

US Nuclear Policies and the Impact on East Asia

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In December 2001 the United States government completed a Nuclear Posture Review to guide the country’s nuclear forces and policy in the next decade. The main decisions of the review included a reduction of “operationally deployed strategic warheads” to 1,700-2,200 by 2012, development of new capabilities to target hard and deeply buried facilities, and modernization of facilities supporting the nuclear weapons complex.

The Bush administration’s portrayal of the Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) emphasized a new kind of review that reduced the role of nuclear weapons and increased the role of advanced conventional weapons and missile defense systems in U.S. strategic planning. To visualize the alleged shift, the Bush administration outlined a transition from a Cold War Triad of land-based intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), sea-based submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs), long-range bombers, to a “New Triad” consisting of nuclear and non-nuclear weapons on Cold War Triad delivery vehicles, in addition to missile defenses and a Responsive Infrastructure of weapons maintenance and production facilities.

The core motivation for doing the review, according to assistant secretary of Defense for International Security Policy J. D. Crouch, was “the idea of ending the relationship with Russia that is based on mutual assured destruction.” In order to improve and forward relations with Russia, “the Cold War approach to deterrence, which was highly dependent upon offensive nuclear weapons, is no longer appropriate,” Crouch explained. Even so, Crouch cautioned, a new relationship with Russia “is not to say that we think that nuclear weapons don’t continue to play a role in that. We think they play an important role, a fundamental role.”¹

If nuclear weapons after the NPR continue to play “a fundamental role” in U.S.-Russian relations, more than a decade after the ending of the Cold War, it is fair to ask where the “new” is. To examine this question and how the NPR decisions impact East Asia I first describe the status of U.S. nuclear forces in the Pacific region and how they relate to U.S. security assurances for Japan and South Korea. I then review elements of the NPR that appear particularly relevant to East Asia, including strategy, offensive weapons, and missile defense. The paper ends with a range of suggestions for steps that could be taken to reduce the reliance on nuclear weapons and forward disarmament efforts.

US Nuclear Force Developments in the Pacific Region

To assess the ongoing role of longstanding U.S. nuclear policies in East Asia, including the role of nuclear deterrence in underpinning Japanese and Korean security, let me begin with an overview of U.S. nuclear force operations and developments in the Pacific region.

The United States currently has nearly 1,500 warheads deployed in the Pacific region. Nearly all of these (1,340) are onboard seven strategic submarines (SSBNs) homeported at Bangor in the state of Washington. The other 160 warheads are for Tomahawk cruise missiles earmarked for delivery by selected attack submarines. Air-delivered nuclear weapons are not deployed in the Pacific region, and no land-based nuclear weapons are forward deployed in either Japan, South Korea, Guam, or Hawaii.

Because the NPR did not announce additional cuts beyond what was decided in the previous NPR in 1994 and the Helsinki agreement signed by former U.S. and Russian presidents Clinton and Yeltsin in 1997, quantitative changes in the U.S. nuclear posture in the Pacific currently consists of implementing force changes from those two older decisions.

The first of these decisions involve the removal of four older SSBNs from strategic service for conversion to conventional cruise missile shooters and special operations submarines (SSGNs). At the same time, four other SSBNs are being upgraded from the

Trident C4 sea-launched ballistic missiles (SLBM) to carry the newer Trident II D5 which has a longer range and greater accuracy. To balance the total SSBN force between the Atlantic and Pacific, two D5-equipped SSBNs from the East Coast base at Kings Bay in Georgia were transferred to the Pacific in 2002 and a third will follow later this year.

When this modernization program is completed in 2007 the Pacific SSBN force will be considerably more capable compared with only a few years ago. Previously only the 100-kiloton W76 warhead on C4 missiles was deployed on the Pacific SSBN force, but with the upgrade to D5 missiles comes the transfer of W88 warheads into the Pacific for the first time ever. While the W76 is only efficient against softer surface targets, the 475-kiloton yield W88 is the most powerful ballistic missile warhead in the U.S. inventory. When combined with the increased accuracy of the D5 it will add “efficient hard target kill capability”² to the Pacific SSBN force for the first time and enable the submarines to “hold at risk, with increased survivability, almost the entire spectrum of strategic targets of any adversary.”³

The mission of the D5/W88 in the region has not been officially disclosed or discussed in public, except as a force management issue, but probably involves targeting of hard and/or deeply buried targets. The introduction of the capability undoubtedly is causing concern among Russian and Chinese military planners. A U.S. SSBN deploying close to the Asian landmass can fire its missiles in a shallow trajectory with a flight time of only 10-15 minutes. With such a short warning time and the accuracy of the weapon, U.S. nuclear planners could use the D5/W88 as a damage-limitation weapon to destroy Russian and Chinese nuclear weapons early in a conflict *before* they are launched.

