

Renewal vs. Disarmament: Update on Disarmament Compliance

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In this presentation, we will focus on what we consider not only the most disturbing regressions but also positive developments in nuclear disarmament since the 2007 PrepCom, in order to provide context for the presentations that will follow.

The Nuclear Weapon States: Two Narratives

There are two competing narratives of the compliance of the NPT nuclear weapon states with their obligations to achieve nuclear disarmament under Article VI. According to the first narrative, the overall trend of global nuclear arsenals continues to be quantitatively downward, which is welcomed. In their statements to the multilateral disarmament fora, the nuclear weapons states claim this trend demonstrates their adherence to their disarmament obligations. However, there is a second and perhaps more important narrative. Arguably, this trend is a result mostly of economic considerations, the ongoing qualitative improvement of existing weapon systems, and the deployment of newer, more capable systems. Since the end of the Cold War, this trend has also been accompanied by large-scale investment in an increasingly globalized military-nuclear economy, driven by high technology elites that demand a long-term commitment to military-industrial spending that far exceeds Cold War levels. At the end of this cycle of reductions, the numbers of weapons will plateau in the thousands and this new number will represent the permanent balance of terror.

The following survey fleshes out the latter narrative:

United States

On 4 March 2008, General Kevin Chilton, Commander of US Strategic Command told reporters that he believes the United States will need nuclear weapons for the remainder of the 21st century, including modernized nuclear weapons to go with modernized delivery systems.¹ The warhead and delivery system modernizations referred to by General Chilton have been long under way, and continued throughout 2007.

Despite congressional cancellation of funding for the Reliable Replacement Warhead (RRW), Congress created a new program continuing research on the basis of studies completed on RRW, leaving the door open for possible new warheads. In the shadow of this debate, in 2007 the United States continued life extension programs to modernize its existing stockpile and, in some cases, improve their military capabilities.

In 2007, the United States continued to rebuild capacity to produce plutonium triggers and, for 2008, Congress continues to fund construction of a new plutonium facility at Los Alamos National Laboratory. In 2007, a decade-long effort to reestablish interim pit production at Los

¹ "As we look to the future—and I believe we are going to need a nuclear deterrent for this country for the remainder of this century, the 21st century—I think what we need is a modernized nuclear weapon to go with our modernized delivery platforms." General Kevin Chilton, Commander of US Strategic Command, quoted in "US needs nuclear weapons for rest of century: general," Agence France-Presse, 4 March 2008.

Alamos bore fruit. On 27 September 2007, the United States certified the first W88 warhead containing a replacement plutonium pit—this was the first such pit to be manufactured by Los Alamos in 18 years.

Throughout 2007, the United States continued a series of multi-billion-dollar modernization efforts related to its strategic delivery systems. Congress appropriated more than a billion dollars in 2008 for modernization and life extension of the Trident II D5 submarine-launched ballistic missile, to extend its service life through 2042 and to upgrade the missile's electronics, guidance, and reentry systems. The United States also continued a \$7–8 billion effort to modernize its Minuteman III intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), intended to improve the system's guidance, propulsion, and reentry systems, and to support its deployment through 2020 when the United States is expected to deploy a new delivery system.

Another disturbing trend has been the development of long-range delivery platforms for conventional use. In January 2007 the US Navy wrapped up an 18 month booster demonstration program of a new submarine-launched intermediate-range ballistic missile related to the Prompt Global Strike program.² Although the Navy requested additional funding to continue this work in 2008, amid domestic and international criticism of this conventional Trident concept, Congress limited the program in 2008 to research and development on a broader range of prompt global strike concepts.³

Russia

Russia maintains the largest nuclear stockpile and asserts a posture of “minimally sufficient” deterrence, envisioning the retention of nuclear weapons for the foreseeable future.

