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policy dialogue brief

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US Nuclear Weapons Doctrine: Can We Adopt No First Use?

The Stanley Foundation

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Stanford University's Center for International Security and Cooperation

A New Look at No First Use

Recommendations/Summary Points

- The United States no longer faces a military force imbalance as was the case during the Cold War. At that time, the United States reserved the right to use nuclear weapons first in a conflict, in large part because the Soviet Union had overwhelming conventional military advantages in Europe, and the United States sought to level the battlefield.

- US military planners take US nuclear declaratory policy into account, and its effects trickle down into procurement decisions, alert procedures, and operational war plans.

- Declared US nuclear doctrine provides the backdrop for public and congressional debate on the proper role of nuclear weapons, the adequacy of the current nuclear arsenal, potential arms control agreements and weapons reductions, and future arms development programs. If the United States adopted no first use (NFU), that debate would change.

- International nuclear norms are constructed of what countries think, say, and do about nuclear weapons, and US statements about its nuclear doctrine can affect those norms by signaling to others what it believes to be reasonable and legitimate potential uses of nuclear weapons.

- Before the United States adopts a NFU posture, it might wish to ascertain whether its conventional forces can fulfill the first-use role nuclear weapons have traditionally played.

On April 4, 2008, a group of nuclear experts gathered at Stanford University's Center for International Security and Cooperation to discuss whether the United States should adopt a policy of never using nuclear weapons first in a conflict.

This reassessment of no first use was sparked by the widespread perception that the latest official review of US nuclear weapons policy has lowered the threshold for use of nuclear weapons. Although the 2001 Nuclear Posture Review stated that the US administration aimed to reduce the role of offensive nuclear weapons in US policy, the document also called for strategic "flexibility" and the development of new low-yield and earth-penetrating warheads. Further, it maintained that the United States needed nuclear weapons to "provide credible military options to deter a wide range of threats, including weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and large-scale conventional military force."

The group asked whether this was in fact still true—does the United States need nuclear weapons to do anything other than to respond to a nuclear attack? Does it need the option of using nuclear weapons to respond to a large conventional attack or a strike using chemical or biological weapons? What would be the costs and benefits of explicitly adopting a NFU posture?

The Case for No First Use

Throughout the Cold War, the United States reserved the right to use nuclear weapons first in a conflict, in large part because the Soviet Union had overwhelming conventional military advantages in Europe, and the United States sought to level the battlefield. However, now that the Cold War is over, conference participants agreed that the United States no longer faces a similar force imbalance. "There is a serious mismatch between current US nuclear weapons doctrine and declaratory policy and the major nuclear threats the United States faces in the world today," said one participant. Moreover, while the value of a first-use posture has gone down, the value of strengthening norms against the acquisition, production, and use of nuclear arms has gone up. Many conference participants argued that by reducing the salience of nuclear arms in US war plans, a NFU posture could help the United States strengthen international antinuclear norms and aid its nonproliferation efforts.

Conference participants noted that there is a difference between declaratory policy and war plans, and that a doctrine of NFU would not necessarily change US nuclear weapons targeting policy. However, they also noted that declaratory policy helps shape the intellectual atmosphere in which US nuclear weapons policy is made. Military planners take declaratory policy into account, and its effects trickle down into procurement decisions, alert procedures, and operational war plans.

A NFU policy would send a signal to American war planners that nuclear weapons are not appropriate in almost all contingencies. This would encourage them to develop capabilities and plans for using conventional arms to destroy hardened and deeply buried targets, biological weapons laboratories, and other sites that the current administration has suggested could only be destroyed by nuclear attack. Expanding conventional capabilities in turn reduces the likelihood that the United States would feel the need to use nuclear weapons. As one conference participant noted, "If you rule out the use of nuclear force, you push war planners to think with more discipline…You can't just let military planners assume that it's all right to use nuclear weapons to cover a wide range of targets." Without the discipline imposed by a change in guidance doctrine, one participant said, military planners are prone to including nuclear options in war plans simply because they need a mission for weapons they already have.

