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Keynote Address: Dr. Kori Schake

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Keynote Address

2022 United States Strategic Command Academic Alliance Conference and
Workshop, March 30-April 1, 2022, Conducted via Zoom

Dr. Kori Schake*

Dr. Tyler White: I am really very pleased to introduce Dr. Kori Schake who is a senior fellow and director of foreign and defense policy studies at the American Enterprise Institute. If you read Dr. Schake's bio, it is long and one of the most impressive bios you will read. She has had a long career in government. She has a distinguished career. She has worked at the State Department, Department of Defense, National Security Council, and the White House. She has also taught at Stanford, West Point, Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, the National Defense University, and the University of Maryland. And above and beyond, she is also a fellow baseball fan. So, I am really excited to turn this over to Dr. Kori Schake. Thank you so much for being here with us this morning. I know it's early where you are, and we very much appreciate it.

Dr. Kori Schake: Oh, Tyler. It is such a pleasure to be in the intellectual company of the academic alliance with STRATCOM. I wish I could have been in Offutt in person. I am instead in Nashville for the unpleasant, but necessary task, of debating John Mearsheimer about the causes of the Ukraine war. I would much rather be having an argument with all of you about the nature of deterrence and whether it's working. I think this is really important and the most understudied area in foreign and defense policy. We have had the luxury of not having to worry about adversaries who might resort to nuclear weapons. We haven't thought as discriminately as we ought to on this. I look forward to this conversation for all of us to sort of exercise the muscles of thinking about it. I would especially hope that where we disagree, we can draw it out. You guys can help me refine in my own thinking about it because I've always believed as a teacher, and as Tyler pointed out, someone who can't hold a job...I have been all over the place. I really think that education is a contact sport. I am privileged to have the pleasure of arguing this morning with you. We have a fabulous test case going on right now in the war Russia has started in Ukraine. For thinking about deterrence and what makes it work and makes it not work...that's my subject this morning.

I should start by saying that I disagree with the STRATCOM Commander about integrated deterrence. Maybe this can be our first point of argument this morning. I struggle to understand the difference between deterrence and integrated deterrence. I understand where Admiral Richard is coming from because we have for a long a time segregated nuclear deterrence as a rare and distinct heart of the deterrent activity. Several STRATCOM Commanders, as he mentioned, have been trying to get reintegration of our thinking and our planning. That's the fundamental concept of integrated deterrence. That, I wholeheartedly agree with.

Deterrence is strongest when it is a spectrum. The spectrum is a continuum all the

way up to the apocalyptic defense of our country and our interests. What I believe I have seen happen is that concept got hijacked by OSD, not simply to mean better integration of our military tools in the deterrence spectrum, but to become a substitute for whole of government operations. Right? That deterrence has to incorporate the State Department, and the Treasury Department, which, again is true, but not the Department of Defense's job, nor is the Department of Defense capable of delivering on that.

I think it's a mistake, actually, to base the national defense strategy on a concept that is only very weakly embraced by the White House. Namely, it is not a major of the component of the national security strategy. It is in the national security strategy where that whole of government emphasis should reside. It seems to me that a better use of the national defense strategy is focusing on the things the Department of Defense actually has the ability to deliver and making sure the integration of nuclear, and conventional, and armament deliveries, and the other things that are in the Department of Defense's purview to contribute to the nation is where the concept should reside. But, that ship has sailed as they say. It's a major element of the national defense strategy, and I think it's going to be more confusing than enlightening.

The early reports on the briefings that the DoD did for Congress and others suggests that it is more confusing than enlightening. And yet, it is being emphasized by the White House and the Defense Department as a major contribution to the war in Ukraine. Right? Both the White House and OSD are using the American policies and policy activities undertaken to assist Ukraine as proof that integrated deterrence is not only working but is the right way to do these things. And, I also disagree with that notion because it seems to me that for an administration that claims integrated deterrence is its purpose, or is its guiding concept, they're actually remarkably bad at integrating military tools, that is the threat of force and the use of force.

Practically the first thing the President said about Russia amassing troops on the order of 200,000 to invade Ukraine, practically the first thing President Biden said was the United States is not going to fight for Ukraine. And the President withdrew the 200 Florida national guardsman who were there as part of a NATO mission training Ukrainian forces. He withdrew the American embassy from Kyiv, and he withdrew the monitors in the OSCE mission in the Donbas eastern region of Ukraine that Russia was occupying. I think all three of those were mistakes and actually undercut deterrence of Russia.

First, to the withdrawal of the military troops, it seems to me that repeatedly and publicly assuring Vladimir Putin's government that Russia wouldn't bump into any American soldiers anywhere in Ukraine was a violation of what Tom Schelling, the patron saint of deterrence, would describe as the threat that leaves something to chance. I do think it was initially the right decision not to send American troops to fight on Ukraine's side, but I think it was a mistake to reassure Vladimir Putin that we were doing it. Ukrainians are paying the price for us wanting to be so far out of

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the equation. I think we might have deterred Russia better had we not made that clear to them.

