The Future in the Balance: 
The Trump Administration’s Nuclear Posture Review 
meets the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists’ Doomsday Clock
It might seem as though the left hand doesn’t know what the right hand is doing. In early February, the US government released the Nuclear Posture Review, a policy statement and planning document for the coming years, a rare snapshot of US nuclear plans.

The 2018 NPR cites Russian and Chinese improvements in their nuclear stockpiles as destabilizing forces in global politics.

At the same time, the US pushes forward with its own plans for a new, multi-billion dollar nuclear bomb plant in Oak Ridge, Tennessee—the Uranium Processing Facility will manufacture thermonuclear cores to refurbish old nuclear weapons and, if the NPR is to be believed, for new nukes as well. The National Nuclear Security Administration says it is on schedule to begin construction of the main UPF process building by the end of March of 2018.

The Trump Administration’s FY2019 budget calls for a whopping 20% increase in nuclear weapons spending—and a cut in nonproliferation funding.

But it does know

The truth is that the architects of US nuclear posture know full well what both of their hands are doing. They also prove, in the NPR, that they are skilled at talking out of both sides of their mouth. This doublespeak is not intended to fool Russia, China, North Korea or others. It is intended to obfuscate the purposes of the US government from the public in this country.

In response to the NPR, Russia’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs released a statement saying the accusations leveled against Russia have no connection with reality. “Russia’s Military Doctrine clearly limits the possibility of using nuclear weapons to two hypothetical defense scenarios: first in response to an aggression against Russia and/or its allies involving the use of nuclear weapons or any other weapons of mass destruction, and second, in response to a non-nuclear aggression but only if Russia’s survival is endangered.”

The new US nuclear posture includes scenarios in which nuclear weapons would be used in circumstances not limited to military scenarios. The Russian statement turns the US accusation back upon the United States, noting the new policy represents an enhancement of the role of nuclear weapons.

The unanswered question is whether the US government will succeed in scaring the US public into silence with misrepresentations of reality and ramp up the funding from Congress for the wish list of long-time weaponeers at the weapons labs and production facilities.

NPR lowers the bar for using WMD

There are plenty of alarming pieces in the 2018 NPR, but chief among them is the proposal to create new, “low-yield” nuclear weapons by modifying submarine-launched ballistic missiles.

The logic used for virtually all nuclear policy discussions lives in a self-contained universe of irrational rationality. When Secretary of Defense Jim “Mad Dog” Mattis answered critics in his testimony before the House Armed Services Committee by saying that low-yield weapons would not be “more useable as they are not for warfighting” but to “convince Russia that the limited use of nuclear weapons is not a viable strategy,” he neglected to mention that the efficacy of this strategy depends entirely on the actual willingness to use the low-yield nukes in, well, fighting a war, which is awfully close to warfighting.

For those new to the ideas contained in the Posture Review, the Secretary’s opening remarks on the NPR might bring clarity. “The 2018 Nuclear Posture Review reaffirms the mutually reinforcing role of nuclear deterrence in a complex and dynamic security environment while underscoring continued U.S. commitment to non-proliferation, counter-nuclear terrorism, and arms control,” he said.

“Mutually reinforcing,” in this instance, signals an Ouroboros—the ancient Egyptian icon of a snake eating its own tail. The policy of nuclear deterrence, with its circular logic and embedded suicide pact, clearly demonstrates the determination of military and Congressional leaders to sacrifice the nation in pursuit of the chimera of security.

Arms reductions in the NPR

Despite paying lipservice to US obligations under the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (we promised in 1969 to pursue in good faith negotiations leading to dis-
armament at an early date), Mattis told Congress not to get its hopes up about further arms control agreements. “Many hoped conditions had been set for even deeper reductions in global nuclear arsenals, and, ultimately, their elimination,” he said after rehearsing the New START Treaty achievements, “yet we must recognize that deterrence and arms control can only be achieved with a credible capability.”

**REACTIONS TO THE NPR**

Russia, the primary audience for the NPR, issued a statement through its Ministry on Foreign Affairs that described the document as “focused on confrontation and anti-Russian.” Noting the NPR’s reference to Russian modernization and a supposed increased reliance on nuclear weapons in Russia’s defense doctrine, the statement said, “We have been accused of lowering the threshold for the first use of nuclear weapons. None of this has any connection with reality.”

The Russian statement concludes by questioning the sincerity of US claims that it seeks “stable relations” and looks forward to “constructive engagement,” but says Russia is ready for such engagement and urges the US to work cooperatively to find solutions to problems.

