

Bush's War Plan includes the Use of Nuclear Weapons

By [Jack A. Smith](#)

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The United States government is preparing for an eventual nuclear war with a determination approximating Cold War standards, but this time with an expressed preemptive first-strike option against even non-nuclear countries.

During the 15 years following the implosion of the Soviet Union, Washington has been upgrading the efficiency and kill power of its 10,000 warhead nuclear arsenal, and has been modernizing its delivery fleet of ballistic missiles, nuclear submarines, warships and bombers. Many aging weapons have been eliminated since the Cold War, but new and more deadly instruments of mass destruction have already been deployed, with many more on the way.

The anticipated "peace dividend" from the end of the Cold War never materialized except in the paradoxical configuration of a profitable war dividend for the military-industrial complex, a large portion of which is derived from nuclear weapons and various support systems.

"The United States continues to spend billions of dollars annually to maintain and upgrade its nuclear forces," according to an article titled "U.S. Nuclear Forces 2006" in the January-February issue of the prestigious Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists. "It is deploying a larger and more accurate preemptive nuclear strike capability in the Asia-Pacific region, and shifting its doctrine toward targeting U.S. strategic nuclear forces against 'weapons of mass destruction' complexes and command centers.

"The Defense Department is upgrading its nuclear strike plans to reflect new presidential guidance and a transition in war planning from the top-heavy Single Integrated Operational Plan of the Cold War to a family of smaller and more flexible strike plans designed to defeat today's adversaries. The new central strategic war plan is known as OPLAN (Operations Plan) 8044."

In a chilling and ambiguous statement before the release of the Pentagon's Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR), Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld explained the plan as the product of "thinking about the 21st century in a way that's different from the 20th century. . . . We're trying to figure out how you conduct a war against something other than a nation-state and how . . . you conduct a war in countries that you are not at war with."

The Pentagon expects the so-called War on Terrorism, which it has just officially renamed the "Long War," to last at least 20 years, according to a statement to the American Forces Press Service Jan. 25 by Army Lt. Gen. Raymond Odierno, assistant to the head of the Joint

Chiefs of Staff. In his statement he equated the Long War against a relative handful of opponents to the Cold War between the two superpowers.

Odierno was speaking about the use of unconventional “special operations” during the new-type conflict, referring to a “holistic concept” but evidently not mentioning nuclear weapons in his interview. Obviously, the new war plan at least in part is intended to avoid another defeat such as U.S. forces have experienced in the Iraq War. Full-scale ground invasions do not appear to loom large in 20-Year-War planning.

The Pentagon remains prepared as usual to fight two major wars and a couple of insurgencies simultaneously. But its new type of “full scale dominance” over terrorism focuses on special operations, special military forces, an electronic battlefield, ground and air robots, communications and surveillance mastery, control of the skies and space, political and economic subversion, sanctions, assassinations, a worldwide propaganda apparatus, and, now, the *pièce de résistance* — precision nuclear attacks when desired.

The militarist mind perceives two anticipated advantages to this new plan: (1) It will require far fewer “boots on the ground,” and (2) the specific mini-wars within the Long War will be brief. The fewer the “boots,” the fewer the grumblings by the American people about GI deaths; the briefer the engagement, the less likely it will be remembered a week later by a nation absorbed in trivia, commerce, consumerism, and a strong attachment to being Number One in the world.

Gen. Richard B. Meyers testified about the new plan in Senate hearings last April. He said that the U.S. Strategic Command (STRATCOM), which directs global and space strike operations, “has revised our strategic deterrence and response plan that became effective in the fall of 2004. This revised, detailed plan provides more flexible options to assure allies, and dissuade, deter, and if necessary, defeat adversaries in a wider range of contingencies.”

One aspect of the OPLAN’s global strike scenario is CONPLAN 8022, which the Bulletin article describes as “a concept plan for the quick use of nuclear, conventional, or information warfare capabilities to destroy — preemptively, if necessary — ‘time-urgent targets’ anywhere in the world. . . . As a result, the Bush administration’s preemption policy is now operational on long-range bombers, strategic submarines on deterrent patrol, and presumably intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs).”

