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*Assessment of the Strategic Posture of the United States: Challenges and Opportunities*

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**PREPARED REMARKS**

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The bipartisan Congressional Strategic Posture Commission offered numerous recommendations to reduce what we called “the nuclear danger.”

### **Commission Recommendations**

For example, to reduce the nuclear danger, the Commission recommended a conscious effort to balance diplomatic measures to reduce the number of nuclear weapons with the measures necessary to deter attacks and to assure allies of their security. Despite the occasional friction between US diplomatic and deterrence efforts, Republican and Democratic administrations for five decades have sought such a balance.

The Commission also emphasized that the US must maintain a viable nuclear arsenal for the indefinite future to support deterrence and assurance.<sup>1</sup>

The Commission did not try to identify “the” minimum number of nuclear weapons necessary for deterrence and assurance.<sup>2</sup> This omission was in recognition of the fact that these force requirements can change rapidly because they are driven by many fluid factors.<sup>3</sup>

Rather than selecting an inherently transient “right” number of nuclear weapons, the Commission highlighted the need for a flexible and resilient force posture to support deterrence and assurance across a fluid and shifting landscape of threats and contexts.<sup>4</sup>

We noted in particular that the importance of flexibility and resilience in the force posture will increase as US forces decline in numbers.<sup>5</sup>

This emphasis on the need for flexibility and resilience is the primary reason the Commission recommended that the Administration maintain the strategic Triad of bombers, ICBMs and sea-based missiles.<sup>6</sup>

Finally, in recognition of the fact that deterrence may prove unreliable, the Commission also concluded that the United States must design its strategic forces not only for deterrence, but also to help defend against an attack if deterrence fails.<sup>7</sup>

This defensive goal includes the requirement for missile defense against regional aggressors and limited long-range missile threats.<sup>8</sup> We specifically urged that US defenses against long-range missiles “become capable against more complex, limited threats as they mature.”<sup>9</sup>

## **Challenges for the US Force Posture**

### **1. Nuclear Reductions as the Policy Priority**

In light of these Commission recommendations, my foremost concern is that US nuclear policy appears to be departing from a balance between diplomatic and deterrence measures to reduce the nuclear danger. Specifically, the goal of nuclear reductions appears to have been given precedence and the resultant imbalance could undermine our future capabilities to deter, assure and defend.

What is the basis for my concern?

The 2010 *Nuclear Posture Review* (NPR), a highly-commendable report in many respects, “*for the first time*” places “*atop the U.S. nuclear agenda*” international non-proliferation efforts “*as a critical element of our effort to move toward a world free of nuclear weapons.*”<sup>10</sup> This prioritization appears self-consciously to depart from the carefully balanced dual tracks of the past 50 years.

Administration assurances that the US will maintain an effective nuclear deterrent certainly are welcome. But, at the end of the day, if the top US policy priority is international non-

proliferation efforts and movement toward nuclear zero, there will be unavoidable trade-offs made at the expense of the US forces important for deterrence, assurance and defense.

## **2. Reducing the Flexibility and Resilience of the Force Posture**

This is not an academic concern over a few policy words: the Administration links qualitative limits and numeric reductions in US nuclear forces to progress in non-proliferation and movement toward nuclear zero.

Qualitative limitations and further reductions in our forces, however, can reduce their flexibility and resilience, undermining our national goals of deterrence and assurance. This is the trade-off that continues to need careful balance.

The Commission specifically cautioned against pursuing nuclear reductions at the expense of the resilience of our forces, in part because policies that undermine credible deterrence and assurance could actually provoke nuclear proliferation, not prevent it.<sup>11</sup> For example, Japanese concerns regarding US credibility reportedly have led the Governor of Tokyo to argue that Japan should look to its own independent nuclear deterrent.<sup>12</sup>

## **3. The Future of US Strategic Defensive Capabilities**

US defensive programs may also be undermined by the Administration's self-described nuclear policy agenda. Russian officials and some American commentators now claim that qualitative and quantitative restraints on US strategic defenses are necessary for any further negotiated nuclear reductions.<sup>13</sup>

With international non-proliferation efforts and movement toward nuclear zero at the top of the US nuclear agenda, the pursuit of nuclear reductions at the expense of US missile defenses could ultimately be deemed an acceptable trade-off. That certainly is the Russian demand.

