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Foreign Media Reactions on U.S. Nuclear Policy Review: ' Sleight of Hand' Doesn't Escape Notice

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The U.S.' "Nuclear Posture Review"--particularly its plans to store rather than destroy some nuclear warheads, and to shorten the lead time on any future nuclear weapons tests--was the subject of limited but, nonetheless, pointed criticism from Russia, European capitals, Canada, Australia and China. A Canadian paper suggested that, with the world's press diverted by other hot-button foreign policy issues, the U.S. may have hoped that last week's Pentagon briefing on the NPR would not cause much of a ripple overseas. A cadre of editorialists, however, put the spotlight on what was widely seen as "deceitful posturing" on the part of the Bush administration: Belying the president's "promised bold thinking on the U.S. nuclear deterrent," the U.S. was, in their view, using "an accounting sleight of hand" to make sure that any heralded arms cuts are "eminently reversible." The prospect of resumed nuclear testing further raised hackles for many analysts, who saw it as one more affront to international arms control. Some complained that the U.S. seems determined to have the CTBT go the way of the soon-to-be-defunct ABM Treaty, thus further "impairing international confidence in arms control." A recent round of U.S.-Russian arms talks, which "ended in practically nothing" according to Russian commentators, added to the generally aggrieved tone in Moscow media. Highlights follow:

Russian Media Aggrieved: Moscow papers across the political spectrum, from reformist to nationalist opposition, interpreted the U.S.' nuclear stance as an unfortunate "relapse" into old thinking. They contended that Washington has essentially "ignored Moscow's calls to make arms reductions irreversible" and is "set to renew nuclear tests." Reformist *Izvestiya* predicted that nuclear arms talks promise a "repeat of the ABM story. Either we will have a 'feeble' agreement...or no agreement at all, if both sides refuse to budge." Opposition *Sovetskaya Rossiya* was more pointed in its critique of the NPR--and of Putin's "still keeping quiet" in response: "This is another instance of Russia having been humiliated in front of the whole world, just a few weeks after [Bush] announced his withdrawal from the ABM Treaty."

Disappointment in European/Aussie/Canadian Outlets: Charges that the U.S., "behind all the rhetoric about peace and security," was bent on "embedding the nuclear deterrent even more deeply into U.S. strategic thinking" were voiced by opinionmakers from London to Toronto and down under to Melbourne. Many were particularly incensed at the prospect of more nuclear testing. If the U.S. continues to put so much stock in its nuclear arsenal, critics argued, "it has no credibility" to tell others--read India and Pakistan--"not to expand their own nuclear stockpiles." Some worried, too, that Washington's nuclear posture could rouse domestic opposition in Russia to Putin's pro-West strategy, and strengthen the hand of revanchist political elements there, "who want to retain the biggest possible deterrent."

Alarm Bells in Chinese Press: Beijing's state press issued predictably dire warnings that the "new U.S. nuclear strategy"--and particularly its "hinting at resuming nuclear testing"--signals another blow, after the ABM Treaty withdrawal notice, to international arms control.

EDITOR'S NOTE: This report is based on 26 reports from 12 countries, January 9-18. Editorial excerpts from each country are listed from the most recent date.

EUROPE

RUSSIA: "America Sticks To Its Guns" Vladimir Georgiyev stated in centrist Nezavisimaya Gazeta (1/18): "As expected by many, the talks in Washington have ended practically in nothing. The United States has barely been reacting to Moscow's initiatives in the area of strategic offensive arms. Despite Washington's stated commitment to the dialogue, what has really been done to date is too little--and this applies not only to the Americans' decision to withdraw from the ABM Treaty and their plans to store dismantled warheads, but also to their intention to resume nuclear tests."

"Newsmakers Rumsfeld, Wolfowitz Eclipse Secretary Powell"

Nikolai Zlobin of the U.S. Center for Defense Information commented in reformist Izvestiya (1/18): "Politicians and the military in Russia, their focus on one aspect alone, point out that the Americans don't want to destroy nuclear warheads but will store them instead. There are other, more serious irritants in the bilateral relations. Firstly, the Bush team does not feel like signing any accords.... Secondly, the Americans believe that they can save [money] not only by reducing arms but also by not destroying warheads. Frugality like that won't make the process of arms reduction irreversible.... Finally, the United States still trusts that it has won the Cold War, so it doesn't give a damn about what the vanquished party thinks. The Americans' success in Afghanistan is a factor, too. Donald Rumsfeld and his 'right hand' Paul Wolfowitz have had their influence inordinately increased.... They have become the chief newsmakers, with Colin Powell hardly seen or heard from."

