

## **Nuclear Warrior Replaces John Bolton as Arms Control Chief**

**By Tom Barry | June 9, 2005**

The top U.S. government official in charge of arms control advocates the offensive use of nuclear weapons and has deep roots in the neoconservative political camp. Moving into John Bolton's old job, Robert G. Joseph is the right-wing's advance man for counterproliferation as the conceptual core of a new U.S. military policy. Within the administration, he leads a band of counterproliferationists who—working closely with such militarist policy institutes as the National Institute for Public Policy and the Center for Security Policy—have placed preemptive attacks and weapons of mass destruction at the center of U.S. national security strategy.

Joseph replaced John Bolton at the State Department as the new undersecretary of state for arms control and international security affairs. Like the controversial Bolton, Joseph has established a reputation for breaking or undermining arms control treaties, rather than supporting or strengthening international arms control. Joseph, too, has long believed that U.S. military strategy should be more offensive than defensive.

Over his long career in government service starting soon after receiving his doctorate from Columbia, Joseph has advocated a military policy that extends beyond deterrence to preemptive first strikes. The Bush administration has given free rein to Robert Joseph's militarist and treaty-breaking convictions.

In his positions as special assistant to the president and director for Proliferation Strategy, Counterproliferation, and Homeland Defense, Joseph was a central figure in formulating the U.S. government's new counterproliferation strategy (including launching the Security Proliferation Initiative together with John Bolton). He led the effort to formulate and implement the U.S. National Strategy to Combat Weapons and the U.S. National Strategy for BioDefense.

According to the National Institute for Public Policy (NIPP), where he serves as director of studies, Joseph had the "principal staffing role in the U.S. withdrawal from the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty" in 2001. Joseph also was the lead administration figure in such "presidential initiatives" as the passage of the UN Security Council resolution (UNSCR 1540) criminalizing proliferation activities by countries not sanctioned by the United States and other great powers to possess WMD capabilities. Joseph has also led the administration's "development and deployment of counterproliferation capabilities, both biological defenses and ballistic missile defenses."

### **Missing the Terrorists While Hawking Missile Defense**

In arguing his case for the deployment of an ambitious national missile defense system, Joseph frequently cites the findings of the 1998 Donald Rumsfeld-chaired Commission to Assess the Ballistic Missile Threat to the United States, whose findings have been widely disputed.

"The unanimous findings of the bipartisan Rumsfeld Commission and the most recent assessments of the intelligence community leave little reasonable doubt about the growing challenges to the security of the American homeland from missile attack," said Joseph.

The House of Representatives established the Rumsfeld missile defense commission in response to congressional pressure from right-wing Republicans, orchestrated by such groups as the Center for Security Policy, the SAFE Foundation (Safeguarding America for Everyone), and American Conservative Union. At the urging of Frank Gaffney, founder and president of the Center for Security Policy, Newt Gingrich included a plank in the 1994 Contract with America that called for the rapid deployment of a missile defense system—the only plank in the Republican campaign platform that addressed foreign or military policy.

Strong advocates of missile defense dominated the commission. Among the named commission members associated with the Center for Security Policy were Donald Rumsfeld, William Graham, William Schneider, Jr., and James Woolsey. Stephen Cambone, who is DOD Secretary Rumsfeld's undersecretary for intelligence, served as Rumsfeld's staff director when he chaired the missile defense commission in the late 1990s.

Joseph, who is a member of the national advisory committee of the neocon-led Council for Security Policy echoes

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the alarmist arguments of CSP, NIPP, and other leading advocates of an extensive national missile defense system that includes theatre defense bases around the world. In their view, the missile threat to the U.S. homeland is greater now than it was during the Cold War. According to Joseph, “there is today substantial consensus” that the threat from long-range missiles is “both real and expanding.”

But Joseph’s alarmism and exaggerated threat assessments do not count on any consensus whether in the U.S. military or among foreign policy analysts, let alone among the U.S. public. Like John Bolton, Joseph disdains diplomacy and treaties as instruments of U.S. national security strategy. “There will always be those who deny the threat or who promote the vain hope for a quick and easy political ‘fix,’” wrote Joseph when representing the Bush administration at a SAFE Foundation forum for the immediate deployment of a national missile defense system, including “sea and space-based approaches.”

