

AMERICA'S PLANS FOR PROMPT GLOBAL STRIKE

The USA's military dominance in conventional warfare systems means it no longer needs to use the nuclear strike option, but its plans for Prompt Global Strike capabilities including space-based weapons are already threatening enough.

by Rick Rozoff ©
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World Military Superiority without Nuclear Weapons

There is only one country that has the military and scientific capacity to launch an instantaneous and undetectable, overwhelming and devastating attack against a vulnerable adversary, and has openly proclaimed its intention to achieve that ability.

That nation is what its current head of state defined last December as "the world's sole military superpower"¹—one which aspires to remain the only state in history to wield full-spectrum military dominance on land, in the air, on the seas and in space, to maintain and extend military bases and troops, aircraft-carrier battle groups and strategic bombers on and to almost every latitude and longitude, and to do so with a post-World War II record defence budget of US\$708 billion for next year. Having gained that status in large part through being the first country to develop and use nuclear weapons, the United States of America is now in a position to strengthen its global supremacy by superseding the nuclear option.

The United States led three major wars in less than four years against Yugoslavia, Afghanistan and Iraq from 1999 to 2003, and in all three cases deployed from tens to hundreds of thousands of "boots on the ground" after air strikes and missile attacks. The Pentagon established military bases in all three war zones and, although depleted uranium contamination and cluster bombs are still spread across all three lands, American troops have not had to contend with an irradiated landscape. Launching a nuclear attack when a conventional one serves the same purpose would be superfluous and too costly in a variety of ways.

On 8 April 2010, American and Russian presidents Barack Obama and Dmitry Medvedev signed the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) agreement in the Czech capital of Prague to reduce their respective nations' nuclear arsenals and delivery systems (subject to ratification by the US Senate and the Russian Duma). Earlier in the same week, the US released its new Nuclear Posture Review (NPR), which for the first time appeared to abandon the first use of nuclear arms.

The dark nuclear cloud that has hung over humanity's head for the past 65 years appears to be dissipating. However, the US retains 1,550 deployed nuclear warheads and 2,200 (by some counts, 3,500) more in storage and a triad of land, air and submarine delivery vehicles.

More ominously, though, Washington is forging ahead with a replacement for the nuclear sword and shield—for blackmail and for deterrence—with a non-nuclear model that could upset the previous "balance of terror" arrangement that has been a criminal nightmare for six decades, but for 60 years without a massive missile war.

The new sword, or spear, entails plans for conventional first-strike weapon systems employing the same triad of land, air and sea components—with space added—and the shield is a worldwide network of interceptor missile

deployments, also in all four areas. The Pentagon intends to be able to strike first, and with impunity.

The non-nuclear arsenal used for disabling and destroying the air defences and strategic, potentially all major military forces of other nations will consist of intercontinental ballistic missiles, adapted submarine-launched ballistic missiles, hypersonic cruise missiles and bombers, and super-stealthy strategic bombers able to avoid detection by radar and thus evade ground- and air-based defences.

Any short-range, intermediate-range and long-range missiles remaining in the targeted country will in theory be destroyed after launching by kinetic, "hit-to-kill" interceptor missiles. Should the missiles so neutralised contain nuclear warheads, the fallout will occur over the country that launches them or over an adjoining body of water or other nation of the US's choosing.

A Russian commentary of three years ago described the interaction between first-strike and interceptor missile systems as follows: "One can invest in the development of a really effective ABM [anti-ballistic missile] system and first-strike weapons, for example, in conventional high-accuracy systems. The final goal is to create a capability for a disarming first strike (nuclear, non-nuclear or mixed) at the enemy's strategic nuclear potential. ABM will finish off whatever survives the first blow."²

The long-delayed "Nuclear Posture Review Report" of early April 2010 asserts the Pentagon's plans for "maintaining a credible nuclear deterrent and reinforcing

regional security architectures with missile defenses..." (p. vi) It also confirms that the addition of "non-nuclear systems to US regional deterrence and reassurance goals will be preserved by avoiding limitations on missile defenses and preserving options for using heavy bombers and long-range missile systems in conventional roles" (p. 25).³

At a 6 April press conference on the Nuclear Posture Review with Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Navy Admiral Michael Mullen, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Secretary of Energy Steven Chu, Gates said that "we will maintain the nuclear

triad of ICBMs [intercontinental ballistic missiles], nuclear-capable aircraft and ballistic-missile submarines" and "we will continue to develop and improve non-nuclear capabilities, including regional missile defenses". Mullen spoke of "defend[ing] the vital interests of the United States and those of our partners and allies with a more balanced mix of nuclear and non-nuclear means than we have at our disposal today".⁴

The Prompt Global Strike concept is meant to sustain the US monopoly in the military sphere and to widen the gap between it and the rest of the world.

