of the IAAF treaty.

00;11;26;22 - 00;11;50;25

Mike Albertson

What they're doing with the conventional weapons convention, what they might be doing in outer space, like there are some clear-cut violation type things that you have to think about. There are, however, other times when a violation is just an implementation problem, that becomes a violation when it's not resolved in the hope that if you call something a violation, you highlight the seriousness and hope to unstick the issue from, you know, just a concern.

00;11;50;27 - 00;12;10;26

Mike Albertson

Look at conventional forces in Europe, treaty open skies, where we are a new start. You know, these are implementation problems that became violations because the Russians simply got stubborn and wouldn't deal with the problem. And again, and then there's a whole bunch of gray space. And like in any legal document, it's like, is this concern, is it a violation what the lawyers say.

00;12;10;29 - 00;12;34;10

Mike Albertson

And then there's just stuff that's actually not a violation. But people use the term violation. And if anyone ever says, you know, this is this violates the spirit of an agreement, it probably means it's not really a violation, because if it was a violation, it would have been in the agreement, not just the spirit of the agreement. So arms controls become sort of this, this sort of whipping boy for why we can't get our own deterrence house in order.

00;12;34;10 - 00;12;58;26

Mike Albertson

Right. And I would just say it's not on arms control. It's on us for choosing different priorities for our time, money, attention, and for not taking care of our own business. I think there's this sort of warm, warm, fuzzy blanket idea that if we were just sort of unconstrained, everything would work out fine. And I guess I would argue that in many areas we are we are not constrained.

00;12;58;28 - 00;13;30;10

Mike Albertson

We have business that needs to be done. We all know what that business is and we should take care of it. But attempting to say sort of an unshackled, we will go back to sort of a peace through strength vision of the 1980s and simply duplicate. It ignores the real hard differences that we face twice what we had in the 1980s in terms of industrial base, in terms of sort of a bipartisan consensus to move out in terms of sort of not having a negotiating partner in Moscow that we can deal with.

00;13;30;13 - 00;13;47;08

Mike Albertson

It's a changed world. And I think we said, you know, analogies can be made with the early 80s, but there are differences as well. So, you know, we've been having these same kind of arguments, you know, for the last 15 years since New Start was ratified and nothing really has taken its place and things have gotten worse.

00;13;47;08 - 00;14;12;00

Mike Albertson

We've gotten, you know, arms control is, is now something that's sort of fading from the scene. What it did is, is sort of largely taken for granted and probably is going to be forgotten pretty soon. We have some problems that are both emerged and emerging that we highlight in things like the two peer report we did, here at the, at GSR a few years ago, and we're now at the end of the new Start treaty.

00;14;12;03 - 00;14;37;19

Mike Albertson

And you have this central debate which you've seen in the podcast here, that Peter and Kimberly have posted about, you know, new start, what comes next? What do we do in terms of limits and numbers, really an arms control, air fixation. And a lot of my writing over the last few years has been on this fixation and why it's, you know, not a helpful one to have in terms of solving the real problems we have and, and sort of the problems that arms control can fix to me.

00;14;37;19 - 00;15;00;07

Mike Albertson

And I highlight this to people, you know, the main value of arms control in a, in a treaty is not the limits which gets the most attention, but sort of the bookkeeping, the accounting, the information, the transparency, the conversations. You know, what the other side's doing. They know what you're doing. You can go see it, if you have concerns and if you have problems, you're forcing the other side to talk about it.

00;15;00;09 - 00;15;21;02

Mike Albertson

And a lot of this value gets sort of wiped aside by this. What's the right number for the new treaty? And it's really not a question that any of us in the outside expert community can answer. That's it. Sort of internal DoD homework assignment that they have to do. Based on our guidance, the requirements, sometimes the numbers discussion doesn't come up until midstream.

00;15;21;02 - 00;15;41;19

Mike Albertson

In a treaty negotiation. We can all do back of the envelope calculations. I point you to a recent podcast that that Frank Miller did, something on some of these back in the calculation, since he's actually done the DoD homework inside the building. But I just caution, like, don't get hung up on a specific number right now that it's 1700 or 2000 or 2500 or something.

00;15;41;19 - 00;16;01;11

Mike Albertson

Because honestly, we don't know what the treaty requirements are behind the scenes. And that is going to dictate, the numbers discussion. So, I think but really we really need to focus on in terms of arms control is what do we think the problems are. With Russia and China is arms control the right solution to those problems?

00;16;01;14 - 00;16;16;03

Mike Albertson

What are we willing to give up to get what we want? And what kind of agreement do I need to construct to get there? And I think this is where the thinking in the community is really atrophied. I mean, we all got used to the purpose of arms control being, you know, simply the numbers are going down.

00;16;16;03 - 00;16;36;12

Mike Albertson

We all know the numbers are going down and we're largely managing in a constructive way the process of going down. You weren't dealing cards back and forth of real value. You kind of knew where you wanted to go. You knew where you want to end up. It was just a question of sort of getting there. Now. People have real demands from the Russians and the Chinese.

00;16;36;18 - 00;16;56;27

Mike Albertson

They want sort of the moon and the stars from those countries, but they don't really know concretely what they want in terms of security concerns, and they aren't really willing to trade a whole lot of U.S. value to get them. I just take sort of tactical nuclear weapons as an example. You know, Russia has a lot more, we didn't really care for a long time.

00;16;57;00 - 00;17;15;21

Mike Albertson

Russia felt the need to get a lot of contextual nuclear weapons because they had a conventional force, suspiciously. And all of a sudden, you know, these things aren't a new start. They were a big issue. They have a lot and we don't it's not fair. It gives them advantage because they're unconstrained. But what actually do people want in terms of Russian nuclear weapons?

