



## **RUSSIA AND THE UNITED STATES**

**With articles by**

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**Edited By**

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**July 2009**

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The Henry L. Stimson Center

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## PREFACE

I am pleased to present *Russia and the United States*, the fifth in a series of Stimson publications addressing questions of how the elimination of nuclear weapons might be achieved. The Stimson project on nuclear security explores the practical dimensions of this critical 21<sup>st</sup> century debate, to identify both political and technical obstacles that could block the road to “zero,” and to outline how each of these could be removed. Led by Stimson's co-founder and Distinguished Fellow Dr. Barry Blechman, the project provides useful analyses that can help US and world leaders make the elimination of nuclear weapons a realistic and viable option. The series comprises country assessments, to be published in a total of six different monographs, and a separate volume on such technical issues as verification and enforcement of a disarmament regime, to be published in the fall.

This fifth monograph in the series, following volumes on *France and the United Kingdom*, *China and India*, *Israel and Pakistan* and *Iran and North Korea*, examines the two nuclear superpowers that together possess more than 95 percent of the world's nuclear weapons. In recent months, the new administration has dedicated the goal of a world without nuclear weapons as a top priority for the United States. Russia has agreed to the call for global zero—and is pleased to be negotiating joint strategic reductions with the United States—but requires an improvement in its security relationship with the West before it will be willing to forgo its reliance on its nuclear arsenal.

The director of the Moscow Center of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Dmitri Trenin, evaluates the odds of Russia forgoing its increasing reliance on its nuclear arsenal in the context of multilateral disarmament. The evolution of the United States as the first nuclear-armed power to an advocate for global zero is traced by the series editor Barry Blechman and the Stimson Center's Alex Bollfrass and Frank Valliere.

This series makes an important contribution to the new and renewed debate about how to rid the world of the dangers of nuclear weapons. This enduring strategic issue has been a central concern of the Stimson Center since its founding twenty years ago. I hope that this new publication will provide insights and pragmatic ideas to facilitate wise policymaking, in keeping with Stimson tradition.

Sincerely,



Ellen Laipson

## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the twin threats of proliferation and terrorism have led to a growing chorus of world leaders calling for the global elimination of nuclear weapons. Thousands of individuals from around the world and across political lines have come together in a project called *Global Zero*. Combining policy research with broad-based public outreach, the project seeks to encourage governments to negotiate an agreement to eliminate all nuclear weapons through phased and verified reductions.

In support of *Global Zero* and the many other ongoing efforts to eliminate nuclear weapons, and in collaboration with the World Security Institute, the Stimson Center has commissioned a series of papers examining the strategic obstacles that block the achievement of zero nuclear weapons world-wide. Written from the perspectives of individual countries that either possess nuclear weapons or have the potential to develop them relatively quickly, the papers describe those nations' official views on, and plans for, nuclear weapons, as well as how the prospect of wide-spread proliferation and the possibility of nuclear disarmament might change those perspectives. The primary purpose of each paper is to identify the policies and international developments that would encourage decision-makers in each nation to look favorably on a treaty to eliminate nuclear weapons by a date certain.

Published together in this volume as the fifth pair of papers in the series, *Russia and the United States* analyzes the perspectives of the nuclear future of these former competitors in a decades-long nuclear arms race, whose presidents agreed in April of this year to the goal of global zero. The threats now faced by the United States have no nuclear solution, a conclusion reached increasingly by prominent Americans from both political parties. Russia, on the other hand, has emphasized the role of nuclear weapons in its defense doctrine to compensate for its deteriorated conventional forces and, according to the author, Dmitri Trenin, it will not agree to zero without first reaching broader arrangements ensuring its security writ large.

This series of papers has been made possible by grants from the World Security Institute (with the support of the Carnegie Corporation of New York) and the Ploughshares Fund, as well as by gifts from individual donors. The Stimson Center and the series' editor are grateful for their generosity.

**Barry M. Blechman**

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# **RUSSIAN PERSPECTIVES ON THE GLOBAL ELIMINATION OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS**

*Dmitri Trenin*\*

As the self-perceived isolated great power in a highly competitive global environment, Russia regards nuclear weapons as the mainstay of both its security posture and status among the major powers of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Even though the likelihood of a war with its ex-Cold War adversaries—America, its European allies, and China—is extremely low, nuclear deterrence gives a measure of comfort to the Kremlin that Russia’s vital interests will be respected under all circumstances by Washington and Beijing, whose military power and “combined national might,” respectively, are now far greater than Russia’s.

Moscow’s prime interest lies in regulating the major-power competition through arms control, not in abolishing nuclear weapons altogether and thus ending nuclear deterrence. Russia’s resources are not nearly great enough to match NATO’s or China’s conventional arsenals. Making the world safe for US global conventional superiority, or allowing China to dominate Eastern Eurasia militarily, is anathema to Russian strategists. On the other hand, engaging with Washington and eventually Beijing in nuclear arms control negotiations, strategic dialogue, and the non-proliferation regime gives Russia both strategic confidence and elevated status. Russia has embraced, in principle, the goal of nuclear disarmament in its National Security Strategy (approved in May 2009), but real progress toward that goal is only possible if there are first major improvements in the strategic offensive and defensive arms area (both nuclear and non-nuclear), as well as conventional arms relationships. Most important, it would require a fundamental change of its security perceptions of other major powers to acquire a comfortable degree of mutual confidence and trust.

## **FACTORS MOTIVATING RUSSIA’S RELIANCE ON NUCLEAR WEAPONS**

Already a central element of the military and foreign policies of the Soviet Union, Russian Federation officials see nuclear weapons as playing even more important roles—protecting Russia’s security and supporting its regional and global political ambitions.

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\* Dr. Trenin is director of the Moscow Center of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. The views expressed in this paper are his and not necessarily those of the Center.

## Security concerns

Russia has been afflicted by a plethora of security concerns following the end of the Cold War. Early hopes for integration into the West as a second-among-equals after the United States were dashed soon after the Cold War's peaceful end and Russia's leaders adopted a crass *Realpolitik* view of the world. Big powers, they are convinced, inevitably compete for global supremacy and regional spheres of influence. Russia faces new threats: terrorism, ethnic and religious conflicts, and transnational crime. Moreover, Moscow has to admit that the Russian Federation is a substantially weaker player compared to the Soviet Union. While the danger of a global nuclear war may have dramatically receded with the end of the Cold War, Russia's territorial integrity, domestic stability, strategic status, access to vital economic and strategic zones and lines of communications, and even its sovereignty, are all being challenged. Russia's military leaders argue that the country's post-Cold War attempts at cooperation with the West "have done nothing" to strengthen its military security. If anything, they maintain, Russian national security has suffered as a result of NATO's eastward enlargement and new US military deployments. Only one element of Soviet military power has survived virtually intact: nuclear weapons. As a result, not only Russia's security, but its status and self-image throughout the 1990s relied heavily, even disproportionately, on Moscow's possession of a massive nuclear arsenal.<sup>†</sup>

Since great-power relations remain of paramount importance to national security, Moscow has been eyeing two countries in particular—one overtly (the United States); the other, covertly (China).

America's global supremacy, its ubiquitous presence, and forceful foreign policy activism not only jar the sentiments of a former superpower, but directly affect Russian interests in what Moscow regards as its zones of concern, particularly in the now independent states of the former USSR. During the past decade, three developments were particularly important in this regard: (i) the expansion of NATO to include the countries of Central Europe, the Baltic region, and the Balkans; (ii) NATO's air war against Yugoslavia over Kosovo, eventually leading to that province's forced separation from Serbia; and (iii) US support for the so-called "color revolutions" in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan and, subsequently, the prospect of awarding NATO membership action plans to Kiev and Tbilisi. The Kremlin also suspects the West of exploiting the conflicts within the Russian Federation, particularly in the North Caucasus, to contain and

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<sup>†</sup> The writer's understanding of the views of Russian leaders is based on his experience as a staff member of the USSR delegation to the US-Soviet Nuclear and Space Talks in Geneva (1985-91), and on numerous personal conversations with diplomats, military officials, and political leaders over the past twenty years.

weaken Russia. In the Kremlin's view, Georgia's move against the Ossetians in August 2008 was a war by proxy launched by "certain quarters" in Washington (then-Vice President Dick Cheney's name is often mentioned) to "test" the Russian leadership and to help the Republican presidential nominee, John McCain, in the US elections. There is a near-consensus among Russian leaders that the one thing that protects Russia from direct US intervention is its nuclear weapons. According to this way of thinking, nuclear weapons made all the difference in restraining the United States from supporting Chechen independence the way it supported independence for Kosovo.

Next to geo-political worries, Russia is concerned about the growth and evolution of American military power. The US fiscal year 2009 defense budget is one-half of Russia's gross domestic product, even in purchasing power parity (PPP) terms. Meanwhile, US military technology is well ahead of Russia's and virtually in a race with itself. The Bush Administration withdrew from the 30-year-old treaty restricting missile defenses (ABM Treaty) and signed agreements with Poland and the Czech Republic to deploy ballistic missile defense (BMD) interceptors and radar. Virtually no one in Moscow's governing circles believed this was done in order to protect the US and its allies from an emerging Iranian missile threat, as US officials maintained. The choice of sites for the US "Global BMD Third Positioning Area," as the sites in Central Europe are known, add insult to the injury because of the inclusion of these former Soviet allies in NATO. Again, the predictable Russian response to this situation is to further develop its nuclear arsenal.

Not that Russia is dismissive of the dangers of nuclear proliferation. It shares with the United States the overriding interest of preventing more states from acquiring nuclear weapons. Nor can it ignore the facts that even though some of the would-be proliferators, such as Iran and North Korea, are virulently anti-American, they are geographically much closer to Russia's territory.

Like the United States, however, Moscow is discriminating in its approach to proliferation, distinguishing "acceptable" proliferators from those it opposes. Russia has tacitly accepted India's quest for nuclear weapons, for example. India, Moscow has reasoned, is a great power and cannot be seriously denied what other great powers take for granted. Moreover, India is the one great power that is totally unproblematic from the Russian perspective. Similarly, Israel, which was considered a potential adversary during the Cold War, has now won Russia's respect as a responsible player: Its nuclear arsenal is seen as a weapon of last resort and thus a factor helping to stabilize the Middle East. On the contrary, Russia had been very concerned about the Pakistani nuclear program

even before Islamabad tested its nuclear weapons in 1998. To Moscow, Pakistan, unlike India, had been historically more of an adversary than a friend: It provided crucial support to the United States proxy war against Soviet forces in Afghanistan; it has been and still is a hotbed of Islamist radicalism; and its political regime, infested with Islamist sympathizers, is believed by Moscow to be inherently unstable.

Russia also has been concerned about North Korea's nuclear program. It fears that Pyongyang's provocative policies could lead to a war, and possible nuclear fall-out, right on Russia's Far Eastern doorstep. Moscow has participated in the "Six-Party Talks" and supports Washington's current approach to solving the issue, which it wishes to be a model for other potential proliferators, above all, Iran. In the case of Iran, an important and growing neighbor across the Caspian Sea, Moscow favors a negotiated solution that would prevent Tehran from becoming a nuclear weapons state even as it takes Iranian security and economic interests into account.

Unlike the United States, China is never mentioned publicly by Russian officials as a security concern. Moscow believes that China will remain friendly toward Russia, at least in the medium-term, and that the current relationship, described as a "strategic partnership," will continue. Yet, beyond the 15-20 year horizon, many alternative scenarios are possible, especially if China turns more nationalistic. This raises the problem of Russian arms sales to China. In the 1990s, selling arms to Beijing was one of the very few means available to Moscow to keep the Russian defense industrial base afloat. In the current decade, these arms transfers are more difficult to defend. Basically, Russians see China through the same prism of *Realpolitik* which they use to watch America. In fact, the Sino-Russian power relationship has changed more dramatically in the last two decades than the US-Russian one. Until recently, Russia never had to live with a strong China. Russian leaders are perfectly aware of the vulnerabilities of their eastern flank, which they have been trying to bolster through various development programs and energy projects. Indeed, former President Vladimir Putin regards the 2004 agreement fixing the entire Sino-Russian border as his top foreign policy accomplishment.<sup>‡</sup>

Although a full-scale military conflict with China would be an absolute disaster for Russia, a combination of vested interests, anti-Americanism, and sheer

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<sup>‡</sup> Putin made the comment during an informal meeting with members of the Valdai Club, which brings together Russian and international academics, experts and journalists for private discussions.  
<http://www.kremlin.ru/text/appears/2006/09/111114.shtml>



complacency keeps the policy of arming China intact. Moscow, of course, imposes certain restrictions on what can be sold to China's military, but essentially it assumes that a Russian refusal to sell military hardware would motivate China to look for other suppliers, including Ukraine, and, at least potentially, Western Europe. Also, arms transfers, some Russian officials hope, have the potential to create special relationships and make the buyer's arsenal more or less transparent to the seller. Others see this as a gamble, and point to the Soviet Union's support of post-Versailles Germany to build its armored forces and chemical weapons arsenal, later inherited by Adolf Hitler. All agree, however, that in order to deter China militarily, if it ever has to, Moscow has no better option than nuclear weapons.<sup>1</sup>

As is evident from the above analysis, for Russia to support an initiative to eliminate nuclear weapons, it would need to find ways to resolve both its perceived American security problem and its potential China problem, too. The former could be achieved, in principle, along the lines of a new Euro-Atlantic security compact that includes Russia alongside the United States, the European Union, and Russia's neighbors, such as Ukraine. This possibility looks remote, but is essentially the only means of ensuring Europe's security—and Russia's too. As to the latter, this can be achieved, again in principle, along the lines of a US-China-Russia security dialogue which effectively removes Russia's fear of a strong and assertive China. Needless to say, the latter appears even more remote than the former.

### **Deterrence vs. war-fighting**

Russia has declared that, in order to defend its own sovereignty, territorial security, and the territorial security of its allies, it would use nuclear weapons, even if it were the first nation in the conflict to use of them. This is a striking departure from the Soviet declaratory stance which proclaimed a “no-first-use” doctrine. This declaratory change of heart is attributable to the dramatic change in its own condition and resources, including its military capabilities, rather than Russia's strategic environment. Russia's conventional forces have been redeployed from the forward positions they previously occupied in Central and Eastern Europe, Central Asia and the Caucasus, Afghanistan, and Mongolia. Russia's defense perimeter has moved closer to Moscow, reducing its strategic depth in the west by about 1,000 kilometers (km). Russia's conventional forces, also reduced to about one-third of their Soviet size, have still not been restructured for modern warfare and their quality has deteriorated drastically. Russia's military has a top-heavy structure, with an outsized overhang of flag officers and colonels, a pathetic shortage of company officers, and a complete lack of professional non-commissioned officers (NCOs). Its weapons and

equipment are obsolete, with virtually no combat systems purchased since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Its training exercises have only been resumed recently, after a break of a decade and a half. Russia took a long time and a lot of effort to defeat the insurgency in Chechnya, and although it did defeat Georgia in the short war in 2008, its conventional forces are no match for the forces of its principal neighbors—NATO in the west and China in the east.

