

BAS

September/October 2002, Volume 58, No. 5, pp. 54-59

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Preemptive posturing
By Hans M. Kristensen

South Korean President Kim Dae Jung and President Bill Clinton met at the White House in June 1998 to discuss "new approaches" toward North Korea and "peace and stability on the peninsula." Just days before, a squadron of U.S. F-15E fighter bombers had taken off from Seymour Johnson Air Force Base in North Carolina on course for the Avon Park Bombing Range in Florida. Their mission: to simulate a long-range nuclear strike against North Korea.

Under their wings the aircraft carried BDU-38 mockups of the B61 nuclear bomb. The crews had spent five months training for this event—their final exam for full certification to annihilate North Korea if ordered by the president to do so.

The basis for the exercise was a scenario in which North Korea invades South Korea, and in response, the 336th Fighter Squadron of the 4th Fighter Wing is "generated" in support of OPLAN (Operations Plan) 5027—a sustained offensive operation that includes "strategic attack missions" for the protection of South Korea. On their simulated mission, the F-15Es were accompanied by E-3A Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) aircraft, KC-135 tankers for refueling, and F-16 and F-16CJ and F-15C aircraft for protection.

In a July 14, 1998 interview, Wing Commander Randall K. Bigum described the mission: "We simulated fighting a war in Korea, using a Korean scenario. This included [North Korean] chemical attacks to protect against using full chemical gear [sic]. The scenario . . . simulated a decision by the National Command Authority about considering using nuclear weapons. . . . We identified aircraft, crews, and [weapon] loaders to load up tactical nuclear weapons onto our aircraft." The "last phase of the exercise, the employment phase . . . required us to fly those airplanes down to a range in Florida and drop" the BDU-38s.

A new nuclear posture

Planning nuclear attacks against North Korea is far from a new approach for the United States, and North Korea featured prominently in the Bush administration's new Nuclear Posture Review (NPR), portions of which were leaked earlier this year.

The simulated nuclear strike by the 4th Fighter Wing illustrates how the posture has changed. A decade ago this mission would have been carried out by U.S. aircraft forward deployed in South Korea with their nuclear weapons. The location of the weapons has

changed dramatically, but the strategy that guides them has not.

When the NPR was revealed, it caused widespread debate because of its prominent mention of alleged proliferators such as North Korea as potential targets for America's nuclear weapons. It called for developing new capabilities, such as earth-penetrating nuclear bombs, to defeat regional opponents armed with weapons of mass destruction. This startled analysts, former officials, and reporters, who believed nuclear doctrine was being transformed. Instead of planning to deter potential enemies, additional weapons and techniques would now be developed for use on the battlefield. Others saw a "commitment trap," in which an opponent's use of even a non-nuclear weapon of mass destruction would require a U.S. nuclear response for deterrence to remain credible in the future.

Bush administration officials have rejected criticism of the new review, insisting instead that the changes made since the last review in 1994 simply represent "prudent planning"—that they needed to adjust deterrence to the realities of the twenty-first century. President George W. Bush said on March 13 that, "the president must have all options available to make that deterrent have meaning."

In truth, many of the elements in the NPR are not new but have been under way since the 1991 Gulf War, but that doesn't make their inclusion in the review or questions about them less important. Whether it is still necessary for the president to have "all options" available, for example, is dubious at best. There are many options that are not needed, others that are dangerous and counterproductive, and others that ignore important lessons learned from past nuclear operations. Documents released under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) show not only that key assumptions used in the NPR are erroneous—something that was acknowledged in the 1994 review—but also that the adaptive planning capabilities that the Bush administration's review says have to be improved to adequately deter regional aggressors armed with weapons of mass destruction were already in place at that time.

Discouraging nuclear ambitions

According to the Bush review, superior weapon systems capable of striking a wide range of targets throughout a country "may dissuade a potential adversary from pursuing threatening capabilities." This claim, one of the core pillars of the NPR, is used to argue that an increase in U.S. capacities to "upgrade existing weapon systems, surge production of weapons, or develop and field entirely new systems" will discourage other countries from competing militarily with the United States. Whether one believes this hypothesis or not, with respect to weapons of mass destruction it directly contradicts the lessons learned from decades of U.S. nuclear posturing on the Korean peninsula.

The United States deployed nuclear weapons in South Korea for 33 years, from 1958 to 1991. Each year, when defense budgets were presented to Congress, military officials argued that the physical presence of nuclear weapons in South Korea was essential to

detering the North Korean threat. The leaders in Pyongyang were under no illusion—and Washington was not timid about saying—exactly where those weapons would be aimed in war.

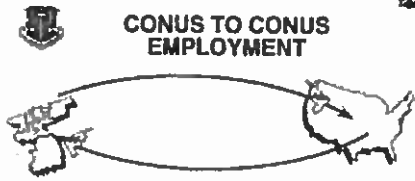
There is no evidence, however, that the past U.S. nuclear posture in South Korea dissuaded the North from pursuing weapons of mass destruction. If anything, it may have helped convince Pyongyang that the acquisition of such threatening capabilities was worth the cost.