00;17;15;24 - 00;17;35;18

Mike Albertson

People would say numerical reductions. They have a lot, and we don't. Numerical reductions really don't solve your security problem, which is, you know, Russia's willingness to use these things first, to address, you know, a failed conventional attack or to use these things is sort of coercive leverage. It doesn't really matter if Russia has 2000 or 500 or 200.

00;17;35;21 - 00;17;50;28

Mike Albertson

You can spend a lot of time and energy reducing numbers but not solve the real security problem you face. What do you want me to do if it isn't a reduction, do you want me to move them further away from operational units? Do you want me to consolidate them in a couple places? You want me to ban them on certain platforms?

00;17;51;04 - 00;18;15;13

Mike Albertson

We don't really get to this level of granularity in the discussion. And to do any of those things, you would have to pay a lot. And the Russian precondition, that they've stayed up front with tactical weapons is basically the US has to withdraw all the tactical weapons from Europe. So if you aren't willing to sort of pay that price or whittle that price down through a series of pretty detailed negotiations, it's kind of a...

00;18;15;13 - 00;18;39;26

Mike Albertson

It's kind of a false lead. So formal arms control, why don't why do we do it? Why would we do it? Now to me it really has two purposes. One is and I and other people have highlighted this in articles and podcasts. And we've highlighted in some analytic reports we've done is one dealing with the short-term problem of how does the US respond to what China is doing in terms of its buildup?

00;18;39;29 - 00;19;00;07

Mike Albertson

And I'd argue there's value to knowing what Russia is doing while we while we respond to what China is doing and the other is dealing with this longer term problem with managing a three party nuclear issue, as we and China and Russia all go forward with modernization programs into, you know, over the next decade, in the late 2030s to do the former.

00;19;00;09 - 00;19;20;18

Speaker 3

And this is a topic of big debate. You know what? What is the number? Do we stay a...? I don't think 1550 is the right number to respond to the former problem. I guess my argument would be that, you know what? I don't think that new start limits are a stable equilibrium. If the treaty is not in place and the verification regime is not in place.

00;19;20;21 - 00;19;44;24

Mike Albertson

This to me has parallels of sort of salt to limits in the early 1980s, sort of a handshake agreement about abiding, you know, sort of tends to break down because, you know, each side's going to suit the other one is breaking the limits in an information vacuum. And that's just going to lead to problems. Second, I mean, it's been recognized by a lot of bipartisan things like the Strategic Posture Commission.

00;19;44;26 - 00;20;08;28

Mike Albertson

And the Russians should understand this, that the US has to make some adjustments on the strategic posture side and move beyond the limits of new start to stay consistent with our, our targeting policy. And deal with the growth in the Chinese ICBM silo force. You can't have sort of

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viable arms control in this environment. If you're not letting you know, DoD Joint Staff, Stratcom, take care of the deterrence business.

00;20;09;00 - 00;20;44;07

Mike Albertson

So, it's just letting the consensus that's been agreed sort of go forward on the need to respond in some way. I think lastly, it's like the longer you place unreasonable demands on new start to account for emerging challenges. You know, 15 years after it was signed, I think more you tarnish the successful legacy of what it did, which was, you know, important in that it managed a complex Russia and modernization cycle, and it was durable and important enough to last through a lot of problems in the bilateral relationship, really only getting derailed with a global pandemic and the biggest land war in Europe since 1945.

00;20;44;12 - 00;21;01;24

Mike Albertson

It's like, just let it die a natural death, you know, let it let it take credit for what it did and create something new to deal with. You know that the current challenges that we face there is this fear, right? That if there is no numerical anchor point, you know what will happen. And this is a perfectly understandable fear.

00;21;01;24 - 00;21;21;11

Mike Albertson

I don't I don't dismiss it. It's why don't we haven't faced for decades. There's also this sort of psychological factor that I think people need to recognize of numbers all of a sudden appearing to go up rather than down, which, again, it's perfectly understandable. This triggers sort of an emotional psychological reaction here, I'd say. And again, this is a topic that's come up.

00;21;21;17 - 00;21;45;25

Mike Albertson

There are limitations involved, right. Like I remember as a kid going on road trips across the country, to the West Coast, and you get to Montana and there were no posted speed limits. And so, you know, the idea was, oh my, oh my goodness, you can drive as fast as you want because there is no speed limits, but you still have the limitations of how comfortable somebody feels going.

00;21;46;00 - 00;22;07;01

Mike Albertson

The fact that you're driving a ten-year-old station wagon, you know, it's not like you all of a sudden go 150 miles an hour because there is no speed limit. There are some challenges that are involved. And I think, you know, just because there are no limits doesn't mean a buildup is going to be immediate, rapid and super.

00;22;07;01 - 00;22;35;06

Mike Albertson

In terms of numbers, I think, you know, the conversation that's being had is talking about conversions, maybe doing some uploading. But based on, you know, the realities of defense, industrial bases, hedges, stockpiles, things like that, that, that are realities. I think if you keep expectations manageable, you can build the outlines of the new formal arms control room with Russia around this new term problem.

00;22;35;08 - 00;22;56;07

Mike Albertson

You can give it a five-year duration with an option for, you know, five year extension. You can tell the Chinese they're more than welcome to join, and you can give yourself an exit clause in the agreement that if China gets beyond a certain point where we feel comfortable, you will withdraw from the treaty. Why does this to me sort of make sense in terms of the next step?

00;22;56;09 - 00;23;19;01

Mike Albertson

First, I think you need to do something legally binding, to do all of the things you need to do, that's durable enough to survive administration changes in the US and ups and downs with Russia. Like you have to have a legally binding forcing function to just exist. You have a strong verification framework from New Start that exchanges, inspections, notifications, etc..

