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The new nuclear arms race
By Katrina vanden Heuvel
Katrina vanden Heuvel, editor and publisher of the Nation magazine, writes a weekly online column for The Post.

On a frigid day in February 1994, William Perry was sworn in as President Bill Clinton's secretary of defense. Perry would take over at the Pentagon during one of the most fluid times in geopolitical history - between the end of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001. During his time in office, Perry was one of the architects of a strategy he called "preventive defense," the goal of which was to reduce global threats rather than just contain them. The greatest threat of all was nuclear, as fears spread about such weapons falling into rogue hands.

Two decades later, Perry has written a new book, "My Journey at the Nuclear Brink," in which he offers a dire warning: "Far from continuing the nuclear disarmament that has been underway for the last two decades, we are starting a new nuclear arms race."

This is not hyperbole. The United States and Russia are acting with increasing belligerence toward each other while actively pursuing monstrous weapons. As Joe Cirincione described in the Huffington Post, the Pentagon plans to spend $1 trillion over 30 years on "an entire new generation of nuclear bombs, bombers, missiles and submarines," including a dozen submarines carrying more than 1,000 warheads, capable of decimating any country anywhere. In the meantime, President Obama has ordered 200 new nuclear bombs deployed in Europe.

Russia has been at least as aggressive. As Cirincione described, Russian state media recently revealed plans for a new kind of a weapon - a hydrogen bomb torpedo - that can traverse 6,000 miles of ocean just as a missile would in the sky. On impact, the bomb would create a "radioactive tsunami," designed to kill millions along a country's coast.

This escalation has been a long time coming, and the U.S. owns much of the blame for the way it has accelerated. During the Clinton administration, the United States pushed hard to expand NATO, breaking a critical promise to Russia not to threaten its sphere of influence. Perry, who played a lead role in this effort, has since acknowledged its folly. "That was the first move down the slippery slope," he said at an event hosted by the Defense Writers' Group. "It's as much our fault as it is the fault of the Russians, at least originally. And it began when I was secretary."

During the George W. Bush administration, there were more missteps, especially the U.S. walking away from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, causing irreparable harm to the countries' fragile relationship. And during the Obama administration, the president seems to have gone out of his way to denigrate Russian President Vladi­mir Putin, publicly describing him as "like a bored child in the back of the classroom." The Obama administration sent arms into Ukraine, reminiscent of Cold War proxy wars that the United States fought on nearly every continent. This time, the game is even more dangerous, playing out on Russia's border instead of thousands of miles away. And though we are more than a quarter century removed from the fall of the Berlin Wall, the United States still has nuclear weapons pointed at Russia on hair-trigger alert, sending a daily signal of aggression.

As Perry noted, one of the great dangers of nuclear proliferation is accidental war. This is not paranoia. In May 2013, the Air Force suspended 17 officers from controlling nuclear weapons after an inspection found a "breakdown in overall discipline." Seven months later, an Air Force general who oversaw bases with 450 ICBM missiles was fired for what The Washington Post described as a "drunken Moscow bender." The next month, 34 nuclear officers were caught cheating on their proficiency exams. According to ABC News, investigators learned about the scandal during "another investigation that has already implicated 11 junior officers in using illegal recreational drugs."

But the increased tension between the U.S. and Russia will have dire global consequences even if neither side launches a weapon. Defeating the Islamic State is likely impossible without Russia as part of a broad coalition. Not only does Russia bring advanced military capabilities and general resources to the fight, it also brings intelligence, diplomatic and political ties in the Middle East that the United States simply does not have. And beyond the fight against the Islamic State, there are a number of vital geopolitical issues where a partnership with Russia can be profoundly powerful. Without Russia, the United States would never have reached a nuclear deal with Iran. Without Russia, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad would still have chemical weapons.

"In a strange turn of history," Obama said during a 2009 speech in Prague, "the threat of global nuclear war has gone down, but the risk of a nuclear attack as gone up." In yet a stranger turn of history, it is the United States that is contributing to the increased risk of both. Whether Hillary Clinton would follow a similar path remains to be seen. On the campaign trail in 2015, the former secretary of state's comments have not been encouraging. The day after Russia started bombing Islamic State targets in Syria, for example, she called for a no-fly zone, a policy that would not just risk confrontation with the Russians, it would require it.

In that same speech in Prague, Obama criticized those who viewed nuclear proliferation as an inevitability. "Such fatalism is a deadly adversary," he said, "for if we believe that the spread of nuclear weapons is inevitable, then in some way we are admitting to ourselves that the use of nuclear weapons is inevitable." In his final year in office, may he remember his own words. And in the years to come, may we all.

The DIPLOMAT

US To Spend $1 Trillion on Nukes

Zachary Keck (at http://thediplomat.com/2014/01/us-to-spend-1-trillion-on-nukes/)

The United States will spend $1 trillion maintaining and modernizing its nuclear arsenal over the next thirty years, according to a new report from an independent think tank.

