



**FRUM IS "THE BALLS" OF THE  
REPUBLICAN PARTY.**

*~Stephen Colbert*

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## Handcuffing Our

## Nuke Arsenal

April 7th, 2010 at 8:40 am by [John Guardiano](#) | [19 Comments](#) |

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The Obama administration finally has unveiled its long anticipated but much delayed [Nuclear Posture Review](#). As expected, and as I reported [here](#) at [FrumForum](#) [last month](#), the Review helps to advance the administration's unilateral disarmament policies while further limiting and constraining the range of options available to U.S. policymakers.

For example, the United States is now mostly forfeiting its right to use nuclear weapons to deter chemical or biological attacks; it is renouncing the use of nuclear weapons against non-nuclear states; and it is abandoning

development of any new nuclear weapons.

But what is equally bothersome is the reaction — or non-reaction, I should say — of some conservatives.

Military analysts [Max Boot](#) and [Peter Feaver](#), for instance, aren't much bothered by President Obama's Nuclear Posture Review because, they say, the document gives the United States considerable wiggle room to backtrack from its self-imposed limits on the use of nuclear weapons.

This may be true, but Boot and Feaver miss the point. Deterrence is effective because of foreign perceptions backed up by the credible potential use of force. That is to say, nuclear deterrence works because America's enemies perceive us as willing to use nuclear weapons against them. If and when our enemies doubt that this is the case, they may well be tempted to test and provoke us.

Thus, it really doesn't matter much if, as Boot and Feaver suggest, the Obama administration can be expected to backtrack and get tough when it has to with our enemies. It won't matter much because at that point the administration will already have precipitated an international crisis or conflict by signaling to friend and foe alike that America's nuclear resolve is lacking.

In short, perceptions and will matter as much if not more so than military capabilities and armaments. The problem with the new Nuclear Posture Review is that it undermines foreign perceptions about American will and resolve while simultaneously undermining the capability of our nuclear deterrent.

In fact, the \$5 billion that the Obama administration pledges to help “rebuild America's aging nuclear infrastructure” is, according to [Sens. McCain and Kyl](#), “woefully inadequate to bring our Manhattan Project-era facilities up to date...”

Worse yet, the Obama administration isn't appropriating an additional \$5 billion to this initiative. Instead, it is taking this money away from the Department of Defense and reallocating it to the Department of Energy. This means that DoD will have to take the money away from existing modernization accounts, which now will be shortchanged — again!

Good for Senators McCain and Kyl for speaking out against Obama's unilateral nuclear disarmament. But where were they last year when the Obama administration was forcing through the Congress the most significant and ill-advised defense cuts in more than 30 years?

I'll tell you where. Sen. McCain was in bed with the Obama administration and thus fully supportive of the president's newly downsized austerity defense budget.

Unfortunately, Sen. McCain's reaction was not atypical; it was instead par for the course on the Right. And it underscores the Right's relative indifference to defense spending cuts aimed at our ground combat soldiers.

Indeed, the Right gets animated about big-ticket air and naval weapon systems like the F-22 and Intercontinental Ballistic Continental Missiles (IBCMs), but says nary a peep about ground combat systems designed for our frontline soldiers and Marines.

In fact, the same conservatives and Republicans who are now denouncing Obama's latest defense cuts were mostly silent and feckless last year when the administration was eliminating eight new Army combat vehicle types. Yet, the Army hasn't fielded a new combat vehicle type since the 1970s and '80s.

Then there's the libertarian Right as epitomized by the Cato Institute. Amazingly, but sadly, [Cato](#) laments that Obama didn't go further in

reining in the entire nuclear weapons enterprise — the warheads and delivery platforms, as well as the laboratories and bureaucracies that support them.

A more emphatic 'no first use' policy would have assisted in this endeavor. The Obama administration chose instead to split the difference between conservatives who favor an expanded role for nuclear weapons and liberals who anticipate their complete elimination.

