

Nuclear War Planning in the Obama Administration: Deterrence or Predominance?

Jules Zacher Esquire

November 16, 2012

Center for Ethics and the Rule of Law Symposium on Deterrence

I. Introduction

President Obama is free to continue and finally complete a historic review of the United States nuclear weapons policy now that he has been re-elected. It is important to know what the issues are in a review that is so instrumental to the fate not just of American citizens, but to Mankind itself. The purpose of this paper, then, will be to explore these issues, particularly within the context of the contemporary nuclear doctrine of deterrence.

II. Current Nuclear Scenario

It is necessary before going much further to present the current nuclear stockpiles of the United States and Russia. As of September, 2012, both countries have deployed 3,221 warheads on 1,297 delivery vehicles¹. These numbers do not include the approximate 3,100 warheads being held in reserve by the United States, or the thousands of warheads held in reserve by the Russians. It is against this background that any nuclear war planning will have to be conducted.

III. Nuclear War Planning

1. Current Nuclear War Plan

The current war plan that President Obama would use in launching the United States nuclear arsenal is entitled “Operations Plan (OPLAN) 8010-08 Strategic Deterrence and Global Strike”. It is designed and maintained by STRATCOM after receiving guidance from the President, Secretary of Defense and the Chairman of the Joint Chief of Staff. The current plan was created during the administration of George W. Bush.²

The planning process required the identification of targets, determining the probability of a warhead arriving correctly, the Desired Ground Zero, allocating warheads to individual missions, and the calculation of the probability of damage. This resulted in the amount and types of warheads required, including reserve and

¹ “Options for Further US-Russian Nuclear reductions”, Hans M. Kristensen, Federation of American Scientists, Arms Control Association Event, United Nations, October 15, 2012, p. 1

² “Obama and the Nuclear War Plan”, Hans M. Kristensen, Federation of American Scientists, February, 2010, p. 2

replacement.³ The current plan does not deal just with Russia, but rather is a family of plans dealing with six adversaries, i.e. China, North Korea, Iran, Russia, Syria, and any terrorist organization working with a regional state. Each adversary has strike options associated with it, ranging from hundreds of warheads against preplanned targets to a small number of warheads in a crisis situation. There are also four levels of executing these options, with Level 4 being fully executable, whereas lower levels require additional effort. Finally, there are four categories of targets for each of these adversaries. These categories are military forces, WMD infrastructure, military and national leadership, and war supporting infrastructure.⁴

2. Obama Administration's Nuclear War Plan

Despite its importance, few in the White House or Congress have ever seen the plan. There is no unclassified version to inform the public debate. Yet arguably this is the most important plan effecting mankind ever produced.

The first stage in the planning process has already occurred, namely the issuance the new Presidential guidance entitled Presidential Policy Directive 11 or PPD-11. This document provides the terms of reference for a Pentagon-led review which will provide options to the President predicated on the Nuclear Posture Review (NPR).⁵ As stated in Secretary Robert Gate's accompanying letter for the publication of the Nuclear Posture Review Report, "This Nuclear Posture Review provides a roadmap for implementing President Obama's agenda for reducing nuclear risks to the United States, our allies and partners, and the international community".⁶

The next stage was the NPR Implementation Study. While this study has probably been completed, it has not yet been announced.⁷ This study looked at strengthening conventional capabilities "and reducing the role of nuclear weapons in deterring non-nuclear attacks, with the objective of making deterrence of nuclear attacks on the US or our allies and partners the sole purpose of US nuclear weapons".⁸ The study also looked at possible additional reductions in US nuclear forces which could serve as guidance for the next round of treaty negotiations with the Russians, as well as the future of the Triad particularly within the context of the budget debates.⁹

Various additional steps are also required before a finalized plan occurs. These steps include the Guidance for Employment of Force (GEF) which contains specific strike options and targeting objectives against specific adversaries based

³ Ibid, Kristensen p. 6

⁴ Ibid, Kristensen p. 6

⁵ "Presidential Guidance on Nuclear Weapons Policy", Stephen Young, December 7, 2011, p. 1

⁶ Letter of Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, April 6, 2010

⁷ Email of Hans Kristenson, November 14, 2012

⁸ Nuclear Posture Review Report, Department of Defense, April, 2010, p. 17

⁹ "Presidential Guidance on Nuclear Weapons Policy", Stephen Young, December 7, 2011, p. 1-2

on Presidential guidance (see Current Nuclear War Plan above). Another step in the process is the Joint Strategic Capabilities Plan (JSCP-N) which is produced by Joint Chiefs of Staff based on the GEF and PPD-11. The JSCP-N directs and initiates the deliberate joint operations planning process to the combatant commanders. At this step the STRATCOM commander instructs the Joint Functional Component Command for Global Strike (JFCC-GS) at STRATCOM how to modify the strategic nuclear war plan to meet the new guidance. JFCC-GS (formerly known as the Joint Strategic Target Planning Staff) is the Component Command at STRATCOM that designs, maintains and executes the strategic war plan.¹⁰

