

26. Nuclear and Space Forces

by *Baker Spring*

ON January 9, 2002, Department of Defense officials described to the public the contents of the Nuclear Posture Review (NPR). This congressionally required study, however, went well beyond addressing the future needs of the U.S. nuclear arsenal and stockpile: It established a new policy governing the overall strategic posture that covered long-range conventional strike weapons and defensive systems as well as nuclear weapons. Its purpose was to adapt America's overall strategic posture to the requirements of the post-Cold War world. Since that time, the Bush Administration has been making steady progress in fulfilling the NPR's promise to move U.S. strategic forces away from a Cold War posture and toward a posture that meets today's needs. The following steps are necessary to continue the progress begun by the Bush Administration.

Notes

Recommendations

1. Recognize that the NPR established a “damage-limitation strategy” to define the strategic requirements of the U.S. in the post-Cold War world. The NPR, while not using this terminology, described the strategic forces essential to meeting the needs of a damage-limitation strategy. This strategy is designed to lessen the incentives for other states to acquire nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons; to reduce the likelihood of an attack on the U.S. and its friends and allies with such weapons; and to limit the impact of such attacks.

2. Recognize that integrated target planning is the cornerstone of overall strategic planning. By establishing a new strategic triad that includes conventional and defensive forces in addition to nuclear forces, the NPR poses a significant challenge to design new plans to guide the creation of strategic forces, including nuclear weapons, and govern their use. Specifically, this process should seek to allocate targeting requirements among conventional and nuclear forces on one axis and between offensive and defensive forces on a second axis. It is the need to meet the requirements of this integrated targeting

process that dictates the need for a new generation of strategic weapons in accordance with the damage-limitation strategy.

3. Recognize that the existing triad of nuclear weapons remains the best option for the overall strategic nuclear force posture. During the Cold War, the U.S. maintained a triad of intercontinental ballistic missiles, submarine-launched missiles, and bombers because this combination of strategic nuclear weapons provided the best option for ensuring the survivability of the force, flexibility regarding its employment, and effectiveness in meeting targeting requirements. Most important, it enhanced deterrence. The NPR preserved the strategic nuclear triad and nested it in a broader triad that includes defensive forces and a responsive infrastructure to address unforeseen developments. Because all three legs of the nuclear triad are aging, the military will need to modernize all three. This includes both the nuclear payloads and the delivery systems and means that the modernization plan should not be curtailed because of demands for a permanent end to nuclear explosive testing and ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT).

4. Recognize that it is necessary to maintain sufficient alert levels of operationally deployed nuclear forces. High states of readiness for operationally deployed nuclear forces are necessary to respond quickly to no-notice nuclear attacks against the U.S., its forces, or its allies. September 11 demonstrated that surprise attacks are a hallmark of today's world. Regrettably, the DOD is coming under increasing pressure from arms control advocates to de-alert U.S. nuclear forces. These pressures should be resisted.

5. Recognize that the U.S. military must have the ability to dominate space. The defense of U.S. military and civilian assets in space is essential to overall national security, as is the ability to deny the enemy access to space during war. Arms control advocates here and abroad want to impose international agreements on the U.S. military to limit its space operations under the slogan of "not weaponizing space." The U.S. should resist these efforts.

6. Recognize that certain space technologies will make invaluable contributions to meeting the needs of the damage-limitation strategy. This is particularly true regarding the defensive side of the new strategic triad. The Department of Defense should therefore be urged to revive the technologies explored in the late 1980s and early 1990s for developing and deploying space-based missile defense interceptors, such as the Brilliant Pebbles system. The Clinton Administration cancelled these promising programs in the 1990s.

Notes

Facts and Figures

See “Facts and Figures” under Defense Spending, p. 127.

This chapter can be read online at issues2006.org/nuclearweapons.

Additional Reading

Baker Spring, “Slipping the Surly Bonds of the Real World: The Unworkable Effort to Prevent the Weaponization of Space,” *Heritage Lecture* No. 877, May 10, 2005, at www.heritage.org/Research/NationalSecurity/hl877.cfm.

Nuclear Stability Working Group, *Nuclear Games: An Exercise Examining Stability and Defenses in a Proliferated World* (Washington, D.C.: The Heritage Foundation, 2005).

Gregory Canavan, *Missile Defense for the 21st Century* (Washington, D.C.: The Heritage Foundation, 2003).

General John L. Piotrowski, USAF (Ret.), *Strategic Synchronization: The Relationship Between Strategic Offense and Defense* (Washington, D.C.: The Heritage Foundation, 2002).