00;23;19;04 - 00;23;37;22

Mike Albertson

You have some markers that you need to address, including the new Russian nuclear arms for Ukraine systems. To me, it's pretty straightforward. If you are going to ban them, you're probably just going to capture them in the limits, you know, new definitions, new inspection procedures. You can't discriminate them against any in any sort of way.

00;23;37;25 - 00;24;00;09

Mike Albertson

To me, that's doable. The Russians will put it before us. You have to negotiate that first away. The second is addressing Russian tactile nuclear warheads. In line with sort of the resolution ratification here. The basis for what we have now is, is we have nothing. So, anything better than nothing? Better addresses Russian nuclear weapons. You can do this to me pretty easy.

00;24;00;12 - 00;24;29;21

Mike Albertson

Data exchanges, maybe visits. You can, you know, simply count cans that the Russians declare to, you know, contain a warhead and same for us. Just going to a nuclear weapons storage site is more than we've ever done. You could also get a more technically complex, work's been done on this. That's been highlighted. You could try to go for a total warhead count, but I think this is where you know that as you get more and more complicated and you try to do more and more attack to new warheads, things are going to get really complicated, really fast.

00;24;29;21 - 00;24;55;05

Mike Albertson

But I think you can do this pretty simply. You have broad political guidance and then, you know, the technical experts are going to go in and hash this out in the negotiations probably means, you know, to get something on novel systems, to get something on, on total warheads or tactical warheads, probably missile the words missile defense are going to have to appear in this agreement, but it's up to you to negotiate that in a way that doesn't limit what the United States needs to do.

00;24;55;07 - 00;25;12;02

Mike Albertson

Maybe they get to go to Fort Greely and pop open a clamshell door and look at an interceptor. Maybe we get to do the same with Moscow interceptors. But like, maybe you have to give some briefings on Golden Dome. But you have to give the Russians something that checks the missile defense box that doesn't open you to criticism that we're that we're limiting ourselves.

00;25;12;05 - 00;25;36;22

Mike Albertson

The cap. You can set the cap wherever you know, DoD does its analysis. You can set it pretty high. You can not set a cap at all. Because I would argue the value is sort of managing information exchange with the Russians as opposed to trying to, you know, set a cap on sort of a question mark of where the Chinese are going, how, you know, why does this provide value, to us?

00;25;36;25 - 00;25;55;03

Mike Albertson

If Russia says negotiate, you know, let's negotiate. Great. I think I think that's fine. We can start talking and see where it goes. If they say no, we can go about our deterrence business, I think, with a clear conscience. And the rest of the world asks, what do you do in an arms control? Why are you not doing arms control?

00;25;55;06 - 00;26;12;22

Mike Albertson

You say we have a concrete proposal. I'll, I'll show it to you. I'll send it to you. Here it is very detailed. Moscow said no. But here's our proposal. We're trying to negotiate in good faith, you know, call Cole Moscow and raise your concerns with them. Does this solve all of our problems? This proposal will do that.

00;26;12;22 - 00;26;33;09

Mike Albertson

Absolutely not. But it solves, I think, a real short-term problem. And it gets us at least prepared for dealing with the longer term problem. And it allows us to sort of address our deterrence requirements over the long term. There are other some other sort of big picture areas which I'd highlight, and we think very, very discreetly about sort of what the next proposal would be like.

00;26;33;09 - 00;26;57;26

Mike Albertson

Big picture stuff, that we should also be thinking about. One is strategic stability. I think, however you define it, sort of strategic stability is complex. It's complex in the Cold War, people ignore that now, it's more complex now, more multi-domain, more multipolar. But you're never going to solve for strategic stability. And you're also unlikely to achieve some, you know, halcyon past moment of strategic stability.

00;26;57;26 - 00;27;26;27

Mike Albertson

Right. The 1990 agreement with the U.S. and the Soviet Union on the topic, maybe, you know, 2009, 2010, where there's Obama and Medvedev smiling and signing a new Start treaty, you're not going to sort of solve the equation for strategic stability or have a world where there is no instability anymore. So, you know, I guess I would make the following analogy with strategic stability for people who are not sort of arms control, people who've read, you know, 60 years of

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history.

00;27;29;14 - 00;27;55;01

Mike Albertson

I look at it like I read a book a few years ago called The Great River, The Making and Unmaking of the Mississippi by an author named Boyce Uphold. And he was talking about sort of the Army Corps of Engineers and dealing with the Mississippi River. And the point was that sort of whatever you do along the river, it creates problems elsewhere that it's a big, complicated force with a lot of water.

00;27;55;03 - 00;28;19;02

Mike Albertson

And if you, you know, build a dike here or you build a dam here, you divert the flow somewhere, it's going to lead to problems elsewhere. And all we're trying to do in sort of arms control is creating little solvable things here and there along a much greater river. And in doing so, you might channel instabilities into other directions, and you have to be aware of that.

00;28;19;02 - 00;28;42;01

Mike Albertson

And also, if you create something, you have to go in and maintain it and keep it up. But there is always going to be instabilities in this equation with Russia and with China. And all you're really doing in deterrence, and arms control is making a calculation of where you think it is more risky or less risky, to do something.

00;28;42;03 - 00;29;10;16

Mike Albertson

So, all of these debates that we have in the field are about where we think it's best to take risks, and we should just be open about those calculations and assumptions. There is no, you know, riskless, absolutely stabilizing option in the security environment. You can and that includes not making choices on things. So one, I think we just need to be sort of open and real about stability is like something we are just going to have to manage and channel and deal with and the no arms control agreement or no weapons system is going to solve all the problems.

00;29;10;16 - 00;29;32;08

Mike Albertson

It's going to be a very sort of holistic, emerging, evolving environment that we have to work together to solve. The second is, you know, I think there's a need to build a new coalition on arms control. You know, arms control and deterrence have become sort of bifurcated. But I definitely see a middle sort of emerging. And I want to foster that middle.