“We face a much more diverse and less predictable set of countries than we did in the Cold War. These states are governed by leaders who are much more prone to taking risks than were Soviet leaders. That doesn’t make them irrational—only gamblers, like Hitler and the Japanese militarists in the 1930s,” stated Joseph. “Long-range missiles become particularly valuable as instruments of coercion to hold American and allied cities hostage, and thereby deter us from intervention. The tremendous disparity in our favor in both conventional capabilities and nuclear weapon stockpiles simply doesn’t matter in this type of calculation. Our adversaries need only hold a handful of our cities at risk.”

Since the early 1990s Joseph has been arguing that the threats to U.S. national security are greater in the post-Cold War world. “The dynamics of deterrents are much different than in the Cold War,” explained Joseph in October 2002. “Remember that we wanted to keep the Soviet Union from expanding outwards. Our new adversaries want to keep us out of what they consider to be their regions, to deny us the ability to come to the assistance of our friends and allies in these vital regions if they are attacked.”

Joseph’s warnings, however, are reminiscent of the Cold War alarmism and paranoia of anticommunist militarists. “By their own calculations, these leaders [from China to Iran] believe that they can do this by holding a few of our cities hostage. This is not about a quest about a first strike capability against the United States as we knew it in the old days. Rather, our new adversaries seek only enough destructive power to blackmail us so that we will not come to the help of our friends who would then become the victims of aggression.”

Two decades ago, Joseph and other Bush administration officials formed part of the militarist faction in the Reagan administration that argued against détente and for an offensive or rollback strategy against the “evil empire” of the Soviet Union. Today, Joseph says that the Soviet Union

was a competitor we could reason and forge deals with, unlike the leaders of rogue states and China. Such countries as North Korea “are much more prone to risk-taking than was the Soviet leadership” and there is no possibility for establishing security relationships based on “mutual understandings, effective communications, and symmetrical interest and risks.”

U.S. security strategy, then, should “not include signing up for arms control for the sake of arms control. At best that would be a needless diversion of effort when the real threat requires all of our attention. At worst, as we discovered in the draft BWC Protocol that we inherited, an arms control approach would actually harm our ability to deal with the WMD threat.”

Before the 9/11 attacks, proponents of national missile defense and a more “flexible” nuclear defense strategy focused almost exclusively on the WMD threat from “competitor” states such as Russia and especially China, and from “rogue” states such as Iran, Iraq, Libya, Syria, and North Korea. Joseph and other hard-line strategists advocated large increases in military spending to counter these threats while paying little or no attention to the warnings that the most likely attack on the United States and its armed forces abroad would come from nonstate terrorist networks.

Instead of advocating improved intelligence on such terrorist networks like al-Qaida, which had an established record of attacking the United States, militarist policy institutes such as NIPP and CSP focused almost exclusively on proposals for high-tech, high-priced items such as space weapons, missile defense, and nuclear weapons development. After 9/11 Joseph and other administration militarists quickly placed the threat from terrorism at the center of their threat assessments without changing their recommendations for U.S. security strategy.

## **Moving in Neoconservative Circles Within and Outside Government**

Joseph points to Iran and North Korea, as well as China, as the leading post-Cold War missile threats to the U.S. homeland. Typical of strategists who identify with the neo-conservative political camp, Joseph continually raises the alarm about China, alleging that China is the “country that has been most prone to ballistic missile attacks on the United States.”

Although not self-identified as a neoconservative, Joseph moves in the same circles as other military strategists such as the CSP’s Frank Gaffney, Richard Perle, and Paul Wolfowitz. In a Washington Post article (May 2, 2002), “Who’s Pulling the Foreign Policy Strings,” Dana Milbank wrote: “The vice president sometimes stays neutral but his sympathies undoubtedly are with the Perle crowd. Cheney deputies Lewis “Scooter” Libby and Eric Edelman relay neoconservative views to Rice at the National Security

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Council. At the NSC, they have a sympathetic audience in Elliott Abrams, Robert Joseph, Wayne Downing, and Zalmay Khalilzad.”

Joseph participated as a team member in crafting the influential 2001 report by the National Institute for Public Policy titled Rationale and Requirements for U.S. Nuclear Forces and Arms Control. The report recommended that the U.S. government develop a new generation of “usable” lower-yield nuclear arms. At the same time, the NIPP study recommended that the government expand the nuclear “hit list” to include countries without nuclear capacity themselves as well as expanding the array of scenarios that would justify U.S. nuclear strikes. The NIPP study served as the blueprint for George W. Bush’s controversial Nuclear Posture Review.