Throughout 2007, Russia continued to reduce the size of its nuclear stockpile, dismantling more than 35 of its Topol road-mobile ICBMs. These reductions, however, will be partially offset by the continued deployment of newer, more capable road-mobile Topol-M missiles. In February 2008, the Strategic Rocket Forces announced deployment of 11 new Topol-Ms by the end of 2008, which would bring the total number of deployed Topol-Ms to 65 by the end of 2008.⁴ Russia may place multiple warheads on its Topol-Ms after the expiration of START in 2009. In addition, Russia has also begun consideration of developing a new ICBM.⁵

In April 2007, Russia launched the first of its new Borey-class of nuclear ballistic missile submarines, with a second expected to come online in 2008. In 2006 Russia began construction

² As stated in US Defense planning and budget documents, the purpose of this program is to develop next generation strategic weapons to allow the United States to strike at any place on the globe within an hour.

³ Congress consolidated funding for related to Air Force and Navy prompt global strike programs into a single defense-wide program for research and development of “promising technologies” related to propulsion and guidance systems, mission planning, reentry vehicle design, modeling and simulation efforts, and launch system infrastructure. Congress provided \$100 million for this purpose for 2008.

⁴ Colonel General Nikolai Solovtsov, commander of Russia's Strategic Rocket Forces, quoted in “Topol-M deployment in 2008,” Russian strategic nuclear forces, 27 February 2008, www.russianforces.org/blog/2008/02/topolm_deployment_in_2008.shtml

⁵ Pavel Podvig, “The truth about Russia's military 'resurgence',” Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, 29 January 2008.

of a third Borey-class SSBN and plans to eventually begin a fourth. After repeated test failures in 2006, Russia certified its new Bulava SLBM for manufacture in 2007, conducting a partially-successful test of the missile. The missiles are to be deployed aboard the Borey-class submarines.

In January, after delays, Russia completed its first Tu-160 supersonic strategic bomber in almost eight years, bringing its total to 15. It also continues to slowly modernize its strategic aviation fleet.

Like the other nuclear weapon states, Russia continues to actively modernize its delivery systems and it maintains a robust testing program. In 2007, Russia conducted several tests of its Topol-M, including two configured with multiple independently targetable reentry vehicles. Russia has announced plans to conduct 11 missile test-launches in 2008, indicating it would double this rate after 2009.⁶

China

China continues to be the only NPT nuclear weapon state that is both qualitatively and quantitatively adding to its nuclear arsenal. An annual US intelligence report stated China's nuclear arsenal had increased by about a third since 2006 due to deployment of new intercontinental- and intermediate-range ballistic missiles, as well as nuclear-capable cruise missiles.⁷

In 2007, NGO experts reported China had launched two additional Type 094 SSBNs, bringing its total to three.⁸ US intelligence predicts China "will likely" build up to five additional Type 094 submarines by 2010.⁹ China's new sea-launched ballistic missile, the JL-2, is not expected to be ready for deployment before 2010.

France

On 21 March 2008, at a ceremony to launch the fourth of its newest class of SSBNs, President Sarkozy announced a reduction in France's air-based nuclear forces and called for pursuit of nuclear disarmament steps at the 2010 NPT Review Conference. These reductions are welcomed, as are France's high-level affirmations of disarmament.

⁶ Planned launches in 2008 include training and life-extension tests of the SS-25, SS-19, and SS-18 missiles, and two more development tests of the Topol-M. "Rocket forces launch plans for 2008," Russian strategic nuclear forces, 27 February 2008, www.russianforces.org/blog/2008/02/rocket_forces_launch_plans_for.shtml.

⁷ According to the report, new deployments included: less than ten 7200km-range DF-31s and less than ten 11,200km-range DF-31As, the latter of which has reportedly not been flight-tested; and 10–20 1800km-range DF-21s. The report also indicated China deployed 50–250 DH-10 cruise missiles, which can carry either a conventional or nuclear warhead, on 20–30 launchers. "Annual Report to Congress: Military Power of the People's Republic of China, 2008," Office of the Secretary of Defense, www.fas.org/nuke/guide/china/dod-2008.pdf.

