A. Statement of research question and its importance

What are the value and challenges of applying a "Strategic Empathy" approach to better understand and deal with adversaries' acquisition, threat, and use of strategic weapons? Strategic Empathy as a concept has yet to be applied systematically to examine adversary behavior with respect to strategic weapons. Finding ways to better understand U.S. adversaries and to avoid both the demonization and apologism of them is more difficult and essential than ever—as evident with regard to the Russia-Ukraine war, North Korean nuclear and ICBM development, and Iranian nuclear, missile, and drone programs.

B. List of collaborators and partners

Research team: Jim Lamson (Principal Investigator), Sarah Bidgood, Hanna Notte, Siegfried Hecker, and Bob Carlin.

Student researchers: Kyle Tucker, Caroline Covey, Matthew Goldenberg, and Darya Kheyrie.

Collaborators: Professor Zachary Shore, author of *A Sense of the Enemy*, which inspired the project; Professor Shore also shared his thoughts and insights in discussions with the research team. Also, the research team received valuable advice and feedback on the project from Samuel Bendett, Avner Cohen, Daniel Horner, Jeffrey Knopf, William Potter, Amy Sands, Nikolai Sokov, Sarah Stroup, and Kristin Ven Bruusgaard.

C. Summary of research findings

In this study, our approach for conducting case studies was primarily rooted in Zachary Shore's book, *A Sense of the Enemy: The High Stakes History of Reading Your Rival's Mind*, which focuses on examining what Shore terms "pattern breaks." These pattern breaks encompass surprising or shocking, high-impact occurrences, and can be either events that affect an adversary or behaviors by the adversary itself. We applied this approach to examining eight pattern breaks for Russia, North Korea, and Iran related to their acquisition, threat, and use of strategic weapons. These case studies shed light on the adversaries' patterns related to strategic weapons and the underlying drivers and constraints that shape them.

Applying strategic empathy towards adversaries can be valuable to improving both analysis and policy. For instance, it can be used to

- Test, validate, challenge, or refine the conventional wisdom about the influence of specific events, drivers, or constraints on the acquisition, threat, and use of strategic weapons by adversary countries;
- Assess potential adversary responses to policy initiatives.

Despite these advantages, there can be serious challenges to applying strategic empathy by both analysts and policymakers. These challenges include:

- Conducting research and analysis with little or no direct contact with the adversary;
- Dealing with domestic political constraints and challenges, including avoiding being perceived as either demonizing the adversary or defending/excusing its behavior;
- Examining a pattern break and crafting policy as that pattern break is unfolding in real-time.

The results of this study point to a number of recommended approaches, as well as pitfalls to avoid, for analysts and policymakers in applying strategic empathy to address the acquisition, threat, and use of strategic weapons by adversaries. These recommendations include:

- Employing multiple methodologies, using strategic empathy as a complement to other tools for understanding the adversary;
- Using multiple types of sources and perspectives to gain insights, including (1) Direct engagement with adversary officials (if possible), (2) Indirect engagement, including via mediators, Track 2 discussions, or scientific engagement; (3) The adversary's statements, policies, and actions that can be analyzed "from afar"; and (4) Outside sources such as official government reports, outside experts, and "inside-out" sources (former adversary officials or experts that have close links to adversary officials);
- Engaging, if possible, with contacts from the adversary country;
- Avoiding the assumption that the adversary has a fixed nature and behavior, where its future actions will necessarily mirror its past behavior;
- Avoiding the assumption that the adversary will view U.S. policies and actions as non-threatening;
- Practicing "reflexivity" in viewing U.S. policies and actions, to consider how they may inadvertently influence adversary patterns, drivers, and constraints, including the role they may play in unintentionally provoking fear in the adversary; and
- Using "red teaming," or viewing an issue from the adversary's perspective.

D. Implications for study and practice of conflict transformation

Applying strategic empathy can contribute to conflict transformation by alleviating sources of misunderstanding or mistrust that can lead to "unhealthy" or "destructive" forms of conflict between adversaries. The insights strategic empathy offers into the patterns, drivers, and constraints related to adversary policies and actions can help to usher in "healthy" (or "healthier"), more constructive, forms of conflict, or as one expert put it, "managed enmity." With this in mind, the method in this study for applying strategic empathy may be applicable to multiple elements of conflict transformation, including:

- *Contextual knowledge*, or a deep understanding of the important underlying historical, geopolitical, social, and other factors that shape conflict.
- *Intercultural competence,* or how to talk across differences. Because strategic empathy is fundamentally an approach that enables analysts and policymakers to better understand their adversaries, it can likewise contribute to the development of intercultural competence.
- *Critical self-awareness*, or an understanding of one's own biases and perspectives. This aspect of conflict transformation maps onto the concept of reflexivity which entails thinking about how U.S. policies and actions may have unintended, or inadvertent, impacts on adversaries of which policymakers and analysts may have been unaware.
- *Dialogue and deliberation*. Strategic empathy can contribute to transforming unhealthy conflicts into healthy (or healthier) conflicts.

E. List of publications, performances, media coverage, and other output

Presentation: "The Importance and Challenge of Applying Strategic Empathy to Address Adversaries' Strategic Weapons," James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies, Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey, 7 July 2023.

Article: Robert L. Carlin and Siegfried S. Hecker, "The Putin-Kim Summit Kicks Off a New Era for North Korea," *Foreign Policy*, 12 September 2023, https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/09/12/putin-kim-russia-north-korea-summit-weapons-ammunition-us-nuclear-weapons-missiles-ukraine-war/.

Podcast: "Strategic Empathy and Strategic Weapons," "Opening Up," Conflict Transformation Collaborative podcast, episode 5, 23 October 2023, https://sites.libsyn.com/209063.

Project final report: "Strategic Empathy: Examining Pattern Breaks to Better Understand Adversaries' Acquisition, Threat, and Use of Strategic Weapons," posted to the Conflict Transformation and CNS websites.[1]

Presentations, media coverage: In November 2023, Sig Hecker and Bob Carlin gave presentations, held discussions, and gave media interviews on their North Korea case studies at Yonsei University in South Korea. On that same trip, Sig and Bob discussed their case studies at a meeting at the Stanford Center at Peking University in Beijing, China, which was organized with the Center for Strategic Studies of the China Academy of Engineering Physics (China's nuclear weapons program).

Article: Robert L. Carlin and Siegfried S. Hecker, "Is Kim Jong Un Preparing for War?" *38 North*, Stimson Center, 11 January 2024, https://www.38north.org/2024/01/is-kim-jong-un-preparing-for-war/.

Presentation (upcoming): Sarah Bidgood will present on strategic empathy and her Russia case study to the U.S. Defense Threat Reduction Agency's (DTRA) Strategic Forum (DSF); held by DTRA's Strategic Trends Office, planned for early 2024.

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[1] CT website: https://www.middlebury.edu/conflict-transformation/supporting-faculty-research/spring-2022-grant-recipients; CNS website: https://nonproliferation.org/strategic-empathy/.