

World News Roundup

Defense

'Low yield'

US adds nuclear weapon to its submarine arsenal

WASHINGTON, Feb 4, (AP): The US military has deployed a new addition to its nuclear arsenal – a long-range missile armed with a nuclear warhead of reduced destructive power. The so-called low-yield missile joins other, more powerful weapons aboard stealthy submarines prowling the oceans.

The debut deployment aboard long-range submarines, known as boomers, is a landmark in US nuclear weapons policy. It is the first major addition to the strategic nuclear arsenal in recent decades and is a departure from the Obama administration's policy of lessening dependence on nuclear weapons in pursuit of a nuclear-free world.

In confirming the missile deployment to The Associated Press, the Pentagon's top policy official asserted that the weapon makes Americans safer by making nuclear war less likely. Critics, including some Democrats in Congress, call it a dangerous excess that increases the risk of war.

John Rood, the undersecretary of defense for policy, said in an AP interview Monday that adding the "low-yield" warhead, known as the W76-2, to submarines which tote Trident II ballistic missiles lowers the risk of nuclear war. He said the United States will continue its stated policy of using nuclear weapons only in "extraordinary circumstances." He also said the warhead will help the United States dissuade Russia from risk-launching a limited nuclear conflict.

"This supplemental capability strengthens deterrence and provides the United States a prompt, more survivable low-yield strategic weapon," Rood said, adding that it supports the US commitment to deter attacks against allies, and "demonstrates to potential adversaries that there is no advantage to limited nuclear employment because the United States can credibly and decisively respond to any threat scenario."

Deployment

Rood declined to provide details about the deployment, including when or where the deployment began; all details, he said, are classified secret. The deployment was reported last week by the Federation of American Scientists, citing anonymous sources and reporting that it was believed to have begun in the final weeks of 2019 with an Atlantic deployment of the USS Tennessee.

Adding the W76-2 fits President Donald Trump's stated interest in beefing up the nuclear arsenal, although he has not commented on this specific weapon. His administration is committed to a broader, costly modernization of the nuclear force.

The essence of critics' argument against the low-yield weapon is that it makes the world less safe because it offers decision-makers another option for using a nuclear weapon in a conflict that could then escalate to a full-blown nuclear war. They also contend that lower-yield air-launched nuclear weapons already in the US arsenal make the W76-2 redundant.

Rood, however, said the submarine-launched low-yield missile is important because it can more reliably penetrate air defenses than could an airplane armed with nuclear weapons.

The W76-2 is the Trump administration's answer to what it calls a Russian misconception of an exploitable "gap" in US nuclear capabilities. By deploying missiles at sea with a lower nuclear yield, or destructive power, the administration aims to dissuade Moscow from thinking it could "win" a war in Europe, for example, by firing its own low-yield nuclear weapon first, forcing Washington and its NATO allies to either commit to full-scale nuclear war or capitulate.

The yield, or destructive power, of the W76-2 is classified. Experts say it may be about 5 kilotons, or roughly one-third the destructive power of the "Little Boy" nuclear bomb the United States dropped on Hiroshima, Japan, in the final days of World War II, killing tens of thousands of people. By comparison, the missile that has been deployed aboard strategic submarines for decades has carried the 90-kiloton W76 warhead and the 475-kiloton W88 warhead.

The newly deployed warhead was produced by modifying the W76. Last February the administration said it expected to have the new version ready for use by late 2019.

Split

The W76-2 has been fitted atop an undisclosed number of Trident ballistic missiles carried aboard the Navy's Ohio-class submarines. This submarine fleet, split between bases at Bangor, Washington, and King's Bay, Georgia, represents one leg of the US nuclear "triad," along with the Air Force's long-range B-2 and B-52 bombers and land-based Minuteman 3 missiles.

The newest addition to the arsenal comes amid important shifts in the US-Russia strategic relationship. Doubts are growing that the Trump administration will accept Moscow's offer to extend the New START arms control treaty before it expires next February. It is the only remaining treaty limiting the number of US and Russian strategic nuclear weapons.

Rood noted that deploying the new lower-yield missiles has not increased the total number of American weapons under the New START limits because each of the warheads replaces one of the more powerful versions that had been exclusively deployed aboard the subs.

Bruce Blair, a former Air Force nuclear weapons officer and co-founder of Global Zero, an international group that advocates the elimination of nuclear arms, said he sees merit in reducing the destructive power of nuclear arsenals.

"But we must not delude ourselves into thinking lower-yield nukes are more usable in a conflict," he said. "Any use of this sea-based weapon – either first or second – will risk stoking the flames of conflict and escalating to all-out nuclear war. A wiser response to an enemy's use of one or two low-yield nukes would be to refrain from nuclear escalation while unleashing America's ferocious and decisive conventional juggernaut."