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- Forward presence
- Dr Wallerstein: Has removal of nuclear weapons from Korea/off naval ships impacted proliferation?
- Group response: No.
- Col Sherrishen: Forward presence of force and nuclear weapons are underpinning of NATO security guarantees.
- Dr Alfeld: Forward deployed weapons provided trigger mechanism (use for less weapons); redeployed systems present timelines problem in perceptions of adversary.

WHAT'S NEXT: 24 Nov. 91, 1300-1600, Blue Room

OTHER: None.



CONUS TO CONUS EMPLOYMENT

- Most responsive option for contingency or short warning
 - Theater basing rights not required
- CONUS operations limited by maximum flying hours

1994

Nuclear Posture Review

These 1994 review documents were released as a result of U.S. Stratcom FOIA Case #97-66. Also from the "Secret Working Papers," on a page labeled "Group 5, page 13 of 16":

"Within the context of a regional single or few warhead detonation, classical deterrence already allows for adaptively planned missions."

When South Korean president Roh Tae Woo visited Washington in July 1991, the first Bush administration flatly rejected adjusting its nuclear arsenal in South Korea as part of any deal to bring the North Korean nuclear program under control. Only a few months later, however, on September 27, 1991, Bush suddenly announced the withdrawal of all nuclear weapons from South Korea, as well as from other overseas locations and ships. The move was part of an arms control initiative aimed at Russia, not North Korea, but documents obtained under the FOIA reveal that the withdrawal from South Korea had the highest priority of all weapons movements.

According to Pacific Command's partially declassified command history from 1991, the Joint Chiefs ordered that the first nuclear weapons should be on their way home from South Korea before the meeting of the U.S.–South Korean Military and Security Committee, scheduled for November 20–22, 1991. The withdrawal was completed in December 1991, six months before the withdrawal of weapons from other forward locations around the world. On December 18, 1991, Roh Tae Woo publicly declared that there were no U.S. nuclear weapons “whatsoever, anywhere in the Republic of Korea” (*Washington Post*, December 19, 1991).

The withdrawal from South Korea took place even though the U.S. government was well aware that North Korea was attempting to develop weapons of mass destruction, and despite decades of insistence that nuclear weapons were essential to deter North Korean aggression against the South. There is no evidence that the North took advantage of the withdrawal for a more aggressive posture or increased pursuit of weapons of mass destruction. In fact, there is no evidence that the withdrawal led to any change in North Korean behavior one way or the other.

This fact was acknowledged in the 1994 NPR, but has never been stated publicly. One of the six working groups established back then to analyze different aspects of U.S. nuclear policy was tasked to examine the relationship between U.S. nuclear posture and counterproliferation policy. According to the minutes from a meeting held in November 1993, the chairman of the groups asked: “Has removal of nuclear weapons from Korea [and] off naval ships impacted proliferation?” The response of the group was a categorical “No.”

And if removal of nuclear weapons from South Korea had no effect on proliferation, why does the Bush administration's review suggest that threatening the North with new capabilities will have such an effect?

Improving adaptive planning

Another central claim of the Bush administration's new NPR is that it is necessary to develop a more flexible nuclear war planning system to reduce the time needed to plan missions against new targets. “In the future,” the NPR predicts, “as the nation moves beyond the concept of a large, Single Integrated Operational Plan (SIOP) and moves toward more flexibility, adaptive planning will play a much larger role.” It outlines two overall types of planning:

- **Deliberate planning:** the creation of executable plans, prepared in advance, for anticipated contingencies. Deliberate planning provides the foundation for adaptive planning by identifying individual weapon and target combinations that could be executed in crises.
- **Adaptive planning:** generating war plans quickly in time-critical situations.

Like so many other elements of the NPR, these are not new ideas. The development of these capabilities has been under way for more than a decade, and adequate capacities for any credible scenario may already be in place or about to be phased in.

A Strategic Command (Stratcom) study, "U.S. Nuclear Postures and Counter-Proliferation Policy," partially declassified and released under FOIA, shows that during the analysis leading up to the 1994 NPR, Stratcom believed that: "Within the context of a regional single- or few-warhead detonation, classical deterrence already allows for adaptively planned missions to counter any use of [weapons of mass destruction]."

And if that were the case as long ago as 1994, why does the NPR suggest that additional adaptive planning capabilities are needed today?

Since 1994, the military has continued to improve its adaptive planning capabilities for nuclear forces. Other documents released under FOIA illustrate just how rapid the planners envision nuclear targeting to be in regional scenarios. When the first B-2 bombers replaced the B-1 in the SIOP-98 war plan in October 1997, it took planners "well over" 24 hours to complete the planning and processing of a single SIOP sortie. One year later, in November 1998, Stratcom ordered an update of the B-2 planning documents to reflect shorter timelines for planning new nuclear strike missions, calling for:

- Deliberate planned missions with a timeline of no more than 24 hours, including executable war plans, prepared in advance, for anticipated contingencies. (An example of this is OPLAN 5027, mentioned at the beginning of this article.)
- Adaptive planned missions (directed planning options or theater nuclear options) with a timeline of no more than eight hours.

