

# BACKGROUND

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## Disarm Now, Ask Questions Later: Obama's Nuclear Weapons Policy

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### Abstract

*President Barack Obama's declared goal of eliminating the U.S. nuclear arsenal appears to be driving U.S. nuclear policy. The Nuclear Posture Review Implementation Study, which recommends reducing the number of U.S. strategic nuclear weapons by up to one-third, appears to have resulted from choosing the amount of reduction first and then justifying the number after the fact, rather than assessing U.S. deterrence needs first and then choosing the number of weapons that would meet that need. The Administration's backward approach to policymaking threatens to undermine the security of the United States and its allies.*

On June 19, 2013, the Obama White House released a fact sheet on its updated nuclear weapons policy. The Nuclear Posture Review Implementation Study (NPRIS)<sup>1</sup> has been a long time in coming. Not surprisingly, the NPRIS contends that the United States can safely reduce the number of strategic nuclear weapons by up to one-third below the current levels. Further, the NPRIS states that the U.S. may do this unilaterally, but prefers to reduce through a negotiated agreement with Russia. Current levels, which were set by the 2010 New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START), are already controversially low.<sup>2</sup>

The report provides evidence that President Barack Obama first chose the reduced numbers in the U.S. strategic nuclear arsenal and then used the NPRIS to justify these numbers, instead of assessing U.S. requirements for deterrence first and then choosing

### KEY POINTS

- While President Obama was speaking in Berlin on June 19 about taking a step toward total nuclear disarmament, the White House issued a statement on how the President had adopted a policy that would change how the United States might employ nuclear weapons in the midst of a future crisis.
- President Obama has apparently decided first to reduce the number of weapons in the U.S. arsenal to meet his arms control objectives and then changed the policy to justify the lower number.
- The result will be a nuclear arsenal that both quantitatively and qualitatively is insufficient to defend U.S. vital interests.
- The United States needs a nuclear force along with defensive and conventional strike weapons that can protect and defend the American people and U.S. allies. This will require more nuclear weapons and a higher-quality nuclear force than what the President says he wants.

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the numbers of nuclear weapons that would meet the requirements. President Obama indicated his thinking more than a year ago in a speech at Hankuk University in Seoul, South Korea: “But even as we have more work to do, we can already say with confidence that we have more nuclear weapons than we need.”<sup>3</sup>

Since meeting deterrence and military requirements was clearly not foremost in President Obama’s mind when he chose these numbers, what was? The overwhelming evidence suggests that he was focused on reaching his declared goal of zero U.S. nuclear weapons, which the fact sheet reaffirms in its first paragraph. Indeed, the true number he desires is zero, but even he recognizes that the American people will reject an attempt to go directly to zero nuclear weapons. Accordingly, the numbers recommended in the NPRIS were essentially chosen for aesthetic reasons. These numbers look about right as an intermediate step between what is permitted by New START after its execution and zero.

This likelihood that President Obama is foremost concerned about reducing the number of U.S. nuclear weapons in the pursuit of his aspiration for zero nuclear weapons is bolstered by a statement by the then-Commander of U.S. Strategic Command during President Obama’s first term. In July 2010, General Kevin Chilton testified about the proper relationship between the numbers and deterrence capabilities:

I do not agree that [the number of nuclear weapons in the U.S. arsenal] is more than is needed. I think the arsenal that we have is exactly what is needed today to provide the deterrent. And I say this in light of—when we talk about the non-deployed portion of the arsenal—it is sized to be able to allow us to hedge against both technical failures in the current deployed arsenal and any

geopolitical concerns that might...cause us to need more weapons deployed.<sup>4</sup>

His testimony sharply contrasts with the assertion in the NPRIS that U.S. nuclear weapons may now be reduced further.

