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Where lawmakers come to blog

The Big Question: Did Obama make the right move on nuclear arms?

By Sydelle Moore - 04/06/10 12:52 PM ET

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Some of the nation's top political commentators, legislators and intellectuals offer insight into the biggest question burning up the blogosphere today.

Today's question:

Is President Barack Obama's new nuclear strategy good policy for the U.S.?

Christopher Preble, director of foreign policy studies at the Cato Institute and author of *The Power Problem: How American Military Dominance Makes Us Less Safe, Less Prosperous, and Less Free*, said:

On balance, the Obama administration's Nuclear Posture Review signals more continuity than change. The review wisely clarifies the limited but essential role that nuclear weapons play in safeguarding U.S. national security through deterrence. Unfortunately, it fails to set the stage for dramatic and necessary changes to a bloated and outdated force structure because it reaffirms the U.S. commitment to other countries that imposes a huge burden on our military and on U.S. taxpayers.

The NPR's middle ground stance on first use has elicited most of the media's attention, but the role that the U.S. military plays around the world -- a role highlighted by the NPR's repeated reassurances that our allies and partners will be covered by the U.S. security umbrella -- deserves even greater scrutiny. Two decades after the fall of the Soviet Union, the United States continues to carry the burden for security in Europe and East Asia. The costs of this burden are growing, but the NPR merely sets the stage for the continuation of this worrisome trend.

Justin Raimondo, editorial director of *Antiwar.com*, said:

It seems somehow worse than naïve to expect the only nation that has actually used nuclear weapons in war to forswear the "first strike" option, and yet that is what many were hoping would be the outcome of President

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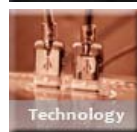
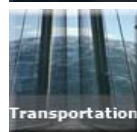
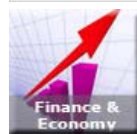
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Obama's new nuclear posture review. However, our sense of disappointment is all the keener because he used what could have been an historic opportunity to make a grotesque mockery of our hope, by singling out Iran and North Korea as the two notable exceptions to the "no first strike" pledge.

As the Washington Post put it, the new policy comes with a "major caveat: The countries must be in compliance with their nonproliferation obligations under international treaties. That loophole would mean Iran would remain on the potential target list." Of course, Iran maintains that it is in compliance, and since International Atomic Energy Agency agreements with member states are not public, we don't know what the terms are, and therefore it is not clear if they are in compliance or not: we would just have to take the President's word, given a US attack on Iran, that they are not. However, with Iran a smoldering nuked ruin, the point would be quite moot....

In any case, it seems odd that the President would take such a stance in the context of a general policy review designed to reduce the possibility of nuclear war, and on the eve of a major disarmament agreement with the Russians. Odd, that is, unless we're on the road to war with Iran ...

Hal Lewis, professor of Physics at UC Santa Barbara, said:

I would feel a lot more comfortable if I knew that at least a few nuclear experts (a dying breed of which the country is still well stocked) had been involved in balancing the complex and conflicting values associated with a nuclear arsenal. Nothing in the history of this administration gives me confidence that this has been the case.

Peter Navarro, professor of economics and public policy at U.C. Irvine, said:

"The US government will pledge to refrain from using nuclear weapons to attack any country in compliance with the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) -- even if that country has attacked the US with chemical or biological weapons." [ABC News]

Well, that's pretty dumb. It just encourages our enemies to increase their development of biological weapons, which are just as deadly as nukes. Or better hide their nukes.

Frank Askin, professor of law at Rutgers University, said:

Every step toward nuclear disarmament is good policy, even when the ultimate goal seems almost hopeless. As the world's major nuclear power, it is up to the U.S. to provide leadership in the quest to halt nuclear proliferation. Announcing a "no first strike" policy is one small step in the right direction.

Paul Kawika Martin, policy director for Peace Action, said:

President Obama is the most engaged U.S. president ever on nuclear disarmament issues, and Peace Action, like millions around the world, applauded his Prague speech one year ago calling for a nuclear weapons-free world. We are also encouraged by the New START agreement, to be signed in Prague this Thursday, as a modest but necessary step toward further nuclear arms cuts with Russia.

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However, the president's Nuclear Posture Review (NPR), released today, appears to be too beholden to outdated Cold War thinking, and it doesn't measure up to his vision of a nuclear-free world. It's certainly better than the one released by the Bush administration which called for the possibility of using nuclear weapons on nonnuclear states. The Obama administration reversed that. President Obama also stated the U.S. would not build new nuclear weapons like those the previous administration wanted but Congress thankfully blocked. Nonetheless, the document leaves room for the possibilities of new warheads in the future.

Besides this disappointing NPR, the Administration has proposed a big increase in funding for the U.S. nuclear weapons complex, and is considering a very bad nuclear technology deal with Pakistan, thus rewarding one of the worst nuclear weapons proliferators. This is in addition to a similarly bad deal with India under the Bush administration.