By cultivating a culture of nonuse within the military, NFU could smooth the way toward adoption of a purely retaliatory nuclear posture, with a nuclear force likely consisting only of submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs). Indeed, conference participants noted that the US armed forces are already far less enthusiastic about nuclear arms than they were during the Cold War. One participant said that the Joint Chiefs now argue about which military branches have to maintain nuclear weapons, rather than which ones get to. One participant suggested that the Air Force is unenthusiastic about maintaining intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), bombs, and nuclear cruise missiles and would not resist a new doctrine diminishing the relevance of nuclear arms. Faced with the nonnuclear culture of today's Air Force, this person said, "Curtis LeMay would be rolling in his grave."

Participants noted that declaratory statements also shape public and legislative debate about nuclear weapons issues. The 2001 Nuclear Posture Review created the widespread perception that US political leaders have sought new uses for nuclear arms, and it justified development of the Reliable Replacement Warhead and the Robust Nuclear Earth Penetrator to Congress. Public and congressional debate on the proper role of nuclear weapons, the adequacy of the current nuclear arsenal, potential arms control agreements and weapons reductions, and future arms development programs are all conducted against the backdrop of declared US nuclear doctrine. If the United States adopted NFU, that debate would change.

NFU could also affect US policy abroad. International nuclear norms are constructed of what countries think, say, and do about nuclear weapons, and US statements about its nuclear doctrine can affect those norms by signaling to others what it believes to be reasonable and legitimate potential uses of nuclear weapons. NFU would indicate that the United States was reducing the salience of nuclear arms in its military policy and would therefore signal that we value our disarmament commitments under Article VI of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). In turn, this could strengthen norms against the spread and use of nuclear weapons and assist US nonproliferation efforts. As one participant noted, "A new NFU declaratory policy would make US engagement in…a global debate about nuclear weapons and other WMD appear credible and thus potentially more effective. It would put the United States in a more tenable position in the ongoing effort to create a broader global consensus against the use of any weapon of mass destruction against noncombatants."

Currently, the United States is in a less tenable position. One conference participant noted that the 1999 North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) "Strategic Concept" explicitly placed a high value on the utility of nuclear weapons: "The Alliance will maintain for the foreseeable future an appropriate mix of nuclear and conventional forces based in Europe…The Alliance's conventional forces alone cannot ensure credible deterrence. Nuclear weapons make a unique contribution in rendering the risks of aggression against the Alliance incalculable and unacceptable. Thus, they remain essential to preserve peace." Such language signals the importance of nuclear weapons and makes it harder to convince states that they do not need them. One participant invoked Ambassador Max Kampelman, who said

that trying to convince countries to denuclearize while maintaining a first-use posture is like "lighting up while telling your children not to smoke."

Participants were concerned that the September 2002 US National Security Strategy—which calls for strategic dominance potent enough to dissuade any state from becoming a potential rival and, more specifically, for exploration of new types of nuclear weapons—signals a repudiation of the US commitment to nuclear disarmament under Article VI of the NPT. Similarly, conference participants worried that when the current administration promises to leave "all options on the table" in regards to Iran—a statement usually construed to include a nuclear option—it reduces the US ability to bring international pressure to bear against Iran's enrichment program.

In addition, there is some empirical evidence to suggest that US nuclear doctrine influences the nuclear doctrines of other states. India, for example, has copied innovations in US nuclear doctrine since the late 1990s, when its Draft Nuclear Doctrine emulated negative security assurances that the United States had developed in the 1980s, directly copying the so-called "Warsaw Pact exception" clause—which allowed the United States to target Soviet satellite states with nuclear arms during a major European war—from US and NATO doctrine. In 2002 the Indian National Security Advisory Board recommended complete abandonment of no first use, citing the need to emulate the doctrine of other nuclear weapon states: "India must consider withdrawing from this [NFU] commitment as the other nuclear weapon states have not accepted this policy…All five nuclear weapon states…reserve the right to launch nuclear weapons first. Then why should India not do so?" In 2003 New Delhi adopted a nuclear doctrine comparable to the United States' strategic ambiguity regarding response to a chemical or biological attack.

