



BASIC Getting to Zero Special Briefing

Obama's Nuclear Posture Review

Putting flesh on the bone of his nuclear diplomacy

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Introduction

The Obama administration's Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) now underway, and due to be reported to Congress by February 2010, will be keenly watched around the world. Though an internal administration document, it will heavily influence the approach the administration will take towards global nuclear arms control and disarmament, the non-proliferation regime, and the future role of NATO's nuclear strategy. The administration has to balance the political and military priorities of diverse constituencies, and the interests of U.S. allies.

Expectations for the NPR have been raised by President Obama's nuclear weapon free world speech in Prague this April. Concerned that a previous downgrading of multilateral nuclear diplomacy by the United States has harmed European security, European governments welcome a renewed commitment to arms control and disarmament by the Obama administration. This paper examines the background to the current NPR, and looks at clues provided by Obama administration members as to the likely course and outcome of the NPR over the coming nine months' gestation.

Scope & functioning of the NPR

The Department of Defense (DoD) has said that the NPR will outline the levels, composition and roles of nuclear forces and supporting complex within broader military strategy, planning and programming, with a commitment to maintain a safe, reliable and credible nuclear deterrent posture consistent with the administration's arms control agenda.¹ It will include assessments of the role that missile defence capabilities and conventional strike forces play in determining the role and size of nuclear forces and the active and inactive nuclear weapons stockpile that will be required.

The ongoing meetings and working papers will be classified, as will the final document, but officials have committed to releasing a non-classified version of the final outcome of the review. Whilst led by the DoD, there will be input from the State Department and the National Security Council, and the President

¹ U.S. Department of Defense, NPR terms of Reference Fact Sheet, 2 June 2009. Accessed at <http://www.defenselink.mil/advisories/advisory.aspx?advisoryid=3117> on 10 June 2009.

will decide the final shape of the document. The main work of the NPR is conducted in a series of four working groups:

- the Policy and Strategy Working Group;
- Capabilities, Force Structure and Programs Working Group;
- Nuclear Weapon Stockpile and Infrastructure Working Group; and
- the International Dimensions Working Group.

The work of these groups is coordinated by the Senior Integration Steering Group. All of these groups are meeting weekly.

The 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review, which looks at conventional force issues, will be conducted concurrently and will also be reported to Congress in December 2009. The NPR is being developed alongside the START follow-on negotiations being conducted with Russia, and preparations for the 2010 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference. The NPR will provide the framework for follow-on talks with Russia after the conclusion of the current negotiation and for nuclear weapons planning and budgeting until 2015.

The Evolution of Post-Cold War Nuclear Use Doctrine

There have been two post-Cold War Nuclear Posture Reviews, the 1994 NPR of the Clinton administration, and the 2001 NPR under President Bush. These have been key in shaping the existing nuclear force structure and policy that will now be reviewed under President Obama, and their outcomes provide important background to his review. The past evolution of nuclear doctrine will have an influence on the 2009 NPR.

1994 NPR

The Clinton administration decided by 1993 that a full scale review of defence policy was necessary, but remained cautious in its reforms of nuclear posture in

a situation they simply didn't understand. The 1994 NPR was the first such review for fifteen years, and was announced by Defence Secretary Les Aspin in October, describing it as "the first DOD study of its kind to incorporate reviews of policy, doctrine, force structure, operations, safety and security, and arms control in one look."

On the civilian side the effort was led by Ashton Carter, now appointed by President Obama as Chair of the Nuclear Weapons Council in his role as Undersecretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology and Logistics. In 1992, in a speech to MIT students, he had said that "[a] world without nuclear weapons would not be disadvantageous to the U.S.. In fact, a world without nuclear weapons would actually be better. Nuclear weapons are still the big equalizer but now the U.S. is not the equalizer but the equalizee."

He experienced strong opposition from within the DoD, and received little or no support from President Clinton or other officials. He left office in February 1994, and his committee review structure, which had attempted to pull together all aspects of nuclear posture, including safety, security, counter-proliferation and threat reduction, collapsed in the summer of 1994. In the end, the commander of Strategic Command (STRATCOM) Admiral Chiles had a paper prepared on his views for the future of nuclear forces which formed the basis for the final NPR, Carter had little effect on the final NPR. The nuclear military had successfully imposed its own vision for the future on the Clinton administration – a reduced status quo ante, with significant change limited to the margins.

The NPR reaffirmed the centrality of deterrence and the importance of the Strategic Triad. Whilst it affirmed reductions under START I and accepted an end to nuclear testing, it also called for the creation of a warhead storage 'hedge force' that could be reintegrated into the operational force if relations with Russia deteriorated. The NPR also confirmed a role for nuclear weapons in the emerging doctrine of counter-proliferation: the destruction of nuclear,

biological and chemical weapons; their means of delivery; and also production and storage facilities. While marginal to policy in 1994, this would prove to be far more significant in later years.

