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CNS Experts Welcome Release of Nuclear Posture Review

Washington, D.C.— The much-anticipated release of the Obama administration’s Nuclear Posture Review, coming just before the signing of the New START arms reduction agreement in Prague, heralds the most significant shift in U.S. nuclear policy since the end of the Cold War, said experts with the James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies. But they cautioned that the changes described in the document—which was requested by Congress as a justification for the administration’s force plans and budgets—fall short of the sweeping and necessary shifts advocated by President Obama himself.

“If President Obama’s nonproliferation and disarmament ambitions are to be realized, this report must be seen as the beginning and not the end of a national debate,” said Stephen Schwartz, editor of the *Nonproliferation Review*, and principal author of the 2009 report, *Nuclear Security Spending: Assessing Costs, Examining Priorities*. “We must also acknowledge the fundamental flaw with the report,” said Schwartz, “which is that rather than utilizing a zero-based approach to our nuclear arsenal—determining our security needs and objectives and then sizing a force to match those—it started with what we already have and, with some modest but important modifications, created a policy framework to justify that.”

“This is certainly a welcome change,” said Patricia Lewis, Deputy Director of the James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies. “Although the Nuclear Posture Review does not go far enough in addressing some of the leftover legacies of the Cold War, such as the continuing high alert rate for strategic nuclear forces and the core purpose of nuclear weapons, it is a substantial step in the right direction. By declaring that the United States will not use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapons states that are party to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and in compliance with their nuclear nonproliferation obligations, the United States has reinforced assurances made under the NPT. In addition, by clarifying that the United States would respond to a chemical or biological weapons attack with ‘a devastating conventional military response’, President Obama is strengthening the existing international system to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and promote nuclear disarmament.”

Although The Nuclear Posture Review discusses a reduced role for nonstrategic nuclear weapons, it largely sidesteps the issue of what to do with the estimated 150-200 U.S. nuclear weapons still deployed in five NATO countries in Europe. “This is clearly a politically sensitive issue within NATO, and it is understandable that the administration would not want to do anything that appears

to prejudge the outcome of the new and still developing NATO strategic concept,” said Nikolai Sokov, Senior Research Associate at the James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies. “Recent statements by administration officials that they are looking to negotiate with the issue with Russia are also positive. But the United States needs to take the lead on this issue or risk the continuation of a dangerous status quo in which neither the United States, Russia, nor many of America’s European allies feels they need many of these weapons anymore but neither wants to take the politically charged first step to remove them.”

“In arguing that major funding boosts are needed to modernize the U.S. weapons and ensure the reliability of the U.S. nuclear deterrent, the Obama administration made a major concession to its Republican opponents, while still not heeding their calls to build a new warhead,” said Miles A. Pomper, Senior Research Associate at the Washington D.C office of the James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies. “However, given some recent statements from the national nuclear weapons laboratory directors, it is not clear how much this concession will gain the administration in dealing with Congress on issues from the new strategic arms agreement to potential Senate consideration of a Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty.”

“This document, combined with the New START accord, will have an impact on the NPT review conference in New York next month,” said William C. Potter, Director of the James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies. “But it is an open question at this stage whether the changes it outlines will be sufficient to convince the majority of non-nuclear weapons states that sufficient progress toward disarmament—as required by Article VI of the NPT—is being made. Although this Nuclear Posture Review is certainly much better than either of the two previous ones, thanks in no small measure to the timely and direct intervention of President Obama, it still suggests that the United States will continue to rely to a significant degree on nuclear weapons for the foreseeable future. It is also not clear that the new positive moves by the United States will be matched by some of the other nuclear-weapon states. That message will be difficult for the non-nuclear weapon states to swallow, particularly given the ambitious but realistic agenda set by President Obama last year in Prague.”

The following CNS staff are available for interviews:

Mr. Stephen Schwartz, Editor, *Nonproliferation Review*, (312) 933-4900, sschwartz@miis.edu

- The Nuclear Posture Review process and budgetary implications

Mr. Miles Pomper, Senior Research Associate, (202) 842-3100, ext. 318, mpomper@miis.edu

- The political impact of the Nuclear Posture Review

Dr. Nikolai Sokov, Senior Research Associate, (831) 647-6577, nsokov@miis.edu

- Russian perspectives on and reaction to the Nuclear Posture Review

Dr. Patricia Lewis, Deputy Director, (831) 647-6575, patricia.lewis@miis.edu

- How the Nuclear Posture Review may influence global disarmament initiatives

Dr. William Potter, Director, (831) 647-4154, wpotter@miis.edu

- The impact of the Nuclear Posture Review on NPT Review Conference

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