That said, conference participants were divided as to how, and how much, a NFU doctrine would affect nuclear-weapons-use norms and the nuclear weapons calculus of other states. The link between US declaratory policy and the strategic decisions of other nations is not always so clear. Iran, North Korea, and other countries have often protested US nuclear policy, citing these "nuclear threats" as a justification for their own arms programs. But conference participants generally agreed that Iran's nuclear program is more likely a response to current US conventional superiority, and before now to Iraq's nuclear program in the Saddam Hussein years. Indeed, the North Korean, Indian, and Pakistani nuclear weapons programs all accelerated during the 1990s, when the United States was moving to delegitimize nuclear weapons. Nevertheless, adopting NFU would at the very least deprive other states of one argument for their arsenals.

Participants were universally concerned that we do not have enough empirical data about how proliferators and potential nuclear weapon states make decisions, meaning that we cannot be sure how much a NFU doctrine (and similar measures) would affect the global nonproliferation regime. Nevertheless, some warned against an excessive focus on tabulating the costs and benefits of NFU in hypothetical situations and allowing that analysis to slow progress toward reducing the salience of nuclear weapons. These participants insisted that developing momentum was essential and that NFU could help create a culture of nonuse that smoothes the way toward eventual disarmament—a goal for which there is increasing support, as demonstrated in the January 2007 *Wall Street Journal* op-ed by George Shultz and others. At the same time, participants agreed that in trying to reduce the salience of nuclear weapons, NFU was not as important as certain other steps, notably US ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT).

The Drawbacks of No First Use

Some participants argued that the United States should not adopt a NFU doctrine, because although the Soviet Union is no longer a threat, we cannot be sure what the future security environment will look like. One conference participant argued that a more sensible position would be a posture of "defensive last resort," as proposed in a 1993 *Foreign Affairs* article by McGeorge Bundy, William Crowe, and Sidney Drell. That article argued: "In recognizing the possibility of a future case in which there might be justification for a use of nuclear weapons in a defensive last resort, we are simply resisting the notion that our country can be certain, *a priori*, that there will never be a case when such use might be the least bad choice."

Some conference participants questioned whether there really was such uncertainty in the post-Cold War world. They argued that it was highly unlikely that "Stalin might come back" or that the United States would be faced with an overwhelming conventional threat that could only be offset with nuclear weapons. Indeed, pressed to describe specific scenarios that might require the first use of nuclear weapons, conference members initially could not think of any because the United States possesses overwhelming conventional superiority. Subsequently, they outlined a situation in which the US military, already fighting in two theaters (e.g., the Middle East and the Korean Peninsula), was faced with yet another major conflict. However, there was disagreement over the importance of this and similar scenarios, with some participants warning that an overabundance of caution—a fear of highly improbable scenarios—can lead to irrational policy. One participant countered that, were such a situation to arise, we could always revoke our NFU policy. However, that possibility immediate raised the problem of whether a NFU doctrine was credible because it could be so easily changed. Another participant noted that in a crisis situation, revocation of

NFU would be seen as threatening and escalatory, much like mating warheads to missiles.

Nevertheless, before we adopt a NFU posture, we must ask whether our conventional forces can fulfill the first-use role nuclear weapons have traditionally played. Most conference participants thought they could, given US power-projection capabilities. Moreover, given the extreme consequences of being the first to use nuclear weapons in a conflict, the United States is extremely unlikely to do so, even if there were some military advantage. But other participants worried that conventional weapons could not fulfill US security guarantees as well as nuclear weapons. A conventional guarantee is a promise to fight a war with an ally, on that ally's territory; the United States and its ally would likely win the conflict, but the ally's population and territory would suffer horribly. By contrast, a nuclear security guarantee presents a potential enemy with an existential threat to *its* territory and is therefore more likely to *prevent* war. During the Cold War, nuclear weapons deterred the Soviet Union from invading Germany because it was likely that nuclear retaliation would destroy the entire Soviet Union. A nonnuclear NATO would not have had the same deterrent effect. While that particular force imbalance was unique to the Cold War, conference participants noted that the United States does not have enough conventional power to deter a North Korean invasion of South Korea. In addition, the United States can only deploy overwhelming conventional power to certain locations because it relies heavily on air and sea forces, which have limited range. For example, US forces would be unable to fight their way to Tehran if that were needed.

