Lots of Hedging, Little Leading: An Analysis of the Congressional Strategic Posture Commission Report

Hans M. Kristensen and Ivan Oelrich

Among the flood of security policy reports issued in recent months, one of the most anticipated has been the one from the Congressional Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States.[1] The panel, which Congress established last year, is a bipartisan, 12-member group of policy veterans, headed by former Secretaries of Defense William Perry, the commission's chairman, and James Schlesinger, the vice chairman. The report, released May 6, is supposed to help guide the Obama administration's Nuclear Posture Review (NPR), which is scheduled to be completed within the next year.

According to the law that created the commission, the report is to provide a review of the U.S. strategic posture, including a threat assessment and "a detailed review of nuclear weapons policy, strategy, and force structure." The back cover of the report says, "Twenty years after the end of the Cold War and with the arrival of the new administration in Washington, it is time to think through fundamental questions about the purposes of nuclear deterrence and the character of the U.S. strategic posture."

That statement is certainly true, but the commission's report is, overall, a conservative and cautious document, arguing largely for maintaining the status quo, perhaps with minor adjustments, into the indefinite future. Anyone hoping for fundamental change in the direction of the nuclear policy and posture of the United States will be disappointed.

The report is modest in its ambitions and views the United States as strangely passive or, at best, reactive. It gives more emphasis to describing how the world is today and how the United States must accommodate itself to those realities than to suggesting how the United States might aggressively seek to transform the world's nuclear reality. The report sees the world as dangerous but manageable; the nonproliferation regime is threatened but not necessarily about to collapse. The future, as far as the commission can see, will be very much like the present. In defining the balance between nonproliferation and "deterrence" policies, between leading with arms control initiatives and hedging by retaining strong nuclear forces, the commission muddles its message. The report states that all members of the commission supported "programs that move in two parallel paths—one path which reduces nuclear dangers by maintaining our deterrence, and the other which reduces nuclear dangers through arms control and international programs to prevent proliferation." The metaphor of "parallel paths" is unfortunate because parallel paths never intersect, and in this case, they actually conflict.

The report acknowledges the conflict:

[C]ooperation of other nations increasingly depends on whether these nations perceive that the U.S. and Russia are moving to seriously reduce the salience of nuclear weapons in their own force posture and are continuing to make significant reductions in their nuclear arsenal. This has been called into question with the new nuclear programs and rhetoric in Russia, the debate in the U.S. about nuclear weapons being used for tactical roles (nuclear bunker busters) and by a perceived stall in formal arms control treaties. Thus U.S. nuclear forces must be postured to have the needed deterrence benefits but also to promote the international cooperation needed for preventing and rolling back proliferation.[2]
Thus, on one path the report recommends a strong push via the nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) regime to prevent other countries from acquiring nuclear weapons. On the other path, the report recommends only "modest" reductions in nuclear arsenals, saying that nuclear weapons should be retained for the "indefinite future." Unlike the recent bipartisan Council on Foreign Relations task force that strongly endorsed U.S. ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) (see Table 1), the commissioners were split on whether to recommend U.S. ratification of the treaty, and the commission calls for an increase in U.S. nuclear weapons production capacity. Such positions would make it more difficult to get international support for nonproliferation and give ammunition to those who want to block it.

The commission's report spans too wide a range of issues, from nuclear forces to infrastructure to ballistic missile defense, to address all of them thoroughly in one article. We will focus on nuclear forces, which, given the START follow-on negotiations and upcoming NPT review conference in 2010, probably constitute the most urgent nuclear issue facing the administration and the international community. The report complicates both efforts.

