

Stop New Nuclear Weapons

The Bush administration has renewed its efforts to develop new nuclear weapons. In February 2005, the administration once again asked Congress for funds for research into the development of a "Robust Nuclear Earth Penetrator" (RNEP), often referred to as a nuclear "bunker buster." This weapon would be designed to be used against deeply buried targets and underground bunkers. In June 2004, the House of Representatives cut all funds for the program, and by the end of the year the Senate also agreed to end the program. Nonetheless, the administration proposed that the program be reinstated in its budget for fiscal year 2006 (FY06).

The administration is asking for \$4 million in the Energy Department budget for FY06 as well as

another \$14 million for FY07. It is also asking for \$4.5 million in the Air Force budget to do non-nuclear tests of the bunker buster. Although the money requested is only for research and testing, actually building these weapons would cost hundreds of millions of dollars.

While the amount requested is small relative to the overall military budget, the significance of asking for funds for new, more usable, nuclear weapons goes far beyond budgetary issues. It is important for how the world perceives the United States' stance towards nuclear weapons. At the same time that the administration is criticizing other countries for pursuing nuclear weapon technology, it is upgrading its own weapons arsenal. This "do what I say, not

what I do" policy is evident to the world. If nuclear weapons are unacceptable for Iran and North Korea, they are unacceptable for the United States. The administration seems to believe that nuclear weapons only present a problem when they are possessed by people who do not support the United States. Instead of reducing the threat of nuclear weapons, U.S. foreign policy is only enhancing the idea that nuclear weapons are sources of power and prestige.

Furthermore, the nuclear bunker buster is not just another nuclear weapon. It would have a destructive force 70 times greater than the bomb that fell on Hiroshima. While burrowing underground before exploding, the bunker buster still would cause tens of thousands of deaths from the fallout.



A B-2 bomber releases a casing for the B61-11 earth-penetrating bomb (similar to the proposed RNEP) during tests in Alaska on November 20, 1996.

Photo courtesy of Sandia National Laboratories.

Why RNEP is Unnecessary

The Bush administration claims that the nuclear bunker buster is necessary because it would allow the United States to destroy underground bunkers that are used for nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons. Yet the administration also claims that developing such a weapon does not lower the threshold for nuclear use.

These two claims, however, cannot both be true. In order for the United States to deter countries from developing nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons, such countries must believe that the United States would actually use its nuclear bunker busters. But if the U.S. were to use them, the nuclear threshold would be lowered, thereby increasing the chance of a nuclear war.

Furthermore, if potential adversaries believe that the United States would use a nuclear bunker buster against a non-nuclear country, it legitimates the view that "nuclear might makes right." It suggests that the only way for countries to defend themselves is by developing their own nuclear weapons. If the U.S., the most powerful military in history, needs nuclear weapons to protect itself, every other country will believe they need them as well.

Bunker Busters and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty

Developing new nuclear weapons is at odds with the U.S. commitment to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons. It undermines the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which has significantly limited the number of countries that have nuclear weapons.

By signing the NPT, the United States agreed "to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to...nuclear disarmament" (Article VI). The administration claims that this language is vague and permits the United States to develop new nuclear weapons. However, the rest of the world is watching to see whether the NPT is in fact a fair deal between nuclear-weapons-possessing countries and non-nuclear countries. They are likely to see this interpretation as the United States dropping its end of the bargain.

What You Can Do

Concerned citizens have played a central role in the past in curbing the nuclear arms race and preventing nuclear war. A similar movement is needed today:

- Communicate with your members of Congress. Urge them to eliminate funding for new nuclear weapons in the FY06 budget. Funding could be included in three annual budget bills: the defense authorization bill, the defense appropriations bill, and the energy and water appropriations bill.
- Write a letter to the editor of your local paper explaining the dangers of developing new nuclear weapons.
- Educate your friends and family. Numbers do make a difference, and legislators will be more inclined to vote your way if they feel there is a groundswell of support for a particular measure or issue. Help create that momentum by educating your community.

February 2005

LET FCNL HELP YOU TAKE ACTION TO STOP NEW NUCLEAR WEAPONS DEVELOPMENT

FCNL has many resources to assist you. If you do not have web access, we can mail written material to you.

Visit FCNL's web site at <www.fcnl.org> to view congressional actions, background information, advocate letters and statements, positions of the 2004 presidential candidates, and links to other resources. The web site includes information on topics such as new weapons development, threat reduction, nuclear weapons use policy, de-alerting, and weapons testing.