The Pentagon's "Ballistic Missile Defense Review Report"⁵ of 1 February 2010 states that "[t]he United States will pursue a phased adaptive approach to missile defense" and "develop capabilities that are mobile and relocatable" (p. vi).

The "Quadrennial Defense Review Report"⁶ of February speaks of similar plans. The review "...advances two clear objectives. First, to further rebalance the capabilities of America's Armed Forces to prevail in today's wars, while building the capabilities needed to deal with future threats" (p. iii). It states that "[t]he United States remains the only nation able to project and sustain large-scale operations over extended distances" (p. iv) with "400,000 US military personnel...forward-stationed or rotationally deployed around the world" (p. xiv) and "enabled by cyber and space capabilities and enhanced by U.S. capabilities to deny adversaries' objectives through ballistic missile defense" (p. v). One of its key goals is to "[e]xpand future long-range strike capabilities" (p. 33) and promote the "rapid growth in sea- and land-based ballistic missile defense capabilities" (p. 39).

The US is also intensifying space and cyber-warfare programs with the potential to completely shut down other nations' military surveillance and command, control, communications, computer and intelligence systems, rendering them defenceless on any but the most basic tactical level.



Albuquerque, New Mexico, hosts Kirtland AFB and many "Star Wars" aerospace contractors like Northrup Grumman. Local activists continue to highlight Albuquerque's role in the plans to move the arms race into space. (Source: www.space4peace.org)

Conventional Prompt Global Strike Capability

The program under which Washington is developing its conventional weapons capacity to supplement its previous nuclear strategy is called Prompt Global Strike (PGS), alternatively referred to as Conventional Prompt Global Strike (CPGS).

Global Security Newswire wrote on 2 April of the proposed START II: "Members of Russia's political elite are worried about what the agreement says or does not say about US ballistic missile defense and 'prompt global strike' systems..."⁷ In fact, the successor to START I says nothing about American interceptor missile or first-strike conventional attack policies, and as such says everything about them. That is, the new treaty will not limit or affect them in any manner.

After the signing ceremony in Prague on 8 April, the US Department of State issued a fact sheet on Prompt Global Strike which states: "The New START Treaty does not contain any constraints on current or planned U.S. conventional prompt global strike capability." By way of background information and to provide a framework for current US military strategy, it adds: "The growth of unrivaled U.S. conventional military capabilities has contributed to our ability to reduce the role of nuclear weapons in deterring non-nuclear attacks... The Department of Defense (DoD) is currently exploring the full range of technologies and systems for a Conventional Prompt Global Strike (CPGS) capability that could provide the President more credible and technically suitable options for dealing with new and evolving threats."⁸

Describing the constituent parts of PGS, the State Department press release also reveals: "Current efforts are examining three concepts: Hypersonic Technology Vehicle, Conventional Strike Missile, and Advanced Hypersonic Weapon. These projects are managed by the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA), the U.S. Air Force Space and Missile Center, and Army Space and Missile Defense Command respectively... [The START II] warhead ceiling would accommodate any plans the United States might develop during the life of this Treaty to deploy conventional warheads on ballistic missiles." In language as unequivocal as the State Department has been known to employ, the statement adds: "New START protects the US ability to develop and deploy a CPGS capability. The Treaty in no way prohibits the United States from building or deploying conventionally armed ballistic missiles..."⁹

The non-nuclear missiles referred to are designed to strike any spot on Earth within 60 minutes, but the main proponent of PGS, Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Marine General James Cartwright, boasted in early June 2009 that, "[a]t the high end", strikes could be delivered in "300 milliseconds".¹⁰ Cartwright has also said that current conventionally armed bombers are "too slow and too intrusive" for many "global strike missions".¹¹

On 21 January, Deputy Secretary of Defense William Lynn called for putting the Department of Defense "on a permanent footing" to maintain "air dominance and the ability to strike any target on Earth at any time... The next air warfare priority for the Pentagon is developing a next-generation, deep-penetrating strike capability that can overcome advanced air defenses..."¹²

In a Global Security Network analysis of 15 March 2010 titled "Cost to Test U.S. Global-Strike Missile Could Reach \$500 Million", Elaine Grossman writes: "The Obama administration has requested \$239.9 million for prompt global strike research and development across the military services in fiscal 2011... If funding levels remain as anticipated into the coming years, the Pentagon will have spent some \$2 billion on prompt global strike by the end of fiscal 2015..."¹³

The land-based component of PGS—Minuteman intercontinental ballistic missiles with a conventional payload—will "initially boost into space like a ballistic missile, dispatch a 'hypersonic test vehicle' to glide and maneuver into a programmed destination, which could be updated or altered remotely during flight".¹⁴

Combined with the deployment of missile defense...the Prompt Global Strike initiative is going to turn Washington into a modern era global dictator.

