

Nuclear First-Strike Plan: It Keeps Getting Scarier

by Jeffrey Steinberg

In the third week of February a number of newspapers in the United States and Great Britain published segments of a Pentagon document, suggesting that the Bush Administration is moving ahead with plans to develop a new generation of “mini” nuclear weapons, to be used against “Third World despots” who collude with terrorists and possess weapons of mass destruction—i.e., Saddam Hussein’s Iraq.

The Jan. 10, 2003 memo from Dr. Dale Klein outlined plans for an August 2003 conference at the Omaha, Nebraska headquarters of the U.S. Strategic Command, where scientists and military planners will gather to make decisions on the production and deployment of a new generation of “mini” nuclear bombs, “bunker busters” and other nuclear devices that will become part of the U.S. military’s arsenal of *offensive* weapons. No longer is the first use of nuclear weapons a taboo. No longer will the United States refrain from the use of nuclear weapons against non-nuclear nations, unless the madness is stopped.

Already, a number of prominent Democrats, including 2004 Presidential pre-candidate Lyndon LaRouche, and Senators Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.) and Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.), are making a big stink over this insane utopian shift in policy. LaRouche has identified the push for the use of nuclear weapons against Iraq as an outrageous move that can backfire to stop the war drive now. Senators Kennedy and Feinstein are reportedly circulating a draft resolution among Senate colleagues, to also take up the issue. And senior Democratic Party figures, in the circles of former President Bill Clinton, have confirmed that there is intense debate and worry behind the scenes, over the Bush Administration war party’s being just insane enough to actually use such nuclear weapons in an attack on Iraq. The prospect of the United States using nuclear weapons against Iraq adds a new, even more horrifying dimension to the threat of war in the Persian Gulf. LaRouche has already called on President Bush to renounce this madness.

The Path to Destruction

The leak of the Jan. 10, 2003 memo did not come out of the blue. For the past year, the Bush Administration has been moving, step by step, to overturn a 50-year policy of keeping nuclear weapons on the shelf as part of America’s strategic deterrent. Here is a short chronology:

- In January 2002, the Bush Administration issued its

Nuclear Posture Review, a Congressionally mandated report on the U.S. nuclear weapons program. For the first time, the 2002 report openly discussed the possible use of nuclear weapons, naming seven countries that could be targets of the American nuclear arsenal: Russia, China, Iraq, Iran, North Korea, Libya, and Syria.

- On Feb. 22, 2002, John Bolton, a leading Administration chicken-hawk, who runs the arms control and disarmament office at the State Department, gave an interview to the *Washington Times*, in which he boasted about the Bush Administration’s intent to use nuclear weapons, under certain circumstances. He candidly told the *Times* that the world had changed so dramatically on Sept. 11, 2001, that it was no longer unthinkable to use nuclear arms against rogue states thought to possess weapons of mass destruction. Bolton said that to continue with the doctrine of no first use of nuclear weapons reflected “an unrealistic view of the international situation. The idea that fine theories of deterrence work against everybody, which is implicit in the negative security assurances, has just been disproven by Sept. 11.” He concluded paradoxically, “What we are attempting to do is create a situation where nobody uses weapons of mass destruction of any kind.”

It is no coincidence that Bolton’s chief deputy at the State Department is David Wurmser, one of the authors, along with Richard Perle and Doug Feith, of the 1996 “Clean Break” report to then-Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. It called on Israel to abrogate the Oslo Accords, launch preemptive war on the Palestinian Authority, and drive America into an armed attack on Iraq.

- On Sept. 14, 2002, President Bush signed a secret document, National Security Presidential Directive 17, which stated in part: “The United States will continue to make clear that it reserves the right to respond with overwhelming force—including potentially nuclear weapons—to the use of [weapons of mass destruction] against the United States, our forces abroad, and friends and allies.”

- On Dec. 11, 2002, the Bush Administration released a declassified version of NSPD-17, under the title “National Strategy to Combat Weapons of Mass Destruction.” The reference to the use of nuclear weapons was not included in the declassified version, but instead said that the government would “resort to all of our options,” an only slightly camouflaged version of the same idea.



