

Statement of the Honorable Douglas J. Feith
Undersecretary of Defense for Policy
Senate Armed Services Hearing on the Nuclear Posture Review
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Introduction

The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2001 required the Secretary of Defense, in consultation with the Secretary of Energy, to conduct a comprehensive review of U.S. nuclear forces and to develop a long-range plan for the sustainment and modernization of United States strategic nuclear forces. The Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) constitutes the Department of Defense response to this requirement.

We submitted the NPR to Congress on January 8, 2002. It is the first comprehensive review of nuclear forces since 1994, when the first Nuclear Posture Review was completed. The primary purpose of the 1994 review was to determine the strategic nuclear force structure to be deployed under the second Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START II).

The current review of the U.S. nuclear posture differs from the 1994 review. The 1994 review assumed that the central strategic U.S. concern was managing a potentially hostile relationship between the two largest nuclear powers. The current review recognizes that the United States and Russia have a new relationship, and that the proliferation of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles has created new challenges for deterrence. It defines the capabilities required of the nuclear forces in the new strategic environment, and in relation to other U.S. defense capabilities. Most especially, it recognizes that Russia, unlike the Soviet Union, is not an enemy. There is ground for mutual cooperation, and the United States is seeking to move beyond the outdated Cold War nuclear confrontation to develop a new strategic framework with Russia.

A New Era

The basic features of the Cold War shaped our approach to security, including the role and size of our nuclear forces and deterrence policies. Our current nuclear triad of ICBMs, bombers, and ballistic missile submarines, and the ways we have pursued deterrence and arms control negotiations, reflect the conditions of Cold War. The new features of the international system, particularly the types of threats we face, are dramatically different. Consequently, President Bush charged the Department of Defense with transforming our approach to defense, including nuclear weapons and missile defenses, to meet the new challenges of the post-Cold War era.

During the Cold War we faced a single, ideologically hostile nuclear superpower. We prepared for a relatively limited number of very threatening conflicts with the Soviet Union. Much of the world was part of two competing alliances and the stakes involved in this competition were survival for both sides. We must never lose sight of just how dangerous the situation was.

There was, however, considerable continuity and predictability in this competition of two global alliance systems. For decades, U.S. nuclear forces were organized and sized primarily to deter the Soviet Union, and there were few sharp turns in U.S.-Soviet relations. Based on the continuities of the international system at the time, the successful functioning of nuclear deterrence came to be viewed as predictable, ensured by a sturdy “balance of terror.” Many argued that defenses which might lessen that terror by offering protection against Soviet nuclear attack would instead undermine the predictable “stability” of the balance of terror.

The Cold War system of two competing blocs has been replaced by a new system, one with a broad spectrum of potential opponents and threatening contingencies. The continuities of the past U.S.-Soviet relationship have been replaced by the unpredictability of potential opponents who are motivated by goals and values we often do not share nor well understand, and who move in directions we may not anticipate. We no longer confront the severe but relatively predictable threats of the Cold War; instead we have entered an era of uncertainty and surprise. As the attacks of September 11th demonstrated, we must now expect the unexpected. What we can predict today is that we will face unanticipated challenges, a range of opponents—some familiar, some not—with varying goals and military capabilities, and a spectrum of potential contingencies involving very different stakes for the United States and its foes. These conditions do not permit confident predictions about the specific threats against which we must prepare or the “stability” of deterrence.

Of particular concern in this era of uncertainty is the emergence of hostile, regional powers armed with missiles and nuclear, biological, or chemical weapons of mass destruction. When the U.S. failed to deter or promptly defeat a challenge in the past, two great oceans generally provided protection to American civil life. Nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons technology, however, increasingly is in the hands of brutal leaders who have few institutional or moral constraints and are motivated by an extreme hatred of the United States and the personal freedoms and liberties we hold dear. This emerging feature of the international landscape has rendered the failure to deter or promptly defeat a threat much more dangerous for all Americans. We can no longer take comfort in the belief that the conflict will be “over there,” or that opponents will be deterred in predictable ways. As was illustrated by September 11th, we now confront enemies who are eager to inflict mass destruction on innocent civilians here and abroad, without regard for the possible cost.