“Over the next thirty years, the United States plans to spend approximately $1 trillion maintaining the current arsenal, buying replacement systems, and upgrading existing nuclear bombs and warheads,” according to the report, [*Trillion Dollar Nuclear Triad:  US Strategic Modernization over the Next 30 Years*](http://cns.miis.edu/trillion_dollar_nuclear_triad/index.htm), which was released by the [James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies](http://cns.miis.edu/) (CNS) on Tuesday.

These costs will not be spread out evenly over the long time period. During this peak period, the United States will have to devote as much as three percent of its annual defense budgets to its nuclear arsenal. This is similar to the percentage of the defense budget that was devoted to modernizing the U.S. nuclear arsenal during Ronald Reagan in the 1980s, according to the report. The CNS figures are roughly consistent with those of the Congressional Budget Office, [which projected](http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/12/20/us-usa-nuclear-arms-idUSBRE9BJ1FH20131220) last month that the U.S. will spend $355 billion over the next decade on its nuclear arsenal.

The new report is based on a year-long study CNS undertook to estimate the cost of maintaining and modernizing the U.S. nuclear arsenal. As the author’s note in the report, “The United States government does not know with any accuracy how much it spends annually on its nuclear deterrent, or how much it will cost to replace the current [nuclear] triad.” Because of this, the authors contend, U.S. lawmakers and policymakers have been able to avoid a robust debate on the strategic utility of maintaining and modernizing the nuclear triad amid an increasingly tight fiscal climate.

According to the [newly published figures](http://bos.sagepub.com/content/70/1/85.full.pdf%2Bhtml) of the Federation of Atomic Scientists (FAS), the U.S. currently has a stockpile of 4,650 nuclear warheads, 2,130 of which are operational. In addition to the 4,650 warheads, Washington has 2,700 retired nuclear warheads that have yet to be dismantled.

The United States also maintains a nuclear triad where it can deliver nuclear warheads via land-based missiles, submarine-based missiles, or from bomber aircraft. According to the FAS estimates, currently “1,620 strategic warheads are deployed on ballistic missiles—1,150 on submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMS) and 470 on intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs); roughly 300 strategic warheads are located at bomber bases in the United States; and nearly 200 nonstrategic warheads are deployed in Europe.”

The CNS report estimates that in recent years the nuclear triad has cost around $8 billion annually, which works out to be about $240 billion over 30 years.

The U.S. intends to modernize all three legs of its nuclear triad in the coming decades. This in many cases is likely to impose a taxing burden on the Air Force and Navy, the two services responsible for the three legs of the triad.  [As I wrote last May](http://thediplomat.com/2013/05/could-new-ssbn-program-sink-u-s-navy/), “The immense cost of the Ohio-class replacement program to build the United States’ next generation ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs) threatens to jeopardize the rest of the fleet.” The U.S. Navy currently envisions purchasing 12 new SSBNs to replace the currently 14 Ohio-class SSBNs that will be gradually retired. Each of the new 12 is projected to cost between $4-6 billion, leaving little additional money in the Navy’s shipbuilding budget.

Some in the arms control community also claim modernizing the nuclear triad is unnecessary strategically. Joseph Cirincione, president of the Ploughshares Fund, [writes in his recent book](http://www.amazon.com/Nuclear-Nightmares-Securing-World-Before-ebook/dp/B00GGTIFA6/ref%3Dla_B001H6QZBO_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1389160055&sr=1-1): “The U.S. nuclear arsenal is still configured to counter the Cold War threat of a massive Russian nuclear attack…. Reconfiguring the nuclear force to address the actual twenty-first-century threat environment could reduce force numbers dramatically over the next decade without sacrificing vital military missions.”

Council on Foreign Relations (<http://www.cfr.org/russian-federation/russian-military/p33758> )

What are Russian nuclear capabilities and doctrine?

Russia's vast nuclear arsenal remains on par with the United States and is the country's only residual great power feature, according to military analysts. Moscow keeps about 1,500 strategic warheads on deployed intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), submarines, and heavy bombers. These numbers comply with the so-called [New START treaty](http://www.cfr.org/arms-control-disarmament-and-nonproliferation/new-start-treaty/p21851), which came into force February 2011. Russia is also believed to have a few thousand nonstrategic nuclear weapons, which are lower-yield munitions that can be deployed and used on the battlefield.

Russia leaned on its nuclear deterrent as its conventional force languished in the years after the Soviet collapse. In 2000, Moscow lowered its [nuclear threshold](http://www.armscontrol.org/act/2000_05/dc3ma00), permitting the use of atomic weapons in response to conventional attacks that pose an existential threat. (By comparison, Soviet doctrine had reserved nuclear weapons for use only in retaliation for a nuclear attack.) The most recent [military doctrine](http://carnegie.ru/eurasiaoutlook/?fa=57607), approved in December 2014, reaffirmed the post-2000 policy.

Much of the Russian nuclear deterrent is being modernized: A new class of ballistic missile submarine is coming into service; some strategic bombers are being upgraded; and there are plans to replace all Soviet-era ICBMs over the next decade or so.

