Nuclear Watch New Mexico

2010 Nuclear Posture Review Calls for Surge Weapons Production Capacity And Funding for CMRR

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One year after President Obama set forth his vision for a world free of nuclear weapons, his administration has released its proposed map of how to begin to get there. The first unclassified Nuclear Posture Review (NPR), released today, sets the direction of U.S. nuclear weapons policy and plans for maintaining the stockpile. Of importance to northern New Mexico is the intention to fund the $4.5 billion Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement (CMRR) Project at the Los Alamos National Laboratory. Apparently bowing to pressure from the weapons laboratories and holdovers from the previous administration, the NPR states that the CMRR is needed to sustain the nuclear arsenal. But it also goes past that and calls for "some modest capacity [that] will be put in place for surge production in the event of significant geopolitical "surprise." Once that capacity is installed we believe the door remains open for expanded plutonium pit production at LANL.

Production remains tied to reduction. It's not clear to us how, as stated in the NPR, expanding production infrastructure will allow excess warheads to be retired along with other planned stockpile reductions. "Funding the CMRR allows increased weapons production capacity and has nothing to do with retiring warheads," said Scott Kovac, operations director of Nuclear Watch New Mexico, "it's surprising that the administration is allowing the funding of this $4.5 billion project to blight an otherwise great NPR."

The NPR also falls short of the conservative approach to maintaining the existing arsenal with minimum modifications to original tested design specifications. NukeWatch advocates "curatorship" of the nuclear stockpile, which involves robust surveillance and maintenance of the stockpile but avoids new-design components and obviates expanded production capacity or new facilities to make them. The NPR calls for a full range of Life Extension Programs, including refurbishment of existing warheads, reuse of nuclear components from different warheads, and replacement of nuclear components. In a follow on NPR news conference, "replacement" of warheads was defined as using designs that have been tested but are not currently or have not been in stockpile. Any such replacement must be authorized by the President and approved by Congress. NukeWatch is deeply concerned that these Life Extension Programs will be used to endow existing nuclear weapons with new military capabilities, as has been done in the past, despite claims made to the contrary in the NPR.

The NPR continues Obama's promise of working toward a world free of nuclear weapons by including statements that the United States will not develop "new" nuclear warheads, and is explicit that preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons is now the top priority of the U.S.' nuclear forces. In our view, this is a laudable evolution in U.S. nuclear weapons policies, but needs to be matched on the ground by refraining from future expanded warhead production and design of new features.

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