



A SPECIAL THREAT: U.S. Nuclear Weapons Policy Under the Bush Doctrine

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The past six years have seen remarkable changes in U.S. nuclear weapons policy, under the administration of President George W. Bush. In 2002 the administration released three official documents that together constitute the new “Bush doctrine.” Discarding the security system and nuclear weapons policies of the Cold War, this new doctrine prepared the way for the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq in March 2003. The Bush doctrine represents a discontinuous sea change in the international security system; this new tide demands analysis and debate.

The doctrine proposes that the earlier bipolar world (U.S./U.S.S.R.) be replaced by a unipolar world. Under President Bush, the U.S. sees itself as the dominant power or sole superpower. Setting aside the mutual deterrence system essential to the relative security and stability of the Cold War era, the administration has taken unilateral actions against threats and possible rivals, including “regime change” as attempted in Afghanistan and Iraq. The administration has largely abandoned cooperative approaches to national and international security, and previous alliance systems, in favor of unilateral U.S. policies and actions.

The historical events forming the background to these new nuclear weapons doctrines include:

1. The end of the Cold War in 1989;
2. The dissolution of the Soviet Union on December 25, 1991;
3. The establishment of The Project for a New American Century (PNAC) in 1997 “to promote American global leadership;”
4. The advent of the new Bush Administration in January 2001, which included many of the PNAC individuals in major leadership positions.
5. The September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks
6. The ensuing declaration by the Bush administration of a “War on Terrorism,” later broadened to the “Global War on Terror.”

The invasion and occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq followed closely upon the adoption of these new policies.

THREE DOCUMENTS: NPR, NSS, NSWMD

The first of the three documents which together comprise the new U.S. nuclear posture is the *U.S. Nuclear Posture Review* (NPR), which the Department of Defense (DoD) delivered to the U.S. Congress in January 2002. According to the NPR, “A combination of offensive and defensive,

and nuclear and non-nuclear capabilities is essential to meet the deterrence requirements of the 21st century.”

The NPR is a wide-ranging analysis of the requirements for deterrence in the 21st century. Its authors do not intend to provide operational guidance on nuclear targeting or planning. They rather state that the Department of Defense continues to plan for a broad range of contingencies and unforeseen threats to the U.S. and its allies, and the DoD means to preempt or prevent such attacks. However, they do imagine the “...possible use of nuclear weapons in an Arab-Israeli conflict, in a war between China and Taiwan, or in an attack from North Korea on the South.” They also envision the use of nuclear weapons against targets able to withstand non-nuclear attack, to retaliate for nuclear, biological, or chemical weapons attacks or “...in the event of surprising military developments.”

The NPR thus foresees the potential use of nuclear weapons in various contingencies, including against non-nuclear weapons states and in response to conventional weapons. In the NPR the U.S. reserves the right to employ nuclear weapons, which in turn would break the international taboo which has stood since their first (and second) use—by the U.S. itself against the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945. According to this declaration of policy, the U.S. thinks of and may use nuclear weapons as it would any other weapon. The world’s largest military and nuclear power razed the firewall between nuclear and conventional weapons.

The second of these documents is the *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (NSS), issued by the Office of the National Security Advisor to the President, Condoleezza Rice, in September 2002. The NSS is an unclassified and open public document, available on the White House website. According to the NSS, the Bush administration will ensure that no nation can rival U.S. military strength. In this document they emphasize defeating rogue states and global terrorists, and insist that deterrence will not work against such enemies.

The NSS proclaims the doctrine of U.S. preemption: the U.S. “...cannot let [its] enemies strike first.” It attempts to give historical and legal precedents and arguments for such “preemption.” The NSS avows, “For centuries, international law recognized that nations need not suffer an attack before they can lawfully take action to defend themselves against forces that present an imminent danger of attack.” It further asserts, “The U.S. has long maintained the option of preemptive actions to counter a sufficient threat to our national security.” Some scholars and analysts have observed, astutely, that this is not a doctrine of preemption but rather one of preventive war.

However, the U.S. did not preempt in any of the recent major wars it has fought: not the two World Wars, nor Korea, Vietnam, or the Gulf War. There are no sound historical precedents. The NSS represents a fundamental shift from a policy of reaction to a new policy of initiation—from wars of necessity to wars of choice.

After three years of war, a shrinking minority of US citizens and their elected representatives argue that it remains too early to say whether the policy of preemption as applied to Iraq has been a failure. But the costs in blood and treasure have been immense. Considering only the most direct and short-term military costs, the price is six times greater than the administration estimated. When Larry Lindsey, the senior Economic Advisor to the Bush administration, estimated the costs at \$100 to \$200 billion, he was effectively fired: the administration preferred the Office of Management & Budget (OMB) estimate of \$50 to \$60 billion. Direct, short-term military costs have already topped \$300 billion, and by no means does that figure represent the full costs to the U.S. economy.

In 2006 Nobel Laureate economist Joseph E. Stiglitz and Linda Bilmes, a former Assistant Secretary of Commerce now at Harvard's Kennedy School, published a careful accounting of the Iraq War. They estimated its full and final costs to the US economy to be between \$1.2 trillion and \$2 trillion, depending primarily on how much longer it lasts. Furthermore, Dr. Stiglitz is on public record characterizing even the upper bound of \$2 trillion as a "gross underestimate."

