

Nuclear Posture Review

**A Research Note
March 2021**

**Prepared By:
Brad Roberts**

Center for Global Security Research
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With expectations of an imminent launch of a Nuclear Posture Review by the Biden administration, I am receiving increasingly frequent requests for relevant publications. Having played a leading role in the Obama administration's NPR a dozen years ago, I have written extensively on these matters. With this note, I am providing a succinct summary of each and a single link to the website of the Center for Global Security Research, where all of my publications can be found: <https://cgsr.llnl.gov/research/director-pubs>

Three essays take up issues certain to be central to the 2021 NPR. In "Debating Nuclear No First Use, Again" (*Survival*, 2019), I review the many past cycles of debate about changing U.S. nuclear declaratory policy and why, on each occasion so far, this basic change has been rejected. In "Adapting Nuclear Deterrence to Reduce Nuclear Risks" (*Daedalus*, 2020), I address the charge that the Obama administration could and should have made more significant adjustments to the U.S. practice of nuclear deterrence to reduce nuclear risk. In "Strategic Stability Under Obama and Trump" (*Survival*, 2017), I explore the changing context and meaning of strategic stability over the last decade.

Three more essays take up issues that may be part of the 2021 NPR, depending on its scope. In "Creating the Conditions for Nuclear Disarmament" (*Washington Quarterly*, 2018), I review the conditions-based approach of the Obama administration, its record of success, and the difficult lessons for contemporary disarmament diplomacy. In "Living with a Nuclear-Arming North Korea" (*38 North*, 2020), I argue for significant adjustments to extended deterrence in Northeast Asia, including elements of a more NATO-like approach. In "Taking Stock: U.S.-China Track 1.5 Nuclear Dialogue" (*CGSR*, 2020), I review the insights gained in 15 years of unofficial nuclear dialogue and set out an agenda for future dialogue on a broader agenda.

Two additional essays raise more fundamental questions about the structure, scope, and even purpose of NPRs. In "It's Time to Jettison Nuclear Posture Reviews" (*Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*, 2020), I argue that a different approach to policy and posture reviews is needed if DoD is to be successful in creating the needed integrated approach to strategic deterrence. In "Theories of Victory, Red and Blue" (*CGSR*, 2020), I describe from first principles the core concepts that should guide U.S. strategy in meeting the challenges of regional conventional wars under the nuclear/multi-domain shadow.

Lastly, in summer 2020 CGSR convened two workshops dealing with nuclear and multi-domain issues requiring consideration in the 2021 review process. The resulting edited volume is entitled *Fit for Purpose? The U.S. Strategic Posture in 2030 and Beyond*.

For those who may wish to read even further, my book, *The Case for U.S. Nuclear Weapons in the 21st Century* (Stanford University Press, 2015) provides a comprehensive review of the evolution of U.S. nuclear policy, strategy, and posture from 1990 to 2014. It also distills lessons of continuing relevance about the need for a strategy that balances efforts to reduce and eliminate nuclear dangers with efforts to adapt deterrence to changing requirements.



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