"Relapse Into Past"

Vitaliy Gan said in neo-communist weekly Slovo (# 2, 1/18): "Moscow's calls to make nuclear arms reduction irreversible have been ignored with characteristic haughtiness. The White House thinks the Russians' position weak since they will have to write off their fast-aging nuclear arsenal anyway. Surely, playing up Russia's financial and economic problems is not consistent with Bush's harangues about 'new times' in relations between Russia and the United States."

"Putin Riding The Texas Mustang" Leonid Nikolayev painted the following picture in nationalist opposition Sovetskaya Rossiya (1/17): "As Putin whips on the Texan mustang going farther West, he may one day look back and find that he is all alone, with Russia having gone the other way."

"Deja Vu"

As the United States and Russia were set to begin the first round of consultations on nuclear arms reduction, the reformist Vremya MN (1/15) predicted in a piece by Vladimir Frolov: "What is going to happen gives no solace. Most probably we are in for a repeat of the ABM story. Either we will have a 'feeble' agreement, with the issue of 'irreversible cuts' left aside and everybody pretending to see nothing wrong with that, or there will be no agreement at all, if both sides refuse to budge."

"Another Myth Exploded"

Vasiliy Safronchuk commented in nationalist opposition Sovetskaya Rossiya (1/15): "Quite recently pundits, interpreting the results of the meeting between Putin and Bush in Texas last November, insisted that the presidents had agreed to reduce their countries' nuclear arsenals equally by two-thirds. That, they alleged, was the price the U.S. president had to pay for his withdrawal from the ABM Treaty. The myth crashed last week once the local media caught on to something from a secret Pentagon report on changes in the U.S. defense doctrine.... Oddly, Putin still keeps quiet about Washington's intention not to destroy, but rather to store the number of nuclear warheads he promised to reduce to a third in the next few years. This is another instance of Russia having been humiliated in front of the whole world, just a few weeks after the U.S. president announced his withdrawal from the ABM Treaty. Washington's action is all the more humiliating because it follows in the wake of the Kremlin's letting the Americans gain bases in Central Asia.... Washington does not hide that its long-term plans in post-Soviet Central Asia go far beyond its 'antiterrorist operation' in Afghanistan.... Obviously, the Americans have been gaining ground in Central Asia with Putin's blessing."

"U.S. Doesn't Trust Russia"

Andrey Lebedev concluded in reformist *Izvestiya* (1/14): "Despite its partnership with Russia in the war on terrorism, Washington doesn't quite trust this country.... Both U.S. reports (one by the Pentagon and one by the CIA) can only be interpreted as a clear hint that Russia is going to have a shaky position at the coming consultations (on arms control in Washington). Yet Moscow is determined to insist on 'controllable and irreversible' cuts.... There is also the idea of compensation for storage of Russian nuclear warheads. Increased financial assistance from the United States may become a sweetener, as Russia is urged to drop its 'irreversibility' demand. But in that case, Russia would be right not to hurry to use up warheads after they are taken off the missiles either."

"Back To The Old Agenda"

Aleksandr Lomanov commented in reformist *Vremya Novostey* (1/11): "As the global war on terrorism turns into daily humdrum, there comes more of the 'old agenda' in international relations. Though Russia and the United States, starting to come together on September 11, are still on converging courses, their relations, for the most part, are new in name alone. Judging by two major documents (one by the Pentagon and one by the CIA) on nuclear and rocket technology that have just been published in the United States, nothing has changed."

"President Bush Spares His Warheads"

Ivan Safronov opined in reformist business *Kommersant* (1/10): "U.S. Defense Secretary Rumsfeld ordered the creation of a Missile Defense Agency (MDA). The task of the MDA is to exercise strict centralized control over all the ABM programs being implemented in the different armed services of the United States. Simultaneously, Washington announced it is forgoing the destruction of nuclear warheads being cut under the existing Russian-U.S. arrangements. The decision now is to store a large part of them.... The most recent decision of the Bush administration to forego the complete destruction of the warheads being cut and to put a large part of them in storage as a reserve (at issue are the Russian-U.S. agreements to cut their strategic arms to the level of 1,700-2,000 nuclear warheads), made public during the Congress hearings on Tuesday, would clearly not suit the Kremlin."

As *Kommersant* learned from sources in the General Staff, the Russian Foreign Ministry will forward a clarification request to the United States in the near future. 'We cannot be satisfied by the contribution Washington is prepared to make to nuclear disarmament: 50 Peacekeeper ICBMs, and two or three hundred warheads whose 'useful life' has expired. This is ridiculous,' the *Kommersant* correspondent was told by a ranking General Staff official."

