

NPR Working Group #5: The 1994 Nuclear Posture Review

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NPR Working Group #5: The Relationship Between Alternative Nuclear Postures and Counterproliferation Policy

Disclosure of portions of the Bush administration's Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) has resurfaced the issue of what role the US nuclear posture should have in deterring and, if necessary, defeating, the acquisition and use of weapons of mass destruction (WMD by so-called "states of concern." President George W. Bush has rejected criticism of the review [saying](#) that, "we've got all options on the table...."

Following the previous NPR in 1994, the Clinton administration said it had reduced the role of nuclear weapons, and officials denied that the review endorsed a widening of nuclear scenarios to increasingly address proliferating countries armed with not only nuclear but also chemical and biological weapons. Because the 1994 review failed to produce a final document, little is known about how the role of nuclear weapons in counterproliferation scenarios was addressed and which conclusions were incorporated into official policy.

Documents released under the Freedom of Information Act, however, now provide a window into the considerations within the review process. One of six working groups in the 1994 NPR was tasked to examine the relationship between the nuclear posture and counterproliferation policy. The [Terms of Reference](#) for the group's work highlighted:

- Potential for mutual reinforcement between counterproliferation policy and nuclear policy.
 - Nuclear posture best suited to deterring proliferation including CTB, role of NUCs against proliferating countries, viability of classic deterrence strategy against lesser aggressors, etc.
 - How does what we do affect what they do, where there are countries with probability of proliferating, including but not limited [deleted]?
 - How does what we don't do affect what they do, where they are countries with an inclination not to proliferate including [deleted]?
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The [telephone roster](#) for Working Group #5 identifies 34 individuals from a wide range of departments and agencies. In addition to these individuals, guests would occasionally participate in the meetings to brief on specific issues. The group was chaired by Mitchell Wallerstein, then Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Counterproliferation Policy. Ashton Carter, the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Policy who was one of the officials in charge of the NPR process, also participated in some of the meetings.

Between October 1993 and July 1994, Working Group #5 held dozens of meetings to analyze key issues and provide recommendations for the NPR. From working groups and presentations by members or visiting guests a consensus -- or near consensus -- gradually emerged on the main issues. These were:

- The full range of nuclear options is desirable to deter proliferant nations.
- The unique contribution of nuclear weapons to counter-proliferation should be stated more forcefully.
- The nuclear posture is unlikely to affect terrorist use of WMD, unless tied to state sponsorship.
- While nuclear weapons deter WMD use, they are unlikely to have an effect on acquisition of such weapons.
- Forward deployed nuclear systems send strong political signals.

Internal Issues

The internal process in Working Group #5 involved setting up a number of working groups to study specific sub-issues and develop recommendations for policy. Five overall issues were studied:

- Acquisition of WMD.
- Terrorist use of WMD.
- Deterring the deployment and use of chemical weapons.
- Deterring the deployment and use of biological weapons.
- Deterring the deployment and use of nuclear weapons.

From what the documents contain, there seemed to be little disagreement within Working Group #5 that nuclear weapons could and should play a role in deterring proliferators of WMD. Certain aspects of the issue, however, raised more debate than others.

One aspect concerned whether different types of WMD (nuclear, biological and chemical) could be equally affected by nuclear weapons. A "[major issue](#)" was whether chemical weapons should be considered weapons of mass destruction or a weapon with less lethal mass destruction capability. An attempt by the Office of the Secretary of Defense to prioritize chemical within WMD in terms of lethality and potential use and US responses to such use, generated "[major objection](#)" especially with military representatives. The documents suggest, however, that in the end the group considered all three types of weapons as WMD.

Another aspect concerned whether advanced conventional weapons should be included in the WMD category. A majority eventually wanted to exclude this technology, and the representative from STRATCOM [explained](#) why he concurred with this decision:

- There is no definition of what is meant by advanced conventional weapon technology.
- The international community has a ban on WMDs as illegitimate weapons because of their effects, "yet it is very hard to make apples-to-apples comparison of WMD weapons to technology, and we should not try to do so."
- Such inclusion could, in fact, block development of weapon systems that could provide the US with the capability to counter WMDs possessed by a potential adversary.