Transforming Defense

What are the implications of these changes in the international system for how we think about security? Most basically, we must transform our forces and planning to meet the dramatically different conditions of the new security environment. Rather than focusing on a single peer opponent, and preparing for a few threatening contingencies, we now need the flexibility to tailor military capabilities to a wide spectrum of contingencies, to address the unexpected, and to prepare for the uncertainties of deterrence. We can no longer approach our military requirements by conveniently defining one or a few countries as the specified “threat,” and then sizing our military capabilities against that defined threat. U.S. planning can no longer be so “threat-based” because, in an era of uncertainty, the precise source of “the threat” is unpredictable.

Our defense preparations must now focus on, and be responsive to, a wide spectrum of potential opponents, contingencies, and threatening capabilities, some of which will be surprising. A capabilities-based approach to defense planning will look more at the broad range of capabilities and contingencies that the United States may confront in the future, as opposed to planning against a fixed set of opponents identified as the threat.

Nuclear weapons will continue to be essential, particularly for assuring allies and friends of U.S. security commitments, dissuading arms competition, deterring hostile leaders who are willing to accept great risk and cost to further their evil ends, and for holding at risk highly threatening targets that cannot be addressed by other means.

Instead of our past primary reliance on nuclear forces for deterrence, we will need a broad array of nuclear, non-nuclear and defensive capabilities for an era of uncertainty and surprise. The United States will transform its strategic planning from an approach that has been based almost exclusively on offensive nuclear weapons, to one that also includes a range of non-nuclear and defensive capabilities. In particular, because deterrence will function less predictably in the future, the United States will need options to defend itself, its allies and friends against attacks that cannot be deterred.

A New Triad for a New Era

The current nuclear triad is a legacy of the Cold War. It is exclusively nuclear and offensive. As part of the defense transformation, we will move to a New Triad. The New Triad comprises a more diverse set of nuclear and non-nuclear, offensive and defensive capabilities. These capabilities encompass nuclear forces and non-nuclear strike means (including information warfare), passive and active defenses (notably missile defense), and the defense-industrial infrastructure needed to build and sustain the offensive and defensive elements of the New Triad. Command, control and intelligence systems are also critical to deterrence. They form an integral part of the New Triad.

This New Triad will provide the United States with the broad range of capabilities suitable for an era of uncertainty and a wide variety of potential opponents and contingencies. In some cases, where nuclear weapons may have been necessary for deterrence and defense in the past, the use of advanced non-nuclear strike capabilities or defensive systems may now be sufficient militarily, involve less risk for the U.S. and our allies, and be more credible to foes. In some cases, nuclear weapons may remain necessary to deter or defeat a particularly severe threat. The New Triad will provide the spectrum of offensive and defensive military capabilities, and the flexibility in planning necessary to address the new range of contingencies, including the unexpected and the undeterrable.

The New Triad differs in a number of important ways from the current triad. In addition to the difference in its overall composition, the strategic nuclear forces of the New Triad are divided into two new categories: the operationally deployed force and the responsive force.

The operationally deployed force includes bomber and missile warheads that are available immediately or within a matter of days. These forces will be available to address immediate or unexpected contingencies. Thus, our stated nuclear forces will correspond to our actual nuclear deployments, which did not occur during the Cold War. By using such “truth in advertising,” we will no longer count “phantom warheads” that could be deployed, but are not. To address potential contingencies—more severe dangers that could emerge over a longer period of time—the responsive force augments the operationally deployed force, largely through the loading of additional warheads on bombers and ballistic missiles. Such a process would take weeks to years. The capability for force reconstitution provided by the responsive force allows significant reduction in the current number of operationally deployed nuclear warheads. This reduction can be achieved prudently and without the need for drawn out and difficult negotiations.

In addition, the New Triad expressly serves multiple defense policy goals. Deterrence of nuclear or large-scale conventional aggression was viewed as the main objective of the Cold War triad. The deterrence of aggression, although still an essential aim, is just one of four defense policy goals for the New Triad. The capabilities of the New Triad, like other U.S. military forces, not only must deter coercion or attack, but also must assure allies and friends of U.S. security commitments, dissuade adversaries from competing militarily with the United States, and, if deterrence fails, decisively defeat an enemy while defending against its attacks on the United States, our friends, and our allies. Linking nuclear forces to multiple defense policy goals, and not simply to deterrence, recognizes that these forces, and the other parts of the New Triad, perform key missions in peacetime as well as in crisis or conflict. How well the New Triad serves these multiple goals—thereby enabling us to cope effectively with the uncertainty and unpredictability of the security environment—is the standard for judging its value.