IV. Deterrence

The current doctrine as espoused in the NPR is that nuclear weapons will only be used by the United States to deter nuclear attacks on the US or our allies and partners. This nuclear on nuclear doctrine is somewhat modified to allow for nuclear weapons to be used against Iran, North Korea, as well as “a narrow range of contingencies in which nuclear weapons may still play a role against conventional, chemical and biological weapons”.¹¹

V. Deterrence versus Predominance

A valid argument can be made that the real underlying doctrine guiding the acquisition, deployment and usage of the United States nuclear arsenal is not to deter an adversary, but rather to maintain a position of superiority in the international arena to any other country. The following elements of OPLAN 8010 are illustrative of this premise. As far as can be determined, the new plan produced by the Obama Administration will retain each of these elements as well.

1. Alert Status

Despite President Obama’s pledge during the 2008 campaign to take nuclear weapons off “hair-trigger” alert status, the current alert posture of U.S. strategic forces is nearly all ICBM’s are on alert, as well as a significant number of SSBN’s (nuclear submarines) at sea at any given time.¹² This hair-trigger alert would consist of the following timeline. According to a former missile base commander, “...U.S. teams in early warning centers responsible for assessing whether missile attack indications are real...may be allowed only three minutes to report their findings. In an emergency, senior U.S. nuclear commanders convened by phone to brief the President on his nuclear strike options and their consequences may be allowed as little as thirty (30) seconds to give the briefing. The President, if

¹⁰ “Reviewing Nuclear Guidance: Putting Obama’s Words Into Action”, Hans Kristensen and Robert s. Norris, Arms Control Association, p. 1-3

¹¹ “Nuclear Posture Review Report”, Department of Defense, April, 2010, p. viii

¹² Ibid, “Nuclear Posture Review Report”, p. x

led to believe the attack indications are real, would at most have twelve (12) minutes to decide whether and how to respond with nuclear weapons or else risk nuclear command-control decapitation...”.¹³

Despite this incredibly dangerous timeline, proponents of this “hair-trigger” alert posture argue that it is necessary to launch the United States arsenal if a “bolt out of the blue” were to occur. Given the current relationship between Russia and the United States, it is hard to imagine such a bolt coming from that country. The only reason such an alert posture could exist would be to pre-empt another country from attacking, or “first strike” capability. Such capability is part and parcel of a nuclear dominant state.

2. Global Strike

The title Operations Plan (OPLAN) 8010-08 Strategic Deterrence and Global Strike really indicates that there two missions for the plan. The first mission is "strategic deterrence" which includes nuclear force operations. The second part of the title, however, Global Strike, suggests a second mission, which is the "...capability to deliver rapid, extended range, precision kinetic and non-kinetic (space and information operations) effects in support of theater and national objectives”, a preemptive weapon by definition. This merger of conventional and nuclear capability can 'kick down the door' to improve the effectiveness of a nuclear strike against Russia or China. From the adversary’s point of view, however, it creates great uncertainty because he cannot tell whether an ICBM launched against him is nuclear or conventional. Rather than enhance deterrence, it undermines it because of hair-trigger military counter-planning .¹⁴

3. Counterforce Targeting

As indicated above, current targeting includes military forces, WMD infrastructure, military and national leadership, and war supporting infrastructure. This targeting scenario was developed to limit the damage an adversary can inflict with its WMDS by destroying the forces before they can be used. Holding one’s adversary’s nuclear capability at bay, or first strike capability requires “a high level of readiness, worst-case scenario planning, a highly dynamic nuclear force posture and insecurity... The use of nuclear forces to hold at risk other nuclear forces is a Cold War strategy intended to win nuclear wars...which drives highly responsive