2001 NPR

Whilst mandated by Congress in the FY2001 Defense Authorisation Act, the origins of the 2001 NPR lie in musings of influential members of the administration before they took office. For example, Stephen Younger in 2000, then with the Los Alamos National Laboratory, wrote *Nuclear Weapons in the Twenty-First Century*, in which he advocated a smaller, modernized U.S. arsenal that could be used against regional, local and even terrorist nuclear, chemical and biological threats.² The neo-conservative National Institute for Public Policy published *Rationale and Requirements for U.S. Nuclear Forces and Arms Control*,³ a blueprint for the Bush administration's NPR advocating a flexible and dynamic nuclear force against diverse nuclear, chemical and biological threats, an end to arms control and a renewed confidence in the domination of the United States unconstrained by treaties. NIPP's Director, Keith Payne, became Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Forces and Policy and chair of the Deterrence Concepts Advisory Panel, driving the 2001 NPR.

The January 9, 2002 DoD press briefing on the NPR highlighted the reductions in the arsenal and the need for a "capabilities-based force" appropriate to the "multiple contingencies" facing the United States in a new security environment. Russia, and a general nuclear exchange, was no longer a threat, but instead the briefing identified "... the growing capabilities of various states in the biological, chemical, nuclear and

² The full report can be read at <http://www.fas.org/nuke/guide/usa/doctrine/doe/younger.htm>, where it was accessed on May 14, 2009.

³ The full report can be read at <http://www.nipp.org/Adobe/volume%201%20complete.pdf>, where it was accessed on May 14, 2009.

ballistic-missile delivery area."⁴ The adaptive capabilities based planning was not country specific and included the whole range of strike forces alongside "active and passive defenses."⁵ Gordon, then-Director of the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) described four principles behind the NPR in his congressional testimony. To:

- assure allies and friends;
- dissuade adversaries from threatening U.S. or allies' interests;
- deter threats and counter coercion; and
- defeat any adversary decisively if deterrence fails.⁶

Key to the new approach was the "New Triad", with a mix of offensive and defensive capabilities to "...improve our capability to deter attack in the face of a proliferating NBC weapons capability":

- non-nuclear and nuclear strike capabilities;
- active and passive defences including ballistic missile defences; and
- the supporting R&D and industrial infrastructure.

The weakening of the firewall between nuclear and non-nuclear doctrine was particularly worrying for many U.S. allies. It was another step in the mission creep for nuclear weapons since the end of the Cold War. It sought greater flexibility, both in the types of nuclear weapons, and in their use. These new missions and planning processes, part of the Counter-proliferation doctrine, could mean the pre-emptive use of nuclear weapons against states or even terrorist groups that may threaten the United States.

⁴ Crouch, J. D., Special Briefing on the Nuclear Posture Review, ASD ISP, January 9, 2002.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Statement of General John A. Gordon, USAF (Ret.), Administrator, National Nuclear Security Administration, before the Senate Armed Services Committee, February 14, 2002.

The Bush administration stated in the NPR there are three kinds of targets that may need to be attacked with nuclear weapons if they pose a threat to the United States. These are:

- **Hard and Deeply Buried Targets (HDBT).** There is a long standing programme of developing nuclear and conventional weapons for this mission. The Clinton administration deployed the B61-11 nuclear bomb, and the Bush administration proposed to develop the Robust Nuclear Earth Penetrator, a new nuclear weapon based on the B81 bomb with a yield of 1.2 megatons, but was defeated by Congress fearing an overly aggressive posture. Many conventional weapons, including a new class of thermobaric bombs, have been developed for the HDBT missions.
- **Mobile and Relocatable Targets.** Mobile targets, such as Scud missile launchers are considered as an enormous proliferation threat. Since they can carry chemical and biological weapons it is thought it may be necessary to use a nuclear weapon to destroy such targets.
- **Chemical and Biological Agent Defeat.** The Pentagon and Department of Energy conducted an Agent Defeat Weapon study, looking at needs for the destruction of chemical or biological weapons in situ, without spreading them in the environment. Nuclear and thermobaric conventional warhead options were considered.

Many feared the NPR signalled a greater willingness to use nuclear weapons in regional conflicts. The use of nuclear weapons against non-nuclear countries or terrorist groups runs counter to U.S. promises made in association with the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), so-called Negative Security Assurances made by President Clinton in 1997 that the United States would never use nuclear weapons to attack a non-nuclear state.⁷ The NPR doctrine clearly breaches these promises, undermining non-proliferation policy.

⁷ In 1997 President Clinton issued a Presidential Decision Directive reaffirming an earlier pledge by U.S. Secretary of

The Bush administration was vague in public on the new nuclear weapons they intended to develop, but their plans were revealed in some detail in leaks of selected parts of the NPR text. In extracts published by the *Los Angeles Times* and the *New York Times*, the Pentagon outlined a list of contingencies and targets where nuclear weapons might be used, in three types of situations: against targets able to withstand non-nuclear attack; in retaliation for attack with nuclear, biological or chemical weapons; or “in the event of surprising military developments.” It listed seven countries — China, Russia, Iraq, North Korea, Iran, Libya and Syria — as potential nuclear targets, and talked of scenarios involving the use of nuclear weapons during an Arab-Israel conflict, an Iraqi attack on Israel or its neighbours, a North Korean attack on South Korea or a military confrontation between China and Taiwan. Building on the 1994 NPR, the new NPR talked of the need to use nuclear weapons to destroy stocks of weapons of mass destruction, such as biological and chemical arms.⁸