As a result, Russia has adopted a version of NATO's 1970s doctrine, which envisaged the first use of nuclear weapons in response to a massive conventional attack by much larger enemy forces. Occasionally, Russia points to the continuing presence of US tactical nuclear weapons (TNW) in Europe as justification for its new policy and maintenance of TNW in support of it, but Moscow has no interest in eliminating TNW altogether.

The likelihood of any attack on Russia is judged to be minimal in the west and – for now – very low in the east. In 1990, the Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty eliminated the material possibility that NATO could potentially launch a surprise attack. However, the version of the treaty negotiated in 1999 to reflect the changed political-military situation following the end of the Cold War, and ratified by Russia, has not entered into force, pending its ratification by NATO countries. The latter have delayed, calling on Moscow to first withdraw its military units from Georgia and Moldova. In response, Moscow has suspended its participation in the original 1990 agreement. Even though there are no signs of a return to military confrontation in Europe, Russia is troubled by new US deployments in Romania and Bulgaria, the US missile defense sites and potentially additional forces in Poland and the Czech Republic, and the “blank area” created by the Baltic States' non-participation in the CFE Treaty. Meanwhile, Western concerns have been heightened by the recent Russian-Georgian war.

Although Moscow signed an agreement with Beijing on a set of confidence building measures along the Russo-China border in 1996, it is fully aware of its weaknesses and vulnerabilities. Should the Sino-Russian relationship turn sour, Moscow's only logical answer would be nuclear threats, both to deter war and, if necessary, to fight it, both at the strategic and tactical levels.

Hardly anyone in Russia today envisions fighting a nuclear war in the west and virtually everyone hopes Russia will not have to fight one in the east. There is no public discussion of the use of nuclear weapons against other nuclear powers in specific scenarios. Russian military and political thought has evolved since the nuclear war-fighting strategies of the 1950s. One can only speculate that, in case

of an existential crisis, after the outbreak of hostilities and in the face of a realistic prospect of military defeat, the Russian leadership could order a nuclear demonstration, e.g., an air burst over a body of water or a desert, to bring home to the enemy the seriousness of the stakes involved.

Prompted by the doctrinal innovations and technical experimentation by the George W. Bush Administration, Russia has also hinted at preventive uses of nuclear weapons directed at sub-state groups, such as well-entrenched insurgents, rebels, or terrorists, which may differ from the “first-use” concept. For three decades now, it is the south, rather than the west or the east, which has confronted Russian strategists with a set of real military security contingencies, from Afghanistan to the North Caucasus. Given the dearth of high-precision conventional munitions in the Russian arsenal, miniature nuclear weapons could be an attractive means of dealing with deeply entrenched enemies. It seems, however, that this is still a controversial option.<sup>2</sup>

### **Support for Russia’s security position in specific regions and for its regional ambitions**

The “region” in which Russia operates is geographical Eurasia. Historically, Russia has been a major power in Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. The current Russian leadership considers much of the former Soviet Union its “zone of privileged interests.” Moscow aspires to a hegemonic role in the post-Soviet area. It has pursued economic integration with Kazakhstan and Belarus and, at a lower level, with Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. So far, the results have been limited. It turned the loose 1992 Collective Security Treaty into a smaller, but potentially more effective security organization with members in Eastern Europe (Belarus), the South Caucasus (Armenia), and Central Asia (all countries minus Turkmenistan). It used the economic crisis to give Kyrgyzstan an offer Bishkek could not refuse: Financial aid in exchange for the termination of US base rights in that country.<sup>§</sup> Russia does not want to undercut the US/NATO effort in Afghanistan: it simply wants Washington to recognize Moscow’s primacy in the region and to deal with the Central Asian states through Russia.

Central Asia is also the geographical focus of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), a mostly Chinese-designed security and development forum in which Moscow enjoys de facto co-leadership status alongside Beijing. As an

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<sup>§</sup> Editor’s note: Since the writing of this paper, Kyrgyzstan has reconsidered its decision to terminate US base rights at Manas and on June 25, 2009 its parliament agreed to the US use of the base at nearly triple the previous annual rent. Russian President Medvedev has stated his support for this agreement.

Anne Gearhan, “Relieved US keeps base key to Afghan war,” *The Washington Post*, June 26, 2009.  
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/06/26/AR2009062600785.html>

organization, the SCO is still in a formative stage; as a forum, it draws many of Asia's leading countries, including India, Pakistan, and Iran. The value of the SCO to Russia lies in the China connection. However, Beijing's flat refusal—supported by all of Russia's own nominal allies—to recognize Abkhazia and South Ossetia, has brought home to the Kremlin that China will never compromise its own interests for the sake of supporting Russia: a most useful insight.

Many Russian leaders believe that their nuclear arsenal both enhances these regional security interests and prevents the US from gaining global dominance. As Chief of the General Staff Yuri Baluevsky contended, “Washington's policy is aimed at attaining global military superiority. The only real barrier to that dream coming true is Russia's strategic nuclear forces.”\*\* Russians are reading US government documents closely, especially those coming from the Pentagon and the intelligence community, for any indication of US strategic policy toward Russia. Even though these documents are usually written in a circumspect manner, the audience in Moscow has formed a habit of reading too much into what they see. Any official US statement of “concern” about Russia's nuclear arsenal, or any verbal placement of Russia as being too close to an avowed US adversary, such as Iran or North Korea, is viewed suspiciously. Russian leaders notoriously do not trust appearances and seek to penetrate the “hidden thoughts” of others, especially the United States. In that effort, they expose themselves as being too clever by half: Even innocuous phrases can acquire ominous meaning when over-interpreted. These perceptions, however, fit into the general concept of the world as seen by the security wing of the Kremlin; namely, that the principal foreign policy goal of the United States is to contain, dominate, and, ultimately, dismember Russia as its one implacable rival.<sup>3</sup>

Since the turn of the century, Russians taking this point-of-view have seen their suspicions confirmed: In the US public debate on security issues, according to many American writers, including former Bush Administration officials, Russia and China have emerged as major problem countries. To Moscow, these statements read as “potential adversaries” or even “future enemies.” Since US statements often refer to the existential threat to America posed by Russian nuclear weapons, many Russian security analysts infer that the denuclearization of Russia is a supreme US security interest. As a first step toward that goal, they claim, the United States seeks to impose its “control” over the Russian nuclear arsenal under the guise of programs aimed at enhancing nuclear security and safety.<sup>4</sup>

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\*\* Author's translation

Russian leaders are impressed by the sheer size of the US military establishment, its growth since the end of the Cold War, and Washington's willingness to use that immense power in various parts of the world. During the Cold War, the Russian concept of military security rested very much on the notion of rough equality of US and Russian global military capabilities. With that equality gone, and no alliance-type, or even cooperative, relationship to replace it, Moscow feels uncomfortable. It perceives the stated US resolve to prevent the emergence of a military competitor as a claim to perpetual military superiority, which leaves the rest of the world, including Russia, at the mercy of Washington decision-making.

US actions since the end of the Cold War have generated and intensified these threat perceptions. Russians, generally, blame US administrations for believing the West "won" the Cold War and for their condescending attitudes in the 1990s toward a "defeated" Russia. The first wave of NATO enlargement in the mid-to-late 1990s, which resulted in the accession of Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic, was seen as a US vote of no-confidence in a post-Communist Russia, an extension of the US zone of influence, a bridgehead for further reducing Russia's influence, and, very importantly, as a breach of faith with regard to US and West European promises to then-President Mikhail Gorbachev that NATO would not expand eastward following the reunification of Germany within the alliance. The fact that the latter were not written promises, and may have been misinterpreted, changes little: Most Russian leaders and officials believe the West deceived Gorbachev and took advantage of Russia's enormous difficulties at the start of the 1990s.<sup>5</sup>

NATO's second enlargement wave in 2004 led to the inclusion of the three Baltic States, whose relations with Moscow are particularly strained over those nations' historical grudges against Russia and Moscow's anger over Estonia's and Latvia's refusal to extend automatic citizenship to their sizeable Russian minorities. With the admission of Romania and Bulgaria, the Black Sea, like the Baltic, became dominated by NATO. Although it did not present a direct military threat, NATO's enlargement came to signify a fundamental geo-political rebalancing west of Russia's borders. Gone was the neutral cushion of Central Europe that separated Russia from the West historically and which, in the past, was a battleground for competing Russian and German influence. The West was now virtually at Russia's doorstep, projecting its influence into parts of what the Russians believe is the core of their historical proto-state, i.e. Ukraine and Belarus.<sup>6</sup>

Former President Putin's unfortunate involvement in the 2004 Ukrainian presidential election, with current President Medvedev at his side as the then-Kremlin chief of staff, had the principal objective of preventing the victory of pro-Western Ukrainian forces that, it was feared, would bring Ukraine into NATO and host US bases there. The so-called "Orange Revolution," however, ousted instead the corrupt clique with whom Moscow had aligned itself. In the Kremlin's mind, the revolution was little more than a special operation conceived and conducted by the United States, aimed at achieving geo-political, rather than democratic goals. When, four years later, the pro-Western Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko applied for NATO's Membership Action Plan, widely considered a virtual guarantee of eventual accession to the alliance, Moscow decided to do everything in its power to prevent its acceptance. Putin warned the Ukrainians of the dire consequences of joining with the West against Russia and played the pragmatic Ukrainian Prime Minister Yuliya Tymoshenko against her ideological president. He also personally cautioned NATO leaders against accepting an unstable country and counted on German and French understanding of, and concern about, Russia's position on this issue and ability to stand up to US pressure, and thus prevented the needed consensus within the alliance.<sup>7</sup>

Faced with a similar situation in Georgia—a pro-Western leadership succeeding a corrupt post-Soviet regime through a near-revolutionary situation—Russia used the conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia to place insurmountable obstacles in the way of Georgia's NATO ambitions. When Georgia launched a surprise attack against the South Ossetian capital in August 2008 and killed a number of Russian peacekeepers, Moscow initially interpreted that move as a war by proxy, waged by the Georgian president Mikheil Saakashvili on behalf of the Bush Administration in Washington. Russia's armed response was aimed as much at Georgia's patron, the United States, as it was aimed at Georgia itself. The Georgian crisis not only marked the lowest point in Russian-US and Russian-Western relations since the start of Gorbachev's perestroika in the mid-1980s, but also the most dangerous period for European and world security. Moscow did not immediately believe the US would take the defeat of its client calmly; it saw the humanitarian mission of the US Sixth Fleet in the Black Sea as an exercise in re-supplying and rearming Georgia for a war of revenge, and interpreted the Ukrainian president's decree restricting the movements of Russia's own Black Sea Fleet as potentially an intolerable provocation, designed to bog Russia down in another conflict, this time in the Crimea. Had it not been for the advent of the world financial and economic crisis the following month, a serious US-Russian collision could have been unavoidable.<sup>8</sup>

Neither the Georgian nor the Ukrainian NATO issues have been resolved. Both have been postponed, but both remain on the agenda. If NATO chooses to reactivate either issue, however, the consequences could be deadly. In Ukraine's case, the NATO issue is extremely divisive as it touches the country's identity, with a majority of its people wishing neither to be part of Russia nor to part with Russia. Russia's concerns need to be taken seriously; everywhere east of Berlin, NATO is perceived to be not about Afghanistan, but still about Russia. In Georgia's case, where the elites and the public are pro-NATO and anti-Russian, the issue is the state's borders. Admitting Georgia in its *de facto* borders (i.e. minus Abkhazia and South Ossetia) would be unproblematic for Moscow, but totally unacceptable for the Georgians. Admitting Georgia in its internationally recognized boundaries, however, would mean that NATO would run a significant risk of a military conflict with Russia. Even those Georgians who point to the fact that the Federal Republic of Germany was admitted to NATO in 1954, while East Germany remained in the Soviet sphere of influence, would have to admit that Germany was the central issue in Cold War East-West relations, while Georgia is a very much off-center item in current global politics.

Russia recognized Abkhazia and South Ossetia not as a belated response to the Western recognition of Kosovo, as has been suggested by some, but as a means to deploy regular forces in both breakaway republics in order to deter a fresh US-supported Georgian attempt to retake them. As for Kosovo itself, from Moscow's perspective, it came as the culmination of a broader Western intervention in the Balkans, through which the US and its allies picked the winners, appointed the villains, and redrew the borders—all without Moscow's consent and often against its protests. The issue for Russia was not the vaunted Slav solidarity, as so often is maintained in the West, which is a chimera, but its demonstration of complete US/NATO dominance in matters of European security. Not only did Russia no longer count diplomatically, even though its leaders believed it remained a great power, but the United States and its allies went into a war of choice in Europe—despite Moscow's most vehement, but also impotent, protests. From Kosovo in 1999 and again in 2008, Moscow heard resoundingly that Russia was now safe to be ignored.<sup>9</sup>

Moscow's other complaints include the lack of any apparent US appreciation for Putin's early conciliatory actions, such as closing the electronic intelligence station at Lourdes, Cuba, and the Danang naval facility in Vietnam in 2000. Russia also tolerated a US military presence in parts of the former Soviet Union, including Central Asia and Georgia, in the wake of the 9/11 incident, not to speak of Russia's strong support for the United States following that attack, including its material help in defeating the Taliban in 2001.

The Obama Administration has entered office with a different set of priorities than its predecessor. It has signaled to Moscow that while NATO's promise of membership to Ukraine and Georgia stands, it will not be a priority, and will not be "pushed." It has also softened its approach to the issue of ballistic missile defenses in Central Europe, linking it to progress toward resolving the Iranian nuclear issue, and indicating willingness to explore the potential for US-Russian collaboration on missile defenses.

This has quelled the Kremlin's early fears about the new Democratic administration. Initially, Moscow was concerned by the number of hold-overs from the Clinton era that were taking positions on Team Obama: The Clinton years are remembered in Moscow mainly for the humiliation that Russia felt due to its weakness and dependency on the West. Within months of the new administration taking office, however, the Russian leadership discovered that the new US governing team was actually very pragmatic, and decided they could do business with them.

The Obama Administration's early policies on nuclear disarmament have received a generally positive, though not a raving, reaction in Moscow. The Russian leadership welcomed the re-launch of strategic arms control negotiations in April 2009. These will allow Moscow to reduce its nuclear arsenal in tandem with Washington, rather than to face the prospect of unilateral cuts and growing disparity in strategic offensive arsenals, which would damage the Kremlin's self-image. At the same time, the Russian leaders take a rather skeptical view of both the feasibility and desirability of full nuclear disarmament. They have taken note, however, that, in his April 2009 Prague speech, Barack Obama envisioned this as "perhaps" not happening "in his lifetime."

Reacting to Obama's vision, President Medvedev agreed with the US President's "conditions" for phasing out nuclear weapons and added three of his own: Preventing deployment of weapons in outer space, preventing a build-up of non-nuclear strategic systems to compensate for reductions in nuclear forces, and a guarantee that a "nuclear return potential" would not be created (i.e. addressing the issue of non-deployed nuclear weapons).<sup>10</sup>

Thus, one is tempted to say that in the Kremlin's view, "movement (toward disarmament) is everything; the end goal (i.e. nuclear abolition) is nothing." Yet, there are limits to how far Russia would be prepared to go in reducing its nuclear arsenal. A thousand nuclear weapons is a psychological barrier below which the Russian leadership believes any further reductions could be destabilizing. These numbers are also dependent on the scope and efficacy of future US ballistic



missile defenses. Moreover, whatever Moscow's willingness to cut its strategic nuclear forces, it also believes in the utility of deterrence at sub-strategic levels. Although its officials would never admit it publicly, Russia is reluctant to eliminate shorter-range nuclear weapons for fear of undermining the credibility of its deterrent vis-à-vis China.