Cato needn't worry. The Obama administration is pushing things along in a decidedly left-wing direction. But conservatives and Republicans bothered by the administration's nuclear cuts might want to revisit Obama's overall defense budget, and especially that minuscule portion of the defense budget devoted to ground-force modernization for our soldiers and Marines.

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## 19 Comments so far ↓

- **TerryF98** // [Apr 7, 2010 at 8:59 am](#)

It's only the Neocons who are concerned about this. Normal people accept that we have the ability to destroy the planet many times over.

- **ottovbvs** // [Apr 7, 2010 at 9:12 am](#)

.....Guardiano is a paranoid neocon

- **sinz54** // [Apr 7, 2010 at 9:53 am](#)

Paper policies, especially redacted ones in which all the juicy top-secret stuff is blacked out, don't impress me or any world leader.

Deterrence is a game of bluff, just like the game of poker.

And in this game, three things matter: The cards you hold, the cleverness to play them well, and the will to take calculated risks.

Transnationalist liberals like Obama don't have the will to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear

targets. They consider that icky. (Meaning that, unlike Truman, they would never have dropped the A-bomb on Hiroshima.)

They are also extremely unlikely to jump the enemy's military before we get jumped (this is known as counterforce credibility). I've read zillions of position papers from liberal think-tanks, and that is their attitude.

If anything hurts our credibility, that's it.

The paper policy is irrelevant. If Iran broke out and test-fired a nuke, the mushroom cloud and/or crater televised by CNN to the world would cause a rapid revision of Obama Administration policy.

Whether it would cause a rethinking of the liberal mindset, is a whole other matter.

Finally, I agree with Mr. Linnane that our forces need more rapid modernization.

What many liberals don't get, is that nuclear fuel degrades over periods of decades, and so do the mechanisms that arm and fuse the warheads. Eventually we'll have nothing left in our arsenal but duds. Right now, the national labs have done a tremendous job modeling the degradation and devising various upgrades. But eventually even that won't be enough. We need a new generation of nuclear weapons to replace the ones that are slowly becoming duds.

Our troops on the battlefield are using conventional weapons that were first designed over 30 years ago. We got blind-sided by the advent of Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs), which killed more of our troops than any other enemy weapon. We need a new generation of ultra-secure Mine Resistant Vehicles to replace the current generation.

As for the paper policy, remember this: No piece of paper has ever stopped a bullet.

- **balconesfault** // [Apr 7, 2010 at 9:55 am](#)

### **it is renouncing the use of nuclear weapons against non-nuclear states**

This is absolutely brilliant – because it immediately removes the argument that many tinpot dictators use when staking their claim to joining the nuke club ... “we won't be safe until we have one”.

Now, with a masterstroke, the reverse is true. At least with respect to dealings with the US, a nation now has a greater risk if they develop and deploy a nuclear arsenal.

No nuke – no US nukes pointed at them. Nuke – they're on our target list.

Given the chances of anyone ever having a shot at winning a nuclear exchange with the US, this suddenly gives anti-nuclear advocates within every foreign country a strong arguing point as to why the country should dedicate their resources elsewhere.

- **balconesfault** // [Apr 7, 2010 at 9:58 am](#)

**Eventually we'll have nothing left in our arsenal but duds.**

Yeah. That's it.

You don't want to go Clint Eastwood with some 3rd world despot "punk, you feel lucky today?"

Of course, this is Clint Eastwood with a fully loaded AK-47 strapped to his back just in case that last bullet in the handgun isn't there.

- **Jeffry1** // [Apr 7, 2010 at 10:03 am](#)

Another brilliant analysis by Otto I see. And Balcon, your naivete is absolutely astounding...almost as much as the child president's. (This will be good for commodities trading though. It makes for greater uncertainty and chaos. Which translates into opportunity. Too bad I'm out of that market now!)