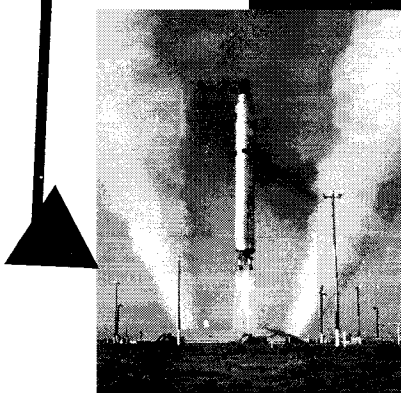
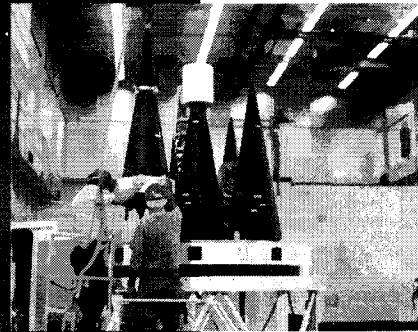
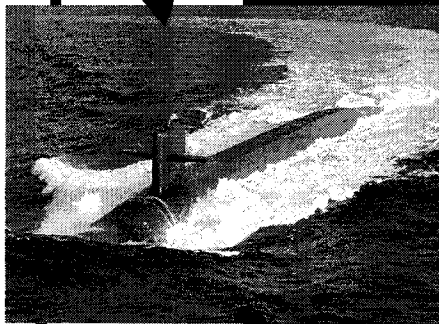
¹³ “Global Zero U.S. Nuclear Policy Commission Report, Modernizing U.S. Nuclear Strategy, Force Structure and Posture”, Global Zero, May, 2012, p. 5

¹⁴ Ibid, “Obama and the Nuclear War Plan”, Hans M. Kristensen, p. 7-10

Current Nuclear Stockpiles

1,297 Delivery Vehicles

3,221 Deployed Warheads



3,100 Warheads Held in Reserve by U.S.



NPR Definition

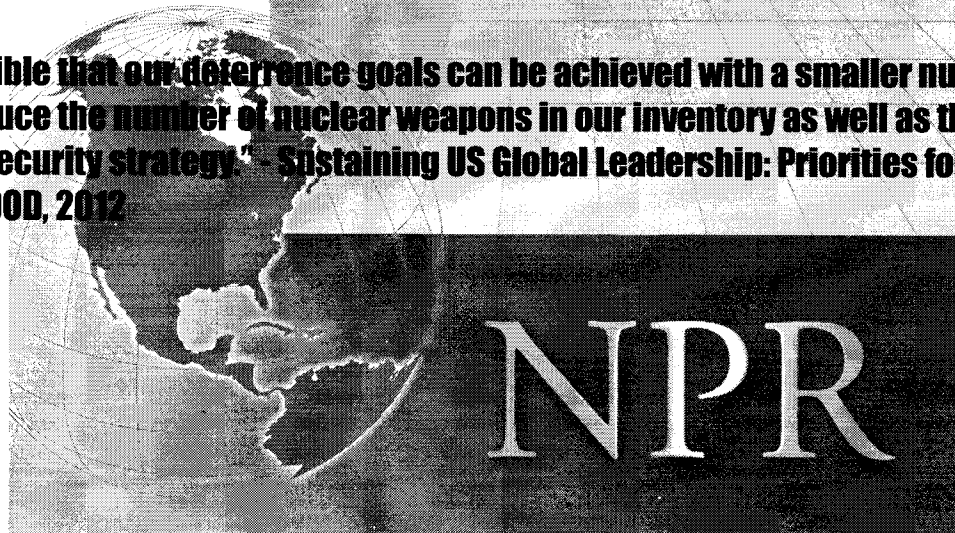
“To put an end to Cold War thinking, we will reduce the role of nuclear weapons in our national security strategy, and urge others to do the same.” - President Barack Obama, Prague, 2009



NUCLEAR POSTURE REVIEW REPORT

In “making preparations for the next round of nuclear reductions” the president has asked DOD “to review strategic requirements and develop options for further reductions in our current nuclear stockpile” and potential changes in targeting requirements and alert postures...” - Thomas Donilon, National Security Advisor, March 2011

“It is possible that our deterrence goals can be achieved with a smaller nuclear force, which would reduce the number of nuclear weapons in our inventory as well as their role in U.S. national security strategy.” - Sustaining US Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense, DOD, 2012



“U.S. Nuclear Strategy After the 2010 Nuclear Posture Review”, Hans M. Kristensen, Federation of American Scientists, Presentation to Graduate Seminar on Nuclear Policy, Georgetown University School of Foreign Service, October 3, 2012

NPR Definition



NUCLEAR POSTURE REVIEW REPORT

Administration says NPR reduced role of nuclear weapons:

-The review "reduces the role of nuclear weapons in our overall defense posture by declaring that the fundamental role of U.S. nuclear forces is to deter nuclear attack...Our new doctrine also extends U.S. assurances by declaring that we will not use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapons states that are members of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and in compliance with their non-proliferation obligations."

