

Center for Global Security and Health

A Summary of Elements Concerning Nuclear Weapons in the Report to Congress on the Defeat of Hard and Deeply Buried Targets

(Transmitted to Congress in October 2001)

It was thought that this report would call for conventional bunker-busting weapons options, and that there was no nuclear element in its requirements. This was based on comments made by Franklin Miller, special assistant to the president and senior director for defense policy and arms control at the National Security Council, who recently told a group from the faith community that there is no current requirement for a mini-nuke, and that the cuts in strategic forces will not lead to new nuclear weapons development. Indeed, the final sentence of the report reads:

Nuclear Weapon for ADW

DoD has not defined a requirement for a nuclear weapon for WMD Agent Defeat missions. See Section 7 within the classified Annex A for further discussion.¹

However, the document is full of references that show that nuclear weapons are an intrinsic part of defeating hard and deeply buried targets, and chemical and biological agents. If DoD ‘has not defined a requirement’ for a nuclear weapon for this purpose, it is only because DoD is *currently* defining such a requirement. This requirement would meet a Mission Needs Assessment (MNA) identified by the Air Force and USSTRATCOM in 1994, for a weapon to defeat Hard and Deeply Buried Targets (HDBT) and WMD. The cuts in strategic forces will not lead to new nuclear weapons development, because that is already underway. The report also describes the intrinsic value of lower-yield nuclear weapons.

A classified study called *Project Sand Dune* started to address the role of nuclear weapons in HDBT defeat in 1997. The study was complete in the first quarter of 1999. This study was undertaken because “..the HDBT Defeat AoA [Analysis of Alternatives] had focused on conventional solutions and highlighted an inability to destroy all HDBTs with current or projected weapons..”² This study looked at nuclear weapons that could fulfill the Air Force and USSTRATCOM Mission Needs Analysis (MNA) from 1994 for a HDBT Defeat Weapon.

The current situation on both HDBT Defeat and WMD Agent Defeat is set out in Section 5 of the paper. On nuclear weapons for HDBT it says:

There is no current program to design a new or modified HDBT Defeat nuclear weapon. However, DoD and DOE continue to consider and assess nuclear concepts that could address the validated mission needs and CRD [Capstone Requirements Document]. They have formed a joint Nuclear Planning Group to define the appropriate scope and option selection criteria for a possible design feasibility and cost study. Further information is provided in Classified Annex A -Section3 – Nuclear Weapons.³

¹ *Report to Congress on the Defeat of Hard and Deeply Buried Target*, Section 6.3.3 S&T Programs, p.24

² *Ibid*, Section 3 Accomplishments to Date, p.11

³ *Ibid*, Section 5 Programs Responsive to the Capstone Requirements Document, p. 18

The paper is even more explicit concerning the role of nuclear weapons in WMD Agent Defeat, they are described as having “a unique ability to destroy both agent containers and CBW agents.”⁴ Accuracy and penetration are important as, given those characteristics the report says that a lower-yield weapon can be used, with less collateral damage. The report also notes that current weapons are not well adapted for this purpose. Interestingly, seemingly referring to the B61-11, it says that the lower yield version of this earth-penetrating nuclear weapon has not been certified.

..it is possible to employ a much lower-yield weapon to achieve the needed neutralization. The ability to use a lower-yield would reduce weapon-produced collateral effects. The current nuclear weapons stockpile, while possessing some limited ground penetration capability and lower yield options (not yet certified), was not developed with this mission in mind.⁵

To fill this gap, Project Sand Dune led to a planning study that is due to report in FY02. As the report says “The overall objective of HDBT and WMD Agent Defeat S&T Programs is to redress shortfalls in current operational capabilities against future threats. Elements include: ... nuclear weapons”⁶ and later elaborates “For destruction of more deeply buried facilities, DoD and DOE are studying the sensitivities and synergies of nuclear weapon yield, penetration, accuracy and tactics.”⁷

No final decisions have yet been taken. The HDBT Report says “Any development and procurement of advanced nuclear capabilities would be considered in the broad context of nuclear stockpile policy, plans and priorities, as well as future DoD strategic programs.”⁸ Any such full scale development of a weapon with a yield of less than 5kt would, of course, need to be preceded by the repeal of the Furse-Spratt provisions from the FY94 National Defense Authorization Act of 1993. The lower-yield version of the B61-11 is a complicating factor, if that is the weapon referenced in the HDBT report, as it needs only to be certified, no research and development would be involved.

Final decisions won't taken until after the NPR and the ongoing HDBT nuclear weapon candidate study has been carried out, and both those requirements will have been met in FY02. There is no current requirement for a nuclear weapon, but there is a current mission need and the Air Force, STRATCOM and DOE are working hard to fill it.

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⁴ *Ibid*, Section 5 Programs Responsive to the Capstone Requirements Document, p. 19

⁵ *Ibid*.

⁶ *Ibid*, Section 6 S&T Meeting Future Threats, p.20

⁷ *Ibid*, Section 6 S&T Meeting Future Threats, p.21

⁸ *Ibid*, Executive Summary, p.4