

THE US NUCLEAR ARSENAL & ARMS CONTROL UNDER BUSH

Greenpeace International Briefing, April 30, 2001



INTRODUCTION

On May 1, 2001, President Bush will give a keynote speech in which he will outline plans for the deployment of a missile defence system dubbed Star Wars and also how deep he plans to cut the US nuclear arsenal. Nuclear reductions are long overdue, but the Bush Administration is also considering changes to nuclear posture that will make US nuclear forces even more dangerous and destabilizing in future, with a switch in targeting away from Russia towards China and studies for new, modernized nuclear forces.

Any nuclear reductions will be used by Bush to appease his European allies, such as France and Germany, which have been critical of Star Wars, fearing it will spark a new nuclear arms race and destroy existing and future arms control and disarmament agreements. Bush also has a pragmatic reason for doing this; he needs British and Danish radar facilities to deploy missile defence.

While any cuts in the US nuclear arsenal are welcome, their impact militarily, strategically and politically will be overwhelmed by the destabilising effect of deploying Star Wars. The Star Wars programme will upset the current global strategic balance, based around the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty, and provoke other nuclear states such as China to greatly expand their nuclear arsenals to overcome missile defence. China's regional rival, India, is likely to follow, leading to an intensified arms race with Pakistan.

Conventional global conflict could also be exacerbated by a United States that is more prepared to act aggressively militarily because of mis-placed confidence in the "shield" missile defense promises from adversaries. The US also plans to design and produce new nuclear weapons including a new warhead design for Trident, the submarine launched ballistic missile. Bush intends to increase the budget for design, development and production of nuclear weapons by four and a half percent to \$US 5,300 million.

In his 23 May, 2000 keynote pre-election address entitled "New Leadership on National Security" in Washington DC, President Bush said that the US needed "a new approach to nuclear security that matches a new era.....it is time to leave the Cold War behind, and defend against the new threats of the 21st century..."¹

"It should be possible to reduce the number of American weapons significantly further than what has been agreed... We should not keep weapons our military do not need. These unneeded weapons are the expensive relics of dead conflicts. And they do nothing to make us more secure..."²

Sadly, the Bush Administration, which is dominated by a number of 1980s Cold War warriors such as Vice-President Dick Cheney and Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, seems intent on

¹ Governor George W Bush during Question and Answer session after press conference on nuclear weapons and security policies, The National Press Club, Washington, DC, May 23, 2000

² Governor George W Bush, speech entitled "New Leadership on National Security", The National Press Club, Washington, DC, May 23, 2000

returning the international community to the kind of tensions seen during the Cold War rather than leaving them behind.

TOWARDS A LEANER, MEANER US NUCLEAR ARSENAL

Bush is expected to cut the US strategic nuclear arsenal from around 7,500 to below 2,500 warheads. But at the same time the Administration is considering major changes to US nuclear posture, which will make US nuclear forces even more dangerous and destabilizing in future.

- The US is reorienting its nuclear posture towards China, risking a dangerous arms race in the Far East.³
- US nuclear forces would be combined with missile defences in an “offensive and defensive” mix,⁴ thereby enabling the US to use nuclear weapons whilst minimizing the impact of reprisals.
- The US is pursuing a “counter-proliferation” strategy to “obstruct and deter” so called rogue states,⁵ including the possible use of nuclear weapons against non-nuclear adversaries and the potential first use of nuclear weapons.
- The US Navy is considering the need for a new generation of Trident submarine launched ballistic missiles, Trident III.⁶
- The US Air Force is exploring the idea of a new “Minuteman IV” intercontinental ballistic missile.⁷
- The Pentagon is studying whether to develop a new, low-yield nuclear weapon (a so-called “mini-nuke”) with an earth-penetrating nose cone to target hardened or buried targets.⁸ Deployment of a mini-nuke would blur the distinction between nuclear and conventional weapons, making the eventual use of nuclear weapons more likely.
- The Department of Energy is increasing its budget for designing, developing, maintaining and producing the US nuclear weapons stockpile to \$5.3 billion for FY2002 alone and Directors of the US Nuclear Weapons Laboratories are pushing for more.