Small Reductions, No Disarmament

At a first glance, the report appears to favor reductions in the number and mission of nuclear weapons, stating that "[t]he moment appears ripe for a renewal of arms control with Russia, and this bodes well for a continued reduction in the nuclear arsenal" and that "[t]he opportunities to engage China are also significant." The report also says that the United States "should reaffirm its commitment to end the arms race and work to create the conditions that might enable nuclear disarmament in the context of general and complete disarmament."[3]

Yet, these endorsements come with so many caveats, reservations, and cautions that they quickly become very difficult or even unattainable. "The United States and Russia should pursue a step-by-step approach and take a modest first step to ensure that there is a successor to START I when it expires at the end of 2009. Beyond a modest incremental reduction in operationally deployed strategic nuclear weapons, the arms control process becomes much more complex as new factors are introduced," the commission warns.[4]

Only reserve warheads can potentially be reduced unilaterally, the report says, but even that comes with the condition "if the nuclear infrastructure is refurbished,"[5] which can be read as "only if warhead production capacity is boosted."

Despite its significance to the nonproliferation agenda and the future of the NPT regime, the report comes close to dismissing the prospect of global elimination of nuclear weapons as utopian: "The conditions that might make possible the global elimination of nuclear weapons are not present today and their creation would require a fundamental transformation of the world political order." In fact, the report does not even begin down the path toward elimination. The chairman's introduction explicitly states that "some of the commissioners do not accept the feasibility or even the desirability of seeking global elimination," and the commission as a whole seems to have adopted their view by concluding that the United States should retain a viable nuclear deterrent for the "indefinite future."[6] The indefinite future is a long time.

By effectively dismissing the realization of the disarmament goals in Article VI of the NPT[7] and the expectations of the vast majority of NPT member states, the commission undercuts the broader international security value of further reductions in the number and role of U.S. nuclear weapons. The commission's recommendation to retain nuclear weapons for the indefinite future is even more remarkable given that the commission warns of a "turning point" in nuclear nonproliferation that demands strong U.S. leadership, beginning with the 2010 NPT Review Conference. The statement is also completely at odds with a recent declaration from the five countries that the NPT designates as nuclear-weapon states. In the May 15 statement at the NPT preparatory committee meeting in New York, China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States reiterated their "enduring and unequivocal commitment to work towards nuclear disarmament."[8]

The commission's reticence on the subject contrasts sharply with the influential 2007 and 2008 Wall...
Street Journal essays by Perry, Henry Kissinger, Sam Nunn, and George Shultz, calling for a world free of nuclear weapons. Those essays argued that such a goal was not impossible. At the same time, they acknowledged that reaching the goal would certainly take time and hard work and that the path to that ultimate goal might not be clear today. Even with an uncertain path, however, the steps needed to move in that direction would enhance U.S. and global security today. The authors of the essays cited CTBT ratification, deep cuts in nuclear arsenals, and removal of nuclear weapons from alert as examples of such actions.[9]

Barack Obama largely adopted the four statesmen's nuclear weapons policy recommendations during the presidential election campaign and has continued to advocate many of them as president. On April 5, in a speech in Prague, Obama stated "clearly and with conviction America's commitment to seek the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons." He pledged that the United States would "reduce the role of nuclear weapons in [its] national security strategy and urge others to do the same." He also vowed to quickly reduce U.S. and Russian arsenals to "set the stage for further cuts" in collaboration with "all nuclear weapon states."[10]

The commission report offers little support for this vision of "an end to end Cold War thinking," as Obama put it. This is surprising because it was issues such as the proposals to build the Robust Nuclear Earth Penetrator and Reliable Replacement Warhead and the efforts to incorporate pre-emptive strike options into U.S. nuclear doctrine that triggered the legislation that created the commission in the first place.

If the commission does not agree that global elimination of nuclear weapons is a realistic goal, then whether a decision today about nuclear force structure takes us closer to that goal can hardly serve as a criterion. In the chairman's introduction, Perry likened eliminating nuclear weapons to climbing a mountain: Perhaps we cannot see the cloud-shrouded mountaintop of complete, global elimination, but we can start up the mountain and establish a "base camp." The commission as a whole not only finds the peak obscured by clouds but, from here, cannot even see the base of the mountain, and some commission members think we should not start climbing even if we could find it. Global nuclear elimination had no role as an organizing principle in this report, which seems preoccupied with managing the status quo.