"Bush And The Bomb"

Official *Rossiiskaya Gazeta* wrote about the reaction in Russia to Washington's possible resumption of underground nuclear tests (1/10): "Almost simultaneously, two influential U.S. newspapers--the Washington Post and New York Times--published a version of a classified Pentagon report on the state of U.S. nuclear forces, which recommends a resumption of the underground nuclear tests.... The Russian military took this information quite calmly. In October last year Colonel-General Igor Volynkin, chief of the 12th Main Department of the Russian Defense Ministry, said that, according to his information, U.S. specialists have been keeping their nuclear testing ground at a half-year readiness for the re-start of nuclear tests. Ranking sources in the Russian General Staff point out that the possible resumption of U.S. nuclear tests may be due to at least two reasons. Firstly, the drafting of programs to develop a national ABM defense. Secondly, the natural obsolescence of nuclear warheads which are now 'on duty' or stored in nuclear arsenals. Russia can also resume its nuclear tests, which was mentioned by Volynkin. For this eventuality, the Central Testing Ground on Novaya Zemlya is now being prepared."

"Underground Plans"

Andrei Lebedev and Dmitry Safonov observed in reformist Izvestiya (1/9): "The United States is set to renew underground nuclear tests, as evidenced by the document the Bush administration sent to the U.S. Congress yesterday.... American officials stress the need to conduct tests to check the combat-worthiness of the nuclear warheads on service duty.... If the United States does resume underground nuclear explosions, it would be for the sole purpose of developing new types of nuclear weapons. Most probably warheads for the future NMD. The problem is that the American project of intercepting enemy missiles with its own anti-missiles is not very effective.... The USSR was solving the problem of intercepting enemy ballistic missiles with the help of a nuclear explosion. That achieved 100 percent success rate in interception. Apparently the U.S. has decided to take a leaf from the Russian notebook."

BRITAIN: "Nuclear Posture"

The independent Financial Times featured this editorial comment (1/10): "Since before he was elected, Bush has promised bold thinking on the U.S. nuclear deterrent. On this week's evidence, he has flattered to deceive. The 'nuclear posture review' outlined this week by the Pentagon offers little new and some of what is new is worrying. The Pentagon has made clear that its planned reductions in the levels of deployed warheads by about two-thirds to between 1,700 and 2,000 are eminently reversible. To provide a hedge against possible new threats, the United States will keep an unknown number of warheads in storage rather than destroying them. Indeed, because of an accounting sleight of hand, the administration's new goal is little different from the 2,000-2,500 figure agreed in 1997 between Clinton and Yeltsin...as the target for the now-defunct START III negotiations. The United States also said it wanted to shorten the lead time to any future nuclear weapons tests, while a Pentagon official said it was looking into modifying warheads to use as 'bunker-busting' weapons. Such a nuclear policy understandably worries Russia, which may feel compelled to follow suit and put many of its nuclear warheads into storage instead of destroying them. Of course, Washington cannot and should not build national security policy around Russian concerns; but must consider potential threats. The administration has cited the high uncertainty military planners face and the growing number of states that possess weapons of mass destruction. For these reasons, it says, the United States should not be constrained by treaties that prevent it from responding to new strategic challenges and should retain the capacity to increase forces. Pentagon resistance to sharper cuts in nuclear weapons is also based on the proposition that the United States cannot retain its triad of nuclear delivery systems...if the warhead figure falls further.

"The irony of all this is that although the Cold War has ended, making it inconceivable that thousands of nuclear warheads could have any use, the review has embedded the nuclear deterrent even more deeply into U.S. strategic thinking. It sends a strong message to other states, such as India and Pakistan, that the real route to power lies in nuclear arms. Most important, it reduces rather than increases America's own security by strengthening the hand of hardliners in Moscow who want to retain the biggest possible deterrent. To make matters worse, warheads in storage in Russia can hardly be considered secure. By encouraging Russia to store its warheads, the United States is increasing the likelihood that nuclear material will end up in the hands of terrorists, who now represent the greatest danger to U.S. security."

FRANCE: "Putin's Western Wager"

Jean-Christophe Ploquin held in Catholic La Croix (1/16): "In the next few months, caught between Russia and the West, Putin may well find himself in an uncomfortable position. His wager after the September 11 attacks has been slow in bringing him the returns he hoped for.... His immediate support to the U.S. has always been in his view something he could use as currency with a Bush administration tempted by unilateral policies. Russia therefore aligned itself with the anti-terrorist coalition. Since then, many observers in Moscow are wondering where American compensation for such a turn-around has gone. The United States has renounced the ABM Treaty...and last Wednesday it indicated it would store certain nuclear warheads instead of destroying them.... Even in Washington, some, like Strobe

Talbot, worry about this latest series of rebuffs.... Putin has only a few months left to try to collect on the dividends of his policy. After that, Russian legislative elections will open the way to nostalgia for Russia's long lost grandeur."

