

# NUKEWATCH

# PATHFINDER

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## U.S. and Russian Nuclear Plans Threaten New Arms Race

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In May 2002, President Bush and Russian President Vladimir Putin signed the Moscow Treaty, an agreement pledging drastic reductions in the stockpiles of each country's nuclear arsenals. However, the agreement does not prevent Russia or the U.S. from developing more sophisticated nuclear technology. While both the U.S. and Russia have made efforts to dismantle older, outmoded missile systems and reduce the number of warheads in their respective nuclear arsenals, both countries are investing in the design and development of new nuclear weapons. Both aim for "leaner but meaner" arsenals.

The Bush administration revealed a plan in April 2006 for overhauling the nation's nuclear weapons complex, including restoring its large-scale bomb manufacturing capacity. The National Nuclear Security Administration's (NNSA) "Reliable Replacement Warhead," (RRW) was conceptualized in Bush's Nuclear Posture Review of 2002. RRW was originally intended to update existing weapons as part of a larger restructuring effort. The program has now been broadened to include a new generation of larger but slightly less powerful nuclear weapons. Los Alamos and Livermore National Laboratories are currently engaged in a design competition.

The U.S. built its last nuclear weapon in 1989, and the U.S. last tested a weapon underground in 1992. The new warheads, according to the NNSA, will be based on nuclear technology that has already been tested, making it possible to build new weapons without additional testing. The U.S. signed the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty in 1996. However, the announcement comes at a time of heightened awareness of a potential arms race developing among nations. As the U.S. takes a hard line against countries like Iran and North Korea, the revamped RRW program threatens the credibility of U.S. commitment to nonproliferation. Thomas D'Agostino, the head of nuclear weapons programs at the NNSA, justifies the plan

as part of a larger effort to accelerate the dismantling of aging bombs left from the Cold War.

The NNSA hopes to choose a design between the two competing weapons' labs by November, in time to develop cost estimates for the administration's 2008 fiscal budget, submitted to Congress early next year. If approved by Congress, it would take almost 10 years before any warheads were produced.

The bombs being designed are touted as "safer" and more "dependable," and include features that would disarm a missile warhead in the event of theft. This is not the first time the Bush administration has proposed new nuclear weapons. In 2003, Congress approved partial funding for further research into "advanced concept" nuclear weapons: the robust nuclear earth penetrator and a low-yield weapon dubbed the "mini-nuke."

On May 10, 2006, during his state of the nation address, Russian President Vladimir Putin said, "It is premature to speak of the end of the arms race." While Russia's military budget is just five percent of the U.S.' budget, in 2005 Russia announced plans for upgrades and new weapons systems. Putin is attempting to reassert Russian nuclear strength after years of decline. On the top of his list is a nuclear warhead specifically designed to counter U.S. anti-missile technology. Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov promised last December that Russia would have a new generation of strategic nuclear missiles by the end of the decade.

Yuri Solomonov, head of Russia's top missile design institute, said the Topol-M and Bulava ballistic missiles would form the core of Russian nuclear forces until 2040, allowing Russia to maintain nuclear parity with the U.S. The new fleet of silo-based Topol-M missiles will carry a special type of warhead that can evade detection by U.S. missile defense systems. The submarine version of the Topol-M, the Bulava missile, will carry several independently targetable warheads. By 2008 the Bulava will be stationed on Russia's new fleet of nuclear submarines.