Closer to home, the German Foreign Minister, Sigmar Gabriel, issued a statement of concern about the “mutually accelerating development of new nuclear weapons,” saying it sends the wrong message and carries the risk of a new arms race. “We need new disarmament initiatives,” Gabriel’s statement said, “rather than new arms systems.” He noted that the US Administration’s decision to develop new tactical weapons “shows that the spiral of a new nuclear arms race has already been set in motion. As at the time of the Cold War, we in Europe are particularly at risk.”

Reciting elements of the deteriorating security environment in Europe in recent years, Gabriel concludes: “We need to work with our partners and allies to find solutions to all of these challenges. However, the solution must not be to simply join the nuclear club.”

**IN THE US**

Critiques of the NPR came quickly in the US where a draft of the document had been leaked almost a month ago.

The American Conservative wrote about the conflict within the military, saying senior Army and Navy personnel waged a “bitter battle” against policy wonks within the Department of Defense over low-yield nuclear weapons. A senior Pentagon civilian said the military leadership is “dead-set against it.”

Kingston Reif of the Arms Control Association noted that a missile carrying a low-yield nuclear warhead would be indistinguishable from the exact same missile carrying a massive warhead, so the response from any target would be predicated on a worst case scenario, meaning any effort to “limit” a nuclear exchange would inevitably fail.

Lawrence Korb of the Center for American Progress ticks off six major flaws in the NPR, including the fact that it apparently rejects Vladimir Putin’s offer to extend the New START Treaty for five more years. The NPR overstates the extent to which Russia and China are modernizing their stockpiles, Korb says, noting China’s entire stockpile consists of 60 intercontinental ballistic missiles and 300 warheads. Korb suggests Congress should refuse to fund the new weapons proposed in the NPR and stop other costly, destabilizing programs as well.

Hans Kristensen, one of the foremost civilian experts on US nuclear weapons capabilities, notes the NPR provides no evidence that existing US capabilities are insufficient to meet US security needs, but “simply claims that new capabilities are needed.” Some of these new capabilities, he notes, could lead to a demand for resuming full scale nuclear testing of unproven or heavily modified warhead designs.

**SAVING THE WORST FOR LAST**

The most disturbing thing about the Trump Administration’s Nuclear Posture Review is that in significant ways, as Mattis testified on Capitol Hill, it is not all that different from Barack Obama’s 2010 NPR.

President Trump intends to continue the massive investment in modernizing the US nuclear weapons program, replacing every weapon in the nuclear arsenal, spending more than $1.5 trillion over the next 30 years. This modernization includes new nuclear production facilities for US nuclear weapons, starting with the Uranium Processing Facility in Oak Ridge.

The UPF, often called the “tip of the spear” of nuclear modernization, will not be sized for maintenance of the existing US stockpile. It will be supersized to produce 80 thermonuclear cores per year—full scale production capacity for new nuclear warheads.

Unlike some of the proposals in the NPR, spending on the UPF is underway; more than $3 billion has been spent so far, and the numbers are expected to increase significantly if and when actual construction begins.
Two minutes til midnight

Doomsday Clock sounds “urgent warning of global danger.”

Just days before the President of the United States unveiled his plan for new, “more usable” nuclear weapons and a commitment to a trillion-dollar-plus modernization plan begun by the Obama administration, a somber group of two women and two men stood at the front of a room at the National Press Club in Washington, DC, and removed the shroud covering a partial clock face.

The hands on the clock, known as the Doomsday Clock, stood at two minutes to midnight—30 seconds closer than in 2017. Since it was first created in 1947 by the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, a board of science and security specialists evaluates the peril of nuclear destruction each year and decides whether or not to move the hands.

Two minutes to midnight is the closest the minute hand of the Doomsday Clock has ever been; it was set there once before, in 1953, when the United States tested its first hydrogen bomb, followed nine months later by a Soviet test.

In resetting the clock this year, the statement released by the Bulletin cited North Korea’s nuclear program and the hyperbolic rhetoric and provocative actions deployed by the US in response.

“To call the world situation dire is to understate the danger—and its immediacy,” said the statement. After reviewing threats and dangers on several fronts globally, the statement says: “There has also been a breakdown in the international order that has been dangerously exacerbated by recent US actions.”

The Science and Security Board of the Bulletin said they hope the clock setting “will be interpreted exactly as it is meant—as an urgent warning of global danger.”