⁸ Hans Kristensen, "Two More Chinese SSBNs spotted," FAS Strategic Security Blog, 4 October 2007, www.fas.org/blog/ssp/2007/10/two_more_chinese_ssbns_spotted.php.

⁹ US NGOs have expressed skepticism about this claim, however. Cf. Hans Kristensen, "Chinese Nuclear Arsenal Increased by a Third Since 2006, Pentagon Report Indicates," FAS Strategic Security Blog, 6 March 2008, www.fas.org/blog/ssp/2008/03/chinese_nuclear_arsenal_increa.php.

While France says it has reduced the size of its nuclear stockpile to half that of its Cold War arsenal, however, it also continues to modernize its nuclear forces. France has arrived at the deployment phase of a major effort to renew both its sea- and air-based nuclear capability.

France is continuing a posture of deploying four SSBNs. In March 2008, France launched its fourth Le Triomphant-class SSBN, which is expected to replace the last Le Redoutable/L'Inflexible-class SSBN. France also expects to begin taking delivery of new SLBMs with new warheads in 2010, for deployment aboard its submarines.

The French Air Force is expected to take delivery of its first squadron of the new Rafale F3 nuclear fighter-bomber in 2008. The French Navy is expected to take delivery of the carrier-based version of the Rafale F3 in 2009. The planes are to be equipped with a new cruise missile, the ASMP-A, which France expects to deploy aboard its Mirage 2000N fighter-bombers in late 2008. The cruise missiles, equipped with a new warhead, are expected to be deployed on the Rafale F3 around 2010.

United Kingdom

The United Kingdom's disarmament record has been arguably the brightest among the nuclear weapon states. Yet it has already set into motion its plans to retain nuclear weapons at least through mid-century.

The UK parliament decided in March 2007 to endorse the government's plans to begin development of new SSBN, to begin deployment by 2024. As part of that decision, the United Kingdom will participate in the US programs, described above, to modernize and extend the service life of its Trident II D5 missile system to 2042.

The Government's 2006 Defense White Paper, which also recommended replacement of the Trident missile submarines, also recommended the reduction of the UK stockpile to 160 warheads. Unlike the most recent US-Russia bilateral arms reductions agreement, the warheads withdrawn from the stockpile will be dismantled, making these reductions permanent.¹⁰

Our question to the United States, Russia, China, France, and even the UK—which we hope you will ask again and again during this PrepCom and the entire Review cycle—is “In what specific ways do these nuclear modernization programs fulfill your disarmament obligations under Article VI of the Treaty?”

Positive Developments: Increased Transparency

These prevailing trends aside, in addition to arsenal reductions there have been some positive developments that should be acknowledged. At last year's PrepCom, three nuclear weapon states

¹⁰ “The warheads that will be withdrawn from service won't simply sit on a shelf as a hedge against a future scenario – they will be truly dismantled.” Statement by UK Ambassador John Duncan to the 2007 NPT Preparatory Committee, 8 May 2007.

provided detailed information about the size and composition of their nuclear arsenals, which is a welcome transparency measure we hope is repeated this year by all five nuclear weapon states. Last year, the delegations of the nuclear weapon states also increased their level of interaction with civil society, engaging in a number of briefings and exchanges. We also hope this trend continues as such exchanges promote transparency and can contribute to the substance of deliberations leading into the 2010 Review Conference.

We are very interested in UK government initiatives to turn Britain into a “disarmament laboratory” and were particularly heartened by the election in May 2007 of a majority in the Scottish Parliament committed to getting rid of Trident and making Scotland—and the world—nuclear weapon free. We hope that the Scottish government’s newly-convened working group on “A Scotland Without Nuclear Weapons” can carry these nuclear free aspirations further, and believe that Scotland’s desire to become nuclear free should be supported by all states parties to the NPT.

We apologize for the brevity of this analysis of positive developments, and wish there were more to report.