The Nuclear Mission

The report concludes that "as long as other nations have nuclear weapons, the U.S. must continue to safeguard its security by maintaining an appropriately effective nuclear deterrent force,"[11] but the commission fails to ask fundamental questions about what nuclear weapons are for and what their character should be. Maybe there was no consensus on these matters, but it would have been better to ask the question and admit the panel had no answer than simply to state over and over that nuclear weapons are for "deterrence" and that we have to have them because others have them.

The "as long as other nations" formula is an assertion that should be challenged but is not. Does this really mean that if North Korea has one nuclear bomb, intended to counter overwhelming U.S. conventional capability, the United States needs to have nuclear weapons to counter it? That may be true, but it is certainly not clear to us and should not be asserted as though it needs no explanation.

Elsewhere, the report says the United States faces decisions about how to reduce "nuclear weapons to the absolute minimum."[12] These sorts of statements are so vague they are meaningless. Two honest people could agree on this goal and differ by a factor of a hundred or a thousand on what constitutes an "absolute minimum." When the United States had 32,000 nuclear weapons, that was also considered the "absolute minimum" needed for national security.

Without examination of the mission of nuclear weapons, how can we say what their characteristics should be? Even if nuclear weapons are for deterrence, how do they deter? What are their targets? How should those targets be attacked and for what purpose? If we do not answer or even ask those questions, how can we say that we need high levels of warhead reliability? How can we say we need a triad of nuclear systems, many of which can be launched on a moment's notice? How can we say we need a vast nuclear weapons complex to design advanced two-stage thermonuclear weapons with hundreds of kilotons of yield? There are other examples as well, dealing with reliability, safety,
and so on, that presume missions and capabilities for nuclear weapons that are simply not analyzed.

The commission acknowledges that it is difficult to replicate the "relatively simple" deterrence calculus of the Cold War, determined by the damage inflicted, in today's much more complicated security environment. Yet, the report apparently is doing that, asserting that the United States still "needs a spectrum of nuclear and non-nuclear force employment options and flexibility in planning along with the traditional requirements for forces that are sufficiently lethal and certain of their result to threaten an appropriate array of targets credibly." The justification for this sweeping conclusion about capabilities is that "the security environment has grown more complex and fluid."[13] If it is so new and confusing, why does the commission recommend capabilities that are similar to those of the past?

As with many discussions of nuclear weapons, the commission's use of the term "deterrence" is confused and the logic self-referential. The report is filled with explicit declarations that nuclear weapons are for deterrence and, from there, slips into the error of assuming that deterrence must be nuclear deterrence. It repeatedly refers to U.S. nuclear forces as the "deterrent" or the "deterrent forces" as though they were the same thing. Nuclear weapons designers, according to the report, are maintaining their "deterrent skills."

In describing the role of deterrence, the commission glosses over many important developments that have shaped U.S. nuclear policy, strategy, and doctrine over the years. "In a basic sense, the principal function of nuclear weapons has not changed in decades: deterrence. The United States has these weapons in order to create the conditions in which they are never used," the report declares.[14] Yet, we recall hugely important developments such as mutual assured destruction, flexible response, adaptive planning, global strike, and pre-emptive strike options, all of which changed the policies and conditions under which the weapons might be used.[15] The report's more accurate statement would be, "Over many decades, presidents have not changed their reluctance to authorize use of nuclear weapons." The unthinking use of the word "deterrence" does not clarify the debate.

Likewise, the report does not describe the important development after the end of the Cold War, where U.S. nuclear targeting policy expanded from Russia and China and their satellite states to deterring use of any weapons of mass destruction by six individual countries, some of which do not have nuclear weapons.[16]

Nonuse, First Strike, and Alert

A particularly important conclusion in the commission report, with which we agree, is that the tradition of nonuse of nuclear weapons serves U.S. interests and should be continued.[17] What that implies for policies and capabilities is not explained. In fact, the commission concludes that not only must U.S. nuclear forces be able to retaliate against an attack, but "the United States must also design its strategic forces with the objective of being able to limit damage from an attacker if a war begins." Such damage-limitation capabilities "are important because of the possibility of accidental or unauthorized launches by a state or attacks by terrorists" and can be achieved "not only by active defenses, such as missile defenses, but also by the ability to attack forces that might yet be launched against the United States or its allies."[18] How the United States is going to anticipate an accidental launch and know to destroy the soon-to-be offending weapon is left as an exercise for the reader.

