

EXPERTS:

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“A Conversation with an Expert,”

Featuring:

Dr. Robert Standish Norris

PART 2: “A Nuclear-Free Mirage? Obstacles to President Obama’s Goal of a Nuclear Weapons Free World.”

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A NUCLEAR-FREE MIRAGE? Obstacles to President Obama’s Goal of a Nuclear Weapons Free World



Charles P. Blair—director of the Terrorism Analysis Project at the Federation of American Scientists—interviewed Federation of American Scientists’ Senior Fellow for Nuclear Policy [Dr. Robert Standish Norris](#) for a special edition of the FAS podcast: A Conversation with an Expert.¹

The interview is part two in a series of interviews with Dr. Norris. The podcast [takes] a much deeper look at the nuclear policies of the Obama Administration—policies that Dr. Norris terms “radical” with regard to their vision of a nuclear weapon free world. In defending Dr. Norris’ belief that U.S. nuclear weapons serve only one useful purpose—that is to deter the use of nuclear weapons by other countries—in this interview we explore other potential roles for nuclear weapons. Additionally, this interview explores Dr. Norris’ vision of **minimal nuclear**

¹ [Charlotte Rungius](#), an FAS Intern, provided valuable assistance in transcribing this interview—recorded 09/21/2011 at FAS, Washington, D.C.

deterrence—an early requirement for the United States if it truly seeks a world free of nuclear weapons. Ultimately, Dr. Norris concludes that this goal a world free of nuclear weapons is probably not going to happen, at least in the near future, given the institution interests and bureaucracies that oppose this goal.

Dr. Norris is Senior Fellow at the Federation of American Scientists. From 1984-2011 he worked at the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) in Washington, DC. His principal areas of expertise include writing and research on all aspects of the nuclear weapons programs of the United States, Soviet Union/Russia, Britain, France, and China, as well as India, Pakistan, and Israel. He co-authored several volumes of NRDC's *Nuclear Weapons Databook* series: *U.S. Nuclear Warhead Production*, Volume II (1987) [DOWNLOAD [PART 1](#), [PART 2](#), [PART 3](#), [PART 4](#)]; *U.S. Nuclear Warhead Facility Profiles* [DOWNLOAD [PART 1](#), [PART 2](#)], Volume III (1987); *Soviet Nuclear Weapons*, Volume IV (1989); and *British, French and Chinese Nuclear Weapons*, Volume V (1994). His more recent books include [Making the Russian Bomb: From Stalin to Yeltsin](#) (1995) and [Atomic Audit: The Costs and Consequences of U.S. Nuclear Weapons Since 1940](#) (1998), [with other authors]. He has co-authored or contributed to the chapter on nuclear weapons in the 1985-2000 editions of the *SIPRI Yearbook*. He has written articles for *Arms Control Today* and *Security Dialogue*, and has written a very influential column for the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* since 1987. He co-authored the online/DVD article on "Nuclear Weapons" of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*.

As we discovered in my [previous interview](#)² with Dr. Norris, he wrote an excellent biography of General Leslie R. Groves, the head of the Manhattan Project that built the atomic bomb during World War II. That book, [Racing for the Bomb: General Leslie R. Groves, the Manhattan Project's Indispensable Man](#) (Steerforth Press, 2002) has been favorably reviewed in the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Foreign Affairs*, *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, [Assembly, U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings, and *The Journal of Military History* among other publications and won the Distinguished Writing Award for best Biography of 2002 from the Army Historical Foundation]. Dr. Norris received his Ph.D. in Political Science from New York University in 1976, and has taught at New York University, Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, Miami University's European campus in Luxembourg, and American University in Washington, DC.

Charles Blair:

Stan, it's been twenty years now since the end of Cold War, I was hoping that you could give to our listeners just a brief overview of what the general mission of nuclear weapons has been from World War II until the end of the George W. Bush's second [presidential] Administration in January 2009.

