Chapter 1 Rhetoric vs. reality: the political economy of nuclear weapons and their elimination
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A state’s interest in acquiring and retaining nuclear weapons is the product of multiple institutions and constituencies dispersed throughout its government, corporate, academic, and political spheres of power. All nuclear-armed states wield these weapons because specific constituents benefit from investment in the weapons’ production and maintenance. Further, these interests within nuclear-armed states reinforce and invigorate similar interests in other nuclear-armed states. For example, the US and UK nuclear industries have collaborated with each other for decades (see “US-UK nuclear sharing: deterring disarmament”), while the US and Indian nuclear industries are gearing up for future collaborations (see “The US-India nuclear deal: violating norms, terminating futures”).

This institutional inertia that maintains the nuclear-armed state and militates against concrete steps toward disarmament is itself encapsulated in a specific geopolitical and domestic order best understood as imperial-

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ism. States with imperial ambitions utilize nuclear weapons, as one means among many, to coerce other states on virtually every matter of international relations. Seen from this angle, nuclear arsenals are not “stockpiles” hidden away in silos and subs awaiting a dreaded day of possible use, but instead are one of many tools used by imperial states to maintain global inequalities between states and within states.

The United States provides an excellent model to explore both the institutional and imperial underpinnings of the nuclear-armed state. The US is the hegemonic nuclear-imperial state. It provides the clearest illustration of the strategic value of these weapons within the current global political economy. While the other nuclear-armed states have similar interests and constituencies, US nuclear weapons exist within the broader context of the country’s unrivaled military supremacy—its military budget, foreign military bases, and history of military interventions. US nuclear weapons are uniquely entrenched in the apparatus and theology of the United States’ hegemonic world order. Other nuclear-armed states fit into this order; their policies both take direction from the United States and help provide cover for US policy. Thus, they stand together at international fora, confirming each other’s need for a strong “nuclear deterrent” and demanding stricter measures to stem further proliferation. Despite this, the international community looks to the US government to “take the lead” in nuclear disarmament. Yet a careful analysis reveals that the direction the United States is leading—which other nuclear-armed states either implicitly or explicitly support—is not toward disarmament at all, but toward the indefinite retention of nuclear weapons in order to preserve the present global order.

The current US administration’s nuclear policy agenda, from its budgetary priorities to treaty aspirations, reveals both the institutional and imperial political economies of the “nuclear threat”. Furthermore it demonstrates the bi-partisan consensus tying both the Democratic and Republican party establishments to these institutional powers and the larger imperial project.

**Visions and vagaries**

Although the Obama administration has committed the United States to nuclear disarmament in stronger rhetorical terms than any administration
in recent memory, its nuclear weapons programmes and policies are actually designed to lock in a virtually insurmountable advantage over other nations in the area of nuclear weapon technologies, while legitimating a more bellicose conventional military and diplomatic stance against accused proliferators. This foreign policy is being given ideological cover by a group of elder (Cold Warrior) statesmen who have in recent years donned a mantle of sober anti-nuclearism, but who remain politically, administratively, and financially invested in the long-term maintenance of the US nuclear weapons complex. The same strategy is being mirrored by the other principal nuclear weapon states, also seeking to use anti-nuclear rhetoric as a weapon against non-nuclear states, particularly those that would transgress the established geopolitical order.

At face value the goals of this political project include non-proliferation, achieving new arms control treaties, new stringent fissile material controls, and the eventual elimination of nuclear weapons, all ostensibly to make the world universally more secure. These aims—to the extent that they are genuine, especially in the case of the last one—are in fact entirely subordinate to the two instrumental goals actually driving current US nuclear weapons policies.

The first is to secure domestic political conditions ensuring the long-range funding of nuclear weapons programmes, principally at the three largest sites of the US weapons complex: the Los Alamos, Livermore, and Sandia laboratories. This means that arms control treaties and platitudes that aspire to a “nuclear free world” will be traded for multi-billion dollar infrastructure investments in the nuclear weapons complex, as well as the programmatic authority to design new weapons. This is entirely about supporting and placating the politically powerful laboratories, corporations, universities, Congress members, and military branches that embody the nuclear weapons complex. As the Los Alamos Study Group’s Greg Mello has pointed out, aspirations to seek disarmament are radically different from commitments that will achieve measurable steps toward disarmament. “Somehow we have gone from, ‘I will put a chicken in every pot,’” observes Mello, “to ‘I will seek to put a chicken in every pot.’” Thus disarmament politics involve vague non-commitments of “seeking,” while the nuclear weapons labs, military, and corporate contractors receive plump chickens by the billion.¹

The second instrumental goal of this political project is to preserve asym-
metric military dominance for the nuclear weapon states, a dominance which is inversely related to waning economic and political hegemony. This massive boosting of “defence” spending relative to all other nations is itself a means toward another end: to sustain a world in which the richest one percent of adults own more than 40 percent of all wealth, while almost half the planet’s population own less than 1 percent. Thus the international and domestic politics surrounding nuclear weapons are, in the most straightforward sense, about political economy, the distribution of wealth, and control over social and economic development.