### **Support for Russia's global ambitions**

After a period of weakness and withdrawal, Russia has again emerged as a global actor, although a relatively weak one. Moscow aspires to become a member of a self-selected group of independent "power centers," alongside the United States and China. (Moscow considers the European Union to be less of a strategic player, due to its lack of unity on a number of political issues and its dependency on the United States for its security). Moreover, recently, Russia has been trying to present itself as the only global military power next to the United States: After a 15-year break, it resumed global air and naval patrols in 2007 and has conducted a number of major military exercises on land. Russian nuclear-capable strategic bombers have been flying over the Atlantic and the Pacific, coming close to the eastern and western coasts of the United States and to the territories of its allies, Britain, Norway, and Japan. The Russian Navy has resumed cruises in the Mediterranean and has sent a ship to the Somali coast to protect shipping against pirates. There has been talk that Russia is considering expanding its presence at the naval facility at Tartus in Syria, and even a return to the Yemeni island of Sokotra in the Gulf of Aden. The economic and financial crunch, however, may trim these ambitions. Indeed, in terms of global naval activity, Russia in 2008 ceded its perennial second place to the fast-growing Chinese Navy.<sup>11</sup>

In order to send a message to Washington not to involve itself militarily in what Russia regards as its sphere of "privileged interests," Moscow sent two Tu-160 strategic bombers in 2008 to Venezuela; within weeks, a squadron of ships from the Russian Northern Fleet followed. Russia has been trying to profit from the strained relations between the United States and several Latin American countries, including Venezuela, Bolivia, Nicaragua, and the former Soviet client Cuba, but its objectives, besides making a point in a public relations contest, are mostly economic. Unlike the Soviet Union, Russia is not thinking of creating a global anti-US coalition.

For almost a decade, its nuclear arsenal, together with its UN Security Council seat, were the two major arguments supporting Russia's claim to great-power status. While Russia's nuclear deterrent has always stayed in the background, its existence gave the Kremlin a degree of self-confidence that, despite the country's

weakness in the 1990s and its near-isolation in the first decade of this century, core Russian interests would be sufficiently protected against anyone, including the reigning world hegemon, the United States, and the rising power of China. It is likely that Russian leaders will continue to see value in this role for nuclear forces. Despite the plan for sweeping military reform announced in 2008, Russia, especially given the economic crisis which is hitting the country hard, can not be expected to modernize its conventional military forces quickly or sufficiently in the mid-term to match US global capabilities. Even when and if it succeeds in its conventional modernization program, Russia's resources—financial, economic, and not least demographic—will prevent Moscow from claiming an equal military status with the United States and, in conventional terms, also with China. For this reason alone, Russian leaders will likely always see value in nuclear forces as defining Russia's claim to a seat at the table with the other world powers.

## **RUSSIA'S NUCLEAR PLANS**

As of January 1, 2007, under the counting rules enshrined in the START I Treaty between the US and the Soviet Union, the Russian strategic nuclear forces included a triad of 530 intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), 16 nuclear-powered strategic submarines (SSBNs) armed with 272 submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs), and 78 nuclear-capable heavy bombers, for a total of 4,162 warheads. Maintaining and optimizing this nuclear triad is considered a supreme national priority. The stated mission of the strategic nuclear arsenal is to deter large-scale aggression against Russia and its allies (presumably in the Collective Security Treaty Organization), including under the worst possible conditions—i.e. by retaining a capability to withstand a first nuclear strike and retaliate with profound effects against the attacker.

Russia's ICBMs are being modernized substantially. In an effort to increase the survivability of these forces and their capability to penetrate the defensive systems being acquired by the United States, Russia is deploying mobile "Topol-M" ICBMs with single warheads (these are also known as RS-12M2). Alongside the existing silo-based RS-24, which is equipped with multiple independently targetable reentry vehicles (MIRVs), Topol-M should increase the Russian missile force's survivability and penetration capabilities and thus counter US BMD plans. Russia is also introducing maneuvering warheads (MARVs) and plans to deploy a hypersonic gliding warhead. The older ICBMs (RS-12M, RS-18 and RS-20) are going through extensive modernization to extend their life cycles to 23, 30, 25 years respectively. Existing ICBM development plans foresee a smaller, but more modern and more capable force, by 2016.

The sea-based element of Russia's strategic nuclear forces is expected to deploy a new SSBN (the *Yuri Dolgoruky*, *Borey*-class) in 2009. This submarine will be armed with a new MIRVed SLBM (*Bulava*), which is completing its flight tests and is expected to go into serial production soon. Two more *Borey*-class SSBNs may become operational in 2010. At the same time, older submarines are being overhauled and equipped with the modernized RSM-54 SLBM (*Sineva*).

After a long break, three TU-160 heavy bombers have been produced since 2001. The emphasis, however, is not so much on producing new aircraft as on modernizing the existing ones, extending their life cycles to 30-35 years. The bombers are being equipped with a new air-launched cruise missile (ALCM), the X-102. A decision to build a new heavy bomber is expected by 2011-12.

Shorter-range non-strategic nuclear forces (tactical and operational-tactical forces in Russian classification) are considered indispensable for deterring conflicts at the regional level. The emphasis is on extending the life-cycles of the existing systems. Tu-22M3 and SU-24 nuclear-capable strike aircraft are being modernized. Only one new short-range missile system, the *Iskander*, has been deployed since the break-up of the Soviet Union.<sup>12</sup>

Under the terms of the 2002 US-Russia SORT Agreement, by the end of 2012 Russia would have 220-260 ICBMs with 810-980 warheads; eight to nine SSBNs with 136-148 SLBMs and 592-664 warheads, and up to 50 heavy bombers with 400 weapons, a grand total of 1,800-2,000 weapons. After that, the Russian strategic nuclear arsenal would be maintained within the range of 1,700 – 2,200 operationally deployed weapons (ie. excluding shorter-range systems and warheads held in reserve).

In the more distant future, the size of the Russian arsenal will depend on the fate of arms control negotiations, the state of nuclear weapons proliferation, global progress in military technologies, and the prospects for ballistic missile defenses. The leaders of the Russian armed forces are confident that Russia could live under the terms of the SORT Agreement until 2015-20, regardless of the anticipated progress of the US BMD program. Beyond 2020, however, it is felt that Russia would need to raise the penetration capability of its strategic systems substantially, increase their survivability, and improve the effectiveness of the Armed Forces' command, control, communications, and intelligence components.<sup>13</sup>

Following the Cold War, Russia was forced to adjust its nuclear strategy. Strategic nuclear *parity* with the US, the Soviet Union's main achievement in the

nuclear arms race, is no longer considered necessary. Instead, Russia's current deterrence strategy talks of maintaining a US-Russian *balance* of nuclear capabilities and, increasingly, neutralizing the impact of the US global BMD system. The importance of this distinction is that rather than seeking numerical equality or, better, preponderance in nuclear warheads and delivery systems, as it did in Soviet times, Moscow could abstain from a nuclear arms race it could not win, and focus on building capabilities which would give it enough confidence that any US lead would not translate into a capability to blackmail Russia.

### **Proliferation concerns**

Russia's proliferation concerns are real. Fundamentally, they are similar to those of the United States (even though the proliferators do not see Russia as their prime adversary), but there are important differences in how the two countries' deal with those concerns.

Moscow abhors unilateral US military actions to prevent or roll back proliferation. From Moscow's perspective, a war in Korea or Iran to destroy those countries' emerging nuclear weapon capabilities would be nearly as bad as living with nuclear-armed regimes in Pyongyang or Tehran. Russia strongly prefers multilateral decisions reached and implemented by the leadership of the UN Security Council, where it has a permanent seat and enjoys veto rights. Russia is also a solid supporter of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), another check on unilateralism.

In North Korea, Russia sees an embattled Stalinist dictatorship that resorts to nuclear and missile blackmail of its neighbors, South Korea and Japan, and the United States, as its only means of ensuring its security from outside attack and its domestic survival—the latter both through permanent political mobilization against the “imperialist enemy” and through the acquisition of scarce food and fuel from that same enemy. Moscow sees Pyongyang as an essentially untrustworthy and unreliable, but a generally rational, if abhorrent, actor. The best way of dealing with such a regime is not to pressure it, but to quell its fears of outside aggression, and mellow its regime through engagement. Russian leaders believe that a natural process of regime decay will do the rest. Thus, Russia supports a US-North Korean understanding as a key element of any solution to the North Korean nuclear program; it also supports China's role as the principal facilitator of North Korea's acceptance of the deal and the agreement's informal guarantor, and the hammering out of the agreement in a wider international setting (the Six-Party Talks), of which Russia is an integral part.<sup>14</sup>

In principle, Russia would want to see a similar framework applied to Iran: A US-Iran deal, Russian-EU “massaging” of Tehran to accept and stick by it, and ratification of the agreement in a wider context (in this case the permanent members of the UN Security Council plus Germany). In the Russian view, the IAEA and the UNSC are the relevant bodies to monitor compliance and act upon the arrangement. Russia appreciates Iran’s role as a regional power and has managed to have a productive relationship with Tehran. Its view of Iranian politics and foreign policy is markedly different from that of the United States. Russia does not dispute Iran’s right to engage in peaceful nuclear research and has been helping Iran to build its first nuclear reactor. Russia, however, would want to present Iran with a set of incentives to drop any nuclear weapon ambitions in exchange for an opportunity to pursue peaceful nuclear energy under international supervision in a greatly improved regional security situation.<sup>15</sup>

In contrast to Iran, whom the Russians see as an essentially stable geopolitical actor, Pakistan had been a major cause for concern in Moscow long before it tested its first nuclear weapons in 1998. The specter of a political meltdown in Pakistan, ultimately affecting its nuclear weapons, is a bigger nightmare for Moscow than a conceivable Iranian nuclear strike at Israel. Another concern is a new war between Pakistan and India over Kashmir or resulting from a terrorist attack inside India. Recognizing the limits of any historical analogy, Moscow supports India and Pakistan working to stabilize their nuclear relationship through confidence building measures and agreements in the image of the steps taken by the US and Soviet Union after the Cuban missile crisis in 1962.

Use of nuclear weapons by sub-state groups, including Islamist terrorists, is also a real concern for Moscow. Following the 9/11 attack on Washington and New York, Russia has initiated and participated in a variety of high-level international meetings and programs, both within the G-8 format and in other forums, to prevent such a threat from materializing, and has been cooperating with the United States and other countries to keep nuclear weapons and materials out of reach of terrorists.<sup>††</sup>

Since the days of the Cold War, Russia has lived at the epicenter of a nuclear confrontation that has outlived its original cause. Yet Russia is less worried about the nuclear forces of the United States and China, not to speak of France and Britain, India and Israel, than about proliferation involving unstable regimes

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<sup>††</sup> As early as 1997, Russia initiated a draft convention on nuclear terrorism; the document was finally approved in 2005. At the 2006 G-8 Summit in St. Petersburg, Russia promoted a Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism.

and sub-state actors. Resisting proliferation is done more effectively if there is close cooperation among the major nuclear powers than if those powers focus primarily on just phasing out their stockpiles, which favors those with more advanced non-nuclear weapons.

In its newly-regained global status, Russia's neighborhood extends way beyond its borders. A future world with perhaps as many as three dozen nuclear states is unacceptable from Moscow's perspective. Such a world would be teetering constantly on the brink of nuclear war, and may eventually fall off the cliff. This horror vision forms a solid basis for renewed Russian-American cooperation to bar nuclear proliferation and to move, eventually, to a world free of nuclear weapons.

## **MOVING TO ZERO**

Mikhail Gorbachev outlined the vision of a nuclear-free world in 1986 and actually discussed a time-table for bringing that vision into reality with President Ronald Reagan at Reykjavik. In present-day Russia, such ideas are mostly considered Utopian. US conventional capabilities have reached the level that many missions which previously demanded nuclear strikes can now be performed more effectively by non-nuclear systems. The lack of such conventional systems in the Russian arsenal has caused Moscow to continue to firmly base its overall security strategy on nuclear deterrence.

Toward the end of his second term, for example, President Putin talked about a new technological arms race in both offensive and defensive systems. Though he didn't mention it by name, he was clearly referring to the United States. As Moscow has discovered, nuclear weapons are a relatively cheap way of ensuring one's security vis-à-vis a much stronger, richer, and technologically accomplished counterpart. Nuclear weapons are considered the great equalizer in a situation of US global dominance, conventional military supremacy, and active interventionism.<sup>16</sup> Both Vladimir Putin and Dmitri Medvedev have come out in support of nuclear disarmament. This is not just rhetoric, but support for disarmament as a principle and a process, within safe limits; it does not constitute a wholehearted embrace, à la Gorbachev, of the actual goal of zero nuclear weapons.<sup>17</sup>

There exists, however, a small group of prominent Russians who would like to see nuclear weapons abolished once and for all, for the same reasons as those campaigning for eliminating nuclear weapons in the United States. To make a serious case in the councils of the Russian state, they need to be able to prove

that moving toward nuclear abolition would not endanger Russia's security and would not "make the world safe for US conventional military dominance." Whether or not they would be able to get that proof would depend heavily on the actions that other nations, in particular the United States, would be prepared to undertake.

Actions like the following might improve the prospects for a positive response from Russia to a serious US initiative to eliminate nuclear weapons:

- If the US were to agree to the basic rules of engagement proposed by Vladimir Putin in Munich in 2007: Accept us as we are; treat us as equals, and cooperate on the basis of shared interests;
- If a gradual, but steady, build-up of confidence, leading eventually to genuine mutual trust, co-leadership on security issues in which Russia can play an important role, with an emphasis on WMD proliferation was introduced into US-Russian relations;
- If a new Euro-Atlantic security system were created in which Russia belonged as a full member (Medvedev's call for a new treaty on European security), anchoring Russia in Europe (Putin's idea of an energy community linking Russia and the EU);<sup>18</sup>
- If the US were to invite Russia to join it as an equal partner in building and operating global/regional ballistic missile defenses;
- If verifiable curbs on advanced, non-nuclear military technologies and non-nuclear strategic weaponry were negotiated;
- If "weaponization of space" (the meaning of this Russian term itself needs to be clarified) were safely barred;
- If a new US-Russian strategic arms agreement were concluded, leading not only to reductions of offensive systems, but to a genuine strategic dialogue between the two countries, addressing such issues as strategic defenses, WMD non-proliferation, and nuclear disarmament;
- If the US/NATO and Russia were to cooperate more closely on Afghanistan;
- If the US and Russia were able to cooperate to resolve the Iranian nuclear issue;
- If the US and Russia were able to cooperate in stemming long-range missile proliferation in the greater Middle East and elsewhere;
- If China were to join the US-Russian strategic arms control talks and resulting mechanisms, and if India showed an interest in at least becoming an observer in that process;

- If NATO were to formally forego any further enlargement into the former Soviet space and if the NATO-Russia Council were transformed into a decision-making body on all matters pertaining to Euro-Atlantic security. The Council, for example, could serve as venue for negotiating, outside of the NATO structure, a new Euro-Atlantic security compact, which would embrace both NATO and non-NATO countries in Europe, including, besides Russia, also Ukraine, Georgia, Kazakhstan and others.

