



## Secret Plan Outlines the Unthinkable. America's Post 9/11 Nuclear Doctrine

### Description

### Introductory Note

*This incisive article by **William Arkin** summarizes the key elements of America's nuclear doctrine, formulated both before and in the immediate wake of September 11, 2001.*

*The article was originally published by the Los Angeles Times on March 10, 2002, a few months prior to the official release of the infamous [2001 Nuclear Posture Review \(NPR\)](#).*

*The doctrine of **mutually assured destruction** (MAD) of the Cold War era has been indefinitely scrapped.*

*[The NPR 2001](#) confirms America's foreign policy stance:*

*the pre-emptive use of nukes as a means of "self-defense" against both nuclear and non-nuclear states.*

*Nuclear weapons are also slated to be used in the conventional war theater.*

## Post Cold War Nuclear Doctrine. NPR 2001 (Drafted 21 Years Ago) Sets The Stage

*Let us be under no illusions.*

***Today, nuclear war is on the drawing board of the Pentagon.***

*[The 2001 NPR](#) (full document) released (officially) in July 2002 is of utmost significance. It determines America's nuclear doctrine. It has a direct bearing on our understanding of the war in Ukraine, and the danger of a World War III scenario. For details, see also [NPR 2001 \(excerpts by FAS\)](#).*

*The geopolitics of America's nuclear doctrine (NPR 2001) are outlined: Russia and the "Axis of Evil", China and the status of Taiwan, Israel, Iran and the Middle East, North Korea.*

*The modalities consist in integrating a new category of nuclear weapons (allegedly safe for the surrounding civilian population) into the conventional war arsenal.*

## Minimizing Collateral Damage while "Blowing up the Planet"

*Here are some of the highlights outlined in William Arkin's article, most of which are being implemented:*

- ***"...the use of nuclear weapons against at least seven countries ... naming not only **Russia and the "axis of evil"—Iraq, Iran, and North Korea—but also China, Libya and Syria."*****
- ***"nuclear weapons may be required in some future Arab-Israeli crisis."***
- ***"...using nuclear weapons to retaliate against chemical or biological attacks"***
- ***"the NPR lists a military confrontation over the status of Taiwan as one of the scenarios that could lead Washington to use nuclear weapons."***
- ***"nuclear strategy ...viewed through the prism of Sept. 11. faith in old-fashioned deterrence is gone"***
- ***"developing such things as nuclear bunker-busters and surgical "warheads that reduce collateral damage,"***
- ***"cyber-warfare and other nonnuclear military capabilities would be integrated into nuclear-strike forces"***
- ***"the integration of "new nonnuclear strategic capabilities" into nuclear-war plans.***
- ***"expand the breadth and flexibility of U.S. nuclear capabilities.***
- ***"what has evolved since last year's [September 11, 2001] terror attacks is an integrated, significantly expanded planning doctrine for nuclear wars."***

Michel Chossudovsky, Global Research, September 10, 2022, December 22, 2022

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Los Angeles Times, March 10, 2002

*The Bush administration, in a secret policy review completed early this year, has ordered the Pentagon to draft contingency plans for the use of nuclear weapons against at least seven countries, **naming not only Russia and the "axis of evil"—Iraq, Iran, and North Korea—but also China, Libya and Syria.***

In addition, the U.S. Defense Department has been told to **prepare for the possibility that nuclear weapons may be required in some future Arab-Israeli crisis.** And, it is to develop plans for **using nuclear weapons to retaliate against chemical or biological attacks, as well as "surprising military developments" of an unspecified nature.**

These and a host of other directives, including calls for developing bunker-busting mini-nukes and nuclear weapons that reduce collateral damage, are contained in a still-classified document called the Nuclear Posture Review (NPR), which was delivered to Congress on Jan. 8.

Like all such documents since the dawning of the Atomic Age more than a half-century ago, this NPR offers **a chilling glimpse into the world of nuclear-war planners: With a Strangelovian genius,** they cover every conceivable circumstance in which a president might wish to use nuclear weapons—planning in great detail for a war they hope never to wage.