In summary, Bush is promoting the Star Wars programme and developing new justifications and uses for new generations of nuclear weapons, while continuing to maintain a still massive nuclear arsenal shorn of those nuclear warheads that are obsolete anyway. At the same time the Administration is undermining international diplomatic efforts to control proliferation.

BUSH ON ARMS CONTROL AND NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT

In the first 100 days of the Bush administration the lack of commitment to international nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament regime is all too apparent:

- Bush wants to increase the budget for design, development and production of nuclear weapons by four and a half percent to USD\$5,300 million.
- On the global ban on nuclear testing Bush said - “...No, I don't support the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty...”⁹

³ Walter Pincus, “US Considers Shift in Nuclear Targets: Defense to Focus on China, Experts Say”, *Washington Post*, 28 April 2001.

⁴ Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld, Senate Confirmation Hearings, January 2001.

⁵ Joint Statement by President George W. Bush and Prime Minister Tony Blair, 23 February 2001.

⁶ William M. Arkin, “New Nukes”, *Washington Post*, 22 April 2001.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Walter Pincus, “US Studies Developing New Nuclear Bomb”, *Washington Post*, 15 April 2001.

⁹ Governor George W Bush during Question and Answer session after press conference on nuclear weapons and security policies, The National Press Club, Washington, DC, May 23, 2000

- Bush does not approve of the Anti Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty, described by many arms control experts as the cornerstone of global security:
"Now is the time not to defend outdated treaties but to defend the American people..."
- Bush has chosen to slash 20% off of Russian and Newly Independent States aid programs for nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament initiatives intended to curb a threat that a recent US Government Task Force described as "a clear and present danger" to the United States.¹⁰
- The Bush administration has, so far, chosen not to continue US engagement with North Korea.
*"We're taking stock of the agreement... We're looking to see if the assumptions (in the agreement) remain valid and does it need to be fine-tuned or do we need to change major elements of it."*¹¹
- Bush retains a strong commitment to possession of nuclear weapons not to nuclear disarmament:
*"I will never reduce the levels of... the nuclear stockpile... to a position where it would jeopardise our safety and security..."*¹²
- Bush has chosen to distance himself from China and has de-emphasised US diplomacy with Russia, choosing not to meet with President Putin until July, the seventh month of his Presidency.

THE US NUCLEAR ARSENAL

From a peak of more than 32,000 nuclear weapons in the US arsenal in the mid 1960s, estimates for the year 2000 put the US active arsenal at around 7,200 nuclear warheads¹³. This represents a destructive capacity equal to 65,000 bombs the size of that which destroyed the Japanese city of Hiroshima during World War II. The US has a further 5,500 nuclear warheads in reserve giving a total arsenal of 12,700.

The current US arsenal is estimated to consist of:¹⁴

- 7200 operational warheads – 5,600 for strategic (long-range) use and a further 1,600 warheads for tactical (short-range) purposes;
- 2,500 'augmentation' or 'hedge' warheads – this is a contingency stockpile available for redeployment;
- 3,000 in 'inactive reserve status' – these are warheads stored just in case there is a need to replace warheads in the active stockpile if they develop reliability or safety problems.

This compares with Russia's 6,300 strategic nuclear warheads and 4,000 tactical nuclear weapons, a total of 10,300 weapons. Of the other nuclear weapons states; France has 470 nuclear warheads, China 410 (although only 12 nuclear warheads are capable of striking the United States), the United Kingdom 200 and Israel 200. India is estimated to have enough nuclear material for 60 nuclear warheads and Pakistan enough fissile material to construct 35 nuclear warheads.¹⁵

¹⁰ "A Report Card on the Department of Energy's Nonproliferation Programs with Russia", The Secretary of Energy Advisory Board, US Department of Energy, January 10, 2001

¹¹ "N. Korea Nuclear Accord Part Of U.S. Policy Review," Reuters, Washington, 21 March, 2001

¹² Governor George W Bush during Question and Answer session after press conference on nuclear weapons and security policies, The National Press Club, Washington, DC, May 23, 2000