The New Triad offers several advantages in this regard. Its more varied portfolio of capabilities, for example, makes it a more flexible military instrument. This greater flexibility offers the President more options for deterring or defeating aggression. Within the New Triad, nuclear forces will be integrated with, rather than treated in isolation from, other military capabilities. This creates opportunities for substituting non-nuclear strike capabilities for nuclear forces and defensive systems for offensive means. This does will not blur the line between nuclear and non-nuclear weapons, but it will reduce the pressures to resort to nuclear weapons by giving U.S. Presidents non-nuclear options to ensure U.S. security.

The New Triad reflects a capabilities-based approach to nuclear force planning and the type of defense transformation required in a new era. It deserves wide support. It gives the United States the greater strategic flexibility needed in an era characterized by surprise. It provides the basis for shifting some of the strategic requirements for dissuading, deterring, and defeating aggression from nuclear forces to non-nuclear strike capabilities, defensive systems, and a responsive infrastructure. As we reduce our nuclear forces to bring them into line with the security environment, the New Triad will mitigate the risks inherent in an increasingly fluid and dynamic security environment. Getting to the New Triad will require us to sustain a smaller strategic nuclear force, reinvigorate our defense infrastructure, and develop new non-nuclear strike, command and control, intelligence, and planning capabilities so that we possess the ability to respond to the kinds of surprises the new security environment holds. By taking these steps, we will reduce our dependence on nuclear weapons and build a New Triad that serves a broader range of American national security goals.

Strategic Nuclear Forces in the New Triad

The positive shift in the U.S. relationship with Russia is of great significance in considering today's nuclear force requirements. Russia is not the Soviet Union, nor is it an enemy. We no longer have to focus our energies on preparing for a massive Soviet nuclear first strike. Rather, we now seek a new strategic framework with Russia to replace the Cold War's balance of terror.

President Bush has announced his decision to reduce our operationally deployed strategic nuclear force to 1700-2200 warheads over the next decade, a level informed by the analysis of the NPR. While roughly one-third the number of our currently operationally deployed warheads, this range is adequate to support our new defense policy goals, including the deterrence of immediate contingencies. It also preserves the flexibility and capability for reconstitution necessary to adapt to any adverse changes in the new security environment.

These reductions, and other adjustments in our offensive and defensive capabilities, will be achieved outside the Cold War's adversarial and endless negotiating process that was centered on the balance of nuclear terror. Today, that competitive and legalistic process would be counterproductive. It would impede or derail the significant reductions both sides now want; it would lock both sides into fixed nuclear arsenals that could be excessive or inadequate in the future; and, by perpetuating the Cold War strategic relationship, it would inhibit movement to a far better strategic framework for relations.

I would like to highlight five key findings of the NPR. Each needs to be well understood:

1. A New Relationship With Russia: Away From MAD

The planned reductions to 1700-2200 operationally deployed nuclear warheads are possible and prudent given the new relationship with Russia. We can reduce the number of operationally deployed warheads to this level because, in the NPR, we excluded from our calculation of nuclear requirements for immediate contingencies the previous, long-standing requirements centered on the Soviet Union and, more recently, Russia. This is a dramatic departure from the Cold War approach to nuclear force sizing, which focused first and foremost on sustaining our side of the balance of terror and mutual assured destruction (MAD). In the NPR we moved away from this MAD policy framework.

This, of course, is not to imply that we will not retain significant nuclear capabilities, or that we can ignore developments in Russia's (or any other nation's) nuclear arsenal. Nuclear capabilities will continue to be essential to our security, and that of our friends and allies.

Nevertheless, we no longer consider a MAD relationship with Russia the appropriate basis for calculating our nuclear requirements. MAD is a strategic relationship appropriate to enemies, to deep-seated hostility, and distrust. Russia is not our enemy, and we look forward to a new strategic framework for our relations.

2. Reductions Plus Security

The President's plan for nuclear reductions permits us to cut the number of operationally deployed nuclear weapons by about 65%, to levels far below current levels, without taking great risks with America's safety. The new relationship with Russia makes such cuts possible, and the President's plan prudently preserves our option to respond to the possible emergence of new threats. Some commentators say we should continue to reduce our forces without preserving our capacity to adapt to changing circumstances, but doing so would require an ability to predict the future with enough accuracy to ensure we will not be surprised or face new threats.