The Bulletin statement also pointed out ways the clock could be turned back. Recommendations included reducing the level of provocation, rhetorical and otherwise, between the US and North Korea; opening multiple channels of communication with North Korea; and rebuilding relationships with Russia in ways that avoid peacetime conflicts along NATO borders; and seek to further reduce nuclear stockpiles by, among other things, limiting nuclear modernization programs that threaten to create a new arms race.

OREPA celebrates MLK birthday

 Despite winter weather warnings, the 11th annual MLK Community Conversation brought more than 60 people to the Beck Cultural Exchange Center to talk about restorative justice in our schools and our legal system. Three days later, OREPA’s puppets were once again the hit of the MLK parade.
“IT’S LIKE a slow-motion race against the clock.”
That’s a description by one of the principals in the Uranium Processing Facility bomb plant lawsuit. OREPA and our co-plaintiffs filed a complaint last July charging the government with violating the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act by failing to complete a supplement to its 2011 Environmental Impact Statement despite making dramatic changes to its plans for handling and processing enriched uranium at the Y12 Nuclear Weapons Complex in Oak Ridge.

In December, the government provided a cache of documents known as the Administrative Record and the case was transferred to a new judge, a Trump appointee with no judicial record to speak of. In mid-February, we requested records that were omitted from the Administrative Record and proposed a schedule for the case as it crawls forward.

In the meantime, the National Nuclear Security Administration is moving to begin construction of the main UPF building. A recent document indicated they reached 90% design completion, an important milestone, at the end of September 2017 and hope to start construction by the end of March 2018.

We should soon begin to see some actual numbers for the cost of the UPF. We expect NNSA will attempt to hide the full cost of enriched uranium operations—all that was included in the original cost estimate for the UPF—and provide the narrowest cost estimate possible in order to claim they are meeting the declared cap of $6.5 billion.

The Trump Administration’s FY19 budget, released on February 12, seeks a nearly 20% increase for nuclear weapons, including construction of the UPF. Exact numbers for the UPF budget have yet to be released.

COMMUNITY EXPRESSES CONCERNS

One critical part of the OREPA lawsuit is the government’s failure to provide any opportunity for public comment on its plans as they changed, three times, over the course of six years, before exploding into the current scenario—one big UPF building, several smaller support buildings, and a decision to use two older, unsafe buildings for 20-30 more years. Not once in that entire process did the NNSA come back to the public to provide information or seek comments.

On January 24, 2018, NNSA held a meeting in Oak Ridge to address community concerns about the UPF. Unfortunately, the meeting agenda was limited to the primary concern of the local community—the plan to erect unsightly towers along the ridgetop to carry power lines from a new substation to the UPF.

Several OREPA members attended the meeting, along with nearly a hundred Oak Ridge residents. The city’s mayor asked why the city had not been consulted about the plan. “We don’t do that,” said NNSA’s Dale Christensen, offering no apology.

One member of the city’s Environmental Quality Advisory Board, noted that NNSA had relied on the expertise of Tennessee Valley Authority officials because “they know power lines,” and asked Christensen for copies of the report TVA provided. Incredibly, Christensen denied that any report existed.

After community members had expressed frustration for 45 minutes, OREPA’s coordinator asked about the NNSA’s failure to inform the public or hold a similar meeting when it decided to subject the residents to significant risks for the next 20-30 years by using unsafe buildings for uranium processing operations.

“I can not comment on anything that is the subject of ongoing litigation,” he answered. Later, OREPA’s newest Board member Nate Williams asked again; the NNSA ducked again.

We distributed dozens of flyers informing the public of the plan to continue operations in Buildings 9215 and 9204-2E despite the NNSA’s admission that the buildings do not meet seismic or environmental requirements and their declaration that they will not bring the buildings up to code. We will continue to educate the public about the UPF bomb plant, and we will push back when the budget comes out.

Despite DOE’s admission that its buildings do not meet current environmental or safety requirements, Y12 Site Manager Geoffrey Beausoleil, assures the audience that he will not allow workers to work in unsafe conditions.
What difference can one person make?

Headlines about missile tests and Twitter exchanges between North Korea’s Kim Jong Un and US President Donald Trump have reawakened concern about the threat of nuclear war in public and private places. Those concerns almost certainly contributed to the overwhelming passage of the Nuclear Ban Treaty in the United Nations this summer, and the conferring of the 2017 Nobel Peace Prize on the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN).

But the United States boycotted the Ban Treaty process and has refused to sign the Treaty. Instead, it has doubled down on its plan to spend more than a trillion dollars modernizing its nuclear weapons.