GERMANY: "The Power Of The Generals"

Wolfgang Koydl stated in center-left Sueddeutsche Zeitung of Munich (1/15): "The joint chiefs of staff were never happy with the president's promise [to reduce the number of U.S. nuclear warheads to below 2,000]. A few days before the start of U.S.-Russian disarmament talks in Washington, the Pentagon put out a surprising study. It recommends that the decommissioned warheads be stored, not destroyed--just in case. After all, one can never be sure about what the Russians or the Chinese may think of in the future. Bush gave in to the pressure from the generals. It may be a new experience for Russia that one cannot necessarily rely on a U.S. president's word."

ITALY: "Missiles Stocked On Side, Bush Won't Keep Promises On Nuclear Weapons"

Bruno Marolo wrote from Washington for pro-Democratic Left party (DS) L'Unita (1/10): "George Bush's nuclear arsenal is like a pig--nothing is thrown away. Even the weapons whose elimination had been announced are being set aside, just in case. They may become useful again. Last December, the U.S. president had promised sensational cuts to his Russian colleague, Vladimir Putin. He was hoping to convince him to give up the ABM Treaty and give his blessing on the space shield.... A subtle distinction is now emerging between 'deployed' nuclear weapons and set-aside weapons, piled up in a cellar so they can age like a good wine for the next generation."

"America Ready For New Nuclear Tests"

Paolo Mastrolilli filed from New York for Turin's centrist, influential La Stampa (1/9): "U.S. nuclear tests will not resume tomorrow, but the Pentagon wants to reserve the option of conducting them in the future. This is the veiled recommendation contained in the Nuclear Posture Review, the secret report on U.S. nuclear policy delivered yesterday to the Congress by Rumsfeld.... With the beginning of the war on terrorism, the White House tried to soften its positions on non-imminent issues, in order to avoid friction with allies. But the nuclear policy remains an open issue which is still being debated." (The report draws from the Jan. 8 Washington Post story. "Washington To Resume Underground Nuclear Tests").

"Washington To Resume Underground Nuclear Tests"

Rome's center-right Il Tempo carried a story under the above headline (1/9), also based on the Washington Post article.

FINLAND: "U.S. Makes Its Own Decision On Changes In Nuclear Strategies"

Leading Helsingin Sanomat commented (1/14): "The Nuclear Posture Review (NPR)...contains a few new and somewhat surprising aspects.... The basic philosophy of the review seems to be that the United States is shifting (but not too drastically), its point of emphasis from strategic nuclear weapons to conventional capability. The United States is maintaining as much maneuver room as possible and committing itself through treaties to as little as possible. No decision has been made to resume nuclear testing, but the United States wants to be prepared to test at any time. It is increasingly doubtful that Washington wishes to conclude an actual agreement with Moscow on a reduction of offensive missiles.... Crouch said...that only part of the U.S.' offensive weapons would be done away with for good. Some would be stockpiled for future dismantling, others would be kept in operational condition for possible changes in the current situation. Russia protested immediately and pointed out that it presupposed a controlled and final destruction of the arms. The information given about the strategic document confirms that the United States continues to regard its nuclear weaponry as an important symbol for its great power status. The first reports appeared to promise a sharp reduction of warheads from

6,000 to 2,000 over a ten year period, but weapons stockpiling and the possibility of new tests considerably reduces the significance of the reduction. If the United States ultimately decides to test weapons in Nevada, the test ban would in practice lose all significance. Recent reports seem to indicate that tests in Nevada will be resumed as soon as the need or temptation becomes great enough.... Nobody will be able to challenge it in terms of power, and that appears to be the decisive point in President Bush's Washington."

SWEDEN: "Bush Wants Nuclear Weapons In Mothballs"

Independent, liberal Dagens Nyheter ran an article by diplomatic correspondent Bengt Albons (1/10): "A great number of those weapons that will be removed from the U.S. nuclear arsenal will be stored for future use. This is evident from the nuclear policy overview, which the Bush administration has submitted to the Congress. The administration also reserves the option of resuming nuclear testing more quickly than is possible today. However, Bush has no immediate plans to resume such tests.... The Bush administration is continuing the nuclear weapons policy of the Clinton administration. It wants to deactivate nuclear warheads while at the same time storing them as a safeguard strategy.... One of the reasons why the Bush administration feels that now is time to reduce nuclear weapons is that conventional weapons technology has led to the development of precision bombs, which can be used to knock out an adversary's nuclear installations. Another is that the planned missile defense conceivably will give protection against limited nuclear attacks."