A third aspect concerned whether there were other means of influencing use of WMD than nuclear deterrence. As the

work progressed on finishing draft slides with conclusions and recommendations, Ashton Carter found the work too focused on identifying nuclear responses. He therefore [instructed](#) the group in February-March 1994 "to suggest possible political, economic, and conventional deterrent options that could complement our nuclear posture." This did not change the main conclusion within the group, that nuclear weapons could make a unique contribution to deterring the use of WMD.

Late in the process the group also [concluded](#) that the final briefing should focus more on deterring and responding to WMD use, and put less emphasis on WMD acquisition and terrorist use.

Despite these internal issues, the majority within Working Group #5 wanted to more forcefully state the unique contribution of nuclear weapons to counterproliferation.

The role of STRATCOM

As the unified command responsible for maintaining and executing the SIOP, STRATCOM's role in the 1994 NPR process was unique. Not only was it represented within Working Group #5, but it also provided [formal external answers](#) to the group's questions about the nature of deterrence and nuclear forces. Following meetings, STRATCOM would summarize the findings in an Update Briefing which complemented the minutes from the actual meetings (see the documents in the right-hand bar).

STRATCOM's answers in a curious way preempted Working Group #5's work by providing answers to the questions the group were tasked to analyze. Nuclear forces have a role in deterring proliferators' use of WMD, STRATCOM stated, and should be thought of as "tools in our 'toolbox' of deterrence options."

For nuclear counterproliferation missions, STRATCOM emphasized a "value-based" deterrence posture that targeted "those elements of power (i.e. political, industrial and economic infrastructure, and military capabilities) which underpin their power, both political and coercive."

When asked which elements make the US posture most effective and credible in deterring WMD use, whether particular nuclear systems or certain deployment patterns matter, STRATCOM explained to the group:

- At lower levels [than a large Russian scenario], a marriage of national policy and various attributes of our nuclear forces enhance our deterrence strategy across many possible WMD scenarios. Weapon system responsiveness, flexibility, ability to deploy, survivability, and overwhelming firepower are among these attributes. The characteristics, tied with a national policy implying the US will retaliate appropriately at a time of its choosing, are important considerations in deterring Nth country actors in their calculations to use or threaten WMD use.
- Within certain scenarios, forward presence serves to enhance perceptions of US capability. A potential proliferator's perceptions are certain to vary when a system is deployed in theater. An "on-the-scene" or rapidly deployable nuclear force offers the potential of providing a more "visible" and viable theater response than a force residing in the US. Also, certain forward deployed assets and systems (i.e. gravity bombs) can be more responsive than a CONUS-based equivalent.
- Forward forces provides [sic] the opportunity to integrate with allies on a periodic basis, and, in the case of dual capable weapon systems, adds to deterrence by creating uncertainty of whether nuclear assets are actually "in-theater."
- Furthermore, while extending an umbrella of protection and signal of US commitments to allies, forward presence transmits a [sic] equally strong message to any potential proliferators. These contributions serve to increase the deterrent value of a nuclear force.

Contradictions with 2001 NPR

STRATCOM's answers to the 1994 NPR also provided some statements that appear to contradict key assumptions in the current Bush administration's NPR. Foremost among these is whether additional nuclear capabilities are needed at all to counter proliferant nations. STRATCOM bluntly told Working Group #5:

- Within the context of a regional single or few warhead detonation, classical deterrence already allows for adaptively planned missions to counter any use of WMD.

This confidence was expressed long before the development of the B61-11, the Pentagon's designated earth-penetrating nuclear bomb, got underway. Yet the Bush administration's NPR says that new earth-penetrating nuclear weapons must be developed to maintain a credible deterrence, and that adaptive planning capabilities must be modernized to better be able to plan for regional missions against proliferant nations. Yet STRATCOM's answer suggests that sufficient adaptive capability was already in place in 1994.