-Thomas Donilon, March 2011

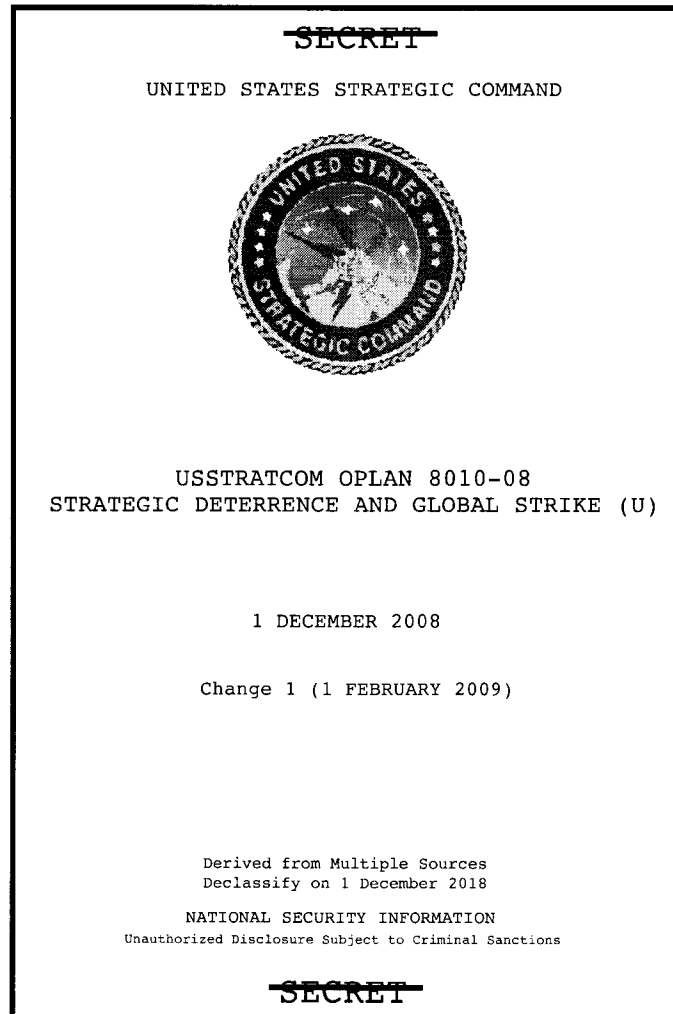
...but also says it can't reduce role yet because:

"there remains a narrow range of contingencies in which U.S. nuclear weapons may still play a role in deterring a conventional or CBW attack against the United States or its allies and partners. The United States is therefore not prepared at the present time to adopt a universal policy that the 'sole purpose' of U.S. nuclear weapons is to deter a nuclear attack on the United States and our allies and partners..." - Nuclear Posture Review Report, April 2010

