

U.S. Nuclear Warfighting Plan Could Wipe Out the Human Race

by Carl Osgood

March 7—In January 1995, the world came to the brink of nuclear war, but war was avoided because tensions between Russia and the West were very low. The launch of a Norwegian scientific rocket, along a trajectory that coincided with that from which Moscow expected a blinding nuclear attack from U.S. Trident submarine-launched ballistic missiles would originate, set off alarm bells in Moscow, but the conditions of Russia-U.S. relations were such that Russian President Boris Yeltsin was able to hold off long enough to determine that, in fact, there was no activity by U.S. nuclear forces that were a threat to Russia.

Today, MIT scientist Theodore Postol wrote in a Jan. 25, 2015 *Boston Globe* article, a similar false alarm might not have such a happy outcome. “In the different political circumstances of 2015, the same cautious assessment of the rocket’s trajectory by Russia’s political and military leaders might not be possible,” he wrote. Among the measures that Postol called for to reduce such dangers, aside from strengthening NATO’s conventional force capabilities and improving Russia’s early warning network, was this: “The United States should rein in its senseless and dangerous nuclear force modernization efforts. This program creates the appearance that the United States is preparing to fight and win a nuclear war with Russia. The nuclear deterrent on hand, with minor modifications, is already more than enough.”

The reality is that the United States is not only creating the “appearance” of preparing to fight and win a

nuclear war, but it actually *is* preparing to fight and win a nuclear war, although the idea that the United States can do that against another nuclear power is a dangerous delusion. Gen. Maj. Andrei Burbin, chief of the Central Command Post of Russia’s Strategic Missile Forces (SMF), made this clear in an unusual March 1 on-air briefing on Russia’s RSN Radio. The message he delivered was that “utopian” military schemes for “limited nuclear war” or a “counterforce” destruction of Russia’s nuclear weapons are illusory: They will fail, and the result will be retaliation against the U.S. by Russia using the missiles of the SMF. (See “Hear These Russian Warnings: They Might Save Your Life,” [EIR](#), March 6, 2015.)

Since the beginning of the George W. Bush Administration in 2001, the United States has been reorganizing and modernizing its nuclear forces on the basis that nuclear weapons aren’t just a last-resort weapon, but are actually tools for coercing other sovereign nations into heeling before the Anglo-American empire of globalization. The successive Bush and Obama administrations have put a great deal of effort into increasing the military utility of nuclear weapons, by integrating them into strategies that also include the strategic use of conventional weapons, and globally deployed missile defense systems. As many experts such as Postol have warned, this increases the danger that nuclear weapons will be used in a geopolitical confrontation or in response to a false alarm, such as the 1995 Norwegian rocket incident.

The 2002 Nuclear Posture Review

The Bush Administration's 2002 Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) began blurring the distinction between nuclear and conventional weapons, and indeed, offensive and defensive systems, when it declared that the Cold War triad of land-based bombers, land-based nuclear ballistic missiles, and submarine-launched ballistic missiles would be replaced by a new triad, consisting of offensive systems, defensive systems, and upgraded defense infrastructure to provide new capabilities against emerging threats. For sure, the old triad would remain, but now it was to be subsumed under a larger strategic concept, in which it would be combined with ballistic missile defenses and bound together through enhanced command and control (C2) systems.

"The addition of defenses, along with the prospects for timely adjustments to force capabilities and enhanced C2 and intelligence systems, means that the U.S. will no longer be as heavily dependent on offensive strike forces to enforce deterrence as it was during the Cold War," then-Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld wrote in the unclassified forward to the NPR. "The addition of non-nuclear strike forces—including conventional strike and information operations—means that the U.S. will be less dependent than it has been in the past on nuclear forces to provide its offensive deterrent capability."

Subsequent media leaks, in the months after the NPR was briefed to Congress and the press, provided some clarity on what this meant. Columnist William Arkin leaked excerpts from the document in March 2002, which were then published by the Federation of American Scientists, though the excerpts were never confirmed by the Pentagon. According to Arkin, the NPR directed the military to develop plans to use nuclear weapons against Russia, China, Iraq, Iran, North

Korea, Syria, and Libya. It also instructed the Pentagon to develop plans for using nuclear weapons in the context of a renewed Israeli-Arab crisis, for retaliation after chemical or biological weapons attacks, and in the event of "surprising military developments" of an unspecified nature. The document did not yet define Russia as a threat, but stated that "Russia's nuclear

forces and programs nevertheless remain a concern."