Preemption in concert with a nuclear first strike became implicit U.S. policy in the Bush administration’s Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) in late 2001 and has become more explicit since then. During the Cold War, the USSR pledged never to be the first to use nuclear weapons in a first strike against nuclear or non-nuclear states, but the U.S. stubbornly refused to follow suit.

Hans M. Kristensen, a nuclear weapons expert and project director at the Federation of American Scientists, wrote the following of CONPLAN in last September’s *Arms Control Today*: “Foremost among the doctrine’s new features are the incorporation of preemption into U.S. nuclear doctrine and the integration of conventional weapons and missile defenses into strategic planning. . . . The new nuclear doctrine makes it clear that the United States will not necessarily wait for the attack but preempt with nuclear weapons if necessary.”

One of the several reasons the Pentagon may use nuclear weapons in a preemptive attack, Kristensen said, is as a “demonstration of U.S. intent and capability to use nuclear weapons

to deter adversary WMD use.” Theoretically, had the plan been in full operation at the time, President George W. Bush could have let loose nuclear weapons against Iraq under the false assumption that it possessed WMD and was preparing to attack America. (Bush in October 2002: “Saddam Hussein is a homicidal dictator who is addicted to weapons of mass destruction [and who] is exploring ways of using [aerial vehicles] for missions targeting the United States.”)

According to military affairs expert William Arkin writing in the Washington Post May 15 last year, CONPLAN authorizes “for the first time a preemptive and offensive strike capability against Iran and North Korea. . . . The global strike plan holds the nuclear option in reserve if intelligence suggests an ‘imminent’ launch of an enemy nuclear strike on the U.S. or if there is a need to destroy hard-to-reach targets.” Iran does not possess nuclear weapons and insists that it will never build them (D.P.R. Korea may have one or two small weapons without an effective delivery system to reach the U.S. or an intention to use them.). CONPLAN thus entertains the use of nuclear weapons against a non-nuclear state, an explicit violation of the 1970 nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) — preemptively, and thus illegally, at that.

Commenting on Tomdispatch.com 10 days after Arkin’s revelations, long-time anti-nuclear analyst Jonathan Schell declared: “In a shocking innovation in American nuclear policy . . . the administration has created and placed on continuous high alert a force whereby the president can launch a pinpoint strike, including a nuclear strike, anywhere on earth with a few hours’ notice. . . . These actions make operational a revolution in U.S. nuclear policy.”

Washington does not publicly disclose the names of the “adversaries” against whom such nuclear weapons are aimed. Bush Administration and Pentagon documents usually refer to “rogue states,” and “terrorists,” but this seems to be a deception. It is absurd to suggest that the world’s strongest conventional and nuclear military power will be threatened by any of the so-called “rogue states,” all of which are spectacularly weaker than the U.S.

As far as the co-called War on Terrorism and terrorists are concerned, even if a small atomic device could be acquired and hand-delivered by al-Qaeda to a target in the U.S. — a most unlikely event — what use is America’s huge nuclear arsenal against a suicidal fanatic with a weapon of any kind and no state to retaliate against?

The only rational explanation for Washington’s continual modernization of its nuclear arsenal and delivery systems is (1) to remain the planet’s sole superpower against all competitors including China and the European Union, and (2) to extend U.S. military, economic and political hegemony throughout the entire world to the point of creating a 21st century American Empire. (For those who blanch at the suggestion of empire, note that even Jimmy Carter, as you will see below, now deplors the quest for “American imperial dominance,” a formulation that could have been lifted from the pages of Monthly Review.)

Even though there are irrefutable indications that Russia and D.P.R. Korea remain among the states foremost in the Pentagon’s nuclear bombsights, as undoubtedly do Iran, Syria and others, China has become the principal target — not because it is a military threat but as a potential economic and geopolitical rival of the first magnitude.

China, which is itself threatened by the nuclear potential of American air bases in close proximity (thanks to the spoils of the Afghan war), the hellfire of ground-launched

intercontinental ballistic missiles from the U.S., and the brimstone of submarine-launched missiles from the Pacific, is expected to overtake the U.S. as the world's leading economic power in 35 to 40 years. Nuclear weapons intimidate as well as kill, and there may come a time when China will have to be "put in its place" one way or the other.

