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Administration's Nuclear Weapons Policies are Dangerous

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Natural Resources Defense Council

WASHINGTON-- The Bush administration has squandered a historic opportunity to reduce the role of nuclear weapons in U.S. security strategy, according to a report released today by the nuclear program at NRDC (Natural Resources Defense Council).

Instead, the administration has pursued programs to develop a new generation of nuclear weapons, and committed billions of dollars to upgrade the arsenal and refine nuclear strike plans against countries that were not targets during the Cold War. The result: Progress in curbing nuclear weapons proliferation has slowed to a crawl, and the federal government is wasting resources that could be better used to address the more pressing threat of terrorism. (See the report, Nuclear Insecurity.)

"The fervor with which this administration continues its commitment to nuclear weapons as a vital component of global U.S. military superiority confers unwarranted legitimacy on the role of nuclear weapons in international relations, and encourages other countries to value them as well," said Dr. Robert S. Norris of NRDC's nuclear program. "The double standard evident in the administration's nuclear policies -- 'Do what I say, not what I do' -- makes a mockery of U.S. efforts to lead a campaign to stop nuclear proliferation." Norris added that the report is especially timely because Congress now has the opportunity to cut funding for the administration's "misguided" policies and initiatives in the energy and water development appropriations bills.

The NRDC report documents wasteful and ill-advised administration initiatives and policies that actually threaten our security rather than enhance it. NRDC found that:

The administration has undermined its effort to combat terrorism by diverting valuable resources, such as squandering billions of dollars on Cold War-era weapons. This year alone, the administration plans to spend \$10 billion on an insufficiently tested missile defense system that, in the best of circumstances, has only a modest chance of working against a limited attack and no chance against a larger one. The system can be easily fooled by a range of enemy countermeasures and cannot discriminate actual warheads from decoys.

Moreover, even if functional, it would provide no defense against the most dangerous security risk of our time: the detonation of a nuclear device by terrorists in a U.S. city or port.

The Department of Energy (DOE) is spending billions of dollars to extend the life of thousands of excess nuclear warheads and delivery systems that were designed to fight World War III with the Soviet Union, while the administration is neglecting the opportunity to achieve verifiable reductions of U.S. and Russian nuclear arsenals to 1,000 warheads on each side, rather than 6,000 warheads now planned for the U.S. nuclear arsenal in 2012.

The administration has adopted policies that increase the potential for using nuclear weapons in a wider range of conflict situations. For example, the administration's Nuclear Posture Review recommended increasing the number of contingencies in which the U.S. military might use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear states, and expanding the list of targets, such as chemical and biological weapon sites, that the military could bomb with a nuclear warhead. The administration also is shifting to a planning and command structure that will speed up the preparation and execution of small nuclear strikes against hardened and deeply buried targets.

The administration is spending billions of dollars to modernize the U.S. nuclear weapons production complex and reactivate design teams to develop new nuclear weapons. These provocative measures, coupled with the administration's unwillingness to ratify a global treaty banning nuclear test explosions, undercut U.S. efforts to curb nuclear proliferation and, in conjunction

with the push for missile defense, block further progress with Russia and China in nuclear arms reductions.

An administration initiative to assist non-nuclear weapon states to develop the capability to recover and recycle plutonium and actinides from commercial reactor spent fuel is counterproductive to a responsible nonproliferation policy. For example, the DOE brought South Korean nuclear researchers to the United States to train them in plutonium and actinide chemistry and metallurgy.

The NRDC report also offers a responsible nuclear policy for the 21st century, one that would increase national security rather than diminish it. The report recommends that the administration:

Honor the U.S. commitment to the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty by pursuing effective measures toward nuclear disarmament, as required under Article VI.

Scrap plans to develop nuclear "bunker busters" and other new nuclear weapons with military characteristics that would make them more likely to be used.

Abolish the U.S. permanent nuclear war plan, a Cold War relic, which requires thousands of U.S. nuclear warheads be kept on alert and targeted on Russia.

Stop deployment of the technically flawed and ineffectual missile defense system, and redirect funds to address the far more pressing threat of terrorist attacks.

Accelerate the implementation of the Moscow Treaty, and require that warheads be destroyed by the United States and Russia under verifiable conditions.

Increase congressional and independent technical oversight of Pentagon and DOE nuclear weapons programs.

Cancel the DOE's programs that assist non-weapons states to develop the capacity to build nuclear reactors and reprocess plutonium. Those programs could make it easier for rogue states and terrorists to acquire nuclear

expertise.

Focus on weapons systems that meet genuine needs
and provide protection for our troops in the field.

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