

to no more than 2,200 by 2012. These recent reductions affect all three arms of U.S. nuclear forces: intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs), and the weapons assigned to long-range bombers.

As of January 2009, the U.S. stockpile contained an estimated 5,200 nuclear warheads: approximately 2,700 operational warheads comprised of 2,200 strategic and 500 nonstrategic warheads; and about 2,500 additional warheads in reserve (including some 150 spares).² An additional 4,200 warheads await dismantlement as a consequence of the Bush administration's announcement in 2004 to reduce the U.S. stockpile by "nearly 50 percent" by 2012.³ This reduction was achieved in December 2007, five years early, and an additional 15 percent reduction is scheduled to be completed by 2012, leaving a stockpile of approximately 4,600 warheads.⁴

The requirement for this many weapons arises from the Nuclear Weapons Employment Policy, signed by then-defense secretary Donald Rumsfeld in 2004, which states in part: "U.S. nuclear forces must be capable of, and be seen to be capable of, destroying those critical war-making and war-supporting assets and capabilities that a potential enemy leadership values most and that it would rely on to achieve its own objectives in a post-war world."⁵ The most recent military translation of this guidance is Operations Plan (OPLAN) 8010-08 Global Deterrence and Strike, a new strategic war plan put into effect on February 1, 2008. This plan differs significantly from the Cold War-era Single Integrated Operational Plan by including a more diverse "family of plans applicable in a wider range of scenarios" that were first developed for the previous plan, OPLAN 8044 Revision 05, in October 2004. The family of plans is meant to provide national command authorities with "more flexible options to assure allies, and dissuade, deter, and if necessary, defeat adversaries in a wider range of contingencies."⁶ OPLAN 8010 also includes a series of executable, scenario-based strike options, first created in 2003, against regional states with weapons of mass destruction programs, including North Korea and Iran.⁷

To achieve further significant reductions—down to say 1,000–1,500 warheads—U.S. nuclear force structure will have to change, as will the guidance that sets out the role of nuclear weapons.⁸ This size arsenal would not support a war plan that requires the military to hold at risk all forms of weapons of mass destruction targets; command and control facilities; political and military leadership; and the war-making industries of Russia, China, and a handful of regional states. It would also make it excessive and too expensive to maintain a triad of sea-, land-, and air-based delivery platforms. It will be a formidable challenge, even for a committed executive branch, to bring about the necessary alterations within