¹³ Nuclear Notebook, Bulletin of Atomic Scientists, March/April 2001

¹⁴ Taking Stock – Worldwide Nuclear Deployments 1998, p.11, William M Arkin, Robert S Norris, Joshua Handler, NRDC Nuclear Program, March 1998

¹⁵ Nuclear Notebook, Bulletin of Atomic Scientists, March/April 2001

The US's active nuclear weapons are deployed on 500 Minuteman III missiles, 50 MX/Peacekeeper missiles, 18 Trident submarines and air-launched cruise missile carrying B52s and bomb-carrying B2 aircraft. While aircraft and land-based missiles have been taken off a high state of alert, the US Trident submarine fleet still maintains at least nine or ten submarines at sea, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. At least half of these submarines are always within range of their selected target area.

STRATEGIC ARMS REDUCTION (START) TREATIES

In 1991 Russia and the United States signed the first Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START I). The US agreed to reduce its strategic nuclear arsenal from the 1990 level of about 13,000 warheads to about 8,500 and Russia agreed to cut from 11,000 strategic nuclear warheads to about 6,500.

Under the START II treaty, signed in January 1993, the US and Russia agreed to cut their deployed strategic forces to 3,500 warheads each and to ban the deployment of land-based missiles with multiple warheads. The United States and Russia have both ratified this treaty. However under both START I and II there was no agreement to dismantle the nuclear weapons taken out of service, only to remove the vehicles from which the warheads were launched. This was a major flaw in the agreement as either side at a later date, if relations deteriorated, could bring the warheads back on active alert. Another flaw in the arms control discussions between the United States and Russia is the lack of any agreement to reduce the number of tactical nuclear weapons.

In March 1997 at the US-Russian Summit in Helsinki, Presidents Clinton and Yeltsin agreed to negotiate a START III treaty, which would cut deployed strategic nuclear weapons of both countries to between 2,000 and 2,500, as soon as Russia ratified START II. In contrast to the earlier START treaties the US and Russia agreed to destroy the warheads deactivated under START III.

Even though Russia finally ratified START II in April 2000 these talks have yet to begin because of Russian opposition to the US missile defense program. Given the Bush administration's more distanced attitude towards Russia and its intention to proceed with missile defence there is little likelihood of these talks beginning anytime in the near future.

Even after the START II nuclear arms reduction are implemented the United States will have a nuclear force of Cold War proportions with up to seven nuclear warheads capable of annihilating each available Russian military target.

" When current reductions and upgrades are completed under START II (in the 2007 timeframe), the United States will retain 900 warheads with hard-target kill capability. In comparison, the Russian force in its START II day-to-day configuration will likely represent some 300 targets. Even adding supporting command and storage, there will be fewer than 500 targets for US nuclear planners to aim their 3,500 accountable START II warheads at. Such a level of overkill capability – potentially seven highly accurate warheads per target (if ignoring China) – is of Cold War proportions and difficult to justify for even the most hardened Cold [War] warrior. Other reasons for the overkill in the US

*enduring arsenal must be found outside Russia, primarily in China but increasingly also in "rogue states."*¹⁶

BUSH SLASHES BUDGET FOR NUCLEAR NON-PROLIFERATION PROGRAMMES

The US Department of Energy's (DOE) Office of Defense Nuclear Nonproliferation budget for fiscal year 2002 proposes a cut of 20 per cent or USD\$122 million, from the USD\$474 million of the previous year . Meanwhile spending on nuclear weapons at DOE has gone up by 4.6% to \$5.3 billion. The Office of Defense and Nuclear Non-Proliferation works to prevent the spread of materials, technology, and expertise relating to weapons of mass destruction (WMD). According to budget documents there is *"an on-going government wide review of Russian programs..."* which will determine the future, if any, for these programs.

