

## **Comparison Analysis on 2010 and 2018 NPR : Changes in trend of nonproliferation and its implications**

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### **1. Introduction**

To have a better understanding of global affairs in nuclear nonproliferation and present a proper research material for policy decision makings of the government, two reports; the 2010 Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) and the 2018 NPR, of the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) were analyzed in comparison, as a part of 2018 Nuclear Nonproliferation and Nuclear Security Research project of KINAC. These two reports are analyzed to apprehend the strategic changes in basic trend of U.S. nuclear weapon program and nuclear nonproliferation policy.

### **2. Analysis**

The Nuclear Posture Review is a legislatively-mandated review that that establishes U.S. nuclear policy, strategy, capabilities, and force posture [1], which is presented every 8 year. The first NPR was published in 1994, so the recent 2018 NPR is the fourth one of the series. Based on NPR, the strategic policy for U.S. national security from 5 to 10 years and the relevant budget is allocated.

In this section the major points of 2010 and 2018 NPR are introduced. Then the differences of these two reports are described in comparison.

#### *2.1 The 2010 Nuclear Posture Review*

It was published in April 6, 2010, preceded by the former U.S. president Barack Obama's speech in Prague (2009), where he prominently outlined a vision of world without nuclear weapons. The major points of the 2010 NPR can be summarized as 5 key objectives below [2]:

- 1) Preventing nuclear proliferation and nuclear terrorism
- 2) Reducing the role of nuclear weapons
- 3) Maintaining strategic deterrence and stability at reduced nuclear force levels
- 4) Strengthening regional deterrence and reassurance of U.S. allies and partners
- 5) Sustaining a safe, secure, and effective nuclear arsenals

In general, the 2010 NPR is focusing on the role of nuclear weapons to achieve nonproliferation goals in peaceful ways, which reflects the liberal view of the Obama administration at that time. Therefore, the top priorities of the 2010 NPR are represented as strong will of nuclear nonproliferation, clarification of negative security assurance (NSA) in NPT regime, and maintaining strategic deterrence with balancing relationships with Russia and China.

#### *2.2 The 2018 Nuclear Posture Review*

The major points of the 2018 NPR can be summarized as below:

- 1) Accentuating the current dynamic security environment: major concerns about Russia, China, and North Korea's elevating nuclear program developments
- 2) Defining the roles of nuclear weapons in wider range of retaliation than the past
- 3) Strengthening deterrence with tailored nuclear strategy and flexible capabilities
- 4) The necessity and affordability of U.S. nuclear triad (ICBMs, SLBMs, and Heavy Bombers)
- 5) Modernization of NC3 (Nuclear Command, Control and Communication): maintaining and developing the capabilities for nuclear weapons by investing to the related infrastructures such as weapon labs and plants

The 2018 NPR gives its justification by stressing on the current global security environment, which is "challenging and dynamic". It mentions Russia and China, almost recognizing them as potential threat to national security, especially pointed out their efforts to expand nuclear capabilities and engage potential aggressive behaviors [1]. The perception is a continuation of the concepts presented in the U.S. National Security Strategy (NSS) 2017 and the National Defense Strategy (NDS); the biggest threat to U.S. national security is not terrorism anymore, but "the reemergence of long-term, strategic competition with revisionist powers" [4,5]. The "tailored strategy and flexible capabilities for responding different adversaries and scenarios", is a phrase that explains the core of this newly changed U.S. nuclear strategy.

### 2.3 Comparison

It is hard that not to notice the different tone of two NPR in 2010 and 2018.

