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Weapons of Mass Destruction ■ Nuclear Warfare

The Promise and Peril of the New Strategic Triad

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Abstract: A mechanism for reviewing and establishing US nuclear policy is the Nuclear Posture Review (NPR). Because of the changing strategic environment resulting from the improved U.S. relations with Russia and the rising threat from regional state and non-state actors the 2001 NPR described significant changes to US nuclear

policy and specifically US nuclear force structure. One of the significant changes announced in the 2001 NPR was the description of a new triad. The traditional triad or old triad referred to strategic nuclear weapons consisting of land based intercontinental ballistic missiles, bombers, and sea launched ballistic missiles. The new triad calls for the incorporation of new capabilities to meet the threats that have arisen from the new strategic environment. It adds non-nuclear global strike weapons to the nuclear weapons and delivery systems of the old triad and moves them to one leg of the new triad. It further calls for the continued development and fielding of ballistic missile defense systems which will make up the second leg of the new triad. The third leg will consist of a robust and responsive infrastructure. The focus of this responsive infrastructure will be both to maintain current strategic capabilities and to respond to new and emerging threats if needed. A robust and redundant command, control, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance system will be at the center of this new triad. The old triad evolved as a result of the threats of the Cold War, the new triad replaces it with a structure designed to meet the threats of the new strategic environment. These changes will have both positive and negative impacts on deterrence, strategicwarfighting, crisis stability, and arms control. Although the new triad could improve deterrence, the addition of non-nuclear global strike weapons has the potential to blur the line between conventional and nuclear war and to degrade crisis stability. Additionally, the new triad mig

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