First-strike planning can be used against other nuclear-weapon states, as it was during the Cold War against the Soviet Union and China. For the commission to advocate such a mission for nuclear forces today, however, is deeply troubling because fear of a first strike is a primary reason that Russia insists it must have large numbers of nuclear weapons on alert, a dangerous posture that is a direct threat to the interest of the United States and its allies.

Nonetheless, the report flatly rejects the idea that U.S. or Russian nuclear forces should be taken off alert. In doing so, the commission insists that U.S. nuclear forces are not on "hair trigger alert," a phrase frequently used in the public debate to describe the alert posture that keeps nuclear weapons on high alert ready to launch in minutes.[19] "This is simply an erroneous characterization
of the issue. The alert postures of both countries are in fact highly stable. They are subject to multiple layers of control, ensuring clear civilian and indeed presidential decision-making."[20] Yet, whether weapons are under their nation's control does not address the question of whether they are ready for rapid launch or why they need to be on alert.

The commission does seem to acknowledge that alert forces present a challenge, and it recommends "increasing the decision time and information available" to the U.S. and Russian presidents so that they do not authorize launch of the alert weapons by mistake. On the U.S. side, the commission concludes that increasing the president's decision time would be sufficient but remains "even more concerned about the possibility that the president of Russia might authorize a launch as a result of decision made in haste that is deliberate but mistaken." That could be fixed, the report argues, by improving the Russian warning systems.[21] not by reducing the alert status of U.S. weapons.

**The "Resurgence" of Russia**

After nearly two decades of the Clinton and Bush administrations insisting that Russia is not an adversary and not an immediate contingency for setting U.S. nuclear force levels—we have even heard officials say that planning against Russia does not affect the size of the U.S. arsenal at all—the commission at least admits that Russia largely drives the U.S. nuclear posture. "The sizing of U.S. forces remains overwhelmingly driven by the requirements of essential equivalence and strategic stability with Russia," the report says.[22]

Thus, the commission essentially reinstates Russia as a central pillar in U.S. nuclear posture planning. Numerous other references to Russia throughout the report underscore this shift, including that "the United States should not abandon strategic equivalency with Russia," the United States "should not cede to Russia a posture of superiority in the name of deemphasizing nuclear weapons in U.S. military strategy," and the United States should "retain enough capacity, whether in its existing delivery systems and supply of reserve warheads or in its infrastructure, to impress upon Russian leaders the impossibility of gaining a position of nuclear supremacy over the United States by breaking out of an arms control agreement."[23]

To a certain extent, this view returns the United States and Russia to an adversarial relationship and a nuclear arms competition that the commission seems to accept and to be surprisingly flummoxed about how to end.

Although the commission says there is no risk of an imbalance emerging in strategic weapons in the near term, the situation is quite different with nonstrategic weapons. The commission does not know how many shorter-range, or "tactical," nuclear weapons Russia has, and it cannot say how many the United States has because the number is a secret. It also acknowledges that strict U.S.-Russian equivalence in nonstrategic-force numbers is unnecessary. Nevertheless, it warns that the current imbalance is stark and will become apparent as strategic weapons are reduced. This, the report correctly concludes, "points to the urgency of an arms control approach" involving nonstrategic weapons.

**Rising China**

China looms in the background in many parts of the report, reflecting uneasiness among the commission members about the direction China is taking with its military modernization. Yet, how that direction relates to the U.S. nuclear posture is not analyzed. Even so, the commission concludes, in addition to being able to deal with Russian and regional scenarios, the United States "should also retain a large enough force of nuclear weapons that China is not tempted to try to reach a posture of strategic equivalency with the United States or of strategic supremacy in the Asian theater."[24] In other words, a form of arms race apparently does exist between the United States and China, but no analysis is offered for how the nuclear posture is supposed to function in U.S.-Chinese scenarios, only that it is supposed to deter.