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ICAN, the Nobel recipients who were the driving force behind the Ban Treaty, is not a front for high powered diplomatic powers or well-heeled philanthropic brokers; it is a network of regular people drawn together by the vision of a world free of nuclear weapons who formulated a strategy to talk about the humanitarian costs of nuclear weapons, got the support of some governments, held international conferences and helped shepherd the idea of a treaty to prohibit nuclear weapons through the United Nations.

Regular people with a vision who acted on it.

Breaking the Silence

The key to breaking the silence is believing that each of us has the power to make a difference. Late last year, one person, Presbyterian pastor Gloria Mencer, approached the peacemaking committee of East Tennessee Presbytery, the regional collection of congregations covering Knoxville, Chattanooga, and Oak Ridge, Tennessee.

Gloria felt the contradiction between the calling of her faith to be a peace creator and the activity of her government that seemed to be pushing ever closer to the brink of complete nuclear annihilation. There must be something we can do, she said to the committee. For starters, came the answer, you should talk to the Oak Ridge Environmental Peace Alliance.

The president of our board, who is also on the Presbytery’s peacemaking committee, invited her to OREPA’s next board meeting. Gloria came and talked about her concerns, and a conversation opened which, we hope, will lead to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA) adopting an overture calling for the abolition of nuclear weapons at its biannual meeting in St. Louis in June.

The Presbyterian Church has a long history of addressing nuclear weapons, including the founding of the formal Presbyterian Peacemaking Program in the early 1980’s to direct the church’s efforts to be part of the nuclear freeze movement. In 1983, the denomination published Peacemaking: The Believer’s Calling, a document that summoned the entire church to contemplate the gospel imperative to live according to God’s vision of a peaceful world.

But for the past two decades or more, the Presbyterian Church has been silent about nuclear weapons, as have most mainstream denominations in the United States, the Society of Friends (Quakers) being the notable exception.

The silence was broken by the Roman Catholic church three years ago when the Pope delivered a powerful statement denouncing nuclear weapons. The Catholic church had issued sporadic statements about nuclear weapons in the years since the US Conference of Catholic Bishops published a paper in the early 1980s, but had never formally renounced the central acceptance of the doctrine of deterrence—which contained a de facto acceptance of nuclear weapons.

That changed last year, when Pope Francis explicitly declared the doctrine of
deterrence outside the bounds of the faith and called for the nations of the world to take steps to disarm. Nuclear weapons, he said, “cannot constitute the basis for peaceful coexistence between members of the human family.” He condemned not only the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons, but their very possession.

**A HISTORIC FIRST**

The proposed overture came up for its first vote before a Presbytery on Saturday, February 10, in Chattanooga, when the East Tennessee Presbytery considered a motion to endorse the overture which had arrived too late on the docket to be directly adopted.

Members of the Peacemaking committee listened anxiously to arguments for and against, several of them speaking powerfully to encourage their colleagues to pass the endorsement. In the end, the vote was 46-22 in favor of the endorsement—the first time in history that East Tennessee Presbytery has voted to abolish nuclear weapons.

**NEXT STEPS**

In order for an Overture to come before the General Assembly in June, it must be adopted by at least one Presbytery and have the concurrence of at least one other Presbytery. In late February, the New Hope Presbytery in North Carolina will consider the overture at its meeting; we expect that it will pass, setting the stage for a vote in St. Louis in June.

The overture has two main goals—educating members of the Presbyterian Church about the threat of nuclear weapons and the imperative to seek nuclear disarmament, and calling on the US government to take steps to sign, ratify, and comply with the Treaty on the Nonproliferation of Nuclear Weapons.

The overture is specific—it calls for the elimination of funding for new or “modernized” nuclear weapons production facilities, including the Uranium Processing Facility bomb plant slated for Oak Ridge, Tennessee.

OREPA hopes the Presbyterian overture might serve as a model to be considered by other US denominations, challenging people of faith to speak and to act to compel the government to take steps to increase our security.

In the rationale accompanying the Presbyterian overture, the ominous words of Beatrice Fihn, director of ICAN, as she accepted the Nobel Peace Prize in December, are cited: “The story of nuclear weapons will have one of two endings. Either we will end them, or they will end us.”