While not each and every one of these conditions needs to be fulfilled, of particular importance are the concerns over US conventional military superiority. These perceptions can only be put to rest through a fundamental change in US-Russian relations, leading from stronger confidence to mutual trust to a new and lasting partnership. This security partnership needs to be strengthened by a revived economic relationship.<sup>‡‡</sup> At the same time, Russia needs to be anchored in Europe through a closer relationship with the European Union, including membership in a free-trade area, visa-free travel, and a serious energy partnership. Finally, the United States, the European Union, Russia, and other non-NATO, non-EU countries of Europe need to come together to form a new security system for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, not to replace NATO and the EU, but to form their functional equivalent for a much wider and more diverse membership.

As noted previously, President Medvedev has come up with an initiative for a new Euro-Atlantic architecture. Moscow's thinking, for the time being, revolves, sadly, around a new-look Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (an OSCE plus, Medvedev called it), a Cold War construct, which would ideally include a UN-style Security Council. This is a non-starter. Rather than prod Moscow for the details it does not have, the United States and its European partners need to engage with Russia in a common thinking about the future relationship that would finally make Europe secure. This is also a *sine qua non* for attaining the objective of a world free of nuclear weapons, at least as far as Russia is concerned. If the United States adopts a foreign policy personality of a global leader by consent, a *primus inter pares*, and a consensus builder, neither goal seems out of reach.

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<sup>‡‡</sup> Finalizing the WTO membership process for Russia, granting it "preferred nation" status as America's trading partner, and ratification and implementation of the "123 agreement" on peaceful nuclear cooperation would serve as a good beginning.



## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> See, e.g., my public debate with Vitaly Tsygichko, a leading military expert, in *Security Index*, 2007, Issue 2 (82), vol. 13, page 147-156.
- <sup>2</sup> See, e.g., *Nestrategicheskoe Yadernoe Oruzhie. Problemy Kontrolya I Sokrashcheniya. Centr po Izucheniyu Problem Razoruzheniya, Energetiki I Ekologii* (Moscow: MFTI, 2004).
- <sup>3</sup> Cf, e.g., Vadim Solovyov, “Reforma Ovoennaya Rbyavlena Bessrochnoy.” *Nezavisimoe Voennoe Obozrenie (NVO)* (January 26, 2007); Gen. Makhmut Gareev. “Novye Usloviya – Novaya Voennaya Doktrina,” *NVO* (February 2, 2007).
- <sup>4</sup> Cf., e.g., the many fairly strident writings and interviews on the subject by Gen. (Ret.) Leonid Ivashov. For a more serious analysis, see Gen. (Ret.) Pavel Zolotarev, “USA Rashiryayut Control Nad Rsoysiyskimi Yadernymi Obyektami,” *NVO* (March 4, 2005).
- <sup>5</sup> See, e.g., Remarks by Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov at the Brussels Forum-2009, convened by the German Marshall Fund of the United States. [www.mid.ru](http://www.mid.ru), document 488-31-03-2009.
- <sup>6</sup> Sergey Lavrov, *Vneshnyaya Politika Rossii I Novoe Kachestvo Geopoliticheskoy Situatsii*. [www.mid.ru](http://www.mid.ru) (Posted on December 29, 2008).
- <sup>7</sup> Sergei Tolstov, “Ukraina Mezhdru Krizisom I Vyborami,” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, April 20, 2009; James Sherr, “NATO Strengthens Ukraine and Itself,” *Zerkalo Nedeli* (April 12-18, 2008).
- <sup>8</sup> Sergey Markedonov, *Pro Gruziiyu s lyubov'yu*. [www.apn.ru](http://www.apn.ru) (Posted October 28, 2008). See also my article, “Russia in the Caucasus: Reversing the Tide,” *Brown Journal of World Affairs* (Spring/Summer 2009), pages 143-155.
- <sup>9</sup> Cf. Dmitri Trenin, “The Kosovo Casus,” *Pro et Contra*, 2006, Issue 5-6. On the implications of the Kosovo casus for Russia’s foreign policy, see Dmitri Medvedev’s interview with Russia Today TV (August 26, 2008), [www.president.kremlin.ru](http://www.president.kremlin.ru).
- <sup>10</sup> “President Dmitri Medvedev’s Remarks at the University of Helsinki” (April 20, 2009), [www.president.kremlin.ru](http://www.president.kremlin.ru)
- <sup>11</sup> *Kommersant* (September 24, 2008); [www.newsru.com/arch/world/29jan2009/yemenbases.html](http://www.newsru.com/arch/world/29jan2009/yemenbases.html).
- <sup>12</sup> Alexei Arbatov and Vladimir Dvorkin, editors, *Nuclear Weapons After the Cold War* (Moscow: Carnegie Moscow Center, R.Elinin Publishing House, 2008), pages 43-45.
- <sup>13</sup> C.f. “Round Table: Nuclear Arsenals in 25 Years,” *Security Index*, Vol. 1, 86 (Winter 2008/09), pages 69-74; for a highly skeptical view of the prospects for nuclear disarmament, and a vision of a future Russian nuclear posture, see: *Opasnost Yadernogo Razoruzheniya. Perspektivy Sozdaniya Novykh Rossiyskikh Yadernykh Sil* (A Report by the Institute for National Strategy, 2009); [www.apn.ru](http://www.apn.ru) Document 2009-03-31 INS.
- <sup>14</sup> Vassili Mikheyev et. al., in Arbatov and Dvorkin, *op.cit.*, pages 352-387.
- <sup>15</sup> Vitaly Naumkin et. al., in *Ibid*, pages 388-429.
- <sup>16</sup> President Putin’s annual address to the Federal Assembly, May 2006, [www.president.kremlin.ru](http://www.president.kremlin.ru).
- <sup>17</sup> See “The National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation to 2020,” approved by President Medvedev on May 13, 2009; <http://www.kremlin.ru/text/docs/2009/05/216229.shtml>.
- <sup>18</sup> President Medvedev’s made his proposal in Berlin on June 5, 2008, and in Helsinki on April 20, 2009; [www.president.kremlin.ru](http://www.president.kremlin.ru); Putin made his remarks at Davos in January 2009. Cf. <http://www.government.ru/content/rfgovernment/rfgovernmentchairman/chronicle/archive/2009/01/28/5825465.htm>.



# **US PERSPECTIVES ON THE GLOBAL ELIMINATION OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS**

*Barry Blechman, Alex Bollfrass, and Frank Valliere*

The United States was the first nation to build nuclear arms and is the only nation to have used such a weapon in warfare. It has relied on the threat of nuclear devastation as a central element in its national security policies for most of the sixty-plus years these weapons have existed, during which it issued explicit nuclear threats in several international crises. With the end of the Cold War in 1989, however, and particularly with growing recognition of the dangers posed by terrorist organizations after the September 11, 2001 attacks, many American citizens and the US government began to re-evaluate the benefits and risks of nuclear weapons. As a result, the US in recent years has downplayed both its rhetorical and policy attachment to issuing nuclear threats, sharply reduced the size of its nuclear arsenal and supporting infrastructure, and has begun to discuss seriously the possibilities of eliminating nuclear weapons completely or, at least, the necessary prerequisite of further dramatic reductions in the number and salience of these weapons. Indeed, there is great hope that the US could become a serious and leading proponent of a world-wide treaty to eliminate nuclear weapons from all nations by a date certain.

## **US MOTIVATIONS FOR ACQUIRING AND MODERNIZING NUCLEAR WEAPONS**

The US has acquired and maintained large nuclear forces for reasons associated both with military planning and with its political relations with other nations, friend and foe alike. Military motivations for investing in nuclear weapons tended to be more prominent earlier in the nuclear era and pertained to specific opponents and conflicts. Political motivations, however, have persisted through to the current period. Throughout the Cold War, nuclear weapons played a prominent role in US national security policies, not only vis-à-vis the Soviet Union, but with regard to US policies toward China and other nations in Asia. During this period, the US was motivated to develop and continually modernize its nuclear arsenal because of a belief that the threat of nuclear devastation served to encourage prudent behavior on the part of the great powers and deterred conventional conflicts among them.

The US was also concerned that, even with its allies, it would be unable to match the great size of the armed forces of the Soviet Union and China. In order to deter

conventional attacks on its own forces and those of its allies, the US maintained, as a central element in its security policy, the threat that it would initiate the use of nuclear weapons in a conflict that it might otherwise lose. US leaders also believed that third parties viewed the balance of nuclear forces as an important indicator of the relative strength and commitment of the superpowers, and thus it was essential to maintain nuclear forces second to none to avoid the political consequences of being seen as the weaker power. Finally, beginning in the 1960s, the US stressed the need to maintain a balance of nuclear capabilities with potential adversaries in order to “extend nuclear deterrence” to certain allies, preventing decisions on their part to develop nuclear weapons of their own. This final motivation gained added currency with the emergence of new nuclear powers in recent years and, with them, a renewed threat of accelerated proliferation.

### **Military/security motivations**

The United States was driven to develop nuclear weapons because of a deep concern that Hitler’s Germany was close to developing such a weapon in World War II. Moreover, the desire to end the war without suffering the massive American casualties that were expected to result from an invasion of the Japanese home islands prompted the first, and, so far, only, uses of nuclear weapons in warfare. Although we know now that the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were not the most important factors in Japan’s surrender, the US entered the nuclear age convinced that atomic bombs were usable as weapons of war and could be decisive.<sup>1</sup>

As the post-war euphoria of the late 1940s turned into the bitter acknowledgment of continuing challenges in Europe from the Soviet Union and in Asia from the new Communist government of China, the US, having rapidly demobilized the armed forces it had built up for World War II, began to rely on nuclear weapons to offset military threats it perceived from both countries. President Harry Truman embraced the nuclear instrument reluctantly, partially deterred by his self-awareness that he had authorized the use of the weapon against the Japanese and its consequences in human terms, and partially constrained by the very small size of the US arsenal in the early years. Truman resisted pressures from both military leaders and political figures to utilize nuclear weapons in the Korean War, for example.\* His successor, President Dwight Eisenhower, however, was

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\* Following General Douglas MacArthur’s numerous public repudiations of official presidential policies during the Korean War, advancing instead policies that called for the unrestricted use of American military power in Asia that would likely directly involve China in the war, President Truman relieved MacArthur of his command, stating, “A number of events have made it evident that General MacArthur did not agree with that policy. I have therefore considered it essential to relieve General MacArthur so that there would be no doubt or confusion as to the real purpose and aim of our policy... We do not want to widen the conflict. We will use every effort to prevent that

not nearly so reluctant and, encouraged by Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, made the use of nuclear weapons a central element of US foreign and security policies throughout his two terms in office. Eisenhower was motivated by a determination to restrain federal spending; he was unwilling to increase the defense budget sufficiently to match either Soviet or Chinese conventional armed forces, believing that such budgets could not be sustained.

The US deployed nuclear weapons at its bases in Asia early in the 1950s and made explicit nuclear threats on several occasions. The first was President Eisenhower's message to Chinese leaders, passed through India, that if the stalled negotiations to end the Korean War were not brought rapidly to a conclusion, the United States would "move decisively without inhibition in our use of weapons, and would no longer be responsible for confining hostilities to the Korean peninsula."<sup>2</sup> The negotiations and the war ended soon thereafter, but the importance of Eisenhower's threat is debatable. The Soviet leader, Josef Stalin, had died a few months prior to the close of the negotiations and his successors, seeking a respite in tensions with the West, may have brought pressure on China, then a close ally, to end the conflict prior to the threat being made.<sup>3</sup> When crises recurred between the US and China, over the Tachen Islands in 1954 and Quemoy/Matsu in 1957-58, Eisenhower again threatened the use of nuclear weapons, in the first instance rushing new weapons into the theater and making fairly explicit allusions to their possible use. These threats seemed to have clear effects on the Chinese leaders. When their Soviet ally stated bluntly that it would not risk nuclear war with the US to support China's position on the islands, China backed down. At the same time, however, Chairman Mao Tse Tung decided that China could not depend on the USSR and needed to acquire its own nuclear capabilities—a feat accomplished within a few years in 1964.<sup>4</sup>

Eisenhower did show nuclear restraint in Asia on one important occasion. When pressed by the Joint Chiefs of Staff under Chairman Arthur Radford to utilize atomic bombs to relieve the French forces besieged at Dien Bien Phu in Vietnam, Eisenhower demurred, stating, "You boys must be crazy. We can't use those awful things against Asians for a second time in less than ten years. My God."<sup>5</sup>

It was Europe, however, that was the focus of US nuclear strategy and the primary manifestation of the role Eisenhower and Dulles foresaw for nuclear weapons in support of national security policy. As early as 1947-48, Secretary of

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disaster. And in so doing, we know that we are following the great principles of peace, freedom, and justice." President Harry S. Truman, Radio Report to the American People on Korea and on U.S. Policy in the Far East (April 11, 1951), <http://www.trumanlibrary.org/publicpapers/index.php?pid=290&st=&st1=>; For a detailed account of the Truman-MacArthur controversy, see: John W. Spanier, *The Truman-MacArthur Controversy and the Korean War* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1959).