State Warren Christopher. The PDD states that: “The United States reaffirms that it will not use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear-weapon state-parties to the Treaty on the Non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, except in the case of an invasion or any other attack on the United States, its territories, its armed forces or other troops, its allies, or on a state toward which it has a security commitment carried out, or sustained by such a non-nuclear-weapon state in association or alliance with a nuclear-weapon state.” This replaces the earlier Christopher letter which had, together with assurances by the four other recognized nuclear weapon states under the Non-Proliferation Treaty, been issued in 1995 and acknowledged in UN Security Council Resolution 984. These pledges had been incorporated into the 1995 NPT Review and Extension Conference’s “Principles and Objectives for Non-Proliferation and Disarmament,” which was vital to securing indefinite extension of the NPT.

⁸ The extracts of the NPR leaked to the *LA Times* can be found at

<http://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/library/policy/dod/npr.htm>, accessed on 14 May 2009.

Obama's NPR

The Obama administration has done little to publicly brief on expectations of its own NPR. We do know the process will be led by DoD but be collaborative across the U.S. government. On May 20, NSC 'WMD Czar' Gary Samore said:

.. we have set up a system so that the nuclear posture review, which is headed by the Department of Defense, will be in collaboration with the State Department, with the Department of Energy, and finally, overseen by the National Security Council... The point of the NPR is not to come back with a single proposed strategy and nuclear requirements; the point is to come back with a range of different options and give the President the opportunity to consider those.⁹

A number of questions arise in the context of the President's Prague speech, the Pentagon news briefing on the NPR and from other official sources.

- Will the goal of a nuclear weapon free world feature in the NPR?
- How will the structure of nuclear forces change? Will it involve new nuclear warheads?
- How will the role of nuclear weapons in U.S. strategy be reduced? Will the close connection between conventional and nuclear elements of strategic deterrence be modified? Will the role assigned to nuclear weapons in counter-proliferation continue?
- What will be the role of missile defences in nuclear strategy?

⁹ Gary Samore, Special Assistant to President Obama and White House Coordinator for Arms Control and Weapons of Mass Destruction and Terrorism, Q&A after Remarks to the Arms Control Association Annual Meeting, 20 May 2009. Accessed at <http://www.armscontrol.org/print/3671> on 3 June 2009.

A World Free of Nuclear Weapons?

In Prague the President endorsed the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, the negotiation of a verifiable Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty, and the goal to secure all "vulnerable nuclear material around the world" within four years, to reduce the threat of nuclear terrorism. It is likely these objectives will feature in the NPR. President Obama also said in Prague:

The existence of thousands of nuclear weapons is the most dangerous legacy of the Cold War. No nuclear war was fought between the United States and the Soviet Union, but generations lived with the knowledge that their world could be erased in a single flash of light. ... Just as we stood for freedom in the 20th century, we must stand together for the right of people everywhere to live free from fear in the 21st century. And as nuclear power – as a nuclear power, as the only nuclear power to have used a nuclear weapon, the United States has a moral responsibility to act. .. So today, I state clearly and with conviction America's commitment to seek the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons...¹⁰

This strong moral and political commitment to a nuclear weapon free world signals a complete break with the Bush years. The President did say he might not see a nuclear weapon free world in his lifetime – a statement that has drawn criticism from some, but he did make a firm commitment to working towards that goal. He also said that:

Make no mistake: As long as these weapons exist, the United States will maintain a safe, secure and effective arsenal to deter any

¹⁰ Remarks by President Barack Obama, April 5, 2009, Hradcany Square, Prague, Czech Republic. Accessed at http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-By-President-Barack-Obama-In-Prague-As-Delivered/ on 17 May 2009.

adversary, and guarantee that defense to our allies ...¹¹

This dual commitment, to disarmament, but also to maintaining a strong nuclear arsenal until disarmament can be achieved, had been described during confirmation hearings for Michele Flournoy, Undersecretary of Defense for Policy:¹²

If confirmed as Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, I would oversee the Nuclear Posture Review (NPR). I consider this basket of issues one of the most important long-term challenges we face – how to support the President-elect’s ultimate goal of eliminating nuclear weapons worldwide while ensuring that America retains a robust nuclear deterrent that is sufficient to the threats we face.¹³

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Michèle A. Flournoy is Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, and will oversee the Nuclear Posture Review. She began her career in Washington DC as Senior Analyst with the Arms Control Association. She co-founded the Center for a New American Security (CNAS) in January 2007. Prior to co-founding CNAS, she was a Senior Adviser at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, where she worked on a broad range of defense policy and international security issues. Previously, she was a distinguished research professor at the Institute for National Strategic Studies at the National Defense University (NDU), where she founded and led the university’s Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) working group. She held two Pentagon posts under President Clinton. She wrote last year in the Autumn 2008 issue of *The Washington Quarterly* that “There is.. a growing consensus that the United States can and should rely less on nuclear weapons in its overall defense posture and move toward a smaller arsenal.”

¹³ Michele Flournoy, Undersecretary of Defense for Policy, Advance Questions for the Record, Confirmation Hearing before the Senate Armed Services Committee, 15 January 2009.