The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists article, written by Robert S. Norris and Hans M. Kristensen, states the following: "During the past few years, the navy has significantly changed the homeporting of SSBNs [nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines] to meet new planning requirements. . . . The primary goal of the shift is to increase coverage of targets in China, according to navy officials. (Pacific-based SSBNs also target Russia and North Korea.)."

Until 2002, the U.S. maintained 10 SSBNs in the Atlantic and four in the Pacific. Today there are nine missile submarines in the Pacific and five in the Atlantic. By 2008, the fleet of 14 SSBNs will share 336 Trident II D5 submarine-launched ballistic missiles armed with 2,000 nuclear warheads. These ballistic missiles deliver their deadly payload faster than land- or air-launched missiles.

Launching the program to cover the Pacific Rim with the improved Tridents, Rear Adm. Charles B. Young declared in August 2002 that the move "enhances system accuracy, payload, and hard-target capability, thus improving [U.S.] available responses to existing and emerging Pacific theater threats." Once again, those "threats" were unspecified.

Advance reports about the Pentagon's QDR indicate that the Navy's "greater presence in the Pacific Ocean" includes a permanent increase to at least six aircraft carriers — half the fleet. The report also requests the "return to a steady-state production rate of two attack submarines per year not later than 2012." Each submarine costs a minimum of \$2 billion. In all probability, most of the new subs will prowl Pacific waters.

In addition to nuclear warheads, the Pentagon seeks to install 96 conventional warheads on 26 of its multiple-warhead Trident submarine launched ballistic missiles. The reason, Bloomberg News reported Jan. 17, "is to allow quicker preemptive attacks on deeply buried enemy command centers or stockpiles of weapons of mass destruction (WMD)." William Arkin has written that "This weapon would give the U.S. global conventional preemption — a first-strike capability — in 30 minutes to attack North Korean or Iranian WMD or leadership facilities." He posits that ballistic missile submarines are now "the front line of U.S. offensive capabilities."

The Pentagon has scrapped its obsolete ground-based MX Peacekeeper intercontinental ballistic missiles, but is strengthening its Minuteman III force of 500 missiles with perhaps 800 warheads. Modernization of the Minuteman, according to the Bulletin article, "continues under an ambitious \$7 billion-\$8 billion, six-part program intended to improve the missile's accuracy and reliability and extend its service life beyond 2020." The Air Force is developing an entirely new ICBM which it hopes to have ready in 2018.

The U.S. has recently modernized its fleet of long-range nuclear bombers, the B-2A Spirit and the B-52H Stratofortress. "Neither bomber is maintained on day-to-day alert as during the Cold War," report Norris and Kristensen, "yet the alert level has increased with the recent tasking of bomber wings in Global Strike missions." By 2018, according to the QDR draft, the Pentagon desires to "develop a new land-based penetrating long-range strike capability.

These bombers carry a mix of nuclear weapons ranging in size from 10 kilotons to 1.2 megatons. One nuclear kiloton emits the energy equivalent of 1,000 tons of TNT. A 1.2 megaton bomb is the energy equivalent of 1.2 million tons (2.4 billion pounds) of TNT.

To convey what this means in practice we will quote from an article by Conn Hallinan that appeared on *Portside* Feb. 1. He was discussing the primitive atom bomb named “Little Boy” with the power of 13 kilotons that the U.S. dropped from a B-29 named “Enola Gay” on the city of Hiroshima on August 6, 1945, a day that, like the Holocaust, must happen “never again”: “The fireball that consumed Hiroshima reached 18 million degrees in one millionth of a second. It evaporated 68% of the city, demolishing structures built to withstand an 8.5 earthquake. It charred trees five miles from ground zero, blew out windows 17 miles from the city’s center, and killed 100,000 people [almost all civilians] in a single blow. Another 100,000 plus would follow in the months ahead.”

By comparison, the most powerful weapon used against the U.S. occupation army by the resistance in Iraq is the IED (improvised explosive device) — a homemade “roadside” bomb with only a few pounds of explosive material. The biggest ever of these weapons contained about 200 pounds of TNT.

Even so, they have been effective enough for the new Pentagon budget to allocate spending over \$3.3 billion, following a previous \$2 billion, to devise a deterrent to IEDs, which so far has proved elusive. As the Pentagon invests astronomical billions on a technologically awesome array of modern mechanisms of death and destruction, it may be useful to recall that the operative weapon used to commandeer airplanes for the suicide missions of Sept. 11, 2001, was a dozen or so box cutters that cost a couple of dollars each — but we digress.