00;29;32;10 - 00;29;52;00

Mike Albertson

I want, you know, there to be, you know, a clear sort of majority in the middle who believe strongly in sort of taking care of deterrence business, but sort of sees value in doing arms control agreements and things that we think are solvable problems. What is that path to a viable, you know, 70, 30, you know, Senate ratification vote?

00;29;52;02 - 00;30;11;29

Mike Albertson

How do I have a coalition with allied and nonaligned states on US arms control proposals? How do I you know, create, create this world? And I'm not going to, you know, wave a wand and, and go back to the kinds of expert debates that we had in the 1980s. But I see this, you know, starting to emerge in the conversations that we're having in the community.

00;30;11;29 - 00;30;27;27

Mike Albertson

You see it in this podcast. I think you see it in the Strategic Stability Podcast that, you know, between the and Avery and Austin Long. And while you're t you're doing see it in the findings of the Street Posture Commission. I mean the problems are now and you have this two-year problem. Resources are finite. Industrial capacity is finite.

00;30;27;29 - 00;30;53;18

Mike Albertson

There's a place for practical arms control here. There's a way that people can see value in this, and it's just making arguments to different constituent camps that there's, there's something in it for them to, to do agreements like this, to allow us to better understand Russia so we can focus on China, to avoid, you know, costly worst case planning that's going to spend time, energy and money in the nuclear space that you'd rather spend in.

00;30;53;18 - 00;31;13;16

Mike Albertson

Five building conventional weapons, to allow us to sort of manage and engage adversaries in the midst of competition elsewhere, and to allow us to get on with our, our strategic modernization program. It just has to be an arms control program grounded in the reality. And I think the final thing I'll talk about is sort of the need to rebuild muscle memory in the field.

00;31;13;19 - 00;31;35;19

Mike Albertson

We haven't had an active treaty negotiation for 15 years. I was 27 when we were negotiating new start. I just turned 43. You have a big missing middle class in arms control. Just like in the deterrence field. Maybe half of those people are on the call right now. You know, senior experts who've spent a lot of time and energy mentoring or leaving the field.

00;31;35;19 - 00;31;59;11

Mike Albertson

You have a very motivated young cadre of next generation nuclear experts coming up, who lack practical experience sort of doing the work behind the scenes. If you want to do this work, you're going to need a big staff to do it. And it means you have to build a cadre of people. And the best way to build a country is to have a real negotiation that brings a lot of new talent and a lot of new thinking, to the field.

00;31;59;13 - 00;32;17;27

Mike Albertson

So, I've put a lot of thought energy into, into thinking about sort of new proposals, the problems we face, and what those agreements might look like. It's been in some of my, my recent writings, in the past few years, which people can find on the internet, you know, will the Russians play? That would be the criticism.

00;32;17;27 - 00;32;46;11

Mike Albertson

Sort of. None of this matters if the Russians don't engage. You know, maybe. Maybe not. I think that is that is an open question to be seen. Russia might not want to engage. We might not want to engage with Russia, but Russia is going to face some real problems. No matter how the Ukraine issue is resolved, with their conventional forces, with their domestic industrial, economy, they might see value in sort of stabilizing things with the US in the nuclear space while they think about what they want to do with their next modernization cycle.

00;32;46;13 - 00;33;11;23

Mike Albertson

Sort of never say never, right. There were a lot of bad takes in the early 1980s about sort of arms control is dead. It's never coming back. And then it did because things changed. The geopolitical environment changed. So, I'm just really happy to be having this conversation. You know, we had an open question at a workshop a few years ago about sort of the coming arms control interregnum and whether this would be long or short.

00;33;11;25 - 00;33;33;27

Mike Albertson

I think regardless of whether it's as long or short, you know, we need to prepare for a world both with and without arms control. And I've tried to do some of that thinking, and I'd encourage other people to, to think about that as well. If you are in the arms control space, a maxim that a former boss of mine had was you can't fight something with nothing in arms control.

00;33;33;27 - 00;33;59;09

Mike Albertson

You have to have a concrete something you can point to. Otherwise, you're arguing about nothing. Or you're arguing about the other side's proposal. So I encourage us, for us, you know, the United States to develop an arms control proposal that makes sense for us, to make it specific, to make it consistent with what we feel our deterrence obligations are and to put it out there, and see if the Russians and the Chinese engage in if not, you know, move on to other things.

00;33;59;09 - 00;34;07;08

Mike Albertson

So, I'll leave it at that. Peter, happy to take questions from the audience and again, very much appreciate the opportunity.

00;34;07;11 - 00;34;47;15

Peter Huessy

That was extraordinarily well done. I'm going to pay it to go read the transcript. Again. And because it's filled with really good, good thoughts, no, I have a bunch of questions I've taken from the chat. Number one, what are the directions of the Chinese and Russian nuclear forces that most worry you? That could be subject to arms control limits?

00;34;47;17 - 00;35;09;14

Mike Albertson

So, the thing that probably worries me most about the Russians is not the novel systems, although I see them as sort of I mean, I see them as sort of costly and unnecessary and sort of

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environmentally stupid and dangerous. So, I see I don't see them as good. But I don't see them as the biggest problem we face.

00;35;09;14 - 00;35;40;18

Mike Albertson

I think if Russia wants to spend a lot of time, energy and money doing these magical missile defense wonder weapons like let, let them, let them do that, what I really worry about is big, heavy ICBMs, which Russia has always had a fixation about. Yes. And, you know, that was a problem that was identified long in the past, and it was dealt with in past arms control agreements, and it was tried to be tackled and things like start to and start three.

