



## W-76, Nuclear Testing and the Reliable Replacement Warhead Program

Bill Broad writes in the *New York Times* about a "fierce debate among experts inside and outside the government over [the W-76 nuclear warhead's] reliability and its place in the nuclear arsenal."

Broad's story builds on John Fleck's excellent reporting for the *Albuquerque Journal* about a March 2004 meeting where "nuclear weapons experts" suggested the W-76 might be unreliable (See also ACW on 9 July 2004).

Fleck's reporting produced an interesting pair of letters—one, defending the W-76 and another criticizing it.

The latter letter was written by Richard Morse, who serves as the protagonist in Broad's version of events.



Morse claims that certain design choices, made to place a large number of W-76 warheads on US Tident II SLBMs (*pictured right*), compromise the design's reliability—making the W-76 the perfect excuse for those who might want to resume nuclear testing or design new warheads.

The W-76 also appears to figure prominently in the rationale for the Reliable Replacement Warhead Program. That program is supposed to "improve the reliability, longevity, and certifiability of existing weapons and their components" like the W-76—although Rob Nelson at UCS thinks there may be more to the story.

Stay tuned to see what Rob and John Fleck turn up ...

Posted by Jeffrey Lewis 2 April 05

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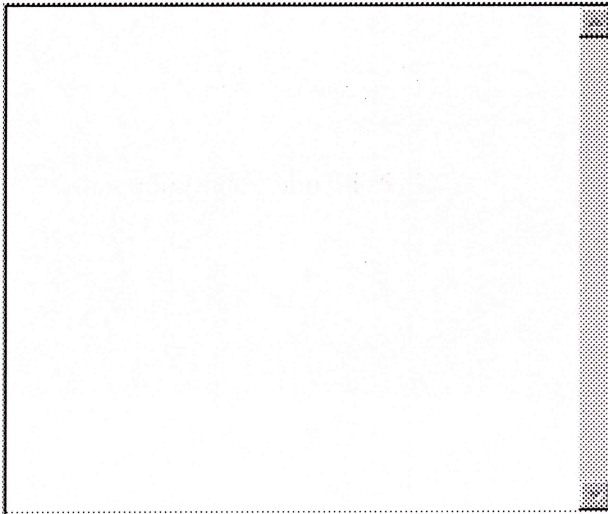
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