Several participants disagreed with this assessment, with one arguing that comparing a nuclear umbrella with the ability to occupy territory is like comparing apples and oranges. While it may not be possible to actually invade Iran with ground troops, the United States can deliver massive destruction by air anywhere in the world. That capability, although conventional, has a strong deterrent effect. We can threaten to fly 80,000 conventional air assault sorties while taking very few casualties and we can knock out a country's electricity grids, go after its political and military leadership, attack the enemy government's power base, and so forth. Although it requires more sorties and more time, this capability is akin to a nuclear capability, posing a threat severe enough to affect the calculations of any rational actor. According to one participant, if deterrence hinges upon the ability to destroy things from the air, then "it's pretty hard to find a case where you can't do something devastating by conventional means."

In response, one participant mentioned that a conventional security guarantee might not be enough to protect Georgia against a Russian attack. However, the same participant noted that extending our nuclear umbrella over Georgia, if it joined NATO, would pose a number of other complications, not the least of which is the prospect of Russian escalation during a conflict.

Along those lines, several participants pointed out that nuclear weapons cannot always make up for the deficiencies of conventional forces. For example, the US nuclear arsenal did not deter North Korea from invading South Korea, nor did the United States use nuclear weapons against the North. Today, using nuclear weapons in such a situation would destroy the entire Korean Peninsula, so we still cannot credibly contemplate a nuclear response. Likewise, US nuclear weapons did not deter Saddam Hussein from invading Kuwait. Thus, our hypothetical retaliatory scenarios are couched in abstract, existential terms—as is the habit of nuclear strategists—but this mode of analysis may be inappropriate in actual situations.

Given the tradition of nonuse that has developed, some participants noted that we are essentially reliant on conventional arms for deterrence anyway. We are restrained by the fact that any nuclear first use would change the world in a dramatically negative way. They suggested that it would be worthwhile to go through every possible scenario and ask whether nuclear first use is actually militarily useful option, in contrast to available conventional options.

Additionally, participants emphasized that security guarantees are not just a function of the relationship between the United States and the country it hopes to deter; they are also a function of how secure the ally under our protection feels. As one participant put it, "What we think about our umbrella isn't important. What's important is what our allies think our umbrella is like." Such concerns drove policy during the Cold War—for example, when the United States deployed Pershing missiles to reassure our European allies that their security was not being decoupled from ours. Today it is essential that our nuclear doctrine reassure allies like Japan, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Taiwan that they do not need nuclear weapons—lest they develop their own arsenals and undercut the nuclear nonproliferation regime.

Conference participants were divided over the effect that a NFU pledge would have on this priority. According to several, a NFU security guarantee—which promises that we will defend our allies with nuclear weapons only if they are attacked with nuclear weapons—need not undermine the security of US key allies and friends in the future, given the United States' overwhelming conventional superiority. However, they did emphasize that US security guarantees are an extremely sensitive subject for key US allies, especially Japan, South Korea, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and members of NATO. The Japanese prime minister's threat to withdraw from the NPT during the 1998 North Korea crisis underscores this point, as does Condoleezza Rice's 2006 trip to Tokyo in the wake of North Korea's nuclear test, in which she reassured Japan's leaders of

the US commitment to "the full range of its defense and security commitments to Japan."

But would NFU actually undermine security assurances? As with their questions about the impact NFU would have on norms, conference participants were struck by the lack of available empirical data—by how little we really know about what our allies think of this issue. It is necessary to collect more evidence to validate or invalidate the contention that Japan, for example, would feel less assured if the United States adopted a NFU posture. It would also be particularly useful to get more data on India, which has publicly rationalized its nuclear posture changes in terms of US posture changes. If the United States adopted a NFU posture, would India follow suit, or would it conveniently forget the linkage it had previously drawn with other great-power nuclear doctrines? Could NFU encourage positive changes in the nuclear doctrines of other countries?