00;35;40;21 - 00;36;09;24

Mike Albertson

But that's what concerns me most is, is that Russia, once it gets its sample program sort of up and up and running or its Satan program or whatever, whatever they happen to be calling it. Have you I been going sort of big into that is their response to whatever they see us doing in missile defense. Think that that is a lot of warheads on sort of a quick alert posture in silos, but they still see them as vulnerable like that.

00;36;09;24 - 00;36;36;27

Mike Albertson

That is that direction. China I think the biggest, the biggest challenge is just sort of it is unknown where they are going and where they will stop. I think if China were to come out tomorrow and say, we want to be at parity with the United States, that is our goal. Once we get to 1550 or 2000 or wherever, we will be comfortable.

00;36;36;29 - 00;37;03;15

Mike Albertson

And that took away a lot of the unknowns in the equation. I think that would be stabilizing. But like how China chooses to build its force, I don't think is destabilizing. I think it's simply like the unknown of where China is going is the big question. And they see value in, I think, cultivating that unknown or they themselves might not know, in fact, where they are going and where they will end up because it's a dynamic thing over the next ten years.

00;37;03;17 - 00;37;12;24

Mike Albertson

But to me, it's not really the Chinese. Are they doing ICBMs? The rest will be arms. And it's the unknowns in the equation.

00;37;12;27 - 00;37;37;24

Peter Huessy

That gets right to the second question, which I was thinking of, is, given the difficulty of having one ceiling for three countries in which two countries you add it up, it's got to be more than the third, right? So if you don't have that, but you have the goal of transparency, assuming you can trust but verify, right. Which goes along.

00;37;38;01 - 00;37;58;15

Peter Huessy

If you can't do well, it would transparency as a initial step. Again, assuming that you can verify

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because you got to know where this stuff is to go, look at it and say, yeah, okay I'm comfortable with you. Got X, whatever kind of systems is that something that's doable?

00;37;58;18 - 00;38;29;00

Mike Albertson

Yes. So I have been arguing for the last few years and sort of fleshing out this argument and getting some resistance and trying to figure out how to better my argument of if you have problems with numbers, and you probably do have a problem with numbers and A33 body problem, can you have an agreement where the purpose of the agreement is essentially to verify the accuracy of the declared data, but without limits and again, this was this is the purpose of the verification regime, a new start, rather a formal agreement.

00;38;29;00 - 00;38;57;03

Mike Albertson

It's verifying the accuracy of the declared data. So you don't have caps. Everyone's doing what they feel they need to do. But you have data exchanges, you have notifications, you have inspections. You have confidence that when you go to see something, because you largely know from national technical means and other sources what you're going to see when you go to see it, and then you're getting sort of confirmatory or not information from arms control.

00;38;57;06 - 00;39;20;13

Mike Albertson

And you go take a look at things that you consider to be interesting or problematic, and then you're allowed to have sort of a formal conversation with the other side that they have to come to you. That to me is sort of 95% of the problem. And, and sort of caps and what is the right number, I think then becomes this sort of distracting and perhaps unsolvable question.

00;39;20;15 - 00;39;29;23

Mike Albertson

That doesn't allow us to get the 95% of value that I, that I want to get, which is just sort of what are we doing in avoiding the worst case analysis?

00;39;29;25 - 00;39;43;13

Peter Huessy

Here's a question that's come up in the chat. I'm just going to read it to you. How does arms control pan out with extended deterrence and desired levels of allies, Allied involvement in the West Pacific, East Asia and in Europe?

00;39;43;15 - 00;40;08;16

Mike Albertson

I think this this gets to this question of how deep do you really want to go on this tactical nuclear weapons question? Because, you know, there has been a real identified need for some sort of change in U.S. extended deterrence posture, both in Europe and Asia to address, you know, what Russia has and what China is doing.

00;40;08;18 - 00;40;41;08

Mike Albertson

And so the question is, the deeper you go into the tactical nuclear weapons problem, the more allies are going to be concerned, the more they're going to want to be involved, and the more

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they're going to have to play, probably in some sort of inspection and verification regime. If you're basing things outside the United States. So, you know, to me, you can do the goal is defined, I think, something simple and useful that checks the box on tact, on nuclear weapons, that gives you more than you have now.

00;40;41;10 - 00;41;04;26

Mike Albertson

But I fear what often happens is that people say I will solve 100% for the tactical nuclear weapons problem, and I and I think just given how big tackle nuclear weapons are, how they can be taken apart and put back together and be in bits and pieces and, and storage sites and abroad, it is a really, really messy problem the further you go into the technical world.

00;41;04;28 - 00;41;21;08

Mike Albertson

And it's not that we shouldn't think about the technical problem and that be the long term perhaps solution. But in terms of getting into the pool of intact nuclear weapons, I would start wading into the shallow end as opposed jumping to the deep end, where again, you run into a lot of complications with that base.

00;41;21;11 - 00;41;58;27

Peter Huessy

Okay. A couple other questions here. What kind of I'm going to give you two and you can answer them both, and then we'll go on. What kind of risk reduction measures do you think the Chinese would be open to right now? Number one. And number two, I mentioned this to Rose when she spoke, our last one of our recent meetings and that is go to India and Pakistan and make a deal between those two and try it first with them, given the fact they both have extended deterrent mentors, to some degree now.

00;41;58;27 - 00;42;25;01

Peter Huessy

I mean, we're now with Pakistan, where we'd like to be allies with India. On the other hand, Russia was a long term ally of India, and China was, of course, built the Khan network, which I want to get to later. But those two issues, what the risk reduction measures with respect to China and in the absence that could you go and do an arms control deal between India and Pakistan, for example?

00;42;25;03 - 00;42;51;07

Mike Albertson

Yes. So, so on the China piece, when I'm writing a paper on this now, I'm just skeptical that sort of risk reduction, like the term risk reduction is a is a useful organizing concept to do business with the Chinese, simply because I think the Chinese see value in creating risks for the United States. And so reducing risks is not really something that they're interested in doing.