Within this context “disarmament” is promoted as a vague “vision,” which can only be reached through the rigorous pursuit of preconditions—the absolute assurance that no state will seek to develop nuclear weapons at any point in the future under any circumstances. In the meantime, the United States claims that as long as nuclear weapons exist, it will need to maintain an “effective deterrent” to any possible nuclear “outbreak”. More than just keeping nuclear warheads in its quiver, this “hedge,” as it has been called by all post-Cold War American administrations, means investing billions of dollars in a modernized nuclear weapons complex capable of maintaining existing weapons indefinitely, including through the manufacture of nuclear weapons components such as plutonium pits.

US leadership against any real de-valorization of nuclear weapons has been more or less matched by Russia and has prompted other nuclear-armed states, such as the United Kingdom and France, to begin outlining policy recommendations for a “nuclear weapon free world” that do not actually include steps for disarmament. Like the United States, these governments focus almost exclusively on strengthening or demanding new non-proliferation restrictions to be imposed on non-nuclear weapon states, while at the same time maintaining the status quo (i.e. no real progress) on nuclear disarmament.

In the context of the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), this spells danger for the 2010 Review Conference. Trading disarmament rhetoric for practical measures on non-proliferation will be unlikely to satisfy most non-nuclear weapon states. Putting some arsenal reductions on the table as proof of intent to move toward eventual disarmament, while simultaneously investing heavily in nuclear weapons research and production facilities capable of building the nuclear threat anew, and far into the future, is
not disarmament. If the danger of nuclear war is to be eliminated, ceasing to plan and build for an eternal nuclear threat must come early, not late, in the process, and it will have to be linked to a more general demilitarization and demobilization of US, Russian, European, and other major military forces. If we seriously comprehend the wider political economy of which nuclear weapons are a part, then we should acknowledge that the rhetoric of political leaders from the nuclear weapon states cannot be trusted. Calls for the US to “lead” the world toward nuclear abolition are naïve at best, and disingenuous at worst.

Rhetoric: The four horsemen

In early 2007, four honoured US Cold Warriors published what appeared to be an unlikely op-ed in the *Wall Street Journal* calling for a “world free of nuclear weapons”. The essay was signed by none other than the former Secretaries of State George P. Shultz and Henry Kissinger, former Secretary of Defense William S. Perry, and former Georgia Senator and long-time Chair of the Armed Services Committee Sam Nunn. Now referred to as the “four horsemen” by those who work on nuclear policy, they wrote that complete nuclear disarmament is “a bold initiative consistent with America’s moral heritage.” The essay implored international leaders to work “energetically on the actions required to achieve” the lofty goals outlined within.

In January 2008, the four horsemen followed up with a second op-ed, also in the *Wall Street Journal*. In their article, titled “Toward a Nuclear-Free World,” they noted that the US and Russia “have a special responsibility, obligation and experience to demonstrate leadership.” For the two states possessing 95% of the world’s nuclear weapons they advised:

- Extending key provisions of the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty;
- Taking steps to increase the warning and decision times for the launch of all nuclear-armed ballistic missiles, thereby reducing risks of accidental or unauthorized attacks;
- Discarding any existing operational plans for massive attacks that still remain from the Cold War days;
- Undertaking negotiations toward developing cooperative multilateral ballistic missile defence and early warning systems, as proposed
by Presidents Bush and Putin at their 2002 Moscow summit meeting; and

- Dramatically accelerating work to provide the highest possible standards of security for nuclear weapons, as well as for nuclear materials everywhere in the world, to prevent terrorists from acquiring a nuclear bomb.3

Notably, they said nothing about nuclear weapons research, development, and production activities, for at the time they were already working through back-channels to lobby for a massive spending surge for the US nuclear weapons complex.

Nevertheless, reaction to the two op-eds was swift and far-reaching. Within a year, they were endorsed by more than two-thirds of living former US secretaries of state, secretaries of defense, and national security advisors. During the 2008 election, Presidential candidates John McCain and Barack Obama both joined the chorus with verbal nods to the four horsemen’s essays. President Obama has held public meetings with them, and his administration’s nuclear posture review, arms control negotiations, and preparations for the NPT are clearly being influenced by this brain trust.4 Shultz, Perry, Kissinger, and Nunn have also succeeded in inspiring esteemed statespeople in Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, and the United Kingdom to issue similar statements. Their vision for a “nuclear weapon free world” is constantly cited in international fora and op-eds around the world.

But what does this supposedly new “consensus” actually entail? The novelty of such a hawkish and bipartisan coalition led by the four horsemen, ostensibly promoting the goal of nuclear disarmament, has, curiously, been spared critical reflection by long-time anti-nuclear activists and analysts. Indeed, many of the more established arms control, disarmament, and peace organizations have fallen all over themselves to cite the four horsemen’s words and the supposedly new political terrain it maps out. This eagerness to embrace their “vision” represents a failure—or an unwillingness—on the part of anti-nuclear advocates to understand the larger political economy in which nuclear weapons play only a part.

Beneath its enticing veneer of humanitarian concern for “future generations,” the work of Shultz, Perry, Kissinger, and Nunn reflects a pragmatic strategy to maintain US military and economic dominance well into the 21st century, resulting in the formation of a new intellectual paradigm perhaps
best described as “anti-nuclear imperialism”. Association with this campaign by those seeking nuclear abolition may turn out to be counterproductive. For, far from embodying the spirit of nuclear abolitionism with its inherent links to anti-war and social and environmental justice movements, this strategy actually represents a clever new kind of nuclear militarism.

