



Reliable Replacement Warhead: Another Unneeded Nuclear Weapon

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Stymied by Congress' refusal for the last two years to fund the nuclear "bunker buster," the Bush administration remains intent on developing another class of nuclear weapons, the so-called Reliable Replacement Warhead, or RRW.

The administration has asked for \$27 million for fiscal year 2007 to enable the Energy Department to design and develop a program to replace current nuclear warheads. Arms control advocates and some members of Congress are concerned that the program is a Trojan horse that could lead to the resumption of nuclear testing.

Researching and developing a new generation of "reliable" nuclear weapons could undermine arms control and nonproliferation objectives by setting off a nuclear arms race. It sends the wrong message to other



Sea-launched ballistic missile
Photo from U.S.Department of Navy

would-be nuclear powers around the world. It could prompt Russia and China to modernize their nuclear arsenals. The program could lead to the resumption of U.S. nuclear testing and end the current international testing moratorium.

Despite the "reliable" label of the proposed new program, the current U.S. arsenal is extremely reliable. The secretaries of Energy and Defense have certified to the president for the past nine years that the present U.S. nuclear stockpile is safe, secure—and reliable.

The program would require new nuclear weapons plants that the Energy Department estimates will cost billions of dollars. As a former White House budget official in the first Bush and Clinton administrations stated, "The weapons labs are more interested in job security than national security."¹

Rep. David Hobson (OH-7), the chair of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Energy and Water, led the effort to eliminate funding for the nuclear "bunker buster." But Rep. Hobson is willing to give RRW limited support as a program "to improve the reliability and longevity of existing weapons and their components,... refurbishing some existing weapons in the stockpile without developing a new weapon that would require underground testing to verify the design."²

Congressional leaders believe they can keep the RRW program within tight constraints, but the history of previous limits on the nuclear weapons program is not promising.

¹Robert Civiak, "Rumblings over the Bomb: Slippery Slope to New Nukes," *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 24, 2006.

²Rep. David Hobson, "U.S. Nuclear Security in the 21st Century," Address to the Arms Control Association, February 3, 2005.

RRW and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty **What You Can Do**

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), an international agreement signed by 188 countries that has significantly limited the number of countries that have nuclear weapons.

In 1970 as part of the NPT, the United States agreed “to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament” (Article VI). As the Vatican remarked at the United Nations in 2005, “In essence, the NPT promised a world in which nuclear weapons would be eliminated...” However, “it is evident that nuclear deterrence drives the development of ever newer nuclear arms, thus preventing genuine nuclear disarmament.”³

The administration claims that new nuclear weapons are needed for some future “new threat.” However, such U.S. weapons programs make it easier for nuclear “hawks” in Moscow and Beijing to argue for new nuclear weapons for their own nuclear arsenals, undermining the process of disarmament.

Developing new nuclear weapons also undermines U.S. nonproliferation goals. As Rep. Ed Markey (MA-7), a leading congressional critic of new nuclear weapons, has stated, “America cannot credibly preach nuclear temperance from a barstool.” At a time when the United States is urging restraint in Iran’s and North Korea’s nuclear programs, the U.S. administration is intent on developing new nuclear weapons against an undefined, future threat.

Concerned citizens have played a central role in the past in curbing the nuclear arms race and preventing nuclear war. FCNL and its disarmament allies were able to defeat the nuclear “bunker buster” in 2004 and 2005 and will work to see that Congress deletes funding for the RRW program. However, the involvement of many thousands of individual citizens is essential for Congress to respond.

- Email or write your members of Congress. Urge them to eliminate funding for new nuclear weapons in the fiscal year 2007 budget. Funding could be included in two annual budget bills: the defense authorization 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.
- Keep informed. The “Nuclear Disarmament” section of FCNL’s website has current information at www.fcnl.org/nuclear

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³Archbishop Celestino Migliore, Statement to the Review Conference on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, United Nations, May 4, 2005.