- **Jeffry1** // [Apr 7, 2010 at 10:05 am](#)

You guys do realize that maintaining a nuclear arsenal is not like keeping your car lubed while it sits in a garage right? These weapons have finite lives and by non-modernization you are in essence allowing the nuclear arsenal of the one state that you want to be the strongest (unless you are on the far left of course where you instead see the USA as a threat and not a peacekeeper) to die by neglect.

- **balconesfault** // [Apr 7, 2010 at 10:24 am](#)

From the new strategy:

- **By maintaining a credible nuclear deterrent and reinforcing regional security architectures with missile defenses and other conventional military capabilities, we can reassure our non-nuclear allies and partners worldwide of our security commitments to them and confirm that they do not need nuclear weapons capabilities of their own.**
- **By pursuing a sound Stockpile Management Program for extending the life of U.S. nuclear weapons, we can ensure a safe, secure, and effective deterrent without the development of new nuclear warheads or further nuclear testing.**

Yep – total disarmament, here we come!

- **Jeffry1** // [Apr 7, 2010 at 10:29 am](#)

The fundamental flaw here Balcon is that this makes the assumption that the ONLY nuclear "threat" to the world is the USA. Are we the only nuclear power? Last time I checked we were not. If you were a world leader would this b.s. statement give you ANY comfort? You think the Russians would never use nukes against a non-nuke power? How about Iran? North Korea? India or Pakistan if attacked? Israel? (You think the Arab nations will suddenly halt desire for nukes because one of MANY nuclear powers has unilaterally hand-cuffed itself...the one least likely to use them regardless?).

There is a real world out there that, whether or not it fits to your view of how things ought to be, is what it is. It is a VERY VERY dangerous planet on which we live. Sorry to burst your bubble.

- **Jeffry1** // [Apr 7, 2010 at 10:31 am](#)

The only logic I can see for such a policy shift is that the underlying assumption is that the USA is a threat

to the world...the Left's mantra for decades now. And there is no doubt we have a leftist in the WH so there we are. Anyone who knows who Obama really is (not the media darling the OBama zombies portray) would see this as par for the course for this child president.

- **TerryF98** // [Apr 7, 2010 at 10:39 am](#)

Jeffry1 // Apr 7, 2010 at 10:31 am

Please grow up.

- **Jeffry1** // [Apr 7, 2010 at 10:41 am](#)

Well Jeffry...that was a well-elucidated argument. I AM grown up. That is why I am not a liberal. Yours is the party that thinks that adulthood now should be postponed to 26 years old!

Whatever. if you wish to refute my argument then that is fine. Otherwise, well, time wasted for me.

- **Jeffry1** // [Apr 7, 2010 at 10:43 am](#)

UGH...should read "well Terry" See how flustered you got me 😊

- **TerryF98** // [Apr 7, 2010 at 10:44 am](#)

You don't have an argument, you have a series of ideological rhetoric and insults.

- **S.L. Toddard** // [Apr 7, 2010 at 10:45 am](#)

Daniel Larison explains:

“For the first time, the United States is explicitly committing not to use nuclear weapons against nonnuclear states that are in compliance with the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty [bold mine-DL], even if they attacked the United States with biological or chemical weapons or launched a crippling cyberattack.’

In other words, Obama has committed to not escalate any future conflict to nuclear war in the improbable event that Brazil or South Africa or Japan decides to attack us with other unconventional weapons or cyber-warfare. Oh, the wretched appeaser! How will we ever survive the long night of Brazilian domination? Ahem.”

<http://www.amconmag.com/larison/2010/04/06/the-radical-status-quo-strikes-again/>

- **balconesfault** // [Apr 7, 2010 at 10:52 am](#)

**The only logic I can see for such a paolicy shift is that the underlying assumption is that the USA is a threat to the world...**

If you put yourself in the shoes of someone living in a 3rd world country – who watched the US invade Afghanistan because a small group of radicals living in the mountains of Afghanistan staged a successful terrorist strike on the US ... who watched the US invade Iraq because – well, just because ... who read about the US having a plan to extent their campaigns to Syria, and then to Iran ... and who constantly

hear people with considerable political clout in the US talking about bunker buster or even nuclear strikes on Iran – you might actually consider the USA to be a threat as well.