Dr. Norris:

Two bombs were used at the end of World War II, bringing that Pacific war to an end. And in the aftermath, in the first decade or so, the military and the civilians were getting used to this new weapon and deciding what to do with it. In addition, there was the role of the laboratory

² FAS Podcast "A Conversation with an Expert," Featuring Dr. Robert Standish Norris Part 1: 66th Anniversary of the Atomic Bombing of Japan. August 9, 2011. Available at: <http://www.fas.org/blog/dev/2011/08/podcast-%E2%80%9Ca-conversation-with-an-expert%E2%80%9D-featuring-dr-robert-s-norris-part-1-66th-anniversary-of-the-atomic-bombing-of-japan/>

and the whole complex that it had been built within the Manhattan project. And it was turned over to the Atomic Energy Commission [AEC], civilian run to build nuclear weapons. And the military was, I think, a bit slow. But eventually it became the thing to have [i.e., nuclear weapons]. The air force, the navy and the army all became enthusiastic over this weapon and found many many uses for it.

Throughout the 50s and then on into the 60s the stockpile growth by leaps and bounds as each of these services find many uses to put to it. So the stockpile growth to an astounding number of some 32,000 plus at one time in about 1967, and that would be the high point of when the stockpile reached its historic peak. I would say throughout the 70s and then on into the 80s mission by mission the military became less enthusiastic about these things and began to get rid of some weapons. And we have a downward trajectory of the stockpile in addition their arms control treaties with the Soviet Union which limited it in some ways but sort of gave rules for the road without letting an unchecked arms race go on. By the time we get to the 80s, the stockpile has diminished quite a bit. And if we go into the more recent situation with the George W. Bush Administration, which also had arms control component, we leave an arsenal of about 5,000 weapons to the Obama Administration. So that is where we are today. Now, not all of those are active. We think about 2,150 of these are in the active stockpile and the balance—about 2,850—are in some sort of reserve status that could be brought back online. So, here we are in 2011, with the Obama Administration inheriting a targeting strategy and a stockpile and deciding what to do about it.

Charles Blair:

So, looking now at the Obama Administration and the [nuclear] stockpile it came into office inheriting and also the targeting list, what are the nuclear policies of the Obama Administration? Do you think that they depart from the previous three post-Cold War [U.S.] administrations?

Dr. Norris:

Well, what we have here is President Obama, who is certainly committed to this issue, we know, longstanding, deciding to initiate what is called the [Nuclear Posture Review](#), giving a [speech](#) in Prague [Czech Republic; April 5, 2009] which is very ambitious in terms of what he wants to do with these things. And this Nuclear Posture Review went through the bureaucracy and was finished and published with certain recommendations about where we want to go. Now, we are at the point of trying to *implement* this Nuclear Posture Review and there are some things that are going to be difficult to have the bureaucracies entertain. I think it is a language problem here. The Pentagon understands how to target and to do this and that. I do not think it understands a commitment to rely less on them [i.e., nuclear weapons] and even to get rid of them. That is something that is not part of the Pentagon's vocabulary. So, whether or not, the

This issue has sort of fallen off the table. With the End of the Cold War, people think that everything has been taken care of and this is a very low priority issue for most of the American public. There are a few groups in Washington and elsewhere that are concerned about it and [we] have to keep carrying the baton here to keep it at least in public view.

goals that are outlined in Obama's Nuclear Posture Review are able to be transformed and implemented and carried out, is something I think is in doubt. It has to do with constituencies, bureaucracies, careers and budgets and a whole host of things that were the driving forces behind the arms race to begin with. And how many of those things are still in place, still operative and resistant to radical changes.

So, whether or not, the goals that are outlined in Obama's Nuclear Posture Review are able to be transformed and implemented and carried out, is something I think is in doubt. It has to do with constituencies, bureaucracies, careers and budgets and a whole host of things that were the driving forces behind the arms race to begin with. And how many of those things are still in place, still operative and resistant to radical changes.

Charles Blair:

I want to get back to the implementation part because I think that it is really critical. But let's go back to the overall goal of the Obama Administration. In the Nuclear Posture Review (all of which is declassified [and] available [on-line](#)) they mention that they seek to make progress toward a "nuclear-free" world on ten different occasions in the document. So, in theory then, how does the Nuclear Posture Review plan on achieving the goal of a nuclear-free world?