Because the future almost certainly will, in fact, bring new dangers, we do not believe it is prudent to set in stone the level and type of U.S. nuclear capabilities. We have embarked on a program to deploy a New Triad that may allow us increasingly to rely on non-nuclear capabilities, and under the President's plan we have the option to adjust our nuclear forces down even further than now planned if appropriate. If severe new threats emerge, however, we must also retain the capacity to respond as necessary. The President's plan is a reasonable way to both reduce nuclear forces and prudently preserve our capability to adjust to the shifting requirements of a dynamic security environment. In the NPR we have recognized that force requirements are driven fundamentally by the realities of a changing threat environment, and we have adopted, in the capabilities-based approach, the commonsense standard that we must retain the flexibility necessary to adjust to and shape that environment.

3. New Emphasis on Non-nuclear and Defensive Capabilities

The President's plan, for the first time, emphasizes the potential for substituting non-nuclear and defensive capabilities for nuclear capabilities. In many likely cases involving an attack against us, our allies or friends, it will be far better to have non-nuclear and defensive responses available. For example, during the Cold War, one of the President's only options to limit damage to the United States was to strike the enemy's offensive weapons, raising the stakes in any confrontation. Defenses will offer the ability to limit damage to the United States without requiring America to "fire the first shot." In the case of an accidental launch of nuclear-armed missiles, defenses will give us the opportunity to destroy such weapons before they inflict any damage on the United States, its friends, or allies.

The NPR, for the first time, explicitly calls for the integration of non-nuclear and defensive capabilities as part of our strategic triad. This is another reason we can move forward with deep nuclear reductions while being careful to preserve our security. The new non-nuclear and defensive capabilities that are emphasized in the NPR may also provide the basis for further nuclear reductions in the future, depending on their effectiveness.

4. A New Diverse Portfolio of Military Capabilities for an New World

The NPR's call for a New Triad begins the transformation of our strategic capabilities to suit a world that is very different from that of the Cold War. In the past we focused on the Soviet Union and a few severely threatening contingencies. We prepared our military to address this relatively narrow Cold War threat.

Today the sources of the threats that face us are much more diverse and even unpredictable, as the September 11 attacks showed. The spread of missiles and weapons of mass destruction makes the current spectrum of potential opponents significant. Whereas in the past, only the Soviet Union posed a serious threat to American cities, in the foreseeable future, several countries—and perhaps some

non-state actors—will present such a risk. Our defensive capabilities must take these new post-Cold War realities into account.

The President's plan will transform our military to provide us with a new portfolio of capabilities to meet these new threats, even while reducing our reliance on nuclear weapons. This portfolio will enable us not only to tailor our force options to the range of potential contingencies and types of opponents, it will help us to shape the threat environment in the most benign directions possible.

5. The Rejection of Adversarial Negotiations

The rejection of the Cold War's adversarial-style of arms control negotiations represents a key change introduced in the NPR. The NPR moves us beyond the essentially hostile and competitive negotiations of the Cold War because such negotiations no longer reflect the reality of U.S.-Russian relations. We do not negotiate with Britain or France with regard to the permitted features of our respective nuclear capabilities. Although our relations with Russia are not yet comparable to our relations with our allies, they are not based on Cold War hostilities.

Were we to have put nuclear reductions on hold until we could have hammered out a Cold War-style arms control agreement with Russia, we would not be making the reductions we plan over the next decade. We would be under pressure to hold on to the weapons we no longer require as bargaining chips because that is the logic of adversarial arms control. Russia would be pressed by the same logic.

We see no reason to try to dictate the size and composition of Russia's strategic nuclear forces by legal means. Russian forces, like our forces, will decline about two-thirds over the next decade. In truth, if the Russian government considers the security environment threatening enough to require an adjustment in its nuclear capabilities, it would pursue that adjustment irrespective of its obligations under a Cold War-style treaty. In fact, the Russian government did just that in 1995 with regard to the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty. Because the security situation had changed, Russia did not meet its obligations to reduce its conventional forces to the proscribed levels. The Russian Defense Minister at the time stated that Moscow would not fulfill legal obligations that "bind us hand and foot."

A highly dynamic security environment such as we now confront ultimately cannot be tamed by rigid, legal constructs, however sincerely entered into. It would be highly imprudent now to rigidly fix our capacity to respond to and shape such an environment by extending the negotiating practices of the Cold War into the future. We seek a new strategic framework in our relationship with Russia, not a perpetuation of the old.

