

Looking Ahead to a Possible 2017 Nuclear Posture Review

Brad Roberts

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Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this preliminary discussion of a possible 2017 Nuclear Posture Review. I would like to underscore that the views I am presenting here are my personal views, following on my service as Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Nuclear and Missile Defense Policy from 2009 to 2014 (in which capacity I was co-director of the 2009-10 NPR) and on my authorship of a recently published book on U.S. nuclear policy (*The Case for U.S. Nuclear Weapons in the 21st Century*, Stanford University Press, December 2015). Please do not attribute my views to my new employer as of last spring, Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory.

You have asked us to highlight elements of continuity and change in U.S. nuclear policy. Surveying the nuclear policies of all four post-cold war administrations, the continuities are striking. Every president has wanted to move away from Cold War approaches, to reduce nuclear arsenals, and to reduce the role and salience of nuclear weapons in U.S. deterrence strategies. Every president has also wanted to ensure that nuclear deterrence would be effective for the problems for which it is relevant in a changed and changing security environment. Each administration has decided to maintain the Triad. Each has worked to ensure stable strategic relationships with Russia, China, and U.S. allies. Each has rejected mutual vulnerability as the basis of the strategic relationship with new nuclear-armed or arming regional challengers.

Let me also highlight two conspicuous changes over the three nuclear posture reviews. One is the rising salience of extended deterrence and the assurance of our allies—which has returned to as central a place in our nuclear strategy as it had at the height of the Cold War. The other change relates to the scope of the reviews. The 1994 review was the narrowest of the set, focused largely on force structure decisions. The 2001 review was broader, linking strategies for modernizing deterrence to a changing defense strategy. The 2009 review was the broadest. As mandated by Congress, it was DoD-led but interagency in character and fully elaborated the “balanced approach” recommended by the Perry-Schlesinger Strategic Posture Commission (balancing political means to reduce threats with military means to deter them so long as they exist). Such a broad review helped to ensure leadership focus, leadership “ownership” of main messages, and effective interagency implementation. These are important benefits of continuing value.

From the vantage point of January 2016, what are the key elements of change and continuity bearing on the U.S. nuclear posture? I will briefly highlight here four key changes.

1. With the abrupt turn in Russian security policy in spring 2014, it is no longer possible, as it was in 2009, to characterize the relationship with Russia as improving and presenting minimum risks of armed conflict. But as the new threat is principally to our NATO allies, our national response needs to focus on adapting and strengthening deterrence in Europe. This process began with the 2013 Wales summit and will be accelerated at the upcoming Warsaw summit. Does this require a change in U.S. nuclear policy or posture, separate and apart from NATO's posture? The current posture is sized and structured to maintain strategic stability with Russia. The Obama administration, like its predecessors, has maintained "second to none" as a guiding principle and has maintained the resilience of the force so that it is not vulnerable to a preemptive strike. The argument has been made that Russia's nuclear assertiveness requires a parallel nuclear assertiveness by the United States and that its large and diverse theater nuclear force requires a symmetric NATO nuclear force, along with a new generation of ultra low-yield weapons. The deficiencies in NATO's nuclear posture are not in its hardware, however, which is robust for the deterrence of Russian de-escalation strikes. The deficiencies are in its software—in the ways in which the Alliance expresses its convictions about the role of nuclear deterrence (and which will be addressed in Warsaw).
2. In the period since 2009, we have learned that the conditions do not now exist—and are not proximate—that would allow us to take additional substantial steps to reduce the role and number of U.S. nuclear weapons. The Obama administration set out a practical agenda for seeking cooperation with other nuclear-armed states to move in this direction. What are the results? Russia has proven unwilling to take an additional one-third reduction. China has proven unwilling to embrace new transparency measures—or even to discuss strategic stability. North Korea has continued its nuclear build up. Our allies are unwilling to abandon the U.S. nuclear capabilities uniquely associated with extended deterrence (i.e., non-strategic nuclear weapons forward-deployed or deployable). This does not mean that the United States should abandon the arms control, nonproliferation, and disarmament projects. Doing so would only further aggravate the problem. We should not abandon the "balanced approach." But the United States should temper its expectations. And it should refrain from unilateral steps that supposedly put pressure on others to join us. If it made no sense in 2009 to take unilateral action to eliminate a leg of the triad, it makes even less sense today.
3. In the period since 2009, the more multidimensional nature of strategic conflict has come more clearly into focus. Nuclear weapons, missile defense, cyber, and space may be separate domains, but they are all part of the same strategic landscape. This puts a focus on the challenge of ensuring the

- needed degree of integration in policy, strategy, and execution. This invites an important question about the scope of a possible 2017 review. The Obama administration conducted a set of separate but linked reviews of these different posture elements. Might an alternative approach enable more effective integration? Possibly. But a single, comprehensive strategic review would be difficult to do on an interagency basis, whereas the 2009 NPR benefited significantly from that interagency aspect.
4. A final key difference is in the political context. In the lead up to the Obama administration, executive-legislative gridlock had prevented any modernization decisions. The Strategic Posture Commission (SPC) helped to remedy that problem, with its bipartisan advice to the Obama administration to pursue modernization by life extension, which the administration accepted. In the interim, we have not recovered a broad and deep bipartisan consensus on nuclear modernization. But we have achieved sufficient agreement within and across the parties to enable a series of positive decisions to support modernization with steadily increasing investments. This needs to be preserved and nurtured. Repeating the SPC would not be useful or necessary toward that end. A private bi-partisan initiative could, however, help set the right context and provide the right markers for the journey ahead.

Let me round out my introductory remarks by highlighting three key elements of continuity since 2009.

1. Asia is as relevant to the U.S. nuclear posture as is Europe. China's nuclear future has nearly as many large question marks as does Russia's. Our pursuit of strategic stability with both needs to continue to adapt. Our Northeast Asian allies are as anxious about extended deterrence in a changing security environment as are our Central and Northern European allies. Don't let the Russia problem distract us from this strategic truth
2. We still don't have the hedge we say we want. Each administration since the Cold War has wanted to ensure that we have a strong national capacity to respond to both geopolitical and technical surprises. Each has wanted to reduce reliance on a large and expensive-to-maintain stockpile of aging nuclear weapons as a hedge against uncertainty by increasing reliance on a responsive and adaptive nuclear weapons complex. The Strategic Posture Commission put special emphasis on this point. Fixing this problem with the proper investment and governance strategies should be a key priority. I know of no one who thinks that the risks of geopolitical and technical surprise are declining.
3. Each administration has debated whether new nuclear weapons are needed—and we are certain to have this debate again. The George W. Bush administration's pursuit of new weapons came to a political dead end. The Obama administration's pursuit of a modern arsenal through the life extension of existing capabilities has been more successful. There are two arguments for new weapons—that we need them for deterrence and that we

need them to sustain our national design competence. Both arguments have some merit. But there is no good reason to think that a new effort to build new weapons for new military purposes would not too come to a political dead end. Moreover, there are other means to strengthen deterrence and sustain design competence.

Thank you for the opportunity to join in this discussion. I look forward to your questions.