WORKING WITH THE ADVERSARY: GREAT POWER COOPERATION AND NUCLEAR RISK MANAGEMENT

This report explores why and how great powers can cooperatively manage the risk associated with nuclear use and proliferation.

The study lays out three Cold War cases:

1. Eisenhower’s 1955 Open Skies proposal
2. The 1958–61 nuclear test moratorium
3. 1964–66 US-Soviet agreement on NATO nuclear sharing

Key Finding

Risk-reducing great power nuclear cooperation is more likely to develop and endure when:

1. Relative material gains are not perceived as relevant.
2. Policymakers’ time horizons are long.
3. Cheating is difficult to conceal.

Core Recommendations

We recommend the following to U.S. policymakers seeking to manage nuclear risk through cooperation with adversaries:

- **Identify areas** in which neither side (the U.S. nor its rival(s)) would gain unequal benefits from cooperation. Non-proliferation and nuclear safety and security agreements are good historical examples.
- **Decline short-term advantages** during the pursuit of long-term agreements to cooperatively manage nuclear risks—and encourage others to do the same.
- **Tailor agreements** and any corresponding verification regimes so that they are invasive enough to detect cheating in a timely fashion but not so invasive that they become intelligence collection activities that generate relative advantage.

“Although near-term prospects for US cooperation with either Russia or China—let alone both—in the nuclear field appear very dim, there is no reason to assume that this will remain true forever.”
ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

This project also offers two additional sets of recommendations—one at the strategic level and the other focused on tactical-level diplomacy—that bookend these core recommendations.

Helping policy-makers evaluate options and frame decisions:
- Cooperation is sometimes the answer.
- Cooperation usually produces modest results by preserving the status quo balance of advantage.
- Failure is an option.
- The scope of what is possible can change over time.

Helping policy-makers improve their odds of achieving a meaningful and enduring agreement:
- Emphasize common threats.
- Frame the issue as a long-term problem.
- Avoid negotiating in public.
- Keep the number of countries involved small.
- De-link areas of possible cooperation from other issues.
- Understand how scientific uncertainty or evolving science can shape negotiations.
- Define key terms to clarify positions and limit misunderstandings.

To read the full report, Working With the Adversary: Great Power Cooperation And Nuclear Risk Management, visit www.cna.org/nuclear

RECOMMENDATION SUMMARY

ABOUT CNA

CNA is a nonprofit research and analysis organization dedicated to the safety and security of the nation. It operates the Center for Naval Analyses — the federally funded research and development center (FFRDC) of the Department of the Navy — as well as the Institute for Public Research. CNA develops actionable solutions to complex problems of national importance.

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