Dr. Norris:

I guess with great difficulty, because it is not exactly spelled out how this would happen. And as we mentioned, this kind of language is very difficult for the military to understand and implement. By the same token, Obama has said that the United States will retain nuclear weapons as long as others have them. Thus, the goal of a nuclear free world is really long-term. I think, he said on several occasions, it will probably not be implemented in his lifetime. Thus, we have to look out over a couple of decades. And what he wants to do is get us on that path. So, that is where we are, how to begin those very first steps of doing it. And even these very first steps are difficult ones. So, this is not something that is going to be done overnight. It is really a long-term goal.

But it is something, I think, new and different that we have not heard before in a serious way. There has always been a commitment under the nonproliferation treaty that this is a goal [[Article VI of the NPT](#)]. But that was always really brushed aside as we went ahead. And, thus, I think the Obama Administration is really almost unique in taking this on seriously and trying to make it happen even if these are just the first baby steps.

Charles Blair:

Stan, you've argued that one of the most critical first steps that the Obama Administration needs in this path towards "Zero" is to embrace a different targeting strategy if you will—what you term "minimal deterrence". We will be discussing this at length, but I was hoping that you could give the [listeners] an overall idea of what you mean by changing the mission of nuclear weapons to minimal deterrence.

Dr. Norris:

It would be grounded on just one task for nuclear weapons and that is to deter the use against the United States by another nuclear power. Deterrence, of course, has a long and involved history throughout the Cold War and was a very, very useful concept to justify and rationalize all of these weapons that were built in the past, for whatever use it was. So to shrink the definition and concepts of deterrence down to a single thing rather than have it be so expansive, I think has to be sort of the first conceptual breakthrough to orient this towards minimizing a stockpile that still numbers some 5,000 weapons.

Charles Blair:

What is that one task?

Dr. Norris:

We have said³ that this one task should just be to deter use against the United States and not have it do a host of other things which it has been invoked to do in past years. You may remember during the Reagan Administration, deterrence became so expansive that it came to mean—to the Soviet Union—an ability to fight a nuclear war and to prevail and the Soviet Union could only be deterred, if its leadership were targeted. These things were spoken out loud, which is part of the function of a policy. That is you have to let your enemy know what it is that you are up to. If you keep it totally secret it remains somewhat ambiguous. So it was articulated in various policy formations that the Soviet Union could only be deterred if its leadership and the sources of its military and civilian power were threatened by the U.S. nuclear weapons. Now, these required more weapons, more warheads. But if you wanted to do very much less than that and just have a minimum force (which is still capable of bringing about vast destruction on whoever would have the poor idea of attacking the United States with nuclear weapons) you can do it with hundreds or thousands, or whatever number you want, given the fact that nuclear weapons are so destructive that we looked to a targeting strategy that is robust and forceful enough to deter use, which is our single goal.

Charles Blair:

But there are others who argue that nuclear weapons have more than one good function; that they are useful in a variety of situations. For example, their perceived value as a political tool. Keith Payne has written in this regard that:

“In the past it was often observed that hundreds of thousands of forward-deployed U.S. forces were the manifest evidence of U.S. security commitment and reliability as an alliance leader, and that theater nuclear forces were the connecting link between the strategic nuclear deterrent and regional security. In the foreseeable future, the retrenchment of U.S. forward-deployed forces and withdrawal of U.S. tactical nuclear weapons [leaves] strategic nuclear weapons and extended deterrence as a unique symbol of leadership power and means of reassurance for allies and friends.”⁴

³ For the case for the U.S. embracing minimal deterrence see, for example, Hans M. Kristensen, Robert S. Norris, and Ivan Oelrich, *From Counterforce to Minimal Deterrence: A New Nuclear Policy on the Path Toward Eliminating Nuclear Weapons*. Federation of American Scientists, Occasional Paper 7. April 2009, p. passim. Available at: http://www.fas.org/press/news/2009/apr_newreport.html

⁴ Keith B. Payne, “Deterrence and U.S. Strategic Force Requirements after the Cold War,” *Comparative Strategy*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (1992), p. 269-282.