This position was repeated in answers given by Michael Nacht in his confirmation as Assistant Secretary of Defense for Global Strategic Affairs beneath Flournoy.¹⁴ If the role of nuclear weapons were limited to that of deterrence, it would represent a significant rowing back from the Bush doctrine, and even from the Clinton years, and go a long way to answering criticism of U.S. ambiguity over their previous Negative Security Assurances (NSAs) to Non-Nuclear Weapons States (NNWS).

This is an area that Gary Samore from the White House addressed at his Arms Control Association session on May 20th, confirming that the goal of the NPR is to reduce the role of nuclear weapons in American strategy, and enhance the NSA’s:

On negative security issues, this is - I think it's a very difficult issue for all the nuclear weapons states, except, perhaps, for China, which has a clear no-first-use position. There's a lot of history here, there's a lot of theology, there's a lot of legalism. The nuclear posture review will look at questions of doctrine - of declaratory doctrine. .. President Obama said, in his Prague speech, that we want to reduce the importance of nuclear weapons for U.S. security strategy, and that has implications for negative security

¹⁴ Michael Nacht, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Global Security Policy, Advance Questions for the Record before the Senate Armed Services Committee, 28 April 2009. Nacht is now the assistant secretary of defense for global strategic affairs, and will manage the Nuclear Posture Review. He served a three-year term as a member of the U.S. Department of Defense Threat Reduction Advisory Committee, for which he chaired panels on counter terrorism and counter proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, reporting to the deputy secretary of defense. From 1994-1997, Nacht was assistant director for Strategic and Eurasian Affairs at the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, leading its work on nuclear arms reduction negotiations with Russia and initiating nuclear arms control talks with China.

assurances and our statements about use doctrine...¹⁵

Moving to restrict the role of nuclear weapons to deterring the use of nuclear weapons by other states would show significant intent in pursuit of the goal of a nuclear weapons-free world (NFWF). This was raised during the Pentagon press briefing at the launch of the NPR review. The Pentagon briefers were less comfortable with the goal, and more with a continued deterrence posture. Asked whether the NPR would further the President's goal of achieving a nuclear weapon-free world, the two briefers replied that:

... I don't know that I would speculate to say that a nuclear weapon-free world would be a goal. Right? I mean, it's -- this NPR, from our perspective, is one about deterrence, how should we deter. And deterrence involves more than just nuclear weapons. So there are other aspects of what the department does that need to be brought to bear to deter, you know, a potential adversary from using nuclear capability.¹⁶

It is probably safe to say that this reflects majority opinion within the Pentagon. There will be a significant struggle over the next months as the NPR and other reviews are conducted, as well as a new National Security Strategy. Nevertheless, Michael Nacht gave some cause for hope that the President's vision will be important in framing the outcome of the NPR:

I think it [NFWF] is an aspiration... which will then structure some of what we will try to do to change attitudes. And perhaps this will lead to reduction in nuclear arsenals, significant reduction, and also to dissuasion of others to acquire nuclear weapons.¹⁷

While civilian and military leaders in the Defense Department are comfortable with cuts in nuclear forces, as in the 1990s, many appear to want to leave the structure and purpose essentially intact. Just as the Clinton NPR ran into serious problems, it is likely Obama's vision will encounter resistance when attempting significant reform in doctrine. The President will have to give strong direction to ensure his ideas are incorporated into the NPR, at a time when he has many battles on his hands, not least to reorient the Pentagon away from preparation for future massive wars, towards current asymmetric conflicts.

A Reduced Force and Role

The NPR is set to reduce nuclear forces, so instead the main debate centres on the roles. President Obama already made clear his preference for both in Prague:

First, the United States will take concrete steps towards a world without nuclear weapons. To put an end to Cold War thinking, we will reduce the role of nuclear weapons in our national security strategy, and urge others to do the same... we will negotiate a new Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty with the Russians this year. President Medvedev and I began this process in London, and will seek a new agreement by the end of this year that is

¹⁵ Gary Samore speaking at the Arms Control Association Annual Meeting, May 20th, available online at: <http://www.armscontrol.org/node/3671>

¹⁶ DoD Background Briefing on the Quadrennial Defense Review and the Nuclear Posture Review, April 23 2009. Accessed at <http://www.defenselink.mil/transcripts/transcript.aspx?transcriptid=4408> on 17 May 2009.

¹⁷ Michael Nacht, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Global Security Policy, Response to the Senate Armed Services Committee, 28 April 2009. Hearing record accessed at <http://armed-services.senate.gov/Transcripts/2009/04%20April/A%20Full%20Committee/09-21%20-%2004-28-09.pdf> on 19 May 2009.

legally binding and sufficiently bold. And this will set the stage for further cuts, and we will seek to include all nuclear weapons states in this endeavor.¹⁸

There is a consensus on the ability of the United States to cut its arsenal, but the level to aim for is a matter for early debate in the process. The need for the debate was very well summarised in a recent report by the Federation of American Scientists:

General Kevin Chilton, head of U.S. Strategic Command (STRATCOM), recently took issue with President Obama's characterization of U.S. nuclear weapons being on "hair-trigger alert" but made our case for us by saying, "The alert postures that we are in today are appropriate, *given our strategy and guidance and policy.*" [Emphasis added.] That is exactly right and, therefore, if President Obama wants General Chilton to do something different, he will have to provide the commander of U.S. nuclear forces with different guidance and directives. The counterforce mission, and all that goes with it, should be explicitly and publicly abandoned and replaced with a much less ambitious and qualitatively different doctrine. A new "minimal deterrence" mission will make retaliation after nuclear attack the sole mission for nuclear weapons. We believe that adopting this doctrine is an important step on the path to nuclear abolition because nuclear retaliation is the one mission for nuclear weapons that reduces the salience of nuclear weapons; it is the self-cancelling mission.¹⁹

¹⁸ Remarks by President Obama, *op cit.*

¹⁹ Kristensen et al, *From Counterforce to Minimal Deterrence: A New Nuclear Policy on the Path Toward Eliminating Nuclear Weapons*, FAS, April 2009. Accessed at <http://www.fas.org/programs/ssp/nukes/doctrine/targeting.pdf> on 19 May 2009.

Likely to be a preoccupation for many within Washington (along with CTBT ratification), deep cuts alone will not be sufficient to convince non-nuclear weapon states of Washington's commitment to the disarmament agenda. There is likely to be much more dispute about the way that the Obama administration can reverse the damage done by the 2001 NPR and 'reduce the role of nuclear weapons' in defence policy, as the President said in Prague.

One report that outlines the need for a new, and reduced posture for U.S. nuclear forces, is *Orienting the 2009 Nuclear Posture Review: A Roadmap*, published by the Center for American Progress by authors close to the Obama campaign. They argue:

There is an emerging bipartisan consensus that America's current nuclear weapons posture imposes an unnecessary burden on U.S. efforts to prevent nuclear terrorism and curtail the spread of nuclear weapons, materials, and technology to additional nation-states. It holds that the United States must retain a nuclear arsenal as a strategic deterrent, but should embrace the vision laid out by senior statesmen George Shultz, Henry Kissinger, William Perry, and Sam Nunn of a world free of nuclear weapons in order to strengthen America's ability to exercise global leadership in countering 21st century nuclear threats. The Obama administration should use the congressionally mandated 2009–2010 Nuclear Posture Review, or NPR, to realign nuclear policy, forces, and posture with these threats.²⁰

They suggest mechanisms by which the NPR might be advanced towards this conclusion, and that the role of nuclear weapons in U.S. strategy should be reduced. For example, they ask whether the force structure should be reduced, the alert status lowered,

²⁰ Joe Cirincione and Andrew Giotto, *Orienting the 2009 Nuclear Posture Review: A Roadmap*, Center for American Progress, November 2008.

and whether preset targeting plans should be abandoned, since these drive the current size and posture of the nuclear force. They further argue that U.S. allies should be closely consulted, and the effect of U.S. policy over issues such as the nuclear test ban and U.S. non-proliferation goals should be strongly considered when deciding on future nuclear posture.

This approach is compatible with that set out last November by Congresswoman Ellen Tauscher (D-CA), chair of the Strategic Forces Sub-Committee of the House Armed Services Committee and likely to be confirmed by the Senate as Undersecretary of State for Arms Control and International Security. In a speech to the Center for American Progress, Mrs Tauscher condemned the Bush administration's approach to nuclear weapons, and outlined her desires for the Obama NPR, saying:

That NPR [2001] unfortunately contained contradictory themes. It claimed to de-emphasize the role of nuclear weapons within our strategic posture, while spelling out a lower threshold for their use. During the same period, the Bush Administration was beginning to articulate its pre-emptive war doctrine. As a result, the administration's posture was viewed by many, including myself, as dangerous and de-stabilizing... Our strategic posture should place the stewardship of our nuclear arsenal, nonproliferation programs, missile defenses, and the international arms control regime into one comprehensive strategy that protects the American people.²¹

She went on to urge consideration of a significantly reduced overall stockpile in the light of the American

²¹ Representative Ellen Tauscher, Chairman, Subcommittee on Strategic Forces, House Armed Services Committee, *Constructing a 21st Century Nuclear Posture*, Remarks at the Center for American Progress, November 17, 2008.

Accessed at

http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2008/11/pdf/tauscher_remarks.pdf on 30 May 2009.

NPT Article 6 commitment to disarmament, and that the NPR be "interwoven with the decision of both our allies and adversaries", advocate ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), and renew the ban on the development of mini-nukes (the so-called Furse-Spratt prohibition), repealed under President Bush. She concluded that:

In the end, our nuclear deterrent capabilities are still required. The challenge, and the choice, is how to reduce the global dangers of nuclear weapons given that reality. I believe we can find a balance while never losing sight of the goal to reduce our arsenal to zero.²²

Major Scott Weston USAF of the Naval Postgraduate School at Monterey concludes that the United States could safely adopt a policy of minimal deterrence in the forthcoming NPR:

The first focus of a minimal deterrent NPR would be in the explicit removal of nuclear weapons from all forms of deterrence except that of deterring nuclear attack. The best way to do this would be to again reform the strategic triad designating a deterrence, strike, and infrastructure arm. The deterrence arm would contain nuclear weapons as well as ballistic missile defenses. The first would have the role of deterrence by punishment, the second, deterrence by denial. The strike arm would consist solely of conventional weapons capable of achieving strategic effects. The infrastructure arm would be uniquely focused on the conventional weapons infrastructure and given the goal to achieve all missions with conventional weapons that were filled previously with nuclear weapons. The minimum deterrent NPR would, like the 2001 NPR, have to have the number of final nuclear warheads dictated by political treaty and verification

²² *Ibid.*

regime established by the President between the current nuclear capable nations.²³

Supporters of the previous administration's strategic thinking continue to oppose radical change in the NPR. Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) rejected much of Obama's arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament agenda in a formal statement in late April in which he criticized the desire to ratify the CTBT:

There are only two ways to ensure the safety of our nuclear stockpile: through actual tests, or by investing in a new generation of warheads. At the moment, the Administration isn't willing to do either. And when it comes to deterrence, this represents a serious dilemma... Our NATO allies need to know that we will not walk away from missile defense or rush to reduce our own nuclear stockpile in the misguided hope of securing a promise of cooperation from Russia with respect to Iran.²⁴

Thomas Skypek wrote recently in the *Weekly Standard*, one of the most influential conservative journals, that:

The NPR should look seriously at the possibility of amending the current force structure to include significant reductions in the bomber fleet. An increased emphasis on SLBMs [submarine-launched ballistic missiles] should also be examined... The United States

²³ Major Scott Weston USAF, Preparing for the 2009 Nuclear Posture Review: Post-Cold War Nuclear Deterrence and the 2001 NPR Debate, *Strategic Insights*, Center for Contemporary Conflict, January 2009. Accessed at <http://www.ccc.nps.navy.mil/si/2008/Dec/weston2Dec08.asp> on 19 May 2009.

²⁴ Senator Mitch McConnell, *US Foreign Policy*, Congressional Record: April 27, 2009 (Senate), pp S4726-S4728. Accessed on <http://frwebgate1.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/TEXTgate.cgi?WAISdocID=846775284773+13+1+0&WASAction=retrieve> on 31 May, 2009.

should consider launching a new Manhattan Project to develop the next generation of nuclear warheads and ballistic missiles... As Senator Kyl noted in his September 2008 speech, "The bottom line is that the nuclear genie is out of the bottle and nobody is ever going to stuff it back in, in spite of their good intentions or the audacity of hope or any other kind of slogan."²⁵

This appears to represent a strong mainstream Republican thinking, and some of the strategic thinking inside STRATCOM. Republicans, however, are not united on these issues. Former Republican presidential candidate, Senator John McCain (R-AZ) explicitly endorsed President Reagan's vision of nuclear weapons free world, saying:

This is a distant and difficult goal. And we must proceed toward it prudently and pragmatically, and with a focused concern for our security and the security of allies who depend on us. But the Cold War ended almost twenty years ago, and the time has come to take further measures to reduce dramatically the number of nuclear weapons in the world's arsenals. In so doing, the United States can – and indeed, must – show the kind of leadership the world expects from us, in the tradition of American presidents who worked to reduce the nuclear threat to mankind.²⁶

These two approaches are indicative of the debates that will be held inside the Pentagon. While conservatives will probably not prevail in crafting the new NPR, they will be able to work in the Senate in particular to block budgetary changes to implement it

²⁵ Thomas M. Skypek, Thinking About the Unthinkable, *The Weekly Standard*, 3 March 2009. Accessed at <http://www.weeklystandard.com/Content/Public/Articles/000/000/016/224vdotg.asp> on 19 May 2009.

²⁶ Senator John McCain, Floor Speech in the US Senate, 3 June 2009.

in the future. They also have the power, if they so choose, to prevent ratification of the CTBT and any future arms control treaties with Russia. This would cause significant problems for the Obama administration internationally, but at significant political risk to the Republican Party within Congress. It seems more likely they will insist on significant budgetary support for the nuclear weapons complex, and in other military budget areas.

New Nuclear Weapons and Nuclear Infrastructure

Energy Secretary Steven Chu told Congress that the administration would not develop a new nuclear warhead. The FY2010 budget proposal terminates the Reliable Replacement Warhead (RRW) programme, intended to provide enhanced capabilities to meet new missions, to prolong the life of the U.S. arsenal for up to a century, and renewal of the entire nuclear weapon infrastructure. The administration will instead continue the stockpile stewardship programme under which the laboratories have maintained and refurbished nuclear weapons since the 1990s. Professor John Holdren, the President's Science Advisor, said in April that:

My personal view—I don't make the policy, but I provide advice—is that we do not need a new warhead. I led a [National Academies'] study at the end of the Clinton Administration and the beginning of the Bush Administration on technical issues relating to ratification of the test ban treaty. It was a very high powered committee. And we concluded that the safety and effectiveness of the current nuclear stockpile could be maintained indefinitely without developing new warheads but by monitoring the situation and making modifications if necessary. My personal view is that designing a nuclear warhead and deploying it would throw out a good part of the baby with the bathwater. It negates a substantial advantage to ratifying the test ban treaty because it would send a message to the

world that the United States still thinks that it can and should design and deploy new warheads when circumstances require it.²⁷