U.S. nuclear planning had to take into account the fact that Russia faced many strategic problems along its periphery, making its future course impossible to chart with certainty. "In the event that U.S. relations with Russia significantly worsen in the future, the U.S. may need to revise its nuclear force levels and posture."

Coercion and a blurring of the lines between nuclear and conventional weapons feature prominently in the document. "Systems capable of striking a wide range of targets throughout an adversary's territory may dissuade a potential adversary from pursuing threatening capabilities. For example, a demonstration of the linkage between long-range precision

strike weapons and real-time intelligence systems may dissuade a potential adversary from investing heavily in mobile ballistic missiles," the document says.

However, if dissuasion fails, then the adversary will have to be defeated by long-range strike capabilities. "Composed of both non-nuclear and nuclear weapons, the strike element of the New Triad can provide greater flexibility in the design and conduct of military campaigns to defeat opponents decisively. Non-nuclear strike capabilities may be particularly useful to limit collateral damage and conflict escalation. Nuclear weapons could be employed against targets able to withstand non-nuclear attack (for example, deep underground bunkers or bio-weapon facilities)." As Arkin wrote, gone is the notion that nuclear weapons might



Donald "Strangelove" Rumsfeld's Pentagon began to blur the distinction between nuclear and conventional weapons, raising the likelihood of nuclear war.

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only be used as a “last resort,” against an adversary that actually has the capability to wipe us off the map.

The 2010 NPR

The Obama Administration’s 2010 Nuclear Posture Review was a milquetoast version of the 2001 document. It talked about President Obama’s Prague 2009 speech, in which he stated his goal of seeking “the peace and security of the world without nuclear weapons.” As we shall see, however, the administration has never closed the door to nuclear warfighting, not even in that initial 2010 document. Indeed, the Obama Administration has continued the policy of Rumsfeld and the neo-cons, ranging from military strategic doctrine to the coverup of the role of the Saudi sponsors of 9/11.

“The massive nuclear arsenal we inherited from the Cold War era of bipolar military confrontation is poorly suited to address the challenges posed by suicidal terrorists and unfriendly regimes seeking nuclear weapons,” the NPR said, in an echo of the previous administration. “Therefore, it is essential that we better align our nuclear policies and posture to our most urgent priorities preventing nuclear terrorism and nuclear proliferation.”

The document declared that the U.S. was prepared to strengthen its negative security assurance, that is, that “the United States will not use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapons states that are party to the NPT [Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty] and in compliance with their nuclear non-proliferation obligations.”

That still leaves a target list very similar to that in the 2001 NPR. However, because of other types of threats, including conventional and chemical weapons, which nuclear weapons may still be able to deter, “The United States is . . . not prepared at the present time to adopt a universal policy that deterring nuclear attack is the sole purpose of nuclear weapons.”

The 2010 NPR also preserved the other elements of the “new triad” of the 2001 document: “Contributions by non-nuclear systems to U.S. regional deterrence and reassurance goals will be preserved by avoiding limitations on missile defenses and preserving options for using heavy bombers and long-range missile systems in conventional roles,” i.e., Prompt Global Strike, a concept first developed by Rumsfeld’s Pentagon. In this vein, the document reports that the administration will continue to maintain forward-based B61 nuclear gravity bombs in Europe and proceed with the full upgrade pro-

gram for that weapon to the B61-12 configuration, which would have greater accuracy and a lower yield. The U.S. will also “continue to maintain and develop long-range strike capabilities that supplement U.S. forward military presence and strength regional deterrence.”

