Reliable Replacement Warhead: Does the United States Need a New Breed of Nuclear Weapon?

Events

Arms Control Association Press Briefing
Tuesday, April 25, 2006
1:00 - 2:30 P.M.
Henry L. Stimson Center Conference Room, 12th Floor
1111 19th Street, NW

TRANSCRIPT OF BRIEFING WITH QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

The Department of Energy and U.S. nuclear weapons laboratories are proceeding with a program, the Reliable Replacement Warhead (RRW), to develop new nuclear warheads to substitute for existing warhead designs. They say the initiative is supposed to lead to warheads that are safer, more certain of working, and easier to produce and maintain. Proponents of RRW herald it as crucial for transforming the nuclear complex and preserving U.S. deterrent capabilities in the coming decades.

However, U.S. officials regularly say that the U.S. stockpile is safe and reliable. And the future viability of U.S. nuclear forces is not dependent upon developing a costly generation of new warheads. But RRW could lead to a resumption of U.S. nuclear testing, especially if weapons designers veer away from proven designs. If the United States resumed nuclear testing or pursued warheads for new military missions, it could lead other countries to follow suit, causing irreparable damage to the global nonproliferation regime and diminishing U.S. security.

Panelists:

Richard L. Garwin, IBM Fellow Emeritus at the Thomas J. Watson Research Center. Dr. Garwin will assess possible technical options for a RRW design, what types of changes could be done without requiring nuclear proof testing, and whether they would be necessary or worthwhile.

Ivan Oelrich, Vice President for Strategic Security Project at the Federation of American Scientists. Dr. Oelrich will explain why Congress has sought to restrict the RRW program so it does not lead to new military capabilities for new attack missions.

Robert W. Nelson, Senior Scientist at the Union of Concerned Scientists. Dr. Nelson will discuss the safety and reliability of the existing U.S. nuclear stockpile and why the RRW program is unnecessary.

Daryl G. Kimball, Executive Director of the Arms Control Association will moderate the discussion.

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The Arms Control Association is a nonprofit membership organization dedicated to promoting effective arms control policies.
U.S. Nuclear Weapons

Posted: April 25, 2006

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