The cancellation of the RRW programme and plans to build new nuclear weapons are positive evidence of the administration's commitment to the nuclear weapon-free world vision. This has important international ramifications. India, for example, has said that it will not ratify the CTBT unless "...the world moves categorically towards nuclear disarmament in a credible time-frame..."²⁸ However, and consistent with Obama's Prague speech, Steven Chu told Sandia National Laboratory workers in April that "maintaining the safety and reliability of U.S. nuclear weapons will remain the core mission of the nation's nuclear weapons laboratories and will likely become more important as the size of our arsenal declines."²⁹ In line with that, the administration requested a budget of \$6.4 billion for the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA), the division of the Department of Energy responsible for the U.S. nuclear arsenal. This budget request keeps NNSA's longer term plans for upgrading the nuclear weapons complex over the next two decades well on track. The Complex Transformation plan was designed by the Bush administration, and was intended to allow the United States to maintain Cold War levels of nuclear weapons indefinitely. This is obsolete now that the Obama administration is committed to deep cuts in the arsenal in the short term.

There are also concerns that continued stockpile stewardship work involves upgrades to components

²⁷ John Holdren, Presidential Science Advisor, in interview with *ScienceNow*, 8 April 2009.

²⁸ The Times of India, 'India links CTBT signing to nuclear disarmament, 24 March 2009m
accessible at:
<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/India/India-links-CTBT-signing-to-nuclear-disarmament/articleshow/4308372.cms>

²⁹ John Fleck, Arms Still Labs' Top Mission, *Albuquerque Journal*, April 11, 2009.

and may yet allow for development of new nuclear capabilities. For example, the Life Extension Program for the W76 Trident warhead has seen a new fuse fitted which allows for extremely accurate detonation, and a new capability to destroy missile silos and other hardened targets.³⁰ Any such work in the future would undermine the Obama policy, and leave sceptics questioning his commitment to reduce and eliminate nuclear weapons. The conclusions of the NPR on this area of policy will be critical to the assessment of the final outcome.

U.S. Nuclear Weapons in Europe

The outcome of the Obama NPR will be watched with interest in Brussels, and will likely define the context for the review of NATO's Strategic Concept due for completion around the end of 2010. For twenty years there has been no serious public debate in NATO on the role of nuclear weapons, though policy has evolved in response to U.S. doctrinal changes. NATO adopted military counter-proliferation as a policy within its last Strategic Concept (1999), for example, and though it has done so in a somewhat ambivalent manner, it allows the targeting of the full range of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons stores and facilities, as well as their means of delivery.³¹ These changes have at times proved deeply controversial. The CMX2002 exercise collapsed after NATO ambassadors refused to sanction nuclear use, or even pre-emptive conventional attacks, on adversary WMD – even in an exercise scenario. These concerns have been fuelled by pressure from senior NATO staff to

³⁰ For a detailed analysis of the LEP on the W76 and its transformation with the Mk4A fuse to the W76-1, see Hans Kristensen's article from August 30, 2008 at http://www.fas.org/blog/ssp/2007/08/us_tripplis_submarine_warhead.php#more-160.

³¹ For a full explanation of counter proliferation and the role nuclear weapons, see Martin Butcher, *What Wrongs Our Arms May Do*, PSR, Washington DC, August 2003. This includes a description of NATO nuclear policy to that date. The report may be accessed at <http://action.psr.org/documents/psrwhatwrong03.pdf>.

introduce pre-emptive nuclear strikes formally into NATO nuclear use doctrine. Western European governments, led by Germany and Norway, have increasingly pressed for moves in the opposite direction, and to give a higher profile for arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament in Alliance policies.

Some 150-250 U.S. B61 free fall bombs assigned for use with shorter-range bombers under 'nuclear burden sharing' arrangements, are thought to remain in Europe.³² They have become increasingly controversial within the debates in Non-Proliferation Treaty reviews. The Obama administration has said that this issue will come second to talks with Russia on strategic forces and that the United States is highly unlikely to move without explicit agreement from its NATO allies. Nevertheless, new U.S. Ambassador to NATO, Ivo Daalder, has written on the need to reduce the role of nuclear weapons to deterring other nuclear weapons; and for the early elimination of tactical nuclear weapons on the road to zero.³³

Representative Ellen Tauscher, in her Senate confirmation hearing for Undersecretary of State for Arms Control and International Security, said that assuring allies remained important, but that it was still possible to reduce the role of nuclear weapons in U.S. strategy, and eventually eliminate them:

I am committed to ensuring that any decisions about the U.S. nuclear force structure and posture are based on strong analysis and a keen awareness of our deterrence and assurance strategy. Extending that deterrence to allies and friends will remain a central element of U.S. nuclear policy. We believe this can be accomplished in a manner consistent

³² <http://www.fas.org/blog/ssp/2008/06/us-nuclear-weapons-withdrawn-from-the-united-kingdom.php>

³³ Foreign Affairs, *The Logic of Zero*, Ivo Daalder and Jan Lodal, available at: <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/64608/ivo-daalder-and-jan-lodal/the-logic-of-zero>

with pursuing the long-term goal of eliminating nuclear weapons and reducing the role of nuclear weapons in national security.³⁴

An active policy of arms control in the NPR would be welcomed by the vast majority of Europeans.

