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# Nuclear Posture Review: Rhetoric vs. Reality

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**Below is the first take on  
the Nuclear Posture Review - excerpted  
from a speech Jackie Cabasso gave yesterday in Brasilia to a hearing convened by the  
Brazilian Senate Foreign Relations Committee.**

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Despite hopes for a dramatic change of course, the long awaited U.S. Nuclear Posture Review (NPR), released yesterday, reveals no substantial changes in U.S. nuclear force structure, retaining all three legs of the strategic triad: heavy bombers; ICBMs and strategic submarines. It only marginally reduces the role of nuclear weapons in U.S. national security policy, stating, "These nuclear forces will continue to play an essential role in deterring potential adversaries and reassuring allies and partners around the world." The NPR explicitly rejects reducing the high-alert status of ICBMs and strategic submarines (SSBNs), concluding that "the current alert posture of U.S. strategic forces - with heavy bombers off full-time alert, nearly all ICBMs on alert, and a significant number of SSBNs at sea at any given time - should be maintained for the present." It also reaffirms the policy of extended deterrence and retains the capability to forward-deploy U.S. nuclear weapons on tactical fighter-bombers and heavy bombers, including at NATO bases in Europe, while proceeding with a modification of the B-61 bomb carried on those planes.

The NPR declares that the United States will not use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapon states parties to the NPT that are in compliance with their non-proliferation obligations - a "negative security assurance" clearly meant as a warning to Iran and North Korea. According to the NPR: "The United States is... not prepared at the present time to adopt a universal policy that the 'sole purpose' of U.S. nuclear weapons is to deter nuclear attack on the United States and our allies and partners, but will work to establish conditions under which such a policy could be safely adopted." And it does not rule out first use.[1]

While the NPR pledges that the United States will not develop new nuclear warheads and will not support new military missions or provide for new

military capabilities, the Obama Administration's FY 2011 budget request, submitted on February 1 in anticipation of the NPR, proposes a 14% increase in funding for the National Nuclear Security Administration to modify and upgrade U.S. nuclear weapons – a greater percentage increase than planned for any other government agency.

Hoped-for US Senate ratification of new START and the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) is being conditioned on increased investment in new infrastructure for building nuclear weapon components, including their plutonium cores ("pits").[2]

The new facilities would provide the capability to build-up nuclear forces should the decision be made to do so and to produce modified or new-design warheads. The Obama administration's FY2011 budget request includes nearly \$7.3 billion for the weapons complex, in inflation adjusted dollars, the largest amount ever.[3]

The request includes a massive increase, to \$225 million for FY2011 alone, for the controversial project to build a facility to produce pits at the Los Alamos nuclear weapons lab.[4]

Modernization of existing US warheads to extend their lives is also ongoing, including in some cases, adding new military capabilities. As verified in the NPR, the Obama administration is proposing that nearly \$2 billion be spent from 2011 to 2015 on modernizing the B-61 gravity bombs, now deployed in Europe, to make them compatible with the next generation of nuclear-capable fighter jets, among other things.[5] Unlike other nuclear weapon states, the United States is not now producing and deploying new versions of missiles, bombers, and submarines assigned to carrying nuclear warheads. But it is intensively developing many other aspects of its nuclear forces, such as command and control and targeting capabilities. And it is planning for eventual new generations of delivery systems. For example, the administration is proposing to spend \$672 million in 2011 for design of a new ballistic missile submarine, to be built in 2019.[6]

Remarks by Defense Secretary Robert Gates at a March 26 White House briefing on the announcement of US-Russian agreement on a new START treaty pretty much sums up the direction of U.S. nuclear weapons policy for the foreseeable future: "America's nuclear arsenal remains an important pillar of the U.S. defense posture, both to deter potential adversaries and to reassure more than two dozen allies and partners who rely on our nuclear umbrella for their security.

But it is clear that we can accomplish these goals with fewer nuclear weapons. The reductions in this treaty will not affect the strength of our nuclear triad. Nor does this treaty limit plans to protect the United States and our allies by improving and deploying missile defense systems. Much of the analysis that supported the U.S. negotiating position was provided by the Defense Department's nuclear posture review, which will be released shortly.

As the number of weapons declines we will have to invest more heavily in our nuclear infrastructure in order to keep our weapons safe, secure and effective." [7]

**Jackie Cabasso, Brasilia, 8 April 2010**

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[1] <http://www.defense.gov/npr/docs/2010%20Nuclear%20Posture%20Review%20Report.pdf>

[2] The US Congress has appropriated \$32.5 million for work in 2010 on design of non-nuclear components of refurbished nuclear bomb, the B-61, currently deployed in Europe. Congress has also appropriated \$97 million for design of a new facility to produce the plutonium cores of warheads at Los Alamos Laboratory, the Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement (CMRR) Nuclear Facility, and \$94 million for design of the Uranium Processing Facility at Oak Ridge, Tennessee, which would build secondaries for warheads. Construction is slated to begin this spring of a replacement Kansas City Plant in Missouri for production of non-nuclear components of warheads.

[3] Dr. Robert Civiak, "Enhancing Nuclear Weapons Research and Production to Enhance Disarmament?", February 22, 2010, <http://www.trivalleycares.org/new/reports/FY2011BUDGETRPT.pdf>

[4] Department of Energy FY2011 Congressional Budget Request, National Nuclear Security Administration, Office of the Administrator, Volume 1, February 2010.

[5] Offried Nassauer, "Washington Mulls Modernization of Aging Bombs," Spiegel Online, March 15, 2010.

[6] John M. Donnelly, "Cost of Nuclear Subs Could Sink Navy Budget," Congressional Quarter Today Online News, March 1, 2010.

[7]

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/briefing-secretary-clinton-secretary-gates-admiral-mullen-announcement-new-start-tr>