



FROM THE ARCHIVE

Presented below are the Preface and Executive Point Summary of National Institute's January 2001 study, *Rationale and Requirements for U.S. Nuclear Forces and Arms Control*. The goal of the study was to present a transparent analysis of the continuing need for nuclear deterrence and the force posture requirements following from that need. The study was a departure from the politically powerful perspective prevalent in Washington at the time that nuclear deterrence and weapons were of rapidly declining value. A popular expectation at the time was that, with the peaceful conclusion of the Cold War and collapse of the Soviet Union, international relations were rapidly becoming reliably more cooperative, open hostilities among great powers was a thing of the past, and global nuclear disarmament had become a realistic prospect. This study was manifestly skeptical of this optimistic set of expectations, noting that:

- Current public proposals for codifying nuclear disarmament and/or deep nuclear reductions assume an international environment in which nuclear deterrence either is unnecessary or relatively easily accomplished; they also assume that this environment will prevail in the future.
 - The current post-Cold War period is one of great political and military dynamism. Even the most basic of the variables concerning U.S. nuclear force posture requirements (e.g., the identity of likely foes) may change rapidly, affecting U.S. nuclear requirements. The current relatively benign conditions cannot be predicted with any confidence to pertain in the future.

With the advantage of over two decades hindsight, it is clear that the study's skepticism of the prevalent expectations at the time, and their implications for the value of nuclear deterrence and weapons, was well placed. Perhaps as important as the study's findings was that contributors to the study included retired senior military officers, noted academic scholars, and highly-regarded individuals who had served in senior positions in Republican and Democratic Administrations or, again with the advantage of over two decades hindsight, would subsequently go on to serve in senior positions in the U.S. foreign and defense establishment. Press reports later said that this study became the "blueprint" for the subsequent December 2001 *Nuclear Posture Review*.

Rationale and Requirements for U.S. Nuclear Forces and Arms Control, Volume I, Executive Report (Fairfax, VA: National Institute for Public Policy, 2001), select excerpts.

Preface

This study departs from the variety of recent public proposals for nuclear "abolition" to examine instead the methodology necessary to assess U.S. nuclear force requirements and



arms control positions. The study first contrasts the basic contours of official U.S. policy with public proposals for new nuclear disarmament treaties, and then focuses on the type of methodical analysis that must precede recommendations concerning the size and composition of U.S. nuclear forces. In the post-Cold War period the various complex technical, political, and operational factors that must be taken into account in advance of such recommendations are far from static. Even the most basic factors, such as the identity of potential opponents and the requirements for deterrence, are unclear at present, and wholly opaque for the future. Consequently, this study concludes that an important priority for the United States is to preserve its capability to adapt U.S. offensive and defensive forces to rapidly changing strategic conditions. Preserving the U.S. capability to adapt does not exclude the potential for U.S. nuclear force reductions, now or in the future. A proper nuclear posture review may determine that U.S. nuclear requirements can be met at lower force levels. Strategic adaptability does, however, weigh heavily against continuation of the traditional bipolar Cold War approach to strategic arms control. Rather than the past focus on rigid treaties designed to perpetuate U.S. and Russian capabilities for Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD), post-Cold War strategic arms control should focus on close consultation, coordination and transparency. Rather than “locking in” ceilings that may soon be excessive or inadequate, arms control should encourage “full disclosure” and predictability with regard to nuclear forces, and facilitate movement away from MAD, which now serves only to sustain unnecessarily a relationship based on mutual threat, suspicion, and animosity.

The participants endorse the study’s general thrust and conclusions as presented in this *Executive Report*. Each participant may not, however, be in full agreement with every specific point and detail.

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Executive Point Summary

- Specific nuclear force posture recommendations should follow a comprehensive review of technical, operational, and political variables. This strategic review must consider factors such as current and potential threats, U.S. deterrence and wartime goals, nuclear targeting strategy and warhead options, enemy passive and active defenses, conventional strike capabilities, and Third Country use.
 - The 2001 Congressionally-mandated nuclear posture review must take these technical, political, and operational variables into account.
 - Force posture recommendations that do not take these variables into account are likely to be flawed (e.g. recent public proposals for nuclear “abolition” or deep force reductions).
 - Proper review may indicate that current U.S. nuclear requirements can be met with reduced nuclear forces.