00;42;51;09 - 00;42;53;05

Peter Huessy

No, they're in the business of doing the opposite.

00;42;53;11 - 00;43;32;16

Mike Albertson

They're because they're kind of in the business of doing the opposite. And it's useful for us to try to reduce risk because we don't want them to change the status quo. It's useful for them to create risks in an effort to change the status quo, where they're sort of useful conversations to be had. If it's not about risk reduction, and they probably aren't getting involved in arms control, I think it is, you know, pushing back on the Chinese notion that escalation can be managed, that there is sort of a clear path to victory in the Indo-Pacific, which would then would lead you to conversations about, you know, war termination, de-escalation off ramps and

00;43;32;16 - 00;43;53;13

Mike Albertson

like, very messy nuclear situation. So having those kinds of conversations with the Chinese, presenting them with, you probably aren't going to have this unfold the way you think it's going to unfold, which is going to lead to some really hard, messy nuclear issues of which the United States has some experience. But like you and I, China need to talk about those.

00;43;53;16 - 00;44;22;22

Mike Albertson

Otherwise, I think really you are kind of waiting. You are waiting for China to engage in this, and you're waiting for them based on their own calculations to decide. It's in my it's in my interest to get in this because I don't like the way the world is going when I'm not right. On India-Pakistan, I think having just become sort of involved in India-Pakistan stuff over the last couple of years, because I have a colleague, Zachary Davis, who is who's one of the experts in this field.

00;44;22;24 - 00;44;45;28

Mike Albertson

It is really, really interesting. And for people who want to get into the nuclear space, India-Pakistan is one of the most fascinating things you can study in terms of the nuclear space, both in terms of like the dangers involved in what those two sides are doing, but also the strange sort of modus operandi they have between the two of them where like they somehow figure it out.

00;44;46;00 - 00;44;46;08

Mike Albertson

You know.

00;44;46;11 - 00;45;10;12

Peter Huessy

When I worked at the United Nations, I had in the Office of Energy and Environment at the U.N. Environment Program, the big boss was a nuclear physicist from Pakistan. The little boss was a nuclear physicist from India. And their dynamic was extraordinary because one of them had been kicked out of Pakistan, saying he opposed the development of the nuclear bomb.

00;45;10;14 - 00;45;32;25

Peter Huessy

And they said, here's your choice. We'll put you in prison or we'll give you a cushy job in the U.N. where you be quiet. So but it was, I was going to say, good luck with India and Pakistan because but it's manageable. You both got about 100 warheads. They're right there. And they have an incentive to make sure nobody goes first, right?

00;45;32;25 - 00;45;51;15

Peter Huessy

Or second, they never use these things because who knows? I apologize for interrupting you, but it is an extraordinary, I think, an opportunity given they recently had a, thank God it didn't escalate out of control. I'm sorry about that, but go get it.

00;45;51;15 - 00;46;15;09

Mike Albertson

You know, I mean, I think it's I think it's worthy of a lot of interesting study. I think it's, you know, if you can't have, you know, if you can't get the Brits and the French involved and have like a real P5 discussion of, you know, collective nuclear action, India-Pakistan is a really interesting thing to put some intellectual capital on, whether they want to deal with each other or not.

00;46;15;11 - 00;46;36;27

Mike Albertson

But understanding this problem of like, what a, what an unconstrained world looks like where like you have hot lines, but do you use the hot lines or not? And, you know, all those interesting dynamics that take place in India and Pakistan are sort, I think, worthy of attention, worthy of worthy some study and worthy drives conclusions on and worthy of proposing some solutions, whether they end up end up paying for it or not.

00;46;36;27 - 00;46;40;26

Mike Albertson

It's, it's a it's a cool thing to look at if you're a nuclear policy expert.

00;46;40;28 - 00;47;03;16

Peter Huessy

And I want to go back to the theater systems in 1999, Mr. Yeltsin said, develop battlefield nuclear warheads that are small, very accurate, low yield, but I can use it in the battlefield. And that was April 1999.

00;47;03;19 - 00;47;38;19

Peter Huessy

Yeltsin. Excuse me. Putin has made and his colleagues have made somewhere the vicinity of 40 or to 45 explicit nuclear threats to use. Their weapons in the Ukraine theater. Unless if the United States did, you know, gave Ukraine the wrong kind of weapons or Ukraine hit the wrong kind of targets. My question to you is, and this is there's a division in this country.

00;47;39;14 - 00;48;06;22

Peter Huessy

Is it bluff or is this real? Because those who don't want to escalate have said it's real. And those who said give Ukraine what they need to, quote unquote, win. How we want to define it is they think it's largely bluff. Yeah. I'm not sure the I don't know how you prove it because it's in Putin's mind. But see what you can do with that.

00;48;06;24 - 00;48;40;06

Mike Albertson

Right. No, that's that is a that is a good a good big hard question. And, you know, getting back to this sort of strategic stability question, I mean, the Russians have they are both very specific about this, and they're very ambiguous about this. So they can sort of play it both ways in terms

of specificity. I get concerned when I see, you know, real things being approached that fit sort of General Staff criteria for when we would use battlefield nuclear weapons, right?

00;48;40;06 - 00;49;14;17

Mike Albertson

Where there's conventional collapse on the battlefield, where I've lost control of a front where there is, you know, one particular strategic target that if I hit would change the course of a conventional conflict on the ground, you know, things like that, where at certain points in time in the Ukraine situation, you know, you did see the Russian military approaching those conditions, and that that then becomes the sort of catch 22 of it's like when you've won conventionally, that's when the nuclear danger is, is the highest, and you have to deal with it.