In now-declassified conversations with Richard Nixon, under whom he served as National Security Advisor, Henry Kissinger said candidly that the NPT was “made at the expense of other countries,” and thus should have little bearing on US policies. We believe that it is this kind of realpolitik, concerned mainly with enhancing US power over other nations, that has been inspiring the recent nuclear “disarmament” rhetoric of Kissinger, Shultz, Perry, Nunn, and others.\(^5\)

**More rhetoric: The Obama “vision”**

In public fora around the world, President Obama’s speech on 5 April 2009 in Prague has been praised as a world-changing event. The speech inspired a tidal wave of hope and opened up the space for a badly needed renewal of advocacy and action to abolish nuclear weapons. The Nobel Committee cited President Obama’s “vision of a world free of nuclear arms” in their decision to award him the 2009 Nobel Peace Prize. However, Obama made a number of conflicting statements in his Prague speech, and his foreign policy has been similarly characterized by contradictory positions emphasizing the importance of diplomacy while relying heavily on the use of force. These include renouncing torture, but refusing to prosecute the torturers; planning for the withdrawal of US troops from Iraq while escalating the US military presence in Afghanistan; and promoting diplomacy and the rule of law while conducting bombing raids on civilian targets in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and now Yemen, using unmanned drone aircraft.

In his Prague speech, Obama made an historic admission that “as the only nuclear power to have used a nuclear weapon, the United States has a moral responsibility to act” for their elimination. This is a welcome acknowledgment. However, while Obama has repeatedly said that he will pursue the goal of a world without nuclear weapons, this statement is invariably followed by a disclaimer that as long as nuclear weapons exist, the US will
maintain a strong nuclear deterrent. This disclaimer reflects the influence of a massive powerful military-industrial complex that has perpetuated the role of nuclear weapons as the cornerstone of US national security policy for nearly 65 years.

The reverse of Obama’s statement is more accurate: as long as the US maintains a nuclear “deterrent,” nuclear weapons will exist. And, as long as the US has nuclear weapons, other nuclear weapon states will maintain their arsenals, and some non-nuclear weapon states may seek to acquire nuclear weapon capabilities in order to obtain a deterrent or counter-balance against the vastly asymmetrical military power wielded by the US and other principal nuclear states.

It is important to understand what deterrence really means in US doctrine. A typical definition appears in a September 2008 Defense Department report:

> Though our consistent goal has been to avoid actual weapons use, the nuclear deterrent is ‘used’ every day by assuring friends and allies, dissuading opponents from seeking peer capabilities to the United States, deterring attacks on the United States and its allies from potential adversaries, and providing the potential to defeat adversaries if deterrence fails [emphasis added].

In other words, the US uses the threat of nuclear attack the way a bank robber holds a gun to the head of a teller. In his 2007 book, *Empire and the Bomb: How the U.S. Uses Nuclear Weapons to Dominate the World*, Joseph Gerson documented at least 30 occasions since the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki when every US President has prepared or threatened to initiate nuclear war. Most recently, during his presidency, Bill Clinton made a covert nuclear threat against an alleged underground chemical weapons facility in Libya, and President George W. Bush had contingency plans drawn up for battlefield use of nuclear weapons in Iraq. The policy of nuclear deterrence is not passive and it is not benign.

This policy has been embraced by other nuclear-armed states. The French government, for example, likewise seeks to preserve its “security” through retaining and even threatening to use nuclear weapons. In a speech on 21 March 2008, French President Nikolai Sarkozy proclaimed, “Our nuclear deterrence protects us from any aggression against our vital interests emanating from a state—wherever it may come from and whatever form it
may take.” To the ever-fluid definition of deterrence, he added, “It cannot be ruled out that an adversary might miscalculate the delimitation of our vital interests or our determination to safeguard them. In the framework of nuclear deterrence, it would be possible, in that event, to send a nuclear warning that would underscore our resolve. That would be aimed at reestablishing deterrence [emphasis added].”

The Commission established by the US Congress to give advice on the 2010 Nuclear Posture Review, chaired by none other than William Perry, reported in May 2009, “The United States requires a stockpile of nuclear weapons that is safe, secure, and reliable, and whose threatened use in military conflict would be credible.” It argued, “The conditions that might make the elimination of nuclear weapons possible are not present today and establishing such conditions would require a fundamental transformation of the world political order.” The UK government is now similarly arguing that the time is not ripe for it to consider eliminating its nuclear weapons, has instead announced plans to work on establishing “the conditions in which there is no requirement for the continued existence of nuclear weapons.”

Almost as if to ensure that such conditions are not created, in July 2009 the US Senate adopted a series of amendments to the 2010 Defense Authorization Bill. One of these amendments calls on the President to make sure that the US-Russia START follow-on does not limit US ballistic missile defense systems, space capabilities, or advanced conventional weapons systems. Yet these are precisely the issues that Russia has raised as impediments to deeper nuclear arms reductions. Another amendment requires the President to deliver a plan to modernize the US “nuclear deterrent”. All of the amendments were adopted by voice votes, meaning that many Democrats, as well as Republicans, said “Aye.”

