



What the Commission Report says on:

NUCLEAR DOCTRINE: NO FIRST USE AND “SOLE PURPOSE” DECLARATIONS

Just as important as President Obama's commitment to numerical weapons reduction in his Prague speech in April 2009 was his statement that “To put an end to Cold War thinking we will reduce the role of nuclear weapons in our national security strategy and urge others to do the same”. Achieving common ground among the nuclear-armed states on nuclear doctrine (i.e. how those weapons could ever be used), will be very difficult, given the wide variations in their present positions, and the process is likely to extend well into our medium-term time frame.

But a significant early move, even by the U.S. alone, toward declared doctrine that visibly reduces the salience, or prominence, of nuclear weapons in national defence and security systems – together with physical arrangements for their location and handling that are entirely consistent with such a declaration and adds credibility to it – would add significant momentum to the disarmament cause, and by extension, be a very significant boost for non-proliferation efforts, in the context of the 2010 NPT Review Conference and beyond.

“**Sole purpose**” and “**no first use**”. On doctrine, the Commission's preferred position, pending the ultimate elimination of nuclear weapons, is that every nuclear-armed state makes a clear and unequivocal “no first use” declaration, committing itself to using nuclear weapons neither preventively or pre-emptively against any possible nuclear adversary, keeping them available only for use, or threat of use, by way of retaliation following a nuclear strike against itself or its allies. We acknowledge, however, that such has been the cynicism about the Cold War “no first use” commitment of the Soviet Union, which has been almost universally dismissed as purely a propaganda exercise, and such has been the subsequent caution with which such continuing declarations from China and India have received, that it may be better to settle in the first instance

for a different formulation of essentially the same idea. This would be a declaration to the effect that “the sole purpose of the possession of nuclear weapons is to deter the use of such weapons against one's own state and that of one's allies.”

The legitimate security concerns of states affected by such declarations would need to be taken very much into account. We are conscious that this issue is a sensitive one particularly for some U.S. allies but, as discussed in Section 6, there is no reason to believe that Washington's embrace of “sole purpose” doctrine, would in any way weaken, or be perceived to weaken, U.S. extended deterrence. It is important, nonetheless, that those allies be given very firm assurances that they will not be exposed to unacceptable risk from other sources, including especially chemical and biological weapons. In this context, it is crucial that continuing strong efforts be made to promote universal adherence to the Chemical Weapons Convention and the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention, and to develop more effective ways of ensuring compliance with the latter.

The present position of most of the nuclear-armed states is some distance away from either “sole purpose” or “no first use”. Present U.S. strategy is based on the Pentagon's OPLAN 8010-08 (Operations Plan, Global Deterrence and Strike, 2008) which focuses on Russia and China, and apparently on some “rogue states”, and provides for great flexibility of nuclear and conventional combinations of strategic strike options, envisioning – as did the last Nuclear Posture Review, conducted by President George W. Bush's administration in early 2001 – the use of nuclear weapons in a whole variety of threat

The full text of *Eliminating Nuclear Threats: A Practical Agenda for Global Policymakers*, Report of the International Commission on Nuclear Non-proliferation and Disarmament, Co-chairs Gareth Evans and Yoriko Kawaguchi (November 2009), is available at www.icnnd.org

contingencies, both nuclear and non-nuclear. This example is being followed by Russia. Having affirmed in 2000–2001 its abandonment in 1993 of the USSR no first use position, Moscow is now emphasizing the crucial role of nuclear weapons in providing for its security. Its military doctrine calls for maintaining parity with the U.S. and preserving nuclear deterrence with the capability “to inflict the designated (planned) level of damage on any opponent”, and its Strike Plan provides for a possibility of “measured combat use” of strategic forces for “demonstration of resolve” or for “de-escalating aggression”, which translates into specific warfighting missions. Most U.S. and Russian flexible strike options imply first use of nuclear weapons.

Taken as a whole, the current official nuclear postures of the eight nuclear-armed states (leaving aside North Korea for present purposes, not least because it has not formalized its position in any way) may be summarized as follows. All envision the use of nuclear weapons in response to a nuclear attack upon their territory. All those with allies and forces abroad envision the use of nuclear weapons in response to a nuclear attack upon them. All, except China, keep open the option of the first use of nuclear weapons in response to an attack by chemical or biological weapons. All, except China and India, envision the first use of nuclear weapons in response to an overwhelming conventional force attack, putting national security at critical risk, with conventional forces against themselves or their allies. And all, except China and India, may initiate the use of nuclear weapons to pre-empt or prevent an attack by missiles or other delivery systems, which might carry weapons of mass destruction.

If the commitment to disarmament of the five nuclear weapons states under the NPT, and the nuclear armed states generally, is to begin to be taken seriously, it is crucial that – as a first step – those states which have not adopted a no first use posture move at least to a “sole purpose” declaration, and that every nuclear armed state be serious in practice about making that declaration credible to the rest of the world. The critical leadership role on the formal declaration side rests with the U.S.: with President Obama having so clearly committed himself in Prague, as noted above, to an effort to “reduce the role of nuclear weapons in our national security strategy”, all eyes are now focused on the new Nuclear Posture

Review scheduled for completion early in 2010. If the President could embrace at least a “sole purpose” position, this would be a significant contribution on this front, placing very strong pressure on the other nuclear armed states to change their own positions in a more forthcoming way, and giving a major demonstration of good faith to those reluctant, on double standards grounds, to support strengthening the non-proliferation regime at the 2010 NPT Review Conference.

Recommendations:

Pending the ultimate elimination of nuclear weapons, every nuclear-armed state should make an unequivocal “no first use” declaration, committing itself to not using nuclear weapons either preventively or pre-emptively against any possible nuclear adversary, keeping them available only for use, or threat of use, by way of retaliation following a nuclear strike against itself or its allies.

If not prepared at this stage to make such a declaration, every nuclear-armed state should at least accept the principle that the sole purpose of possessing nuclear weapons – until such time as they can be eliminated completely – is to deter others from using such weapons against that state or its allies.

The allies in question – those presently benefiting from extended deterrence – should be given firm assurances that they will not be exposed to unacceptable risk from other sources, including especially biological and chemical weapons. In this context, continuing strong efforts should be made to promote universal adherence to the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention and the Chemical Weapons Convention, and to develop more effective ways of ensuring compliance with the former.

It is particularly important that at least a “sole purpose” statement be made in the U.S. Nuclear Posture Review due for publication early in 2010, placing pressure as this would on other nuclear armed states to be more forthcoming, and undermining “double standards” arguments at the 2010 NPT Review Conference.

[Section 17, Paras 17.27-32, Recs 49-52]