



Biden Administration's 'Nuclear Posture' keeps up war preparations

Special to the AAS

On 27 October the US Department of Defence released its 2022 Nuclear Posture Review (NPR), attached to the new National Defence Strategy.¹ It simultaneously published the Missile Defence Review. The publication of the non-classified versions of the three documents was delayed for months as the Pentagon reconsidered the US military posture in the context of ongoing fighting between the NATO-backed Kiev regime and Russian forces in Ukraine.

Like the NPRs of 2010 and 2018, the 2022 nuclear-weapons policy document rejects any pledge not to use nuclear weapons first in a conflict. It also continues the line set forth in the 2010 NPR, which stated, "The United States is ... not prepared at the present time to adopt a universal policy that deterring nuclear attack is the sole purpose of nuclear weapons". In other words, the USA might use nuclear weapons first, if it assessed that a conventional-weapons attack or other threat to "the vital interests of the United States, its allies, and partners" required it. The refusal to commit to "no first use" or "sole purpose", however, is more ominous in the setting of a characterisation of alleged threats from Russia and China in language even more extreme than that of the Trump Administration.

The 2018 NPR stated, "The United States does not wish to regard either Russia or China as an adversary and seeks stable relations with both." Now, China is presented solely as "the pacing challenge" (meaning the one that sets the pace) for US defence within "strategic competition", while Russia is "an Acute Threat".

The Biden document does not walk back from the heightened risk of strategic confrontation, but pushes it ahead.

No 'No First Use'

In January of this year, the USA joined China, Russia and the other permanent members of the UN Security Council, the P5, in a joint statement that "a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought".² But the NPR authors are on a different wavelength, writing, "No First Use and Sole Purpose policies ... result in an unacceptable level of risk, in light of the range of non-nuclear capabilities being developed and fielded by competitors that could inflict strategic level damage to US Allies and partners."

This formulation also runs counter to intentions stated earlier by President Joe Biden. The Federation of American Scientists has noted that during his presidential campaign in 2020, Biden pledged to establish that "the sole purpose of our nuclear arsenal is to deter—and if necessary, retaliate for—a nuclear attack against the United States and its allies."

The new NPR states, "While the United States maintains a very high bar for the employment of nuclear weapons, our nuclear posture is intended to complicate an adversary's entire decision calculus". In other words, potential adversaries

cannot be sure what we might do. The NPR claims that this ambiguous posture (explicitly called, in the 2018 document, "ambiguity regarding the precise circumstances that might lead to a US nuclear response") not only defends the US homeland, but is good for "deterring regional aggression with emphasis on the PRC (People's Republic of China) and Russia."

The United States will also seek to expand "integrated deterrence" by partnering its nuclear force with non-nuclear deterrents of allied and partner nations. In the "Indo-Pacific region" (the terminology the Pentagon insists on), the USA is promoting trilateral and quadrilateral cooperation with Japan, South Korea, and Australia to establish integrated nuclear and non-nuclear forces.

Former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, before his assassination in July, promoted a public debate over expanding nuclear forces for deterrence of North Korea and China, a plan that would involve the deployment of American nuclear weapons on Japanese soil in conjunction with enhanced Japanese conventional forces. The debate broached the possibility of Japan developing its own arsenal of nuclear weapons. The debate over developing nuclear weapons is even more advanced in South Korea.

Under the new US Nuclear Posture Review, the USA pledges that any North Korean use of nuclear weapons will mean "the end of that regime".

Matching weapons with doctrine

The NPR provides a limited profile of the new generation of nuclear weapons that the USA is deploying, leaving further detail to the classified version submitted to the President and Congress.

Washington has allocated hundreds of billions of dollars to nuclear weapons modernisation. Among the new weapons, some of them carried forward from the 2018 NPR and now reaching the point of deployment:

- W76-2 low-yield submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM) warheads.
- A new generation of strategic bombers, including the B-52H and B-21.
- Long-Range Stand-Off W80-4 warheads to be fired from fighter jets.
- F35A stealth fighter jets to replace the aging F-16 fleet with dual options (fire nuclear or conventional weapons).
- Replacement of the Minuteman III Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) fleet with 400 new Sentinel ICBMs.
- Replacement of *Ohio*-class nuclear submarines with 12 new *Columbia*-class nuclear submarines.

The USA is currently deploying F-35A stealth fighter aircraft to Europe, along with the new generation of theatre nuclear weapons, the B61-12. The B61-12 air-drop gravity bomb was designed to deliver a range of nuclear explosives, with a "dial-a-yield" system to determine the lethality of the nuclear detonation. The bombs have an advanced guidance system and fins for manoeuvrability, allowing them to be dropped from fighter jets distant from targets.

On 26 October 2022, *Politico* reported that the Pentagon

Continued page 14

1. "Biden Administration revives Cold War's 'Truman Doctrine'" and "B52s, NATO integration: Albanese courts WWII on two fronts", AAS, 9 Nov. 2022, discussed highlights of the National Defence Strategy in connection with the new National Security Strategy, which preceded it by two weeks.
2. "Anglo-American war hawks push showdown with Russia", AAS, 12 Jan. 2022.

Biden Administration's 'Nuclear Posture' keeps up war preparations

From page 13

had moved up the deployment date of the B61-12 bombs to Europe. "The United States has accelerated the fielding of a more accurate version of its mainstay nuclear bomb to NATO bases in Europe, according to a US diplomatic cable and two people familiar with the issue. The arrival of the upgraded B61-12 air-dropped gravity bomb, originally slated for next spring, is now planned for this December, US officials told NATO allies during a closed-door meeting in Brussels this month, the cable reveals."

One hundred of the new-generation B61-12 nuclear bombs will be deployed to sites in Germany, Italy, Belgium, Netherlands, and Turkey.

Heightened risks

For years the Western media has charged that Russia has adopted a first use nuclear doctrine called "escalate to de-escalate". The idea was that Russia would launch a limited nuclear strike to force NATO to make concessions before things escalated to full-scale strategic nuclear Armageddon. But reference to this claim was removed from the new NPR, an indication that the Pentagon knows the reports are false. The "escalate to de-escalate" formula had been highlighted in the 2018 NPR.

Nonetheless, the danger of uncontrolled nuclear war by miscalculation is of growing concern. On 18 March of this year, MIT nuclear scientist Theodore Postol told a Committee for the Republic event in Washington, DC, that the performance gap between the American and Russian satellite

early detection systems is so great, that Moscow could misread or miss altogether a US launch and resort to an automatic full-scale retaliatory strike, even if the USA had not in reality launched a nuclear attack. The US military has a global look-down satellite system that provides early detection of missile launches from any location around the world. Russia's far more limited satellite tracking system is focused on a narrow area in North Dakota and Montana where the USA has its ICBM launch sites.

This is not a merely hypothetical danger. Recently American *Ohio*-class nuclear weapons-armed submarines surfaced in the Arabian Sea and near Gibraltar at the mouth of the Mediterranean. From either location, nuclear weapons launched at Moscow or other Russian targets would be minutes away.

The heightened danger of miscalculation has prompted US and Russian officials to resume talking, and to restore military-to-military channels. The stalled negotiations on a new strategic nuclear weapons reduction treaty to supersede the New START Treaty, which expires in 2026, are about to be resumed. Diplomats will be meeting in Egypt starting 29 November to resume negotiations that were ended soon after the Russians launched their special military operation in Ukraine.

These limited steps, taken while NATO's support for Ukraine is maintained—even after the Ukrainians tried to blame Russia for their own missile landing in Poland—serve to underscore that the danger of miscalculation or misunderstanding is present and real.