Further, the author of the modernization amendment, Republican Senator Jon Kyl (AZ), along with Democratic Senators Byrd (WV), Levin (MI), and Kerry (MA) and Republican Senators McCain (AZ), and Lugar (IN), on 23 July 2009, signed a letter to the President calling on him to submit, in connection with the new START, a plan “to modernize the nuclear weapons infrastructure, maintain the key capabilities and competencies of the nuclear weapons workforce—the designers and the technicians—and to maintain the delivery platforms.” This demand was reinforced by a second letter to Obama, dated 15 December 2009, signed by 41 Republican Senators.
This Senatorial wing of the pro-nuclear weapons coalition is poised to extract as many dollars and permissions from the administration as possible in exchange for not blocking the ratification of the START-follow on agreement. As a down payment, the Obama administration has recently committed $5 billion in funding for the Department of Energy National Nuclear Security Administration’s weapons activities between 2011 and 2016. The budget request for fiscal year 2011 increases spending on the nuclear weapons stockpile, complex, and related nuclear weapons programmes to $7 billion—10% above spending in 2010—much of which will be used to push ahead with the construction of a plutonium pit factory at the Los Alamos National Laboratory and a uranium processing factory at the Y-12 site in Tennessee. Bills of additional dollars to support nuclear weapon systems are buried in the Department of Defense budget.

An even pricier set of anti-disarmament conditions will likely be attached to Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) ratification, thus rendering the historic intent of the Treaty mute and making it even more unlikely that the other holdout states will ratify it. Renewed push for ratification of the CTBT will, as it did in the late 1990s, provide pro-nuclear lobbies embedded and linked to the weapons labs with a powerful bargaining chip. “It is impossible to pass a clean CTBT ratification bill in the US,” says Greg Mello. “Such a notion is 14 years too late. Largely as a result of the last CTBT ‘deal,’ nuclear warhead budgets rose 89% here in real (inflation-corrected) terms between 1995 and 2005. If warhead budgets were $4.77 billion today as they were in FY1995 (in 2008 dollars), surely we would not be talking about all these upgrades, new factories, and so on.”

**Reality: Putting nuclear weapons in context**

The United States spends as much as the rest of the world’s countries combined on its military. In fiscal year 2008, the United States spent an estimated $52.4 billion on nuclear weapons-related programmes alone. This staggering amount is a drop in the bucket compared to overall US military spending that year ($711 billion), but it exceeds the entire military budgets of nearly every other country. In 2006, only China ($121.9 billion), Russia ($70 billion), the United Kingdom ($55.4 billion) and France ($54 billion)
spent more on their militaries than the US spent on its nuclear weapons related programmes.20

Another way of looking at the value the US places on nuclear weapons is that, in dollar terms, its nuclear weapons programmes are actually larger than the national budgets of most nations on earth. For example, Bangladesh, Bolivia, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, with national budgets of roughly $16, $8, and $2 billion, respectively, do not even combine to reach half of what the US spends on nuclear weaponry.21 In a domestic context, the US leadership’s commitment to nuclear weapons is evident in the fact that they choose to tax every American household $453 dollars per year to pay for nuclear warheads and weapons systems.22

President Obama’s remarks in Prague not withstanding, when he presented his first military budget request, for fiscal year 2010, he said, “Going forward, we will continue to make the investments necessary to strengthen our military and increase our ground forces to defeat the threats of the 21st Century.”23

To meet the challenge of abolishing nuclear weapons, we must broaden our understanding of how nuclear weapons fit into a historical continuum and a larger scheme. The Encarta Encyclopedia describes militarism as “advocacy of an ever-stronger military as a primary goal of society, even at the cost of other social priorities and liberties.” Unfortunately, this definition accurately describes the historical trajectory and still the current reality of US national security policy. The threatened first use of nuclear weapons remains at the heart of that policy. In many cases the architecture of US militarism is “hidden in plain sight,” yet is kept out of mainstream discourse. Elements include over 800 overseas bases in more than 140 countries, and an additional 6000 bases in the United States and its territories, maintained by the Pentagon.24 The US military dominates the globe through its operation of 10 Unified Combatant Commands whose areas of operation now cover the entire Earth, the final piece being Africom—the Africa Command.25 The US is currently building new bases in Colombia and as the military escalation continues, will build more bases in Afghanistan as well. The 234 years of US history have been marked by nearly continuous military interventions around the world. From 1945 to 1989, only the Soviet Union rivaled the US in terms of military reach and power. Since 1991, the US has existed as the world’s sole hyperpower.
Nuclear weapons exist within—and not apart from—this system of extended military bases and Unified Combatant Commands, and the history it derives from. The US is the only country that deploys nuclear weapons on foreign soil, at North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) bases in five European countries.26

Another element of the “hidden architecture” is the nuclear weapons infrastructure of laboratories and production facilities that derive from the Manhattan Project. In addition to these we would add the intellectual and corporate bastions of nuclearism, including the think tanks, academic centers, industrial corporations, lobbyists, and other institutional agents heavily vested in preserving high levels of nuclear weapons spending.27