## The NPRIS

According to the fact sheet, the NPRIS:

- **Reaffirms the President’s goal of achieving “the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons.”** Clearly, this has been and remains President Obama’s highest priority in U.S. nuclear weapons policy.
- **Commits to reducing the number of U.S. strategic nuclear weapons by up to one-third below New START levels.** The second most important aspect of the NPRIS is the commitment to reduce the number of U.S. strategic nuclear weapons. The fact sheet states this determination was made after a comprehensive review of the requirements for nuclear forces. Yet as detailed in the next section of this paper, the preponderance of the evidence strongly suggests that the scope of the reduction was chosen first and the NPRIS was pursued to justify it. The fact sheet further states that the U.S. intends to seek the reductions in negotiations with Russia, but fails to indicate that an agreement with Russia is in any way necessary or that any agreement with Russia will be concluded as a treaty in accordance with the law.<sup>5</sup>
- **Asserts that the United States will maintain a credible nuclear deterrent, in contrast to the commitment to disarmament.** Specifically, it states the U.S. nuclear posture will remain

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1. The White House, “Nuclear Weapons Employment Strategy of the United States,” June 19, 2013, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/06/19/fact-sheet-nuclear-weapons-employment-strategy-united-states> (accessed June 19, 2013).

2. Baker Spring, “Twelve Flaws of New START That Will Be Difficult to Fix,” Heritage Foundation *Background* No. 2466, September 16, 2010, <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2010/09/twelve-flaws-of-new-start-that-will-be-difficult-to-fix>.

3. Barack Obama, “Remarks by President Obama at Hankuk University,” The White House, March 26, 2012, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/03/26/remarks-president-obama-hankuk-university> (accessed May 29, 2012).

4. General Kevin P. Chilton, testimony in *The New START Treaty (Treaty Doc. 111-5): Views from the Pentagon*, video file, Committee on Foreign Relations, U.S. Senate, 111th Cong., 2nd Sess., June 16, 2010, <http://www.foreign.senate.gov/hearings/the-new-start-treaty-treaty-doc-111-5-views-from-the-pentagon> (accessed May 8, 2013).

5. See 22 U.S. Code § 2573.

“capable of convincing any potential adversary that the adverse consequences of attacking the United States or our allies and partners far outweigh any potential benefit they may seek to gain through an attack.” However, it does not provide a clear justification for this assertion.

- **Narrows the focus of U.S. nuclear strategy.** Presidential guidance to the Department of Defense (DOD) and the military on the U.S. nuclear policy and posture, which results from the NPRIS, narrows U.S. nuclear strategy to focus on only those objectives and missions that are necessary for deterrence in the 21st century. However, it does not describe the nuclear force’s specific objectives and missions. Shortly after release of the fact sheet, the Department of Defense released a more detailed description of the modifications that the NPRIS made to U.S. nuclear employment and targeting policies, but the DOD report suffers from several internal contradictions and contradicts the fact sheet.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, it is impossible to discern how U.S. nuclear strategy has been narrowed. The purpose behind this provision, by contrast, is clear. It moves further toward reducing the role of nuclear weapons in the broader U.S. security strategy.
- **Directs the Department of Defense to strengthen non-nuclear capabilities.** This provision clarifies that U.S. conventional capabilities are being redefined as a replacement for, as opposed to a complement to, the nuclear arsenal in meeting the needs of deterrence.
- **Directs the Department of Defense to examine and reduce the role of launch under attack in contingency planning.** This provision is supposedly justified by the observation that the potential for a surprise, disarming nuclear attack against the U.S. is exceedingly remote. At the same time, NPRIS directs the DOD will retain a launch-under-attack capability. Specifically, it instructs the Department of Defense to focus planning on the more likely 21st-century

contingencies. Apparently, the Department of Defense is being instructed to reduce the role of launch under attack in contingency planning, but only after taking that step may it examine why this is desirable. On this basis, it is entirely plausible that the actual text of the NPRIS instructs the Department of Defense to de-alert the U.S. nuclear force.

- **Codifies an alternative approach to hedging against technical or geopolitical risk.** This is supposed to lead to more effective management of the nuclear weapons stockpile. In reality, it appears to weaken the hedging policy. In other words, it could mean that NPRIS could weaken the requirements for the hedging policy.
- **Attempts to reaffirm the President’s earlier pledge that, as long as nuclear weapons exist, the United States will maintain a safe, secure, and effective arsenal.** As a way to justify this attempt, it observes that the President has supported significant investments to modernize the nuclear enterprise and maintain a safe, secure, and effective arsenal. However, the funding levels for supporting the U.S. nuclear arsenal and weapons infrastructure, which the President stated were necessary during Senate consideration of New START, have not been met. Nowhere in the fact sheet is a statement that the President will honor his commitment to the Senate to modernize or replace the triad of U.S. strategic nuclear delivery systems, which consists of intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs), and heavy bombers. The accompanying DOD employment report states that the NPRIS and the guidance provided to the DOD endorse retention of the triad, but this raises the question of why it was omitted from the White House fact sheet.<sup>7</sup> The plausible answer to this question is that the White House recognizes that the President’s own budget policies make the guidance provided to the Department of Defense for retaining the triad untenable.