John Bolton, who runs the State Department's Office of Arms Control and Disarmament, boasted to the press on Feb. 22 that the Bush Administration intends to use nuclear weapons first under certain circumstances, including against non-nuclear states.



Vice President Cheney's chief of staff, Lewis Libby, co-authored a plan for American military empire 12 years ago, in April 1991, when Cheney was Secretary of Defense. That plan included use of a "new generation of nuclear weapons" in war with nations which would challenge U.S. global supremacy.

- On Jan. 31, 2003, the *Washington Times* published a front-page story, revealing the existence of NSPD-17, which warned, "The disclosure of the classified text follows newspaper reports that the planning for a war with Iraq focuses on using nuclear arms not only to defend U.S. forces, but also to pre-empt deeply buried Iraqi facilities that could withstand conventional explosives."

- On Feb. 19, 2003, the London *Guardian* was the first newspaper to publish the Jan. 10, 2003 Pentagon minutes of the planning for the Omaha session in August. The *Guardian* and other major newspapers have received copies of Dr. Klein's memorandum from Greg Mello, who heads a group called the Los Alamos Study Group, which initially received the leak.

A Decade-Old Plot

The push for a new generation of nuclear weapons, to be used as part of America's offensive military arsenal, has been under way for a decade. It first surfaced in the immediate aftermath of the 1991 Persian Gulf War, just as the current Bush Administration's supposedly "new" national security doctrine of preventive war was first promoted by Dick Cheney, Paul Wolfowitz, Lewis Libby, Eric Edelman, and Zalmay Khalilzad back in 1991, when they were all together at the Pentagon.

In April 1991, shortly after Operation Desert Storm, then-Secretary of Defense Cheney commissioned a study of how the United States should respond to the new military strategic reality of the fall of the Soviet Union, leaving the U.S.A. as the world's unchallenged military superpower. Wolfowitz, then Assistant Secretary of Defense for Policy, teamed up with his deputies Libby, Edelman, and Khalilzad, and presented Cheney with a plan for an American military empire, striking out against any nation or alliance of nations threatening American military hegemony. The use of a new generation of nuclear weapons was included in the proposed new arsenal.

In 1992, when Cheney and his cohorts attempted to in-

clude the idea of preventive war, and the offensive use of mini-nukes in their draft Defense Planning Guidance, the proposal was vetoed by President George H.W. Bush, at the urging of his top national security aides, Gen. Brent Scowcroft and James Baker III.

Nevertheless, in January 1993, after Bush had been defeated by Bill Clinton, Cheney did put the same utopian ideas into his final policy pronouncement, "Defense Strategy for the 1990s: The Regional Defense Strategy." The document read in part, "In the decade ahead, we must adopt the right combination of deterrent forces, tactical and strategic . . . to mitigate risk from weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery, whatever the source. For now this requires retaining ready forces for a survivable nuclear deterrent, including tactical forces. In addition, we must complete needed force modernization and upgrades."

While the language was vague to the average reader, it was crystal clear to the utopians among the defense planners and scientists. By October 1991, the Strategic Air Command of the U.S. Air Force had already commissioned a study on the future uses of mini-nuclear weapons, and two scientists from Los Alamos National Labs had published a declassified study, calling for the development and deployment of "mini," "micro," and "tiny" nuclear bombs.

Of course, the architects of this madness back in 1991-93 are now back in power again. Cheney is Vice President, his chief of staff and chief national security advisor is Lewis Libby, Paul Wolfowitz is Deputy Secretary of Defense, and Eric Edelman is one of Libby's chief strategists at the Vice President's Office. Zalmay Khalilzad is the Bush Administration's liaison to the Iraqi opposition.

At a Feb. 4, 2003 forum at the Willard Hotel in Washington, Michael Ledeen, a leading chicken-hawk and self-professed "universal fascist," bluntly stated that if the United States launches a war against Iraq—which he fully endorses—it will, in reality, be a regional war, also targeting Iran, Syria, Lebanon, and even Saudi Arabia. If the utopian schemers in the Bush Pentagon are not stopped, they may trigger more than a regional war. As Lyndon LaRouche has warned, repeatedly, this could be the trigger for World War III. And it could be a nuclear war.