The second thing is a counterfactual, but what I think the President ought to have done to strengthen deterrence, which is to congratulate the Florida National Guard that only 200 part-time American soldiers were sufficient to be a threat to Russia invading Ukraine. To congratulate them and to explain to the American public and others that American soldiers were in Ukraine as part of a NATO mission to train the Ukrainian military so that they could defend their territory. Because the United States believes the international order is most stable and safe when every country can defend their territory, including Russia. And that we would oppose any invasion of Russia just as we would oppose an invasion of Ukraine. So, the defense of the international order was an opportunity the President missed by not reinforcing deterrence, second closing the embassy. I think that sent that our policy ought to be aimed...is best likely to deter Russia if we sort our actions by trying to reinforce Ukrainian will to fight and diminish Russian will to fight. I think that should be the decision rule because it maximizes both deterrence and success. So, what the President might have said, instead of closing the embassy in Kyiv, is that America's diplomats very often operate in war zones and in danger. That's why we admire them so much. That is why they are the lead element of American policy in the world. Because of their courage, their assistance to Americans in warzones, and assistance to governments who are who the United States supports as we support the government of Ukraine.

And third, withdrawing from the OSCE mission. This one is the one I'm the least committed to...but removing the eyes and ears of an international organization committed to the stabilization and peace of the region. Again, I think the signal that it sends is that we are so fearful of running any risk ourselves that we are willing to let Russia get away with running enormous risks themselves. I think that undercuts deterrence. I should say, though, that I also think Vladimir Putin was probably undeterrable in the invasion of Ukraine. It seems that he had so many fundamental things wrong...the willingness of Ukrainians to fight for the country, the belief among Ukrainians that they are a country and not merely a marshland that the Russians can sweepingly claim have no rights and no sovereignty. The overestimation, and not just by Vladimir Putin, but by me and a whole bunch of other people, the overestimation of the capabilities of the Russian military. I think this is the biggest shock for me. Another of the signs of the nuclear priesthood, Matthew Kroenig is telling a very good joke these days about how before Russia's invasion of Ukraine, we thought they had the second-best military in the world, and now we realize they don't even have the second-best military in the former Soviet Union.

Russia's invasion has collapsed what we thought we knew about the Russian military. And the United States should be very glad of this for two reasons. First, because they would have conquered Ukraine otherwise, and second, because it

changes the deterrence dynamic between us and the Russians. It may not change that dynamic in positive ways, namely, I think for both the West and for Russia. Potential nuclear use has always been a substitute for successful, conventional forces. It was true of us in the 1950s and stopped being true of us in the 1980s when we gained enough confidence that we had the conventional force to defend ourselves, our allies, and our interests. Coincidentally, that's when nuclear planning receded from being an integral part of American military and national security planning. I think, probably, the nadir, was probably...1991? Tyler, correct me if I'm wrong please. I think 1991 when in the Bush administration, NATO had a nuclear exercise that the Germans walked out of. That we haven't effectively made the case since then that we need to have the ability to talk about nuclear war, to plan for nuclear use, as part of the seriousness with which we take our own sovereignty, and the seriousness with which we take the sovereignty of our allies around the world.

Maybe two more things, Tyler, and then I'll open it up for questions if I'm not going on for too long. So, I wrote a piece in the *Washington Post* a week or two ago about how nervous I am because failing militaries can be as much of a danger, and sometimes even more than successful militaries. I worry that the collapse of professionalism, of competence, of our expectations of what the Russian military was capable of, actually opens the aperture for lots of bad things including threats of escalation, and possibly even just destructive, not productive uses of nuclear weapons by the Russians. What do I mean by that? So, Vladimir Putin has three times threatened nuclear use against the countries of the West if we should intervene on the side of the Ukrainians. And that is clearly deterring the President of the United States, right? President Biden said before those threats that the United States would not fight to defend Ukraine, but what he has said since those threats is a sort of alarmed tone in his voice, "We don't want World War III", which is a euphemism for nuclear war. So, it's hard to tell when deterrence succeeds, and it's easier to tell when it fails. But, I do think Vladimir Putin has succeed in deterring President Biden from intervening on the side of Ukraine with US forces. He has done that by the threat of nuclear escalation.

Deterrence has succeeded for Russia in keeping the NATO allies out of direct involvement. I think it has failed, though, from keeping the Western countries from understanding the real nature of the threat Russia poses, not just for Ukraine, but for all of us. And to commit to being the arsenal of Ukraine, the bank of Ukraine, and to imposing a wide range of nonmilitary sanctions on Russia. You know, it's quite an amazing thing to have a socialist Chancellor of Germany commit to nearly triple Germany's defense budget this year to finally meet the NATO 2% standard to wean Germany off of Russian oil and gas this year. And to become, to send, hundreds of millions of dollars of weapons to Ukraine when Germany has been uncomfortable about being an armaments provider. I think that's the right fingerprint of change. Vladimir Putin has failed in his war aims of conquering Ukraine. Failed in his war aims of regime change in Kyiv. I believe he will probably

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fail to hold any of the territory of Ukraine, except possibly Crimea. And he failed at dividing the West because the real deterrent that the United States has in the world is our ability to organize and persuade others, voluntarily, to take our side and fight.

That's the great success of the Biden administration. My hair stands on end when I imagine President Trump as the Commander in Chief during a crisis like this. We are so much better off with President Biden at the helm. For all my criticism of the finer points of the Biden administration's deterrence strategy, we are much better off than the alternative that was at our door. The ability to organize international action on the magnitude that the Biden administration has done is an enormous accomplishment. But, this is my closing remark, that doesn't remove from us the responsibility to better integrate our military contributions to our national security strategy. That is the endeavor that all of us are together for today. To think about how to do better, how to make more resilient and stronger our deterrent to include thinking about the unthinkable, as they said in the 1950s.

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