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6. U.S. Department of Defense, “Report on Nuclear Employment Strategy of the United States Specified in Section 491 of 10 U.S.C.,” June 12, 2013, [http://www.defense.gov/pubs/reporttoCongressonUSNuclearEmploymentStrategy\\_Section491.pdf](http://www.defense.gov/pubs/reporttoCongressonUSNuclearEmploymentStrategy_Section491.pdf) (accessed June 19, 2013).

7. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

- **Defers the question of reducing the disparity between the U.S. and Russia in short-range nuclear weapons.** The fact sheet states that NPRIS did not set out to address this matter, particularly in relation to such weapons deployed in Europe. Deferring this issue represents a presidential repudiation of his commitment to the Senate to address the matter, not just directly but in short order.
- **States that the U.S. is focused on maintaining and improving strategic stability with both Russia and China.** Presumably, this further codifies the earlier stated policy that the U.S. must remain vulnerable to nuclear attacks by either Russia or China.
- **Notes that the President has directed the DOD to begin updating and aligning its directives and contingency plans with the new guidance and to implement them over the course of the next year.** The NPRIS is accompanied by a guidance document, in the form of a directive to the Department of Defense. The fact sheets states that the President has directed the Department of Defense to use the new guidance resulting from the NPRIS to begin updating and aligning its directives and contingency plans in order to implement this policy over the next year. This requirement is designed to force the Department of Defense, particularly U.S. Strategic Command, to redesign the U.S. nuclear posture in a year's time. The accompanying DOD employment report acknowledges that the DOD has received this guidance document.<sup>8</sup> For whatever reason, the President is in a rush.

### **Evidence of Arms Control and Disarmament-Driven Numbers**

The evidence in the NPRIS fact sheet supporting the argument that the numbers were chosen for reasons of arms control and disarmament, not for deterrence and defense, follows from the wide variety of flaws in the report's recommendations, which go beyond the numbers themselves. These

recommendations, if followed, would result in a dangerously weak U.S. deterrence posture for both the U.S. and its allies. This is the inevitable result when arms control and disarmament goals, not strengthening the overall U.S. deterrent, drive a review of the U.S. nuclear force.

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The most significant flaws are:

**Flaw #1: An obscure targeting policy.** The NPRIS states that U.S. policy is to narrow the requirements for its nuclear employment and targeting policy. However, the reduced number of deployed strategic nuclear weapons will drive the U.S. in the direction of “countervalue targeting,” targeting populations and economic centers. This is problematic because a countervalue targeting policy is not compatible with the values of the U.S. as a free country and therefore is not compatible with a credible deterrent.<sup>9</sup> No U.S. President would choose to use nuclear weapons to cause widespread death and destruction in an enemy country in which the population is repressed and poses no significant threat to the U.S. and its allies. Further, history suggests that foreign tyrannies do not value their people. Instead, they value the means of repressing their populations and of threatening free nations, including the U.S., that pose an ideological threat to their repressive regimes. Finally, because the U.S. was founded on the principle of liberty, it values the security and prosperity of its people.

Thus, the most effective nuclear deterrent for the U.S. against a repressive regime would be a “counterforce policy” that targets the regime’s internal security forces and strategic military forces, while protecting and defending the populations and economic capacity of the U.S. and its allies. Indeed, the

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8. *Ibid.*, p. 1.

