

WebMemo



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Omnibus Eliminates Funding for the Reliable Replacement Warhead Program

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Post-Cold War security requires a new nuclear weapons policy, operational doctrine, arsenal, and infrastructure. The Bush Administration announced a new strategic policy with the Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) in 2002 and issued a draft of the new Doctrine for Joint Nuclear Operations for the military in 2005. The Administration is now moving to construct a nuclear arsenal to meet the needs of the new policy and doctrine, which directs the fielding of both offensive and defensive strategic nuclear and conventional forces to reduce to an absolute minimum the possibility that any hostile state will be able to launch a successful strategic attack on the United States or its friends and allies. At the heart of this policy is a program for creating a new nuclear warhead called the Reliable Replace Warhead (RRW). The House of Representatives, however, has unwisely chosen to use the Omnibus Appropriations Bill (H.R. 2764), adopted on December 17, to eliminate all funding for the RRW program.

Importance of the RRW. While the Bush Administration does not use the term, its approach constitutes a damage-limitation strategy. In this context, the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) announced on March 2, 2007, that a joint Department of Defense and NNSA Nuclear Weapons Council had selected a Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory and Sandia National Laboratory design for the RRW. The RRW would provide the Navy with a replacement for existing warheads on a portion of its submarine-based nuclear-armed missiles. It is an essential part of meeting the requirements of the NPR.

What Congress Should Do. The House of Representatives, therefore, is wrong to withhold funding for the RRW program. It has justified this action by pointing to a related legislative requirement that the Bush Administration provide a nuclear weapons strategy for the 21st century, implying that a specific funding request for RRW should be considered only after the submission of the report. This is a subterfuge. The Bush Administration has already provided Congress with the required strategy in the form of the NPR. What the House should be doing is pressing the Bush Administration to move forward smartly in realizing the promise of the NPR by taking the following steps:

- *Provide* the NNSA with the full \$6.5 billion requested for weapons activities in fiscal year 2008, including for the RRW program.
- *Direct* the NNSA to refine the RRW's design and build it to provide the military with the capabilities to hold at-risk enemy targets that require nuclear weapons and that constitute the means to attack the U.S. and its friends and allies with nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons. This includes both hardened and mobile targets.

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at:
www.heritage.org/Research/NationalSecurity/wm1755.cfm

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- *Direct* the NNSA to design and build the RRW so that it can be mated to delivery systems that can strike enemy targets quickly and accurately enough to limit the damage that otherwise would be imposed on the U.S. and its friends and allies.
- *Give* the NNSA the explicit authority to pursue the RRW as a new warhead design and conduct explosive tests as necessary to field nuclear weapons with these capabilities.

Conclusion. Nuclear weapons are no less essential to the security of the U.S. and its friends and allies than they were during the Cold War, but the requirements are different. Current and projected circumstances allow the U.S. to maintain a smaller active nuclear arsenal and stockpile of warheads, in part based on the deployment of effective conventionally armed strategic strike weapons and defenses. This smaller U.S. nuclear arsenal, how-

ever, makes it more important that the arsenal is fully modernized and tailored to meeting the demands of the damage-limitation strategy.

U.S. strategic forces should not be used to exact revenge on an enemy foolish enough to attack the U.S. or its friends and allies with weapons of mass destruction. They should be used to deter that enemy from attacking by making it clear that such an attack will fail. The decision by the House of Representatives to withhold funds from the RRW program signals that it is unwilling to defend the American people and U.S. friends and allies, whether or not this is its intention.

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