

Four Reasons Why U.S. Claims of NPT Compliance Are False

In April 2015 the U.S. State Department issued a so-called Fact Sheet entitled *Myths and Facts Regarding the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and Regime*. Its targeted audience was international delegations attending the 2015 NonProliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference. Given the increasing dissatisfaction of non-nuclear weapons states, the State Department argued that numerical stockpile reductions since the end of the Cold War is ample evidence that the U.S. is complying with the NPT's Article VI obligation for nuclear disarmament. It also claimed:

The United States is committed not to pursue new nuclear warheads, and life extension programs will not provide for new military capabilities... infrastructure modernization, stockpile stewardship, and life extension programs for U.S. warheads will contribute to and do not detract from progress on our NPT nuclear disarmament obligations.¹

There are four immediate reasons why these claims by the United States Government are false:

- 1) While it's true that the number of weapons is being reduced (albeit more slowly now), the U.S.' nuclear stockpile is being indefinitely preserved and qualitatively improved through new military capabilities. Clearly this is not the nuclear disarmament required by NPT Article VI.
- 2) The United States Government is preparing to spend more than one trillion dollars over the next thirty years for nuclear weapons modernization and new ballistic and cruise missiles, submarines and bombers.^{2 3} This too is obviously not nuclear disarmament.
- 3) The new Kansas City Plant has begun operations to produce or procure up to 100,000 nonnuclear components every year for nuclear weapons life extension programs.⁴ Multi-billion dollar upgrades and new facilities are planned for expanded production of plutonium pit cores at the Los Alamos Lab and for thermonuclear components ("secondaries") at the Y-12 Plant near Oak Ridge, Tennessee.⁵ These upgrades and new facilities are being designed to produce up to 80 plutonium pits and secondaries per year. Once completed, these three new complexes comprehensively rebuild the production side of the U.S. nuclear weapons complex. Moreover, they are expected to be operational until ~2075. That is not nuclear disarmament.
- 4) The United States Government has a high-level annual plan to indefinitely preserve its nuclear weapons stockpile⁶ and a new high-level plan to prevent other countries from acquiring

¹ <http://www.state.gov/t/isn/rls/fs/2015/240650.htm>

² *Projected Costs of U.S. Nuclear Forces, 2015 to 2024*, Congressional Budget Office, January 22, 2015, "CBO estimates the Administration's plans for nuclear forces would cost \$348 billion over the next decade... For each leg of the triad, most of the cost to procure new systems would occur after 2023." <https://www.cbo.gov/publication/4987>

³ *The Trillion Dollar Triad*, James Martin Center, Jan. 7, 2014, http://cns.miis.edu/trillion_dollar_nuclear_triad/

⁴ <http://www.nnsa.energy.gov/aboutus/ourlocations/kansas-city-plant>

⁵ See the National Nuclear Security Administration's *FY 2016 Stockpile Stewardship and Management Plan*, March 2015, Section 2.4.6.3 "Uranium Sustainment" and Section 4.3.3.1 "Strategy for Key Commodities," http://nnsa.energy.gov/sites/default/files/FY16SSMP_FINAL%203_16_2015_reducedsize.pdf

⁶ *FY 2016 Stockpile Stewardship and Management Plan*, National Nuclear Security Administration, March 2015, http://nnsa.energy.gov/sites/default/files/FY16SSMP_FINAL%203_16_2015_reducedsize.pdf

or proliferating nuclear weapons.⁷ But the United States Government has no high-level policy plan to implement its NPT Article VI nuclear disarmament obligation.

Concerning indefinite preservation of the nuclear stockpile, the U.S. National Nuclear Security Administration has scheduled programs out to 2040 and beyond that extend the service lives of nuclear weapons by at least 30 years. Moreover, the current B61-12 life extension program will be followed by another program in 2038 to produce the B61-13 nuclear bomb, indicating a perpetual cycle of life extension programs.⁸ It also suggests that some form of the B61 nuclear bomb is planned to be forward deployed in Europe until around the year 2070.

Concerning new military capabilities, the B61-12 blurs the line between strategic and tactical nuclear weapons. The B61 life extension program is creating the world's first nuclear smart bomb through the installation of a new guided tail fin kit that will dramatically increase its accuracy. It is also slated for delivery by the new super stealthy F-35. Yet the United States continues to assert that it would never give existing nuclear weapons new military capabilities.⁹

This is part of a long pattern. Then-U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton told the international delegations at the 2010 NPT Review Conference that “[o]ur Nuclear Posture Review ruled out the development of new U.S. nuclear weapons and new missions and capabilities for our existing weapons.”¹⁰ But at the same time the U.S. was ramping up a life extension program for the 100 kiloton W76 warhead that gave it the capability of assuming the hard target kill mission of the 475 kiloton W88 warhead.¹¹ Going further back, in the late 1990's the 9 megaton surface-burst B53 bomb was replaced by the 400 kiloton B61-11 earth-penetrating modification to destroy hardened deeply buried targets. The point is that the general direction of post-Cold War planning for nuclear warfighting has been toward more accurate weapons with lower yields and reduced fallout, all of which make them arguably more usable.

Nevertheless, the United States maintains that these are not new military capabilities. It apparently avoids talking about the characteristics of individual nuclear weapons types and adopts the position that there are no new military capabilities because of the incalculable amount of extremely destructive military capabilities already in the stockpile as a whole. Thus, by this logic, if a lower yield, more precise nuclear weapon assumes the mission of a higher yield weapon, then that is not a new military capability. If so, then the United States Government's assertion that it will never give existing nuclear weapons new military capabilities is essentially meaningless, giving it carte blanche to do whatever it wants with its existing stockpile.

The international community should demand that the United States Government fully explain and justify its claim that it would never give existing nuclear weapons new military capabilities, when the evidence points to the contrary. Perhaps that would be a step toward getting serious about global, verifiable nuclear disarmament.

⁷ *Prevent, Counter, and Respond – A Strategic Plan to Reduce Global Nuclear Threats*, National Nuclear Security Administration, March 2015, <https://www.scribd.com/doc/259397464/Prevent-Counter-and-Respond-A-Strategic-Plan-to-Reduce-Global-Nuclear-Threats-FY-2016-2020>

⁸ *FY 2016 Stockpile Stewardship and Management Plan*, National Nuclear Security Administration, March 2015, chapter 2, page 19 and chapter 8, page 18, http://nnsa.energy.gov/sites/default/files/FY16SSMP_FINAL%203_16_2015_reducedsize.pdf

⁹ For more, see *General Confirms Enhanced Targeting Capabilities of B61-12 Nuclear Bomb*, Hans Kristensen, January 23, 2014, <http://fas.org/blogs/security/2014/01/b61capability/>

¹⁰ *Hillary Clinton's Remarks before the 2010 NPT Review Conference*, May 3, 2010, <http://www.cfr.org/united-states/hillary-clintons-remarks-before-2010-npt-review-conference/p22042>

¹¹ For more, see *Administration Increases Submarine Nuclear Warhead Production Plan*, Hans Kristensen, August 30, 2007, http://fas.org/blogs/security/2007/08/us_tripplis_submarine_warhead/