9. Rebecca Heinrichs and Baker Spring, “Deterrence and Nuclear Targeting in the 21st Century,” Heritage Foundation *Backgrounder* No. 2747, November 30, 2012, <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2012/11/deterrence-and-nuclear-targeting-in-the-21st-century>.

accompanying DOD report finds the argument in favor of countervalue targeting so weak that it categorically denies the guidance from the White House requiring that the DOD to pursue it.<sup>10</sup>

Accordingly, the problem with the NPRIS is that a counterforce employment and targeting policy requires a larger and more capable force than the one the NPRIS recommends. This contradiction exists between the White House guidance to the Department of Defense and the DOD nuclear employment report and within the DOD employment report. The repressive regimes that the U.S. needs to deter maintain multiple levers of internal repression and strategic military capabilities to threaten the nations of the free world. Consequently, they present larger numbers of targets, many of them hardened against attack with reinforced bunkers, than would be presented by population centers under a countervalue targeting policy. The problem becomes even more pronounced if the U.S. faces a coalition of strategic enemies made possible by proliferation.

By way of reference, the numbers of deployed strategic nuclear warheads found necessary by the George W. Bush Administration to meet the requirement to defeat strategic attacks and deter them was between 1,700 and 2,200. The plan included targets that are hardened and deeply buried facilities, which are fairly described as classic counterforce targets. The NPRIS fact sheet says nothing about why it relies on the target sets that are shrinking enough to permit reducing the number of operationally deployed strategic nuclear warheads by one-third from the 1,550 accountable warheads under New START, not to mention the 1,700 to 2,200 deemed necessary by the Bush Administration.

Accordingly, dedicated advocates of lower numbers of nuclear weapons in the U.S. arsenal than proposed by the Obama Administration have openly argued for a “minimal deterrence” nuclear posture based on countervalue targeting.<sup>11</sup> These advocates understand that a countervalue targeting policy

would permit a significantly smaller nuclear force, admittedly under the questionable assumption that such a targeting policy would present a strong deterrent posture toward current and future U.S. enemies, whereas the counterforce targeting policy identified in NPRIS must lead to relatively high numbers of nuclear weapons.

The Obama Administration apparently has chosen to gloss over this apparent contradiction in the NPRIS. Indeed, the fact sheet fails to identify clearly the nature of the connection that the NPRIS makes between its suggested targets and its recommended number of weapons.

**Flaw #2: Insufficient survivability for the U.S. nuclear force.** The reductions recommended by NPRIS would likely make the U.S. strategic nuclear force less survivable. The fact sheet asserts that a disarming strike against U.S. strategic nuclear forces is “exceedingly remote.” However, whether such a strike will remain exceedingly remote would depend on the future structure of the U.S. strategic nuclear posture. The NPRIS provides only vague overall numbers. For example, in a letter to Senator John McCain (R-AZ) on November 14, 2011, Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta explained how automatic spending cuts under the Budget Control Act of 2011 could affect the defense program.<sup>12</sup> An attachment to his letter states that these cuts could eliminate the ICBM leg of the triad.

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## Secretary Panetta identified elimination of ICBMs as a plausible result of President Obama’s defense budget policies.

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Former Air Force Chief of Staff Larry Welch explained the link between preservation of the ICBM leg and survivability in a speech in Washington, D.C.,

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10. U.S. Department of Defense, “Report on Nuclear Employment Strategy,” p. 4.

11. For example, see Hans M. Kristensen, Robert S. Norris, and Ivan Oelrich, “From Counterforce to Minimal Deterrence: A New Nuclear Policy on the Path Toward Eliminating Nuclear Weapons,” Federation of American Scientists and the Natural Resources Defense Council *Occasional Paper* No. 7, April 2009, [http://www.fas.org/pubs/\\_docs/OccasionalPaper7.pdf](http://www.fas.org/pubs/_docs/OccasionalPaper7.pdf) (accessed June 18, 2012).

12. Leon Panetta, letter to Senator John McCain, in press release, “Statement by Senators McCain and Graham on Secretary Panetta’s Letter Detailing ‘Devastating’ Impact of Sequester,” November 14, 2011, [http://www.mccain.senate.gov/public/index.cfm?FuseAction=PressOffice.PressReleases&ContentRecord\\_id=a4074315-fd3e-2e65-2330-62b95da3b0e9](http://www.mccain.senate.gov/public/index.cfm?FuseAction=PressOffice.PressReleases&ContentRecord_id=a4074315-fd3e-2e65-2330-62b95da3b0e9) (accessed July 11, 2012).

on May 25, 2012.<sup>13</sup> He pointed out that one of the central characteristics of an effective strategic nuclear deterrent is to make an enemy never feel confident that it can pull off a successful first strike. He went on to say that he saw no technological breakthrough or operational innovation that could put a robust force of U.S. ICBMs at risk and that this makes the ICBM leg the most stabilizing leg of the triad. Nevertheless, Secretary Panetta identified elimination of ICBMs as a plausible result of President Obama's defense budget policies. The DOD employment report fails to acknowledge Secretary Panetta's warning.