EAST ASIA AND PACIFIC

AUSTRALIA: "Now The U.S. Poses A Nuclear Threat"

Commentator Keith Suter observed in Melbourne's liberal Age (1/14): "Some in the United States want to start nuclear testing again.... That would be disastrous.... If the United States resumes nuclear testing, it has no credibility to tell the Indians and Pakistanis not to expand their own nuclear weapons stockpile. Nuclear testing debases the currency of diplomacy.... The United States has expected the rest of the world to rally around its war on terrorism. Cooperation should be a two-way street. America's allies should say that further cooperation in the U.S. campaign should be done on the basis of enhancing international cooperation. This means among other things, ratifying the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, the Rome Treaty for an International Criminal Court and the creation of a protocol to augment the Biological Warfare treaty."

CHINA: "U.S. Cuts Nuclear Warheads In Name Only"

Xie Meihua wrote in the official Chinese Youth Party's China Youth Daily (Zhongguo Qingnianbao, 1/11): "Analysts say the new U.S. nuclear strategy is designed to abandon Cold War era nuclear deterrence so that it can deal more flexibly with 21st century challenges.... Analysts believe that the U.S. decision to put in reserve nuclear weapons which will be cut, in order to deal with possible emergencies, will definitely invite criticism from the international community."

"International Arms Control Reaches A Low Ebb"

Li Bin held in official Communist Party People's Daily (Renmin Ribao, 1/11): "U.S. withdrawal from the ABM Treaty will seriously impair international confidence in arms control. However, this does not necessarily mean that a worldwide, full-scale arms race will begin. If the U.S. deploys NMD, other nuclear countries will take technical measures to maintain the effectiveness of their own nuclear retaliatory capability."

"U.S. To Resume Underground Nuclear Tests"

Ren Yujun wrote in official Communist Party People's Daily (Renmin Ribao, 1/10): "According to the Washington Post, the 'Nuclear Strategy Evaluation Report,' presented by the Bush administration to

Congress on January 8, constitutes a hint foreshadowing the resumption of underground nuclear tests.... A commentary has pointed out that the Bush administration is posing another challenge to an important international treaty, after it has rejected a series of international accords including the ABM Treaty."

JAPAN: "Flow Of Nuclear Materials To Terrorists Must Be Stopped"

An editorial in the business-oriented Nihon Keizai observed (1/18): "President Bush has announced that the United States will continue to cooperate with Russia in safekeeping nuclear materials. The cash-strapped Russian government finds it increasingly difficult to properly safeguard nuclear materials removed from dismantled nuclear arms. U.S. assistance for Russia's safekeeping of nuclear materials is significant, given rising concerns that terrorists may attempt to obtain such materials which may be smuggled out of Russia.... All-out efforts must be taken to defend the world from the threat of nuclear terrorism."

SOUTH ASIA

PAKISTAN: "U.S. Announcement To Restart Nuclear Testing"

Leading, mass-circulation Jang judged (1/14): "It is interesting that these countries are the biggest champions of the ban on nuclear testing and nonproliferation of weapons and they even refuse to let students from the Third World study nuclear physics and other such subjects in their countries.... The goal of peace, justice and human rights for all has receded a bit now after the U.S.' announcement of its restarting nuclear testing."

WESTERN HEMISPHERE

CANADA: "The Nuclear Weapons Bush Won't Destroy"

The leading Globe and Mail opined (1/14): "Slashing your nuclear arsenal by two-thirds, it turns out, is not quite as difficult as it seems. Especially if you don't actually destroy those pesky warheads at all, but rather place them in storage. Perhaps the United States thought nobody would notice its sleight of hand, or at any rate make much of a fuss. Wrong again. Russia is furious. With good reason.... Considering the stakes in the Bush administration's deceitful posturing, it was remarkable how little media attention last week's Pentagon announcement drew. Mr. Putin, for his part, may not have been entirely surprised.... But Mr. Putin must surely be worried at how things are unfolding. If the United States stores and conceals a significant portion of its nuclear capability, the pressure on Russia and other nuclear powers to do the same will be formidable.... Then there are all those other nuclear powers. China is one. India and Pakistan, seemingly on the brink of yet another war, are two more. What might they conclude from this latest exercise in smoke and mirrors? Only that behind all the rhetoric about peace and security, the world's only superpower still regards nuclear weapons as a cornerstone of its national security, even as it abandons the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty on grounds the treaty is obsolete. If that's the message that gets digested, the world is in even greater danger than we had thought."