

Proposed nuke plan dangerous idea

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ONE of our local representatives in Congress, Rep. Adam Schiff, D-Pasadena, has a commendable record regarding nuclear nonproliferation issues. He has been a leader in crafting legislation aimed at stemming the spread of nuclear weapons and materials beyond those nations comprising the "nuclear club." But he and the other members of California's Congressional delegation will have their work cut out for them in trying to stop the latest follies devised by the Dr. Strangeloves in the Bush White House.

Do you think the end of the Cold War means nuclear weapons have somehow vanished from the face of the Earth?

Think again.

The U.S. and Russia each maintain about 2000 nuclear-tipped missiles on high alert, and we also keep about 4,000 operational nuclear weapons in reserve. Each of these warheads is many times the size of the bomb that destroyed Hiroshima.

One would think we would be leading the world in abolishing nuclear weapons once and for all, as former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, former Secretary of State George Schultz, former Secretary of Defense William Perry, and former Senator Sam Nunn called for in a Wall Street Journal article published earlier this year.

Instead, the Bush White House wants to reinvigorate our entire nuclear weapons complex in a massive program sure to add to our deficit woes (with a price tag starting at \$150 billion) and re-ignite a global arms race. This reckless and misguided program has been christened "Complex 2030."

Complex 2030 calls for many new projects, including the resumption of plutonium pit manufacturing, but probably the most dangerous and foolhardy is the so-called "Reliable Replacement Warhead" (RRW) project.

This program would be our first attempt since 1989 to create a nuclear warhead with a new design. The plan is to pursue a whole new series of bomb designs with the goal of replacing all U.S. nuclear warheads over the next two to three decades (which accounts for the number 2030).

The ostensible rationale for the RRW program is the presumed unreliability of our current stockpile. But nothing could be further from the truth. Several independent studies have shown the plutonium inside our nuclear warheads can last much longer than previously expected.

Moreover, our ability to rebuild warheads remains solid based on existing designs, which are highly reliable after hundreds of tests. In short, Complex 2030 and the RRW are basically job programs for a nuclear priesthood that clings to an old Cold War paradigm and refuses to acknowledge our new world where stateless terrorism has become our main concern.

The Bush administration cannot simultaneously call for the U.S. to design and deploy new nuclear weapons and at the same time demand nations like Iran and North Korea halt their nuclear programs. This is a grossly hypocritical and morally bankrupt policy that will only motivate such nations to pursue their own nuclear weapons with more fervor.

Indeed, former Sen. Nunn recently testified in Congress that moving ahead with the RRW will be "misunderstood by our allies; exploited by our adversaries; complicate our work to prevent the spread and use of nuclear weapons ... and make the resolution of the Iran and North Korea challenges all the more difficult."

After four years of a disastrous war in Iraq, including claims that we would be greeted as liberators and repeated assurances over the last two years that the insurgency is "in its last throes," the Bush White House has run out of credibility. Their arguments for Complex 2030 and the RRW are just as false and bogus as their claim in May 2003 of "mission accomplished" in Iraq.

With crucial votes looming, Rep. Schiff, Sens. Feinstein and Boxer, Speaker Pelosi, and other members of the California Congressional delegation must exert leadership and persuade their colleagues that funding Complex 2030 and the RRW would be colossal mistakes rivaling the folly of the Iraq War.

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