Blair, who testified to Congress last year in opposition to the new weapon, also argues that the rationale has been overtaken by events. The Russians, in his view, have shifted their focus to non-nuclear means, including with cyberweapons, of striking primarily Western civilian infrastructure.

"Instead of using small numbers of tactical nukes to frighten the US and NATO into suing for peace, the Russians today plan to paralyze civilian financial, energy, communications and transportation grids to incite NATO populations to demand an end to hostilities," he said.



Trump



Sarah Kohles (right), helps Dorothy Schwedinger during the Democratic caucus at the UAW Hall in Dubuque, Iowa on Feb 3. (AP)



Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer of NY, arrives on Capitol Hill on Feb 3, in Washington. (AP)



Klobuchar



Burrell

America

Klobuchar's claims challenged: Civil rights activists and legal experts challenged Sen. Amy Klobuchar's claims that she was unaware of questionable evidence and police tactics used to send a young black teen to prison for life when she was a top Minneapolis prosecutor.

In an interview with "Fox News Sunday," Klobuchar denied that she had knowledge of any evidence that would call the conviction into question. But much of what The Associated Press found while investigating the case of Myon Burrell, now 33, would have been available to her office at the time.

Burrell was accused of firing the gun that killed 11-year-old Tysha Edwards in 2002 while she was doing homework at her dining room table in south Minneapolis.

Klobuchar, who was Hennepin County attorney at the time, has raised the case throughout her political career as an example of how she helped find justice for victims of violence.

"I didn't know about this new evidence until I saw the report," Klobuchar told Fox host Chris Wallace when asked about allegations the teen may have been wrongfully convicted. "I couldn't have. I haven't been in the office for 12 years."

As she and other hopefuls entered the Iowa Democratic caucuses, Klobuchar said any new evidence should be brought forward and considered immediately by the courts.

Klobuchar has trailed the top tier of candidates in Iowa, but she is hoping to exceed expectations by touting her moderate record and ability to win in Republican-heavy areas.

The AP offered repeatedly to meet with Klobuchar to discuss the Burrell case, but she declined.

What her office would have known at the time of Burrell's first trial in 2003:

- The case hinged on a single eyewitness – a teen rival of Burrell's who gave conflicting accounts of what he saw.

- No gun, fingerprints or hard evidence linked Burrell to the crime.

- Police video showed the lead homicide detective offering informants cash for information – even if it was hearsay.

- Burrell's co-defendants said he was not even at the scene.

- The getaway driver gave a physical description and the first name of a suspect, but police did not follow up.

- Alibis mentioned by Burrell in his interrogation were not questioned by police.

- Officers did not pull a convenience store surveillance tape that Burrell said would have cleared him. (AP)

Border apprehensions drop: The number of border apprehensions has dropped for the eighth straight month, following

Politics

Tech troubles, reporting 'inconsistencies' behind delay

Democrats have no Iowa caucus results

DES MOINES, Iowa, Feb 4, (AP): Democratic party officials in Iowa worked furiously Tuesday to deliver the delayed results of their first-in-the-nation caucus, as frustrated presidential candidates claimed momentum and plowed ahead in their quest for the White House.

Technology problems and reporting "inconsistencies" kept Iowa Democratic Party officials from releasing results from Monday's caucus, the much-hyped kickoff to the 2020 primary. It was an embarrassing twist after months of promoting the contest as a chance for Democrats to find some clarity in a jumbled field with no clear front-runner.

Instead, caucus day ended with no winner, no official results and many fresh questions about whether Iowa can retain its coveted "first" status.

State party officials said final results would be released later Tuesday and offered assurances that the problem was not a result of "a hack or an intrusion." Officials were conducting quality checks and verifying results, prioritizing the integrity of the results, the party said in a statement.

The statement came after tens of thousands of voters spent hours Monday night sorting through a field of nearly a dozen candidates who had spent much of the previous year fighting to win the opening contest of the 2020 campaign and, ultimately, the opportunity to take on President Donald Trump this fall.

The candidates didn't wait for the party to resolve its issues before claiming, if not victory, progress and moving on to next-up New Hampshire.

"It looks like it's going to be a long night, but we're feeling good," former vice-president Joe Biden said, suggesting the final results would "be close."

Vermont Sen Bernie Sanders said he had "a good feeling we're going to be doing very, very well here in Iowa" once results were posted. "Today marks the beginning of the end for Donald Trump," he predicted.

"Listen, it's too close to call," Massachusetts Sen Elizabeth Warren said. "The road won't be easy. But we are built for the long haul."

And Pete Buttigieg, the former mayor of South Bend, Indiana, was most certain.

"So we don't know all the results,

but we know by the time it's all said and done, Iowa, you have shocked the nation," he said. "By all indications, we are going on to New Hampshire victorious."

