

# On a Highway to Hell: Nuclear Weapons Offer an Illusion of Security. Scott Ritter

By [Scott Ritter](#)

Global Research, September 03, 2024

[Consortiumnews](#) 1 September 2024

Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [Intelligence](#), [Militarization and WMD](#)

In-depth Report: [Nuclear War](#)

*Nuclear weapons offer an illusion of security. By allowing the U.S. nuclear posture to shift from deterrence to employment, there will be a scenario where the U.S. will use nuclear weapons. And then it's lights out.*

\*

An interesting thing happened on the road to Armageddon.

In January 2017, then-Vice President Joe Biden, [speaking at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace](#), warned about the dangers inherent in expanding funding for, and by extension increasing the importance of, nuclear weapons.

“If future budgets reverse the choices we’ve made, and pour additional money into a nuclear buildup,” said Biden — referring to Obama administration policies that included secured the New START Treaty limiting the size of the U.S. and Russian nuclear arsenals — “it hearkens back to the Cold War and will do nothing to increase the day-to-day security of the United States or our allies.”

Later, in 2019, Biden, now a candidate for president, commented on the decision made by President Donald Trump to deploy two missile systems — a cruise missile still under development, and the Trident submarine-launched ballistic missile deployed onboard the U.S. Navy’s Ohio-class submarines —armed with a new low-yield nuclear warhead.

“The United States does not need new nuclear weapons,” Biden declared in a written answer to [questions posed by the Council for a Livable World](#). “Our current arsenal of weapons...is sufficient to meet our deterrence and alliance requirements.”

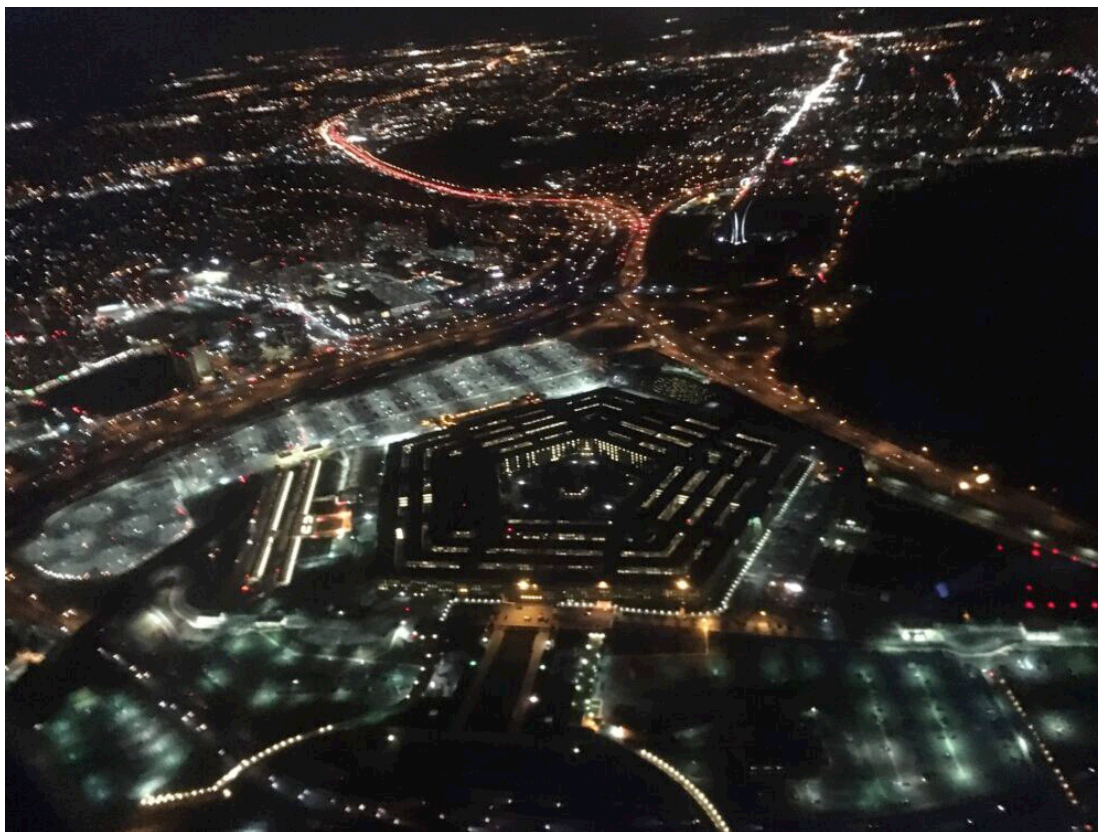
In an article published in [the March/April 2020 issue of Foreign Affairs](#), candidate Biden vowed to “renew our commitment to arms control for a new era,” including a pledge to “pursue an extension of the New START treaty, an anchor of strategic stability between the United States and Russia, and use that as a foundation for new arms control arrangements.”