Defense James Forrestal, one of the leading proponents of the need for a firm stance against Soviet expansion in Europe, deployed US B-29 bombers (previously used to deliver the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki) to bases in England and Germany as warnings to the USSR that the US had means of resisting Soviet encroachments. The bombers were not carrying nuclear weapons, as the US had very few, if any, in its arsenal at the time, but they seemed to have bolstered the allies' morale, as well as making an impact on the Russians. This was the beginning, of course, of the US extended deterrence guarantee, the so-called "nuclear umbrella" that the US eventually placed over all the members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).<sup>6</sup>

The central role of nuclear weapons in US military strategy to counter Soviet expansion in Europe was outlined in an official US government document in 1953. The so-called "NSC 162/2" stated, "The major deterrent to aggression against Western Europe is the manifest determination of the United States to use its atomic capability and massive retaliatory striking power if the area is attacked."<sup>7</sup> This strategy was sealed at the NATO meeting on December 17, 1954 in Paris, when the allies decided explicitly not to match Soviet conventional armed strength. With 22 Soviet divisions in eastern Germany, 60 in East European satellite states and the western USSR, and another 93 elsewhere in the USSR, the task was far too daunting from both a manpower and budgetary point-of-view.<sup>8</sup> Instead, NATO adopted Secretary Dulles' doctrine of "massive retaliation," stating that if Soviet forces invaded and NATO was unable to defeat them conventionally, the alliance would make use of nuclear weapons to end the conflict. This doctrine envisioned the use of short-range, or tactical, weapons initially, but included the commitment to escalate the conflict as necessary, up to and including the possibility of a strategic nuclear exchange between the US and Soviet homelands.<sup>9</sup>

To make the doctrine credible, the US deployed many kinds of tactical weapons to Europe beginning in 1955, nearing 3000 nuclear weapons deployed in seven European states by the end of 1960.<sup>10</sup> Additionally, the US reorganized its ground forces to fight on "atomic battlefields" and built up its strategic forces. President John F. Kennedy continued this policy and even accelerated the nuclear build-up, at the same time adopting a more flexible strategy that put greater emphasis on keeping any conflict on the conventional level. For example, during the Berlin Crisis of 1958-59, the Eisenhower Administration seemed to relish the West's conventional inferiority, implementing Secretary Dulles' policy of "brinkmanship" and highlighting its determination to respond to any outbreak of war with "massive retaliation." As Eisenhower asserted, "...if resort to arms should become necessary, our troops in Berlin would be quickly overrun, and the

conflict would almost inevitably be global war. For this type of war our nuclear forces were more than adequate.”<sup>11</sup> During the 1961-62 Berlin Crisis, on the other hand, President Kennedy called up military reserve forces to bolster US conventional capabilities and indicated to his military planners the need to find conventional means to end the Soviet pressures on Berlin. In a televised speech announcing this call up and his request of “some \$1.8 billion...for the procurement of non-nuclear weapons, ammunition and equipment,” President Kennedy asserted, “We intend to have a wider choice than humiliation or all-out nuclear action.”<sup>12</sup>

The stalemate over Berlin was followed quickly by the Soviet gambit to emplace nuclear-armed missiles in Cuba and the ensuing crisis—the riskiest nuclear confrontation to have ever taken place—seemed to have sobered both sides. Although the US/NATO policy remained unchanged from the mid-1960s to the end of the Cold War, throughout this period American planners sought means of either countering quantitatively superior Soviet conventional forces with superior Western conventional military technology or controlling the Soviet advantage through arms control agreements. Additionally, the US continually modified its nuclear forces, seeking greater flexibility and means of containing a nuclear war, should one begin.<sup>13</sup>

The US/NATO willingness to stand by its first nuclear use policy persists to this day, now motivated primarily by the post-Cold War Russian emphasis on its tactical nuclear forces as substitutes for its now clearly inferior conventional military capabilities. Although, following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the US and Russia solemnly declared that they no longer considered each other to be enemies, each nation remains wary of the other. NATO’s expansion to include the former members of the Warsaw Pact, as well as some former parts of the Soviet Union, raised concerns in Russia, while NATO, and especially its new members, remain wary of their former Russian masters. Although relations are more cooperative and peaceful than during the Cold War, the potential remains for crises and confrontations, as seen in Georgia during the summer of 2008. As a result, the US retains some, if many fewer, tactical nuclear weapons in Europe in support of NATO, and Russia deploys large numbers of tactical nuclear weapons on its territory and maintains a doctrine that stresses their potential use in the event of war.<sup>14</sup>

During the contemporary period, the US has also flirted with a new security-related motivation for nuclear weapons. Greatly concerned about the possibility that a terrorist organization might acquire, or be given, nuclear weapons that it could use to attack US cities, the George W. Bush Administration attempted to

deter such actions in support of terrorist organizations by hostile governments. Hence, following North Korea's nuclear test in 2006, President Bush warned, "the transfer of nuclear weapons or material by North Korea to states or non-state entities would be considered a grave threat to the United States, and [the United States] would hold North Korea fully accountable of the consequences of such action."<sup>15</sup> Subsequently, National Security Advisor Stephen Hadley broadened the warning to other governments stating,

The United States has made clear for many years that it reserves the right to respond with overwhelming force to the use of weapons of mass destruction against the United States, our people, our forces and our friends and allies. Additionally, the United States will hold any state, terrorist group, or other non-state actor fully accountable for supporting or enabling terrorist efforts to obtain or use weapons of mass destruction, whether by facilitating, financing, or providing expertise or safe haven for such efforts."<sup>16</sup>

Although the threat of nuclear retaliation was not made explicitly in either statement, the words, "overwhelming force," are normally taken as an allusion to nuclear capabilities.

### **Political motivations**

The US strategic policy of extended deterrence and the resulting forward deployment of nuclear weapons in Europe and East Asia served political, as well as security, functions. In the 1940s and 1950s, the deployments were part of the many actions taken by the Truman, Eisenhower, and Kennedy administrations to "draw the line" in Europe. Its goal was to make it clear to the Soviet Union that although the West would not contest Soviet control of the countries it had occupied during World War II, the West would not permit the USSR to extend its influence into Western Europe and especially into the portions of Germany occupied by US, UK, and French forces; indeed, these actions signaled that the US and its allies were prepared to go to war, if necessary, to stop the Soviet advance. Moscow tested this determination on several occasions between 1947 and 1962, and the West responded each time with a variety of diplomatic and military actions, including changes in the disposition and alert status of nuclear forces to signal the ultimate danger of a crisis getting out of hand. Although these dramatic incidents ceased after 1962 (with the partial exception of a contained confrontation following the Soviet re-occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1968), nuclear policies and forces were believed by Western policymakers to play a continuing, positive role in stabilizing the European divide and providing



incentives to both sides to reach cooperative arrangements, such as arms control treaties, to reduce the risk of war.

Extended deterrence in Europe also helped to ensure cohesion within the NATO alliance, at least during most of the Cold War period. By placing US troops on the front-lines in Germany, by stating that if those forces were unsuccessful in stopping a Soviet invasion that NATO would utilize tactical nuclear weapons (and by making that threat credible through the deployment of weapons and development and rehearsal of procedures indicating that their use would be almost automatic), and by committing itself to continuing to escalate a nuclear war up to and including an all-out strategic exchange between the US and Soviet homelands, the United States made clear its willingness “to share the risk” of the confrontation with its European partners. Although the US and its European allies sometimes differed over the military requirements to keep the NATO deterrent viable, such as the debate over the deployment of theater-range missiles in the early 1980s, the physical placement of military capabilities (conventional and nuclear) in Europe, and adoption of the policies and procedures which governed their use, made the US security commitment credible in ways that a treaty alone, or even the most forceful statements by US presidents, never could.

US nuclear policies and force deployments strengthened NATO’s cohesion in more subtle ways as well, particularly among those nations who accepted nuclear weapons on their soil or dedicated some of their aircraft to deliver those weapons if the need arose. Officials of these states maintain that their nuclear roles permitted them to participate in NATO decision-making more fully and to have influence on those decisions beyond their relative weight in the alliance.<sup>†</sup> They were also assured a voice in NATO decision-making on war and peace issues that otherwise might have been reserved only for the largest West European powers. In the latter part of the Cold War, this decision-making role extended to NATO’s positions on arms control initiatives and negotiations.

In Asia, the political consequences of US nuclear doctrine and deployments were not so stark, but probably helped to stabilize regional relationships—at least during the 1950s. Repeated confrontations between the US and China over Korea and Taiwan, often with a nuclear tinge to them, probably had a sobering effect on Communist China’s initial appetite for immediate resolution of outstanding disputes through the use of force, if necessary. Following the

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<sup>†</sup> For instance, in Germany’s current coalition government, conservative-run ministries make the participation argument, while the center-left foreign minister has called for their unilateral removal. See, for example, “Yankee Bombs Go Home: Foreign Minister Wants US Nukes out of Germany,” *Spiegel Online* (April, 10, 2009) <http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/0,1518,618550,00.html>.

Korean War, the US deployed nuclear weapons to Korea and adopted a first use policy to offset North Korea's apparent superiority in conventional forces. Secretary Dulles' effort to replicate NATO's success in Europe by creating a Southeast Asia Treaty Organization was never effective. Moreover, nuclear weapons played no role in the Vietnam conflict and the US suffered a humiliating and costly defeat despite its vast nuclear arsenal. Indeed, following the fall of Saigon in 1975, then-Secretary of Defense James R. Schlesinger reminded Pyongyang of the US nuclear commitment: "If circumstances were to require the use of tactical nuclear weapons...I think that would be carefully considered," adding, "I do not think it would be wise to test (American) reactions."<sup>17</sup> Schlesinger made the statement to deter what was feared to be North Korean intent to test US resolve on the Peninsula, as a result of Washington's willingness to accept the fall of its ally in South Vietnam.

The US also extended its nuclear deterrent to Japan in the 1950s, making clear that if the US-Japan Mutual Security Treaty were challenged and Japan attacked, the US would utilize all means at its disposal to defend its ally.<sup>‡</sup> For most of the post-World War II period, these commitments were aimed at the Soviet Union, which disputed Japanese retention of the southern half of Sakhalin Island and some other island territories. After the Cold War, however, extended deterrence to Japan has gained importance as a means of offsetting increasing Chinese military capabilities. Unlike the situation in Europe, the Japanese have never fully reconciled with their World War II enemies and tensions between Japan and China, and Japan and Korea, have ebbed and flowed over issues stemming from the war. Now that both China and North Korea have nuclear weapons, in view of this continuing tension, many Japanese and American leaders believe that the US nuclear guarantee continues to be essential to keep Japan from developing nuclear weapons of its own (see below).

Throughout the nuclear age, most US leaders have also believed that the American nuclear posture serves an even more fundamental political purpose. Along with US economic strength, conventional military power, and the vitality of its culture and international political leadership, US nuclear forces are believed to contribute to the world-wide perception of the United States as a "superpower;" one of two superpowers during the Cold War, and now the only superpower.

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<sup>‡</sup> "In the event of an armed attack against these islands, the United States Government will consult at once with the Government of Japan and intends to take the necessary measures for the defense of the islands, and to do its utmost to secure the welfare of the islanders." Statement by the US Plenipotentiary, Secretary of State Christian Herter, Ambassador to Japan Douglas MacArthur, and Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs J. Graham Parsons. "Texts of U.S.-Japanese Treaty and Communique," *New York Times*, (January 20, 1960) page 4.

To maintain this position during the Cold War, the US continually modernized its strategic nuclear forces to ensure that they would be seen as at least equivalent to those of the Soviet Union—particularly in the capacity to withstand a first-strike and retaliate against the attacker. Many debates over US strategic weapons modernization, such as the so-called “window of vulnerability” in the 1970s, hinged on differing perceptions of what was required to maintain this parity of survivable forces.<sup>18</sup> According to US strategic doctrine, maintaining such parity was essential to avoid providing any incentive to the USSR to launch a first-strike during a crisis. However, fundamental political consequences were also believed to hinge on maintaining parity. Proponents of highly capable nuclear forces proclaimed that third nations viewed trends in the strategic balance of forces as indicators of the two superpowers’ resolve. If the US was seen to be declining, as during the Carter Administration, it encouraged greater aggressiveness on the part of hostile nations, not only the USSR, but countries like North Korea, and also caused allied or neutral nations to be less willing to take a stand in support of US interests.<sup>§</sup>

Since the end of the Cold War, elaborate calculations of survivable second strike capabilities have gone out of fashion, but most US leaders continue to believe that fundamental political benefits result from maintaining strategic nuclear forces at least equal to those of any other nation—in effect, Russia. Although several influential analysts urged the Obama Administration to make unilateral reductions in the US strategic arsenal, maintaining that the US had far too many weapons—more than were necessary to deter nuclear use—and that such a gesture would strengthen the US position with respect to proliferation issues, such moves were not undertaken during the administration’s early months, with the administration preferring to negotiate bilateral reductions with Russia.<sup>19</sup> The recent Congressional Commission on the US Strategic Posture endorsed this view explicitly, stating, “Substantial stockpile reductions would need to be done bilaterally with the Russians.”<sup>20</sup>

Some US leaders also believe that there is a political advantage in maintaining a significant lead in nuclear strength over other countries. The George W. Bush Administration, for example, in its 2001 Nuclear Posture Review, argued that a significant US lead “dissuaded” other states from even thinking about investing

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<sup>§</sup> Paul Nitze, then Chairman of the Committee on the Present Danger, arguing in favor of a renewed US nuclear expansion in 1980 stated, “[T]he danger that the Soviets might seek to exploit their temporary advantages in terms of military power cannot be dismissed. Crises may indeed arise a little sooner than they would otherwise have done. . . . But what is clear beyond doubt is that if the United States does not act along the lines proposed here, the kind of Soviet gains and threats to world peace that have arisen in the last five years will multiply inexorably and perhaps, in the end, irretrievably.” Paul H. Nitze, “Strategy in the Decade of the 1980s,” *Foreign Affairs*, 59 (Fall 1980), page 97.

the resources that would be needed to match US capabilities and thus prevented an arms race from developing.\*\*

Finally, there is a broad consensus among US leaders and nuclear strategists that by extending the US nuclear umbrella to other nations, the United States has greatly curtailed the number of nuclear powers in the world. Following the French and Chinese tests of nuclear weapons in the early 1960s, there was great concern that there would soon be a “cascade” of proliferation, as nuclear technology was spreading widely for civilian purposes, and the knowledge of how to convert such civilian expertise and materials to military applications was also proliferating. In Europe, the US sought to persuade its allies that there was no need to develop their own weapons by discussing a variety of means by which US nuclear forces might be “shared” by the allies. The most seriously discussed proposal was the so-called “Multilateral Force,” a ship equipped with nuclear-armed missiles that would be manned by military personnel from several NATO nations. In the end, this and related schemes appeared unwieldy and the alliance settled on the current system in which nuclear bombs are maintained in Europe under US control, but would be made available for delivery by the air forces of several allied nations if authorized by NATO.<sup>21</sup>

The US umbrella was also extended to Asia, as noted previously, particularly to persuade Japan not to develop nuclear weapons in response to China’s growing capabilities, but also to Australia, New Zealand, South Korea, and Taiwan. Indeed, in the early 1970s, it came to light that both the latter two nations were developing latent nuclear weapon capabilities. When the US made clear that continuation of these programs would mean loss of the US nuclear guarantee, the weapon programs were stopped immediately.<sup>22</sup> Japan’s advanced civilian nuclear capabilities and abundance of nuclear materials means that the possibility that it might develop a weapons capability of its own remains a serious concern to US decision-makers. The role that US nuclear capabilities and guarantees might play in preventing such a step is an important political motivation for maintaining a significant US nuclear arsenal.

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\*\* This idea was first alluded to in the Bush Administration’s 2001 Nuclear Posture Review: “The capacity of the infrastructure to upgrade existing weapon systems, surge production of weapons, or develop and field entirely new systems for the New Triad can discourage other countries from competing militarily with the United States.” The White House, *Nuclear Posture Review [Excerpts]* (January 8, 2002) page 14. <http://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/library/policy/dod/npr.htm>. Subsequent Bush doctrine reiterated this view: “It is time to reaffirm the essential role of American military strength. We must build and maintain our defenses beyond challenge. Our military’s highest priority is to defend the United States. To do so effectively, our military must dissuade future military competition.” The White House, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, (September 2002). <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/nsc/nss/2002/nss.pdf>. “We will work to dissuade potential adversaries from adopting threatening capabilities, methods, and ambitions, particularly by sustaining and developing our own key military advantages.” The White House, *The National Defense Strategy of the United States of America*, (March 2005). <http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Mar2005/d20050318nds1.pdf>.