Curiously, the commission is so concerned about China's potential nuclear capacity that it urges that Russia, with which it is otherwise concerned, not reduce its nuclear forces too much. This perverted
logic is a mild, reversed version of the Reagan administration's policy that sought China as a nuclear deterrence partner against the Soviet Union.

Extended Deterrence

The commission report gives much attention to the need to reassure friends and allies by extending nuclear deterrent guarantees. This mission, which has a special legitimacy because it is cast as a nuclear mission that actually reduces countries' incentives to acquire nuclear weapons, is likely to be one of the key arguments for retaining nuclear forces. The commission paints a dire picture:

One crucial element [of the concept of deterrence] is extended deterrence and the assurance this provides to allies and partners of the United States.... [T]heir assurance remains a top U.S. priority in the current security environment and there are some important new challenges to extended deterrence associated with Russia, China, and proliferation. Some U.S. allies believe that extended deterrence requires little more than stability in the central balances of nuclear power among the major powers. But other allies believe that their needs can only be met with very specific U.S. nuclear capabilities. This point was brought home vividly in our work as a commission. Some allies located near Russia believe that U.S. non-strategic forces in Europe are essential to prevent nuclear coercion by Moscow and indeed that modernized U.S./NATO forces are essential for restoring a sense of balance in the face of Russia's nuclear renewal. One particularly important ally has argued to the commission privately that the credibility of the U.S. extended deterrent depends on its specific capabilities to hold a wide variety of targets at risk, and to deploy forces in a way that is either visible or stealthy, as circumstances may demand.[25]

Nevertheless, the report, in our estimation, seriously understates the complexity of arriving at arrangements for allied reassurance. During the Cold War, the United States and European allies engaged in complex back-and-forth negotiations about plans for nuclear deployments. In fact, the United States has significant leeway in promoting or downplaying the role of nuclear weapons in reassurance. Assurance of allies involves a wide range of capabilities and measures, most of which have nothing to do with nuclear weapons, yet the commission report portrays assurance as essentially a nuclear matter. The report further recommends existing and future nuclear capabilities with little analysis of the validity of these claims. Indeed, "the requirement to extend assurance and deterrence to others may well impose on the United States an obligation to retain numbers and types of nuclear weapons that it might not otherwise deem essential to its own defense."[26]

The report greatly skews the views of the allies by selectively including some but excluding others. Even those that are mentioned are portrayed only as opposed to deep cuts, even though the overwhelming majority of the allies in NATO have repeatedly and consistently called for the elimination of nuclear weapons and many allies have called for the withdrawal of nuclear weapons from Europe. In Germany, Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier recently called for a dialogue on the withdrawal of nuclear U.S. weapons from Europe,[27] the Belgian Senate in 2005 unanimously called for a withdrawal,[28] and opinion surveys indicate that an overwhelming majority of Europeans want the weapons out.[29] Likewise, in Asia, Japan has long been a vocal advocate for elimination of nuclear weapons. On April 27, Prime Minister Taro Aso outlined an 11-point plan for global nonproliferation and disarmament. Unfortunately, the commission ignores these important allied voices.

The report recommends increased consultations between the United States and its allies on extended deterrence. All NATO member states except France already participate in ongoing and detailed nuclear consultations in the Nuclear Planning Group, which is the ultimate authority within NATO on nuclear policy issues. This consultation covers a broad range of nuclear policy matters, including the safety, security, and survivability of nuclear weapons, communications, and information systems, as well as deployment. It also covers wider questions of common concern, such as nuclear arms control and nuclear proliferation.

So why is there a need for more consultation? We agree that there is a problem in NATO's decade-long refusal to discuss in detail the future of nonstrategic nuclear weapons in Europe. Some NATO members, especially Canada and Germany, still have scars from the beating they received in 1998 when they dared propose that NATO reassess its nuclear policy. We do not believe the reluctance to
confront head-on the question of nuclear deployment in Europe reflects any uncertainty about U.S. guarantees. In our view, the main factor is a dread of the complexity of negotiating any change in the status quo.

