

**Hearing on the Department of Energy's Proposed "Complex Transformation" of  
the U.S. Nuclear-Weapons Program**

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**Paul Boyer**

I am grateful for this opportunity to comment on the Department of Energy's proposed changes in the United States Nuclear Weapons complex. I speak both as a citizen and as a historian who has published extensively on America's more than sixty-year encounter with nuclear weapons.

The Department of Energy's proposal focuses exclusively on narrow technical detail. I think it is important to place this proposal in a larger context. First of all, note the choice of language. The DoE's goal is to "modernize" our nuclear-weapons complex. Certainly all would agree that "modernization" is a good thing. Right?

Further, underlying the proposal is an unspoken assumption: that nuclear weapons production and stockpiling will continue to be a central aspect of American public policy into the foreseeable future. This represents a further embedding of nuclear weapons into the very core of our nation's economy, culture, and strategic policy. There is no hint of a commitment to *eliminating* these terrible weapons, but rather this proposal simply *assumes* their permanence, and at a level of thousands of weapons—a total that would have appalled all Americans when the first atomic bombs were dropped on Japan in 1945, if they could have foreseen what lay ahead.

Further, this proposed reconfiguration of the nation's nuclear-weapons program must be viewed in the larger context of America's overall nuclear-weapons policies over

the years, and specifically the policies of the current administration. In fact, the assumption of this proposal that nuclear-weapons will remain a permanent part of the U.S. military arsenal is part of a larger pattern of government policies that pays lip service to nuclear disarmament, while in fact contributing to proliferation worldwide and dangerously worsening what used to be called the nuclear balance of terror—a term that remains all too appropriate today.

- The current administration has worsened the danger of proliferation. The United States continues to supply Israel with military hardware and billions of dollars in aid each year, despite the fact that Israel secretly developed and stockpiled nuclear weapons in defiance of stated U.S. policy, and has refused to sign the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty.

- This administration has entered into a highly controversial agreement to supply nuclear know-how and technology to India, despite India's development of nuclear weapons in defiance of international nonproliferation agreements, its refusal to open all its nuclear facilities to inspection, and its refusal to sign the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty.

- This administration has given billions in aid to Pakistan, despite Pakistan's development and testing of nuclear weapons, and despite the role of Pakistan's top atomic scientist, A. Q. Khan, in secretly giving vital weapons-making information to other countries.

- This administration has continued to push for the development of earth-penetrating nuclear weapons, the so-called "bunker buster" missiles, despite congressional opposition, and in violation of the spirit of the 1968 Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, by

which the nuclear powers pledged to work in good faith for nuclear disarmament—not for developing new weapons systems.

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Above all, the current administration has pursued the development and deployment of anti-missile missiles, a legacy of the so-called Strategic Defense Initiative, popularly called “Star Wars,” launched by President Ronald Reagan twenty five years ago. In addition to setting up anti-missile launch sites in Alaska and California, the administration now proposes further deployment in Poland and the Czech Republic, stirring fierce opposition from the Russian government, which is now threatening to target these sites with its own missiles.

Russia’s reaction is entirely predictable, since the whole history of the nuclear arms race makes clear that an escalation by one side, whether labeled “offensive” or “defensive,” inevitably triggers a counter-move by the other side, leading to further escalation. Further, in taking this step, the Bush Administration abandoned the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, which had acknowledged the dangerously destabilizing effects of trying to develop a defense against missile attack. If such a system were ever actually deployed and proven to be workable, it would mean that the nation deploying the system could then safely launch a nuclear attack without fear of retaliation.

The administration’s anti-missile program is not only dangerous and unwise strategically, it is technologically unfeasible and a massive waste of money. As has often been noted, trying to shoot down a missile with another missile is the equivalent of trying to stop a bullet with another bullet. Test after test has resulted in failure, *even when the timing of the target-missile’s firing and its trajectory were fully known!* What are the

chances of successfully destroying a missile fired at an unknown time, and on an unknown trajectory?