Some conference participants worried that adopting NFU might actually *encourage* proliferation by weakening security assurances or by suggesting a shortcut for a weak state to match our military capability. One participant speculated that this is a natural consequence of US conventional superiority and that we should consider how to redress those security imbalances. Other participants argued that the US nuclear posture is basically irrelevant as it relates to this problem: no matter what the US nuclear posture is, states will see nuclear weapons as a way of offsetting America's conventional military superiority.

One participant questioned whether adopting a NFU posture in the current political environment is wise. If the United States adopts NFU in 2009 in the midst of a withdrawal from Iraq, troubles in Afghanistan, and an economic crisis, it might contribute to a general perception that the United States is weakening and its assurances are less credible. The United States has been militarily aggressive since the 9/11 attacks but that does not mean our assurances are more credible. There is uncertainty about US nonproliferation policy and almost no trust in US intelligence. Elites abroad do not know what to believe when the United States makes statements about its intentions. While our goal of a NFU pledge would be to devalue nuclear weapons, discourage proliferation, and lock in US conventional superiority, other states might not interpret the move that way. A NFU pledge might simply signal that a weakened United States had lost its nerve.

Does It Really Matter?

According to some conference participants, whatever stated doctrine may be, the default US nuclear posture is a defensive last resort simply because American officials would not consider using nuclear weapons except under the most dire of circumstances. The 2001 Nuclear Posture Review, other nuclear planning documents, Global Strike, and efforts to develop low-yield and earth-penetrating weapons have led to the common impression that the current policies have lowered the threshold for using nuclear weapons. However, a few participants argued that top US officials have become largely indifferent to nuclear weapons and pointed out that they were not mentioned in the 2002 National Security Strategy. Although US officials have said "all options are on the table" with regard to Iran, the senior staffs of the Rumsfeld and Gates Pentagons have considered nuclear weapons unusable. According to this view, Global Strike includes a nuclear option only because it is technically expedient to integrate a conventional ICBM capability with the system that does nuclear targeting, and nuclear weapons are included in other war plans simply because the administration's default view is that it is good to have military options.

Many conference participants disagreed with this view, but they noted that, if true, it had significant implications for NFU. One pointed out that indifference toward nuclear doctrine might be as bad as a policy of nuclear preemption because it engenders a lack of discipline that allows junior war planners to contemplate a wide range of uses for nuclear weapons and send the wrong signal about when we would use them. Indeed, noted one participant, if the current nuclear weapons policy is actually one of strategic ambiguity or defensive last resort, then the US administration should spell that out publicly so that the United States does not suffer from the perception that it has an aggressive nuclear stance. Likewise, participants noted that perceptions of current nuclear policy are undercutting the officially-stated desire to impress upon terrorists and rogue states a debate about the moral legitimacy of nuclear arms.

Some participants were not sure that NFU would measurably reduce the salience of nuclear weapons. For example, nuclear weapons certainly affect the relationship between India and Pakistan, and their nuclear weapons are not even deployed. Moreover, when Russia and India declared that they would no longer adhere to a NFU posture, the effect—negative or positive—on the international community was negligible. One participant recalled a meeting in Norway on reducing the salience of nuclear weapons, in which the representatives of Asian countries were unenthusiastic about NFU. Instead, they said the key to delegitimizing nuclear weapons was to get them out of the hands of the military and remove them from war plans. To that end, rather than changing declared doctrine, the United States should focus on programmatic steps toward a less aggressive nuclear posture—cutting the Reliable Replacement Warhead, de-alerting nuclear weapons, developing conventional means to cover every possible contingency except for nuclear attack, and so forth. The United States should strive to emphasize, with words and actions, that "the purpose of nuclear weapons is to ensure that they are never used." Participants said that such a policy would

have the virtue of reducing the salience of nuclear weapons while remaining more realistic and honest about possible nuclear use in extenuating circumstances.

