What if the Obama Administration Changes US Nuclear Policy?
Potential Effects on the Strategic Nuclear War Plan

Hans M. Kristensen
Federation of American Scientists
hkristensen@fas.org
202-454-4695

Presentation to
"Building Up or Breaking Down: The Direction of Nuclear Non-Proliferation"
Quinnipiac University School of Law Center
February 19, 2010
Promise to Reduce Role

Big Statements – Big Expectations

“To put an end to Cold War thinking, we will reduce the role of nuclear weapons in our national security strategy…”

*Barack Obama, Speech in Prague, April 5, 2009*

The “Nuclear Posture Review will reduce role and number of nuclear weapons in our national security strategy.”

*Barack Obama, Letter to Global Zero Summit, Paris, February 2, 2010*

The Clinton and Bush administrations also promised to reduce the role of nuclear weapons but actually expanded it. How might the Obama administration be different?
Current Declaratory Policy

“the United States has made clear for many years that it reserves the right to respond with overwhelming force to the use of weapons of mass destruction against the United States, our people, our forces and our friends and allies. Additionally, the United States will hold any state, terrorist group, or other non-state actor fully accountable for supporting or enabling terrorist efforts to obtain or use weapons of mass destruction, whether by facilitating, financing, or providing expertise or safe haven for such efforts.”

The White House, Remarks by the National Security Advisor, Stephen Hadley, to the Center for International Security and Cooperation, Stanford University, February 8, 2008, p. 5.

Where to “Reduce Role”?

“the United States has made clear for many years that it reserves the right to respond with overwhelming force to the use of weapons of mass destruction against the United States, our people, our forces and our friends and allies. Additionally, the United States will hold any state, terrorist group, or other non-state actor fully accountable for supporting or enabling terrorist efforts to obtain or use weapons of mass destruction, whether by facilitating, financing, or providing expertise or safe haven for such efforts.”

Potential areas for change:

- Replace “weapons of mass destruction” with “nuclear”
- Limit nuclear extended deterrence to allies
- Remove terrorist connection
Where to “Reduce Role”? 

How dynamic does “respond with overwhelming force to the use of” have to be to provide sufficiently credible nuclear deterrence?

- **Deter and prevent**: Very broad, includes preemptive
- **Deter**: Very broad
- **Respond to**: Vague but less proactive
- **Retaliate**: No-first-use without calling it so
- **No-first-use**: Constrained but credible?

The Nuclear Trend

Note: Estimates jointly developed by FAS and NRDC.

Warhead numbers are derived from number of targets (aim points) and weapons capability:
Target Development ⇒ Probability of Arrival ⇒ Aim Points (Desired Ground Zero) ⇒ Probability of Damage ⇒ Warheads

## The US Nuclear Arsenal

### Estimated Nuclear Warheads

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weapons Category</th>
<th>Estimated Warheads</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Operational</td>
<td>2,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic</td>
<td>2,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tactical</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reserve</td>
<td>2,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Stockpile</strong></td>
<td><strong>5,000</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weapons Category</th>
<th>Estimated Warheads</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Awaiting</td>
<td>~4,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dismantlement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Inventory</strong></td>
<td><strong>~9,500</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Nuclear Delivery Vehicles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weapons Category</th>
<th>Number Deployed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strategic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SLBM</td>
<td>288</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICBM</td>
<td>450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bombers</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>~800</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weapons Category</th>
<th>Number Deployed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non-Strategic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DCA</td>
<td>400(400)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TLAM/N</td>
<td>100(200)*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*About 1,200 total; 200 in Europe; all TLAM/N in storage

**Background Information:** Status of World Nuclear Force  
Modernization Decisions

Major nuclear force structure decisions pending:

- **Triad** or Dyad?
- **SSBN(X):** Reduce from 14 to 12
- **New SLBM** or D5LE beyond 2042?
- New ICBM or **Extend Minuteman ICBM through 2040?**
- **New long-range bomber**
- New cruise missile or **extend ALCM?**
- **New fighter-bomber (F-35 JSF)** or phase out NATO deployment?
- **Retire** or extend TLAM/N?
- New bomb factory (Pu/HEU fabrication)
- Modernize warheads through Life Extension Programs

First of 12 new SSBNs is expected in 2019 under an $80 billion project.
The Strategic War Plan: OPLAN 8010

Strategic war plan; replacing SIOP and OPLAN 8044.

First real non-SIOP, “New Triad” war plan.

Directed against six adversaries: Russia, China, North Korea, Iran, Syria, and 9/11 WMD scenario.

Three of the adversaries do not have nuclear weapons; two of those are signatories to the NPT.

Merges strategic deterrence and Global Strike missions.

Includes broad “family” of nuclear and non-nuclear strike options.

When The Nuclear Mission Expanded

Russia removed as “immediate contingency” but remains largest contingency.

Mission creep beyond “nuclear” to “WMD” broadened geographic scope and contingencies. Compared with SIOP, OPLAN 8010 “provides more flexible options” for “a wider range of contingencies.”

Wider targeting scope combined with reduction in deployed warheads has led to requirements for increased flexibility, “grooming” of weapons, and created an increasingly complex plan.

Effect of “Reduction” on the War Plan

Potential changes to OPLAN 8010 resulting from changing declaratory policy from WMD to nuclear adversaries:

• Reduce adversaries in plan from six to three (Russia, China, North Korea)
• Reduce target list by removing chemical and biological facilities
• Reduce number of warheads required to meet targeting plans
• Reduce flexibility requirement (fewer scenarios and options)
• Allow greater separation of nuclear from non-nuclear

Other options for changing posture:

• Reduce alert-level and/or decision time
• Reduce SSBN deployments and tempo
• Curtail most offensive and threatening first-strike capabilities
• Reduce force-on-force scenarios and focus posture on retaliation
Concluding Observations

Removing requirement for nuclear planning against chemical and biological weapons would reduce the role of nuclear weapons by...

- reducing number of adversaries and scenarios in the strategic war plan

But it would not “put an end to Cold War thinking” (only to post-Cold War thinking), which would require changing planning against Russia and China

- Cold War thinking includes force-on-force scenarios (warfighting) and first-strike planning with alert forces

- A nuclear-only policy could still permit all current Cold War-like planning

Putting an end to Cold War thinking requires more than a nuclear-only policy
QUESTIONS?

More publications from the Nuclear Information Project:
http://www.fas.org/programs/ssp/nukes/Publications.html