Nevertheless, the current Bush administration has poured billions into this unwise and unworkable program. In the first Bush budget, spending on missile-defense hit nearly \$8 billion. Despite a series of failed tests, the administration requested a staggering \$9.3 billion for fiscal year 2007, the highest in the program's history and more than the *total 2006* budgets for the National Park Service, the Food and Drug Administration, the Smithsonian Institution, the National Archives, the National Endowments for the Arts and the Humanities, and the administration's highly touted Millennium program to combat poverty and disease in Africa.

In its final budget, released in February 2008, the Bush administration requested a staggering \$10.4 billion for the Missile Defense Agency, plus nearly \$2 billion more for missile-defense related projects buried in other parts of the budget.

The "Star Wars" scheme that Reagan sprung on the nation out of the blue in 1983 is now an embedded Pentagon program, the Missile Defense Agency, with its own entrenched bureaucracy, powerful corporate interests that stand to profit, and lobbying muscle to secure billions in new funding year after year, whatever the record of failure. The whole depressing "Star Wars" story offers a classic example of how a dangerous, misguided, and technologically unworkable program can become lodged in the bureaucracy, and take on a life of its own. In 2006, President Bush told a California audience, "Technology will once again make this country the leader of the world, and that's what we're here to celebrate." When it comes to nuclear weapons, the answer is

not technology, but a renewed national commitment to eliminate them from the earth—not just from “rogue states” or designated enemy nations, but eliminating them entirely.

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Much of my research has looked at the shifting rhythms of Americans’ response to nuclear weapons and the shifting fortunes of the anti-nuclear movement. What I’ve found is a pattern of upsurges of grassroots opposition to nuclear weapons, followed by a calculated government effort to neutralize that opposition. The first antinuclear movement came right after World War II, amid a massive wave of fear and revulsion against a single bomb that could destroy an entire city and snuff out hundreds of thousands of human lives in an instant. This first surge of anti-nuclear activism was blunted, however, as government propaganda hailed the promise of “the peaceful atom,” and whipped up fears of a communist takeover as the Cold War began.

The second wave of grassroots antinuclear activism came in the later 1950s and early 1960s, as deadly radioactive fallout from atmospheric nuclear tests posed a terrifying danger to public health, especially the health of the most vulnerable—babies taking in radioactive poisons with their mother’s milk.

This surge of activism was blunted with the signing of the Limited Nuclear Test Ban Treaty in 1963. That treaty did not end nuclear tests, but it put them underground, out of sight, and the antinuclear movement soon faded.

The third wave of grassroots antinuclear activism came in the early 1980s, in reaction to the Reagan administration’s nuclear build-up, belligerent Cold War rhetoric, and renewed focus on civil defense in a possible nuclear war. As public alarm mounted, millions of Americans rallied to the Nuclear Weapons Freeze campaign, the brainchild of

Randall Forsberg, who died prematurely last October. Some veterans of that campaign are here today.

The government, in the person of President Reagan, blunted that campaign with the 1983 Strategic Defense Initiative, with its deceptive promise of using America's technological prowess to build a secure shield against nuclear attack. The whole idea was strategically dangerous and fatally flawed technologically, but it served its immediate political purpose. Reagan shifted the terms of the debate, and the nuclear freeze movement collapsed.

We now stand at another crossroads. Attention to the global danger of nuclear proliferation and the massive nuclear arsenal still held by the United States, Russia, and other nations has been diverted since 9/11 by a very selective attention to the nuclear danger posed by two specific nations, North Korea and Iran. That danger is real, but it is part of a far larger danger to our planet itself—a danger in which the United States itself is deeply implicated.

But while attention to the true nature of the nuclear threat has been blunted by propaganda, a profound movement for change is sweeping the nation. This may, indeed, be a propitious moment for a new surge of grassroots anti-nuclear activism by a new generation. Through determined effort by concerned citizens, we may be poised once again to confront the threat the whole world faces from the horrendous new power of destruction that our government, in our name, unleashed on the world on August 6, 1945.

Paul Boyer is the Merle Curti Professor of History Emeritus at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He is the author of *By the Bomb's Early Light: American Thought and Culture at the Dawn of the Atomic Age* (1985) and *Fallout: A Historian Reflects on America's Half-Century Encounter with Nuclear Weapons* (1998).]