More Pentagon Plans for Precision Weapons

On 22 March 2010, *Defense News* featured an article titled "US Targets Precision Arms for 21st-Century Wars", which included this excerpt: "To counter...air defenses, the Pentagon wants to build a host of precision weapons that can hit any target from thousands of miles away. Known as a family of systems, these weapons could include whatever the Air Force chooses as its next bomber, a new set of cruise missiles and even, someday, hypersonic weapons developed under the Pentagon's Prompt Global Strike program that would give the speed and range of an ICBM to a conventional warhead."¹⁵

An 8 April *Washington Post* report on PGS quoted Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov warning: "World states will hardly accept a situation in which nuclear weapons disappear, but weapons that are no less destabilizing

emerge in the hands of certain members of the international community."¹⁶ The same source added that "the Obama administration...sees the missiles as one cog in an array of defensive and offensive weapons that could ultimately replace nuclear arms". It quoted the Pentagon's Cartwright as affirming: "Deterrence can no longer just be nuclear weapons. It has to be broader."¹⁷

The following day, Britain's *Independent* ran a story, the following quotes from which should disabuse anyone hoping that Washington's "post-nuclear world" will be any safer a one. Referring to PGS intercontinental ballistic missiles with (at least in theory) conventional warheads, the newspaper warned: "...Once they are launched, there could be difficulty in distinguishing their conventional payloads from nuclear ones. That in turn could accidentally trigger a nuclear retaliation by Russia or another similarly armed power.

"Another danger is that if nuclear weapons are no longer at issue, there would be a bigger temptation for American military commanders to become more cavalier about ordering strikes. And unless intelligence can be fully relied upon, the chances of striking mistaken targets are high."¹⁸

US officials have discussed the prospect of launching such missiles at a lower altitude than nuclear ICBMs would travel, but it would take an almost limitless degree of trust—or gullibility—on behalf of Russian or Chinese military officials to depend upon the assurance that ICBMs heading toward or near their territory were in fact not carrying nuclear weapons at whatever distance from the Earth's surface they were flying.

Reactions to the PGS Initiative

In 2007, the year after the Pentagon announced its Prompt Global Strike plans, a Russian analyst, Andrei Kislyakov, wrote: "Despite the obvious threat to civilization, the United States may soon acquire orbital weapons under the Prompt Global Strike plan. They will give it the capacity to deal a conventional strike virtually anywhere in the world within an hour."¹⁹

Elaine Grossman wrote on 1 July last year: "Once it is built, the Conventional Strike Missile is expected to pair rocket boosters with a fast-flying 'payload delivery vehicle' capable of dispensing a kinetic energy projectile against a target. Upon nearing its endpoint, the projectile would split into dozens of lethal fragments potentially capable against humans, vehicles and structures, according to defense officials..."²⁰

A comparably horrifying scenario of the effects of a PGS attack, this time from the sea-based version, appeared in *Popular Mechanics* in January 2007.²¹

On 7 April 2010, former Joint Chief of Staff of the Russian Armed Forces General Leonid Ivashov penned a column titled "Obama's Nuclear Surprise". Referring to the US President's speech in Prague a year ago—"The existence of thousands of nuclear weapons is the most dangerous legacy of the Cold War"—and his signing of the START II agreement in the same city this 8 April, the author stated: "No examples of sacrificial service of the US elites to mankind or the peoples of other countries can be discovered in US history over the past century. Would it be realistic to expect the advent of an African-American president to the White House to change the country's political philosophy traditionally aimed at achieving global dominance? Those believing that something like that is possible should try to realize why the US—the country with a military budget already greater than those of all other countries of the world combined—continues spending enormous sums of money on preparations for war."²²

Specifically in reference to PGS, Ivashov gave this detail: "The Prompt Global Strike concept envisages a concentrated strike using several thousand precision conventional weapons in 2–4 hours that would completely destroy the critical infrastructures of the target country and thus force it to capitulate..."

"The Prompt Global Strike concept is meant to sustain the US monopoly in the military sphere and to widen the gap between it and the rest of the world. Combined with the deployment of missile defense supposed to keep the US immune to retaliatory strikes from Russia and China, the Prompt Global Strike initiative is going to turn Washington into a modern-era global dictator..."

"In essence, the new US nuclear doctrine is an element of the novel US security strategy that would be more adequately described as the strategy of total impunity. The US is boosting its military budget, unleashing NATO as a global *gendarme*, and planning real-life exercises in Iran to test the efficiency of the Prompt Global Strike initiative in practice. At the same time, Washington is talking about the completely nuclear-free world."²³ ∞

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