

White House Readies Nuclear Pre-Emption Guidelines

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With a view to clarifying the intentions of the Bush administration regarding the use of tactical nuclear weapons against Iran, we reproduce this incisive article by David Ruppe, published last September. The guidelines were formulated in the Pentagon's new Doctrine for Joint Nuclear Operations. They pertain to the use of nuclear weapons against "rogue enemies" which possess or plan to use WMDs,

It is worth noting that prior to the war on Iraq, both Britain and the US stated that they would hesitate to use nuclear weapons against Iraq, if attacked with weapons of mass destruction, knowing from the outset that these WMDs were, in the case of Iraq, nonexistent.

It should be noted that under present guidelines, the use of mini-nukes in conventional war theaters could potentially be activated without presidential approval.

Michel Chossudovsky, Global Research Editor

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By David Ruppe

Global Security Newswire

WASHINGTON — Contrasting earlier denials, the Defense Department appears to be formalizing military guidelines for seeking presidential approval to use nuclear weapons preemptively against suspected WMD facilities (see [GSN](#), July 22).

The Pentagon disclosed the potential guidelines earlier this year with the Internet publication of a "final" draft of a new Doctrine for Joint Nuclear Operations, produced by the Joint Staff.

The Office of the Undersecretary of Defense for Policy is expected to review the document for possible final approval by the end of the year, according to a defense official, who asked not to be identified. The *Washington Post* in a [story](#) yesterday said the Joint Staff director could sign the doctrine in a few weeks.

Differing from its two predecessor doctrines of 1993 and 1995, the document describes

several scenarios in which U.S. military commanders might request presidential authorization for a nuclear strike against a suspected WMD threat.

They are:

- “an adversary using or intending to use WMD against U.S./international alliance forces and/or innocent civilian populations that conventional forces cannot stop”;
- “imminent attack from adversary [biological weapons] that only nuclear weapons effects can safely destroy/incinerate”; and
- “attacks limited to adversary WMD (e.g. against deep, hardened bunkers containing chemical and biological weapons or the C2 [command and control] infrastructure required for the adversary to execute a WMD attack) that could be employed against the United States.”

Critics said the new guidelines reflect a shift toward an increasing role for nuclear weapons in Bush administration war planning, and argued that the public release of the new policy could foster insecurity in other countries and encourage nuclear proliferation.

“What’s most troubling is the public visibility to it,” said Steve Fetter, dean of the University of Maryland’s School of Public Policy, who was assistant defense secretary for international security policy during the Clinton administration.

The military has always had plans and the ability for conducting nuclear first strikes, he said, but detailing it in a public document “undermines our official diplomatic positions and policies related to the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty not to threaten parties to that treaty with a nuclear attack.”

The document suggests that “we’re planning to use things first and when it does, if you’re a country like Iran, that’s a pretty good argument for wanting to get nuclear weapons,” said Jeffrey Lewis, a research fellow at the University of Maryland’s Center for International and Security Studies.

Recommending the use of U.S. nuclear weapons against suspected enemy WMD arsenals, Lewis said, would be reckless in light of difficulties the U.S. faces in determining whether a country has or is developing a weapon of mass destruction, where such a capability might be located, and whether there is any real intention to use it.

“We simply don’t have the intelligence to launch pre-emptive strikes. ... If we [had attacked] Iraq with nuclear weapons, we wouldn’t have known that they didn’t have WMD. And as bad as Iraq is because we got it wrong, imagine how much worse it would be if we had used nuclear weapons,” he said.

U.S. defense officials have been fairly mum on the document, noting it is still in draft form and subject to changes. They say, however, that the existence of such guidelines would not necessarily make the use of U.S. nuclear weapons any more probable because the decision to use nuclear weapons is not one any president would take lightly.

“As far as the nuclear policy, there isn’t a change. The president still has to authorize the use of any nuclear weapon,” the defense official said.

Lewis argued the contrary. “If the president really wants to use nuclear weapons, I’d much prefer he’d have to sit down over maps in the Oval Office. I want to make it hard for the president to use nuclear weapons. And you know plans are designed to make it easy.”

“What this sets the basis for are plans, operational planning, and it affects the way leaders, military as well as civilian, react in a crisis,” Fetter said.

Expression, Not Creation of Policy

Though copies are available [elsewhere](#) on the Internet, the Pentagon removed its version of the draft doctrine in the spring and classified it with a code word. “It just created too much controversy,” the defense official said.

The proposed language, which remains under review, probably reflects a classified policy decision signed by President George W. Bush several years ago, said Lewis, a former staffer in the Pentagon’s defense policy office.

“The White House drafts a national security presidential directive [NSPD]. Then the secretary of defense creates a nuclear weapons employment policy [NWEF], and then that kind of goes down into the bowels of the Pentagon and ends up with the SIOP [Single Integrated Operational Plan] and all the different plans that might exist,” he said.

“This doctrine document is an unclassified publication for combatant commanders. So it doesn’t really establish any policies, but it should fairly accurately reflect the contents of the NSPD and the NWEF,” he said.

The press reported on such a policy before the March 2003 invasion of Iraq. Military affairs analyst William Arkin in January 2003 published an opinion piece in the *Los Angeles Times* stating that the U.S. Strategic Command, following a December 2002 presidential decision memo, was preparing target lists for potential nuclear attacks against non-nuclear Iraq.

Attributing his information to documents and interviews with military sources, Arkin also wrote of planning for possible targeting of WMD capabilities in other countries, including Iran, North Korea, Syria, Libya, Russia and China.

Signs of movement toward the policy, he wrote, emerged in leaked excerpts of the administration’s 2001 [Nuclear Posture Review](#), which called for “deliberate preplanned and practiced missions” against hardened and deeply buried targets, including WMD facilities, and for developing improved capabilities for striking them.

In 2002, North Korea justified its nuclear weapons program by saying it was concerned about nuclear pre-emption and appeared to cite the review, which listed that country, Iraq, and the other five noted by Arkin as countries where contingencies could rise requiring nuclear weapons use.

Administration Denials

While not denying the existence of such a policy or plans, U.S. officials said have said they had no intention of using nuclear weapons pre-emptively.

In February 2003, Assistant Secretary of State for Arms Control Stephen Rademaker [said](#) the administration had made no decision on listing North Korea for a possible pre-emptive nuclear attack. "This is a nonexistent decision and a total fabrication," Rademaker said.

The Energy Department's National Nuclear Security Administration chief, Linton Brooks, several times last year denied the United States would conduct such an attack.

On May 12, 2004, he said, "While no one wants to constrain a president's options in advance, I've never met anyone in the administration who would even consider nuclear pre-emption in connection with countering rogue state WMD threats."

"Nuclear pre-emption with a low-yield weapon is fanciful," he said at an Aug. 11, 2004 event, according to United Press International. "I've never heard anyone in the administration who could foresee circumstances under which we would consider nuclear pre-emption."

"It seems to me he's either completely out of the loop, or extraordinarily economical with the truth," said Hans Kristensen, a nuclear weapons consultant for the Natural Resources Defense Council.

"That's exactly what they've been trying to come up with for the last five years, ways of doing that," he said, citing for instance Air Force programs for a rapid, global nuclear weapons strike capability.

"The first strike language you speak of is clearly not in the context of pre-emption in time of peace. Administrator Brooks stands by his statement and see no inconsistency," NNSA spokesman Bryan Wilkes said today.

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