So, in short, nuclear advocates see nuclear weapons as a means of “bolstering our security commitments to our allies”⁵ and, possibly, serving non-proliferation goals by obviating the need for our allies to build their own arsenal. How do you respond?

Dr. Norris:

Those have been two popular arguments throughout the years. The first one, in terms of what is usually called the nuclear umbrella that is spread over European allies and some Pacific allies. Of course, this began early after the World War II when the Soviet army, the Red Army, did not disband as much as possible and we have the Iron Curtain and the Warsaw Pact and all the rest and nuclear weapons were said to fill the gap between the opposing forces since we could not match the numbers that the Red Army and the Warsaw pact were putting in the field. And it stayed that way throughout NATO. But if you still want to do that—and I think the Obama Administration is forced to continue to do that—it does not necessarily have to mean that [nuclear weapons are in Europe](#). That can be done with weapons that are in the United States or on submarines. You can still provide an umbrella in another way. So I do not think we are disbanding these security commitments. It does not necessarily mean that you still have to have them in place, on the soil of allies. We do not have any weapons in Japan, for example, but we still have a security commitment to Japan and to South Korea as well but there are no nuclear weapons in Japan or South Korea. So, already we have done it in one place and we could do it as well as in Europe.

For every target that is generated it elicits a new requirement for a nuclear weapon. This has been the story of the Cold War throughout: greater reconnaissance abilities finding more and more targets, more and more targets needing more and more weapons. This is an ‘engine’ that was in play for quite a period of time.

As far as bolstering the nonproliferation goals, this is sort of an interesting argument here where it is said, that if we no longer provide this nuclear umbrella that somehow Germany or Japan is going to build the bomb. But these are not serious arguments in terms of the enemies that they face at the moment. Who is the enemy of Germany? And is Japan [really] so jeopardized by North Korea that they are going to decide to build the bomb on their own? So, I think this is kind of a simplistic argument. It does not hold water when you get down to essentials of what drives countries to get nuclear weapons in the first place. The situation they find themselves in is not so dire that they are going to immediately turn and build nuclear weapons. But the Japanese, this is almost inconceivable, that the Japanese would go ahead at this point in time and build nuclear weapons. In the aftermath of Fukushima, and all of the ... civilian part of things, the so called ‘nuclear allergy’ which I think is in Japan higher than ever, and the security concern which would only be faced by North Korea, it can be taken care of by the United States in the fashion that obviates the need for Japan to go forth. These are arguments that have to be confronted; and the Obama Administration will have to handle this very ticklish situation of providing security commitments to our allies in a fashion that satisfies the allies and the American people.

⁵ Amy F. Wolfe, “U.S. Nuclear Weapons: Changes in Policy and Force Structure.” CRS Report for Congress, January 23, 2008. P. 43. Available at: <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/nuke/RL31623.pdf>

Charles Blair:

Assuming that your analysis is correct, that nuclear weapons do not serve a role to reassure allies and to prevent nonproliferation. The other argument made that nuclear weapons serve multiple function[s] is the idea that they serve to deter the use of nuclear weapons [*and*] that they also serve to deter the use of chemical and biological weapons. Now, since the United States does not possess chemical or biological weapons, this argument goes, it cannot effectively counter chemical or biological weapons attack. However, it has been proposed, that certain low-yield nuclear weapons could fulfill that kind of mission [A dated but seminar article written by two Los Alamos weaponeers, sums up the argument nicely]:

“While Washington may not consider using a [multi-megaton] nuclear [weapon] to counter a chemical weapons attack . . . a small nuclear weapon could be employed for exactly that circumstance.”⁶

Do you think that U.S. nuclear forces should be tasked with deterring the use of chemical and biological weapons?

Dr. Norris:

No, I do not. Again, these are some of these arguments that are dragged out here to support and trying to promote new uses for nuclear weapons in the post-Cold War era. We have precision [conventional] munitions that can do the job of attacking if we could find out who did it. I do not think any country is going to attack with chemical or biological weapons. I mean, mainly we are talking about terrorists and those kinds of missions that would be carried out by terrorists. They are not going to be deterred by the United States, whatever it does. I think these are arguments that are used to justify a new type of weapon and keep the laboratories busy. But there has not been any requirement that the military has suggested that it needs a weapon for this. This is mainly going on in the civilian think tank arena and some Congressmen, who for one reason or another are trying to justify new uses for nuclear weapons.