NPR

OPLAN 8010

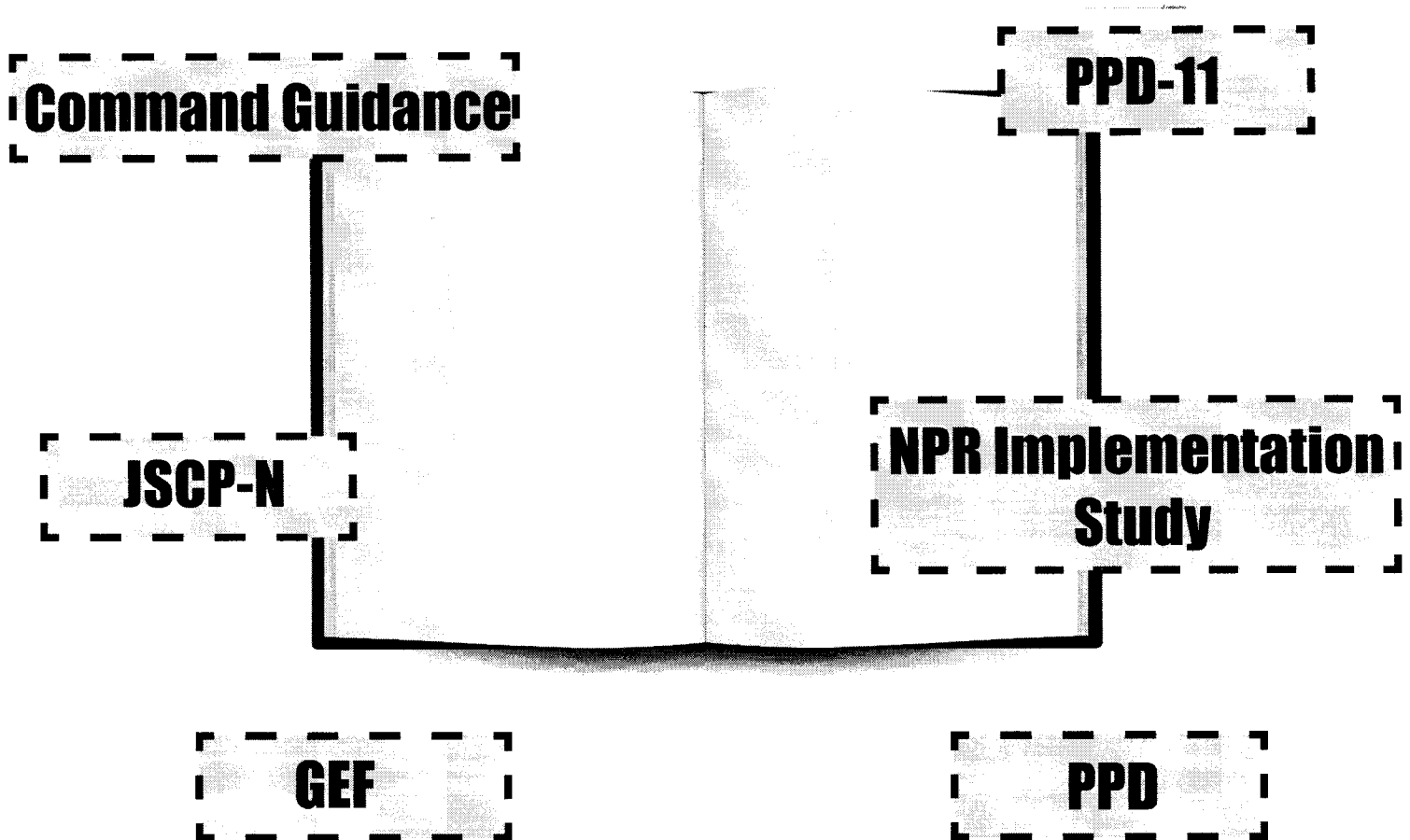
Adversaries



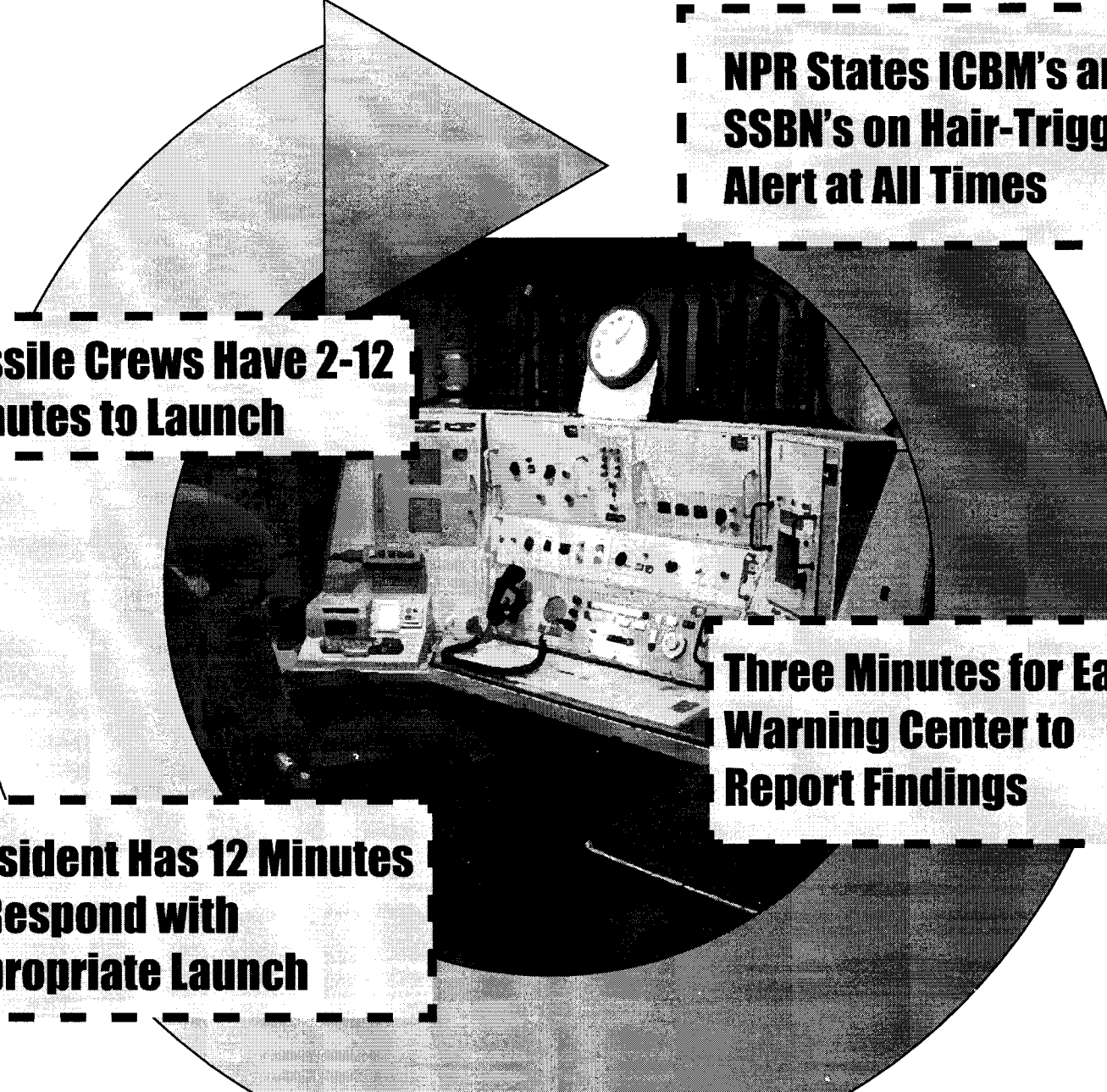
**Strike
Options**

Target Categories

OPLAN 8010 Replacement



Launch - Ready Status



**NPR States ICBM's and
SSBN's on Hair-Trigger
Alert at All Times**

**Missile Crews Have 2-12
Minutes to Launch**

**Three Minutes for Early
Warning Center to
Report Findings**

**President Has 12 Minutes
to Respond with