Even before the Bush budget cuts, funding was described as "falling short of what is required to address the threat" by a government task force, appointed in February 2000 by the then US Energy Secretary Bill Richardson to review the Russian programmes. The task force co-chaired by Senate Republican Majority leader Howard Baker and former Clinton/Carter White House counsel Loyd Cutler concluded that:

"The most urgent unmet national security threat to the United States today is the danger that weapons of mass destruction or weapons-usable material in Russia could be stolen and sold to terrorists or hostile nation states and used against American troops abroad or citizens at home.

This threat is a clear and present danger to the international community as well as to American lives and liberties."

NEW NUCLEAR WEAPONS DEVELOPMENT

The US has embarked on a multi-billion dollar programme to retain the capability to design, develop, produce and deploy new nuclear warheads at any point in the future and it is certain to continue if not expand further the US nuclear arsenal under the Bush administration.

This programme, known as the *"Stockpile Stewardship Programme"* (SSP), aims to *"ensure that the US nuclear stockpile remains safe, secure and reliable without nuclear testing"*. It includes work to ensure significant qualitative improvements in the capability of most of the current US nuclear stockpile, including two replacement warhead designs for Trident.

By 2010 the US hopes to have in place, through the SSP:

- Several replacement designs and/or refurbishment options for all weapons in the current US nuclear arsenal;
- An "integrated, agile, rapid and expandable" warhead design and production system;
- An ability through established contingencies to resume underground nuclear testing, new weapons design and production and an expansion of tritium supply.
- A reliable source of tritium production (an essential ingredient for nuclear weapons) ;
- Enhanced surveillance and computational capabilities to predict the effects of ageing on nuclear weapons performance, reliability, safety and security;
- A smaller, more efficient infrastructure capable of meeting all US needs at a cost of no more than US\$4,500 million;

¹⁶ "US Nuclear Strategy Reform in the 1990s", Hans M Kristensen, Research Associate, The Nautilus Institute, prepared remarks for the international symposium: denuclearisation of Asia and the role of Japan issues of realising nuclear-free Asia, Tokyo, 18-19 December 1999

- Assured methods of replicating or replacing warhead components;

The US Department of Energy's proposed Fiscal Year 2002 budget for designing, developing, maintaining and producing the US nuclear weapons stockpile has been increased by \$230 million to a total of \$5,300 million compared with the previous year.

In the fiscal year 2001 budget legislation the military were asked to review the need for low-yield nuclear bombs which could penetrate deep underground to attack military targets such as underground command centres, the so-called "bunker busters". The recommendations from this review are to be submitted to Congress by July 1.

Given that the Bush administration are rationalising the numbers of targets and therefore the number of nuclear weapons required to destroy them, if the military conclude that they need such a weapon then it is highly likely that they will be given permission to do so.

CONCLUSION

President George W Bush is not a disarmer and any policies he announces on May 1 will not make the world a safer place, they will make it a more dangerous one. His policy towards nuclear non-proliferation and arms control is clearly one of isolation from not engagement with the international community.

The welcoming voices for any cuts he announces on May 1 will be drowned out by the condemnation he receives for pursuing a global missile defense system. His commitment to Star Wars will inevitably lead to a new nuclear arms race.

The Bush administration refuses to be bound by the international norm of multilateral treaties and international negotiation and agreement. Ignoring such norms allows Bush could increase the US nuclear arsenal again without the lengthy withdrawal process or the legal constraints that normally accompany treaties.

The only way that President Bush and his administration can prove they are committed to one day bringing about a world free of nuclear weapons is by:

- (a) scrapping the Star Wars programme;
- (b) halting all reviews of new nuclear warheads and delivery systems;
- (c) increasing aid to Russia and the Newly Independent States to safeguard their nuclear weapons and materials;
- (d) resuming talks with North Korea;
- (e) agreeing to begin immediate negotiation and implementation of a START III Treaty with Russia that will bring strategic nuclear warheads levels down to one thousand warheads on each side and that those warheads removed under START III are irreversibly destroyed;
- (f) Immediately sending to the House and Senate for ratification the global treaty that bans nuclear testing;
- (g) Restoring good relations with China.

FOR FURHTER INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:

WILLIAM PEDEN ON ++44-7801212992 OR MATT STEMBRIGE ON ++1-202-3192404