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MONDAY, APRIL 12, 2010

Is An Obama 'No Nukes' World Likely To Be A Safer One?

By Paul Starobin
NationalJournal.com

Is President Obama on the right track with his new commitment to unilaterally scale back America's threat to use nuclear weapons to deter attacks on the U.S. and its allies? And as world leaders assemble in Washington on April 12 to discuss matters of global nuclear security, is Obama's cherished goal of ridding the world of nukes ever likely to be a reality? Would a nukes-free world in fact be a safer, more peaceful one? Even if Obama is right that he is not likely to see a nuclear-free world in his lifetime, will a trend toward declining global nuclear arsenals make America more or less safe? Is Obama right that the chief threat to the United States is no longer a massive nuclear attack by another nation-state, but rather nuclear proliferation that leads to terrorists acquiring a nuclear weapon?

These questions are prompted by the administration's newly released "Nuclear Posture Review." The most hotly debated item is this bald pledge: "The United States will not use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapons states that are party to the NPT" -- the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty -- "and in compliance with their nuclear nonproliferation obligations." In practical terms, this means America is now forswearing the use of nukes against a nonnuclear state that attacks the U.S. or its allies with chemical or biological weapons -- and is instead vowing, as the review states, "the prospect of a devastating conventional military response." Perhaps the future will belong to the Pentagon's Prompt Global Strike program, with intercontinental ballistic missiles, armed with conventional warheads, able to hit a target anywhere on the planet under an hour from launch.

As worded, Iran and North Korea are not covered by this pledge. Still, "realist" critics are attacking the Obama administration for buying into the "bad-nukes myth" -- into the idea that nuclear weapons and the threat to use them make for an unstable world. After all, during the Cold War, the Soviet Union never invaded a Europe covered by the U.S. nuclear umbrella -- even though the U.S.S.R. possessed a massive advantage in conventional arms.

"The Obama Administration must clarify that we will take no option off the table to deter attacks against the American people and our allies," Arizona Republican Sens. John McCain and Jon Kyl said in a statement objecting to the new Obama policy. Who is on the right side of this issue -- the Obama "no nukes" camp, or critics like McCain and Kyl? Is this likely to become a political issue in the 2012 presidential campaign, with Obama getting attacked from the right as soft on national security?



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CHAFF & WHEAT

By **Michael Brenner**

Professor of International Affairs, University of Pittsburgh

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The nuclear issues that are the subject of this week's conclave are numerous and complex. Assessing each is complicated since the gathering is more of a photo-op cum political happening than it is a serious diplomatic conference. Such is the now recognizable style of Mr. Obama on all matters. The questions in play are nonetheless consequential so let's temporarily set aside the implications of style to examine substance.

A. Nuclear Disarmament & The Zero Option

This is the easiest question to handle. We never will achieve a nuclear free world. Getting very close to zero is highly dangerous for obvious reasons; and modest reductions in the arsenals of the United States and Russia are strategically meaningless. Yes, it is a talking point in the proliferation context since with have a legal obligation under the NPT to lower the number of warheads in the arsenals of n-weapons states. No would-be weapons state, though, cares a fig about those numbers in making the momentous decision whether or not to go nuclear.

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Modest Cuts Make Sense; Deeper Ones, Too

By **Christopher Preble**

Director of Foreign Policy Studies, Cato Institute

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It was inevitable that Republicans would knock President Obama for being soft on national security, and it is likely to be an issue in this year's mid-term elections, and in the 2012 campaign. This has been the standard mantra from the GOP playbook for over a generation, and the party's leaders show no sign of backing away from it. But the Democrats shouldn't be too worried. They easily turned aside such criticisms in 2006 and 2008 by pointing out that policies promoted by a Republican president, and supported by a Republican Congress -- especially the ruinous Iraq war -- had significantly undermined U.S. security.

With respect to nuclear weapons, the president and his allies have more than enough ammunition to refute the charges that reductions in the size of the U.S. arsenal make the U.S. more vulnerable to attack. Leaders in Washington and Moscow figured out long ago that a stable, secure and credible deterrent need not include many thousands of nuclear warheads. A Republican president, Richard Nixon, initiated the very first round of reductions in the early 1970s, and another Republican, George H.W. Bush, made even deeper cuts at the end of the Cold War. George W. Bush tacked on additional reductions under the Moscow Treaty signed with Vladimir Putin. The modest cuts envisioned by New START and implied in the Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) are consistent with this bipartisan trend.

But what of President Obama's goal of a world free of nuclear weapons? He concedes that this is unlikely to occur in his lifetime, and that is almost surely the case. He is not the first U.S. leader to pledge to reduce the importance of nuclear weapons in U.S. security policy; this is a commitment the United States made under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. What will take the place of nuclear weapons if they were to be abolished? We can glean the answer from the NPR. The United States first shifted to nuclear weapons in the 1950s because they presented a far more cost effective deterrent than conventional military assets. Not surprisingly, the NPR envisions that conventional weapons -- namely a forward U.S. troop presence and ballistic missile defenses -- will take on greater importance as nuclear weapons recede.

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This is a costly proposition at a time when U.S. military spending is already at a post-World War II high. The Obama administration does not dwell on the costs, I suspect, because many Americans are not enamored with extending an indefinite and costly security umbrella over other countries who can -- and should be encouraged to -- defend themselves. In short, President Obama's determination to reduce and eventually eliminate nuclear weapons will accelerate this costly trend unless he is also willing to revisit the purpose of U.S. military power and our global posture.

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President Obama Is On The Right Track

By [David Krieger](#)

President, Nuclear Age Peace Foundation

President Obama is on the right track with his multiple efforts to reduce nuclear dangers. I only wish that it were a faster track and reflected a greater sense of urgency. His policies take account of some important current realities: The Cold War has ended (20 years ago); the greatest threat confronting the US and the world is no longer all-out nuclear war, but nuclear proliferation and nuclear-armed terrorists; and the United States has obligations under the Non-Proliferation Treaty to engage in "good faith" negotiations to achieve total nuclear disarmament.

The Obama administration made a smart move by ruling out using nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapon states that are in compliance with the Non-Proliferation Treaty. It could have gone further, though. While the administration surely sees its posture as a useful threat for states not in compliance, this is a two-edged sword. Such threats also send a message to the rest of the world that the US still finds nuclear weapons useful and is willing to threaten their use. This continued reliance on n...

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And The Beat Goes On

By [Ron Marks](#)

Senior Vice President for Government Relations, Oxford-Analytica

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As a thirty-year veteran of Washington politics, I have become a jaded sort. My wife thinks of me as a balding version of Oscar the Grouch; though my McLean "garbage can" is on substantially higher taxed land than Sesame Street.

So when I think of the upcoming Nuclear Conference/Summit this week, my mind turned in several grouchy personal directions. First, how in the world am I going to get to my appointments downtown? Second, how busy are all the good restaurants going to be? And third, and this is really important, is this good for the Willard Hotel, the Hay-Adams and the Four Seasons. I suspect the answer is yes, very yes.

As for the substance of the summit, I wonder what old Cold Warriors like Reagan and the recently deceased Anatoly Dobrynin would make of it. In a way, it was a dream goal of reducing nuclear weapons to zero. At Reykjavik in October 1986, Reagan certainly made a very hard effort to rope the Russians into doing something. Gorbachev stunned by the proposal and in no political position to accept it, pushed it off. Eventually, ...

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