Charles Blair:

My next question is closely related to what we just discussed. You argue that nuclear weapons have only one role: to deter the use of nuclear weapons. However, in addition to arguments that they have a political role and that they are useful in deterring the use of chemical and biological weapons, some argue that nuclear weapons have a real battle-field applicability. Since the end of the Cold War this view has been articulated in two primary ways: first, some argue that nuclear weapons can be used to destroy hardened and deeply buried targets⁷ and, in addition to destroying command and control facilities found therein, may be capable of neutralizing

⁶ T. W. Dowler and J. S. Howard III, “Countering the Threat of the Well-armed Tyrant: A Modest Proposal for Small Nuclear Weapons,” *Strategic Review* (Fall 1991).

⁷ See, for example, Department of Defense / Department of Energy, Report to Congress on the Defeat of Hard and Deeply Buried Targets (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2001). The 2001 Nuclear Posture Review notes that, “Several nuclear weapons options that might provide important advantages for enhancing the nation’s deterrence posture: possible modifications to existing weapons to provide additional yield flexibility in the stockpile; improved earth penetrating weapons (EPWs) to counter the increased use by potential adversaries of hardened and deeply buried facilities; and [new] warheads that reduce collateral damage. “Nuclear Posture Review [Excerpts],” Global Security.org, Jan. 8, 2002.

chemical and biological agents stored in those buried facilities⁸. Second, some have advocated an available stockpile of low-yield tactical nuclear weapons to counter sudden reversals in *conventional* conflicts.”⁹ How do you respond?

Dr. Norris:

As far as the dialogue and debate that is going on in the post-Cold War period, I think it is [constituted by] several constituencies trying to find uses for nuclear weapons that they think have some utility. We talked before about [the] precision that would be needed to attack leadership targets in the Soviet Union, now Russia—to burrow into bunkers that no doubt the Russians have built.¹⁰ For every target that is generated it elicits a new requirement for a nuclear weapon. This has been the story of the Cold War throughout: greater reconnaissance abilities finding more and more targets, more and more targets needing more and more weapons. This is an “engine” that was in play for quite a period of time. But now we do not have the Russian as an enemy the way we did in the Cold War. So, new enemies were found in the form of perhaps terrorists, North Korea or China. But the arsenal that we have is certainly large enough and adequate enough to destroy [anything] within any measure that is conceivable. I just do not see that in a conventional situation escalating to the point where nuclear weapons would even be *considered*. I mean we have had situations already with the wars in Iraq and the Gulf war and so on. We never really got close to actually the use of nuclear weapons. They were once threatening during the Gulf War and Saddam, a message was sent. We were not quite sure how it was received. Any country, and any faction or group knows that the United States has nuclear weapons. To the degree that it is a factor in their consideration of using weapons against us, it is hard to tell. Apparently with some it would have no bearing at all, and they would come with their airplanes to crash into buildings or do whatever other things that they wanted, irrespective of the United States possessing nuclear weapons. So we are in a different area. Whether the threats are different, the enemies are different and the role of nuclear weapons in that situation is still to be determined. But for the time being, there have not been formal military requirements to the laboratories to build new nuclear weapons, to do some of this. We already have nuclear weapons that can do much of this. Our nuclear weapons are such that various yields can be an option for them, for bombs that are dropped by airplanes.¹¹ You could have a sub-kiloton weapon already with very precise targeting abilities. Much of what is called for by some of these proponents is actually already on the table. We have already said that in several places.¹² This obviates the need for anything new, since we can probably do it already. But would we do

⁸ See, for example, Michael May and Zachary Haldeman, *Effectiveness of Nuclear Weapons against Buried Biological Agents* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University, 2003). Available at: http://iis-db.stanford.edu/pubs/20216/Haldeman_May_long-S%26GS.pdf