Second, the report fails to acknowledge that the reduced numbers inherently reduce the confidence of surviving a first strike. In short, it fails to acknowledge that keeping prospects for a disarming strike against the U.S. exceedingly remote is a good thing. It sees the current margin of safety against attack as something that may be narrowed. In a March 22, 2011, letter to President Obama, 41 Senators expressed concern over the relationship between reduced strategic nuclear forces and increased risks to force survivability. They also expressed overall concern about reducing U.S. strategic nuclear forces below the levels required by New START. The letter specifically noted that "the U.S. nuclear force posture should have the survivability and characteristics necessary to defeat potential nuclear adversaries and limit damage to the United States in the case of war."<sup>14</sup>

Under the NPRIS, the military's strategic nuclear bombers will likely remain at no more than two bases and not on strip alert. The submarine force will almost certainly remain ported at just two bases, and there is no discussion of the risk that future breakthroughs in anti-submarine warfare could make submarines more vulnerable at sea.

Finally, the fact sheet offers no specific recommendations for improving the survivability of strategic command and control systems and the political and military leadership to maintain the continuity of government following a strategic attack on the U.S.

**Flaw #3: A reduction in the number of strategic aim points for enemy forces.** Closely related to

the survivability issue is the danger that the recommendations to consolidate the U.S. strategic nuclear force would reduce the number of aim points for enemy strategic forces. If the ICBM leg is eliminated and U.S. ballistic missile submarines and bombers are limited to just two bases each, the overall weapons-derived aim points for a disarming strike against the U.S. could fall by 99 percent. Since the broader U.S. nuclear force is to be consolidated under the NPRIS's recommendations, the aim points presented by non-weapon facilities, such as command and control facilities and nuclear weapons infrastructure, will likewise be reduced. Disturbingly, the fact sheet provides no analysis of the aim point issue.

**Flaw #4: The NPRIS fact sheet implies that the U.S. may de-alert its strategic nuclear force.** De-alerting would render nuclear forces in the field unusable without extensive and time-consuming steps to re-alert them. Lessening the risk of accidental nuclear strikes is the primary justification for de-alerting proposals. Specifically, the fact sheet states that the U.S. would "reduce the role of launch under attack in contingency planning." This phrase could be a euphemism for de-alerting. The Department of Defense report does not explicitly refer to de-alerting in any way.

De-alerting is unwise. First, de-alerting would exacerbate the survivability problems resulting from other NPRIS recommendations. Second, it would make the strategic nuclear force unable to meet targeting requirements to hold enemy strategic forces at risk. Third, de-alerting would burden the President with trying to calculate the risk of instability by initiating steps to re-alert the strategic nuclear force in a crisis. With the exception of the NPRIS fact sheet's failure to provide an effective targeting policy, the possibility of an implied de-alerting proposal in the NPRIS presents the clearest evidence that the study's recommendations were driven by the desire to eventually eliminate all U.S. nuclear weapons unilaterally. De-alerting is an effective step for artificially reducing the value of the U.S. nuclear force to the point that maintaining any such force can no longer be justified.

13. General Larry Welch, "ICBM and Nuclear Deterrence," transcript of remarks at Nuclear Deterrence Seminar Series on Nuclear Weapons, Defense Policy, Arms Control and US National Security, Capitol Hill Club, Washington, DC, May 25, 2012, <http://www.afa.org/hbs/transcripts/2012/5-25-2012%20Gen%20Larry%20Welch%20v2.pdf> (accessed June 25, 2013).

14. James M. Inhofe et al., letter to President Barack Obama, March 22, 2011, <http://www.inhofe.senate.gov/download/?id=97ff9372-1dcc-451b-9401-1beb9df0b8d4> (accessed June 25, 2013).

