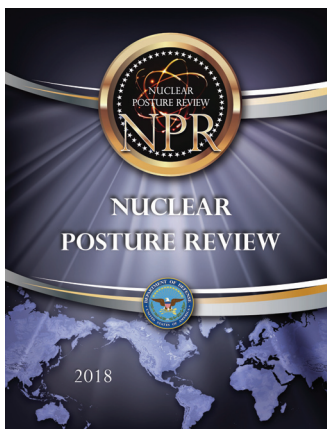


US Nuclear Posture

James Mattis et al



In the first weeks of his Administration, President Trump ordered the Department of Defense to conduct a review of US nuclear weapons and strategies. The resultant Nuclear Posture Review, with its emphasis on smaller, ‘useable’ nukes, was published in February 2018. We reprint some key excerpts.

Secretary’s Preface

Secretary of Defense James Mattis

‘For decades, the United States led the world in efforts to reduce the role and number of nuclear weapons ... During this time, the US nuclear weapons stockpile drew down by more than 85 percent from its Cold War high. Many hoped conditions had been set for even deeper reductions in global nuclear arsenals, and, ultimately, for their elimination.

While Russia initially followed America’s lead ... it retained large numbers of non-strategic nuclear weapons. Today, Russia is modernizing these weapons as well as its other strategic systems. Even more troubling has been Russia’s adoption of military strategies and capabilities that rely on nuclear escalation for their success.’ (Page I)

‘This review rests on a bedrock truth: nuclear weapons have and will continue to play a critical role in deterring nuclear attack and in preventing large-scale conventional warfare between nuclear-armed states for the foreseeable future. US nuclear weapons not only defend our allies against conventional and nuclear threats, they also help them avoid the need to develop their own nuclear arsenals. This, in turn, furthers global security.’ (Page III)

Executive Summary

An Evolving and Uncertain International Security Environment

‘While the United States has continued to

reduce the number and salience of nuclear weapons, others, including Russia and China, have moved in the opposite direction. They have added new types of nuclear capabilities to their arsenals, increased the salience of nuclear forces in their strategies and plans, and engaged in increasingly aggressive behaviour, including in outer space and cyber space.’ (Page V)

‘The United States does not wish to regard either Russia or China as an adversary and seeks stable relations with both ... The United States and Russia have in the past maintained strategic dialogues to manage nuclear competition and nuclear risks. Given Russian actions, including its occupation of Crimea, this constructive engagement has declined substantially. We look forward to conditions that would once again allow for transparent and constructive engagement with Russia.’ (Page VI)

Deterrence of Nuclear and Non-Nuclear Attacks

‘Effective US deterrence of nuclear attack and non-nuclear strategic attack requires ensuring that potential adversaries do not miscalculate regarding the consequences of nuclear first use, either regionally or against the United States itself. They must understand that there are no possible benefits from non-nuclear aggression or limited nuclear escalation. Correcting any such misperceptions is now critical to maintaining strategic stability in Europe and Asia.’ (Page VII)

The Triad: Present and Future

‘The current non-strategic nuclear force consists exclusively of a relatively small number of B61 gravity bombs carried by F-15E and allied dual capable aircraft (DCA). The United States is incorporating nuclear capability onto the forward-deployable, nuclear capable F-35 as a replacement for the current ageing DCA. In conjunction with the XI NUCLEAR POSTURE REVIEW ongoing life extension program for the B61 bomb, it will be a key contributor to continued regional deterrence stability and the assurance of allies.’ (Pages X-XI)

Enhancing Deterrence with Non-Strategic Nuclear Capabilities

‘... To meet the emerging requirements of US strategy, the United States will now pursue select supplements to the replacement program to enhance the flexibility and responsiveness of US nuclear forces ... These supplements will enhance deterrence by denying potential adversaries any

mistaken confidence that limited nuclear employment can provide a useful advantage over the United States and its allies. Russia's belief that limited nuclear first use, potentially including low-yield weapons, can provide such an advantage is based, in part, on Moscow's perception that its greater number and variety of non-strategic nuclear systems provide a coercive advantage in crises and at lower levels of conflict ... To address these types of challenges and preserve deterrence stability, the United States will enhance the flexibility and range of its tailored deterrence options. To be clear, this is not intended to, nor does it enable, 'nuclear war-fighting'. Expanding flexible US nuclear options now, to include low-yield options, is important for the preservation of credible deterrence against regional aggression. It will raise the nuclear threshold and help ensure that potential adversaries perceive no possible advantage in limited nuclear escalation, making nuclear employment less likely ... [I]n the near-term, the United States will modify a small number of existing SLBM [submarine launched ballistic missile] warheads to provide a low-yield option, and in the longer term, pursue a modern nuclear-armed sea-launched cruise missile (SLCM). Unlike DCA [dual capable aircraft], a low-yield SLBM warhead and SLCM will not require or rely on host nation support to provide deterrent effect. They will provide additional diversity in platforms, range, and survivability, and a valuable hedge against future nuclear 'break out' scenarios.

