



May 20, 2003

## RPC TALKING POINTS

### REPEAL OF BAN ON R&D FOR LOW-YIELD NUCLEAR WEAPONS

- C (See Title 31, Sec. 3131 of S.1050, the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2004.)
- C This repeal simply allows our scientists to think about better ways to defend America.
- C Allowing research and development would in no way commit us to producing or deploying new low-yield weapons. It simply allows thought.
- C Why do we need to think about the possibility of new low-yield weapons? For starters, low-yield weapons could provide the capability to destroy stocks of chemical and biological weapons while reducing fallout.
- C In addition, deterrence relies upon us having a credible threat of actually using nuclear weapons in retaliation for aggression against us.
  - Our existing stockpile of nuclear weapons provided that deterrent during the Cold War, but it is reasonable to think that a different mix of weapons *may* be necessary given today’s new environment. That environment includes the absence of a rival superpower, but new threats from smaller rogue states, as well as terrorist organizations, developing weapons of mass destruction.
  - The absence of a rival superpower means that we can dramatically reduce the number of warheads in our arsenal — to 1,700-2,200, according to the Nuclear Posture Review — a number which is now in the Treaty on Strategic Offensive Reductions, known as the “Moscow Treaty.”
  - But a smaller arsenal, combined with the nature of the threats we now face, argues for having an arsenal that is as flexible and modern as possible. We must maintain the ability to develop, if not necessarily deploy, new or modified weapons that pose a credible risk to potential adversaries. In some cases, threatening a massive counter-attack with high-yield warheads might be seen by our enemies as excessive and unrealistic. They would thus not be deterred.

- C The advances in precision delivery that we have recently witnessed in the Iraq War also argue for examining lower-yield weapons. As Steve Younger, Associate Director for Nuclear Weapons at Los Alamos, has written, only a few targets truly require a high-yield nuclear device in order to be destroyed. The advances in precision delivery mean that some targets — a missile silo with a 30-foot-thick door, for example — could be destroyed with a low-yield weapon. In the past, less precise delivery may have meant tasking a high-yield device to destroy such a target.
  
- C We should not fall for the trap of attempting to separate research from development. The line between the two is often blurry, and allowing “research” but not development will likely not end the current chilling effect on our scientists. For example, there are issues involving material strength that require the development of new materials, which then need to be tested and have their properties fed back into research models.

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