**Flaw #5: The fact sheet offers no commitment to modernize nuclear delivery systems.** The U.S. needs to modernize the delivery systems for its nuclear forces for reasons that go beyond the need to replace the aging delivery systems. The U.S. needs new systems that can ensure the timely, highly precise delivery of weapons against time-sensitive targets, such as ICBMs mounted on mobile launchers. Speed and precision of the new delivery vehicles should be key considerations in the modernization effort. The NPRIS fact sheet does not mention these requirements.

**Flaw #6: The fact sheet mentions no recommendations for appropriate yields of the weapons in the arsenal.** The yield of a specific nuclear weapon is critical to maximizing its deterrent effect under different circumstances. A key variable in addressing the yield question is the accuracy of the overall weapon system. Generally speaking, higher accuracy permits lower yields in a counterforce targeting plan.

Maximizing the effectiveness of the deterrent is even more important than the question of the relationship between accuracy and yields. Higher yields do not always strengthen deterrence. For example, if a President finds the yield to be too high to permit its use under a given circumstance, it will detract from deterrence if a potential enemy calculates in advance that the President will recognize this problem. Disturbingly, the NPRIS fact sheet does not discuss the preferable yields for a full array of different weapons in the U.S. nuclear arsenal. In fact, it does not address the yield question whatsoever, and neither does the Department of Defense employment report. This suggests that they assume that the yields of the current array of weapons are appropriate in every instance and will remain so for the indefinite future. This is a dangerous assumption.

**Flaw #7: Command and control problems are not seriously addressed.** The overall capabilities of the nuclear command and control system are essential to determining the overall survivability of the force. However, improved command and control systems for nuclear weapons are about more than survivability. By outward appearances, both the NPRIS fact sheet and the DOD employment report fail to recognize the broader issues related to nuclear command and control.

Speed and reliability of communications are key considerations for modernizing nuclear command

and control systems, particularly with ballistic missile submarines at sea. Further, the broader command and control structure should be integrated with the global reconnaissance strike system, which identifies strategic targets and rapidly and precisely directs weapons against the target. Accordingly, nuclear delivery systems that can rapidly and precisely attack targets will be of little value if not supported by a command and control system that is integrated with the global reconnaissance strike system. According to the fact sheet, the NPRIS addresses neither issue.

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**Flaw #8: The NPRIS defers consideration of the deterrence value of short-range weapons, particularly for extended deterrence.** U.S. nuclear weapons deter strategic attacks not only against the U.S. itself, but also against U.S. allies around the world, which is called extended deterrence. The existing U.S. nuclear posture is considered weak by some allies and friends, who are less confident in U.S. assurances about and the commitment to their security. While U.S. strategic nuclear forces are essential to strengthening extended deterrence, they are not sufficient for this purpose by themselves. Forward basing short-range nuclear weapons to address strategic threats to U.S. allies is also essential because these forward-deployed nuclear forces are tangible means of bringing U.S. allies into the overall deterrence posture. Further, these forward-deployed weapons can fill in rungs in the escalation ladder, which if left out would result in a relatively weak deterrent. Finally, forward-deployed nuclear forces increase the flexibility of the overall nuclear force and add to the military effectiveness of the broader nuclear force.

Accordingly, in its 2009 report, the Strategic Posture Commission noted an emerging perception among some U.S. allies and friends that U.S. weakness in non-strategic nuclear weapons was undermining their confidence in U.S. security assurances.

Specifically the report states, “Some allies located near Russia believe that U.S. non-strategic forces in Europe are essential to prevent nuclear coercion by Moscow and that modernized U.S./NATO forces are essential for restoring a sense of balance in the face of Russia’s nuclear renewal.”<sup>15</sup> The report further stated, “Overall equivalence is important to many U.S. allies in Europe. The United States should not cede to Russia a posture of superiority in the name of deemphasizing nuclear weapons in the U.S. military strategy.”<sup>16</sup>

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At the moment, Russia has a multifold advantage over the U.S. in short-range nuclear forces. The President certified to the Senate during consideration of New START that he would address this matter and seek to reduce, if not eliminate, this disparity in short order. He has not done so, and the fact sheet acknowledges that the NPRIS did not address this matter in any substantive way.