In addition to Joseph, other NIPP study team participants entered the Bush administration as officials or advisers, including Stephen Hadley and Stephen Cambone, both of whom oversaw the administration’s Nuclear Review Process; and Kurt Guthe, Linton Brooks, James Woolsey, and Keith Payne who served on the Deterrence Concepts Advisory Panel during Bush’s first term.

Joseph was instrumental in inserting the concept of counterproliferation into the center of the Bush administration’s national security strategy. Counterproliferation is the first of the three pillars of the administration’s WMD defense strategy, as outlined in the National Strategy to Combat Weapons of Mass Destruction—a document that Joseph helped draft—and in the White House’s National Security Strategy.

## **Arms Controls as Counterproliferation**

Although Joseph has long worked on proliferation and arms control issues, he believes that the United States needs total freedom to develop, test, and use the weapons it sees fit—even nuclear warheads and other weapons of mass destruction.

In 1999 Joseph told the Senate Armed Services Committee that the country was unprepared to defend the homeland against new WMD threats. He recommended that the “United States acquire the capabilities to deny an enemy the benefits of these weapons. These capabilities—including passive and active defenses as well as improved counterforce means such as the ability to destroy mobile missiles—offer the best chance to strengthen deterrence, and provide the best hedge against deterrence failure.”

Joseph, the founder and director of the Counterproliferation Center at the National Defense University, told the senate committee: “We are making progress in improving our ability to strike deep underground targets, as well as in protecting the release of agents [meaning radioactive fallout]. We are revising joint

doctrine for the conduct of military operations in an NBC environment [meaning one in which nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons are the weapons of choice], based on the assumption that chemical and biological use will be a likely condition of future warfare.” According to Joseph, “The regional CINCs [the armed forces’ regional commands] are embedding counterproliferation in their planning and training.”

Joseph describes counterproliferation as a “counterforce” strategy to complement strategic deterrence. It means the commitment “to develop and deploy the capabilities to deter and defend against the full spectrum of WMD threats.” According to Joseph, “We must insure that key capabilities, detection, active and passive defenses, and counter-force capabilities are integrated into our defense and homeland security posture.”

In an October address at Fletcher University, Joseph said: “Counterproliferation must also be an integral part of the basic doctrine, training, and equipping of our forces as well as those of our allies to insure that we can operate and prevail in any conflict with WMD-armed adversaries. Counterproliferation can no longer be a specialty or an afterthought. The threat to the homeland, to our friends and allies, and to our military forces abroad, will not allow this luxury.”

For Joseph, diplomacy, deterrence, and international agreements are at best weak instruments of U.S. national security. He believes that the concept of defense has to be updated “in light of the new threats we face” from WMDs, particularly because “many of our adversaries will be targeting, not military forces alone, but also our civilian populations. ... We simply can’t wait until that occurs before we protect ourselves.”

“In the new world we have entered, the only path to peace and security is the path of action,” concludes Joseph—and that action includes the U.S. preemptive use of WMDs.

Writing in the New York Times Magazine, Bill Keller compared the skepticism of counterproliferationists like Joseph about nuclear disarmament and arms control to the convictions of the National Rifle Association, resembling “the tautology of an N.R.A. bumper sticker: If nukes are outlawed, only outlaws will have nukes. The Bush policy is to worry about the outlaws rather than the nukes.”

According to Keller, “The senior policy makers in the area of arms control—at the Pentagon, the State Department and the White House—are pretty uniformly of the diplomacy-has-failed school. The principal players, like Under Secretary John Bolton at State, Under Secretary Douglas Feith and Assistant Secretary J.D. Crouch at Defense, and Robert Joseph, who runs the nuclear franchise at the National Security Council, have voluminous records as fierce critics of the arms-control gospel from their days on the outside.”

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## Reaganesque “Peace Through Strength”

Not a high-profile hardliner like Bolton or Feith, Joseph successfully avoided the public limelight—that is until the scandal of the 16 words in Bush’s 2003 State of the Union Address about Iraq’s alleged nuclear weapons development program. According to president, “The British government has learned that Saddam Hussein recently sought significant quantities of uranium from Africa.”

