

1

## Submission by End the Arms Race, Vancouver, Canada

Written by Michael D. Wallace, Vice – President

Professor of Political Science and Faculty Fellow, Liu Centre for the Study of Global Issues,  
University of British Columbia, Canada.

Ph: 604-822-4550

Fax: 604-822-5540

E-mail: [mdwallac@interchange.ubc.ca](mailto:mdwallac@interchange.ubc.ca)

---

On September 11, 2001, the whole world watched in horror as weapons of terror hit two large buildings, setting raging fires that caused their rapid collapse and the deaths of over 3,000 souls.

Now imagine this tragedy multiplied by 10 or even 100,000, with an entire city vapourized or incinerated literally within minutes, causing as many as a million deaths. It is hard to conceive of the malicious human force that could cause such a massive horror. Yet, it could readily happen by human agency, and in only one way; by the explosion of a single nuclear weapon. Astoundingly, at least eight countries possess collectively well over **10,000** such weapons, more than enough to destroy nearly every vestige of human civilization.

It is in this context that we must view the recently – released American “Nuclear Posture Review”, and more generally, the policy of the U.S. towards nuclear non – proliferation. This document is flawed in a number of critical ways.

First, the statement that the US will retain 3,800 nuclear warheads on active alert breaks the tentative agreement with Russia agreed to in November 2001, when the US promised to reduce the number of its warheads on alert to somewhere between 1,700 and 2,250, and Russia in turn would reduce to 1,500. Even the lower numbers would give the US de facto counterforce capability vis – à – vis the Russians, and the larger number makes this certain. Thus, the Russians have a renewed incentive to continue with their nuclear weapons development program, meanwhile maintaining their existing on – alert force in an increasingly unsafe condition.

Second, the US does not plan to destroy or render inactive all of the warheads taken off alert – an unspecified number would be retained as a “responsive force”, and if ordered could be re – activated to active status within weeks. While removing warheads from active status reduces the chance of accident, it must be emphasized that the NPR envisages a minimal change from the existing status quo.

This is true in several other ways as well. The US continues to refuse to ratify the CTBT, or even to give an informal undertaking not to resume testing should it perceive its strategic interests required it to do so. Linked to this refusal is another – it has not ruled out the development of new types of nuclear weapons, even though to do so would violate the Bush (Sr.) – Gorbachev agreement of 1991.

What is the impact of the 2002 NPR on the prospects for a strengthened NPT and nuclear disarmament in general? **The Leitmotif of the NPR is that nuclear weapons continue to represent important political currency for their owners**, and therefore as the hegemonic power the US must retain its dominant nuclear position.

**But the key purpose underlying the NPT is to deny political value to nuclear weapons.** How is one to convince a nation that perceives itself under strategic threat that the acquisition of nuclear capabilities is not a viable solution when the strongest military power on earth continues to view them as a key element of its global dominance?

In recent months, the US has, for all practical purposes, abandoned most of its commitments to multilateral international instruments, even ones such as the NPT that the US itself has historically played a central rôle in creating and strengthening. The new doctrine, as expressed by President George W. Bush in his recent State of the Union message, is that the US will by itself decide who is and who is not entitled to possess nuclear weapons, and will if necessary take unilateral military action against those states in the latter category should they defy the US fiat. The assumption is that US military power will be sufficient to deter those who would defy US unilateral edicts, and that the relative military weakness of its allies will force them to acquiesce.

But is it not just as likely that the high and essentially unchanged political value still placed on nuclear weapons by the hegemon will continue to stimulate nuclear programs throughout the world? The American doctrine has already led to ongoing nuclear modernization and buildups among existing nuclear powers such as Russia and China, and encouraged fledgling nuclear powers such as India and Pakistan. The logic which translates nuclear weapons into political influence has already led to clandestine nuclear weapons programs in the DPRK and Iraq. In time other nations who feel strategically threatened may conclude that the same logic compels them to break out of the NPT regime. The list of such nations is a long one, and includes, at a minimum, Japan, Taiwan, the ROK, Iran, Egypt, and Turkey. The deterrence effect of US belligerence on such efforts is real, but is significantly attenuated by the long history of US strategic intelligence failures, the events of September 11 being only the most recent and dramatic example.

As a practical matter, the vast disparity in military strength between the US and the rest of the world means that only the US can take meaningful initiatives in the arena of military policy. In the case of nuclear weapons, **the objective of those committed to arms control is clear; to reduce the political value of nuclear weapons by a sharp reduction in their numbers combined with significant changes in military doctrine reducing or eliminating US reliance on these weapons to achieve its security objectives.**

It is almost self – evident that the present Administration's goals are almost diametrically opposed to such changes. Consequently, nations historically committed to nuclear disarmament and non – proliferation must, more than ever, distance themselves from the current bellicose direction of US military policy. This will not be easy, as the language of threat and military rhetoric seem to dominate policy circles in Washington.

But the world simply cannot afford to mark time endlessly on nuclear arms control, disarmament, and non – proliferation until the American political scene changes. Since 1945 we have a remarkable streak of luck in that nuclear weapons have not been used in anger. But more than one commentator has likened the present situation to a gigantic game of Russian Roulette (or, as the Russians call it, Officers' Roulette). One can pull the trigger only so many times before a fatal catastrophe. Time to unload the gun.