U.S. Nuclear Employment Strategy

The U.S. Nuclear Employment Strategy, as reported to Congress in June 2013, further muddies the waters. Although differences remain between the U.S. and Russia, it says, “the prospects of a military confrontation between us have declined dramatically.” Yet, “Russia remains the United States’ only peer in nuclear weapons capabilities.” While the need for parity is not as compelling as it was during the Cold War, “large disparities in nuclear capabilities could raise concerns on both sides and among U.S. allies and partners, and may not be conducive to maintaining a stable, long term relationship, especially as nuclear forces are significantly reduced. We therefore continue to place importance on Russia joining us as we move to lower levels of nuclear weapons.”

“The United States seeks to maintain strategic stability with Russia,” it goes on. “Consistent with the objective of maintaining an effective deterrent posture, the United States seeks to improve strategic stability by demonstrating that it is not our intent to negate Russia’s strategic nuclear deterrent or to destabilize military relationship with Russia. Strategic stability would be strengthened through similar Russian steps toward the United States and U.S. Allies.”

One theme that runs through the rest of the document is reducing reliance on nuclear weapons by eventually replacing them with conventional strike capabilities. “DoD is directed to conduct deliberate planning for non-nuclear strike options to assess what objectives and effects could be achieved through integrated non-nuclear strike options and to propose possible means to make these objectives and effects achievable. . . . [P]lanning for non-nuclear strike options is a central part of reducing the role of nuclear weapons.”

Otherwise, the United States will continue to maintain the current nuclear triad. “These forces should be operated on a day-to-day basis in a manner that maintains strategic stability with Russia and China, deters potential regional adversaries and assures U.S. allies and partners.”

The report also demonstrates that U.S. targeting doctrine has settled on counterforce, rather than a

“counter-value” or “minimum deterrence” strategy. In other words, U.S. targeting doctrine calls for targeting the adversary’s strategic forces, which certainly implies a “nuclear war winning” strategy. “The new guidance requires the United States to maintain significant counterforce capabilities against potential adversaries,” it says. The report “shows that the American military-political leadership is still firmly committed to the essentially global doctrine of offensive nuclear deterrence, with the strategy of ‘extended nuclear deterrence’ as a component of the later,” writes Russian analyst V. Kozin in *International Affairs* No. 6 in 2013; he points to the continued presence of U.S. tactical nuclear weapons in Europe as a major element of a “regional” nuclear strategy.

The B61 Bomb Modernization

Another element of the hair trigger is the B61 tactical nuclear bomb and plans to integrate its modernized version, called the B61-12, into the F-16 and Tornado aircraft of five NATO countries—Belgium, the Netherlands, Turkey, Germany, and Italy—as well as U.S. forces stationed in Europe, a task to be completed by about 2019, ahead of the 2020 delivery date for the first modernized bombs. Around the end of the decade, the F-16s are to be replaced by F-35 Joint Strike Fighters, which will also be capable of delivering the enhanced B61 bomb.

The Federation of American Scientists’ Hans Kristensen, in a Feb. 28, 2014 posting on his Strategic Security blog, strongly suggested that the B61-12 enhancement is a violation of the 2010 Nuclear Posture Review and of the spirit, if not the letter, of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, because it essentially creates a new nuclear capability that doesn’t exist with the current versions of that bomb, but does so under the pretext of a life-extension program (albeit one that’s behind



U.S. Air Force

Demonstration of the nuclear weapon disarming procedures on a “dummy” version of a B61 bomb in the Netherlands. The Obama Administration plans to upgrade these into the B61-12 configuration, which some experts consider to be a violation of arms control treaties.

schedule and over budget).

Under the program, the bomb gets a new tail kit assembly that substantially improves its accuracy, which Kristensen estimates to be a reduction from about 110-180 meters with unguided bombs, down to about 30 meters. The tail kit also gives the bomb the capability of gliding towards its target, something that current non-guided versions of the bomb can’t do. Kristensen reports that the Nuclear Posture Review “explicitly promised that ‘Life Extension Programs ... will not support new military missions or provide for new military capabilities.’ But the guided tail kit is a new military capability and so is a different explosive yield.”

Kristensen notes that NATO decided in 2012 “that the Alliance’s nuclear force posture currently meets the criteria for an effective deterrence and defense posture.” If so, he asks, “why enhance it with guided B61-12 nuclear bombs and F-35 stealth fighter-bombers?” Indeed, why create this new capability, when the publicly professed goal is to eliminate the need for nuclear weapons altogether? And why create it when it’s not even appropriate for the security needs of Europe today?

