

## The Trump Nuclear Posture Review

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My topic is the 2018 American Nuclear Posture Review; that is, the doctrine which regulates the circumstances in which nuclear weapons will be used and which guides decisions underpinning the management, maintenance and modernization of the nuclear arsenal. But first it is necessary to say a few words about the [massive nuclear weapons modernization program](#) already underway in the USA in the amount of \$1.25 trillion over 30 years (without even taking into account predictable Pentagon cost overruns). Begun under President Obama, it was the price exacted by the Senate for its ratification of the New Start agreement with Russia.

While [New START](#) (which came into effect at the same time the Trump NPR was released) sets strict limits on the number of warheads and launch vehicles, nothing in it forbids upgrading or replacing old weaponry and delivery vehicles

The result is an exponential increase in the killing power of the warheads and delivery vehicles that are far more accurate, have much longer ranges as well as many other dangerous new features.

Thus, despite the Obama NPR seeking to *reduce* reliance on nuclear weapons, these new features push in the opposite direction. An example is [the B61-12 “tactical” nuclear weapon](#) (replacing the B61 gravity bombs), with “lower” yield and greater precision, thereby creating the “illusion of usability” in war fighting. And these weapons are slated for the five so-called NATO “basing” countries in Europe – Belgium, Germany, Italy, Netherlands and Turkey.

Against this backdrop, the 2018 Trump NPR uses the deterioration in the security environment since 2010 to justify boosting modernization efforts even more, expanding the role of nuclear weapons and sidelining arms control.

The Obama NPR sought to maintain a balance between the ultimate goal of a world without nuclear weapons and the need in the meantime to maintain a “safe, secure and effective nuclear deterrent”. It committed to the longer-term goal of shifting from calculated ambiguity over the possible use of nuclear weapons in non-nuclear scenarios to a sole-purpose or “no first use” posture – where nuclear weapons only have a role in nuclear scenarios. The Trump NPR does not reaffirm this commitment but instead includes a *wider* range of circumstances in which the USA would consider the *first* use of nuclear weapons including in response to a cyber attack. “Expanding flexible U.S. nuclear options, to include low-yield options, is important for the preservation of credible deterrence against regional aggression,” the NPR claims.

So the Obama modernization program was already increasing the possibility of early recourse to nuclear weapons and the Trump NPR has exacerbated that trend.

It is to be noted that President Putin, in his recent “State of the Union” address where he outlined an array of new weapons systems, insisting all the while that they were achieved at very “modest cost” (which would certainly be true if all these new systems were in fact under development) also specifically [critiqued the Trump NPR](#) for “lowering the threshold of nuclear weapons use” and reiterated the more restrictive Russian first use policy.

## No Strategic Dialogue

The Trump NPR rejects the Obama 2010 policy of strategic dialogue with Russia and China when clearly there is an opportunity for dialogue on how to lower the threshold of nuclear weapons use. While the NPR expresses support for the NEW START Treaty, there are no practical steps to continue the process or extend the Treaty beyond 2021, putting at risk its valuable verification and transparency measures.

Another area ripe for urgent discussion is the [INF Treaty](#). The NPR highlights alleged Russian violations but does not address Russian concerns over alleged USA violations. It would be catastrophic for European security if this treaty were to fail.

The Trump NPR offers nothing to reduce nuclear dangers and may [well achieve the opposite effect](#) – lowering the threshold for using nuclear weapons, increasing the perception in Russia and China that the USA is trying to achieve a first strike capability (to overcome Mutual Assured Destruction), which in turn could well trigger reciprocal modernization efforts in Russia and China and make North Korea and Iran more confrontational.

And one must also note the obvious negative impact of the Trump NPR on non-proliferation efforts. How can the USA convincingly argue that others should not seek nuclear weapons while at the same time declaring that, despite its overwhelming conventional and retaliatory nuclear capabilities, it still needs a range of *nuclear first use options* to deter non-nuclear attacks.

### **NATO Summit Declarations versus Trump NPR**

There is a [clear divergence](#) between the role of nuclear weapons in NATO Strategic doctrine as reaffirmed in last two NATO Summit declarations and the 2018 American NPR.

Both the [2014 Wales Summit](#) and the [2016 Warsaw Summit](#) of NATO concluded that the alliance has the appropriate mix of nuclear, conventional, and missile defense capabilities, and *there is no need to rush to parity with Russia in the non-strategic nuclear domain*. The Summit declarations actually reaffirmed the commitment of the alliance to global zero, and called for reciprocal reductions in nuclear arsenals once the circumstances are favourable to such negotiations.

Therefore, the Trump NPR's conclusion that new "limited" nuclear options are needed to address these threats clearly goes against the Summit declarations.

Instead of having the effect of pressuring Russia to *reduce* its non-strategic nuclear arsenal (as the NPR asserts), US pursuit of low-yield options might instead justify further Russian investments and increases in this terribly destabilising capability.

It will be imperative, therefore, for Canada and other NATO members who do not possess nuclear weapons, to "hold the line" at the upcoming NATO Summit in Brussels on 11-12 July 2018. In this regard, it should be recalled that NATO nuclear doctrine is policy, not part of the treaty provisions. Therefore, member states are free, and have in the past, indicated their dissent to aspects of NATO's nuclear policy through use of the "footnote" procedure.