

US Strategic Command Force Structure Studies

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As the unified command in charge of U.S. nuclear forces, U.S. Strategic Command (STRATCOM) periodically conducted force structure studies during the 1990s to assess the impact that arms control, new weapons, and world changes on the nation's security and the viability of the Single Integrated Operating Plan (SIOP) and other nuclear war plans. These studies not only became the basis for the START II Treaty and 1994 Nuclear Posture Review, they also continue to shape future arms control and force modernization.

This section of the Nuclear Files includes brief descriptions and copies of six different force structure studies and briefings conducted by STRATCOM (and its predecessor Strategic Air Command) between 1991 and 1996. The six studies are the Phoenix Study from 1991, STRATCOM's briefing to Defense Secretary Richard Cheney and Chair Joint Chief of Staff Colin Powell in 1992, the Sun City study from 1993, the Sun City Extended from 1994, STRATCOM's white paper on post-START II arms control options from 1996, and STRATCOM's Warfighter Assessment of post-START II Arms Reductions from 1996.

Other agencies also provided input to nuclear posture and arms control agenda. But STRATCOM's force structure studies illustrate the considerable leverage this nuclear "super-command" had and continues to have on the formulation of US nuclear strategy and policy. These force structure studies provide a unique and rare glimpse into the secret corridors of the nuclear priesthood. As such they are essential for the public's ability to understand and assess the Bush administration's nuclear posture review expected to be completed in 2001. The main nuclear planning principles identified in the STRATCOM documents for maintaining a credible deterrence are:

- Maintain a Triad of nuclear forces;
- Actual posture is a Twin Triad with SSBNs and ICBMs carrying day-to-day deterrence burden and bombers providing back-up;
- Maintain two-ocean SSBN force with full target coverage in both oceans, large operating areas, and maximum reconstitution (upload) capability;
- Protect MIRV on SSBNs;

- Retain warheads a level consisting with warfighting needs;
- Nuclear forces must be highly flexible, i.e. retain weapon platforms and most capable systems;
- Nuclear war planning system must be robust and highly flexible;
- Nuclear forces must be survivable;
- Command and Control (C2) connectivity must be survivable;
- Continue modernization of remaining forces;
- Secure hedge and reconstitution (upload) capacity;
- Arms control must ensure stability: retain most capable U.S. systems (including first strike and prompt retaliatory launch), but reduce most threatening Russian systems.

The unilateral Presidential Nuclear Initiatives from September 1991 and January 1992 were effective in breaking the deadlock of lengthy and complicated arms control negotiations. To the nuclear planners at US Strategic Air Command (subsequently STRATCOM), however, the initiatives brought confusion, uncertainty, and even danger. As the primary nuclear command, STRATCOM set out to restore order and predictability in the arms control process through its main asset: expertise in nuclear war planning and analysis. Very few people in the White House or the Congress had ever read the SIOP -- much less understood the methodology that created the justification for why the Pentagon needed a certain number of nuclear warheads deployed on a certain number and type of delivery platforms to deter a certain enemy.

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