In this top-secret domain, there has always been an inconsistency between America's diplomatic objectives of reducing nuclear arsenals and preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, on the one hand, and the military imperative to prepare for the unthinkable, on the other.

Nevertheless, the Bush administration plan reverses an almost two-decade-long trend of relegating nuclear weapons to the category of weapons of last resort. It also redefines nuclear requirements in hurried post-Sept. 11 terms.

In these and other ways, the still-secret document offers insights into the evolving views of nuclear strategists in Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld's Defense Department.

While downgrading the threat from Russia and publicly emphasizing their commitment to reducing the number of long-range nuclear weapons, Defense Department strategists promote tactical and so-called "adaptive" nuclear capabilities to deal with contingencies where large nuclear arsenals are not demanded.

They seek a host of new weapons and support systems, including conventional military and cyber warfare capabilities integrated with nuclear warfare. The end product is a now-familiar post-Afghanistan model—with nuclear capability added. It combines precision weapons, long-range strikes, and special and covert operations.

But the NPR's call for development of new nuclear weapons that reduce "collateral damage" myopically ignores the political, moral and military implications—short-term and long—of crossing the nuclear threshold.

Under what circumstances might nuclear weapons be used under the new posture? The NPR says they "could be employed against targets able to withstand nonnuclear attack," or in retaliation for the use of nuclear, biological, or chemical weapons, or "in the event of surprising military developments."

Planning nuclear-strike capabilities, it says, involves the recognition of "immediate, potential or unexpected" contingencies. **Show me why.** "All have long-standing hostility towards the United States and its security partners. All sponsor or harbor terrorists, and have active WMD [weapons of mass destruction] and missile programs."

**China, because of its nuclear forces and "developing strategic objectives,"** is listed as "a country that could be involved in an immediate or potential contingency." Specifically, **the NPR lists a military confrontation over the status of Taiwan as one of the scenarios that could lead Washington to use nuclear weapons.**

Other listed scenarios for nuclear conflict are a North Korean attack on South Korea and an Iraqi assault on Israel or its neighbors.

The second important insight the NPR offers into Pentagon thinking about nuclear policy is the extent

to which the Bush administration's strategic planners were shaken by last September's terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Though Congress directed the new administration "to conduct a comprehensive review of U.S. nuclear forces" before the events of Sept. 11, the final study is striking for its single-minded reaction to those tragedies.

Heretofore, nuclear strategy tended to exist as something apart from the ordinary challenges of foreign policy and military affairs. Nuclear weapons were not just the option of last resort, they were the option reserved for times when national survival hung in the balance—a doomsday confrontation with the Soviet Union, for instance.

**Now, nuclear strategy seems to be viewed through the prism of Sept. 11.** For one thing, the Bush administration's faith in old-fashioned deterrence is gone. It no longer takes a superpower to pose a dire threat to Americans.

"The terrorists who struck us on Sept. 11th were clearly not deterred by doing so from the massive U.S. nuclear arsenal," Rumsfeld told an audience at the National Defense University in late January.

Similarly, U.S. Undersecretary of State John R. Bolton said in a recent interview, "We would do whatever is necessary to defend America's innocent civilian population .... The idea that fine theories of deterrence work against everybody ... has just been disproven by Sept. 11."

Moreover, while insisting they would go nuclear only if other options seemed inadequate, officials are looking for nuclear weapons that could play a role in the kinds of challenges the United States faces with Al Qaeda.

Accordingly, the NPR calls for new emphasis on **developing such things as nuclear bunker-busters and surgical "warheads that reduce collateral damage,"** as well as weapons that could be used against smaller, more circumscribed targets—"possible modifications to existing weapons to provide additional yield flexibility," in the jargon-rich language of the review.