Indeed, the new elite “nuclear disarmament” campaign led by Kissinger et al is best understood as an intellectual project of the conservative Hoover Institution at Stanford University, where it was incubated during conferences in 2006 and 2007.28 For roughly four decades, this influential right-wing think tank has enjoyed a little-known, but fateful administrative and political affiliation with the US nuclear weapons complex, with many of its fellows coming out of the weapons labs, and many of its administrators beholden to the military industrial corporations which profit from running the weapons complex. The link between Hoover and the nation’s two primary nuclear weapons labs—managed by a University of California and Bechtel Corporation-led consortium—provides a revealing window into the inner-workings of US nuclear policy-making. This secretive process is driven by a handful of elite think tanks and powerful multi-national firms, working in conjunction with the national nuclear weapon laboratories at Los Alamos, New Mexico and Livermore, California.29

**Reality: the pursuit of non-proliferation through the language of disarmament**

In recent years, the common thread among supporters of the Shultz, Perry, Kissinger, Nunn “vision” is a desire to legitimize US action against alleged “rogue states” and to tighten control over what has, since the mid-1990s, been called the “nuclear black market”. A secondary, but equally important goal is to provide financial and programmatic support to the weapons labs
in order to sustain the US capacity to design, test, and build new nuclear weapons—with or without a CTBT. These practical agendas are more or less obscured behind the rhetorical disarmament agenda.

A collaborative project between Stanford and Harvard Universities called the Preventative Defense Project is illustrative of this trend. Currently co-directed by Clinton administration Defense Secretary and “four horsemen” member William Perry and former Los Alamos Lab Director Siegfried Hecker the concept of Preventative Defense in the post-Cold War era is: premised on the belief that the absence of an imminent, major, traditional military threat to American security presents today’s leaders with an unaccustomed challenge and opportunity to prevent future Cold War-scale threats to international security from emerging.... [The US defence establishment’s] highest priority is to contribute to forestalling developments that could directly threaten the survival and vital interests of American citizens.

This mission echoes a statement made in 1991 by General Colin Powell, who said, “You’ve got to step aside from the context we’ve been using for the past 40 years, that you base [military planning] against a specific threat. We no longer have the luxury of having a threat to plan for. What we plan for is that we’re a superpower.”

To this end, Perry, with former Project co-director Ashton Carter, has promoted a US policy leading toward future disarmament as the best means of facilitating what they believe is necessary US military action against those nations they simplistically label as “bad guys”. In recent years they have published articles and op-eds advocating US military action against North Korea, alarmist tracts about rising China, and justification of the US-India nuclear technology sharing deal. In their 2003 essay “Good Nukes, Bad Nukes,” they called for ratification of the CTBT as a way to lock in a global nuclear status quo, while also justifying US military strikes against would-be transgressors of this geopolitical order. “The treaty does have an impact even on ‘bad guys’ like Iraq, Iran and North Korea,” they wrote. “When the United States moves against such regimes, it does so with the support of the global opprobrium for nuclear weapons that the treaty enshrines.”

Translating this philosophy into official US government policy are the highly vaunted US resolution on nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament adopted unanimously at the 24 September 2009 UN Security Council
Summit chaired by President Obama and the previous week’s announce-
ment that the White House had cancelled plans to deploy a long-range mis-
sile defence system in the Czech Republic and Poland. Both of these initia-
tives appeared to signal a welcome change of course in US nuclear weapons
and foreign policy. However, both cases merit a closer look at the reality
behind the rhetoric.

While the scrapping of the missile defence project seemed to be a positive
development, reflecting the will of the majority of Czech and Polish people,
it was accompanied by the little-noticed unveiling of a replacement plan, offi-
cially directed at Iran, for strengthening missile defences in Europe using
“proven” land and sea-based technologies. These theater missile defenc-
es—part of the US “strategic triad” of nuclear and conventional offensive
weapons, missile defences, and research and development capabilities—are
intended to work in conjunction with the offensive weapons systems, like
swords and shields, to protect US troops and bases and other “strategic as-
sets” around the world. They are a source on ongoing of concern to Russia,
endangering prospects for further US-Russia arms reductions.

Turning to the UN Security Council resolution, while it recycles a list of
disarmament measures previously agreed to by the nuclear weapon states—
notably the 40-year old commitment in the NPT “to pursue negotiations
in good faith on effective measures relating to nuclear arms reduction and
disarmament”—there is not one new or concrete disarmament measure
called for. On the other hand, the nuclear non-proliferation and anti-terror-
ism clauses are far-ranging and specific, invoking the enforcement author-
ity of the UN Security Council—coincidentally, controlled by the five NPT
nuclear weapon states.

The United States is by no means alone in pursuing aggressive non-pro-
liferation measures in the name of disarmament. France is one of the stron-
gest proponents of imposing stricter non-proliferation requirements on
non-nuclear weapon states as a precondition for nuclear disarmament. Dur-
ing the UN General Assembly First Committee's 2009 session, for example,
the French ambassador argued that the “crises of proliferation are now the
greatest threat to international peace and security” and that their resolution
is necessary to create a safe international context in order to pursue nuclear
reductions. He called for the international community to be “united and
resolute” and “rigorous with those who violate international [non-prolifera-
Likewise, in February 2009, the United Kingdom released an information paper called *Lifting the nuclear shadow: Creating the conditions for abolishing nuclear weapons*. The paper, which serves as “a call to accelerate disarmament to prevent proliferation to new states and to ultimately achieve a world that is free from nuclear weapons,” outlines conditions and steps that are “potentially attainable” within the next few years “toward a global ban on all nuclear weapons.” These include “stopping proliferation” in Iran, North Korea, and Syria; “tightening controls” on nuclear materials and technology; “strengthening international commitment to preventing proliferation”; “managing the growth in nuclear power”; and finally, “reducing arsenals” and “going to zero.”