The W76 warhead is not forgotten. Although it does not currently have a hard target kill capability, the transfer of the warhead to the longer-range and more accurate D5 missile nonetheless provides military planners with new targeting opportunities in the region. Moreover, the W76/Mk4 reentry vehicle is being modernized to add important new capabilities to the weapon. In the terminology of the U.S. nuclear establishment, this

modernization is called “life extension” intended simply to extend the service life of an existing warhead in the absence of new nuclear warhead developments.

Yet behind this benign terminology lies important new improvements to the weapon that will dramatically improve the capabilities and expand the targeting options. While the current W76/Mk4 only has an air-burst capability, one of the most important features of the new W76/Mk4A is the incorporation of a new fuze that will provide the weapon with ground-burst capability. The new reentry vehicle has already been test flown and once deployed will permit planners to aim the warhead against harder and even some underground targets. [fig 3]

As if these improvements weren't enough, the Navy has begun development of a revolutionary new technology for ballistic missile reentry vehicles: the three-axis flap control system. This simple and lightweight technology developed by Lockheed Martin will create a maneuverable reentry vehicle (MARV) and dramatically increase the accuracy of existing and new ballistic missile reentry vehicles. The Navy flew the technology on a Trident II missile test launch in October 2002, and last year began a formal four-year development program to “demonstrate a near-term capability to steer a SLBM warhead to Global Positioning Satellite (GPS)-like accuracy”⁴ (less than 10 meters). The beauty (or danger) of the new technology is that it is simple, small, lightweight and can be added to the rear of the W76/Mk4A and W88/Mk5 reentry vehicles thereby dramatically increasing the lethality of each weapon.

The NPR also advocated a role for conventional weapons in America's strategic posture, but ICBMs and SLBMs currently don't have the accuracy to effectively deliver the comparatively modest explosive power of conventional warheads against targets. The Navy test flew conventional reentry vehicles on SLBMs in the early 1990s, but with only modest results. The MARV technology promises to provide the capability to incorporate conventional warheads on ballistic missiles.

Beyond modernizing the weapons themselves, the U.S. in October completed development and deployment of a new submarine-launched ballistic missile retargeting system (SRS). The new system will enable Trident submarines "to quickly, accurately, and reliably retarget missiles to targets" and "allow timely and reliable processing of *an increased number of targets*."⁵ The capability of the SRS will "reduce overall SIOP processing" time and "support adaptive planning"⁶ of strike missions.

This continued U.S. deployment and modernization of sea-based strategic nuclear forces in the Pacific must be seen in the context of a Russian navy that in 2002 failed to deploy a single SSBN on patrol, and a Chinese navy that has yet to deploy a fully operational SSBN much less be able to deploy it in a way that matters.

The need for and wisdom of these increased warfighting capabilities are essentially undebated in the United States, much less in East Asia. In the United States they take place in accordance with the Bush administration's new "capability-based planning," a murky concept which officially removes country-specific threats as a planning parameter and instead allows planners to pursue technological improvements with the goal of ensuring superiority.

The B-2 Stealth Bomber

The U.S. is also modernizing the nuclear strike capability of its most modern bomber, the B-2, which first entered the SIOP in October 1997. At that time the planning and processing of a single SIOP sortie took approximately 25 hours, much too slow for a 21-aircraft B-2 fleet (only 16 are fully ready). In November 1998, shortly after the signing of Presidential Decision Directive 60 (see below), STRATCOM ordered the operational requirement documents for the B-2 updated to reflect new timing requirements for the planning of nuclear missions. Under the new requirements, which were incorporated in December 1998 in time for incorporation into the SIOP-00, the timeline for planning new nuclear strike missions were:⁷

- a) Deliberate Planned Missions: no more than 24 hours.

- b) Adaptive Planned Mission (Directed Planning Option and Theater Nuclear Option): no more than 8 hours.

In other words, planning of new nuclear strike missions as part of larger and more complex preplanned scenarios against Russia or China could be done within a day, while limited strikes in smaller regional scenarios involving only one to a handful of weapons could be done in less time that it takes for a B-2 to fly from Whiteman AFB in Missouri to North Korea. Yet given that a global strike sorties normally take 32-48 hours to complete (16-24 hours each way), and forward deployed sorties 12-18 hours (6-9 hours each way) depending on location,⁸ the 8 hour time limit for Adaptive Planned Missions seems to envision forward deployment of the B-2s.

Several such forward deployment exercises, generally known as Global Power missions, were done with the B-2 in the late 1990s and continue today. The first forward deployment took place in March 1998, when two B-2s and approximately 200 airmen and 160 tons of equipment deployed to Andersen AFB in Guam.⁹

The Role of Nuclear Deterrence in East Asia

The Bush administration insists that the role of nuclear weapons today is more limited than at any point during the Cold War, which is obviously true given the new international situation and force changes. But this doesn't mean that nuclear weapons don't have a role or that the Bush administration no longer considers that role important. Indeed, underpinning all the nuclear capabilities and modernizations described above is a continued belief in the role and value of nuclear weapons also in the Pacific region.