You don't hear the dialogue in potential rogue nuclear nations talking about needing a nuke because Russia has nukes, China has nukes, or even North Korea has nukes. India and Pakistan clearly have them because of one another, pure and simple. You do hear nations talking about needing nukes because Israel has them, yes – but then again Israel has certainly signaled that they're willing to make a first strike if need be.

You do hear leaders justifying to their people the enormous expense of developing and deploying nukes “because of the US”.

I personally do not see the loss of the US declaring that we will not conduct nuclear strikes on non-nuclear countries. Sinz example of Japan in WWII is specious in modern context – Japan was a superpower at the time, and any conventional warfare against them was going to be extremely costly to the US. Any nation with a conventional force powerful enough to pose a threat to the US today would also be a nuclear nation.

The game has changed, and unless you're willing to just blow up anyone who starts developing a nuke (granted, some people are) we need to think of ways to disincentivize developing nukes. I consider the new position to be a masterstroke on this count.

- **Jeffry1** // [Apr 7, 2010 at 11:00 am](#)

Balcon...sounds like you are in the “USA is a threat camp” then. Or sympathetic to the argument. At least you're honest about it. Your ignorance of the history of the 20th century is of course mind boggling. Close your eyes. Imagine a world WITHOUT the US. (If you need a hint start with the First Battle of the Marne and move all the way through the Battle for Berlin).

The world has ungratefully lived under a Pax Americana since 1945. How do you think Europe had the free time and loose change to atrpohy into entitlement quagnires? We footed the bill to prevent Europe and other parts of the world from being trapped in endless conflict that IS the natural state of the dynamic between nations.

The world will rue the day that US power is diminished to the point of impotency.

- **Jeffry1** // [Apr 7, 2010 at 11:04 am](#)

Toddard. Your straw man is cute. Wow, and I thought that Japan was all set to hit us with anthrax too. You guys are hopeless. You see the world through rose-tinted glasses despite the very historical record which belies your views. Naivete is an over-used word, but the one that seems to fit so well in this case.

It must be nice to live in a la la world where eberyone is reasonable if just talked to the right way and we are all crew members hurtling along as one big happy on spaceship earth. Unfortunatley, reality just doesn't work that way.

Gotta run. The REAL world awaits again. Have fun with your fantasy politics girls. Laytah.



- **balconesfault** // [Apr 7, 2010 at 11:09 am](#)

**Balcon...sounds like you are in the “USA is a threat camp” then. Or sympathetic to the argument.**

I understand why people would make the argument. And depending on who is in the Oval Office at the time, yes, we can be a threat.

If I close my eyes and imagine right wingers holding sway after WWII, instead of Harry Truman, I imagine the US consolidating our forces and taking a quick breather after Japan surrendered and moving straight to dealing with the “Soviet Menace” in a direct military confrontation while we still had atomic superiority. I see millions of people dead, a prolonged invasion of the USSR that would have cost the lives of many many American troops (very likely my dad, as well), and probably a few more cities hit by the atomic bombs once the US ran into the same problems with invading Russia that Napoleon and then Hitler eventually dealt with.

Pax Americana? Tell me the time period since WWII when there wasn't a war somewhere on the earth ... and even a war that the US wasn't involved in?