But the B61 isn’t the only nuclear weapon the Air Force wants to put on its bombers. It’s also seeking to

develop a new long-range cruise missile, for deployment in the mid-2020s. In an Oct. 10, 2014 blog posting, Kristensen specifically cited this weapon as a nuclear warfighting weapon, not a weapon for strategic deterrence. Known as the Long Range StandOff (LRSO) weapon, the new cruise missile, the Air Force argues, is needed to help bombers avoid having to penetrate air defenses in order to put the weapon on its target.

“The assumption for the argument is that if the Air Force didn’t have a nuclear cruise missile, an adversary could gamble that the United States would not risk an expensive stealth bomber to deliver a nuclear bomb and would not want to use ballistic missiles because that would be escalating too much,” Kristensen writes. “That’s quite an assumption, but for the nuclear warfighter the cruise missile is seen as this great in-between weapon that increases targeting flexibility in a variety of regional strike scenarios.”

Prompt Global Strike

The idea of Prompt Global Strike, as we’ve seen, was an outgrowth of the 2001 Nuclear Posture Review, one that was maintained in the 2010 review, even if it differs in implementation. In the beginning, the argument of Rumsfeld’s Pentagon for putting conventional warheads on ICBMs was that the United States had to have a long-range strike capability, to be able to quickly interdict emerging targets anywhere in the world, within 30 minutes to an hour of the decision being made, even in places where the U.S. had no forward military presence. The capability was needed, so the argument went, in case a high-value terrorist leader was suddenly located in some safe house where there were no U.S. force presence, or if North Korea suddenly began preparing for a nuclear missile launch against the United States. Other possible scenarios were probably not excluded, but these were the two main ones.

The initial proposals were based on placing conventional warheads, with enhanced precision capability, either on the submarine-launched Trident II missile or the land-based Minuteman missile, but those proposals were repeatedly shot down by Congress on concerns that were such a missile to be launched, it would look to other nuclear powers, particularly China and Russia, no different from a nuclear missile launch and, therefore, could precipitate a series of unpredictable events that would wind up with a very bad ending.

The idea was never abandoned, however. Both the Navy and the Air Force continued to pursue their own

separate programs, until 2008, when Congress placed them under a single Pentagon authority. The Navy continued to propose modifications to the Virginia-class attack submarines, to give them the capability to launch medium-range ballistic missiles, but that idea also has never flown in the Congress.

The programs currently underway are an Air Force/DARPA program to develop a hypersonic glide vehicle that would be launched from a modified MX missile, called the Conventional Strike Missile, and an Army project called the Advanced Hypersonic Weapon, launched from a shorter-range, three-stage rocket booster. Test flights have been conducted in both programs, with some failures, but both of them are a long way from actual deployment. In early 2013, there were indications that the Pentagon was considering redefining Prompt Global Strike to include systems of somewhat shorter ranges and slightly longer response times, in order to reduce costs.

Whatever the status of the Prompt Global Strike program, the Russians take the intention behind it very seriously and the U.S. military knows this. Former Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. James Cartwright, noted Russian concerns at a conference in Virginia in May 2012. First of all, he said, they’re concerned about the possibility of U.S. missile defenses being able to “reach out and touch” their ICBMs, thereby upsetting the balance of power. Secondly, “there’s the potential that you could, in fact, generate a scenario where, in a bolt from the blue, we launch a pre-emptive attack and then use missile defense to weed out their residual fires [that is, retaliatory launch of their remaining ICBMs]. . . . We’re going to have to think our way out of this. We’re going to have to figure out how we’re going to do this.”

The Congressional Research Service report on Prompt Global Strike, dated Aug. 26, 2014, also mentions this. It describes efforts in the programs to develop vehicles that have a different trajectory from nuclear ICBMs, to reduce the chance of a misunderstanding. The Conventional Strike Missile, for example, would fly at a more compressed trajectory than that of nuclear ICBMs, before the hypersonic glide vehicle separates from the booster. The vehicle would then fly at the edge of the atmosphere on its way to the target. While such measures “can reduce the possibility of misunderstandings they probably cannot eliminate them,” the report says.