Many participants emphasized the realist's perspective that, despite our attempts to reduce the salience of nuclear weapons, many countries do not see nuclear weapons as a tool to "ensure that nuclear weapons are never used," but rather as an essential guarantee of their security against conventional attack. For example, a US NFU doctrine will have no effect on Israel's nuclear strategy. Likewise, Russia sees its nuclear weapons as a way to offset the erosion of its conventional military strength. This applies to states like North Korea and Iran as well. Their nuclear programs are, in large part, a response to US conventional military might, so a change in US nuclear doctrine is unlikely to affect their own nuclear decisions.

Yet, although states will pursue their national interests, there are a number of states, like Ukraine and South Africa, that saw it in their interest to renounce nuclear weapons and sign the NPT. The United States can convince states to renounce their nuclear options by tailoring its nonproliferation policies to each individual country's security concerns. In this way the United States could also prevent a nuclear domino effect if one state does go nuclear. By addressing Japan's and South Korea's security interests, for example, the United States can reduce the likelihood that North Korea's nuclear program will spark proliferation throughout East Asia. The relevance of NFU lies in how it contributes to this tailored nonproliferation calculus.

Most participants expressed the opinion that NFU and other elements of US nuclear posture must be important insofar as they set the stage for the United States to hold other countries to their nonproliferation commitments and how they affect states' decisions about whether or not to fully embrace the nonproliferation regime. Even if states gain and maintain nuclear arsenals based on their own security interests, some participants pointed out, that does not mean the United States should dismiss the importance of norms: "I don't think we should simply say that the Cold War worked out fine, deterrence held, and that the Pakistanis and the Indians should replicate the experience of the United States and Russia."

In addition, participants were overwhelmingly of the opinion that the most important items to address while setting the stage for the 2010 NPT Review Conference are ratification of the CTBT and steps toward the denuclearization of North Korea and Iran. NFU factors into that calculus, but it is definitely lower on the list.

Important Questions

Participants raised three issues for special discussion. First, would a NFU policy reduce our ability to deter a chemical or biological attack?

Currently, the United States suggests that it might respond to a chemical or biological attack with nuclear weapons, a policy of "calculated ambiguity" that is intended to deter enemy states from contemplating such an attack. Most conference participants agreed that the United States should not threaten nuclear retaliation in response to an attack with weapons of mass destruction because it suggests that we might respond to a chemical attack with nuclear weapons, which would be a highly disproportionate response, as nuclear weapons are orders of magnitude more powerful than chemical weapons. Threatening to respond to a chemical attack with nuclear weapons overstates the value of chemical weapons, lowers the threshold for the use of nuclear weapons, and creates a "commitment trap," whereby the United States might feel obligated to use nuclear weapons after a chemical attack to demonstrate that its threats were credible.

There was, however, disagreement about whether nuclear weapons should be used to deter biological weapons. Theoretically, biological weapons could kill hundreds of thousands or even millions of people, rendering large amounts of urban infrastructure useless by forcing expensive decontamination or even razing of the affected buildings. However, the level of certainty between nuclear and biological attacks is vast; a nuclear attack in an urban area would almost certainly produce 100,000+ casualties, whereas a biological attack in the same area could produce anywhere from zero to millions of casualties. Furthermore, it is clear that medical preparedness—quarantines, vaccinations, cures, and the like—constitutes a much better defense against biological attack than the threat of nuclear retaliation, especially given that bioweapons are more likely to be used by terrorists than by states.

This led to another issue: President Bush has declared that states that transfer nuclear arms to terrorists will be held "fully accountable for the consequences of such action." As National Security Adviser Stephen Hadley explained, "deterrence policy targeted at those states, organizations, or individuals who might enable or facilitate terrorists in obtaining or using weapons of mass destruction can help prevent the terrorists from ever gaining these weapons in the first place"; the purpose is to "affect the strategic calculus of the terrorists." It might be useful to threaten nuclear attack against a state that could transfer nuclear material to a terrorist actor even if that state is not contemplating a direct assault on the United States or its allies. One participant noted that this might deter North Korea or Pakistan from passing nuclear arms or material to nonstate actors. If the United States adopted a NFU doctrine, it would be important to address this particular element of declaratory policy as a special case.