Democrats faced the possibility that whatever numbers they ultimately released would be questioned. And beyond 2020, critics began wondering aloud whether the Iowa caucuses, a complicated set of political meetings staged in a state that is whiter and older than the Democratic Party, are a tradition whose time had passed.

The party has tried to accommodate critics, this year by promising to report three different data points about voters' preferences, presumably improving transparency. But the new system created new headaches.

State party spokeswoman Mandy McClure said it had "found inconsistencies in the reporting of three sets of results," forcing officials to try to verify results with "underlying data" and the paper trail.

Problems

Some of the trouble stemmed from issues with a new mobile app developed to report results to the party. Caucus organizers reported problems downloading the app and other glitches.

Des Moines County Democrat Chair Tom Courtney said the new app created "a mess." As a result, Courtney said precinct leaders were phoning in results to the state party headquarters, which was too busy to answer their calls in some cases.

Organizers were still looking for missing results several hours after voting concluded.

Shortly before 2 a.m., the state party was making plans to dispatch people to the homes of precinct captains who hadn't reported their numbers. That's according to a state party official in the room who was not authorized to share internal discussions publicly.

Earlier in the night, Iowa Democrats across the state cast their votes, balancing a strong preference for fundamental change with an overwhelming desire to defeat Trump. At least four high-profile candidates vied for the lead in a contest that offered the opening test of who and what the party stands for in the turbulent age of Trump.

It's just the first in a primary season that will span all 50 states and several US territories, ending at the party's national convention in mid-July.

For Democrats, the moment was thick with promise for a party that has seized major gains in states since Trump won the White House in 2016. But instead of clear optimism, a growing cloud of uncertainty and intraparty resentment hung over the election as the prospect of an unclear result raised fears of a long and divisive primary fight in the months ahead.

One unsurprising development: Trump won the Republican caucus, a largely symbolic victory given that he faced no significant opposition.

The president eagerly seized on the Democrats' problems.

"The Democrat Caucus is an unmitigated disaster," Trump tweeted early Tuesday. "Nothing works, just like they ran the Country." He added: "The only person that can claim a very big victory in Iowa last night is 'Trump.'"

Pre-caucus polls suggested Sanders entered the night with a narrow lead, but any of the top four candidates – Sanders, Biden, Warren and Buttigieg – was positioned to score a victory. Sen. Amy Klobuchar, who represents neighboring Minnesota, was also claiming momentum, while outsider candidates including entrepreneur Andrew Yang, billionaire activist Tom Steyer and Hawaii Rep Tulsi Gabbard could be factors.

"We know one thing: We are punching above our weight," Klobuchar said late Monday, promising to keep fighting in New Hampshire.

New voters played a significant role in shaping Iowa's election.

About one-quarter of all voters reported that they were caucusing for the first time, according to AP VoteCast, a survey of voters who said they planned to take part in Monday's Democratic caucuses. The first-timers were slightly more likely to support Sanders, Warren or Buttigieg, compared with other candidates.

At the same time, VoteCast found that roughly two-thirds of caucusgoers said supporting a candidate who would fundamentally change how the system in Washington works was important to their vote.

crackdowns by the Trump administration that include forcing asylum seekers back over the US-Mexico border to wait out their claims, a Homeland Security official

said Monday.

The official said the number of encounters with border officials over the past four months was 165,000. A year earlier during

the same time it was about 242,000. The official spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because the official results have not been released.

The tally for the month of January was about 36,000, including apprehensions of people crossing illegally and migrants who were declared inadmissible by border officers at a port of entry. It was a 10 percent decline from December.

The steep decline will almost certainly figure heavily into President Donald Trump's State of the Union address Tuesday. Trump has made cracking down on immigration – legal and illegal – a signature issue. He has railed against asylum seekers and other border crossers as con artists who "scam" the system, and derided immigrants from Mexico as "bad hombres."

Trump uses the monthly border tallies as a benchmark to determine how his policies are working, railing against Homeland Security officials when the numbers are up. The number of people crossing the border traditionally declines when it's hot outside – but the winter months often see creeping increases.

The monthly tally is down almost 75 percent from the peak last May, when there were more than 144,000 encounters with migrants, the large majority families from Central America who are not easily returned over the border. The immigration system was vastly strained last spring, with migrants crammed for weeks into small border stations not meant to hold people beyond a few days. (AP)



In this Jan 9, 2008 photo released by the US Navy, the Ohio-class ballistic-missile submarine USS Wyoming approaches Naval Submarine Base Kings Bay, Ga. The Pentagon's top policy official tells The Associated Press that the United States for the first time has deployed the newest addition to its nuclear arsenal – a submarine-launched weapon that the Trump administration says will make nuclear war less likely. (AP)