Considering Washington’s calculated hysteria about Iran’s desire to build nuclear power plants, which do not contravene the Non-Proliferation Treaty, it is interesting to note that the U.S. routinely violates the treaty in two major ways.

First, as mentioned earlier, it is contrary to the NPT to threaten non-nuclear states with nuclear weapons, as the U.S. now does. Last Dec. 5, 16 Congressional Democrats sent a message of concern to President Bush about the new nuclear doctrine, which contained these words about the treaty: “This drastic shift in U.S. nuclear policy threatens the very foundation of nuclear arms control as shaped by the nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty, which has helped prevent nuclear proliferation for over 35 years. In the context of efforts to strengthen and extend the treaty, the United States issued a negative nuclear security assurance in 1978, reiterated in 1995, that the United States would not use nuclear force against NPT member countries without nuclear weapons unless attacked by a non nuclear-weapon state that is allied with a nuclear-weapon state.”

Second, while pledging the nearly 180 non-nuclear nations which have signed the NPT to eschew developing nuclear weapons, the treaty further obliges the U.S., USSR, Britain, France and China to take steps toward nuclear disarmament. But according to David Krieger, president of the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation: “The United States has failed to fulfill its obligations under Article VI of the NPT, requiring good faith efforts to achieve nuclear disarmament — for more than 30 years. The United States [also] has failed to ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and has withdrawn from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty.”

By scoffing at the notion of nuclear disarmament in practice, by modernizing its nuclear

capability, and by embracing an aggressive first-strike policy, Washington is not only violating the NPT but is contributing toward the proliferation of nuclear weapons. “Nothing could be more calculated to goad other nations into nuclear proliferation,” is how Jonathan Schell put it.

As long as the U.S. maintains its huge arsenal, none of the eight other nuclear-enabled states are willing to significantly disarm. Meanwhile other countries begin to consider obtaining nuclear weapons as a defense against a possible American attack, a hardly illogical consequence of Washington’s nuclear equivalent of saber rattling. D.P.R. Korea’s tiny nuclear capability, for example, was developed to defend itself against U.S. threats, and as a bargaining chip in hopes of a negotiated peace with Washington, which never signed a peace treaty with Pyongyang after the Korean war almost 53 years ago. The USSR developed nuclear weapons because it feared Washington would vaporize Moscow the way it did Hiroshima and Nagasaki, lest it be forgotten that one of the principal reasons the U.S. destroyed these two Japanese cities was as a warning to the non-nuclear Soviet Union. China obtained nuclear weapons for the same reason.

Britain and France built nuclear bombs so as not to be completely dominated by and dependent upon the reigning hegemon of the post-war capitalist world. India and Pakistan developed their weapons against each other, but the U.S. has been winking and nodding toward them, just as it does toward Israel’s nearly 200 nuclear weapons. These last three countries are in outright violation of the entire non-proliferation treaty, which they refuse to sign — and they remain American allies, while non-nuclear Iran is a potential nuclear target for the U.S. and Israel for insisting on building a nuclear power station. Washington’s hypocrisy about Iran’s actions has reached the point on Feb. 4 where a spokesperson charged that Teheran was “threatening the world.” (See article below, “Iran and the Non-Proliferation Treaty.”)

Arguing that the Bush Administration’s Global Strike policy is a “negative trend for nuclear proliferation,” Theresa Hitchens, a vice president at the Center for Defense Information, noted in a 2003 report that the seeds for this policy were planted during the Clinton Administration. She was referring to then-Defense Secretary Les Aspin’s “counter-proliferation” strategy, which was based on taking defensive and offensive measures against the acquisition of WMD by small countries. The use of U.S. nuclear weapons in this endeavor was left open in what has been termed by the Arms Control Association as “strategic ambiguity.”

Opposition to the Bush Administration’s reckless nuclear strategy is generating domestic opposition but it is relatively small so far. There has been sufficient criticism, however, for the Pentagon on Feb. 2 to decide against publishing its long-delayed revised draft of the “Doctrine for Joint Nuclear Operations,” which was to provide a precise public statement on the preemptive use of nuclear weapons. Newspaper leaks over the last months, combined with some congressional opposition, convinced the Bush Administration to eliminate the report.