Under these guidelines, planning for new limited strikes in smaller regional scenarios involving only one or a few nuclear weapons could be carried out in less time than it takes for a B-2 to fly from home base at Whiteman Air Force Base in Missouri to North Korea. On the way, the crew would be able to reconfigure existing sorties or build entirely new strike options with the bombs in their payload, revolutionizing the flexibility of nuclear-bomber strike planning.

The navy is also incorporating new adaptive planning capabilities into its Trident submarines. Although the Trident is often mistaken for a merely retaliatory force intended to ride out a surprise attack, the Trident weapon system has undergone considerable modernization that places it on the front line of U.S. nuclear posture.

In October 2003, coinciding with the SIOP-04 war plan entering into force, the navy will complete deployment of a new submarine-launched ballistic missile retargeting system (SRS). On May 11, 1993, Adm. John T. Mitchell told Congress that the new system will enable Trident submarines "to quickly, accurately, and reliably retarget missiles to

targets” and “allow timely and reliable processing of an increased number of targets.” In a 1996 briefing, the navy said that the capability of the SRS will “reduce overall SIOP processing” time and “support adaptive planning.”

The commander-in-chief of “U.S. Forces, Korea” identified Trident as a “mission critical system” in 1999, and all Trident submarines operating in the Pacific are currently being refitted with the longer-range and more accurate Trident II (D5) missile that in 2006 will give Pacific submarines a “hard-target kill capability” for the first time.

The Scud factor

The new nuclear capabilities the NPR seeks are focused on relatively limited strike scenarios against difficult targets such as hardened underground facilities that the military says cannot be destroyed with confidence using conventional weapons. In North Korea, some of these underground facilities are thought to house mobile Scud missile launchers armed with chemical or biological warheads. With missiles only minutes from their targets in South Korea, the pressure on the United States early in a crisis to destroy the underground facilities housing Scud missiles or chemical and biological warheads would be considerable. A 1998 air force briefing on U.S. theater missile defense strategy on the Korean peninsula underscores how this time constraint drives aggressive targeting.

The briefing shows the air force’s thinking on how it expects North Korea to employ its Scud missiles in a crisis and how they can most effectively be countered. It outlines three launch scenarios, each of which demands different targeting strategies: The North might launch exclusively from underground facilities, or disperse launchers in the field, or use a combination of the two. The latter was considered “the most likely.”

For North Korea to hide the Scuds in underground facilities and essentially roll them out only to launch might seem to present the most complicated U.S. targeting situation, yet the briefing concluded that such an employment “makes the targeting process easier for us since they remain at known locations.” Once out in the field, by contrast, the launchers are vulnerable only if they have been found. According to the briefing, dispersion “complicates our targeting solution greatly.” It adds: “Despite advances in our weapon systems, the launcher remains the most difficult target to hit.”

There is one more problem that complicates targeting of dispersed launchers. The briefing continues: “Although [launchers are] vulnerable during setup, we do not know where to look until the launch occurs. At that point, it is too [sic] late to strike since the [launcher] will be gone from the area within two minutes” after the missile is fired. “Launch points, detected by any means,” the briefing concludes, “are not targets” because the “ability of a [launcher] to hide after launch is far too rapid.”

In a crisis on the Korean peninsula, U.S. forces would not be “Scud hunting” for individual launchers to destroy, but would instead search “for the greatest war-fighting impact, and that is to destroy the TMD [theater missile defense] infrastructure.”

What's going on here?

Behind the development of these capabilities is one common feature: the drive of targeting philosophy toward preemptive strikes against underground facilities, as early in a crisis as possible. It is a philosophy that is deeply rooted in war-fighting, which makes the NPR's pursuit of more credible retargeting capabilities and nuclear bunker-busting weapons particularly worrisome.

My concern is the extent to which the goal of the posture is changing from one of deterrence through secure retaliation to deterrence through ever-increasing war-fighting capabilities.

Is America's nuclear posture becoming so driven by the pursuit of "credibility" that it risks pulling us into the conflict it is intended to deter? Or will there be a point beyond which the posture is considered "credible enough"—beyond which the pursuit of superior war-fighting capabilities becomes meaningless or even counterproductive?

Congress urgently needs to probe deeply the key underlying assumptions of the Bush administration's NPR, assumptions that contradict the 1994 NPR. The need for increased scrutiny is even greater today than it was in 1994, because the new NPR "shifts planning for America's strategic forces from the threat-based approach of the Cold War to a capability-based approach."

If this transition is permitted to occur unchecked, the shift will allow a narrow focus on technology rather than policy, and will further strengthen the hands of nuclear planners in setting the direction of future postures. The new NPR ignores the most important lesson from the 1990s: that progress curtailing North Korea's nuclear ambitions was accomplished through cooperative engagement and the Agreed Framework—not through nuclear posturing.

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