In the meantime, the UK’s paper dismisses the concept of a nuclear weapons convention, arguing, “most of the states with nuclear weapons, including the UK, while accepting that some form of such an agreement is likely to be necessary in due course to establish the final ban, consider that it would be premature and potentially counter-productive to focus efforts on it now when the many other conditions necessary to enable a ban have yet to be put in place.” Ironically, the paper notes, “Words alone will not rid the world of nuclear weapons.”

In July 2009, the UK government released a second report, *The Road to 2010: Addressing the nuclear question in the twenty first century*. The report is intended to “lead” global efforts for a successful NPT Review Conference. As noted by the Acronym Institute for Disarmament Diplomacy in the UK, the plan “stops short of announcing any new steps towards disarmament by the UK” and does not even mention its plans to renew Trident, the UK’s “strategic deterrent.” Instead, the plans—just like in *Lifting the nuclear shadow*—focus exclusively on preventing the spread of nuclear weapons rather than refraining from upgrading its nuclear weapon systems, reducing its arsenal, or ending its “special relationship” with the United States that fuels its capacity to upgrade its own nuclear weapon system (see “US-UK nuclear sharing: deterring disarmament”).
Reality: Fewer but newer nukes forever?

In November 2009, General Kevin Chilton, Commander of Strategic Command, predicted the United States will still need nuclear weapons 40 years into the future. Chilton said his prediction was not inconsistent with the president’s vision of a nuclear-free world: “The president himself has said such a world will not be reached quickly and perhaps not in his lifetime and I agree with that.” He added that the idea of a world without nuclear weapons: includes a vision of a different world order than what we have today …. That’s why most people who talk about that vision caveat it with, ‘I don’t think it will happen in my lifetime.’ It’s not because we couldn’t physically cut up every weapon in the world in 40 years. We could. The question is would it be a safer world if we did [emphasis added].

Quoting from Obama’s Prague speech, Chilton said his command must focus on “the president’s confirmation that as long as nuclear weapons exist the United States will maintain a safe, secure and effective arsenal to deter any adversary and to guarantee that defense to our allies.”

To this end, the US nuclear weapons research and production infrastructure is being renovated through a massive “Complex Transformation” programme. At the end of September 2009, the Democratically-controlled Congress voted to spend $6.4 billion in FY 2010 to maintain and enhance the “safety, security, and reliability” of the US nuclear weapons stockpile—slightly more than in 2009. This includes the “Stockpile Life Extension” programme for the W76 Sea-Launched Ballistic Missile warhead, carried aboard the US Trident submarines currently patrolling the world’s oceans, ready to target any location on earth with a computer keystrokes. Under this programme the W76 is being given a new capacity to destroy “hard targets,” making it more suitable for a first-strike. It also includes funding to study modernization of the B61 gravity bomb, and plan for a “long-term 21st century weapon”. This legislation contains increases in funding for the production of plutonium pits—the cores of hydrogen bombs.

According to Defense Secretary Robert Gates, kept on by President Obama from the Bush administration, the forthcoming Nuclear Posture Review, a Congressionally-mandated review of US nuclear strategy currently underway, is likely to recommend development of new warhead designs (under the guise of “safety and reliability”) as part of a broader effort to
maintain and modernize the nation’s “nuclear deterrent”.47

A litmus test for the sincerity of the four horsemen’s desire to pursue nuclear abolition occurred shortly after publication of their initial op-ed. Since 2005, the directors at Los Alamos and Lawrence Livermore had been promoting a programme called the Reliable Replacement Warhead (RRW), which they hoped would take the place of the more generic “Stockpile Stewardship,” as the raison d’être of the nuclear weapons complex. Under the rubric of “replacing” existing nuclear warheads and enabling a quantitative reduction in the US arsenal, the labs sought to develop a new model nuclear weapon, receive billions of dollars in funding for production infrastructure, and train cadres of weapons scientists for future careers in the nuclear enterprise.

Throughout the 2007–08 Congressional debate over the RRW, Kissinger and Shultz proved to be among the most prominent advocates of the new nuclear weapons programme. As Congressional Subcommittee hearings concerning the programme were in full swing, Kissinger wrote in a letter to Senator Pete Domenici (R-NM), “Specifically, I believe that research and design of the RRW should continue and that the infrastructure to support our current programme should be urgently strengthened.” In a joint letter to Domenici, Shultz and Perry wrote, “upgraded infrastructure is needed ... to manufacture warheads of any design. This work should proceed since a robust infrastructure will be necessary at every phase of the process of reducing and eliminating nuclear weapons.”48 The Congressional Commission tasked with making recommendations for the 2010 Nuclear Posture Review, headed by William Perry and facilitated by the US Institute of Peace, in its final report, released in May 2009, listed the construction of a plutonium pit factory at the Los Alamos lab, capable of flexible manufacturing new pit designs for new warheads, among its highest priorities.49