- Current public proposals for codifying nuclear disarmament and/or deep nuclear reductions assume an international environment in which nuclear deterrence either is unnecessary or relatively easily accomplished; they also assume that this environment will prevail in the future.
 - The current post-Cold War period is one of great political and military dynamism. Even the most basic of the variables concerning U.S. nuclear force posture requirements (e.g., the identity of likely foes) may change rapidly, affecting U.S. nuclear requirements. The current relatively benign conditions cannot be predicted with any confidence to pertain in the future.
 - U.S. foreign policy goals and requirements, and the technical, political, and operational variables that must help shape U.S. nuclear force requirements, can change rapidly as the strategic environment changes.
 - It is not now possible to predict with confidence future deterrence requirements. The future may prove to be far more dangerous than benign: nuclear deterrence may become more important for the United States, and a robust nuclear capability may be essential to support U.S. deterrence objectives.
- Possible current/future deterrence and wartime roles for nuclear weapons may include:
 - Deterring weapons of mass destruction (WMD) use by regional powers.
 - Deterring WMD or massive conventional aggression by an emerging global competitor.
 - Preventing catastrophic losses in conventional war.
 - Providing unique targeting capabilities (deep underground/biological weapons targets).
 - Enhancing U.S. influence in crises.
- Because the international environment and operational considerations are dynamic, as is the context for deterrence, the ability to adjust the U.S. offensive and defensive force posture to a changing strategic environment is critical.
 - Adaptability requires the capacity to both *augment and reduce* U.S. defensive and offensive forces to fit a changing strategic environment and rapid possible shifts in technical, operational, and political variables.
 - Adaptability also requires a capacity to design and build new weapons.
- Cold War-style arms control, a process that has focused on specific limitations designed to codify “Mutual Assured Destruction”(MAD), now contributes to U.S.-Russian political enmity, and is incompatible with the basic U.S. strategic requirement for adaptability in a dynamic post-Cold War environment.

- There is an inherent contradiction in attempting to improve U.S.-Russian political relations by remaining committed to the Cold War approach to arms control, an approach designed to perpetuate MAD. This contradiction is recognized by U.S. and Russian officials.
 - The codification of deep reductions now, according to the traditional Cold War approach to arms control, would preclude the U.S. *de jure* prerogative and *de facto* capability to adjust forces as necessary to fit a changing strategic environment. It would render the U.S. vulnerable to the highly questionable assumption that the international environment is and will continue to be relatively benign.
 - The U.S. is highly restricted politically in its capability to withdraw from or even modify established arms control agreements regardless of changes in the strategic environment (witness the ABM Treaty) or evidence of an opponent's non-compliance.
 - The traditional strategic arms control process does not affect many factors potentially relevant to U.S. strategic requirements, and thus cannot preclude the potential for disturbing changes in the strategic environment.
 - Further adjustment to the U.S. strategic forces must not be rendered practically or legally "irreversible" via codification in the traditional arms control process.
- The United States should move toward a new post-Cold War framework for arms control, and new forms of U.S.-Russian engagement and dialogue aimed at moving away from MAD, not its perpetuation.
 - If indicated by comprehensive strategic review, the U.S. should move unilaterally toward significant nuclear force reductions and other changes in the force posture, while retaining its prerogative and capability to reconstitute or further reduce its forces as made necessary or possible by future developments in the strategic environment.
 - Post-Cold War strategic arms control, including potential U.S. unilateral reductions, should focus on efforts to promote transparency and predictability in U.S. and Russian decision-making concerning active defenses and nuclear forces, including systematic discussions.
 - To advance movement away from MAD, the U.S. should initiate "Mutual Assurance Talks" with Russia, which should draw on the 1992 Ross-Mamedov Talks.
 - The strategic arms control process should be restructured to reflect this new, post-Cold War approach.