

## Arms Control and the New 'War'

- [Arms Control Today](#)

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As President George W. Bush and congressional leaders have correctly suggested, the response to the devastating attacks on New York and the Pentagon requires unprecedented international cooperation to prevent future outbreaks of terrorism. This new “war” will consume attention and resources, but Washington cannot lose sight of the related and equally severe threat posed by the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Although the carnage wrought by the airliners-turned-flying-bombs is staggering, the toll from biological, chemical, or nuclear weapons could be even greater. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld has acknowledged the importance of “seeing that...weapons of vastly greater power...are not used by the kinds of people that attacked the United States.” Nevertheless, the Bush administration has so far failed to present an effective and comprehensive approach.

National, state, and local emergency response and public health systems to help treat the victims of any future attacks must certainly be fortified. But we must recognize that there is no civil defense plan, however robust, that can adequately protect the public against chemical, biological, and especially nuclear attack. The first line of defense is and must be prevention. Success depends on ensuring that the acquisition and delivery of these weapons remains technically challenging and universally unacceptable. This requires a sustained and coordinated international effort to extend and strengthen the multilateral framework of arms control and non-proliferation.

Unfortunately, Bush and his cadre of advisers have spent their first eight months in office dismissing, dismantling, and disavowing proven and promising arms control measures. At times, the Bush team speaks positively about a few treaties, such as the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). However, in keeping with its “à la carte” approach, the administration supports only those NPT provisions that constrain the capabilities of others, while it chooses to ignore U.S. non-proliferation and disarmament commitments. To work, this treaty, like so many others, must continue to serve the interests of all treaty partners, not just a few.

If the administration is truly committed to protecting the homeland, it must shed its disdain for multilateral arms control and non-proliferation and build upon the bipartisan mood that has enveloped Capitol Hill.

Among other actions, the president should reconsider his rejection of the draft protocol to the Biological Weapons Convention and help achieve, not hinder, agreement on a strengthened text. He should utilize a part of the \$20 billion approved for anti-terrorism activities to broaden and accelerate programs to secure and dispose of weapons-usable nuclear material and demilitarize chemical weapons in the former Soviet Union. The president should redouble U.S. efforts for strengthened International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards and UN Security Council support for on-site inspections to help prevent Iraq from reconstituting its weapons of mass destruction programs. International support for these steps would be greatly enhanced if Bush moved to fulfill key U.S. NPT commitments. In particular, he should reconsider his refusal to seek ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty; initiate genuine negotiations with Russia on verifiable, irreversible nuclear force reductions; and agree to operate within the framework of the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty.

The latter objective will require an important adjustment in the pace and direction of national missile

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Published on Arms Control Association (<https://www.armscontrol.org>)

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defense policy, which now calls for deployment of a rudimentary capability by 2004 and possible unilateral ABM Treaty withdrawal within months. Predictably, U.S. officials have resumed their push for deployment. But the airliner attacks highlight that, however capable they may someday become, strategic missile defenses are useless against cheaper and more available means of weapons delivery. Though U.S. officials have "consulted" with their Russian counterparts, they have flatly rejected inquiries about possible treaty modifications to allow for planned anti-missile testing and have not yet made proposals for nuclear reductions. Taking the time necessary to reach a lasting strategic weapons agreement with Russia would, among other benefits, help preserve the long-term cooperation of Moscow, Beijing, and other governments in the new anti-terrorism campaign.

As he tries to root out global terrorism, the president must not create additional proliferation dangers. He should decisively put to rest speculation that the United States might use nuclear weapons against targets in Afghanistan. Even the implied threat of using nuclear weapons against non-nuclear-weapon states could spur some states to seek their own nuclear weapons capability.

Just as the United States cannot combat global terrorism by itself, it cannot alone curb the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and reduce the risks associated with existing nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons stockpiles. If the president and the Congress continue to ignore this reality, they do so at our peril.

**Source URL:** <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2001-10/issue-briefs/arms-control-new-war>