The third and final document is the *National Strategy to Combat Weapons of Mass Destruction* (NSWMD), which the White House issued in December 2002. As with the NSS, the NSWMD is an unclassified and open public document available on the White House website. It notes that WMD, by which it means nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons (NCBs), in the hands of states or non-state actors hostile to the U.S., represent the nation's greatest security challenge.

The NSWMD states that an effective strategy for countering NCBs, their use and further proliferation, is an integral component of the National Security Strategy of the U.S. As in the war on terrorism, the overall strategy for homeland security, and the new concept of deterrence, the new U.S. approach to WMD represents a fundamental change from the past.

The NSWMD accords the highest priority to protecting the U.S. and its allies from the threat of NCBs. Three pillars hold the strategy aloft:

1. Counter-proliferation to combat NCB use;
2. Strengthened nonproliferation efforts to combat NCB proliferation;
3. Consequence management to respond to NCB use.

The NSWMD lays out policies to interdict NCB, to deter by threat of overwhelming force, and to "mitigate defense," i.e. to destroy an adversary's NCBs before use. The latter includes the potential for a first-strike attack as outlined in the NSS, as well as traditional nonproliferation approaches. It does not exclude the use of nuclear weapons to destroy facilities that could produce nuclear weapons.

AN ALTERNATIVE DOCTRINE: GLOBAL SECURITY

Our planet, its many nations, and its billions of people, all face a vast and sometimes overwhelming array of threats, an increasing number of which are existential, such as the threats of global warming or a flu pandemic. Some of these threats existed when the UN was created in 1945 while others are new. They represent immediate and major threats to the planet or the human species and thus endanger global security. Furthermore, they are interrelated, and cannot be addressed by one nation, no matter how powerful, acting alone. Rather they require international cooperation, with increased reliance on existing but revitalized international institutions, including the UN and its affiliated bodies, and the creation of new international organizations. Many of these problems have regional or global significance and do not respect national boundaries. They demand coordinated remedial measures at national, regional and international levels—involving governments, NGOs, other international organizations, and the private sector.

In contrast to the Bush Doctrine, the concept of global security recognizes the need to create a new global system comparable to the creation of the UN, the Bretton Woods institutions, and the war crimes tribunals after World War II. Such a system would, like the UN, encompass not only security but also economic, political, environmental, social, and cultural concerns. Through

strengthening existing international institutions or creating new ones the system would manage security, both military and non-military.

These new institutions could be built, in part, on the UN system and its components. They would involve supranational decision-making and authority, with enforcement capabilities, transparency, and accountability and with global perspectives and responses. Participation in the world's decision-making process would be through close international cooperation. There would be a prohibition against preemption by any one nation, no matter how powerful, in favor of collective action. We should prefer, and endeavor to create, such a global system in favor of overwhelming power in the hands of any nation, including the U.S.

At the moment, terrorism is the tactic of choice for many groups, and their supporting states, in conflict with the U.S., which enjoys historically unprecedented military might. Indeed, such is the totality of U.S. dominance—the US spends more than the rest of the world put together on its war-making capacities and its defense—that most states are severely limited in their scope of response or attack. Hostile states and terrorists alike appear eager to acquire nuclear, biological, chemical, or radiological weapons to counter, challenge, or attack the U.S. and its few remaining allies.

At the time of writing (August 10, 2006), the reportedly foiled Islamist plot to explode up to 10 U.S. carrier-owned airplanes simultaneously reminds us that those who wish to be mass murderers can again employ U.S. commercial assets. As with the attacks of September 11th, 2001, terrorists again perceived opportunities to turn planes into missiles. No NBCs are required.

It is unlikely that the would-be terrorists of August 2006 were deterred by the Bush doctrine. On the contrary, if the media is correct in reporting that the suspects are British-born Pakistanis, the doctrinally justified “preventive war,” occupation, and counter-insurgency in Iraq may well have motivated their own attempt at pre-emptive strike. Only international cooperation can interdict such a highly coordinated international conspiracy.

Among the necessary steps required to foster the needed global security agenda are:

1. Reducing world stockpiles of nuclear weapons and other NBCs, especially the enormous stockpile of chemical weapons in Russia.
2. The US ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty;
3. Taking nuclear weapons off hair-trigger alert and generally de-alerting all NBC delivery systems;
4. Reaffirming the moratorium against nuclear testing;
5. Deeper international cooperation to prevent nuclear proliferation;
6. Implementing the 13 steps of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, with a clear and specific timetable for each steps;
7. All countries abandoning plans to develop new nuclear weapons;
8. Sharing Permissive Action Link (PAL) technology with all nuclear weapons states to reduce the chance of accidental nuclear war;
9. U.S. renunciation of its policy of preemption and its reaffirmation of the UN Charter;
10. Cooperative efforts against terrorists groups, especially against their acquisition of NBCs.

Following the attacks of September 11, 2001, President George W. Bush initiated a “War on Terror” later broadened to the “Global War on Terror” or GWOT. Many have noted that there is no clear enemy in this war; terror is in the mind of the beholder. Nor is there a clear endgame, because terror is a long-standing *tactic*, neither an enemy (Imperial Japan) nor an ideology

(Communism). A 2004 Pentagon effort to rename the GWOT the “Global Struggle Against Violent Extremism” did not survive a week. The Bush administration stands proudly by its dubious doctrine of preventive war.

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