Indeed, three of the countries identified in the NPR as potential targets for U.S. nuclear weapons are in the Pacific region: Russia, China and North Korea. Assuring allied countries such as Japan and South Korea about the U.S. commitment to provide a nuclear umbrella was specifically mentioned in the NPR. This extended deterrence has a double purpose: deterring other countries from attacking Japan and South Korea; and dissuading Japan and South Korea themselves from developing nuclear weapons:

“U.S. nuclear forces will continue to provide assurance to security partners, particularly in the presence of known or suspected threats of nuclear, biological, or chemical attacks or in the event of surprising military developments. This assurance can serve to reduce the incentives for friendly countries to acquire nuclear weapons of their own to deter such threats and circumstances.”¹⁰

This role was also highlighted in the Bush administration’s public NPR presentations as necessary for “assuring allies and friends” and requires “developing credible non-nuclear and nuclear response options.”¹¹ To that end the Pentagon emphasized the need for a “second-to-none nuclear capability.”¹² Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Policy Crouch further described:

“I also think it's important to underscore that we continue to need nuclear forces as well as other elements of the new triad, both to assure our friends and allies of U.S. security commitments and to dissuade potential competitors from competing with the United States in ways that are harmful to U.S. security and allied security.”¹³

One of the problems for this policy is that neither Japan nor South Korea (or others for that matter) can see the nuclear umbrella. All nuclear weapons were removed from South Korea in the early 1990s and the nuclear-armed warships that used to visit Japanese harbors have been denuclearized or the weapons offloaded in the United States. Both countries have to trust the policy or, in the case of South Korea, be shown tangible examples of nuclear planning such as targeting plans or deployment contingencies.

Some of these examples unexpectedly became public knowledge in 2002, when excerpts from the NPR report were leaked to the U.S. media and later posted on the Internet. This helped the public see – and Japan and South Korea feel assured of – how U.S. nuclear planning against China, North Korea, and Russia continue and have real implications for the size and capability of the U.S. nuclear stockpile. In setting the requirements for nuclear strike capabilities, the NPR distinguished between immediate, potential and unexpected contingencies:

- Immediate contingencies involve well-recognized current dangers... Current examples of immediate contingencies include an Iraqi attack on Israel or its neighbors, a North Korean attack on South Korea, or a military confrontation over the status of Taiwan.
- Potential contingencies are plausible, but not immediate dangers. For example, the emergence of a new, hostile military coalition against the United States or its allies in which one or more members possesses WMD and the means of delivery is a potential contingency that could have major consequences for U.S. defense planning, including plans for nuclear forces.
- Unexpected contingencies are sudden and unpredicted security challenges," like the Cuban Missile Crisis.¹⁴

The NPR further explained that, "North Korea, Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Libya are among the countries that could be involved in immediate, potential, or unexpected contingencies. All have longstanding hostility toward the United States and its security partners; North Korea and Iraq in particular have been chronic military concerns. All sponsor or harbor terrorists, and all have active WMD and missile programs."¹⁵

For an ally it can be difficult to see exactly where the "rogue" deterrence element of the U.S. extended nuclear deterrent is. After all, the "old" enemies of Russia and China have much more sizeable WMD capabilities, and therefore also much greater impact on how U.S. forces are sized. Ironically, a decade and a half after the ending of the Cold War and an almost continuous frenzy of WMD proliferation, the fact remains that 99 percent of U.S. nuclear planning is focused on maintaining strike plans against Russia and China.

Russia

The NPR did find that there currently are "no ideological sources of conflict with Moscow" and that the U.S. "seeks a more cooperative relationship with Russia and a move away from the balance-of-terror policy framework, which by definition is an expression of mutual distrust and hostility." To that end the NPR concluded that, "a [nuclear strike] contingency involving Russia, while plausible, is not expected."¹⁶

In what promised to be one of the most important breaks with Cold War nuclear planning, the NPR therefore proclaimed: "Adjusting U.S. immediate nuclear force requirements in recognition of the changed relationship with Russia is a critical step away from the Cold

War policy of mutual vulnerability and toward more cooperative relations.”¹⁷ Doing so would mean real changes to the way U.S. nuclear forces are deployed and targeted, how warplans are constituted, and what modernizations are undertaken or required in the future.

Unfortunately, but perhaps not surprisingly, the overall NPR fell far short of such a nuclear revolution but instead reminded that Russia nevertheless maintains the most formidable nuclear arsenal (aside from the United States), that Russia’s nuclear forces and programs remain a concern, that Russia’s future remains shaky, and that U.S. planning must take this into account. In fact, “in the event that U.S. relations with Russia significantly worsen in the future,” the NPR cautioned, “the U.S. may need to revise its nuclear force levels and posture.”¹⁸ For the planners at STRATCOM this means that a host of strike plans are maintained and updated and that alert forces continue to hold Russian nuclear forces and other strategic target categories at risk.