Another issues concerns the Bush administration's conviction that that a strong nuclear posture "capable of striking a wide range of targets throughout an adversary's territory may dissuade a potential adversary from pursuing threatening capabilities." Yet STRATCOM answer to the 1994 NPR appeared much less certain -- even contradictory -- about this effect:

- Our nuclear deterrent posture does not influence these reasons to obtain WMD except, by maintaining nuclear weapons we can support political aims. This is accomplished through demonstrating intent by maintaining an arsenal and continuously providing war plans to support regional CINCs.
- Nth countries faced with the US nuclear deterrent capability coupled with political intent may chose not to follow the course of a *Nuclear Weapon State (NWS)*.

The contradictory answers appear to reflect a conclusion that a strong US nuclear posturing toward proliferating nations could work both ways. Some nations might feel dissuaded from acquiring WMD, STRATCOM said, "yet others will feel it is necessary to have WMD in order to deal with the US on a more equal footing." This potential boomerang effect is not acknowledged in the Bush administration's NPR.

In the case of the Korean peninsula, where the US deployed nuclear weapons for over 30 years, Working Group #5 was convinced that the nuclear posture had not effected North Korea's pursuit of WMD. "Has removal of nuclear weapons from Korea/off naval ships impacted proliferation," chairman Mitchell Wallerstein [asked](#) the group. The reply was an unconditional "No!" The 2001 NPR, in contrast, assumes that an overwhelming posture can dissuade proliferating nations from pursue WMD capabilities.

Outcome of the 1994 NPR

Working Group #5 periodically briefed its findings to the NPR Steering Group, which was taked to coordinate the work of the six working groups. By the late spring of 1994, Working Group #5's efforts focussed on completing a declaratory policy briefing to be presented first to Deputy Secretary of Defense John Deutch and Joint Chiefs of Staff Vice Chairman Admiral William Owens, and then to Secretary of Defense William Perry and Joint Chief of Staff Chairman John Shalikashvili. The intention was for the Steering Group to incorporate the findings and recommendations of Working Group #5 with those of the other five working groups into a final report to the Secretary of Defense.

Before the NPR process was finished, however, the review collapsed, the working groups dispersed, and no final document was ever produced. It is therefore unclear to what extent Working Group #5's conclusions and recommendations were carried forward to influence nuclear policy. What is clear, however, is that the NPR that was [briefed](#) to Congress in September 1994 concurred that one of the roles of the nuclear posture was to deter WMD use and acquisition. This expanded posture was downplayed in public, however, partly because it could undermine the Clinton administration's efforts to gather sufficient international support for an indefinite extension of the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty in 1995.

The documents in the right-hand bar provide the first window into the nuclear counterproliferation analysis of the 1994 NPR.

FOIA documents

>> USSTRATCOM, Nuclear Posture Review Slides, [TOR_Topics](#), October 11, 1993

>> USSTRATCOM, Nuclear Posture Review Slides, [TOR_Topics](#), October 14, 1993

>> USSTRATCOM/J51 Memorandum, [NPR Report #4](#), Working Group #5, October 29, 1993.

>> Working Group #5 [Telephone roster](#), October 29, 1993.

>> Nuclear Posture Review [Products slide](#), October 29, 1993.

>> USSTRATCOM/J51 Memorandum, [NPR Report #8](#), Working Group #5, November 4, 1993.

>> USSTRATCOM/J51 Memorandum, [NPR Report #14](#), Working Group #5, November 10, 1993.

>> USSTRATCOM Nuclear Posture Review slides, [Update Briefing](#), November 12, 1993.

>> USSTRATCOM/J51 Memorandum, [NPR Report #15](#), Working Group #5, November 15, 1993.

>> USSTRATCOM Action Processing Form, [Nuclear Posture Review Questions and Answers](#), November 17, 1993.

>> USSTRATCOM Action Processing Form, Nuclear Posture Review Questions and Answers, [Tab A](#), November 17, 1993.

>> USSTRATCOM/J51 Memorandum, [NPR Report #19](#), Working Group #5, November 17, 1993.

>> USSTRATCOM/J51 Memorandum, [NPR Report #22](#), Working Group #5, November 18, 1993.

