

HOT AIR

Preventing war is in America's interest

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Moscow would not defeat America in a conventional war, though the former's armed services likely would do better defending their homeland than attacking their neighbor. However, Russian doctrine envisions earlier use of nuclear weapons in response to U.S. conventional superiority, a reverse of the Cold War balance in Europe. And Ukraine matters much more to Moscow than Washington, hence Vladimir Putin's many complaints over NATO expansion, most famously at the 2007 Munich Security Conference.

This makes Turner's demand that the Biden administration confront Russia particularly misguided. Turner complained that President Biden "seems almost timid and afraid of what Russia may do as opposed to being appalled at what Russia is doing," and insisted that Biden "needs to be able to stand up to [Putin] and to say that the United States certainly will deter Russia and all threats from them."

Washington should deter threats—to America. Better, however, to avoid a potential war, whether advertent or inadvertent. International relations often is a complicated game of chicken. The U.S. and Russia sparring over the Ukraine conflict is a nuclear version of chicken, and Moscow possesses an advantage. It is the weaker power with more at stake, and has an incentive to make bigger bluffs and take bigger risks. If America's survival were at stake, Washington might have cause to call Putin's bet. But not when the U.S.'s stakes are so small.