The State of the Union Address, which laid out the administration’s case for a preemptive invasion of Iraq, used unconfirmed intelligence reports about Iraq’s WMD programs. Press reports and congressional testimony by CIA officials later revealed that the CIA had vigorously protested the inclusion of any assertion that Iraq was developing nuclear weapons since their intelligence would not support such a conclusion. Alan Foley, the CIA’s top expert on weapons of mass destruction, told Congress that Robert Joseph repeatedly pressed the CIA to back the inclusion in Bush’s speech of a statement about Iraq’s attempts to buy uranium from Niger. Following these revelations about the inclusion of erroneous and disputed intelligence estimates in this major speech that readied the U.S. public for war against Iraq, Joseph said he did not recall Foley’s raising concerns about the credibility of the information to be included in the speech.

In his 1999 testimony to the emerging threats subcommittee of the Senate Armed Services Committee, Joseph helped lay the groundwork for the 2003 counterproliferation action against Iraq by misrepresenting the extent and character of Iraq’s WMD programs. According to Joseph, “The alarming size and scope of the Iraqi NBC [nuclear, biological, and chemical] programs, revealed only after its defeat in war, reflect the value ascribed to these weapons by rogue states.” Furthermore, “we know that state programs, such as in Iraq, have overcome technical challenges. For this reason, access by terrorists to state programs—or to key individuals from such programs—should be of greatest concern.”

Frank Gaffney, head of the Center for Security Policy, defended Joseph’s role in the incident that went to the heart of the credibility of the administration’s alarmism about the threat from Iraq. In a National Review Online op-ed, Gaffney wrote: “It should come as no surprise that bureaucracies that are hostile to President Bush have taken a dim view of Joseph and others who have proven so effective in helping him to articulate and advance his Reaganesque philosophy of international peace through American strength. Neither should anyone be surprised that the NSC counterproliferation chief’s foes would try to take him out, or at least diminish his authority, by making him a scapegoat for the present controversy. ... The CIA’s efforts to make Joseph the fall guy for the present imbroglio should fail [and] Joseph’s name should be cleared and his considerable contribution to the national security should be able to continue undiminished for years to come.”

Joseph is likely to be a more effective arms control undersecretary than his predecessor. John Bolton’s blusters, blunders, and bluntness undermined his ability to implement the administration’s security agenda—one that is not about global arms control but ensuring uncontested U.S. global dominance. Contrary to Bolton’s claims during his confirmation hearings and elsewhere, it was Robert Joseph, not Bolton, who spearheaded the administration’s Proliferation Security Initiative. This is a U.S.-guided counterproliferation alliance that operates outside of the United Nations and sidelines international law, treaty, and norms by having a “coalition of the willing” assume authority to interdict suspected WMD shipments on the high seas.

Bolton also took credit for the administration’s drive to dismantle Libya’s WMD programs, even though he himself opposed the initiative because it involved engagement with Libya rather than just bullying. A former senior administration official credited Joseph with implementing the Libya strategy.

Joseph attempted to pick up the pieces of the U.S. strategy regarding the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) conference in May 2005. Over the years, Bolton has become so involved in pursuing his pet projects such as his personal albeit unsuccessful campaign to drive Mohamed ElBaradei from his position as chief of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Bolton was so fixated on denying the highly regarded ElBaradei a third term as IAEA director that, according to a source quoted by Newsweek, he “fumbled preparations for the NPT conference,” leading to another in a lengthening series of international embarrassments for the administration. Joseph vainly tried to salvage the U.S. agenda at the NPT conference, which included revamping the NPT to deny selected non-nuclear states like Iran the capacity to develop nuclear energy plants.

The new undersecretary of state for arms control has said that his “starting point and first conclusion” in formulating national security strategy is the fact that “nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons are a permanent feature of the international environment.” As his second conclusion, Joseph asserted that nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons “have substantial utility,” adding as a corollary that a versatile U.S. WMD capability is essential “to deny an enemy of these weapons” since “the threat of retaliation or punishment that formed the basis for our deterrent policy in the Cold War is not likely to be sufficient.”

Arms control chief Joseph is a new breed of militarist who believes that in a world where weapons of mass proliferation may be proliferating, it behooves the United States to bolster its own WMD arsenal and then use it against other proliferators.

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