Biden went on to declare that “that the sole purpose of the U.S. nuclear arsenal should be deterring—and, if necessary, retaliating against—a nuclear attack. As president, I will work to put that belief into practice, in consultation with the U.S. military and U.S. allies.”

Biden prevailed over Trump in the 2020 Presidential election, and on Jan. 21, 2021, was sworn in as the 46th President of the United States.

And then...nothing.

## Copying Trump's Pre-Emptive Strike



Aerial view of Pentagon at night. (Joe Lauria)

In March 2022, after much speculation about whether or not Biden would follow through with his pledge to implement a “sole purpose” nuclear policy, the Biden administration published the [2022 edition of the Nuclear Posture Review](#) (NPR), a Congressionally-mandated document which describes United States nuclear strategy, policy, posture, and forces in support of the National Security Strategy (NSS) and National Defense Strategy (NDS).

It was a near carbon-copy of the [February 2018 NPR](#) published by the Trump administration, including language which enshrined as doctrine the U.S. ability to use nuclear weapons pre-emptively, even in scenarios that did not involve a nuclear threat.

In December 2022, during a reunion of personnel involved in the negotiation and implementation of the landmark 1987 Intermediate Nuclear Forces treaty, a senior Biden administration arms control official was asked by a veteran arms controller why Biden had backed away from his pledge regarding the “sole purpose” doctrine.

“The inter-agency wasn’t ready for it,” this official replied.

The “inter-agency” the official was referring to is the amalgam of departments and agencies, staffed by unelected career civil servants and military professionals who serve as the executioners of policy regarding America’s nuclear enterprise.

It was a surprising, and extremely disappointing, admission on the part of an official whose oath of office bound him or her to the bedrock constitutional principle of executive authority and civilian control of the military.

Biden had, even before being sworn in, received push-back regarding any alterations in the nuclear doctrine of the United States.

In September 2020, Admiral Charle Richard, commander of U.S. Strategic Command, responsible for America's nuclear arsenal, warned that,

“We are on a trajectory, for the first time in our nation's history, to face two peer nuclear-capable competitors.”

Richard was referring to the nuclear arsenals of Russia and China.

Once he became president, Biden was immediately confronted with two major challenges for which he was ill-equipped to handle — the Russian-Ukraine crisis, and China's assertion of its national interests over Taiwan and the South China Sea.

Both involved the potential of military escalation leading up to direct force-on-force conflict between the U.S. military and their Russian and Chinese counterparts, both of which included the possibility of nuclear war.

The Russian initiation of its “Special Military Operation” against Ukraine, in February 2022, brought with it the inherent risk of escalation with NATO, leading to Russian threats about the potential for nuclear weapons use if NATO decided to directly intervene in Ukraine.

And a November 2022 Pentagon report forecast that China would increase its nuclear arsenal from around 400 weapons to more than 1,500 by 2035.

The New START treaty limits the number of deployed nuclear warheads to 1,550 each for the U.S. and Russia. The treaty was negotiated on the principle of bilateral reciprocity.

With the U.S. facing a potential Chinese nuclear arsenal of 1,500 weapons, and the existing Russian arsenal of around the same, it was clear that, left unchecked, the U.S. was going to find itself in a disadvantageous position when it came to its strategic nuclear forces.

While the NPR provides a general policy statement regarding the U.S. nuclear arsenal, there are two more documents — the President's Nuclear Employment Guidance and the Secretary of Defense's Nuclear Weapons Employment Planning and Posture Guidance — that direct planning for actual employment of nuclear weapons consistent with national policy.

The last Nuclear Employment Guidance document, [published in 2019](#), was responsive to the 2018 NPR. This guidance fully incorporated the new low-yield W-76-2 nuclear warhead into the nuclear employment plans of the United States. It did the same for the new generation of B-61 gravity bombs that constitute NATO's nuclear deterrence force.

The employment plans, which were based upon the concept of “escalate to de-escalate” (i.e. by using a small nuclear weapon, the U.S. and NATO would deter Russia from escalating

out of fear of bringing on a general nuclear exchange.)

In short, America's nuclear war plans were front loaded for the localized employment of nuclear weapons against both a Russian and Chinese threat.

This U.S. nuclear war plan was premised on the ability to deter Russian nuclear escalation and deter or defeat China's nuclear force using the number of nuclear warheads permitted under the caps implemented by the New START treaty.

## Facing a Stronger Nuclear China

However, the Biden administration is now confronted with the possibility and or probability of a much larger, capable Chinese strategic nuclear force capable of surviving a limited U.S. first-strike and delivering a nation-killing nuclear payload to U.S. soil in retaliation.