China

As for China, the NPR concluded that because Chinese strategic objectives were “still developing” and because of its “ongoing modernization of its nuclear and non nuclear forces, China is a country that could be involved in an immediate or potential contingency.”¹⁹ Since the NPR was completed, U.S.-Chinese relations have since experienced a warming period, but this is merely the latest chapter in the roller-coaster ride that China’s position in U.S. nuclear planning has experienced over the years.

China has been a target of U.S. nuclear strike plans since the beginning of the nuclear era, but in 1981 the Reagan administration decided to remove China from the SIOP (Single Integrated Operational Plan) and instead form a partnership with the country against the Soviet Union. After the 1991 Gulf War, relations gradually soured and during the 1993-1994 Nuclear Posture Review of the first Clinton administration U.S. Strategic Command (STRATCOM) and others argued internally for increased planning against China because of the long-term outlook for Chinese nuclear modernization. STRATCOM greatly increased the focus on China in its nuclear force structure planning in 1994 and identified

two potential U.S.-China adversarial scenarios: the first resulting from a conflict involving Korea; and the second being a direct U.S.-China confrontation.

The direct U.S.-China confrontation scenario, STRATCOM concluded, required construction of a major attack response plan. STRATCOM couldn't convince the first Clinton administration of the need for such a plan, but this changed during the next several years as U.S.-Chinese relations worsened following the U.S. accidental bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Yugoslavia and the Taiwan-strait crisis in the mid-1990s. The year after the Taiwan Strait crisis, President Clinton in November 1997 signed Presidential Decision Directive-60 (PDD-60) which among other things ordered STRATCOM to increase nuclear targeting of Chinese forces and facilities. STRATCOM did so and in 1998 brought China back under SIOP planning. The return of China to the SIOP was accompanied by the creation of the Chinese Integrated Strategic Operations Plan (CHISOP), a hypothetical Chinese nuclear war plan created by STRATCOM planners and used to "wargame" U.S. nuclear strike plans against Chinese nuclear forces.

It is in this context that the upgrade of the SSBN force in the Pacific and the improvement of the W76 targeting capabilities attain new importance. For U.S. planners the continued importance of nuclear weapons in the region seem clear enough, but whether Japan and South Korea feel assured – or even know about this development – is another question.

Korea

On the Korean peninsula the nuclear planning has undergone tremendous changes since the ending of the Cold War, most powerfully symbolized by the complete removal of U.S. nuclear weapons from South Korea in 1991-1992. Yet at the same time the South Korean government has invited, and the U.S. has provided, assurances that the nuclear umbrella remains intact over the peninsula.

Since then the nuclear umbrella has been maintained by SSBNs forward deployed in the Pacific and fighter-bombers based in the United States. A rare glimpse of the involvement of the SSBNs came in 1999 when the DOD Inspector General conducted an

audit of the Trident submarine Command and Control System (CCS) to check for Y2K compliance in connection with the year 2000. The audit was part of an evaluation of “mission critical systems” identified by the U.S. Pacific Command and U.S. Forces Korea “as being of particular importance to them....”²⁰ It is one of the few times the SSBN force has been publicly – albeit inadvertently – linked to the Korean situation.

Better known is the portion of the umbrella represented by nuclear gravity bombs for delivery by fighter-bombers. Until 1992 these weapons (as well as nuclear artillery shells) were deployed in South Korea, but the U.S. decided to remove the weapons as part of its response to the dramatic changes in the former

Soviet Union. The number of nuclear weapons in South Korea changed considerably over time, but always toward less, until they removed ended 33 years of continuous nuclear U.S. nuclear deployment on the peninsula.

U.S. Nuclear Weapons in Korea	
mid-1970s	680
early-1980s	150
mid-1987	150
mid-1991	100
late-1991	60
Source: William M. Arkin and Richard Fieldhouse, <i>Nuclear Battlefields</i> (Ballinger, 1985), Natural Resources Defense Council.	

The Joint Chiefs of Staff ordered that the first nuclear weapons should be on their way home from South Korea before the meeting of the U.S.-South Korean Military and Security Committee, scheduled for November 20-22, 1991.²¹ The withdrawal appears to have been completed in December 1991, six months before the withdrawal of weapons from other forward locations around the world. On 18 December 1991, the South Korean President, Roh Tae Woo, publicly declared that there were no U.S. nuclear weapons in South Korea. “As I speak, there do not exist any nuclear weapon whatsoever anywhere in the Republic of Korea,” he said.²²

Since the withdrawal, this part of the umbrella has been a responsibility of the 4th Fighter Wing at Seymour-Johnson Air Force Base in North Carolina on the U.S. East Coast. Part of this Wing’s responsibility has recently come to light thanks to the U.S. Freedom of Information Act. Just days before South Korean President Kim Dae-jung met with President Bill Clinton at the White House in June 1998 to discuss “new approaches”

toward North Korea and "peace and stability on the peninsula," a squadron of F-15E fighter bombers from the 4th Fighter Wing flew from Seymour Johnson Air Force Base to a bombing range in Florida to simulate a long-range nuclear strike against North Korea. The crews had spent five months training for this event -- their final exam for full certification to annihilate North Korea if ordered by the president to do so.