Japan is also held forward, although mostly anonymously, by the commission as an ally with great reservations about future U.S. nuclear reductions and concerns about the credibility of the extended deterrent. The United States withdrew nonstrategic nuclear weapons from the Pacific in 1992 and scrapped most of them, retaining a small number of sea-launched cruise missiles in storage on land. Fewer than a dozen attack submarines are equipped to deliver the missiles, which are but a tiny fraction of the U.S. nuclear posture in the Pacific.[30] Even so, the commission report says that

[i]n Asia, extended deterrence relies heavily on the deployment of nuclear cruise missiles on some Los Angeles class attack submarines-the Tomahawk Land Attack Missile/Nuclear (TLAM/N). This capability will be retired in 2013 unless steps are taken to maintain it. U.S. allies in Asia are not integrated in the same way [as NATO is] into nuclear planning and have not been asked to make commitments to delivery systems. In our work as a commission it has become clear to us that some U.S. allies in Asia would be very concerned by TLAM/N retirement.[31]

Although there might be a need to consult more closely with Asian allies about the nature of the U.S. extended deterrent, we agree with other commentators[32] that this alleged Asian concern over potential retirement of the TLAM/N is overstated and reflects the view of a few individuals in the Japanese government and the commission.

**Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty**

Obama and the international community are adamant about the importance of U.S. ratification of the CTBT. It is therefore very unfortunate that the CTBT was the one major issue on which the commission could not reach consensus. The report contains two parallel position summaries, pro and con. The anti-CTBT arguments come down to two parts: an old and unsubstantiated assertion that other countries, particularly Russia and China, interpret the treaty's prohibition on "all nuclear test explosions" differently than the United States does and that they can conduct militarily significant tests at very low yields without detection.

The CTBT itself does not define "nuclear explosion," but its meaning is clear to all negotiating parties. As U.S. CTBT negotiator Ambassador Stephen Ledogar said in his testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in October 1999,

I have heard some critics of the Treaty seek to cast doubt on whether Russia...committed itself under treaty law to a truly comprehensive prohibition of any nuclear explosion.... In other words, did Russia agree that hydronuclear experiments would be banned, and that hydrodynamic explosions (which have no yield because they do not reach criticality) would be banned? The answer is a categorical 'yes.' The Russians, as well as the other weapon states, did commit themselves.[33]

Some commissioners also assert that "the CTBT is unverifiable" and "even a 'zero-yield' CTBT could not prevent countries from testing to develop new nuclear warfighting capabilities or improve existing capabilities."[34]

This argument misses the point on verification and implies that low-yield tests are militarily significant. Verification of arms control agreements does not have to achieve 100 percent certainty to be effective. The goal is to achieve high confidence that militarily significant activities can be detected.[35] This means that potential cheaters must consider the reality that there is a high probability that clandestine tests will be detected, especially if they are repeated.

In other words, although there is a theoretical chance that small clandestine tests could be conducted undetected, there is a substantial chance they could be detected. This risk of discovery probably has some deterrent effect because the political costs of cheating could be great while the military benefits would be small.

The anti-CTBT section of the report asserts that the United States should not ratify the treaty
because its formal entry into force depends on getting eight other states, including North Korea and Pakistan, to ratify it.[36]

This perspective overlooks the substantial benefit of having the other major nuclear powers, in particular Russia and China, within the treaty framework. As the pro-CTBT section of the commission report notes, "CTBT ratification would greatly enhance essential U.S. leadership in preserving and strengthening the NPT" and "other CTBT hold-outs likely would be influenced by U.S. ratification, especially if there was a major diplomatic effort to secure additional ratifications."[37]

Given the skepticism toward the CTBT expressed by some commissioners in the past, it is perhaps not surprising that the commission was divided on the subject. It is disappointing that Perry, Schlesinger, and the other members of the commission failed to provide greater clarity and consensus on these core technical and legal issues relating to the CTBT.