⁹ See, for example, William Arkin, “Secret Plan Outlines the Unthinkable,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 10, 2002. Available at: <http://articles.latimes.com/2002/mar/10/opinion/op-arkin>

¹⁰ See, for example, Kristensen, Norris, and Oelrich, *From Counterforce to Minimal Deterrence: A New Nuclear Policy on the Path Toward Eliminating Nuclear Weapons*, 23-25. See also, Robert Nelson, “Low-Yield Earth-Penetrating Nuclear Weapons,” *Federation of American Scientists*, Public Interest Report 54 (Jan/Feb. 2002). Available at: http://www.fas.org/programs/ssp/nukes/new_nuclear_weapons/loyieldearthpenwprpt.html

¹¹ See, for example, Robert S. Norris, Hans M. Kristensen and Joshua Handler, “The B61 Family of Bombs,” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* (2003) Vol. 59, No. 74, pp. 74-76. Available at: <http://bos.sagepub.com/content/59/1/74> See also, Thomas B. Cochran, William M. Arkin, Robert Norris, and Milton M. Hoenig, *Nuclear Weapons Databook: U.S. Nuclear Warhead Production*, Volume II (Natural Resources Defense Council: Washington, D.C.: 1987), p. 20.

¹² See, for example, Kristensen, Norris, and Oelrich, *From Counterforce to Minimal Deterrence: A New Nuclear Policy on the Path Toward Eliminating Nuclear Weapons*, p. 43.

it? To cross that line it seems at this point a very distant in almost any conceivable conflicts we will get ourselves into.

Charles Blair:

In your dealings with the Obama Administration and your understanding of its general outlook, do you think that the relevant players in the administration share the view that you have that nuclear weapons only have one role: to deter the use of other nuclear weapons?

There is good will in some of these bureaucracies to try to advance some of the things in the Nuclear Posture Review but whether we come out on the other end with something that is dramatically new that can start us down a road towards elimination, I must say is probably not happening because of the language problem with the Pentagon.

Dr. Norris:

We are at a point, where we are trying to discover what has happened to this document that was publicized some time ago now, the Nuclear Posture Review, as it goes through the various bureaucracies, offices, agencies and departments within the U.S. Government who have a stake in what happens. For the most part it is terribly difficult to change policies in a fundamental way no matter if it is the department of education or whatever. There is a kind of bureaucratic politics, I guess [that's what it's] called and taught in political science departments, that is trying to handle these kinds of questions about how entrenched are bureaucracies. Administrations come and go but bureaucracies are there forever. And in terms of implementing something very radical, and taking the Nuclear Posture Review as an example, and trying to implement new goals for it in the face of resistant bureaucracies that have been there for a long time with interests that spread beyond. These are stills laboratories, corporations building weapons, lobbying and having a stake in tomorrow, which may mean a new missile, a new submarine, payrolls in New Mexico at Los Alamos laboratories [LANL] or Livermore [LLNL]. So these are all realities that are going to either promote or resist these changes. The jury is still out whether all of this is going to result in some sort of realistic change.

Charles Blair:

You and I were discussing the other day that this sort of bureaucratic obstacles and advocates that counter White House guidance is probably found in just about every piece of legislation in every government globally. But if I hear you correctly, what you are really laying out is that—if we can broadly sum it up—we have two groups of people: one group is advocating new missions for nuclear weapons and new types of nuclear weapons. They are highlighting the fact that hardened and deeply buried targets, neutralizing chemical and biological agents, etc. And then on the other hand there [are] the bureaucracies, whose job—“job one”—is to keep their job. They just want to perpetuate themselves and keep rolling. That is a rather grim yet, I believe, accurate view of what is going on. Do you think that there is enough ... impetus coming out of the White House and that there is enough going that they can overcome these.