One month earlier, it was reported that the US has been using Britain’s Atomic Weapons Establishment to carry out research into its own nuclear warhead programme. US-UK cooperation in nuclear weapons research has been ongoing since the Manhattan Project, though the details are secret. Speculation is that the US is or has been using the UK’s facilities to get around restrictions placed on development of a new RRW by the US Congress. In a 2008 interview, John Harvey, policy and planning director at the US National Nuclear Security Administration, said:
We have recently, I can’t tell you when, taken steps to amend the MDA [Mutual Defence Agreement], not only to extend it but to amend it to allow for a broader extent of cooperation than in the past, and this has to do with the RRW effort.\(^{50}\) (For more details, see “US-UK nuclear sharing: deterring disarmament”).

In January 2010, Shultz, Perry, Kissinger and Nunn peeled away some of the disarmament rhetoric from their “vision” in a starkly titled op-ed, “How to Protect Our Nuclear Deterrent,” again appearing in the *Wall Street Journal*. Declaring that, “Maintaining high confidence in our nuclear arsenal is critical as the numbers of these weapons goes down,” they wrote, “The United States must continue to attract, develop and retain the outstanding scientists, engineers, designers and technicians we will need to maintain our nuclear arsenal, whatever its size, for as long as the nation’s security requires it.”\(^ {51}\) Calling for a substantial increase in funding for the US nuclear weapons laboratories and a modernized nuclear weapons infrastructure, they warned, “[T]he deadliest weapons ever invented could fall into dangerous hands.”

In their op-ed, the authors invoked the spectre of nuclear weapons falling into “dangerous hands” three times. Yet in whose hands are nuclear weapons “safe”? (The only hands that have so far used them?) As the Hans Blix-led Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission wrote in its 2006 report, *Weapons of Terror: Freeing the World of Nuclear, Biological and Chemical Arms*, “The Commission rejects the suggestion that nuclear weapons in the hands of some pose no threat, while in the hands of others they place the world in mortal jeopardy. Governments possessing nuclear weapons can act responsibly or recklessly. Governments may also change over time.”\(^ {52}\)

In a profoundly disturbing speech to the US Institute of Peace on 21 October 2009, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said:

> We are sincere in our pursuit of a secure peaceful world without nuclear weapons. But until we reach that point of the horizon where the last nuclear weapon has been eliminated, we need to reinforce the domestic consensus that America will maintain the nuclear infrastructure needed to sustain a safe and effective deterrent without nuclear testing. So in addition to supporting a robust nuclear complex budget in 2011, we will also support a new Stockpile Management Program that would focus on sustaining capabilities.
Citing General Chilton, she added, “This is what the military leaders, charged with responsibility for our strategic deterrent, need in order to defend our country,” noting, “As the President has acknowledged, we might not achieve the ambition of a world without nuclear weapons in our lifetime or successive lifetimes.”

In a 29 January 2010 Wall Street Journal op-ed of his own, Vice-President Joseph Biden gave a ringing endorsement of the four horsemen’s latest op-ed. The Obama administration’s fiscal year 2011 budget request, released a few days later and welcomed by the National Nuclear Security Administration as “a critical step toward implementing President Obama’s nuclear security vision,” asks for a nuclear weapons spending surge in order to modernize the US arsenal, build a 21st century nuclear weapons complex with plutonium pit manufacturing and uranium processing capabilities, and more.

Whatever the Obama administration’s true intentions are, not only will investing in a modernized nuclear weapons infrastructure be viewed as hypocritical by other nations, it will also provide future presidents, whatever their foreign policies may be, the means to design and manufacture new nuclear weapons if they want to, with all that that implies. Likewise, regardless of whether the individual motivations of the four horsemen are sincere, their institutional loyalties and larger political agendas reflect a political economy that is not only fundamentally at odds with nuclear abolition, but is an anathema to peace and justice.

Ultimately, if the Hoover “no nukes” initiative is to have any genuine value, it will be because it helps to reveal the political and ideological trappings of an entrenched power structure that has for too long avoided criticism and exposure, and has made end-runs around arms control and disarmament activists whose naïve best intentions are no match for the calculated strategies of the weapons labs and their allies. In the meantime, the widespread international endorsement of their “vision” makes it even more difficult to press for a vision that is not rooted in major power hegemony that gives other nuclear weapon states an excuse to put off their own disarmament obligations to the very distant future.
Modernization, indefinite retention, and deterrence: Not just an American fetish

At end of 2009, there were approximately 23,360 nuclear weapons in the world, possessed by China, France, India, Israel, Pakistan, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Nearly half of them are active or operationally deployed. The United States and Russia possess 96% of this global nuclear arsenal. The United States is the only nuclear weapon state to deploy its nuclear weapons on foreign soil, with approximately 200 nuclear bombs at six air bases in five NATO countries.¹