The US also utilized vaguely promised nuclear guarantees to help persuade Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine to give up the nuclear weapons they had inherited when the Soviet Union collapsed, and to sign the NPT as non-nuclear weapon states. Although no formal commitment has been made to these states, then-Secretary of Defense William Perry asserted in 1995, the Ukraine, “can achieve its security interests through a vigorous role in the Partnership for Peace and through a strong bilateral security relationship with the United States – both of which exist now.”

Currently, a theory holds that if Iran develops nuclear weapons, a wave of proliferation might engulf the Middle East. Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Algeria are often mentioned as nations that might feel compelled to emulate an Iranian bomb. The US nuclear guarantee to NATO presumably would reassure Turkey, but there is speculation that to prevent proliferation in the region the US would have to extend its deterrent to additional nations. Whether such a step is possible or not—either because the presumed recipients would not like to have such close and public security ties to the US or because the US public might balk at a commitment to risk their own lives in defense of nations that are seen by many as foreign cultures that do not share American values, if not as enemies—remains to be seen.

## **NUCLEAR PLANS**

The priority role of nuclear weapons in US security policy during the Cold War led to a massive investment in nuclear weapon systems and the infrastructure necessary to maintain it. Contemporary doctrine foresees a more circumscribed role for these weapons and the posture has been cut back sharply as a result. Similarly, the infrastructure has been permitted to wither.

### **US posture during the Cold War**

“Only by the end of the 1950s, following fifteen years of nuclear weapon stockpiling and, most important, after the Soviet Union had developed similar weapons and delivery systems, did the concept of deterrence occupy center stage in American military and political strategy.”<sup>23</sup> Though the declared US nuclear posture has remained based on the theory of deterrence since the 1950s, the approach to deterring adversarial aggression has undergone many transformations, usually in response to a call for greater flexibility in how nuclear weapons are to be used. Furthermore, the reality of US nuclear planning has not always coincided with the declared deterrent posture.

In 1954, Secretary Dulles suggested, “The heart of the problem is how to deter attack. This, we believe, requires that a potential aggressor be left in no doubt that he would be certain to suffer damage outweighing any possible gains from aggression.”<sup>24</sup> The Eisenhower Administration’s so-called “New Look” policy, a way to balance the Soviet conventional superiority with the threat of “massive retaliation,” formed the beginning of a US strategy based on deterrence. The “New Look” policy threatened a major escalation in response to any Soviet aggression.

Where the Eisenhower Administration had threatened an escalation to nuclear use in response to any Soviet aggression, President Kennedy and Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara looked to provide greater flexibility and discrimination in nuclear targeting. Initially, Secretary McNamara called for a “counter-force” strategy, focusing the US nuclear arsenal on enemy forces, not cities. But with the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, the closest the Cold War came to turning hot, “the [counter-force] strategy had proven to be irrelevant,” and the declaratory policy shifted to a strategy of “assured destruction,” with American nuclear weapons focused predominantly on cities “adopted to warn of the dangers of nuclear war rather than to describe how a nuclear war should be fought if it had to be fought.”<sup>25</sup> Thus began a declaratory posture of maintaining a second-strike capability, the ability for nuclear retaliation should an adversary decide to make first-use of nuclear weapons. Maintaining a second-strike capability required an increase in the manufacture of nuclear weapons, as Secretary McNamara testified before the House Armed Services Committee in 1963, “Because since no force can be completely invulnerable...we must buy more than we otherwise would buy.”<sup>26</sup> But at the same time, as Soviet nuclear forces achieved parity with US nuclear forces, the Kennedy Administration chose not to impede Soviet realization of their own “assured destruction” capability, in hopes of achieving “mutual deterrence,” a nuclear stalemate in which neither side could risk the use of nuclear weapons.

With a rapid build-up of delivery vehicles in the late 1960s, the Soviet missile inventory had surpassed that of the United States by 1971.<sup>27</sup> During this period, interest grew in counteracting the missile threat through Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) systems. Yet there was also a growing realization that an ABM system would be costly, probably ineffective, and lead to increased production of offensive counter-measures, escalating the arms race without real military gains. In response to the continued build-up of strategic nuclear offensive and defensive forces, Washington and Moscow announced the commencement of “Strategic Arms Limitation Talks” (SALT I) in 1969.<sup>28</sup> Following two and a half years of negotiations, the first round of SALT concluded with President Nixon and

General Secretary Brezhnev signing the ABM Treaty, which included limiting the US and the Soviet Union to “two ABM deployment areas, so restricted and so located that they cannot provide a nationwide ABM defense or become the basis for developing one,” and an Interim Agreement on Strategic Offensive Arms, a five year agreement freezing the number of missile launchers, and committing the two sides to continue talks on limiting strategic offensive arms.<sup>29</sup> Praising the ABM Treaty as one “without precedent in the nuclear age; indeed, in all relevant modern history,” US Assistant for National Security Affairs Henry Kissinger stated, “We are compelled to coexist. We have an inescapable obligation to build jointly a structure for peace. Recognition of this reality is the beginning of wisdom for a sane and effective foreign policy today.”<sup>30</sup> Similarly, Minister of Defense Marshal Andrei A. Grechko and Chief of the General Staff General Viktor G. Kulikov noted the ABM Treaty’s significance in “preventing the emergence of a chain reaction of competition between offensive and defensive arms.”<sup>31</sup> By providing limitations on strategic arms and limiting defensive capabilities to ensure each side retained its retaliatory capability, the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks slowed the arms race between the US and the USSR and provided a base for greater stability and predictability in the relationship of the two superpowers.

But the Nixon Administration, too, would look to change the US approach to deterrence, complaining that “Mutual Assured Destruction” failed to provide sufficient flexibility in response options. President Nixon posited, “Should a President, in the event of a nuclear attack, be left with the single option of ordering the mass destruction of enemy civilians, in the face of certainty that it would be followed by the mass slaughter of Americans?”<sup>32</sup> In 1974, Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger outlined the Nixon Administration’s new approach to deterrence, focusing on maintaining “essential equivalence” in strategic forces, and a “flexibility of response” with a variety of limited, preplanned options available.<sup>33</sup> In planning for the availability of nuclear weapons in more limited roles than an all-out attack and “assured destruction” of enemy cities, including options to target military forces, the Nixon Administration claimed that the new US posture enhanced the deterrent ability of the US nuclear arsenal. The so-called “Schlesinger Doctrine” remained the basis of US nuclear planning for the next 25 years.

Regardless of the approach to deterrence, maintaining a second-strike capability played an important role in the declaratory policy of the Soviet Union and the United States throughout the Cold War and beyond. But despite the persistence of this declaratory posture, the reality is that US war-fighting plans were not always geared solely toward retaliation and deterrence. While US declaratory

policy has consistently focused on retaliatory nuclear use, official doctrine has implied the possibility of disarming “first-strike” capabilities. The Kennedy Administration’s initial “counter-force” strategy sought “to deter war by [the strategic retaliatory forces] capability to destroy the enemy’s war-making capabilities,” though many realized the implications of a first-strike in such a strategy.<sup>34</sup> The Nixon Administration’s “Schlesinger Doctrine” stated that the primary deterrent objective “does not preclude US use of nuclear weapons in response to conventional aggression.”<sup>35</sup> Additionally, the return of a counterforce option in the Nixon Administration’s “flexible” nuclear planning once again implied the possibility of a first-strike, necessary to carry out such a strategy. While the reality persisted that a disarming first-strike was highly improbable from the late 1950s onward, planning remained in place to ensure that should the situation change, US forces would be ready to take advantage. US administrations have also sought ways out of the deterrent relationship through defensive measures. Early on, the Nixon Administration considered the creation of an ABM system to counteract the growing Soviet missile threat, before realizing that the prohibitive costs and likely ineffectiveness made the ABM Treaty a better option. The Reagan Administration similarly sought a missile defense system, the Strategic Defense Initiative, which the USSR feared could have provided the US with a credible first-strike capability and an escape from the deterrent relationship of the Cold War.

### **The US posture in the post-Cold War world**

The end of the Cold War brought the beginning of dramatic reductions in the US and Soviet nuclear arsenals and improved relations between the two nations, if not immediate changes in nuclear policy. Since the early 1990s, the nuclear arsenals of both countries have decreased significantly. In September 1991, stating that the end of the Cold War brought with it “an unparalleled opportunity to change the nuclear posture of both the United States and the Soviet Union,” President George H. W. Bush called for deep reductions in tactical nuclear weapons (TNW), “the most fundamental change in nuclear forces in over 40 years.”<sup>36</sup> In October, Soviet President Gorbachev similarly pledged the reduction of Soviet TNWs, a pledge that was reasserted in January 1992 by the new Russian President Boris Yeltsin. The so-called Presidential Nuclear Initiatives (PNI), a series of unilateral actions undertaken by the two superpowers, “led to perhaps 17,000 TNWs being withdrawn from service, the deepest reductions in nuclear arsenals to date.”<sup>37</sup> In addition to limiting TNWs, President Bush also negotiated and signed the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaties (START) I and II. START I mandated each party to reduce and limit its deployed delivery vehicles to 1,600 and deployed warheads to 6,000. START II called for further reductions, but following years of being held up in the Russian Duma, never



entered into force. Still, through the negotiation of START I and the PNIs, President Bush helped achieve significant reductions in deployed nuclear weapons, both strategic and tactical.

The most recent change in US nuclear posture came with the Bush Administration's 2001 Nuclear Posture Review (NPR), which, again recognizing the need for greater flexibility in nuclear planning, called for "Nuclear attack options that vary in scale, scope, and purpose [to] complement other military capabilities."<sup>38</sup> To provide this greater flexibility, the Bush Administration proposed the creation of new nuclear weapons; in particular, earth-penetrating "bunker busters" that could reach "hard and deeply-buried targets." The initiative was rejected by Congress, as was a subsequent proposal to build a more reliable warhead that would not require explosive testing, to replace existing weapons as they wore out. The NPR also sought to reduce reliance on nuclear weapons in some scenarios by positing the possibility of prompt, long-range strikes with conventionally armed missiles. The administration sought to implement this new policy by placing conventionally armed missiles on US strategic submarines, but this initiative, too, was rejected by the Congress.

To support modernization of the nuclear arsenal, the NPR called for, "A revitalized defense infrastructure that will provide new capabilities in a timely fashion to meet emerging threats."<sup>39</sup> But this initiative also was never fully embraced, and infrastructure modernization has not approached the scope envisioned in the NPR. The NPR also called for reinvigorated development of ballistic missile defenses "to protect all 50 states, our deployed forces, and our friends and allies against ballistic missile attacks."<sup>40</sup> With this new posture, President Bush announced the US withdrawal from the ABM Treaty, stating, "...we are on the path to a fundamentally different relationship. The Cold War is long gone. Today we leave behind one of its last vestiges."<sup>41</sup> Russian responses varied, from the mild response of Russian President Putin, who, not surprised by the decision, called it, "mistaken," to the strong responses of Deputy Speaker of the Duma Vladimir Lukin, who called the decision, "worse than a crime," and Duma member Alexei Arbatov, who stated, "Russia extended its hand full-length to meet the United States in the spirit of cooperation and even mutual alliance. And yesterday and today, the United States has spat into that extended hand." US development of a defensive missile shield remained a primary US focus and primary Russian concern throughout the Bush presidency.

Despite domestic and international concerns raised by the Bush Administration's focus on the creation of new offensive nuclear weapons, defensive ABM systems, and the mistaken perception that the new US nuclear posture increased

the possibility of nuclear use by the US, the Bush nuclear posture brought coherence to the US declaratory posture and the reality of US nuclear planning. The 2001 NPR sought to narrow the role of nuclear weapons in US deterrent planning by integrating conventional weapons into the offensive deterrent and bringing a renewed focus on defensive capabilities. The idea that the US no longer views Russia as an adversary allowed for significant cuts in deployed nuclear weapons and resulted in the May 2002 signing of the “Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty,” limiting each side to between 1700-2200 deployed nuclear warheads. Similarly, attempts to integrate long range, conventional strike capabilities as a replacement for nuclear weapons in deterrence planning could justify a further decrease in the nuclear arsenal but, to date, Congress has refused to fund such projects.<sup>42</sup>

At the time this monograph went to press, the future direction of the US nuclear force was unknown. The Obama Administration is required by legislation to complete a review of the nuclear posture by the end of the year. It is likely that President Obama will continue the trend begun under President Bush, as he stated in April, “To put an end to Cold War thinking, we will reduce the role of nuclear weapons in our national security strategy, and urge others to do the same.”<sup>43</sup> But in that same speech, President Obama went on to say, “Make no mistake: As long as these weapons exist, the United States will maintain a safe, secure and effective arsenal to deter any adversary, and guarantee that defense to our allies.” If this is any indication of the upcoming policy decisions, nuclear weapons will likely continue to play a prominent, if not central, role in US strategic planning for the foreseeable future.

## **PROLIFERATION CONCERNS**

The US has expressed great concern about nuclear proliferation virtually from the beginning of the nuclear age. After a single and perhaps not-so-serious attempt to eliminate nuclear weapons in the 1940s, the US has reacted to each addition to the nuclear club individually, depending on its relationship with the new nuclear power. The few exceptions include the initiative to negotiate the NPT following China’s test of a nuclear device in 1964, establishment of the Nuclear Suppliers’ Group to constrain trade in nuclear-related exports after India’s misuse of reactors and special materials provided for civilian purposes by Canada and other nations in 1974, and efforts during the George W. Bush Administration to forge new types of informal multinational arrangements to constrain trade in nuclear-related items—the Proliferation Security Initiative and UNSC 1540. Generally, however, the US has tended to drag its feet when

confronted by international efforts to impose more far-ranging solutions to the proliferation issue.

### **Global nonproliferation initiatives**

On March 16, 1946, less than a year after the bombings of Nagasaki and Hiroshima and while the US was still the sole possessor of nuclear weapons, the US government published the first plan to address the prospect of nuclear proliferation, *The Report on the International Control of Atomic Energy*. Commonly known as the Acheson-Lilienthal Report, it advocated the creation of an International Atomic Development Authority to assume control over the most “dangerous” fuel cycle processes, i.e. uranium enrichment and reprocessing, and apply safeguards to them. Once the internationalized civilian energy infrastructure was operational, the plan asserted, the US would transfer its nuclear weapon components (fissile materials, laboratories, and warheads) to the international authority.