**Flaw #9: The NPRIS fails to explain how U.S. nuclear forces will be integrated with defensive forces and conventional strike forces.** In a proliferating world, the most powerful overall deterrent the U.S. can present would balance defensive forces and conventional strike forces with nuclear forces. This means all three types of forces must be integrated in order to reinforce each other. Specifically, all three must work within the global reconnaissance strike system because it can provide vital supporting functions to each. For example, its early warning capabilities will provide not only added flexibility to the nuclear and conventional strike forces, but also initial cueing and tracking to ballistic missile defense forces.

There is no evidence that NPRIS considered the synergistic effects of fully integrating defensive, conventional, and nuclear forces for strengthening deterrence. Indeed, the fact sheet indicates that the NPRIS sees U.S. defensive and conventional strike forces as replacements for, not complements to, the U.S. nuclear force in meeting deterrence needs.

**Flaw #10: The Obama Administration continues to walk away from its commitments to the Senate to modernize the U.S. nuclear weapons infrastructure.** On this point, the fact sheet simply seeks to mislead the public. The President is failing to keep some of his commitments to the Senate to modernize U.S. weapons infrastructure, such as accelerating construction of the Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement (CMRR) facility at Los Alamos National Laboratory.

These commitments served as the political and legal foundation for the Senate’s consent to the ratification of New START and its permission to let the U.S. strategic nuclear force fall to the levels required by the treaty. Now, the Administration is asserting that the U.S. not only may safely reduce its strategic nuclear arsenal to New START levels, but to one-third below New START levels. Simply put, the facts indicate otherwise.

**Flaw #11: The NPRIS provides no assessment of the cost-effectiveness of the recommended nuclear force.** The NPRIS, focused as it is on reducing the numbers of U.S. nuclear weapons, can easily be interpreted to mean that the overall cost of U.S. nuclear forces will also come down. However, the Administration cannot honestly assert that the overall cost-effectiveness of the nuclear force will increase under the NPRIS. The NPRIS recommendations reduce the cost of the U.S. nuclear force and its supporting elements by reducing the size of the force, which will reduce the capability of the force. Needless to say, the Administration is finding it inconvenient to acknowledge that it is producing a less effective nuclear force and a less effective deterrence posture. The Administration is all too happy to switch the subject and assure the American people that they will live in a world free of nuclear weapons.

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15. Congressional Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States, *America’s Strategic Posture* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2009), p. 20, [http://media.usip.org/reports/strat\\_posture\\_report.pdf](http://media.usip.org/reports/strat_posture_report.pdf) (accessed June 25, 2013).

16. *Ibid.*, p. 21.



## What Congress Should Do

Congress has a responsibility to push back against President Obama's anti-nuclear policies as codified in the NPRIS. His policies will result in an overall nuclear posture that is inferior to Russia's nuclear posture and a broader U.S. strategic posture that would be dangerously weak toward a variety of potential foes. Accordingly, Congress should:

- 1. Work toward building a total nuclear force of 2,700 to 3,000 weapons.**<sup>17</sup> This range of weapons is needed in the context of a review process defined around holding targets that could be used to threaten the U.S. and its allies with strategic attack first. Unlike the review process that was apparently used in drafting the NPRIS, this review process should be driven first by the requirements for deterrence and only second by any desire for a specific number of weapons. This number extends to consideration of the requirements for short-range nuclear weapons to bolstering the U.S. extended deterrence and reassurance policies. Accordingly, this review would address a need that was ignored by the NPRIS. This range of numbers may or may not be compatible with New START because New START does not cover short-range nuclear systems. As a practical matter, it is not compatible with the one-third reduction recommended by the NPRIS.
- 2. Suspend the ongoing nuclear reductions under New START for at least one year.** As is now apparent, ratification and entry into force of New START is leading to additional declines in the strength of the U.S. nuclear deterrent. In fact, U.S. nuclear posture has been declining for more than two decades. Despite commitments to the contrary, the decline has continued under President Obama. The additional reductions recommended by the NPRIS will only accelerate this decline. Further, President Obama has failed to honor several conditions that the Senate imposed on him as the price for ratification and entry into force of New START. These include his commitments to modernize the U.S. nuclear weapons infrastructure. Accordingly, Congress should halt the reductions, at least temporarily.
- 3. Establish in law a counterforce (damage limiting) strategy.** The purpose of both the U.S. nuclear force and the broader strategic posture should be to hold at risk the means of strategic attack against the U.S. and its friends and allies. This would bolster deterrence because it would reflect the values of the American people and advance U.S. interests in fostering freedom and security around the world. This would unequivocally override the fact sheet's ambiguous description of the NPRIS that appears to move the U.S. toward a countervalue employment and targeting policy. Additionally, it would codify the DOD employment report's statement of U.S. policy under the NPRIS and the guidance it has received from the White House. If the White House shares this DOD assertion about counterforce targeting, the Obama Administration should not object to codifying it in law.
- 4. Seek to shift the focus of the U.S. strategic forces policy and posture.** Specifically, the U.S. needs to move away from a nuclear-focused strategic deterrence posture to an integrated strategic deterrence posture that balances U.S. offensive and defensive strategic forces in servicing the damage-limiting strategy at the heart of the need to protect and defend the American people and U.S. allies against strategic attack. Ironically, a nuclear-focused policy and posture has advanced the wrong-headed conclusion that fewer nuclear weapons and reduced nuclear capabilities necessarily lessen nuclear dangers. Nothing could be further from the truth. If properly designed, a more robust U.S. nuclear force within the appropriate broader strategic posture would strengthen deterrence and lessen nuclear dangers, at least in relative terms. This shift in focus will counterintuitively bolster the public's commitment to the U.S. nuclear force because that force will be postured to serve the public's desire for safety and protection rather than the abstract requirements of deterrence based on retaliatory attacks and revenge.
- 5. Focus U.S. strategic capabilities less on Russia and more on addressing U.S. and allied**

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17. Heinrichs and Spring, "Deterrence and Nuclear Targeting in the 21st Century."

**security requirements resulting from proliferation.** The Obama Administration and the critics of its nuclear policy agree that the primary source of increased nuclear dangers in today's world is the prospect for proliferation of nuclear weapons and the means to deliver them, including to non-state actors such as terrorist organizations. Nevertheless, the two sides disagree on how to address proliferation from the perspective of the U.S. nuclear weapons posture. The Obama Administration is wrong to put its particular notion of strategic stability with Russia and China at the core of its nuclear policy, as it does in the NPRIS, believing that keeping the U.S. vulnerable to Russian and Chinese nuclear threats will bolster stability. In fact, the U.S. should be encouraging Russia and China to adopt more defensive strategic postures that eschew threats to population and economic centers. This positive alternative is detailed in the declaration attached to the New START resolution of ratification by Senator Jim DeMint during the Senate Foreign Relations Committee's debate over the treaty.<sup>18</sup>

- 6. Rebuild the U.S. short-range nuclear force to bolster extended deterrence and assurance.** The U.S. short-range nuclear force is not nearly as effective as it should be. The disparity with Russia alone means the Obama Administration is effectively abandoning the long-standing U.S. policy of maintaining an overall nuclear force "second-to-none." Congress needs to establish a program for urgently strengthening this element of the U.S. nuclear arsenal. Failure to do so will only increase the incentives for nuclear proliferation and instability, increasing the nuclear

dangers. Such a failure will also increasingly undermine the policy of extending the U.S. nuclear deterrence to its allies and the associated policy of reassuring these allies that the U.S. will help them to address their immediate security needs.

## Conclusion

Making U.S. nuclear policy on the basis of seeking numerical reductions in the nuclear arsenal and stockpile to meet particular arms control and disarmament goals is unwise even within the realm of the arms control process. This approach inevitably results in negotiating from a position of weakness. It is downright dangerous in the U.S. deterrence posture because it artificially divorces the answer to the question of how many nuclear weapons are enough from the answer to the question of what kind of nuclear force provides the most effective deterrent.

The NPRIS—particularly in the context of the flawed arms control process that led to the negotiation, ratification, and entry into force of New START—is taking U.S. security policy in the wrong direction. It is well past time for Congress to halt this process because it threatens to leave the U.S. with an ineffective nuclear deterrence posture. Such an outcome will necessarily undermine U.S. security and the security of its allies. Congress can correct course by reestablishing the policy that deterrence and security come first and that arms control must operate in service to these higher priorities.

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18. *Congressional Record*, December 22, 2010, p. S10984.