

The ‘new’ U.S. doctrine of pre-emptive warfare and its implications for nuclear deterrence and disarmament by Erika Simpson, Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, University of Western Ontario, London, Canada. **Abstract:** The U.S. administration declared in 2002 that it could no longer rely on a reactive posture, given the goals of rogue states and terrorists, and that to forestall or prevent hostile acts, the U.S. would, if necessary, act preemptively. The new strategy was reasserted in 2006 and continues to be the foundation of emerging U.S. nuclear doctrine. Other Nuclear Weapon States, like Britain, France, and Russia also seem more willing to contemplate nuclear first-use. The U.S. doctrine of pre-emptive warfare—and its concomitant development of nuclear weapons for use in regional theatres—alarms members of the international arms control community because of its implications for deterrence and nuclear disarmament. This article asserts that the emerging U.S. doctrine of preemptive warfare is proving to be problematic, even amongst its chief proponents in Washington and NATO. There is agreement that it needs formal review by the U.S. and its NATO allies. The doctrine has implications for NATO’s traditional doctrine, referred to variously as ‘mutual assured destruction’, ‘NATO’s Strategic Concept’ and/or ‘traditional nuclear deterrence’. As NATO approaches its 60th anniversary in 2009, the potential problems between the emerging U.S. doctrine and long-held NATO nuclear policy are becoming more apparent, particularly among strong proponents and critics of nuclear deterrence. Both doctrines—the U.S. pre-emptive doctrine and NATO’s Strategic Concept—need review and reconsideration after the onset of a new U.S. administration and in time for the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty Review Conference in 2010. Despite widespread faith in nuclear deterrence, doctrines that rely upon nuclear threats lack long-term credibility. They should be questioned, reconsidered, and replaced with strategies that more effectively enhance international security.