00;49;14;19 - 00;49;37;26

Mike Albertson

Then there, however, is all of this sort of deliberately created political ambiguity about, you know, when the Russian state is threatened, the existence of the Russian state is threatened, like, you know, nuclear weapons are on the table. Or when, you know, something of strategic value in Russia has been hit, it's nuclear weapons are a viable response. And that's where you see a lot of the threats come in.

00;49;37;29 - 00;50;12;17

Mike Albertson

And we've had conversations in the two world with Russian nuclear doctors who basically have grown frustrated over the Ukraine crisis of why aren't you taking our nuclear threat seriously? And the answer is sort of, you make so many of them and they come from so many different Russian officials, and you never actually follow through on any of them, you know, thank goodness, that it's really hard to sort of separate the signal from the noise on, on your, you know, on your nuclear, you know, threats because you, because you throw it around so casually.

00;50;12;20 - 00;50;32;28

Mike Albertson

And I think this is one of the big debates that's going to take place in Russia, sort of post Ukraine is we Russia spent a lot of time and energy developing all these technological weapons systems. Were they actually effective or not in deterring the West? And I think there's going to be pros and cons to that debate.

00;50;33;00 - 00;50;36;13

Mike Albertson

But they spent a lot of energy and time and money on these things that they.

00;50;37;05 - 00;51;00;07

Mike Albertson

Use and may or may not have actually deterred us from supplying the Ukrainians with lots of military systems. So I think it then sort of going forward, it'll be interesting how the nuclear debate goes in Russia and how they choose to prioritize maybe more tactical nuclear weapons systems where they say, actually, what we need is a lot more air defense, a lot more conventional strike, a lot more, you know, if those kind of things.

00;51;00;13 - 00;51;05;27

Mike Albertson

So, it is a really big open debate that I think you're going to see unfold over the next couple of years.

00;51;05;29 - 00;51;15;11

Peter Huessy

Would it be fair to say that to some degree, the United States took it took hard to turn off the table by saying, we don't want to risk escalation.

00;51;15;14 - 00;51;41;28

Mike Albertson

I mean, I think it gets to this question of there is sometimes value in being ambiguous, like we, the United States, all you know, we tend to see value in being transparent and open and clear when our adversaries see value in being sort of unclear and raising uncertainties and fears and risks in the mind of our opponent.

00;51;42;00 - 00;51;51;04

Mike Albertson

And, you know, and the criticism is always like, we have to be clear or else it's destabilizing. And sometimes I would argue like it's stabilizing.

00;51;52;19 - 00;52;15;13

Mike Albertson

Make the Russians think, you know, that we could do things, because, you know, actually, our best ally is the Russian analysis of what they think we can do because they think we can do everything. And so when you categorically rule out, we're going to go here, we're going to do this, we're going to do those things. It makes them more comfortable and more confident.

00;52;15;13 - 00;52;16;14

Mike Albertson

Sometimes.

00;52;16;16 - 00;52;54;10

Peter Huessy

Yeah. That's that was that's what I said I think was the problem. There are two related questions here. What are incentives that we could put on the table that would bring Russia or China to the arms control table number one. And number two, instead of having an overall number. What about ceilings on specific weapon types? Now I have suggested to Rose that Rose got Miller that we put a ceiling on large curved biceps, which you mentioned earlier, and she tended to think that that ship has sailed, though.

00;52;54;13 - 00;53;33;06

Peter Huessy

That's the thing we worry about in terms of preemption. Yeah, more than anything, as opposed to using theater nuclear weapons first, which isn't a numbers game, it's just if any number is used, and that's the escalate to win problem we have. So is it worth pursuing ceilings on specific types and or what incentives are available, do you think to get the these two adversaries to the table, assuming what you want them to do at the table is a good objective?

00;53;33;08 - 00;53;43;28

Peter Huessy

I'm assuming that that we're just not going to have them to come to the table for nothing. But if there's something we really need, like transparency, agreement or something.

00;53;44;01 - 00;54;07;03

Mike Albertson

So, I looked at I looked at both these topics a couple of years ago in a, in a paper I wrote, called Closing the Gap, where I was thinking about, you know, how do you do concrete arms control stuff going forward in terms of incentives for getting the Russians and the Chinese table? I think you have to you have to say that you are willing to at least discuss Russian and Chinese concerns that they bring to the table.

00;54;07;10 - 00;54;24;02

Mike Albertson

So, you have a concrete proposal of what you want to talk about, and you don't immediately rule out talking about things that the Russians and the Chinese will bring to the table. I think by saying, like, we're not going to talk about missile defense. Like, what incentive do the Russians and the Chinese have to come and talk to you?

00;54;24;04 - 00;54;47;02

Mike Albertson

And my experience with this is sort of you start in missile defense, where the Russians obviously had a precondition that, like the words missile defense must appear somewhere in the treaty. Everyone was very worried about it. But the negotiating team managed to negotiate essentially something very meaningless into the treaty that allowed the Russians to check the box and didn't constrain us in any way on the defense.

00;54;47;05 - 00;55;03;11

Mike Albertson

And again, this is this is the goal of any good negotiator. Is you put something like that on the table, the Russian, the Chinese are going to have a very maximalist demand. They're going to stick to it for a long time. And you have to try to whittle that down over the course of the negotiation to something that you can live with.

00;55;03;13 - 00;55;26;04

Mike Albertson

But by just saying, we're not going to talk about it, you're sort of removing the incentive they have to negotiate. This question about supplements, you can make things you can make things more complicated. You can say, freedom to mix, do it. Do what you want. You can do supplements. If the sub limits are actually limiting, right.

00;55;26;04 - 00;55;43;09

Mike Albertson

If you are actually sort of preventing one side from doing what it wants to do, there's going to be some cost involved and you just have to be aware of that and say it is a value to me to cap Russian heavy base becomes they might have limits on they might put limits on bombers or something like that.