Appropriate Launch**

**Senior U.S. Nuclear Commanders
Have 30 seconds to Brief the President**

Global Strike

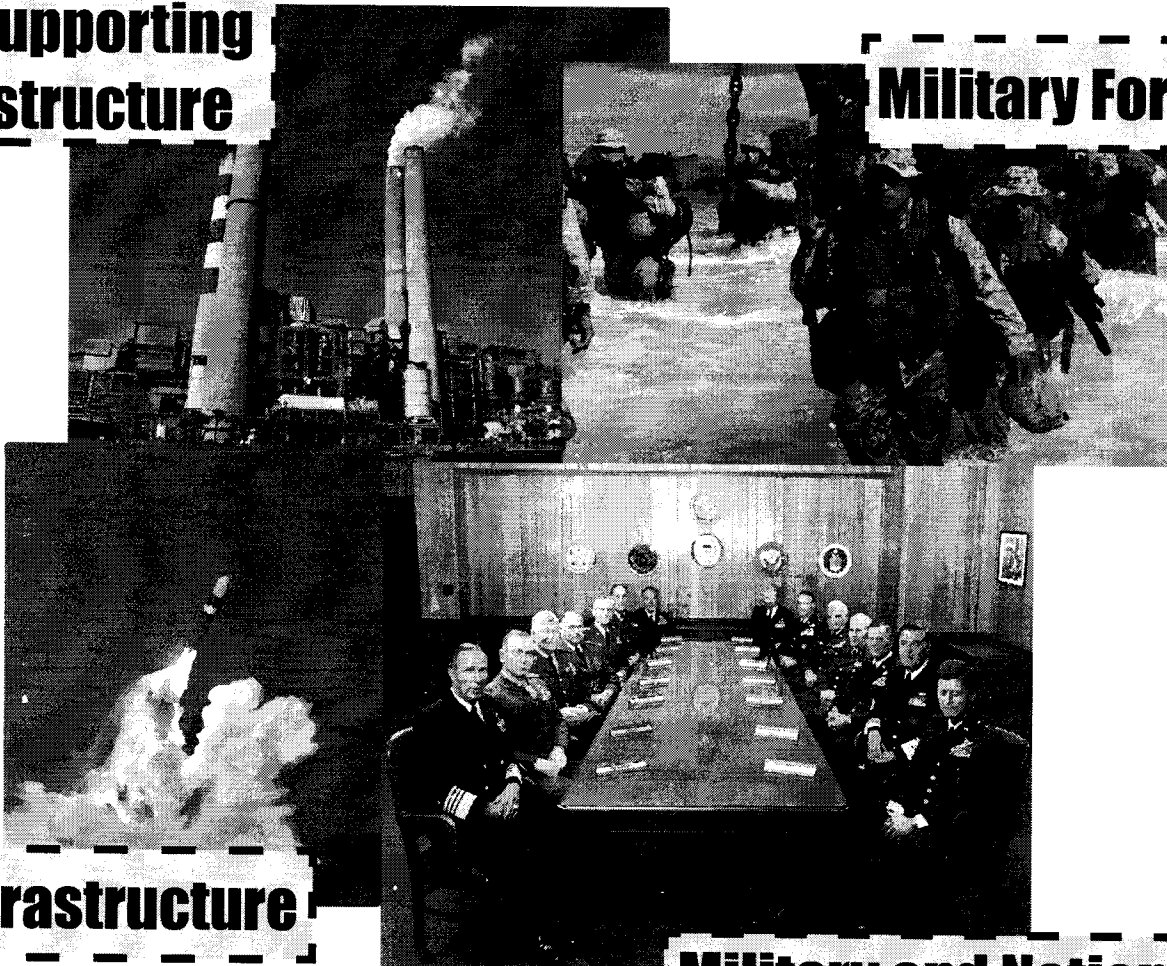


Counterforce Targeting

OPLAN 8010 (2009)

**War Supporting
Infrastructure**

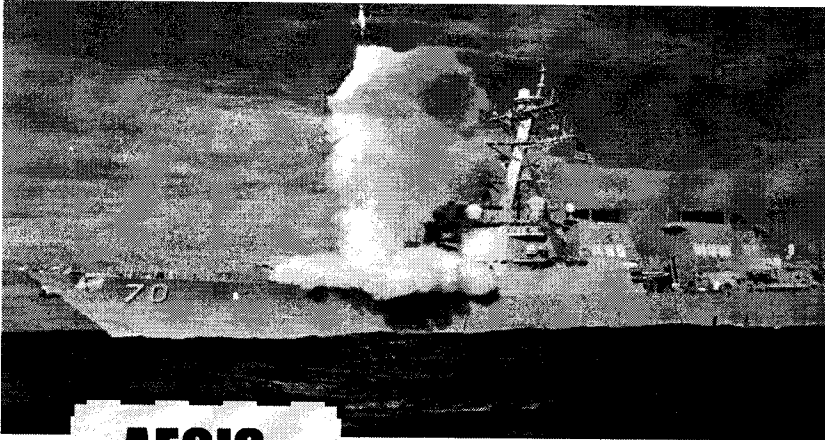
Military Forces



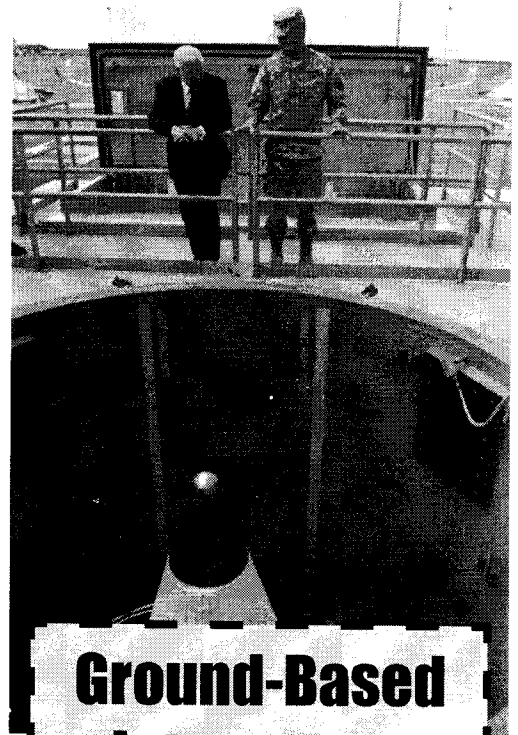
WMD Infrastructure

**Military and National
Leadership**

Ballistic Missile Defense



AEGIS



Ground-Based Interceptor



Overhead Periscope Infrared



UAV Based Sensor



Space Tracking & Surveillance System



Sea-Based Radar



Early Warning Radar



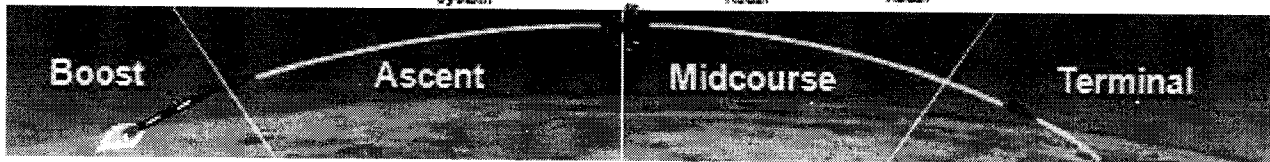
Midcourse X-Band Radar



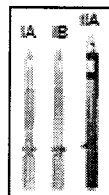
ANTPY-2



SPY-1



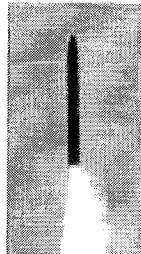
Command, Control, Battle Management & Communications



