

The U.S. Removes The Nuclear Brakes

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Under the cloak of secrecy imparted by use of military code names, the American administration has been taking a big—and dangerous—step that will lead to the transformation of the nuclear bomb into a legitimate weapon for waging war.

Ever since the terror attack of Sept. 11, 2001, the Bush Administration has gradually done away with all the nuclear brakes that characterized American policy during the Cold War. No longer are nuclear bombs considered “the weapon of last resort.” No longer is the nuclear bomb the ultimate means of deterrence against nuclear powers, which the United States would never be the first to employ.

In the era of a single, ruthless superpower, whose leadership intends to shape the world according to its own forceful world view, nuclear weapons have become a attractive instrument for waging wars, even against enemies that do not possess nuclear arms.

Remember the code name “CONPLAN 8022.” Last week, the *Washington Post* reported that this unintelligible nickname masks a military program whose implementation could drag the world into nuclear war.

CONPLAN 8022 is a series of operational plans prepared by Startcom, the U.S. Army's Strategic Command, which calls for pre-emptive nuclear strikes against Iran and North Korea. One of the plan's major components is the use of nuclear weapons to destroy the underground facilities where North Korea and Iran are developing their nuclear weapons. The standard ordnance deployed by the Americans is not capable of destroying these facilities.

After the war in Afghanistan, it became clear that despite the widespread use of huge conventional bombs, “bunker-busters,” some of the bunkers dug by al-Qaeda remained untouched. This discovery soon led to a decision to develop nuclear weapons that would be able to penetrate and destroy the underground shelters in which the two member states of the “axis of evil” are developing weapons of mass destruction.

The explanation given by administration experts calls these “small” bombs, which would have a moderate effect on the environment. The effect of the bomb would not be



Defense Threat Reduction Agency

For the Bush/Cheney Administration, “which intends to shape the world according to its own forceful world view, nuclear weapons have become an attractive instrument for waging wars, even against enemies that do not possess nuclear arms.” This picture sequence shows a non-nuclear precision-guided munition test being performed against an underground facility.

discernible above ground, the radioactive fallout would be negligible, and the “collateral damage” caused to civilians would be minimal.

Accordingly, America’s deterrent credibility against the “rogue states” would grow, because it is clear that the U.S.

would allow itself to make use of these “small bombs”—as they would destroy the weapon sites but not cause the death of many civilians.

The war in Iraq, whose purpose was the destruction of Saddam Hussein’s development facilities and stockpiles of weapons of mass destruction, but which led to America’s miring in the Iraqi swamp, has increased the attraction of nuclear weapons. After all, it would have been much simpler and more logical to destroy Saddam’s facilities with a few “small bombs,” which would not have caused any real damage to the civilian population, than to become entangled in a ground war that has resulted in 150,000 American soldiers treading water in the Iraqi swamp.

The problem with this argument is that it is hopeless. To understand this, one may analyze the effect of a nuclear attack of the sort posited by American military strategists in CONPLAN 8022. Obviously, the U.S. would not use less than five to ten “small bombs” were it to attack Iran or North Korea, since, considering the number of relevant targets in the two countries, anything less would fail to achieve the goal of deterrence and prevention. According to the plan, each bomb would have a 10-kiloton yield—about two-thirds of that of the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Each detonation of a bomb a few meters underground would destroy most of the buildings on the surface to a range of two kilometers. After the explosion, there would be a need to quickly evacuate civilians from an area of 100 square kilometers, to avoid the deadly effects of the radioactive fallout; buildings, agricultural crops and livestock would be affected in an area of thousands of square kilometers, and depending on wind direction and velocity, there could be a need to evacuate more people from thousands of additional square kilometers.

None of this takes into account the political and psychological repercussions of using nuclear weapons for the first time in more than 60 years. The Bush Administration regards all this as “limited collateral damage.”

The nuclear policy that the Bush Administration continues to formulate, including plans for a pre-emptive nuclear strike against states that do not possess such weapons and the development of new nuclear weapons—is a recipe for disaster. It is a policy that blurs the line between conventional and nuclear war. This blurring could undermine the relative strategic stability that has set in since the Cold War.

In addition, the Bush Administration’s approach contains a message that is liable to encourage Iran and North Korea to reassess the contribution such a weapon would make to their own nuclear policies, possibly providing the incentive that would accelerate such development.

Herein lies an inherent contradiction in the American approach that on the one hand acts with commendable determination to prevent the proliferation of nuclear arms, but on the other hand, contributes toward it by adopting an irresponsible nuclear policy.