Conventional & Nuclear Force Mix, and Missile Defences

The Pentagon NPR briefing confirmed that the process would consider conventional alongside nuclear strike capabilities. The Bush administration was strongly criticised for weakening the firewall between nuclear and non-nuclear use by combining conventional and nuclear forces under STRATCOM as part of the last NPR. The Bush administration's Prompt Global Strike (PGS) programme also proposed a conventionally armed Trident D-5 missile, but this was blocked by Congress. Russia, which still bases its deterrent posture on launch-on-warning, objected strongly to the project, saying that they would be unable to detect the difference between a nuclear and conventional Trident launch until it was too late. However, alternative means of delivering PGS, supported by Ellen Tauscher and leading members of Congress, is certain to feature in the NPR.

The NPR will have a big impact on the review of policy on missile defences. A cornerstone of the New Triad, missile defences were an integral part of the 2001 NPR, with the full range from tactical systems such as the Patriot PAC-3 to the Airborne Laser considered as elements of one, multi-layered system. President Bush created the Missile Defense Agency (MDA) as a semi-autonomous agency of the Defense Department, exempted from normal technical and financial oversight constraints in recognition of the fact that few MDA programs could survive them.

³⁴ Representative Ellen Tauscher, Responses to Pre-Hearing Questions for the Record from Senator Richard G. Lugar on the Nomination of Ellen M. Tauscher to be Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security, 9 June 2009.

The establishment of a range of missile defences – tactical, theatre, strategic – has the stated purpose of defending all 50 states, as well as U.S. allies and U.S. deployed forces abroad. While some tactical systems, such as the Patriot that saw operation during the Gulf War, may have some limited efficacy, there is no good evidence that missile defence can genuinely defend against a missile attack against a huge area such as the United States for the foreseeable future.

However, according to documents such as the Pentagon's Joint Doctrine for Nuclear Operations, the aim of missile defences is to give the President and field commanders enough confidence that the U.S. is protected that they will not hesitate to use American nuclear weapons in a conflict for fear of reprisals. China, with only a very limited capability to strike the United States with nuclear forces, may have felt its capability to be the target of a combination of missile defences and new U.S. nuclear capabilities – especially since it is named in a list of countries to be targeted in the NPR. And indeed, there is now evidence that China is modernizing and upgrading its nuclear forces, exactly as opponents of the role of missile defences in the 2001 NPR said would happen.

In Prague President Obama gave an indication about his opinion of missile defences in Europe, something that has deepened hostility with Russia, saying:

.. The Czech Republic and Poland have been courageous in agreeing to host a defense against these missiles. As long as the threat from Iran persists, we will go forward with a missile defense system that is cost-effective and proven. If the Iranian threat is eliminated, we will have a stronger basis for security, and the driving force for missile defense construction in Europe will be removed.³⁵

This is a coded political statement of opposition. Obama was involved in Congressional action through the National Defense Authorization Act that

³⁵ Remarks by President Obama, *op cit*.

mandated that no money could be spent on European missile defences unless the system was proven to work under operational conditions. Most impartial observers agree that the European missile defence project cannot possibly meet such a test, and as a result will not go forward. In addition, the Obama review of major defence spending has targeted items such as the Airborne Laser for cancellation, and the missile defence site in Alaska will not be expanded. The Pentagon briefers confirmed that the Missile Defense Review would be sent to Congress in 2011, and that the fate of mid-course defences and the European site, in particular, would be decided as part of that review.

While some aspects of missile defences will remain untouched by the Obama administration, it seems likely that those expensive and unproven parts of the program that are the most destabilizing are likely to be cut. Above and beyond the hardware itself the question of the role of missile defences remains. In the case of a limited use of nuclear weapons, for example in a regional conflict or in the case of use for counter-proliferation to deny weapons of mass destruction to an adversary, missile defences are fully integrated into nuclear strike plans. If the President is to reduce the role of nuclear weapons in national strategy, it will be interesting to see how the role of missile defences changes.

Conclusion

The NPR could bring about the most significant change in U.S. nuclear use doctrine since the end of the Cold War, a first step in President Obama's vision of the complete global elimination of nuclear weapons. If the outcome is: a reduced role for nuclear weapons, deterring only other nuclear weapons; a much smaller nuclear force; no role for nuclear weapons in counter-proliferation; and a significant enhancement of arms control in U.S. policy, then many will judge this a successful outcome which will strengthen the global non-proliferation regime.

It is already clear that the terms of reference for the NPR are ambitious, but realistic and realisable. Many U.S. allies and other nations look forward to a nuclear posture that is less unilateral and more cooperative, a determined move away from the Bush years. The Clinton administration, in the 1990s, set similar goals for its NPR, but failed to deliver through a failure to invest the necessary political capital. President Obama has indicated by implication that he will not make the same mistake. He will face institutional challenges along the way, and it is yet uncertain what the outcome will be.

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This Special Report forms part of BASIC's Getting to Zero programme, embracing both the vision of eliminating nuclear weapons and the practical steps necessary to get there.

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