

The New **NUCLEAR THREAT**

The Bush administration is pushing forward dangerous new policies for nuclear weapons. The administration's nuclear weapons plans, spelled out in the *Nuclear Posture Review*, include a new breed of "usable" nuclear weapons that threaten to blur the line between conventional and nuclear warfare. The President's policies also open the door to nuclear testing and identify countries targeted for potential attack with nuclear weapons.

These hazardous policies will risk much of the progress that has been made to limit the dangers of nuclear war and could signal the beginning of a new arms race.

New, More Usable Nuclear Weapons

In the 2003 fiscal year budget, the President requested funding for the Robust Nuclear Earth Penetrator (RNEP), or "bunker buster." The RNEP is a new nuclear weapon designed to penetrate the earth in order to destroy underground bunkers or other underground targets. The idea is to build nuclear weapons that would be used on the battlefield or against terrorist groups. According to Dr. Rob Nelson of the Federation of American Scientists, if used, this weapon would "blow out a huge crater of radioactive material, creating a lethal [radioactive] field over a large area." In an urban setting, this weapon would likely kill 10,000 to 50,000 people within 24 hours.

Development of these new nuclear weapons would also signal a commitment to resuming of nuclear testing. Statements from Defense Department officials confirm this more aggressive attitude: "... the resumption of testing is something that the administration ought to consider," remarked Assistant Secretary of Defense J.D. Crouch last year. Aside from all its devastating environmental effects, new testing would end a decade-long testing moratorium by the United States, and effectively kill the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty - an important treaty that would ban nuclear testing throughout the world.

Striking First

In a commencement address at West Point in June 2002, the President announced a new "strike first" military doctrine that includes launching pre-emptive attacks against countries perceived to be potential threats. In February 2002, John Bolton, Undersecretary of State for Arms Control and International Security, announced that the government has reversed a commitment not to launch nuclear attacks against countries that don't have nuclear weapons.

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Nuclear Testing

It currently would take 2 to 3 years of preparation for the government to resume nuclear testing at the Nevada Test Site. The Department of Energy (which runs the Nevada Test Site) has asked for a reduction in that preparation period, and the head of the National Nuclear Security Administration has said that the US testing posture is too lax. Here are some quick facts about nuclear testing:

1,030 nuclear tests

have been conducted by the United States

8 Pacific islands

(at least) are still contaminated from nuclear testing

\$1,200,000,000

amount spent between October 1, 1992 and October 1, 1995 on nuclear testing activities (0 tests were completed)

120,000 additional thyroid cancers

are attributed to US nuclear testing

(from "50 Facts About US Nuclear Weapons," US Nuclear Weapon Cost Study Project, and the National Cancer Institute)

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More Targets, Less Safety

The administration has also increased the number of countries the US may target for nuclear attack and has broadened the circumstances under which the US would use nuclear weapons. The administration now plans to target China, Russia, Iraq, Iran, North Korea, Libya, and Syria as countries against which it would consider using nuclear weapons or launching pre-emptive attacks.

Also in the *Nuclear Posture Review*, the administration specifically states that the government would consider using nuclear weapons against China in a military confrontation over Taiwan, nuking Iraq should that country attack Israel or another country, launching a nuclear attack against North Korea should it attack South Korea, and using nukes in the Arab-Israeli conflict. The US may use nuclear weapons in retaliation for a non-nuclear attack, or “in the event of surprising military developments.” According to William M. Arkin, a former Army intelligence analyst and consultant, (in the *New York Times*, 3/10/01), “officials are looking for nuclear weapons that could play a role in the kinds of challenges the United States faces with Al Qaeda.”

This renewed emphasis on the use of nuclear weapons gives them more global legitimacy and is likely to have destabilizing and dangerous results. Countries that don't currently have nuclear weapons and countries on the list of potential targets will seek new nuclear weapons to deter the US from attacking.

These policies also compromise our national authority in everything from disarmament to diplomacy. For example, the US government lectures India and Pakistan, both of which possess nuclear weapons, to refrain from firing them at each other. At the same time, however, the US government is willing to grant *itself* the right to use nuclear weapons against Afghanistan or Iraq – neither of which possesses them. How can the US mediate international conflicts if it pursues this dangerous posture?

Take Action

The only way to secure the globe from the danger of nuclear weapons is to abolish them. Call your members of Congress and tell them that its time for us to renounce nuclear weapons. Tell them:

Twelve years after the end of the Cold War, the administration is pulling the US, and the world, in the wrong direction. It is time for us to move away from nuclear weapons, not make them more usable.

Ask them what they will do to stop the US from following this dangerous path.

Call the Congressional Switchboard at (202) 224-3121.

“Since the dawn of the nuclear age, American military planners have had to factor these enormously destructive weapons into their calculations. Their behavior has been tempered by the belief, shared by most thoughtful Americans, that the weapons should be used only when the nation's most basic interest or national survival is at risk, and that the unrestrained use of nuclear weapons in war could end life on earth as we know it. Nuclear weapons are not just another part of the military arsenal. They are different, and lowering the threshold for their use is reckless folly.”

– *New York Times*, March 12, 2002

Local Contact:

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The Peace Action Education Fund informs the public, media, and policy makers about policy alternatives in order to cut military spending, end global weapons trafficking, and abolish nuclear weapons.

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