The exercise scenario envisioned a North Korean invasion of South Korea, after which the 4th Fighter Wing was "generated" in support of a sustained offensive operation that included "strategic attack missions" for the protection of South Korea. On their simulated mission, the F-15Es were accompanied by E-3A Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) aircraft for early warning and air control, KC-135 tankers for refueling during the long flight, and F-16CJ and F-15C aircraft for protection. According to the wing commander:²³

"We simulated fighting a war in Korea, using a Korean scenario. This included [North Korean] chemical attacks to protect against using full chemical gear [sic]. The scenario ... simulated a decision by the National Command Authority about considering using nuclear weapons.... We identified aircraft, crews, and [weapon] loaders to load up tactical nuclear weapons onto our aircraft." The "last phase of the exercise, the employment phase ... required us to fly those airplanes down to a range in Florida and drop" the BDU-38s.

The withdrawal of nuclear weapons from South Korea is particularly remarkable because the existence of WMD programs in North Korea was well known at the time, although not as well known as today. In hindsight, some may see the withdrawal as a mistake, especially considering the Bush administration's subsequent "axis of evil" doctrine and core elements of the NPR. Yet there is no evidence (at least in the public domain) that the deployment of nuclear weapons in South Korea limited North Korea's WMD ambitions.

Nor is there any evidence, so it appears, that the removal caused North Korea to speed up its WMD efforts. This fact was acknowledged in the 1994 NPR but has never been announced by the U.S. government. One of the six working groups established back then

to analyze different aspects of U.S. nuclear policy was tasked to examine the relationship between the nuclear posture and counterproliferation policy. According to the minutes from a meeting held in November 1993, when the chairman of the group asked if “removal of nuclear weapons from Korea [and] off naval ships [has] impacted proliferation,” the response of the group was a categorical “No.”²⁴

Such analysis did not dampen the perception, even at the very top of U.S. nuclear planning, that nuclear weapons serve a useful – even visible – role toward North Korea. Three years after 1994 crisis, when the U.S. came close to launching non-nuclear strikes against North Korea’s nuclear facilities, STRATCOM commander General Eugene Habiger was asked during Congressional hearings what “sort of deterrence” he thought U.S. nuclear weapons played in preventing WMD from being used by rogue states. General Habiger stated:²⁵

“In my view, sir, it plays a very large role. Not only was that message passed in 1990 by the President [to Iraq], that same message was passed to the North Koreans back in 1995 [sic], when the North Koreans were not coming off their reactor approach they were taking [sic].”

Implications of Recent U.S. Nuclear Policy Initiatives

There is little doubt that the NPR has important implications for the Pacific region. The question is whether they will manifest themselves as real changes to the nuclear posture or just more of the same albeit at a lower level compared with the Cold War. The NPR got a lot of attention in the Pacific because of the mentioning of China and North Korea, but U.S. nuclear crosshairs have been on those countries since the 1950s.

Equally controversial was the publication of the National Strategy to Combat Weapons of Mass Destruction, published by the White House in December 2002,²⁶ which became known as the Preemption Doctrine because of its emphasis on striking first instead of waiting to retaliate. This doctrine was provoked by the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and provided the policy justification for preemptively attacking Iraq “instead of waiting for the mushroom cloud.”

Yet preemption as such is nothing new in U.S. doctrine and has a long history in its nuclear planning. As early as in the late 1960s, for example, the “*only two* warning conditions used in developing the SIOP were United States pre-emption and tactical warning.”²⁷ Even so, that era concerned planning for the very survival of the nation, unlike the Bush administration doctrine which has expanded the meaning by lowering the threshold from strategic nuclear war to preventative war against terrorists and “rogue” states. “[W]e will not hesitate to act alone, if necessary, to exercise our right of self defense by acting preemptively against such terrorists, to prevent them from doing harm against our people and our country.”²⁸

The problem obviously is that preemption at that lower level of conflict is intertwined with the nuclear option. The public version of the document states that the U.S. “reserves the right to respond with overwhelming force – including through resort to *all of our options* – to the use of WMD against the United States, our forces abroad, and friends and allies.”²⁹ In the classified version of this document, which is National Security Presidential Directive 17 (NSPD-17) issued on September 14, 2002, the sentence “including through resort to all of our options” instead reads “including potentially nuclear weapons.” The word nuclear apparently was too controversial for the public version, but using the words “nuclear weapons” in the classified directive, according to an unnamed senior administration official, gives the military and other officials “a little more of an instruction to prepare all sorts of options for the president,” *The Washington Times* reported.³⁰ And “the president must have all options available to make that deterrent have meaning,” as President Bush stated on March 13, 2002.

