CRS Issue Statement on Nuclear Weapons: U.S. Posture and Programs and Arms Control

Amy F. Woolf, Coordinator
Specialist in Nuclear Weapons Policy

Jonathan Medalia
Specialist in Nuclear Weapons Policy

George Mangan
Information Research Specialist

January 6, 2010
President Obama outlined his Administration’s priorities and goals for U.S. nuclear weapons and arms control policy in a speech in Prague, in April 2009. The President stated that “the existence of thousands of nuclear weapons is the most dangerous legacy of the Cold War” and that America was committed to seeking “the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons.” He recognized that this goal would not be reached quickly, but he pledged that the United States would “reduce the role of nuclear weapons in our national security strategy, and urge others to do the same.” At the same time, he indicated that “as long as these weapons exist, the United States will maintain a safe, secure and effective arsenal to deter any adversary, and guarantee that defense to our allies.”

Congress has shown a continuing interest in both of these issue areas—the role of nuclear weapons in U.S. national security policy and the programs and budgets dedicated to maintaining the safety, security and reliability of the U.S. nuclear arsenal. In the FY2008 Defense Authorization Act, Congress mandated that the next Administration conduct a Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) in 2009. The Obama Administration plans to submit its report on the NPR to Congress in early March 2010. This report is to offer the Administration’s conclusions on the key threats to U.S. national security, the role nuclear weapons can play in addressing these threats, and the size and structure of the future U.S. nuclear arsenal. It is also likely to highlight the relationship between U.S. nuclear weapons strategy and U.S. nonproliferation goals.

The NPR is likely to identify a number of programs designed to maintain a “safe, secure, and effective” nuclear arsenal and to bolster the U.S. ability to mitigate emerging threats to U.S. national security. Moreover, in the FY2010 Defense Authorization Act, Congress mandated that, when he submits the new START Treaty to the Senate, the President submit a “report on the plan to (A) enhance the safety, security, and reliability of the nuclear weapons stockpile of the United States; (B) modernize the nuclear weapons complex; and (C) maintain the delivery platforms for nuclear weapons.” As a result, during the annual authorization and appropriations process, the 111th Congress will likely continue to review Administration requests for funding in the Department of Energy budget for warhead maintenance and modifications and funding in the Department of Defense budget for maintenance, training, operations, and modernization of U.S. weapons systems. The NPR may also offer proposals for changes in the size or structure of the U.S. nuclear weapons complex—the Cold War-era facilities that manufacture and maintain U.S. nuclear warheads. Funding for this endeavor may also be addressed in the debate over the Department of Energy budget.

In addition, the NPR may propose that the United States expand or modify its nuclear security and nonproliferation programs to further mitigate the risk that nuclear weapons might spread to unfriendly regimes or non-state actors. The United States spends nearly $1.5 billion per year on programs in the Department of Energy, Department of Defense, and State Department that contribute to these goals, and Congress will have a key role to play in determining the future size and direction of these efforts.

In his speech in April, President Obama indicated that the United States would also pursue arms control agreements as a part of its effort to restrain and eliminate nuclear weapons. It has already pursued negotiations with Russia on a new Treaty to replace the 1991 Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START), which expired in December 2009. The Administration hopes to complete these negotiations and to submit the treaty to the Senate for its advice and consent on ratification early in 2010. It may then pursue discussions with Russia on further reductions in offensive nuclear weapons. The President also indicated that his Administration would “immediately and aggressively pursue U.S. ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty.” The United States
signed this treaty in 1996, but the Senate voted against ratification in October 1999. Administration officials have said that the President would ask the Senate to reconsider this treaty later in 2010, after it debates the ratification of the new START Treaty.

**Issue Team Members**

Amy F. Woolf, Coordinator  
Specialist in Nuclear Weapons Policy  
awoolf@crs.loc.gov, 7-2379

George Mangan  
Information Research Specialist  
gmangan@crs.loc.gov, 7-5970

Jonathan Medalia  
Specialist in Nuclear Weapons Policy  
jmedalia@crs.loc.gov, 7-7632
For detailed information select from the following topical links.

**Nuclear Weapons: U.S. Posture and Programs and Arms Control**

**Force Structure and Posture**
- U.S. Strategic Nuclear Forces: Background, Developments, and Issues
- Nonstrategic Nuclear Weapons

**Treaties**
- Strategic Arms Control After START: Issues and Options
- Nuclear Arms Control: The Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty
- Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty: Background and Current Developments

**Weapons Maintenance**
- The Reliable Replacement Warhead Program: Background and Current Developments