The Future Nuclear Posture

The commission could not come up with a recommendation for the most appropriate nuclear posture, even though that was one of its primary tasks. As the report explains, "There is no right number of weapons needed for the U.S. strategic posture other than one that is derived from a complex decision-making process, originating with the president. To determine that number, the strategic context must be assessed. Political judgment from the highest level of the government is required. Numbers associated with different force sizes must be set in a strategic context."[38]

Even so, the commissioners concluded that the United States should retain its current Cold War structure of a triad of strategic nuclear forces. No basis for this recommendation is provided other than claims about the virtues of each leg, the assertion that the "resilience and flexibility of the triad have proven valuable as the number of operationally deployed strategic nuclear weapons has declined," and the belief that the triad "promise[s] to become even more important as systems age and if back-up systems within each leg of the triad are reduced."[39] Under that formula, the United States should still have a triad when it has three nuclear weapons left.

The recommendation to retain the triad is a clear example of where the "parallel tracks" of the commission's policy result in worst-case scenarios that conflict with the task of reducing nuclear dangers. The current U.S. nuclear posture exceeds national security needs so greatly that even if two nuclear warheads were targeted against every single Russian and Chinese nuclear ballistic missile and long-range aircraft, there would be hundreds of warheads to spare under the Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty limit of 2,200 operationally deployed strategic warheads. That does not take into account that many Chinese and Russian missiles and aircraft are clustered on the same submarine or base. The comparison also does not include the several thousand additional warheads that the United States keeps in reserve for potential upload or its inventory of nonstrategic warheads.[40] Even if a START follow-on were to set a limit as low as 1,000 for the number of deployed strategic warheads, that level would still exceed the combined number of Russian and Chinese nuclear ballistic missiles and long-range aircraft.

Indeed, unless the Obama administration's NPR significantly reduces the U.S. triad, the ICBM leg alone could soon include more delivery vehicles than the entire Russian strategic arsenal of land- and sea-based ballistic missiles and long-range bombers.[41]

Conclusion

Our concerns about the report are not simply limited to its conclusion that the United States continues to need a nuclear deterrent, but also to its lack of analysis for deciding what that deterrent should look like. It strongly endorses the status quo and does not take a hard look at where U.S. nuclear forces are and where they ought to be. The national security interests and foreign policy of the United States deserve better.

The report shows that the commissioners believe that the current nuclear posture by and large is the force level the United States should retain indefinitely while it waits for the world to change enough to permit elimination of nuclear weapons. It is difficult to find differences between the commission
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The report repeats the Clinton administration's nuclear "lead and hedge" policy from 1994 but actually focuses on hedging with very little leading. Indeed, the report seems strangely detached from the current president's vision and the widespread support it and the four statesmen's op-eds have received worldwide.

A common reaction to the report is that it is remarkable that such a diverse group could agree on so much and that its agreement shows that there is, after all, a bipartisan consensus on the central elements of U.S. nuclear policy. We see a larger issue: if left unchallenged, the commission report, when seen together with other recent reports, such as the December 2008 "Report of the Secretary of Defense Task Force on DoD Nuclear Weapons Management Phase II: Review of the DoD Nuclear Mission" and the September 2008 joint Department of Defense-Department of Energy report entitled "National Security and Nuclear Weapons in the 21st Century," risks creating considerable uncertainty in the international community about the domestic support for Obama's more transformative nuclear vision. Some allied countries, to use the anonymous phrasing of the commission report, already have approached us about what this means for the Obama administration's nuclear policy.

In Prague, Obama stated "clearly and with conviction America's commitment to seek the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons." Although he acknowledged the challenge of achieving that goal, he cut through the "hedging" that so dominates the commission's report by saying, "[N]ow we, too, must ignore the voices who tell us that the world cannot change. We have to insist, 'Yes, we can.'"