Finally, participants asked whether NFU implied the de-alerting of our nuclear arsenal or changes to force

structure. Some participants argued that there was no relationship between the two because first use is not the same thing as prompt use. A de-alerted weapon could still be the first nuclear weapon used in a conflict, and therefore one could conceivably have a first-use force comprised entirely of SLBMs, even though they are usually thought of as retaliatory weapons. Conversely, a NFU force could be composed of ICBMs that we are able to launch quickly.

However, other participants maintained that there is an implied relationship between de-alerting and NFU. For one thing, de-alerting might restrict the range of circumstances in which the United States could use its nuclear weapons first in a conflict. For another, as one conference participant pointed out, Global Strike is designed to deliver conventional or nuclear weapons to targets anywhere in the world given very little lead time, effectively dictating a prompt-use posture. If we wish to maintain a Global Strike capability, which is meant for use in time-sensitive situations when we are faced with perishable intelligence—like notice of a terrorist meeting—we are effectively telling military planners to maintain a prompt-use posture. Some suggested that a declaration of NFU doctrine should be followed by de-alerting to render the NFU pledge more credible, but others suggested this sequence should be reversed: de-alerting would make a subsequent NFU pledge more credible.

Conclusion

The conference did not conclude whether adopting a NFU doctrine would further US interests. Participants were divided as to whether conventional weapons could be just as effective a deterrent, whether the security environment might change for the worse, whether our allies would react with horror to NFU, and whether any potential benefits for the nonproliferation regime would really outweigh these potential costs. Rather, the conference determined that to make such a decision, more data was needed about the role that declaratory doctrine plays in affecting international nuclear norms, influencing the nuclear doctrines of other countries, and reassuring allies of our intention to protect them.

Participant List

Co-organizers

Matt Martin, Program Officer, Policy Analysis and Dialogue, The Stanley Foundation

Scott Sagan, Co-Director of CISAC and Professor of Political Science, Stanford University

Discussants

Linton Brooks, Former Under Secretary of Energy for Nuclear Security; Administrator, National Nuclear Security Administration

Sid Drell, Professor Emeritus and Deputy Director, Stanford Linear Accelerator Center, Stanford University

Rapporteur

Peter Scoblic, Executive Editor, *The New Republic*

Participants

George Bunn, Consulting Professor, CISAC, Stanford University

Lynn Eden, Associate Director for Research and Senior Research Scholar, CISAC, Stanford University

Charles Ferguson, Fellow, Science and Technology, Council on Foreign Relations

Siegfried Hecker, Co-Director and Research Professor, CISAC, Stanford University

David Holloway, Raymond A. Spruance Professor of International History, CISAC, Stanford University

Tom Isaacs, Director, Planning and Special Studies, Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory

Raymond Jeanloz, Professor of Astronomy, University of California, Berkeley

Michael May, Senior Fellow, Freeman Spogli Institute for International Affairs, CISAC, Stanford University

Steve Miller, Director, International Security Program, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University

Michael Nacht, Dean, Goldman School of Public Policy, University of California, Berkeley

Janne Nolan, Professor of International Affairs, Graduate School of Public and International Affairs, University of Pittsburgh

Pavel Podvig, Research Associate, CISAC, Stanford University

Nina Tannenwald, Associate Research Professor of International Relations, Watson Institute for International Studies, Brown University

Dean Wilkening, Director, Science Program, CISAC, Stanford University

Barron YoungSmith, Research Assistant, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

Staff

Rupal Mehta, Assistant, CISAC, Stanford University

Veronica Tessler, Program Associate, Policy Analysis and Dialogue, The Stanley Foundation

Affiliations are listed for identification purposes only. Participants attended as individuals rather than as representatives of their governments or organizations.

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The Stanley Foundation
209 Iowa Avenue
Muscatine, IA 52761 USA
563-264-1500
563-264-0864 fax
info@stanleyfoundation.org

Production: Amy Bakke Anne Drinkall, and Jeff Martin