



"float like a butterfly, bite like a dawg"

**a special bulletin from nuclear watch new mexico april 2002**

## **NUCLEAR POSTURE REVIEW: OUR ANALYSIS**

This January the Department of Defense (DoD) released a new **Nuclear Posture Review (NPR)**. These reviews, periodically required by Congress, generally set the strategic nuclear force levels deemed necessary for the DoD's nuclear warfighting plans and the supporting role of the Department of Energy's nuclear weapons complex. DoD has repeatedly claimed that the new NPR makes US national security less reliant on nuclear weapons. This new review replaces the old nuclear force triad of bombers, land-based intercontinental ballistic missiles and submarine-launched missiles with a "New Triad" of "non-nuclear and nuclear strike capabilities;" "active and passive defenses," and "a responsive defense structure," while making purported deep cuts to the numbers of nuclear warheads. This analysis examines those claims.

In mid-March the *Los Angeles Times* revealed a leaked version of the classified NPR. [Comprehensive excerpts are available at [www.globalsecurity.org](http://www.globalsecurity.org); NPR page numbers given below are as stated in those excerpts.] While it is true that the DoD is placing increased emphasis on advanced conventional weapons, at the same time the new review contradictorily broadens the rationale for the potential use of nuclear weapons. The new NPR also bestows continuing (arguably increasing) legitimacy upon nuclear weapons indefinitely on into the future. This contradicts the pledge made by the nuclear powers in the 1970 NonProliferation Treaty (NPT) "to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament..." (restated in 2000 as "an unequivocal commitment").

**Expanded nuclear weapon targeting:** Defense Secretary Rumsfeld has said "I can say that the review says nothing about targeting any country with nuclear weapons." To the contrary, plenty is said. In addition to already

targeted Russia and China, the NPR has expanded the potential targeting list to include North Korea, Iraq, Iran, Syria and Libya. "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." (p. 16). The NPR expands the targeting policy from being solely based on deterrence against other nuclear powers to include pre-emptive attacks against suspected chemical and biological weapons facilities. Finally, while arguing for "more flexibility [and] adaptive planning" (p. 29), the NPR extends future targeting justifications to hypothetical and undefined "surprising military developments." (p. 3)



cartoon by Jamie Chase

### **New and Modified Nuclear Weapons:**

The NPR is explicitly calling for the development of low-yield earth-penetrating nuclear weapons designed to destroy underground, reinforced facilities. Congruently, the new DOE budget request specifically funds design and feasibility studies for a "Robust Nuclear Earth Penetrator," most likely a modification of an existing weapon (by using a modification the US can avoid international censure for a "new" weapon). Since a low-yield weapon can be obtained by disabling some features of the original design DOE can also circumvent a 1994 congressional law barring research into "mininukes" (weapons with less than a 5 kiloton yield). The urgent danger here is that low-yield nuclear weapons are inherently more usable and can severely erode international norms against the use of weapons of mass destruction.

At the same time there is growing momentum toward US development and production of new designs. The NPR states that "[t]he need is clear for a revitalized nuclear weapons complex that will: ...be able, if directed, to design, develop, manufacture, and certify new warheads in response to new national requirements; and

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(continued from front)

maintain readiness to resume underground nuclear testing if required." (p. 30) Additionally, the DOE is now seeking to dramatically reduce the lead time required to resume full-scale testing at the Nevada Test Site.

**Nuclear Force Modernization:** Instead of the old strategic nuclear triad being qualitatively diminished it is being modernized. The Navy is retrofitting its strategic Trident submarines with a more advanced and accurate nuclear-armed missile. It is also planning on completely new missiles and subs in the coming decades. (p. 42) For the future the Air Force is planning on a "next generation ICBM" and a new strategic bomber (likely to be an aerospace vehicle). (p. 41 & 43)

**Active and Passive Defenses:** For this second leg of the New Triad, non-classified NPR viewgraphs assert that "[d]efenses reduce dependency on offensive strike forces to enforce deterrence." This means the Bush Administration's accelerated plans for a Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD) or "Star Wars." Rather than increasing our national security as claimed, to begin with a BMD has many technical uncertainties, will cost hundreds of billions of dollars and clearly will not protect us from unconventional threats made terribly obvious by September 11. Moreover, a BMD requires unilateral US withdrawal from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, long regarded as the keystone to nuclear arms control. Furthermore, since Russia and China may well believe that their own deterrent nuclear forces are undermined by a US missile defense, those countries may respond by modernizing and expanding their strategic nuclear forces, thus ultimately decreasing US national security. Finally, US missile "defense" could be a platform for the future US militarization of space (for example, see the US Space Command 2025 Vision at <http://www.peterson.af.mil/usspacecom/visbook.pdf>), which could be deeply, globally destabilizing.

**A responsive defense structure:** This third leg of the New Triad is to explicitly have "[t]he capacity of the infrastructure to upgrade existing weapon systems, surge production of weapons, or develop and field entirely new systems for the New Triad..." (p. 14) It is further stated that "[t]he need is clear for a revitalized nuclear weapons complex that will: ...be able, if directed, to design, develop, manufacture, and certify new warheads in response to new national requirements; and

maintain readiness to resume underground nuclear testing if required." (p. 30) "Plutonium Operations: One glaring shortfall is the inability to fabricate and certify weapon primaries, or so-called "pits" [the triggers for modern thermonuclear weapons]... For the long term a new modern production facility will be needed to deal with the large-scale replacement of components and new production." Meanwhile, capabilities at the Y-12 Plant in Tennessee for manufacturing highly enriched uranium components and the Pantex Plant in Texas for the remanufacturing of existing weapons will be greatly expanded. (p. 33)

**Nuclear Arms "Cuts":** Following the December 2001 bilateral summit between Presidents Bush and Putin much was made of the fact that the US and Russia pledged to cut their nuclear arsenals from some 8,000 nuclear weapons each to 2,000 or below. However, the NPR has made clear that instead of making irreversible cuts (i.e., actual dismantlements) the US plans to simply switch nuclear weapons from an "[o]perationally deployed force for immediate and unexpected contingencies" to a "[r]esponsive force for potential contingencies." (NPR viewgraphs.) In other words, they will be held in an active reserve from which they can be readily re-deployed for reasons now as broad as "surprising military developments." Finally, these so-called cuts are to take place outside of a binding treaty and therefore without any international accountability.

**Why this matters to you:** We are living in a world increasingly threatened by the use of weapons of mass destruction, a world in which the US should lead by example towards their elimination. This alert is not to argue for unilateral nuclear disarmament: instead, it is to argue that our own national security can be better enhanced if our own government leads by example. American citizens should voice their objections to their congressional delegations about the broadening of potential US nuclear targeting, the current efforts to make nuclear weapons more usable, and programs that seek to preserve nuclear weapons forever. At the same time, international opinion focused through review committees of the NonProliferation Treaty should bring to bear increasing pressure on the US (and all of the nuclear powers) to honor their treaty commitments to disarm their nuclear stockpiles.

  
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