>> USSTRATCOM Nuclear Posture Review slides, [Update Briefing](#), November 19, 1993.

>> USSTRATCOM/J51 Memorandum, [NPR Report #23](#), Working Group #5, November 22, 1993.

>> USSTRATCOM/J51 Memorandum, [NPR Report #27](#), Working Group #5, November 24, 1993.

>> USSTRATCOM Nuclear Posture Review slides, [Update Briefing](#), December 3, 1993.

>> USSTRATCOM Nuclear Posture Review slides, [Update Briefing](#), December 10, 1993.

>> Listing, Group 5 -- Relationship Between US Nuclear Postures and Counter- Proliferation Policy, [Formal STRATCOM Answers](#) as of November 22, 1993

>> USSTRATCOM/J51 Memorandum, [NPR Report #36](#), Working Group #5, December 13, 1993.

>> USSTRATCOM Nuclear Posture Review slides, [Update Briefing](#), December 17, 1993

>> USSTRATCOM/J51 Memorandum, [NPR Report #45](#), Working Group #5, January 5, 1994.

>> Brig Gen Lindhard, USAF, [note to Col Rhoades](#), January 12, 1994.

>> USSTRATCOM/J51 Memorandum, [NPR Report #51](#), Working Group #5, January 12, 1994.

>> USSTRATCOM/J51 Memorandum, [NPR Report #52](#), Working Group #5, January 12, 1994.

>> USSTRATCOM/J51 Memorandum, [NPR Report #53](#), Working Group #5, January 13, 1994.

>> USSTRATCOM Nuclear Posture Review slides, [Update Briefing](#), January 14, 1994.

>> USSTRATCOM/J51 Memorandum, [NPR Report #60](#), Working Group #5, January 25, 1994.

>> USSTRATCOM/J512 Memorandum, [Review of NPR Working Group 5 Briefings](#), February 11, 1994.

- >> USSTRATCOM/J060 Memorandum, [NPR WG-5](#), February 11, 1994.
- >> USSTRATCOM/J51 Memorandum, [NPR Report #62](#), Working Group #5, February 2, 1994.
- >> USSTRATCOM/J51 Memorandum, [NPR Report #69](#), Working Group #5, February 9, 1994.
- >> USSTRATCOM/J51 Memorandum, [NPR Report #70](#), Working Group #5, February 10, 1994.
- >> Memorandum/Col Rhoades, [Taskers We Discussed Last Night](#), February 16, 1994.
- >> USSTRATCOM/J512 Information Paper, Npr Questions, [Manual Staffing, Ordnance Pinning](#), February 16, 1994.
- >> USSTRATCOM Nuclear Posture Review slides, [Update Briefing](#), February 18, 1994.
- >> USSTRATCOM/J51 Memorandum, [NPR Report #80](#), Working Group #5, February 23, 1994.
- >> USSTRATCOM/J51 Memorandum, [NPR Report #83](#), Working Group #5, February 28, 1994.
- >> USSTRATCOM/J51 Memorandum, [NPR Report #86](#), Working Group #5, March 2, 1994.
- >> USSTRATCOM Nuclear Posture Review slides, [Update Briefing](#), March 4, 1994.
- >> USSTRATCOM/J51 Memorandum, [NPR Report #90](#), Working Group #5, March 7, 1994.
- >> USSTRATCOM/J51 Memorandum, [NPR Report #92](#), Working Group #5, March 9, 1994.
- >> USSTRATCOM Nuclear Posture Review slides, [Update Briefing](#), March 11, 1994.
- >> USSTRATCOM/J51 Memorandum, [NPR Report #96](#), Working Group #5, March 16, 1994.
- >> USSTRATCOM Nuclear Posture Review slides, [Update Briefing](#), March 25, 1994.
- >> USSTRATCOM Nuclear Posture Review slides, [Update Briefing](#), July 8, 1994.
- >> USSTRATCOM/J0734, [letter](#) to Hans M. Kristensen, October 30, 1997.

Other NPR documents are available [here](#).

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