Yet it remains unclear which options the president lacked before the Preemption Doctrine. As mentioned earlier, U.S. nuclear doctrine has long incorporated preemptive strike options. Moreover, the example provided by General Habiger above suggests that the United States in the 1994 Korea crisis directly communicated to the North Korean leadership a threat of preemptive use of force – including nuclear weapons. And since the North Korean actions in 1994 did not – unlike the 1990 Iraqi invasion on Kuwait –

constitute a military attack or an imminent threat, the preemption threat describe by General Habiger would represent a precursor to the Preemption Doctrine of Bush administration.

Missile Defense

Another “new” element of the NPR is the incorporation of defensive systems into the strategic posture. The Pentagon says that missile defense systems in the future will constitute a leg of the “New Triad” alongside offensive strike forces and the nuclear infrastructure. The rise of missile defenses U.S. strategic doctrine follows a decade of expansion of the nuclear doctrine to more directly counter regional aggressors armed with not only nuclear but also chemical and biological weapons. Missile defense represents a blunt acknowledgement that this effort has failed and that the Bush administration does not have confidence in the deterrence effect of its thousands of nuclear weapons.

The Pacific region is slated to become a center for the battle between offensive and defense postures. This summer the United States plans to declare a limited ballistic missile defense system operational at Fort Greely, Alaska, and Vandenberg Air Force Base in California. Initially there will be 10 silo-based interceptors and eventually as many as 100. North Korea’s fragile long-range ballistic missile program is being used as one of the core justifications for the defense against “tens” of missiles. The system is not directed against China or Russia, the Bush administration insists, but in the long run those are probably the countries where we will see the strongest reaction.

The Bush administration has rejected such concerns, insisting that a limited U.S. missile defense system will not affect Russia’s nuclear deterrent or spur Chinese nuclear modernization. “Our missile defenses will be no threat to Russia,” Undersecretary of Defense for Policy Douglas J. Feith told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in July 2001. It “will have virtually no effect on Russia’s capabilities” so “there is no incentive for Russia to spend scarce resources to try to overcome them.” As for China’s efforts, Feith claimed, it “will continue this modernization whether or not we build missile defenses.”

Yet America's own encounter with missile defenses suggests a very different dynamic. Documents recently declassified under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) reveal that when the Soviet Union built a limited missile defense system in the late 1960s, the U.S. response was dramatic. The pentagon drew up a special nuclear strike plan designed to overwhelm the defenses with an astonishing amount of nuclear firepower – more than 100 Minuteman ICBMs and Polaris SLBMs -- that would have killed tens of millions of people. The documents reveal that all components of the missile defense system – missile interceptors, battle radars, and distant early warning radars – were high-priority targets.³¹

Another U.S. response was the development of penetration aids (devices carried on the missiles meant to confuse the interceptors) and multiple independently targetable reentry vehicles (MIRVs). The United States undertook these efforts even though the Soviet ABM system was a limited one – a deficiency the U.S. planners were well aware of – similar in scale to the one planned by the Bush administration that purports to defend against small attacks. Even today, the U.S. continues to target the Moscow ABM system with many dozens of nuclear warheads.

Although we're now in a different era, the dynamic that triggered the developments in the 1960s is still alive. Russia has already begun to adjust its forces in anticipation of a future U.S. missile defense system. Their main concern is not so much whether their current forces can overwhelm a limited U.S. missile defense system, but how well Russia's surviving *retaliatory* forces will do *after* a hypothetical U.S. first strike. This fear is now driving further modernizations, despite the new U.S.-Russian partnership.

The situation is drastically different for China because a U.S. missile defense system fundamentally challenges the credibility and capability of the Chinese nuclear retaliatory deterrent. Ironically, the situation is similar to the late 1960s when China was the “rogue” state that was used by U.S. officials as the justification to build the first missile defense system. Back then the U.S. government estimated that a system of 100

interceptors – the same number planned by the Bush administration today – could reduce U.S. fatalities from a Chinese attack to “possibly zero, if the number [of Chinese missiles] does not reach 25.” Today China has approximately 20 ICBMs capable of hitting the U.S. mainland.

The current Chinese modernization program began more than a decade ago. U.S intelligence estimates that the number of warheads primarily targeted against the United States will increase “several fold” by 2015 to about 75 to 100. The Bush administration’s claim that China “will continue this modernization whether or not we build missile defenses” is a dangerous gamble that belittles the impact of an ABM system on the Chinese deterrent. The United States needed more than 100 missiles, warheads, penetration aids, and forward deployed ballistic missile submarines to overwhelm the limited Soviet ABM system in 1968. The Chinese reaction to a more capable U.S. ABM system may require similar changes in China’s capabilities such as MIRVing and other countermeasures.