Reducing the Number of Nuclear Warheads

Some now argue that the nuclear weapons removed from our strategic forces must be destroyed or the announced reductions would be “a subterfuge.” The NPR, of course, calls for the destruction of some, but not all of the U.S. warheads removed from the operationally deployed force. We must retain these weapons to give the United States a responsive capability to adjust the number of operationally deployed nuclear weapons should the international security environment change and warrant such action. Presidents from both parties have long recognized the need for such a capability. For example, the previous Administration adopted a “lead and hedge” policy with regard to reductions below the levels required by the START II Treaty in the 1994 NPR. The last Administration planned to retain the U.S. ability to regenerate capabilities reduced by the START II Treaty as a “hedge” against the possibility that Russia might reverse its course towards democracy. The previous Administration continued that policy through its last day in office.

The current Nuclear Posture Review makes a similarly prudent decision to maintain the ability to restore capabilities we now plan to reduce. The difference, however, is that the NPR’s responsive force is not being sized according to the dictates of a possible resurgence in the threat from Russia. Instead, our new responsive capability is being defined according to how it contributes to the four goals of dissuading potential adversaries, assuring allies, deterring aggression, and defeating enemies.

At this time, the appropriate size of our responsive force has not been determined. However, the analysis that helped determine the size of the operationally deployed force and the decision to pursue non-nuclear capabilities in the New Triad suggests that our responsive capability will not need to be as large as the “hedge” force maintained by the previous Administration. Given the era of uncertainty we now face, maintaining a responsive force is only prudent and consistent with the capabilities-based approach to our defense planning.

Finally, the pace with which we reduce the nuclear stockpile will be determined in part by the state of our infrastructure and the very real limits of our physical plant and workforce, which has deteriorated significantly. For example, the United States today is the only nuclear weapon state that cannot remanufacture replacements or produce new nuclear weapons. Consequently, we are dependent on stored weapons to maintain the reliability, safety, and credibility of our stockpile and to guard against the possibility of a technical or catastrophic failure in an entire class of nuclear weapons. Other nuclear states are not bound by this limitation of their infrastructure. Repairing the U.S. nuclear infrastructure and building the responsive infrastructure component of our New Triad may well permit us to reduce the size of the nuclear stockpile needed to support the responsive force.

In sum, the NPR develops an approach to reductions that provides an accounting of reductions that reflects “truth in advertising,” protects conventional capabilities from efforts to limit nuclear arms, and preserves the flexibility necessary in an era of uncertainty and WMD proliferation. This is the only prudent path to deep reductions given the realities of the threat environment we face.

Programs

Developing and fielding the capabilities for the New Triad will require a dedicated effort over the next decade. Program development activities must be paced and completed in a manner such that the integration of capabilities results in the synergistic payoff envisioned for the New Triad. The Department has identified an initial slate of program activities that we propose to fund beginning in FY2003.

DoD Infrastructure. Funding for the sustainment of strategic systems will be increased. This effort will support surveillance and testing of weapon systems slated for life extension programs such as the Air-Launched Cruise Missile (ALCM) and the Advanced Cruise Missile (ACM). We propose to conduct additional test flights for solid rocket motors and to increase our efforts for unique technologies for strategic systems, such as missile electronics and navigation. In addition, the Department will fund the development and qualification of radiation-hardened parts for strategic systems.

Offensive Strike. Funding has been programmed for two specific advanced conventional weapon applications and one concept development program to explore options for advanced strike systems. The two advanced conventional strike applications include a fast-response, precision-impact, conventional penetrator for hard and deeply buried targets and the modification of a strategic ballistic missile system to enable the deployment of a non-nuclear payload.

Missile Defense. The Department will conduct an aggressive R&D program for ballistic missile defense and we are evaluating a spectrum of technologies and deployment options.

Strike Support. Advancements in offensive and defensive capabilities alone will be inadequate without enhancements in sensors and technology to provide detailed information on adversary plans, force deployments, and vulnerabilities. Such systems are critical in developing the advanced command and control, intelligence, and adaptive planning capabilities required to integrate all three legs of our New Triad. Therefore the Department has proposed additional funding for the development of advanced sensors and imagery, for improved intelligence and assessment, and for modernization of communications and targeting capabilities in support of evolving strike concepts.

Conclusion

A half a century ago, in the midst of the Cold War, Prime Minister Winston Churchill noted in the House of Commons the “sublime irony” that in the nuclear age, “safety will be the sturdy child of terror and survival the twin brother of annihilation.” The Cold War is long over and new approaches to defense are overdue. As President Bush has stated, “We are no longer divided into armed camps, locked in a careful balance of terror....Our times call for new thinking.” The New Triad, outlined in the Nuclear Posture Review, responds to the President’s charge.