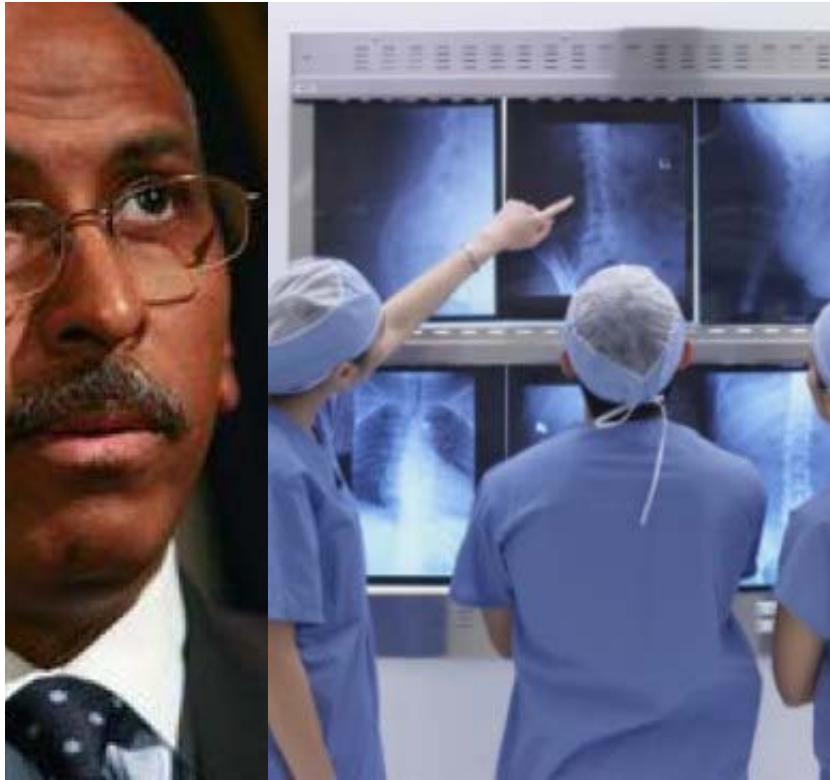
Overall, the US has been a stabilizing force in the world, and we were a necessary force to counteract Soviet attempts to export revolution throughout the world. But a major part of the reason we were a stabilizing force was because some of the most dangerous voices on the right wing, who throughout that time always wanted more conflict, more use of US force to “resolve” situations, were kept from being able to pull the trigger at will.

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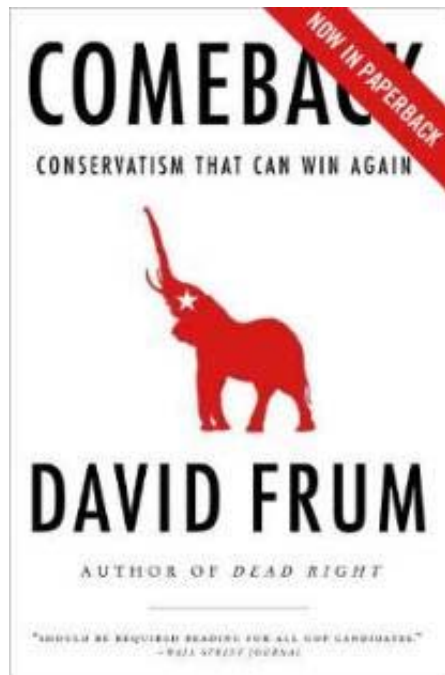


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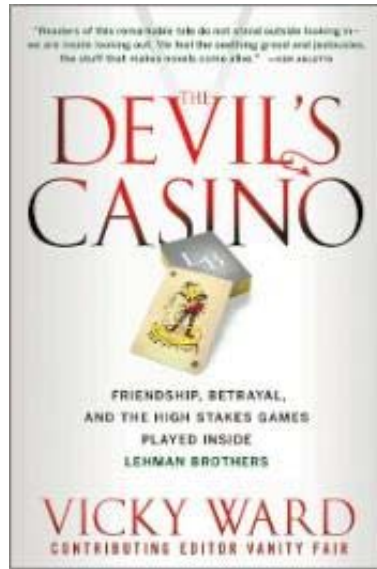


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