Dr. Norris:

From all that we have been able to determine at the moment, it seems as though the White House, the President himself, the National Security Council (NSC) and some advocates within there, have many other things on their plate here and this is not a very high priority issue—unfortunately. We think [and have written to that affect](#) that if the President really wants to change things, he is going to have to be involved and really set the tempo here for change. But of course there are so many other more pressing issues to him, I think, and maybe to the country than the future targeting strategy of the United States. That debt issue, jobs and all the rest of it, which take up his time, energy and resources and for him to be involved in a very focused way on this issue, is really asking quite a bit. But I think it is necessary if real changes come about. Otherwise it is really like a rubber ball: you squeeze it and it takes a new shape, but if you don't keep the pressure on it is going to return to its normal size. And this is what I think we have here. For many people that he has appointed, it is much easier to go with the status quo and live with the smaller arsenal which is all well and good and that has been done somewhat and more could be done in the future but it has to have committed people to do it. There is good will in some of these bureaucracies to try to advance some of the things in the Nuclear Posture Review but whether we come out on the other end with something that is dramatically new that can start us down a road towards elimination, I must say is probably not happening because of the language problem with the Pentagon. It does not know how to do these things. It can do some things very well what it has done during the last 50 years. And it will continue to do that, unless it is forced to do something else. At this point in time we are not quite sure, what is happening with this implementation process. But if I had to say anything I would say that it is probably not going to get the job done the way we have advocated and recommended in recent writings.¹³

Charles Blair:

What could listeners to the program today, people that are not directly involved in policy or the military, not working at the labs, what can they do to forward these ideas of minimal deterrence; of helping craft the guidance from the White House so that it actually becomes policy?

Dr. Norris:

That is a really tough [question], because we are dealing with something that ... there is probably nothing more secret in the whole U.S. government than the *real* information about the U.S. nuclear war plan. It has a special category of secrecy, over and beyond, top secret. So only a very very special few people even know its details. To ask the American people to be involved in this issue again is quite an effort considering they have other things on their mind about whether their job is intact and their pension and the next paycheck. This issue has sort of fallen off the table. With the End of the Cold War, people think that everything has been taken care of and this is a very low priority issue for most of the American public. There are a few groups in Washington and elsewhere that are concerned about it and [we] have to keep carrying the baton here to keep it at least in public view. Even journalists, which we try to look into these matters through their contacts, have told me that it is terribly difficult, that it is highly secret. There is a fence around it and they are not sure what is going on and to dig deeply is terribly difficult.

¹³ See, for example, Robert S. Norris and Hans M. Kristensen, "A Presidential Policy Directive for a New Nuclear Path," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, August 10, 2011. Available at: <http://thebulletin.org/web-edition/op-eds/presidential-policy-directive-new-nuclear-path> See also Kristensen, Norris, and Oelrich, From Counterforce to Minimal Deterrence: A New Nuclear Policy on the Path Toward Eliminating Nuclear Weapons, passim.

What can we tell the American people? We can tell them that we hope that the President's goals will be at least carried out somewhat—perhaps not in their totality. We just hope, that we have some implementation that can achieve a partial victory in what was outlined in Prague in a very dramatic speech that the president gave, and was partially incorporated in this Nuclear Posture Review and we will just keep our fingers crossed that at least a percentage of that can be accomplished.

Charles Blair:

We have really only scratched the surface here. I would encourage our listeners to go to the FAS.org [website](#) where there is an actual transcript of this interview and in the interview there are links to a [lengthy report](#) that Stan did with others, other experts here at FAS on the idea of minimal deterrence and also a link to [a report](#) that [Dr. Norris] and [Director of FAS' Nuclear Information Project] [Hans Kristensen](#) did for the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, reiterating this with a draft memo to the President. I really appreciate your time here with the second interview and we should be back in another month with a whole new topic.

About the Experts



Dr. Robert Standish Norris joined FAS in July 2011 as a senior fellow for nuclear policy. Dr. Norris was a senior research associate with the Natural Resources Defense Council in Washington, DC. His principal areas of expertise include writing and research on all aspects of the nuclear weapons programs of the United States, Soviet Union/Russia, Britain, France, and China, as well as India, Pakistan, and Israel.



Charles P. Blair is the director of the Terrorism Analysis Project. An expert in radiological and nuclear weapons and specializing in terrorism, Blair's work focuses on the nexus of violent non-state actors and weapons of mass destruction (WMD).

About FAS and the FAS Issue Briefs

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