Table 1: Comparing Policy Recommendations


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<th>Policy Issue</th>
<th>Council on Foreign Relations</th>
<th>Strategic Posture Commission</th>
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<td>Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT)</td>
<td>&quot;The Task Force believes that the benefits outweigh the costs and that the CTBT is in U.S. national security interests&quot; and recommends that the United States &quot;[i]ncrease national and international efforts toward entry into force&quot; of the CTBT.</td>
<td>&quot;The Commission is divided over whether the United States should ratify the [CTBT].... [T]he Obama administration should help to frame a broad...debate about the CTBT by conducting a broad net assessment of the benefits, costs, and risks of ratification and entry into force of the CTBT.&quot;</td>
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<td>Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty (FMCT)</td>
<td>&quot;The Task Force recognizes that although an FMCT faces daunting political and technical hurdles, the United States has an interest in efforts to ban the production of fissile material for weapons purposes.... The</td>
<td>&quot;Negotiation and entry into force of a ban on the production of fissile material for weapons purposes would be a valuable addition to the global nonproliferation regime.... A well[-]crafted [FMCT] would impose few</td>
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<td>Task Force believes that the United States should treat the FMCT, though it is an important initiative, as a lower priority than the CTBT at the 2010 Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty Review Conference.</td>
<td>burdens on the United States, solidify China's stated moratorium, and rein in worrisome arms production in South Asia. The United States should explore a treaty with strong verification mechanisms.</td>
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<td>Missile Defense</td>
<td>&quot;Delay ballistic missile defense deployments in Europe until this defense system is technically viable and shown to be needed. Equally important, perform a joint missile threat assessment.&quot;</td>
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<td>&quot;Work to come to an understanding with Moscow on missile defense, if possible. The United States should explore more fully Russian concerns. The two should define measures that can help build needed confidence. Revive the moribund effort to establish a joint warning center.&quot;</td>
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<td>START follow-on</td>
<td>&quot;Provide for a START-type legal and verification foundation for uninterrupted regulation, transparency, and predictability for U.S. and Russian nuclear forces. Include, as an important part of strategic dialogue, discussions on missile defense, nondeployed warheads, nonstrategic nuclear forces, and prompt conventional strike weapons.&quot;</td>
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<td>&quot;[T]he first step on U.S.-Russian arms control [should be] modest and straightforward in order to rejuvenate the process and ensure that there is a successor to...START I...before it expires at the end of 2009. The United States and Russia should not over-reach [sic] for innovative approaches.&quot;</td>
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ENDNOTES

(hereinafter Strategic Posture Commission final report).

2. Ibid., p. x.

3. Ibid., pp. xviii, 78, 97, 98.

4. Ibid., p. xviii.

5. Ibid., p. 100.

6. Ibid., pp. xii, 98.

7. Article VI of the nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty states that "[e]ach of the Parties to the Treaty undertakes to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament, and on a Treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control."


12. Ibid., p. 15.

13. Ibid., p. 23.


18. Ibid., p. 23.


21. Ibid.

22. Ibid., p. xvii.

23. Ibid., p. 21.

24. Ibid., p. 22.


26. Ibid., p. 21.


34. Strategic Posture Commission final report, p. 83.

35. On the question of what constitutes military significance, the definitive 1995 JASON study "Nuclear Testing" (see www.fas.org/rlg/jsr-95-320.htm) said nuclear explosions below approximately 500 tons in yield—potentially low enough to evade detection if decoupled—are not very useful in assessing a new nuclear thermonuclear warhead design because that level is generally below the yield required to initiate boosting. A nuclear-weapon state could design and might even fully test an unboosted fission weapon with a yield of a few tens of tons in modest cavities at a test site if it felt such a test were worth the high risk of detection. Yet, it is unclear why a nuclear-weapon state would engage in such risky behavior with smaller-yield fission weapons already in their arsenal. The commission report fails to note that unclassified, civilian arrays of seismic instruments continuously and routinely monitor vast areas of the globe down to very low seismic magnitudes. At Russia's former test site at Novaya Zemlya, this translates to the ability to detect the equivalent of as little as 10 tons of TNT. U.S. national technical means of intelligence at Novaya Zemlya and China's Lop Nor and near other states of concern are likely even better than that. As the JASON report noted, very low-yield hydronuclear explosions, in the equivalent range of 4 pounds of TNT, are not useful for validating new designs and may only have utility in confirming whether a warhead is one-point safe, which is unnecessary for the U.S. arsenal.

37. Ibid., p. 82.

38. Ibid., pp. 28, 99.


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