

1994 Nuclear Posture Review

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This web page gives a brief description of the 1994 NPR and provides links in the right-hand bar to documents (pdf format) released by the Department of Defense at the time, as well as documents since obtained under the Freedom of Information Act.

The Objective of the 1994 NPR

In response to President Clinton's direction that DOD examine US defense force in light of new security challenges, Secretary of Defense Les Aspin announced on October 29, 1993 the start of a comprehensive review of America's nuclear posture. The Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) was described as "the first DOD study of its kind to incorporate reviews of policy, doctrine, force structure, operations, safety and security, and arms control in one look."

The Process

The review was a "DOD-wide collaborative effort" lead by a five-person steering group co-chaired by Ashton Carter, the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Nuclear Security and Counterproliferation, and Major General John Admire, the Vice Director for Strategic Plans and Policy at Joint Staff. The other three members represented nuclear, space, and intelligence agencies.

The review was organized around six topic areas, with each topic examined by a team of military and civilian experts from the DOD, Joint Staff, the Services and various agencies. The six topics were:

1. The role of nuclear weapons in US security strategy.
2. US nuclear force structure.
3. US nuclear force operations.
4. Nuclear safety and security.
5. The relationship between US nuclear posture and counter-proliferation policy.
6. The relationship between US nuclear posture and threat reduction policy with the former Soviet Union.

The overall objective for the six working groups was to define the issues, analyze the options, prepare recommendations, and to prepare implementing documents.

The schedule for the review envisioned the working groups to finalize their recommendations by late spring 1994 so that the Secretary of Defense could submit a final report to the President in June 1994.

The elaborate NPR study process was intended to produce several specific products, including a new Presidential Decision Directive (PDD) to "replace" two outdated presidential directives:

- National Security Decision Directive (NSDD) 13 on nuclear employment policy signed by Ronald Reagan in 1981.
- Presidential Decision (PD) 48 on ballistic missile submarine commitments to NATO, signed by President Jimmy Carter in April 1979.

The new PDD, in turn, would have triggered production of two revised military guidance documents: the Nuclear Weapons Employment Document (NUWEP) and Annex C (nuclear) to the Joint Strategic Capability Plan (JSCP).

NPR Infighting

From the beginning of the review, the military viewed Ashton Carter with skepticism. STRATCOM collected background information on Carter that indicated "a less-than favorable long-term outlook for nuclear weapons" and long-term visions of "complete denuclearization." The nuclear command was concerned that persuading such policy makers of a continued need and "wider role" for nuclear weapons would be "an uphill battle."

After only a few months of work, one of the two co-chairs (Maj Gen John Admire) sent a [letter](#) to Ashton Carter in which he expressed concern with the NPR process and how the Steering Group would review and approve the working group findings. This same concern, he said, "has been expressed to me by the Services and CINCs based on input from their working group members."

Four days later, Carter issued a [joint letter](#) with Admire to the NPR Steering Group that outlined the "way ahead." The Steering Group's activity would intensify, the letter said, and laid out a work plan for the six working groups that aimed at completing a preliminary draft NPR guidance by mid-February.

The letter immediately triggered an angry memo within STRATCOM, which complained over the lack of progress and tight schedule. Retired Admiral Bobby Inman complained to STRATCOM chief Admiral Chiles that Carter's plan "imposes a schedule that will backfill the vacuum with grab-bag thinking and then ask the Secretary for his blessing....This would be comical if we didn't have so much at stake."

In the end, Carter's study plan could not match the technical and bureaucratic skills of the military Services. According to one participant in the review: "The military officials knew the lay of the land, we didn't. Ash Carter set us up for disaster."

The NPR Outcome

As the working group efforts collapsed in the early summer of 1994, STRATCOM commander Admiral Chiles took the initiative and ordered his Strategic Advisory Group (SAG) to prepare a paper on the future development of the nuclear posture. The six-page document, entitled "Nuclear Forces; Post 1994," outlined the main policy and force assumptions and much of it appear to have been carried forward into the final NPR decision. Chiles forwarded the paper to CJCS Chairman Shalikashvili, who [said](#) the paper would be useful as the Joint Staff evaluated the conclusions and recommendations on the NPR. "In particular," Shalikashvili said, "I appreciate your perspective on hedging against future uncertainty while we grapple with near-term resource requirements." Chiles later thanked the SAG for the paper, which he said was "particularly effective" in preparing the NPR.

When the Pentagon released the main conclusions of the NPR on September 22, 1994, the result was a combination of STRATCOM's [Sun City](#) and [Sun City Extended](#) force structure study from 1993 and the SAG paper's recommendations. Rather than presenting this in a final report, however, the Pentagon put together a brief [press release](#) with [slides](#) containing the main force structure decision. This material, combined with transcripts of briefings to the [Congress](#) and [media](#), constitute the official record on the outcome of the NPR and US nuclear policy in the mid-1990s.

NOTE: Go directly to documents from Working Group 5 on relationship between nuclear posture and counter-proliferation policy.

FOIA documents

>> [Memo](#) (U), Maj. Gen. John H. Admire, USMC, Vice Director for Strategic Plans and Policy, Joint Staff, to Assistant Secretary of Defense for Nuclear Security and Counterproliferation, "Nuclear Posture Review (NPR)," 6 January 1994;

>> [Note](#) (U), Executive to DCINCSTRAT to DCINCSTRAT, [npr's lack of progress], January 11, 1994. w/attachment

>> [Briefing](#), Brig. Gen. Tony Tolin, Deputy Director for Strategy and Policy, Joint Staff/J5, "Nuclear Posture Review Key: Key Issues for Review by the Strategic Advisory Group," March 15, 1994.

>> USSTRATCOM/Strategic Advisory Group, "Nuclear Force; Post 1994," July 12, 1994.

>> [Memo](#) (U), Gen. John M. Shalikashvili, CJCS, to USCINCSTRAT, "Strategic Force Structure," 28 July 1994.

>> [Pt Ppr](#) (U), USSTRATCOM J004, "Overview of Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) Results," [ca. 22 September 1994].

>> Department of Defense, additional [written answers](#) provided for the Senate Armed Services Committee for the September 22, 1994, hearing on the Nuclear Posture Review.

Other NPR documents

>> Senate Armed Services Committee, Nuclear Posture Review [hearing](#), September 22, 1994. [3.8 MB]

>> Department of Defense, [press release](#) on the results of the Nuclear Posture Review, September 22, 1994. [0.2 MB]

>> Department of Defense, "Press Conference with Secretary of Defense William J. Perry, General Shalikashvili, Chairman, JCS, Deputy Secretary of Defense John Deutch, Mr. Kenneth H. Bacon, ATSD-PA, [News Release](#) No. 546-94, September 22, 1994.

>> Department of Defense, Nuclear Posture Review [slides](#), September 22, 1994.

>> John Deutch, Assistant Secretary of Defense, [prepared testimony](#) for the House Foreign Affairs Committee, October 5, 1994. [0.66 MB]

>> "Nuclear Posture Review," excerpt from William Perry, Secretary of Defense, "Annual Report to the President and the Congress," 1995, pp. 83-92. [pdf version] [0.84 MB]

Books about NPR

>> Janne Nolan, *An Elusive Consensus* (Brookings Institution Press, 1999).

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