Like the United States, Russia is reducing the number of nuclear weapons in its arsenal, but is also modernizing its remaining forces. When the Soviet Union disbanded in 1991, Russia inherited approximately 35,000 nuclear weapons, a massive and sophisticated nuclear weapon infrastructure, and the world’s largest stockpile of fissile material.² As of late 2009, Russia had reduced its nuclear arsenal to approximately 4600 warheads in its operational arsenal—2,600 strategic and 2000 nonstrategic—with an additional 7,300 warheads in reserve or awaiting dismantlement. The anticipated START follow-on, if it enters into force, will further reduce deployed strategic warheads to between 1500 and 1675 and strategic launchers to between 500 and 1100. However, mirroring US national security policy, plans for modernization of Russia’s nuclear forces are underway. In a November 2009 speech, President Dmitry Medvedev announced that the Russian military would receive “more than 30 ballistic land- and sea-based missiles” and three nuclear submarines in 2010.³ This is in line with previously announced Russian intentions to continuously modernize all three legs its nuclear triad—land-based intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), submarines, and bombers, in order to maintain a “credible strategic deterrent force”.⁴

Russia’s sprawling nuclear weapons complex includes two major design centers and three research institutes under the Ministry of Atomic Energy’s Directorate of Nuclear Warhead Design and Testing;
a number of related research institutes under different agencies’ supervision; and various fissile and other radioactive materials production, processing, and storage facilities. Unlike the US “Stockpile Stewardship” programme, which is based on modifying and extending the service lives of existing warheads, maintenance of Russia’s nuclear stockpile has been based on the periodic reproduction of warheads. However, seemingly adopting the US method, in July 2009, President Medvedev announced that by 2011 Russia would develop supercomputers to monitor the effectiveness of its nuclear deterrent.

On 5 February 2010, Russia published its new Military Doctrine, which replaces a 2000 document. Despite concerns that the role of nuclear weapons might be expanded in the new Military Doctrine, the 2010 document essentially reaffirms the nuclear policies elaborated in 2000. Like its predecessor, the new Doctrine retains the first-use option, reserving the right to use nuclear weapons not only in response to a nuclear attack or an attack with biological or chemical weapons, but also in response to a conventional attack.

The new Doctrine places the expansion of NATO’s mission and movement of the military infrastructure of NATO member countries closer to the borders of the Russian Federation at the top of its list of external military dangers to Russia. It also identifies the deployment of strategic missile defence systems, the militarization of outer space, and the deployment of precision nonnuclear strategic weapon systems as threats that undermine global security.

The main mission assigned to nuclear weapons by the new Doctrine is deterrence, defined as the “prevention of nuclear military conflict or any other military conflict.” This mission assumes “the maintenance of strategic stability and the nuclear deterrence capability at the level of sufficiency.” The notion of “sufficiency” is defined as ability to inflict “predetermined” or “tailored” damage to an aggressor.

In a new development, the doctrine introduces the use of high-precision conventional weapons to provide for strategic deterrence, along with nuclear weapons. This is an indication that Russia plans to follow the US lead in developing a conventional global strike capability.
In April 2009, following US President Obama’s Prague speech, Russian President Medvedev signed a joint statement with Obama committing the “two countries to achieving a nuclear-free world.” In the May 2009 “Strategy of National Security until Year 2020,” President Medvedev also committed Russia to pursuing a world free of nuclear weapons.

Possibly reflecting these commitments, some analysts believe that the new Military Doctrine appears to somewhat reduce the role of nuclear weapons in Russia’s national security policy. For example, while the 2000 Doctrine foresaw resorting to nuclear weapons “in situations critical for [the] national security” of Russia, the 2010 version contains stricter language allowing for their use in situations when “the very existence of [Russia] is under threat.” In general, the 2010 Doctrine devotes less attention to the nuclear component of Russia’s armed forces than its predecessor.

However, at the same time President Medvedev signed the 2010 Military Doctrine, he also signed a classified companion document, “The Foundations of State Policy in the Area of Nuclear Deterrence until 2020.” There is no way to determine if Russia has constrained the use of nuclear weapons or exactly what its nuclear posture is unless Medvedev decides to declassify the second document.7


6 Norris and Kristensen, supra note 3.

If the danger of nuclear war is to be eliminated, ceasing to plan and build for an eternal nuclear threat must come early, not late, in the process, and it will have to be linked to a more general demilitarization and demobilization of US, Russian, European, and other major military forces. All states possessing nuclear arsenals should halt research, development, testing, and component production while reductions of arsenals are in progress, not afterwards. Production and research facilities should be subject to an intrusive verification regime at the earliest possible time. States should reduce nuclear arsenals in a manner that supports concurrent general disarmament of “conventional” forces.

Civil society and government leadership in non-nuclear weapon states need to recognize the dangers of uncritically endorsing the rhetorical “vision” espoused by the Obama administration, four horsemen, and other nuclear elites, and instead push forward a concrete agenda for nuclear disarmament to be pursued in tandem with non-proliferation measures. Within this concrete agenda for nuclear disarmament, these actors should recognize the paradoxically pro-nuclear weapon aims of the United States that can be accomplished through ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) under current conditions.

Taking this into account, disarmament NGOs in the United States and other nuclear weapon states should rigorously oppose funding for nuclear weapons research, design, and production and should oppose construction of any new nuclear weapons complex facilities as a condition of CTBT ratification. If this cannot be accomplished, perhaps it would be best to forgo CTBT ratification entirely, focusing instead on budget and infrastructure developments within nuclear weapon states.