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Abstract: Since the end of the Cold War, the United States has been reexamining the role of **nuclear** forces in its national security policy. Traditional U.S. **nuclear** strategy was primarily intended to deter a Soviet attack against the United States, along with a few lesser objectives. This strategy called for a **nuclear** arsenal held at constant high alert and a Single Integrated Operational Plan (STOP) that would make execution of a retaliatory strike as simple, quick, and effective as possible. Today, the United States faces a more diverse set of potential threats. Political instability in established **nuclear** states such as Russia and Pakistan is a major concern. The deterioration of military command and control in Russia increases the chances of accidental or unauthorized launch. The possible emergence of new **nuclear** adversaries poses a further threat because of the wide variety of strategies and capabilities they may present. **Nuclear** weapons may become instruments of the weak rather than the strong. Weak regimes opposed to the United States may attempt to deliver **nuclear** warheads on trucks or ships, thus eluding U.S. tactical warning systems. States or groups that embrace radical, anti-American ideologies and feel that they have nothing left to lose may not be deterred by the threat of **nuclear** retaliation. Long before the current Bush administration took office, it was clear that the United States needed to rethink its fundamental **nuclear** posture. RAND Project AIR FORCE examined a range of strategies and force postures that the United States could adopt to make the most effective use of its **nuclear** forces in an uncertain world.

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