Luckily, the NPR is not the last word on these or other nuclear weapons subjects. Congress, the American people, and the international community all have a role to play in advocating faster progress toward the global elimination of the scourge of nuclear weapons. The upcoming Non Proliferation Treaty Review conference in May will attract tens of thousands of people from around the world to New York City demanding a safer world with no nuclear weapons.

John F. McManus, president of The John Birch Society, said:

When discussing "nuclear strategy" or anything related to our nation's military, the very purpose of maintaining a military force has to be considered. It usually isn't even mentioned.

Our nation (any nation?) has a right to defend itself. Maintaining a military force should only be for this purpose. But we live in an era of preemptive war against another nation that did not attack us and, indeed, did not even threaten us. We have invited retaliation for our gross misdeeds.

Regarding President Obama's decision to scale back our nation's nuclear strategy, it should be assessed only in light of our nation's needs, not in order to comply with some international treaty. History is very clear about the best way to avoid war as being so well prepared for it that no other nation would consider attacking. If his new strategy weakens our nation and makes us vulnerable to attack, it is a serious mistake.

The nuclear genie is out of the bottle. A policy of preventing other nations from building their own nuclear weapons capability seems to be inviting trouble for our nation.

Comments (18)

PAGE | 1 | 2 | >

So far Obama has shown he can be a toughguy militarily. all it takes is a couple of bombs to doom humanity? All this is basically perception.

BY **DOUG MCMANUS** on 04/06/2010 at 13:49

President Obama has made several very positive moves in the NPR that will help to reduce the nuclear threat. However, he has also supported a huge financial investment to expand nuclear weapons production capacity. In classic DC-doublespeak, the NPR claims that by building new production plants the US will be able to go to lower numbers of deployed and reserve warheads. The US stockpile is

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safe, secure and reliable and the Stockpile Stewardship Program is working. We could save billions of taxpayer dollars by refurbishing the existing facilities that currently maintain the warheads as we go to lower numbers. The only reason for new facilities is to have the capability to increase production of new nuclear warheads. US integrity on nonproliferation remains in question with the NPR. You can't have your expanded nuclear warhead production capacity cake and expect other countries to not want a bite too.

BY **SUSAN GORDON** on 04/06/2010 at 14:52

It seems to me that the United States is heading in the right direction with its nuclear posture, but does the NPR commit the US to doing enough quickly enough? I'm not so sure. I think that the global threat posed by nuclear weapons justifies swift and bold action for their elimination, not incremental steps toward their possible ultimate elimination by future generations.

BY **RICK WAYMAN** on 04/06/2010 at 15:05

i dont see any reason that can make obama allow america to expand his nuclear weapon once is not good, or obama just want to use it to destroy muslim nations as former president did to iraq

BY **KAMAL** on 04/06/2010 at 15:38

Jim Hightower says the middle of the road is for yellow lines and dead armadillos. Voters and world citizens who saw hope in Obama's election with regard to nuclear abolition are deflated by his attempt to stay in the middle. Those whose jobs are dependent upon maintaining the nuclear terror have been appeased, the labs will continue to consume the national treasure developing new nuclear weapons technology instead of cleaning up their mess, and the underlying myths that somehow these monsters make us safe — better to have them around until utopia is achieved — is given yet another telling. But we would be safer confessing our past insanity as General Lee Butler did during the "90's" and moving quickly away from a military model for the national defense. We may be mite safer with Obama in the "decider" seat with the "football" than with a man whose chief adviser read Machiavelli once a year for guidance, but so long as our system is vested in Space Warfare Domination of nations who threatened to "proliferate," the tools will remain to be placed again in the hands of chicken hawks who will use the nuclear terror to commit our troops whenever and wherever they please to destroy "the enemies" WMD's. The middle of the road is a tar baby for those old enough to remember the reference.

BY **BOB KINSEY** on 04/06/2010 at 15:39

Obama's ruling on arms control is another "feel good" gesture with deadly real world consequences. We don't owe it to any nation to tell when we will use our bombs or military. All it does is tell our enemies that we are getting soft on security and that our President wants to win another Peace Prize.

BY **ELWOOD BAAS** on 04/06/2010 at 15:57

The NPR tries to justify additional funding and

BY **SCOTT YUNDT** on 04/06/2010 at 16:01

The NPR tries to justify additional funding and

BY **SCOTT YUNDT** on 04/06/2010 at 16:12

There is no rational reason for Obama to provide any strategic information on what we will or won't do with our nuclear weapons. The president's ego and pure stupidity is beyond comprehension.

BY **BJCASS** on 04/06/2010 at 17:05

Walk softly and carry a big stick, evolved into, bully everybody and hope they don't get a stick of their own, is evolving into bully with no stick. If we are going to continue to resolve disputes through acts of war we need all the sticks we can get, and we need to make sure none of the opposition get there hands on a bigger stick. There are 2 choices, tax more to finance the military, or make peace. Please consider the tax more aspect this November!

BY **MARK** on 04/06/2010 at 17:48

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