To adjust to this new reality, the U.S. would need to allocate nuclear warheads currently targeted against Russia onto China. This would require that the U.S. not only develop revised target lists for both Russia and China, but also rethink targeting strategies in general, looking to maximum physical destruction over political impact.

More dangerously, the U.S. would have to look at employment strategies that maximized the element of surprise to ensure all targets were hit by their designated weapons. This would require a change in the readiness posture and operational deployment areas of U.S. nuclear forces.

With increased readiness comes the need for vigilance against any preemption efforts by a potential nuclear adversary, meaning that U.S. nuclear forces will be placed on a higher alert status.

In short, the risk of nuclear war, inadvertent or otherwise, has become exponentially greater.

In March the Biden administration reportedly issued a new Nuclear Employment Guidance document reflecting this reality.

Nowhere in this guidance is there consideration for using arms control as a means of managing the nuclear equation, either by extending the New START treaty, or working with China to prevent a Chinese nuclear breakout.

Instead, the U.S. appears to be concerned about the erosion of nuclear deterrence that will be brought about by diverting weapons dedicated to non-Chinese contingencies. When seen in this light, the answer to the problem is more, not fewer, nuclear weapons.

This is why the U.S. is going to let the New START treaty lapse in February 2026 — once the treaty goes away, so, too, does the cap on the number of deployed warheads, and the U.S. nuclear establishment will be able to build up the U.S. operational nuclear arsenal so that there are enough weapons for every designated target.

The world is becoming a very dangerous place.

Nuclear weapons offer the illusion of security.

By allowing the U.S. nuclear posture to shift away from deterrence toward warfighting, all we guarantee is that eventually there will be a warfighting scenario where the U.S. will end up using nuclear weapons.

And then we all die.

We are, literally, on a Highway to Hell.

\*

Click the share button below to email/forward this article to your friends and colleagues. Follow us on [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#) and subscribe to our [Telegram Channel](#). Feel free to repost and share widely Global Research articles.

### [One Month Before Global Research's Anniversary](#)

*Scott Ritter is a former U.S. Marine Corps intelligence officer who served in the former Soviet Union implementing arms control treaties, in the Persian Gulf during Operation Desert Storm and in Iraq overseeing the disarmament of WMD. His most recent book is Disarmament in the Time of Perestroika, published by Clarity Press.*

*Featured image: A front view of four nuclear free-fall B61s on a bomb rack at Barksdale Air Force Base, Louisiana, 1986. (DoD, Public domain, Wikimedia Commons)*



[“Towards a World War III Scenario: The Dangers of Nuclear War”](#)

by Michel Chossudovsky

*Available to order from Global Research!*

ISBN Number: 978-0-9737147-5-3

Year: 2012

Pages: 102

[PDF Edition](#): \$6.50 (sent directly to your email account!)

[Michel Chossudovsky](#) is Professor of Economics at the University of Ottawa and Director of the Centre for Research on Globalization (CRG), which hosts the critically acclaimed website [www.globalresearch.ca](http://www.globalresearch.ca). He is a contributor to the Encyclopedia Britannica. His writings have been translated into more than 20 languages.

## Reviews

“This book is a ‘must’ resource – a richly documented and systematic diagnosis of the supremely pathological geo-strategic planning of US wars since ‘9-11’ against non-nuclear countries to seize their oil fields and resources under cover of ‘freedom and democracy’.”

*–John McMurtry, Professor of Philosophy, Guelph University*

“In a world where engineered, pre-emptive, or more fashionably “humanitarian” wars of aggression have become the norm, this challenging book may be our final wake-up call.”

*–Denis Halliday, Former Assistant Secretary General of the United Nations*

Michel Chossudovsky exposes the insanity of our privatized war machine. Iran is being targeted with nuclear weapons as part of a war agenda built on distortions and lies for the purpose of private profit. The real aims are oil, financial hegemony and global control. The price could be nuclear holocaust. When weapons become the hottest export of the world’s only superpower, and diplomats work as salesmen for the defense industry, the whole world is recklessly endangered. If we must have a military, it belongs entirely in the public sector. No one should profit from mass death and destruction.

*–Ellen Brown, author of ‘Web of Debt’ and president of the Public Banking Institute*

The original source of this article is [Consortiumnews](#)

Copyright © [Scott Ritter](#), [Consortiumnews](#), 2024

---

[Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page](#)

[Become a Member of Global Research](#)

Articles by: [Scott Ritter](#)

**Disclaimer:** The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). The Centre for Research on Globalization will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long as the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: [publications@globalresearch.ca](mailto:publications@globalresearch.ca)

[www.globalresearch.ca](http://www.globalresearch.ca) contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: [publications@globalresearch.ca](mailto:publications@globalresearch.ca)