Department of Defense and National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) will develop for deployment a low-yield SLBM warhead to ensure a prompt response option that is able to penetrate adversary defences ... In addition to this near-term step, for the longer term the United States will pursue a nuclear-armed SLCM, leveraging existing technologies to help ensure its cost effectiveness. SLCM will provide a needed non-strategic regional presence, an assured response capability. It also will provide an arms control compliant response to Russia's non-compliance with the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces Treaty, its non-strategic nuclear arsenal, and its other destabilizing behaviours. (Pages XI-XIII)

Non-Proliferation and Arms Control

'Russia continues to violate a series of arms control treaties and commitments. In the nuclear context, the most significant Russian violation involves a system banned by the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces Treaty. In a broader context, Russia is either rejecting or avoiding

its obligations and commitments under numerous agreements, and has rebuffed US efforts to follow the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) with another round of negotiated reductions and to pursue reductions in non-strategic nuclear forces.’ (Page XVII)

II. An Evolving and Uncertain International Security Environment

Russia

‘Russia considers the United States and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) to be the principal threats to its contemporary geopolitical ambitions. Russian strategy and doctrine emphasize the potential coercive and military uses of nuclear weapons. It mistakenly assesses that the threat of nuclear escalation or actual first use of nuclear weapons would serve to ‘de-escalate’ a conflict on terms favourable to Russia. These mistaken perceptions increase the prospect for dangerous miscalculation and escalation. Russia has sought to enable the implementation of its strategy and doctrine through a comprehensive modernization of its nuclear arsenal. Russia’s strategic nuclear modernization has increased, and will continue to increase its warhead delivery capacity, and provides Russia with the ability to rapidly expand its deployed warhead numbers. In addition to modernizing ‘legacy’ Soviet nuclear systems, Russia is developing and deploying new nuclear warheads and launchers ...

These theatre- and tactical-range systems are not accountable under the New START Treaty and Russia’s non-strategic nuclear weapons modernization is increasing the total number of such weapons in its arsenal, while significantly improving its delivery capabilities. This includes the production, possession, and flight testing of a ground-launched cruise missile in violation of the INF Treaty. Moscow believes these systems may provide useful options for escalation advantage. Finally, despite Moscow’s frequent criticism of US missile defence, Russia is also modernizing its long-standing nuclear-armed ballistic missile defence system and designing a new ballistic missile defence interceptor.

Russia’s increased reliance on nuclear capabilities to include coercive threats, nuclear modernization programs, refusal to negotiate any limits on its non-strategic nuclear forces, and its decision to violate the INF Treaty and other commitments all clearly indicate that Russia has rebuffed repeated US efforts to reduce the salience, role, and number of nuclear weapons. (Pages 8 – 10)

Uncertainties

‘There are two forms of uncertainty regarding the future security environment which US nuclear policy, strategy, and posture must take into account. The first is geopolitical uncertainty. This includes the potential for rapid shifts in how other states view the United States, its allies, and partners; changing alignments among other states; and relative power shifts in the international system ... The second form of uncertainty is technological. This includes the potential for unanticipated technological breakthroughs in the application of existing technologies, or the development of wholly new technologies, that change the nature of the threats we face and the capabilities required to address them effectively.’ (Page 14)

VI. US Strategies to Counter Contemporary Threats*A Tailored Strategy for Russia*

‘Russia is not the Soviet Union and the Cold War is long over. However, despite our best efforts to sustain a positive relationship, Russia now perceives the United States and NATO as its principal opponent and impediment to realizing its destabilizing geopolitical goals in Eurasia ... Most concerning are Russia’s national security policies, strategy, and doctrine that include an emphasis on the threat of limited nuclear escalation, and its continuing development and fielding of increasingly diverse and expanding nuclear capabilities ... Effective US deterrence of Russian nuclear attack and non-nuclear strategic attack now requires ensuring that the Russian leadership does not miscalculate regarding the consequences of limited nuclear first-use, either regionally or against the United States itself. Russia must instead understand that nuclear first-use, however limited, will fail to achieve its objectives, fundamentally alter the nature of a conflict, and trigger incalculable and intolerable costs for Moscow. Our strategy will ensure Russia understands that any use of nuclear weapons, however limited, is unacceptable ... This strategy will ensure Russia understands it has no advantages in will [sic], non-nuclear capabilities, or nuclear escalation options that enable it to anticipate a possible benefit from non-nuclear aggression or limited nuclear escalation. Correcting any Russian misperceptions along these lines is important to maintaining deterrence in Europe and strategic stability ... To correct any Russian misperceptions of advantage and credibly deter Russian nuclear or