#### **4. Minimum Deterrence as the Basis for Force Sizing**

My final related concern is the possibility that new policy guidance could attempt to drive deep reductions in US nuclear forces by redefining deterrence in minimalist terms, thereby lowering the US force requirements deemed adequate for deterrence.

For over five decades, Republican and Democratic administrations have consistently rejected minimum deterrence as inadequate and dangerous.

Yet, many proponents of Nuclear Zero now again advocate new presidential guidance that adopts minimum deterrence as the way to justify deep reductions in US nuclear forces.<sup>14</sup> Adopting a minimum definition of deterrence may help to justify the elimination of the Triad and US nuclear reductions down to 500 deployed weapons,<sup>15</sup> but it would do so at the expense of the flexibility and resilience of our forces for deterrence and assurance.

Again, the Commission specifically cautioned against nuclear reductions at the expense of flexibility and resilience, and emphasized that new presidential guidance should “be informed by assessments of what is needed” for deterrence and assurance.<sup>16</sup> Any new guidance that adopts minimum deterrence could easily increase the nuclear danger by undermining credible US deterrence and by pushing friends and allies toward nuclear proliferation.

#### **Summary and Conclusion**

In summary, I am concerned about the apparent imbalance in the Administration’s announced “nuclear agenda” and the possibility that new policy guidance may adopt long-rejected minimum deterrence standards as a route to deep nuclear reductions. The Commission’s unanimous recommendations for: 1) a balance in US priorities; 2) the maintenance of a flexible and resilient strategic force posture; and, 3) improving US defensive capabilities against missile threats of all ranges, remain useful and pertinent.

Thank you.

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<sup>1</sup> William J. Perry, James R. Schlesinger, et al., *America's Strategic Posture* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2009), p. 17. Hereafter, *America's Strategic Posture*.

<sup>2</sup> *America's Strategic Posture*, p. 23.

<sup>3</sup> *America's Strategic Posture*, pp. 23-24.

<sup>4</sup> *America's Strategic Posture*, pp. 22-23, 29.

<sup>5</sup> *America's Strategic Posture*, p. 26.

<sup>6</sup> *America's Strategic Posture*, pp. 25-26, 29.

<sup>7</sup> *America's Strategic Posture*, p. 23.

<sup>8</sup> *America's Strategic Posture*, p. 31.

<sup>9</sup> *America's Strategic Posture*, pp. 31-33.

<sup>10</sup> Department of Defense, *Nuclear Posture Review Report*, April, 2009, p. vi (italics added); see also p. iv.

<sup>11</sup> *America's Strategic Posture*, pp. 29, 67, 94.

<sup>12</sup> See Julian Ryall, "Japan Should Develop Nuclear Weapons to Defend Itself," February 4, 2011, at [www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/japan/8303366/Japan-should-develop-nuclear-weapons-to-defend-itself.html](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/japan/8303366/Japan-should-develop-nuclear-weapons-to-defend-itself.html).

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, the statement by Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov in, "RF Keeps Right to Withdraw From START if US ABM Creates Risks," *ITAR-TASS*, May 19, 2010. See also, Dmitriy Rogozin, quoted in, *BBC Monitoring: Proliferation Digest* (in English), February 22, 2011; and Greg Thielmann, "Strategic Missile Defense: A Threat to Future Nuclear Arms Control?" *Threat Assessment Brief*, Arms Control Association, January 26, 2011.

<sup>14</sup> See Hans Kristensen, "Obama and the Nuclear War Plan," *Federation of American Scientists Issue Brief*, February 10, 2010; Hans Kristensen, et al., *From Counterforce to Minimum Deterrence: Briefing to MORS Nuclear Online Workshop*, Federation of American Scientists and the Natural Resources Defense Council, May 5, 2009.

<sup>15</sup> As recommended in, Hans Kristensen, Robert Norris, Ivan Oelrich, *From Counterforce to Minimal Deterrence: A New Nuclear Policy on the Path Toward Eliminating Nuclear Weapons*, Federation of American Scientists and The Natural Resources Defense Council, Occasional Paper, No. 7 (April 2009), p. 43.

<sup>16</sup> *America's Strategic Posture*, p. 24.