But as Hans Kristensen wrote for the Nuclear Information Project the day the report was withdrawn: “The decision to cancel the documents simply removes controversial documents from the public domain and from the Pentagon’s internal reading list. The White House and Pentagon guidance that directs the use of nuclear weapons remains unchanged by the cancellation.

Former President Jimmy Carter has sharply condemned Bush's nuclear program, which he implied was a product of U.S. imperialism. On Nov. 20 he declared:

"There are determined efforts by U.S. leaders to exert American imperial dominance throughout the world. These revolutionary policies have been orchestrated by those who believe that our nation's tremendous power and influence should not be internationally constrained. At the same time, our political leaders have declared independence from the restraints of international organizations and have disavowed long-standing global agreements, including agreements on nuclear arms, control of biological weapons and the international system of justice.

"Instead of reducing America's reliance on nuclear weapons and their further proliferation, we have insisted on our right (and that of others) to retain our arsenals, expand them and, therefore, abrogate or derogate almost all nuclear arms-control agreements negotiated during the last 50 years. We have now become a prime culprit in global nuclear proliferation. America also has abandoned the prohibition of 'first use' of nuclear weapons against non-nuclear nations and is contemplating the previously condemned deployment of weapons in space."

Since 1947, the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists has featured a "Doomsday Clock" as part of its front cover. When and if the clock hands reach midnight, it will indicate that nuclear war is about to destroy the world. The worst years for the clock were when it reached three minutes to midnight in 1949, when the USSR joined the U.S. as a nuclear power, and 1984 after President Ronald Reagan greatly accelerated the arms race.

The best year was 1991, when the Doomsday Clock was moved back to 17 minutes to midnight as the Cold War ended and the U.S. and USSR signed the long-stalled Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) coupled with further unilateral cuts in tactical and strategic nuclear weapons. Soon afterward the Soviet Union dissolved, leading many Americans to believe that the U.S. would finally get rid of its nuclear sword and shield "down by the riverside," but that was based on an unrealistic understanding of imperialism.

By 2002, the clock hands moved forward to 7 minutes before midnight — the same position it was in during the intense Cold War year of 1980 — mainly because the Bush Administration rejected a series of arms control treaties and said it would withdraw from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty. The Doomsday clock has remained the same until now: too close to the utilization of nuclear weapons for comfort, assuming one is even aware of the danger.

The great physicist, pacifist, and socialist Albert Einstein deeply regretted his intellectual contribution to the construction of nuclear weapons. (He had feared Nazi Germany would acquire them first.) In the post-Hiroshima years, Einstein was a strong advocate for complete nuclear disarmament until the day he died in 1955. In May 1946 he wrote, "The unleashed power of the atom has changed everything save our modes of thinking and thus we drift toward unparalleled catastrophe."

The drift to catastrophe continues, less flagrantly than during the Cold War but no less potentially apocalyptic for being relatively covert. Washington has become considerably more aggressive now that the counter-balance of Moscow's powerful presence no longer exists. The size and content of America's nuclear arsenal, combined with its quest for world hegemony, and its unjust, illegal and immoral policy of preemptive war, have made the U.S.

the most dangerous state in world history.

The large activist U.S. antiwar movement has essentially relegated the matter of nuclear weapons to a low priority 15 years after the end of the Cold War in order to concentrate on stopping the war in Iraq. But if we do not wish the hands of the Doomsday Clock to tick closer to midnight, it will be incumbent upon the peace forces to pay far more attention to Washington's disastrous nuclear policy.

A domestic constituency exists for complete nuclear disarmament. According to an Associated Press poll conducted by Ipsos-Public Affairs 10 months ago, 66% of Americans believe no nation, including the U.S., should possess nuclear weapons. Polls in many nations are in agreement. Most people in the world fear nuclear weapons and want them destroyed.

The longer we wait, the longer "we drift toward unparalleled catastrophe." While continuing the struggle against the unjust Iraq adventure and the Pentagon's 20-year Long War, let's raise that fighting banner too long in disuse — Ban the Bomb! In the unforgettable words at the melancholy conclusion of "On the Beach," the popular 1959 anti-nuclear film, "There is still time." But it is ticking away, more quickly than we think.

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