The U.S. reaction to missile defenses in the 1960s provides an important reminder for today’s missile defense advocates: The defenses were intended to *protect* against nuclear attacks, but rather than shielding the capital from nuclear peril, the system had the opposite effect of *attracting* nuclear warheads. Missile defense systems, because they are not perfect and can be overwhelmed, are highly potent drivers of offensive nuclear planning. The U.S. ballistic missile defense system will be no exception.

Conclusion

United States nuclear doctrine in the Pacific is in a grand dilemma. On the one hand the U.S. continues strategic nuclear operations and modernizations in the region as if the Cold War never ended, and formally insists that the nuclear umbrella over Japan and South Korea is intact and credible. Russia and China still need to be deterred, and smaller opponents armed with weapons of mass destruction must also be countered with nuclear might.

On the other hand the U.S. insists that the role of nuclear weapons is smaller than ever, that its relationship with Russia is a partnership and no longer based on mutual assured destruction, and that ballistic missile defenses are urgently needed because “states of concern” may not be deterrable with nuclear weapons.

It is as if the U.S. doesn't know which horse to bet on and therefore has decided to bet on all of them. The NPR was presented as a dramatic shift in U.S. nuclear policy. In terms of the *nuclear* posture, however, it wasn't. Indeed I would argue that we didn't have a *nuclear* posture review but a strategic review, which failed in its most important task of fundamentally changing the purpose and role of U.S. nuclear planning, and instead protected nuclear status quo and increased the prominence of missile defense and advanced conventional forces in strategic planning.

How can I conclude that? After all, the NPR cuts the nuclear force to only 1,700-2,200 warheads and reduces the role of nuclear weapons by adding conventional weapons and missile defenses to the Triad. Yet the NPR doesn't present one single new nuclear cut beyond those decided in the 1994 NPR and the 1997 Helsinki Agreement (START III). Indeed, in terms of force level, the NPR *is* START III. Nor does the NPR reduce the nuclear role, it *adds* advanced conventional forces and missile defenses.

Instead the NPR protects the Cold War nuclear force structure, advocates new Cold War-type nuclear weapon systems, maintains the requirement for large-scale nuclear war planning against Russia and China, and continues an outdated and counterproductive nuclear posture against North Korea. Nuclear planning in the Pacific seems to happen almost on autopilot outside the context of efforts to denuclearize the Korean peninsula, improve relations with China, and create a partnership with Russia.

What are the steps that can be taken, not just by the United States but by all countries in the region, to promote nuclear disarmament? I think there are two overall tracks. First it is necessary to curb and scale back those elements of the existing and planned nuclear posture that are threatening and trigger responses on the other side. I know this is much

to ask from nuclear doctrine that relies on threat to be viable. But nuclear posturing can be more or less threatening, and still retain a sufficient secure retaliatory capability to deter big events. Offensive nuclear posturing in the post-Cold War era will always counterproductive short of national survival. This means scaling back or ending the most threatening and aggressive behaviors, such as forward deployment of SSBNs with more and more capable weapon systems. To that end it is vital to end “capability-based planning” which endlessly pursues superior capabilities simply because it can, and to link posture planning much more directly and overtly to specific threats.

Secondly it is necessary to bring back the end-goal: disarmament. This is where the Bush administration has most fundamentally altered U.S. nuclear policy; it has abandoned disarmament as a tangible end-goal, removed nuclear arms control as a limit on nuclear planning, and replaced it with an unrestrained and revitalized nuclear posture for the indefinite future. Perhaps nuclear disarmament was an illusion during the Cold War, but at least it was a goal. In the post-Cold War era this means reinstating disarmament by example (unilateral cuts), and returning to the negotiating table to build drastic and verifiable agreements not only with Russia but also the smaller nuclear powers. It means constraining rather than expanding nuclear planning, and limiting rather than expanding the number and types of strike options available to the president. And very importantly: make the process transparent and irreversible.

Finally it means ending the “rogue” states deterrence mistake. In its attempt to make nuclear deterrence relevant to the post-Cold War era, the nuclear establishment has worked hard to convince people that nuclear weapons should serve a credible even useful role against regional aggressors armed with WMD. The evidence in support of such a role is, at best, dubious. Yet a core assumption of the NPR is a world of unprecedented uncertainty in which proliferation continues and requires new options and capabilities. But non-proliferation comes from non-proliferation efforts, not nuclear deterrence. In the three years since the NPR was completed, two of the “rogue” countries (Iraq and Libya) highlighted by the NPR have dropped off the list, and a third (Iran) is in the middle of a transition that has the prospect of ending that potential nuclear contingency. With the

Syrian WMD problem potentially isolated in the Middle East (not to forget Israel), and with North Korea perhaps – only perhaps – deciding at some point to swap wasteful nuclear prestige with social realities, the U.S. nuclear policy may be in need of an overhaul sooner than expected.

ENDNOTES:

¹ J. D. Crouch, U.S. Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Policy, "Special Briefing on the Nuclear Posture Review," January 9, 2002.