non-nuclear strategic attacks—which could now include attacks against U.S. NC3—the President must have a range of limited and graduated options, including a variety of delivery systems and explosive yields.’ (Pages 30 – 31)

VII. Current and Future US Nuclear Capabilities

Enhancing Deterrence with Non-Strategic Nuclear Capabilities

‘Existing elements of the nuclear force replacement program predate the dramatic deterioration of the strategic environment. To meet the emerging requirements of US strategy, the United States will now pursue select supplements to the replacement program to enhance the flexibility and responsiveness of US nuclear forces. It is a reflection of the versatility and flexibility of the US triad that only modest supplements are now required in this much more challenging threat environment ... Recent Russian statements on this evolving nuclear weapons doctrine appear to lower the threshold for Moscow’s first-use of nuclear weapons. Russia demonstrates its perception of the advantage these systems provide through numerous exercises and statements. Correcting this mistaken Russian perception is a strategic imperative. North Korea is illicitly developing a range of strategic and non-strategic nuclear systems to threaten the United States, allies, and partners. It may mistakenly perceive that these systems, when coupled with the threat of a strategic nuclear attack against the United States, would provide advantageous nuclear escalation options in crises or conflict ...

For decades, the United States has deployed low-yield nuclear options to strengthen deterrence and assurance. Expanding flexible US nuclear options now, to include low-yield options, is important for the preservation of credible deterrence against regional aggression. To be clear, this is not intended to enable, nor does it enable, ‘nuclear war-fighting’. Nor will it lower the nuclear threshold. Rather, expanding US tailored response options will raise the nuclear threshold and help ensure that potential adversaries perceive no possible advantage in limited nuclear escalation, making nuclear weapons employment less likely.

Consequently, the United States will maintain, and enhance as necessary, the capability to forward deploy nuclear bombers and Dual Capable Aircraft around the world. We are committed to upgrading DCA with the nuclear-capable F-35 aircraft. We will work with NATO to best ensure—and improve where needed—the readiness, survivability, and

operational effectiveness of DCA based in Europe ... DoD and NNSA will develop for deployment a low-yield SLBM warhead to ensure a prompt response option that is able to penetrate adversary defences. This is a comparatively low-cost and near-term modification to an existing capability that will help counter any mistaken perception of an exploitable 'gap' in US regional deterrence capabilities. Doing so will not increase the number of deployed US ballistic missile warheads, as the low yield weapons will replace higher-yield weapons currently deployed.

In addition to this near-term step, for the longer term the United States will pursue a nuclear-armed submarine launched cruise missile, leveraging existing technologies to help ensure its cost effectiveness. SLCM will provide a needed non-strategic regional presence, an assured response capability, and an INF-Treaty compliant response to Russia's continuing Treaty violation. If Russia returns to compliance with its arms control obligations, reduces its non-strategic nuclear arsenal, and corrects its other destabilizing behaviours, the United States may reconsider the pursuit of a SLCM ... Given the increasing need for flexible and low-yield options to strengthen deterrence and assurance, we will immediately begin efforts to restore this capability by initiating a capabilities study leading to an Analysis of Alternatives (AoA) for the rapid development of a modern SLCM.' (Pages 52 – 55)

Full text available at: <https://bit.ly/2nDa4Rw>

China rejects 'cold-war mentality'

The 2018 NPR describes China as 'a major challenge to US interests in Asia,' and outlines a strategy to 'prevent Beijing from mistakenly concluding that it could secure an advantage through the limited use of its theater nuclear capabilities or that any use of nuclear weapons, however limited, is acceptable'.

In response, Defense Ministry spokesman Ren Guoqiang, said 'We hope the U.S. side will discard its 'cold-war mentality,' shoulder its own special and primary responsibility for nuclear disarmament, understand correctly China's strategic intentions and take a fair view on China's national defense and military development'.