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**Excerpts from the Overture**

The Overture that is expected to be considered by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, USA at its June meeting asks the church to:

- call upon all members of the Presbyterian Church, USA, in faithfulness to the God of justice, mercy and compassion, to take actions in defense of God’s creation and our own security, which is inextricably bound to the security of the rest of the world, to take all actions such as might be effective in requiring full US compliance with the obligation to achieve nuclear disarmament under the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons,
- renounce the false god of nuclear security with its promise of catastrophic consequences;
- renounce any policy which threatens the death of millions of God’s children in any land with a single command and a single warhead;
- join in ecumenical discussion at the highest level to develop a collaborative strategy with Christian and other faith communities to effect the total elimination of nuclear weapons from the Earth;
- make use of resources within the Presbyterian Church, USA, to educate members about the existential threat of nuclear weapons and effective actions that can be taken to address and eliminate that threat; and
- call upon Presbyterians to take the Five Risks Presbyterians Must Take for Peace: commit to the Gospel of Peace, confess our complicity in not being peacemakers, reclaim Christ the peacemaker, find new peace strategies, and convert the empire and work for peace [Five Risks Presbyterians Must Take for Peace: Renewing the commitment to peacemaking in the PC(USA), Christian Iosso, 2017].

The overture also asks the General Assembly to call upon the government of the United States of America to:

- immediately begin the process of complete, irreversible and verifiable nuclear disarmament in compliance with our obligations under the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (1969), the findings of International Court of Justice (July, 1996), and the requirements of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (2017),
- recognizing that any use of nuclear weapons is a de facto declaration of war, a power conferred by the Constitution on Congress alone, constrain the power of any President to initiate a nuclear “first strike” by adopting “No First Use” legislation,
- eliminate funding for programs designed to prolong the nuclear danger, including the Life Extension Program for existing nuclear weapons and the construction of nuclear weapon production facilities in Oak Ridge, Tennessee; Los Alamos, New Mexico; and any other locations that may be proposed;
- direct the U.S. Department of Energy to redirect resources to cleaning up nuclear and other contamination that has accumulated over decades and threatens human health and the environment at multiple nuclear weapons installations, former and present, and at waste sites used to dispose of nuclear waste;
- provide sufficient resources for the protection of human health and the environment and the remediation of former nuclear weapons facilities;
- provide support where possible to non-governmental groups and organizations working for the abolition of nuclear weapons.
The year 2018 is a milestone year for OREPA—we turn 30 years old this year. It is a time for remembrance of people, events, actions, and successes of years gone by. But even more importantly, it is a time to look forward and to prepare the organization for the challenges of the future.

That pivot is at the heart of this year’s Peacemaker Awards, to be celebrated on Saturday, February 24 at St. James Episcopal Church in Knoxville. The theme of the awards is “Celebrating Emerging Leadership,” and the 2018 Peacemaker Awards will be given to three strong, young women who have shown leadership in peace and justice issues in Knoxville and two equally strong women who have dedicated their lives to teaching and nurturing young people in the ways of peace.

Summer Awad, Carmella Cole and Meghan Conley will be joined by Kathie Shiba and Mitzi Wood-Von Mizener as recipients of this year’s awards. Kathie, long-time professor at Maryville College, and Mitzi, director of Narrow Ridge Earth Literacy Center, have directed programs that challenge young people to step outside their comfort zone, exposing them to new ideas, and providing opportunities for them to experience the satisfaction of working to create a better world.

Summer, Carmella and Meghan have taken up the challenge of improving the world in different ways. While a student at the University of Tennessee, Summer created a remarkable play, Walls, examining what it means to live as a Palestinian in the shadow of the Wall and the walls that are erected to isolate and disempower Palestinians in their search for identity and justice.

Carmella, a member of OREPA’s Board of Directors, took up the cause of nuclear abolition while still in high school, organizing with friends a demonstration in Oak Ridge. Since then, she has taken the vision of a world free of nuclear weapons to Washington, DC, and Büchel, Germany.

Meghan provides strong leadership to Allies of Knoxville’s Immigrant Neighbors (AKIN), an organization that employs a wide range of strategies to address the needs of Knoxville’s immigrant communities, from direct action aimed at discriminatory law enforcement actions to providing workshops and direct services to immigrants.

The Peacemaker Award celebration provides an opportunity for us to celebrate and encourage the work of remarkable people in our community. It is also a chance to get together and have fun, meeting new friends and hanging out with old ones.

The event also serves as a fundraiser for OREPA. This year, proceeds will be directed to OREPA’s Next Generation Fund, established to provide resources and, eventually, hire staff to do youth organizing on nuclear weapons issues in East Tennessee. Suggested donations are $25 for adults and $5 for students and children; you can pay at the door, or on-line via the donate button on OREPA’s web site. If you don’t have money, come anyway!

The evening will be filled out with great food—the serving line will open at 7:00pm, and great music: local musician Jack Herranen will play tunes, and The Emancipators will provide music as well.