- 1) The attitude to China and Russia is significantly different in those two reports. The 2010 NPR already recognized that those two countries were modernizing their nuclear capabilities and clarified that the United States will also maintain strategic stability with the two countries. However, the 2010 NPR described the sentence above within the paragraph of *'Reinforcing Strategic Stability'* in its executive summary; "the U.S. will pursue high-level, bilateral dialogues with Russia and China aimed at promoting more stable, resilient, and transparent strategic relationships [3]." This indicated that the U.S. weighed on balancing relationships with Russia and China at least in 2010. However in the 2018 NPR, Russia and China were pointed almost as challenging actors to contain, for their elevated level and size of nuclear weapons. Right after the official announcement of the report, Russia and China strongly criticized it for the U.S. attitude and assessment for their nuclear capabilities and its intentions, understandably.
- 2) Both reports used identical language to explain the role of nuclear weapons, but the range of its use became different:

*"The United States would only consider the use of nuclear weapons in extreme circumstances to defend the vital interests of the United States or its allies and partners [1, 3]."*

A number of press and journals pointed out that the Trump administration defines extreme circumstances in a broader range to include "significant non-nuclear strategic attacks", which could include chemical and biological attacks, large-scale conventional aggression and cyber-attack, unlike the previous Obama administration. The 2010 NPR, on the other hand, described "a narrowed range of contingencies" in which nuclear weapons may play a role in deterring "a conventional or CBW attack", of which the phrase is in contrast to that of 2018 NPR. Also, the 2018 NPR references the role of nuclear weapons in deterring non-nuclear attacks over 30 times.

### 2.4 Implications

The proposed changes in the new NPR sounded more aggressive and impulsive. There are concerns that this document might trigger the official initiation of nuclear arms race, by pointing out that many countries' increasing budget and efforts for nuclear modernization. Also, many phrases of the 2018 NPR yielded almost the opposite interpretation of other countries and experts paradoxically, and it might achieve exactly the opposite end of triggering reciprocal modernization efforts in Russia and China, and making North Korea and Iran even more confrontative [6]:

*"To be clear, this is not intended to, nor does it enable, "nuclear war-fighting." Expanding flexible U.S. nuclear options now, to include low-yield options, is important for the preservations of credible deterrence against regional aggression. It will raise the nuclear threshold and help ensure that potential adversaries perceive no possible advantage in limited nuclear escalation, making nuclear employment less likely [1]."*

The 2018 NPR is also reviewed as 'walked back' from the longstanding U.S leadership role on arms control and nonproliferation at a time by a number of domestic and international media. There are concerns that there will be a possibility of lowering the threshold of nuclear war, if the U.S. starts to implement the new NPR, such as developing and deploying the low-yield nuclear weapons. The 2018 NPR referred the feasibility of developing of low-yield weapons, of which the phrases imply that the U.S. can actually use them in certain circumstances. However, the report lacks of description of how the low yield weapons development will contribute to the increase of strategic stability and prevent of nuclear war.

In summary, U.S. nuclear strategy in two decades have been representing antinomic goal of pursuing reducing reliance on nuclear weapon as strategic mean and strengthening nuclear deterrence at the same time. The 2018 NPR might have intended to convince other countries not to lower the threshold for using nuclear weapons, but it might achieve exactly the opposite end,

### 2.5 Trend of nonproliferation

The trend of nonproliferation has been changed radically in few years. Many states emphasize that their efforts of nuclear non-proliferation have been maintained, but their increasing trend of budget expenses in military sectors shows the reality of the current flow of slowly accelerating arms race and modernizing nuclear systems. Concerns that this

atmospheric difference might weaken the global non-proliferation regime have been raised continuously. The interpretation of this 2018 NPR, especially the part of mentioning nuclear weapons to the conventional attacks, may have the potentials to violate the principle of Negative Security Assurance (NSA) in NPT [4]. The 2018 NPR also asserted that “the United States does not support the ratification of the CTBT (Comprehensive nuclear Test Ban Treaty)”. In addition, U.S. also stated the opposition for the Nuclear Weapons Ban Treaty with the reason of threatening their national security interests. All these aforementioned actions can easily interpreted to the ‘eclipse’ of nuclear nonproliferation momentum.

### **3. Conclusions**

The new NPR assesses that nuclear weapons will play an essential role in deterrence and emphasizes the importance of tactical nuclear power. Without the change of the U.S. recognition of “the reemergence of long-term, strategic competition with revisionist powers”, nuclear nonproliferation trend will continuously be fading away. There will be more of nerve wars and conflicts for national security interests. The global society will have to respond to this atmospheric change with ‘flexible’ strategic diplomacy.

### **REFERENCES**

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