With several modifications that made the plan less attractive to the international community, President Truman’s special advisor Bernard Baruch presented the report to the United Nations Atomic Energy Commission on June 14, 1946. In his speech to the UN, Baruch emphasized that the United States, still the world’s only nuclear weapons power, would only stop warhead production and disarm once it was satisfied that the new internationalized fuel cycle controls had been implemented effectively, and when it was certain that the United States would not be threatened with biological or chemical weapons. The Baruch proposal could even be understood as suggesting that the US would need to be confident that the threat of warfare had been abolished before it would relinquish its nuclear weapons. In a more constructive addition, Baruch suggested that the UN Security Council should be the enforcing body for the nuclear ban, and that the permanent members of the Council should be stripped of their veto power when it came to these questions. The Baruch Plan was rejected by the Soviet Union and others as a disingenuous attempt by the US to institutionalize its nuclear arms monopoly.<sup>44</sup>

The next major global approach to stemming nuclear proliferation came two decades later in the form of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). The NPT’s procedural origin was a 1961 UN General Assembly resolution that called for the negotiation of a treaty that would bar the proliferation of weapons, as well as the control of those weapons and relevant knowledge about them. Initial attempts to enlist the Soviet Union in negotiations to implement the resolution were unsuccessful, but the US was not really enthusiastic either. After China tested a nuclear weapon in 1964, however,

President Lyndon Johnson established the Gilpatric Committee to examine alternative means of stemming proliferation. As previously noted, one idea that had been discussed for some time was to establish a multi-national nuclear force (MNF) within NATO. The arrangement was intended to persuade countries like Germany that it was not necessary for them to develop their own nuclear weapons, but in Soviet eyes, establishing the MNF conflicted with the principle of nonproliferation. In the end, the US decided against the MNF and the Soviet Union agreed to talks on a non-proliferation treaty.<sup>45</sup> A US-Soviet draft was subsequently presented to the Conference on Disarmament and the completed treaty was signed by the US on July 1, 1968. As one of five nuclear-weapon-states recognized by the NPT, the US committed itself “to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament, and on a treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control.”<sup>46</sup>

In order to coordinate observance and enforcement of the NPT’s Article III, which prohibits the transfer of nuclear equipment and materials for peaceful uses unless the transferred materials were safeguarded against diversion for military purposes, the signatory states with the potential to export such materials formed the Zangger Committee, also known as the NPT Exporters Committee, and sought to compel non-signatories to accept International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards before receiving relevant imports.<sup>††</sup> Following India’s 1974 nuclear detonation, France, which was not yet an NPT signatory, joined the US and other Zangger Committee members in establishing a more robust export control regime known as the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG). The NSG restricts both materials and technologies (fissile materials, reactors, and so forth) that are directly usable in the production of nuclear weapons, as well as so-called “dual-use items,” that have legitimate non-nuclear applications but can also be used for producing fissile materials or warheads.<sup>47</sup> Examples are certain types of aluminum tubes that have many innocent uses, but that also could be used to make centrifuges for enriching uranium.

The nuclear export regime was also strengthened in 1992 when the US led an effort to require so-called “full scope safeguards” before nuclear materials and equipment could be transferred to a country, meaning that not only the reactor for which the materials were intended needed to be safeguarded, but all nuclear facilities in the purchasing country had to have such safeguards.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>††</sup>“Each State Party to the Treaty undertakes not to provide: (a) source or special fissionable material, or (b) equipment or material especially designed or prepared for the processing, use, or production of special fissionable material, to any non-nuclear-weapon State for peaceful purposes, unless the source or special fissionable material shall be subject to the safeguards required by this article.” NPT, Article III, paragraph 2. *Ibid.*

Although the US played a key role in strengthening the non-proliferation regime for many years, Washington significantly weakened it in 2008 with a campaign to waive the prohibition on nuclear exports to states that had not signed the NPT for India. Though packaged as a nonproliferation initiative by US officials, it clearly reflected US perceptions that developing a strategic partnership with India, as well as certain commercial interests, were more important than the integrity of the nonproliferation regime. On September 6, 2008, following the United States' intense lobbying of fellow member-states, the Nuclear Suppliers' Group reluctantly exempted India from its requirement that recipient states must have their entire nuclear complex safeguarded.<sup>49</sup> While both governments claimed the agreement would bring India into the "nonproliferation mainstream," it allowed favorable conditions in the nuclear trade with a country that had developed a nuclear arsenal outside the NPT, much to the consternation of countries that had remained within the NPT framework and therefore foregone developing weapons. To other NSG members, it was peculiar that one of only three states that never signed the NPT and, indeed, whose misuse of imported civilian nuclear materials for a nuclear test had inspired the export group's founding, would be selected for such an exemption. Pakistan and Israel, the two other nuclear, yet non-signatory states to the NPT, have continued to push for a "criteria-based approach" to determining a state's eligibility to engage in nuclear trade, hoping that they might be in line to receive a similar deal.<sup>50</sup>

The US, like all the other nuclear weapon states, has paid greater lip-service than serious attention to the NPT's Article VI commitment to disarmament. The carefully hedged formulation of the Article has been interpreted by the US, as by the other nuclear weapon states, as a mandate for negotiations toward arms reductions, rather than as a mandate to act seriously and promptly to eliminate nuclear weapons. The nuclear weapon states also see the link stated in the Article between nuclear disarmament and "general and complete disarmament" as an acknowledgement that radical changes in the international environment would be necessary before it would become possible to eliminate nuclear weapons.

The NPT includes a provision requiring periodic reviews of the Treaty with the possibility that it would be permitted to expire after 25 years, or in 1995. The United States lobbied heavily and successfully for the indefinite extension of the Treaty during that year's review conference. To secure the consent of the non-weapon states displeased by the slow progress that had been made toward disarmament, the US and the other weapon states made a series of commitments, including completion of a comprehensive test ban treaty (CTBT) and a treaty to cut-off the production of fissile materials, as well as further reductions in the size

of nuclear arsenals. At the 2000 Review Conference, under President Clinton, the United States and the other weapon states agreed to 13 “practical steps” toward implementing Article VI, which address these three issues more specifically, and added retention of the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, the de-alerting of nuclear forces, the beginning of negotiations for complete disarmament, and declarations of excess fissile materials, among other measures. However, two years later the Bush Administration indicated that the US no longer supported the 13 steps.<sup>51</sup> US refusal to follow through on this agreement was a major contributing factor to the 2005 Review Conference’s acrimonious failure; the conference was unable to agree on any joint statement. Instead, the “Final Document” essentially said the NPT signatories had met.<sup>52</sup>

Generally speaking, the Bush Administration preferred greater flexibility through informal arrangements among like-minded states than formal treaties. Throughout the president’s two terms, the administration was inclined to respond to problems by assembling informal coalitions to work specific issues. On the nuclear front, this inclination manifested itself through the Proliferation Security Initiative and the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism. Both initiatives were part of an overarching drive to “enhance the capabilities of our military, intelligence, technical, and law enforcement communities to prevent the movement of WMD materials, technology, and expertise to hostile states and terrorist organizations.”<sup>53</sup>

The 2003 Proliferation Security Initiative is “an activity, not an organization,” which aims to enhance cooperation among states to interdict the movement of materials related to weapons of mass destruction (WMD) across international borders, particularly shipping routes.<sup>54</sup> The Initiative has conducted several dozen exercises with partner nations and, according to US officials, has successfully interdicted a number of shipments related to WMD or their delivery systems.<sup>\*\*</sup>

Born in 2005 under joint US-Russian chairmanship, the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism aims to “prevent the acquisition, transport, or use by terrorists of nuclear materials and radioactive substances or improvised explosive devices using such materials, as well as hostile actions against nuclear facilities.” This goal is to be accomplished by cooperative capacity-building in other states and assist in the implementation of UNSCR 1540. Introduced by the United

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<sup>\*\*</sup> Robert G. Joseph, “Broadening and Deepening Our Proliferation Security Initiative Cooperation,” Warsaw Poland (June 23, 2006). [http://poland.usembassy.gov/poland/joseph\\_remarks.html](http://poland.usembassy.gov/poland/joseph_remarks.html). The PSI is credited with the seizure of the ship, *BBC China*, which was carrying nuclear materials from Pakistan to Libya, thus revealing both Libya’s nuclear program and the AQ Khan nuclear smuggling operation.

States, the Resolution requires all states to enact anti-proliferation measures to secure all relevant materials. For those states unable to fulfill their obligations, the US has offered assistance to build that capacity.<sup>55</sup>

President Obama seems to prefer a return to the more formal treaty route and has suggested turning “efforts such as the Proliferation Security Initiative and the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism into durable international institutions,” a process he plans to initiate by hosting a global summit.<sup>56</sup>

### **Responses to individual proliferators**

As the first nuclear-armed nation, the United States reacted to those that followed based on the threat level that US policymakers believed the proliferator posed to US interests. The Soviet Union’s first detonation in 1948 yielded a nuclear arms race in which both sides attempted to out-produce one another with massive increases in nuclear arsenals. After the Cuban Missile Crisis, diplomatic means were sought to mutually constrain capabilities and the US stockpile steadily declined after its 1966 peak.<sup>57</sup> The next major nuclear breakthroughs by potential adversaries were met by the establishment and strengthening of the global non-proliferation regime. After US intelligence was surprised by China’s sooner-than-expected development of a nuclear weapon, the United States prioritized the pursuit of a nonproliferation ban with universal reach, as described previously. US defense planners also announced the deployment of a missile defense system, aimed at neutralizing China’s small ballistic missile force.<sup>58</sup> After India’s first explosion in 1974, the US sought to develop curbs on trade in nuclear materials and supporting equipment so as to prevent countries from diverting civilian nuclear materials into weapon programs.

Allied countries’ weapons programs have provoked less concern in the US government, though responses have ranged from complicity to reluctant acceptance to vigorous opposition. The US was fully complicit in the United Kingdom’s development of an arsenal, which has never been fully autonomous from the US despite British insistence on calling it an “independent deterrent.” British scientists participated in the Manhattan Project and its current nuclear-armed submarine fleet depends on US provision of Trident missiles. The French weapons project was largely undertaken in an effort to gain independence from the United States, both symbolically and operationally. The French deterrent assumed a key role in the unfolding acrimonious relationship between De Gaulle’s France and the United States, even though the United States was more concerned about the broader political symbolism of the French nuclear force than proliferation itself. Indeed, the US even offered its NATO ally the nuclear-capable Polaris missiles as a way to mend the relationship at the time, and

eventually helped the French to develop the technology for multiple independently targetable reentry vehicles.<sup>59</sup>

France, in turn, provided Israel with the foundation of its nuclear capability. The United States was kept in the dark by the Israelis about their intentions, but formed its Middle East policy on the assumption that Israel was at the very least capable of quickly assembling a nuclear weapon beginning in 1970.<sup>60</sup> Presented with a covert *fait accompli*, however, the United States did not react in any significant way, even though it occurred after negotiation and implementation of the NPT, which Israel has not signed to this day. The US posture vis-à-vis the Israeli bomb was worked out in secret discussions between President Richard Nixon and Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir in 1969 and has more or less remained in place ever since.<sup>61</sup> Many suspect that the Israelis even tested a nuclear bomb in the atmosphere with the help of South Africa in 1979 and that the US helped to cover up the incident.

Despite its displeasure with both the Indian and Pakistani nuclear programs, the US deliberately avoided making a public issue of them for years, and exerted some private pressure to keep the capability ambiguous, for instance by lobbying against further tests after India's 1974 "peaceful" nuclear explosion.<sup>62</sup> The initial impulse among US officials was a lead-by-example unilateral trade restriction. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger instead convened the founding meeting of what was to become the Nuclear Suppliers Group in April 1975 in order to prevent other countries from filling the supply gap.<sup>63</sup> Congress also enacted legislation to require a US vote against World Bank assistance for India, but no efforts were made to enlist other countries to vote similarly.<sup>64</sup>

In Pakistan, the development of nuclear weapons beginning in the late 1970s made an uncomfortable fit for US policy, as the country was home to several US facilities used to monitor military activities in the Soviet Union and became an essential conduit for US support to the Mujaheddin opposing the Soviet Union's occupation of neighboring Afghanistan during the 1980s. As a result, the US found ways around the automatic cut-off of military and financial assistance that was required by law. For example, beginning in 1982, "Congress created eight Presidential waiver authorities exclusively on Pakistan's behalf, and five of these were exercised." Later on, the Pakistani program had become so visible that the country could no longer be certified not to possess nuclear weapons, but by that time US restraint had allowed the creation of "a fairly unimpeded Pakistani weapons program that led to nuclear tests in 1998."<sup>65</sup> The Carter Administration's National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski made it clear that this was fully intended: "Our national security policy toward Pakistan cannot



be dictated by our non-proliferation policy.”<sup>66</sup> The harsh sanctions imposed on India and Pakistan after the 1998 tests were also whittled away with waivers and changes within a matter of months. Even revelation of A.Q. Khan’s nuclear black market activities did not produce a substantive response by the United States, in large part due to the need for Pakistan’s support for US and NATO forces in Afghanistan.

On the other hand, South Africa’s covert development of a small arsenal became a priority in US relations with that country. This was in part by design, given that the arsenal’s *raison d’être* was to attract the attention of the United States and Great Britain during a crisis. A contributing factor was the lack of information on the true capabilities of the South Africans, in particular the controversy over the possible Israeli – South African nuclear test in the late 1970s. As the signals became clearer, however, the United States devoted considerable high-level resources to tempering the apartheid regime’s nuclear ambitions. The most notable instance was the Soviet Union’s revelation of South Africa’s test preparations in 1977, which prompted cooperation among the two Cold War rivals to pressure South Africa to refrain. Given US discomfort with the domestic political arrangements of the proliferator, the South African case again shows the US habit of coming down harder on proliferators that it finds distasteful or threatening.

However, US tolerance for allied proliferation also has had its limits. South Korea and Taiwan started on the path of developing nuclear weapons capabilities in the 1970s, but were threatened with the withdrawal of military protection if they continued. Indeed, Taiwan attempted to create a weapons capability twice, once in the late 1970s and then again a decade later. The United States forced Taiwan to accept verification procedures and asked for the return of separated plutonium from US-origin fuels. The US was responsible for ending Taiwan’s drive for a reprocessing capability on both occasions.<sup>67</sup> A similar effort by South Korea was stopped by US pressure on France not to supply reprocessing technology. The US government also strongly pressured its East Asian ally to sign the NPT, which it did in 1975, even though South Korea’s clandestine activities continued for several years.<sup>68</sup> In both these cases, the strong US response was probably motivated by concern that the programs would provoke China and destabilize East Asia.

