



The Nautilus Institute Nuclear Strategy Project: The Warfighter's Assessment Post-START II Arms Restrictions

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In December 1996, a few months after the [White Paper](#) on post-START II arms control was completed and only a few months before the U.S. and Russia agreed in Helsinki to a START III Treaty of 2,000-2,500 warheads, STRATCOM published the results of another force structure study on post START II arms reductions. As with many of the previous studies of the 1990s, the study reemphasized STRATCOM's nuclear warfighting philosophy.

Up front the study established that the guidance for employment of nuclear weapons remained "unchanged." This meant that planning principles that were used to analyze a START III force structure were based on the same guidance as the principles that formed the basis for the 1993 [Sun City](#) study, which, in turn, was based on presidential guidance dating back as far as President Ronald Reagan's National Security Decision Directive from October 1981.

Like several of the previous force structure studies, the Warfighter's Assessment concluded that as the overall number of weapons continued to decline in the future, the characteristics of the force mix would become increasingly important both for deterrence and warfighting. The implication was that the flexibility of the remaining forces had to be maintained under future arms control treaties. The study concluded that, "credible, effective deterrence is a package deal" which involves many of the traditional warfighting principles from the Cold War, including:

- Force modernization;
- Stockpile stewardship;
- Survivable forces;
- Robust planning capability;
- Survivable C2 connectivity; and
- Timely threat warning.

The Assessment also reiterated the national security objective of maintaining a nuclear posture that would "make outcome of conflict uncertain and dangerous" for an opponent. This objective echoed one of the main conclusions of a deterrence study conducted for CINCSTRAT General Habiger in 1995, a study that National Security Council official Robert Bell upon [disclosure](#) in 1998 assured the press did not reflect official national policy. One year later, in 1999, this objective was used repeatedly when the Clinton administration rejected German and Canadian calls for a change in the NATO's nuclear first-use-policy.

A copy of the declassified version of the Warfighter's Assessment is provided in the right hand bar. Due to its size (50 pages), the document has been split in two PDF-versions.

FOIA documents

Summary report

["The Matrix of Deterrence"](#)

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