

The Nautilus Institute Nuclear Strategy Project: STRATCOM's View

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In November 1992, shortly after the Washington Summit Agreement between the United States and Russia -- and a few months before the START II Treaty was signed, representatives for US Strategic Command (STRATCOM) went to Washington, DC, to brief Defense Secretary Richard B. Cheney and Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Colin Powell about the implications of the Washington Summit Agreement.

The nuclear posture was in turmoil following dramatic international changes and sweeping unilateral arms cuts ordered by President Bush in September 1991 and January 1992. The Office of the Secretary of Defense wanted an in-depth study of the strategic nuclear forces and both the Joint Staff and US Air Force considered this to be STRATCOM's responsibility. So in a number of conferences with the Joint, Air and OPNAV Staff, Air Combat Command (ACC), and the commanders of the surface and submarine fleets in the Atlantic and Pacific, STRATCOM developed "a preferred USSTRATCOM force structure" that subsequently became the basis for the [Sun City](#) study, the 1994 Nuclear Posture Review and the 1997 Quadrennial Defense Review. This included:

- Flexibility is key to war planning, i.e. retain weapon platforms;
- New nuclear certification schedule for the B-2;
- Transition B-1 to conventional role;
- Modification of B-52Hs by removing internal ALCM capability from 47 aircraft and removing the external ALCM capability from 47 B-52Hs scheduled to receive heavy conventional upgrade by the fall of 1996 (the latter delayed until the FY96 POM);
- Assignment of Air Reserve Component to nuclear bomber functions;
- Modernization and life-extension of Minuteman III ICBMs;
- Maintain Peacekeeper ICBM until 2001;
- Transfer some W87 warheads from retired Peacekeepers to Minuteman III ICBMs;
- Maintain two-ocean SSBN force with full target coverage in both oceans, large operating areas, and maximum reconstitution capability;
- Less than 18 SSBNs is undesirable;
- Protect MIRV on SLBMs since START prohibits uploading.

In preparing for the briefing, the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (International Security Policy) stressed to the Secretary of Defense that the study "highlights the importance of identifying, in the near term, the force structure with which we will want to move into the 21st century."

The study was also STRATCOM's first chance to prove its worth after replacing the split Air Force-Navy nuclear planning structure from the Cold War. By centralizing all nuclear command and control in a single command, the hope was to ensure a more impartial and realistic nuclear planning. Indeed, in undertaking the study, ASD(ISP) said after visiting Offutt Air Force Base prior to the briefing, STRATCOM had "filled the void that we sought to eliminate through the establishment of the Command: provide a single voice which could (1) analyze impartially the full range strategic force issues, integrating force structure, targeting, operational, and arms control considerations; and (2) speak to these national requirements in programmatic and budgetary fora, and bring them forward for your review."

Yet the status of STRATCOM as a nuclear super-command also monopolized somewhat the analysis of the nuclear posture. A change in structure did not necessarily mean a change in mindset so a central principle in STRATCOM's efforts was that the preferred force structure should meet the needs of the "warfighter" by maintaining highly survivable, flexible, and modern offensive forces. Although this principle inevitably limited that changes that could be made, it was deeply rooted in the nuclear planning culture and found its way into subsequent force structure studies.

A copy of the redacted study briefing document and two related inter-agency letters are available in the right hand bar.

FOIA documents

Briefing, USSTRATCOM/J53/J54, "Strategic Nuclear Forces: STRATCOM's View," November 23, 1992. Partially declassified and released under FOIA. (1.1 Mb)

Stephen J. Hadley, ASD(ISP), to Michelle McIntyre, Executive Assistant to the Secretary of Defense, "[Schedule Proposal](#)," October 30, 1992, w/attachment: Stephen J. Hadley, ASD(ISP), to Secretary of Defense/Deputy Secretary of Defense, "Visit to U.S. Strategic Command on 6 October 1992 - Trip Report," October 10, 1992. Partially declassified and released under FOIA. (0.18 Mb)

John P. Jumper, MGEN, USAF, Office of the Secretary of Defense, "Note for ASD(ISP)/CJCS," October 27, 1992, w/attachment: Transcript, Assistant Secretary of Defense (International Security Policy), to Executive Assistant to the Secretary of Defense/Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, "Schedule Proposal," n.d.[October 1992]. Released under FOIA. (0.09 Mb)

Summary report

["The Matrix of Deterrence"](#)

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