² U.S. Department of the Navy, Department of the Navy Fiscal Year (FY) 2005 Budget Estimates, Justifications of Estimates (P-1), "Weapons Procurement, Navy," February 2004, item 2, p. 1.

³ William J. Perry, U.S. Secretary of Defense, "Annual Report to the President and the Congress," Washington, D.C., March 1996, p. 215.

⁴ U.S. Department of the Navy, FY2004 Budget, Exhibit R-2 RDT&E Budget Item Justification, February 2003, Page 1 of 22.

⁵ Senate Committee on Armed Services, "Hearings on Department of Defense Authorization for Appropriations for Fiscal Year 1994 and the Future Years Defense Program, Part 7: Nuclear Deterrence, Arms Control and Defense Intelligence," testimony of Adm. John T. Mitchell, U.S. Navy, Director, Strategic Systems Program Office, 103rd Cong., 1st sess, May 11, 1993, p. 17. Emphasis added.

⁶ U.S. Navy, Strategic Systems Project Office, briefing on the SRS Program, "SRS Operational Requirement Document, O.R. #254-0289," n.d. Partially declassified and released under the Freedom of Information Act, February 9, 1996.

⁷ Air Combat Command, "History of Air Combat Command 1 January - 31 December 1998," [1999], p. 194. Secret. Partially declassified and released under FOIA.

⁸ *Ibid*, p. 195.

⁹ The deployment was ordered by ACC in response to a report by the U.S. General Accounting Office, which questioned the B-2's mission capability and ability to deploy to forward areas due to its vulnerable radar absorbing surface. *Ibid*, p. 194.

¹⁰ U.S. Department of Defense, Office of the Secretary of Defense, "Nuclear Posture Review Report," submitted to Congress on December 31, 2001, p. 12. Excerpts available at URL <http://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/library/policy/dod/npr.htm>

¹¹ J. D. Crouch, U.S. Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Policy, "Special Briefing on the Nuclear Posture Review," January 9, 2002. Emphasis added.

¹² U.S. Department of Defense, "Findings of the Nuclear Posture Review," January 9, 2002, slide 7.

¹³ J. D. Crouch, U.S. Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Policy, "Special Briefing on the Nuclear Posture Review," January 9, 2002.

¹⁴ U.S. Department of Defense, Office of the Secretary of Defense, "Nuclear Posture Review Report," submitted to Congress on December 31, 2001, p. 16. Excerpts available at URL <http://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/library/policy/dod/npr.htm>

¹⁵ *Ibid*.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 17.

¹⁷ *Ibid*.

¹⁸ *Ibid*.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 16.

²⁰ Department of Defense, Office of the Inspector General, "Year 2000 Compliance of the Trident Submarine Command and Control System," Audit Report Number 99-167, May 24, 1999, p. 1.

²¹ Commander in Chief, U.S. Pacific Command, "USCINCPAC Command History 1991," Vol. I, October 30, 1992, pp. 91-92. Secret. Partially declassified and released under FOIA.

²² Robin Bulman, "No A-Arms In S. Korea, Roh Says," *Washington Post*, 19 December 1991, p. A38.

Some analysts suggest the President's statement was premature, and that the last nuclear weapons didn't leave South Korea until the spring of 1992.

²³ U.S. Air Combat Command, Ninth Air Force, "History of the 4th Fighter Wing January-June 1998," Appendix U: A: Interview, Brigadier General Randall K. Bigum, Commander 4th Fighter Wing with SSgt. John T. Murphy, 4th Fighter Wing Historian, July 14, 1998, pp. 111-12. Secret/NOFORN. Partially declassified and released under FOIA.

²⁴ U.S. STRATCOM/J51, Memorandum, NPR Report #23, Working Group #5, November 22, 1993. For Official Use Only. Partially declassified and released under FOIA.

²⁵ Eugene E. Habiger, General, USAF, Commander in Chief, U.S. Strategic Command, statement before the Senate Armed Services Committee Authorization for Appropriations hearing for FY 1998 and Future Years Defense Programs, S. 936, S. HRG. 105-37, PT. 1, March 13, 1997, p. 654.

²⁶ The White House, "National Strategy to Combat Weapons of Mass Destruction," December 2002.

²⁷ Tactical warning was equal to 15 minutes launch detection by the Ballistic Missile Early Warning System (BMEWS). U.S. Strategic Air Command, "History of the Strategic Air Command July-December 1968," Volume I, February 1969, p. 97. Partially declassified and released under FOIA. Emphasis added.

²⁸ The White House, "National Strategy to Combat Weapons of Mass Destruction," December 2002, p. 6.

²⁹ Ibid, p. 3. Emphasis added.

³⁰ Nicholas Kralev, "Bush Approves Nuclear Response," *The Washington Times*, January 31, 2003.

³¹ Hans M. Kristensen, et al., "The Protection Paradox," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, March/April 2004, pp. 68-77.