

## [SE9-LT-2] U.S. Nuclear Posture Review

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### Full Summary

The 9<sup>th</sup> session of the 2011 Asan Plenum focused on the U.S. Nuclear Posture Review, and in particular, the perspectives and reactions of the United States, China, and Russia. It featured presentations by Dr. Clark Murdock, a senior advisor at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), Dr. Lora Saalman, a Beijing-based associate in the Nuclear Policy Program at the Carnegie Endowment, and Mr. Walter Slocombe, a former U.S. Undersecretary of Defense for Policy and senior counsel at Caplin & Drysdale.

Murdock began with a brief introduction to the main issues in the 2010 Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) report. He began by outlining the main takeaways. Among other things, the NPR report identifies nuclear terrorism and proliferation as the top priorities for the United States; expresses an interest in maintaining strategic stability with Russia and China; updates the U.S. understanding of its Negative Security Assurance, specifying that it only applies to countries in compliance with their nonproliferation obligations; argues that the United States should maintain the triad during the 10-year duration of New START; commits to limiting silo-based intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) to a single warhead; pledges to retire the Tomahawk Land Attack Cruise Missile/Nuclear (TLAM/N); and rejects the de-alerting of ICBMs and submarine launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs).

Murdock went on to note that that the NPR report is just one of many activities that the Obama administration pursued in its nuclear agenda. A second element is New START, which was signed in April 2010 and ratified in February 2011. New START limits the number of U.S. and Russian deployed strategic warheads to 1550 (under New START's counting rules) and total delivery vehicles to 800, with a separate limit of 700 deployed delivery vehicles. The treaty also includes a non-binding preamble that acknowledges the relationship between offensive and defensive strategic systems. However, the Obama administration has consistently argued that New START in no way constrains current or planned missile defense deployments.

A third part of the Obama administration's nuclear agenda is the Ballistic Missile Defense Review (BMDR), which includes the Phased Adaptive Approach (PAA). The PAA reorients

U.S. strategy to counter the more immediate threat of short- and medium-range missiles, while maintaining the flexibility to respond as future threats develop. It is divided into four phases; the third will include defenses against intermediate-range ballistic missiles, while the fourth will include defenses against intercontinental ballistic missiles. The BMDR links missile defense to reductions in the role of U.S. nuclear weapons, highlights the importance of missile defense within regional security architectures in East Asia and elsewhere, and also advocates expanding strategic stability dialogues with China.

The final part of the agenda, according to Murdock, is the Fiscal Year 2011 Budget. The proposed budget requested \$11.2 billion for the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA), which would have been a 13% increase. After Congressional debate, the NNSA received a 7% increase. Of the approved funds, the President committed \$85 billion to sustaining and modernizing the nuclear weapons complex, including the construction of a new Uranium Processing Facility and Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Facility, the execution of the B-61 and W-76 life extension programs, and the study of W-78 life extension options. The budget also included substantial funding for delivery system modernization, missile defense, and Conventional Prompt Global Strike (CPGS).

According to Murdock, the totality of these undertakings demonstrate that the Obama administration is committed both to the eventual elimination of nuclear weapons and, as long as nuclear weapons exist, to the maintenance of a safe, secure, and effective nuclear deterrent.

Saalman followed with a discussion of China's reaction to the U.S. NPR. Like many other audiences, strategic thinkers in China saw both positives and negatives in the NPR. After all, China was mentioned 19 times in the NPR, often in a pair with Russia. On the positive side, the NPR shifted its focus to terrorism and proliferation and did not explicitly list China as a threat. Many in China also see the NPR as a policy document, not a posture, and recognize that it includes a great deal of compromise

However, analysts also identified a number of negatives. They believe that the document contains a number of contradictions and uncertainties. For example, the NPR argues that high-tech conventional weapons, such as Conventional Prompt Global Strike and ballistic missile defenses, might substitute for roles currently assigned to nuclear weapons. Many in China feel that the United States is trying to lock in its conventional advantage and worry that advancing U.S. conventional capabilities could trigger an arms race.

Others believe that the softer rhetoric in the NPR hides America's true hostile intentions, which can be seen in U.S. discussions of extended deterrence and in the Fiscal Year 2011 Budget. These people fear that the United States sees them as a small Russia. China has no

interest in an arms race, but remains concerned that the United States is locked in a Cold War mindset. As a result, Chinese analysts are worried that their country is an implicit target of U.S. nuclear weapons. In particular, many are troubled by the possibility that the “extreme circumstances” in which the United States might use nuclear weapons could involve conflicts with China.

According to Saalman, many in China formed their understanding of the NPR based on news reports and speculation, rather than reading the full text, which has created some misperception. Therefore, the United States might still have an opportunity to change China’s view of the NPR by sitting down with officials and analysts and explaining the document paragraph by paragraph.

Slocombe spoke last, discussing the Russian reaction to the U.S. NPR. Slocombe began by reviewing Russia’s general thinking about nuclear weapons. He argued that Russian strategic thinkers see an enduring role for nuclear weapons, which they see as a key symbol of their status in international affairs and a central component of Russia’s relationship with the United States. However, the role of nuclear weapons is not entirely symbolic. Russia also relies heavily on nuclear weapons in instances where the existence of the states is threatened. This is clearly stated in Russia’s most recent military doctrine.

Russia remains concerned with U.S. technical advantages, and in particular with U.S. missile defense plans. While many in Russia might acknowledge that it’s an improvement over the Bush-era configuration, they still dislike the PAA and, more generally, fear U.S. technological advancements in missile defenses and precision strike weapons. For this reason, Russia objects to U.S. plans to build radars in the Czech Republic, Poland, and possible other places in Eastern Europe.

Disparities in capabilities, Slocombe argued, might create problems for future arms control agreements. While the United States would like to focus further reductions on strategic weapons and delivery vehicles, as well as on tactical nuclear weapons, Russia is more concerned with conventional arms reductions. Both sides face domestic political constraints, and in the United States, conventional arms reductions or limitations are out of the question

Slocombe argued that, overall, Russia sees the NPR as fairly conservative. While it takes modest steps to address Russian concerns, it reveals that the United States sees an enduring role for missile defense and CPGS, which Russia identifies as threats to strategic stability. And unlike the United States, Russia has a clear definition of strategic stability – a condition in which both sides have survivable and effective nuclear second-strike capabilities.

During the question period, a Russian analyst in the audience said that the United States does not seriously consider Russia's concerns, making progress on these issues difficult. The analyst argued that discussing these issues with more candor and seriousness could make collaboration more likely. The panel agreed, and Slocombe said he had no intention of disrespecting Russia in any way.

Another member of the audience asked about transparency in China. The panel generally agreed that China could do more on transparency and that the lack of transparency remains a key sticking point in U.S.-China relations. Saalman argued that, for China, transparency is mostly an issue of domestic politics and regime control. There's not much pressure for nuclear transparency, but there has been some discussion about China's involvement in future arms control. She said that, in her experience, it is fairly easy to conduct research in China and that she rarely faces limited access on the internet or from current and retired military leaders. This demonstrates, she argued, that there is some level of transparency in China.

Overall, it was a valuable discussion that outlined the main components of recent U.S. nuclear policy and the major reactions of China and Russia.

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