More importantly, “they cannot address concerns,

often expressed by officials in Russia and China, that the United States might use these weapons, along with other conventional strike systems and missile defenses, to acquire the ability to attack strategic or nuclear targets in these nations without resorting to the use of U.S. nuclear weapons.”

As for ballistic missile defenses and nuclear offensive forces, there seems to be no literature or doctrine in the public domain as to how they would work together, but they are indeed linked, as Rose Gottemoeller, the State Department’s chief arms control negotiator, has suggested. “Nuclear, conventional, and missile defense capabilities all contribute to extended deterrence, and they all require constant tending,” she said at a U.S. Strategic Command conference in 2012.

The Risk of Escalation

The danger that this all presents was vividly illustrated in September 2013, when Israel conducted a missile defense test over the Mediterranean Sea. The test involved firing a target missile north of the Libyan coast and towards the coast of Israel, in a test of the Arrow anti-missile system.

As reported by Russian nuclear weapons expert Pavel Podvig, in an Oct. 7, 2013 article in the *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*, the target missile was detected by a Russian early warning radar in Armavir, in southern Russia close to Iran. It is one of the radar facilities Russia had offered to operate jointly with the West, if the latter were really concerned about possible launches from Iran. The Israeli test took place during a very tense time. Obama had just backed down from launching an unprovoked attack on Syria, allegedly in response to a chemical weapons attack, and Russia, as Podvig noted, was very publicly opposed to such military action and wanted to dramatize the dangers involved.

“The Russian military let it be publicly known that the missile was detected and that the Russian president was informed about the launch,” Podvig writes. “For a few hours the identity of the missile remained a mystery, but then Israel admitted that the launch was part of a test of its Arrow anti-missile defense system.” The test was long planned and Israel had sent the necessary notifications to air-traffic control authorities. “Although Israel is under no obligation to provide direct notification of its ballistic missile launches to Russia or anyone else, the Russian military most likely knew about the planned test. Still, the fact that the identity of the missile was unknown for several hours, and that Russia

claimed to see the test as dangerous, shows that in the real world, events can interact in totally unexpected ways. They may trigger a response that nobody can expect, let alone predict.”

Podvig places all of this directly into the context of U.S. work on Conventional Prompt Global Strike (CPGS). “One of the questions that this program has left unanswered surrounds the potential consequences of using long-range sea-launched or land-based ballistic missiles to deliver a strike in a real-world crisis. Advocates of the program argue that the risk of miscalculation is small and suggest that if the CPGS launchers fly along a different trajectory or originate from a certain known location, they will not be mistaken for their ‘regular’ counterparts that carry nuclear warheads,” he writes.

“This argument, however, assumes that the circumstances under which these weapons were used would be well understood, and that everybody involved would be making perfectly rational decisions based on the information at hand. But the recent incident shows that these are faulty assumptions—things are much less predictable than we may think they are, and decisions are rarely based on rational calculations. In a rational world it is unlikely, say, that Moscow would mistake a missile launched from somewhere in the ocean for an attack on Russia and launch its nuclear missiles in response. However, in the real world, the use of a ballistic missile in a crisis—an unannounced and unexpected event of the kind no one has dealt with before—could trigger a chain of reactions that may not be under anyone’s control. The risk may be small, but it is not negligible. The incident in the Mediterranean reminded us again that one can never foresee everything.”

Which brings us back to the public briefing by Gen. Maj. Andrei Burbin of Russia’s Strategic Missile Forces. “In particular, in peacetime, our strategic mission is deterrence,” he said. “But if it is necessary to perform the mission of launching a nuclear missile strike, this will be done in the prescribed time frame with absolute certainty. Our units are geographically deployed in such a way that no global strike is capable of disabling the entire SMF.” He stressed, in response to a follow-up question that this “absolutely” applies to a nuclear attack on Russia, as well.

Indeed, the delusion that the U.S. could wage and win nuclear war against Russia could lead to the end of civilization itself.

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