In the cases of states that are non-compliant with their non-proliferation obligations, with which the US already has a hostile relationship, the US has taken hawkish positions to ensure compliance. The most extreme expression of this has been the US overthrow of the Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq, ostensibly

because of that government's pursuit of weapons of mass destruction. The United States also led the so-far unsuccessful international effort against Iran's violations of its NPT safeguards. With the 2002 revelation of Iran's clandestine uranium enrichment, the United States has attempted to ensure Iranian compliance and, more broadly, tried to prevent Iran from acquiring a weapon capability. Toward this end, the US has pushed in the UN Security Council for increasingly harsh sanctions but, until 2009, refused to participate directly in European diplomatic efforts to gain Iranian compliance through a package of economic and political incentives. Many observers believe that the US refusal to negotiate directly with Iran, as well as its hostility to the government itself and military presence in the region, has made negotiations much more difficult.<sup>69</sup>

The US has also led the effort to stop the North Korean weapons program. Of course, North Korea's primary motivation for breaking out of the NPT and acquiring nuclear weapons is assumed to be to deter a US attack. The US successfully negotiated a freeze of North Korea's nuclear program bilaterally in 1994, the so-called "Agreed Framework," bringing the first nuclear crisis between the US and North Korea to an end. When the Bush Administration terminated the Agreement as a result of its discovery of a covert North Korean uranium enrichment program in 2002, the North Koreans resumed building plutonium-based weapons and eventually tested one in 2006. After first refusing to negotiate with Pyongyang, the United States organized the so-called "Six Party Talks" to resolve the situation. These talks resulted in a North Korean commitment to dismantle its nuclear weapons and production complex, but the agreement has yet to be implemented and, at the time this paper was written, North Korea had just conducted its second nuclear test and was threatening to resume production of plutonium.<sup>70</sup>

As the only country to have initiated a war chiefly on counter-proliferation grounds, it would seem that US concerns about nuclear proliferation are sincere.<sup>§§</sup> US reactions to individual proliferators, however, show that although US administrations are willing to devote resources and high-level attention to the problem, they often will subsume misgivings about the spread of nuclear weapons to other significant and competing geopolitical interests. Still, when it decides to promote a universal, rule-based solution to the problem—as was the case with the NPT and the subsequent Nuclear Suppliers Group—the United

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<sup>§§</sup> The proliferation case for the war was made by then Secretary of State Colin Powell in a presentation to the UN Security Council on February 6<sup>th</sup>, 2003. In addition to concerns about alleged biological and chemical weapons, he identified a nuclear *casus belli*: "We have no indication that Saddam Hussein has ever abandoned his nuclear weapons program. On the contrary, we have more than a decade of proof that he remains determined to acquire nuclear weapons." Colin L. Powell, "Remarks to the United Nations Security Council" (February 5, 2003). <http://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/library/news/iraq/2003/iraq-030205-powell-un-17300pf.htm>.

States takes the process seriously and works to advance its interests through it. If a US administration agreed to a disarmament agreement, it could be expected behave in the same way.

## US DISARMAMENT DIPLOMACY

Early in its first term, the Reagan Administration's public discourse on expanding the US nuclear arsenal and fighting protracted nuclear wars led to a public backlash that found expression in the "nuclear freeze movement." The movement gained significant domestic and international support and had important effects on the president's policy formation, particularly when it proved to be a potent political force in the 1982 mid-term elections. In that year, President Reagan publicly expressed his own abhorrence for nuclear weapons, stating, "a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought."<sup>71</sup> He reiterated this sentiment many times over the following years, including in his 1984 State of the Union address, in which he stated, "The only value in our two nations possessing nuclear weapons is to make sure they will never be used. But then would it not be better to do away with them entirely?"<sup>72</sup>

However, discussing the possibility of disarmament was only half of the Reagan Administration's approach to ending the threat of nuclear war. In a televised speech on March 23, 1983, President Reagan introduced his idea for a defensive approach to countering the nuclear threat, the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), calling upon the American scientific community "to give us the means of rendering these nuclear weapons impotent and obsolete" through the creation of a missile defense shield to counter incoming missiles.<sup>73</sup> But the Soviets feared a US missile defense system would upset the deterrent balance, and though negotiations between the two sides led to agreement to ban an entire class of intermediate-range missiles, President Reagan's and General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev's talks on disarmament were unable to move beyond the two leaders' general agreement on the desirability of the goal.

As the enmities of the Cold War faded later in the 1980s, the United States and the Soviet Union were able to quickly reach agreement on deeper reductions in their long-range strategic forces in the START Treaty, and, once the Soviet Union fell in 1991, President George H.W. Bush and Russian President Boris Yeltsin were able to agree to unilaterally remove nuclear weapons from naval vessels and make other reductions in shorter range weapons.<sup>74</sup>

During the Clinton years, US-Russia progress halted and the United States seemed to focus more on multilateral forums. From 1993-1996, for example, the

United States assumed a leadership role in the successful negotiation of a comprehensive test ban at the Conference on Disarmament. This accomplishment was a crucial contributor to the 1995 agreement to extend the NPT indefinitely. Subsequently, however, the Senate declined to provide its consent to ratification. Most observers believe that political factors, rather than the merits of the treaty, determined the Senate's vote. Opponents of the treaty argued that the US needed to maintain its option to test in order to retain confidence in its stockpile and that it was impossible to verify (let alone enforce) compliance with the test ban. Subsequent scientific investigations into these objections have rejected the validity of these concerns to the satisfaction of mainstream observers, even if a core of treaty opponents remains unconvinced.<sup>75</sup> President Obama has promised to "immediately and aggressively pursue US ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty," and has appointed Vice President Biden to oversee the task.<sup>76</sup>

President Obama also has promised to "seek a new treaty that verifiably ends the production of fissile materials intended for use in state nuclear weapons."<sup>77</sup> Limits on the production of fissile material for weapons purposes have long been sought by the United States. In his "Atoms for Peace" speech to the UN in 1953, President Eisenhower stated, "The United States would seek more than the mere reduction or elimination of atomic materials for military purposes."<sup>78</sup> A US-drafted resolution passed by the UN General Assembly in 1957 called on the Conference on Disarmament (CD) to pursue a disarmament agreement providing for "the cessation of the production of fissionable materials for weapons purposes..."<sup>79</sup> In 1964, President Lyndon Johnson renewed the call for an end to fissile material production in his State of the Union Address, stating, "Even in the absence of agreement, we must not stockpile arms beyond our needs..."<sup>80</sup> Later that year, President Johnson followed through on this call with a unilateral cut in US production of fissile materials for weapon purposes. While unilateral moves over the next three decades limited production of fissile materials for weapon purposes, the US push for an international agreement banning production faded.

In 1993, President Clinton renewed the call for negotiations of a Fissile Materials Cut-off Treaty (FMCT) in an address to the UN General Assembly, leading to a UN Resolution that recommended "a non-discriminatory, multilateral and internationally and effectively verifiable treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices."<sup>81</sup> In 1996, President Clinton again called on the CD to negotiate a freeze on fissile materials production, stating it "should take up this challenge immediately." The CD established a committee to begin discussions in 1998, but the talks quickly deadlocked, as China linked the FMCT discussions to limits on military uses of space.<sup>82</sup> In 2006, the Bush Administration presented a draft FMCT to the CD,

calling for an end to the production of “fissile material for use in nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices.”<sup>83</sup> But the proposal was lacking, as its scope was limited to future production, did not require ratification by key states with unsafeguarded enrichment and reprocessing plants, such as Israel, India, and Pakistan to enter into force, and it contained no provisions for verification.<sup>84</sup> This reflected the Bush Administration’s stance that verification was impossible, a belief the Obama Administration does not share.

## **MOVING TO ZERO**

Concerns about proliferation and nuclear terrorism have prompted renewed unofficial, bipartisan, mainstream calls for the elimination of nuclear weapons. For the first time, senior statesmen in the United States, the UK, Russia, China, and India have talked seriously about the need to eliminate all nuclear weapons, from all nations. The trend began with two *Wall Street Journal* op-eds in 2007 and 2008 by former secretaries of state George Schultz and Henry Kissinger, former secretary of defense William Perry, and former senator Sam Nunn. In the articles, these respected voices on national security issues called on the US to provide leadership in reversing the global dependence on nuclear weapons and ultimately moving the world toward the elimination of nuclear weapons, calling this a “bold initiative consistent with America’s moral heritage.” Although the overall tone of the articles suggested that these four statesmen believe eliminating nuclear weapons to be a realistic goal, as a practical matter they argue that attention should be paid first to measures that could be implemented in the near-term, establishing “paving stones” on the “road to zero.”<sup>85</sup>

Esteemed foreign policy experts in other countries have echoed these path-breaking calls for eliminating nuclear weapons. In the UK, for example, former foreign ministers Douglas Hurd, Malcolm Rifkind, and David Owen, and former secretary of state for defense and secretary general of NATO George Robertson wrote in the *London Times*, “The ultimate aspiration should be to have a world free of nuclear weapons. It will take time, but with political will and improvements in monitoring, the goal is achievable.”<sup>86</sup> In Germany, former chancellor Helmut Schmidt, former president Richard von Weizsäcker, former foreign minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher, and former Socialist Party leader Egon Bahr wrote a parallel piece.<sup>87</sup> India’s venerable grand master of national security strategy, K. Subrahmanyam, has written similarly, “India should attempt to regain its earlier reputation as a champion of a nuclear weapon free world.”<sup>88</sup> Finally, in Paris in December 2008, more than 100 leaders from 23 countries came together under the banner of “Global Zero” to kick off a world-wide campaign to

persuade the governments of the nuclear weapon states to negotiate a treaty to eliminate nuclear weapons by a date certain.<sup>89</sup>

Many governments have also expressed their desire to attain the “goal” of eliminating nuclear weapons, or have discussed the “vision” of a nuclear-free world. Russian Prime Minister Putin, for example, has said, “I believe it is now quite possible to liberate humanity from nuclear weapons...”<sup>90</sup> Similarly, China has stated that it, “stands for the comprehensive prohibition and complete elimination of nuclear weapons.”<sup>91</sup>

US leaders have been equally vocal on the desirability of a nuclear-free world, which became a conspicuous point of agreement during the 2008 presidential campaign. Candidate Barack Obama stated, “A world without nuclear weapons is profoundly in America’s interest and the world’s interest. It is our responsibility to make the commitment, and to do the hard work to make this vision a reality. That’s what I’ve done as a Senator and a candidate, and that’s what I’ll do as President.”<sup>92</sup> Interestingly, his conservative Republican opponent, Senator John McCain, made a similar statement, “A quarter of a century ago, President Ronald Reagan declared, ‘our dream is to see the day when nuclear weapons will be banished from the face of the Earth.’ That is my dream, too.”<sup>93</sup>

On his first transatlantic trip, President Obama set out his nuclear agenda, identifying as its centerpiece “America’s commitment to seek the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons,” though with the caveat that it, “will not be reached quickly – perhaps not in my lifetime.” He outlined his view of how the goal could be achieved, beginning with the pursuit of CTBT ratification, the negotiation of a fissile materials cut-off treaty, a “new framework for civil nuclear cooperation, including an international fuel bank,” a reduction of, “the role of nuclear weapons in our national security strategy,” and a “legally binding and sufficiently bold” strategic arms reductions treaty with Russia. These reductions would then “set the stage for further cuts” that would “include all nuclear weapons states.”<sup>94</sup>

Whether US-Russian strategic reductions and the pursuit of CTBT ratification and a fissile materials treaty will translate into tangible movement toward eliminating nuclear weapons as envisioned by the president remains to be seen and will depend on how rapidly progress might be made toward these near-term steps and on broader trends in international relationships. It is evident that the United States will have to take the lead if progress is to be made. Together, the US and Russia own roughly 95 percent of the world’s nuclear arsenal, having perhaps ten thousand weapons each, including inactive warheads, while no other

nation is believed to have more than a few hundred.<sup>95</sup> Each of the smaller powers, with some justification, point to the need for the US and Russia to make further reductions in their weapon stocks before multinational negotiations for eliminating nuclear weapons could even be considered.<sup>96</sup> Moreover, although Prime Minister Putin has expressed support for the goal of zero weapons, as noted above, in recent years, Russian military doctrine has placed new emphasis on these weapons. Facing sharp deterioration in the quality of its conventional military forces, Russia has taken a page from NATO's book and ended the Soviet Union's long-standing "no-first nuclear use" policy. Although this policy was never reflected in Soviet war plans or equipment, and despite the slow pace of Russian modernization of its nuclear forces, the doctrinal change suggests that while further reductions in Russian forces are possible, Moscow will be reluctant to move seriously into a negotiation aimed at eliminating all nuclear weapons until outstanding issues between it and the West are resolved.<sup>97</sup> However, the surprising joint statement by presidents Obama and Medvedev in April 2009, announcing that they had "committed our two countries to achieving a nuclear free world," is an encouraging sign of the potential for progress in that direction.<sup>98</sup>

Writing in the Obama Administration's earliest days, it is difficult to predict how seriously the president's rhetorical support for eliminating nuclear weapons will be taken. It is certainly good politics—domestic and international—to support zero weapons as a goal or vision; actually seeking to begin negotiations toward that end is something else. The administration would certainly be split on such a political initiative internally. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, for example, a hold-over from the Bush Administration, has indicated he doesn't believe the goal to be a realistic policy option, stating, "... the power of nuclear weapons and their strategic impact is a genie that cannot be put back in the bottle, at least for a very long time. While we have a long-term goal of abolishing nuclear weapons once and for all, given the world in which we live, we have to be realistic about that proposition."<sup>99</sup> Secretary of State Hillary Clinton reaffirmed the Obama Administration's nuclear elimination goal during her nomination hearing before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, but key appointments at Defense, State, and the National Security Council have tended to favor incremental approaches to arms reductions in their writings and previous government service.<sup>\*\*\*</sup>

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\*\*\* "I take to heart what the chairman said about trying to reduce our numbers even lower. This incoming president, like all presidents, has been committed to the end of nuclear weapons, as long as we can be assured that we have adequate deterrents and that we are protected going forward. So we're going to enter it with that frame of mind, which is quite a change." Hillary Rodham Clinton, "Confirmation Hearing," (January 13, 2009). [http://www.cfr.org/publication/18225/transcript\\_of\\_hillary\\_clintons\\_confirmation\\_hearing.html](http://www.cfr.org/publication/18225/transcript_of_hillary_clintons_confirmation_hearing.html)

The issue will probably be discussed in the context of the “Nuclear Posture Review,” which the administration is required by legislation to submit in December, 2009. Proponents of a more visionary approach will not be helped by the Congressional Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States, which the same legislation also established. In its final report, and despite the fact that its chairman is former Secretary of Defense William Perry, one of the four senior statesmen who kicked off the new attention to nuclear elimination, the Commission stated that, “The conditions that might make the elimination of nuclear weapons possible are not present today and establishing such conditions would require a fundamental transformation of the world political order.”<sup>100</sup> This phrase may be interpreted to mean that the current international system would have to morph into some sort of world government before nuclear weapons could be eliminated, meaning that the “vision of a nuclear-free world,” will always remain just that, a “vision.”

In all likelihood, the Obama Administration will continue to pay rhetorical obeisance to the goal of nuclear elimination, if for no other reason than to help reduce problems at the NPT Review Conference to be held in June 2010, but will focus on four tangible actions:

- Attempting to persuade Iran to halt its nuclear weapons program short of an overt capability;
- Attempting to cajole North Korea into resuming progress toward fulfillment of its commitment to dismantle its nuclear weapons and supporting infrastructure;
- Negotiating a new, verifiable agreement with Russia for deeper reductions in the two nations’ nuclear arsenals, perhaps broadening the limits from their past focus on so-called “strategic” or long-range weapons to encapsulate shorter range weapons, as well as reserve warheads; and
- Seeking ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty by the US Senate and, if successful, persuading other key states, especially China, India, Israel, and Pakistan to follow suit.

The first three items on this agenda, of course, are interlinked with a broader range of issues between the United States and the government in question. One would be hard-pressed to predict success in all three. The fourth depends largely on the ebb and flow of politics in the US, for example, whether Republicans will see it in their interest to present a united front against the president as a matter of principal. Nonetheless, should President Obama indeed live up to his reputation of deftly achieving difficult goals and manages to achieve most of the short-term



agenda above, the possibility of a far-reaching initiative to start multinational discussions about the elimination of nuclear weapons could be a distinct possibility in the president's second term.

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