SM-3



Aegis BMD



Ground-Based Midcourse Defense



Terminal High Altitude Area Defense



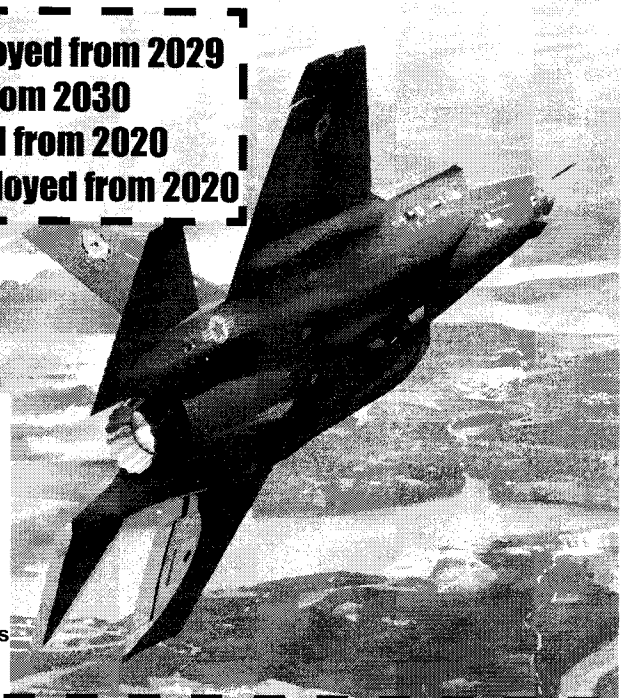
Sea-Based Terminal



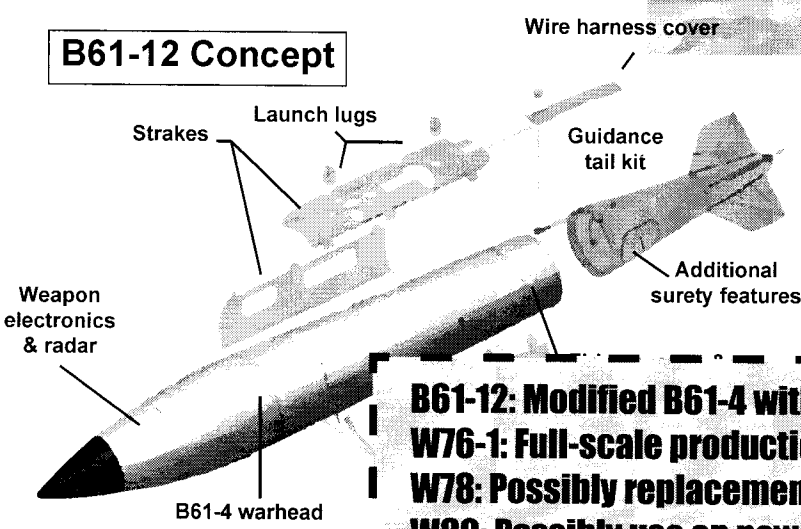
Patriot Advanced Capability-3

Modernization

SSBNs: New class of 12 boats/16 tubes each; deployed from 2029
ICBMs: Replacement study underway; deployed from 2030
Bombers: 80-100 new bombers planned; deployed from 2020
Fighters: F-35 JSF Block IV nuclear capability; deployed from 2020



B61-12 Concept



B61-12: Modified B61-4 with new guided tail kit to increase accuracy
W76-1: Full-scale production underway; new fuze with enhanced options
W78: Possibly replacement by common warhead
W80: Possibly use on new ALCM on new bomber
W88: New Af&F; potential replacement by common warhead



Uranium Production Facility (UPF): Completion in mid-2020s; secondaries
Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement-Nuclear Facility (CMRR-NF):
Planned for mid-2020s but deferred for at least five years, possibly canceled; primaries
Kansas City Plan: New plant operating; non-nuclear components

"U.S. Nuclear Strategy After the 2010 Nuclear Posture Review", Hans M. Kristensen, Federation of American Scientists, Presentation to Graduate Seminar on Nuclear Policy, Georgetown University School of Foreign Service, October 3, 2012