00;55;43;09 - 00;56;03;09

Mike Albertson

Right. Like that. That is going to be the cost that they put on the table that you might pay or not pay, depending on how valuable a supplement is. Or you can create sort of supplement without meaning, but just sort of caps, you know, you can have ten Poseidon's or you can have 200, you know, B20 ones or something like that.

00;56;03;14 - 00;56;22;05

Mike Albertson

It doesn't really limit the program record or something like that on either side, but you're sort of capping something that you kind of see as value to prevent sort of a breakout. So, like again, I think this gets to this point I was raising about supplements involved, sort of knowing what you want and what you think is of real security importance.

00;56;22;05 - 00;56;33;00

Mike Albertson

And we haven't done a whole lot of that thinking. But I think going into an agreement, we should do a fair amount of thinking on that, that sort of question and whether supplements are applicable.

00;56;33;02 - 00;57;03;03

Peter Huessy

Well, we are now at 10:57. This has been an extraordinary conversation. Michael, you've done a great job. I'm going to turn it back to my president, Jim Petrosky, who's head of the National Institute of Deterrence Studies. And, Jim, if you have any questions you'd like to follow up with or any comments you'd like to make, and then I'll have Mike finish by giving us kind of a 1-to-2-minute summary of what he hopes people have gotten as a message.

00;57;03;05 - 00;57;05;22

Peter Huessy

For today. Yeah.

00;57;05;22 - 00;57;24;18

James Petrosky

Thanks, Peter. And, again, thank you. Michael. Yeah, you're. By the way, I find you have a very, a very good quality speaking voice. So, you do well in this forum. So, I just wanted to pass that on. But, I do have a question for you that probably will let you sort of help you too, to summarize this.

00;57;24;20 - 00;57;43;12

James Petrosky

And that, is something I tended to lean into in a, in the show prep, and that is what do you see or how do you define the ultimate goal of an, nuclear arms treaty or maybe even the, you know, the intermediate goals because that's, you know, everything's got to have a goal. And I've never really been able to wrap my head around it.

00;57;43;12 - 00;57;53;22

James Petrosky

So, I'll pass that on to you. And you can use that as your closer if you want to. And I just wanted to say thank you to our audience. Of course, you make us you make us happen. Go ahead.

00;57;53;24 - 00;58;14;01

Mike Albertson

Oh, Jim. Very, very, very kind of you. My dad was a college professor, so I spent time watching him do Greek and Roman art history lessons. And I was like, if he can make that interesting, maybe I can make arms control interesting. And that's a hard thing to do. So, let the goal, I guess if I had one word, what is the goal of arms control?

00;58;14;04 - 00;58;34;02

Mike Albertson

It's not reductions. It's not limitations. It's management. I look at this as sort of a management problem for five years and ten years where there's a lot of uncertainties. There's a lot going to be a lot of sort of worst case analyzes done that. I ended up being sort of costly Cul de sacs to go down.

00;58;34;04 - 00;59;02;19

Mike Albertson

And the more information I have and I would think the same cases for the Russians and the Chinese, sort of the information you have on what the other side is doing avoids these kind of worst-case spending exercises that don't actually provide you any security value. And I'm just trying to sort of manage the next modernization cycle between now three countries and again, it might be the case where everyone says, let's just let's just compete for the next ten years and see where we are.

00;59;02;21 - 00;59;19;23

Mike Albertson

But I think where that is going to end up is we're going to be in 2035, and the Russians and the Chinese and the Americans are going to be where we are. And everyone's going to say, are we actually more secure now than we were ten years ago? And the answer will be, yeah, probably not. We still have a lot of concerns.

00;59;19;23 - 00;59;42;10

Mike Albertson

We still have a lot of issues, and everyone knows they didn't. There used to be this thing called arms control that we did in the past. And maybe we, you know, maybe we should go back to it. And at that point, there won't be anybody left who remembers how to do arms control. And we'll sort of be going back to you know, through 1959 and like finding all of the files and remembering like how we did how we did the talks back then.

00;59;42;13 - 00;59;56;13

Mike Albertson

And so to try to avoid that, I'm like, can't we do something sort of reasonable to sort of manage things while we still largely sort of go about our business, but do it in a way that avoids sort of the bigger, bigger pitfalls. I could see.

00;59;56;15 - 01;00;25;24

Peter Huessy

With that. Michael, thank you very much for a wonderful presentation. We invite everybody to hear another, I'm sure, wonderful presentation with Ambassador Chris Ford, who is just an extraordinary, analyst and thinker. Who's going to talk to us about Iran and proliferation and the nonproliferation treaty and what the prospects are there. Again, I want to thank Kimberly, who does wonderful work, organizing and doing the logistics here.

01;00;25;24 - 01;00;46;00

Peter Huessy

And thank you to NIDS for sponsoring this. And to you, Michael, and best to you. And also, would you give me, my friend Brad Roberts, who is your boss, who does such wonderful work out there in California? I want to thank you. And again, we will have you back. Probably early next year. We'll have to figure that out.

01;00;46;00 - 01;01;06;29

Peter Huessy

But again, thank you for your wonderful remarks. And Kimberly will have a transcript. And the video for you probably sometime later today or, fairly soon. And again, thank you to all our participants, our sponsors, some of whom are online right now. Thank you again for your support. And again, Michael, thank you. You did a great job.

01;01;06;29 - 01;01;07;14

Peter Huessy

Thanks.

01;01;07;14 - 01;01;18;00

Mike Albertson

Oh, wonderful. Thank you, Peter. Thanks, everyone, for taking the time out of your morning to listen to me and stay in touch. Openly findable. So, if people have following questions or want to engage more, I'm out there.

01;01;18;03 - 01;01;19;14

Peter Huessy

Okay.