It also proposes to train U.S. Special Forces operators to play the same intelligence gathering and targeting roles for nuclear weapons that they now play for conventional weapons strikes in Afghanistan. **And cyber-warfare and other nonnuclear military capabilities would be integrated into nuclear-strike forces to make them more all-encompassing.**

As for Russia, once the primary reason for having a U.S. nuclear strategy, the review says that while Moscow's nuclear programs remain cause for concern, "ideological sources of conflict" have been eliminated, rendering a nuclear contingency involving Russia "plausible" but "not expected."

"In the event that U.S. relations with Russia significantly worsen in the future," the review says, "the U.S. may need to revise its nuclear force levels and posture."

When completion of the NPR was publicly announced in January, Pentagon briefers deflected questions about most of the specifics, saying the information was classified. Officials did stress that, consistent with a Bush campaign pledge, the plan called for reducing the current 6,000 long-range nuclear weapons to one-third that number over the next decade. Rumsfeld, who approved the review late last year, said the administration was seeking “a new approach to strategic deterrence,” to include missile defenses and improvements in nonnuclear capabilities.

Also, Russia would no longer be officially defined as “an enemy.”

Beyond that, almost no details were revealed.

The classified text, however, is shot through with a worldview transformed by Sept. 11. The NPR coins the phrase “New Triad,” which it describes as comprising the “offensive strike leg,” (our nuclear and conventional forces) plus “active and passive defenses,” (our anti-missile systems and other defenses) and “a responsive defense infrastructure” (our ability to develop and produce nuclear weapons and resume nuclear testing). Previously, the nuclear “triad” was the bombers, long-range land-based missiles and submarine-launched missiles that formed the three legs of America’s strategic arsenal.

The review emphasizes **the integration of “new nonnuclear strategic capabilities” into nuclear-war plans.** “New capabilities must be developed to defeat emerging threats such as hard and deeply-buried targets (HDBT), to find and attack mobile and re-locatable targets, to defeat chemical and biological agents, and to improve accuracy and limit collateral damage,” the review says.

It calls for “a new strike system” using four converted Trident submarines, an unmanned combat air vehicle and a new air-launched cruise missile as potential new weapons.

Beyond new nuclear weapons, the review proposes establishing what it calls an “agent defeat” program, which defense officials say includes a “boutique” approach to finding new ways of destroying deadly chemical or biological warfare agents, as well as penetrating enemy facilities that are otherwise difficult to attack. This includes, according to the document, **“thermal, chemical or radiological neutralization of chemical/biological materials in production or storage facilities.”**

Bush administration officials stress that the development and integration of nonnuclear capabilities into the nuclear force is what permits reductions in traditional long-range weaponry. But the blueprint laid down in the review would **expand the breadth and flexibility of U.S. nuclear capabilities.**

In addition to the new weapons systems, **the review calls for incorporation of “nuclear capability” into many of the conventional systems** now under development. An extended-range conventional cruise missile in the works for the U.S. Air Force “would have to be modified to carry nuclear warheads if necessary.” Similarly, the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter should be modified to carry nuclear weapons “at an affordable price.”

The review calls for research to begin next month on **fitting an existing nuclear warhead into a new 5,000-pound “earth penetrating” munition.**

Given the advances in electronics and information technologies in the past decade, it is not surprising that the NPR also **stresses improved satellites and intelligence, communications, and more robust high-bandwidth decision-making systems.**

Particularly noticeable is the directive to improve U.S. capabilities in the field of “information operations,” or cyber-warfare.

The intelligence community “lacks adequate data on most adversary computer local area networks and other command and control systems,” the review observes. It calls for improvements in the ability to “exploit” enemy computer networks, and the integration of cyber-warfare into the overall nuclear war database “to enable more effective targeting, weaponizing, and combat assessment essential to the New Triad.”

In recent months, when Bush administration officials talked about the implications of Sept. 11 for long-term military policy, they have often focused on “homeland defense” and the need for an anti-missile shield. In truth, **what has evolved since last year’s terror attacks is an integrated, significantly expanded planning doctrine for nuclear wars.**

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2. Main

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