



BEYOND NUCLEAR NON-PROLIFERATION

NEWSLETTER FOR STRENGTHENING AWARENESS OF NUCLEAR ABOLITION WITH DECEMBER 2012 ARTICLES

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In-Depth Reports

Rate of U.S., Russian Nuclear Disarmament 'Slowing'



WASHINGTON - Although the United States and Russia have massively reduced their collective number of nuclear weapons since the heyday of the Cold War, the rate of that reduction is slowing, the Federation of American Scientists (FAS) warned on December 17. Further, these two countries alone continue to account for more than 90 percent of the world's total nuclear arsenal, 15 times the rest of the seven nuclear weapon states combined. "The pace of reducing nuclear forces appears to be slowing compared with the past two decades," Hans M. Kristensen, director of the FAS Nuclear Information Project, said. "Both the United States and Russia appear to be more cautious about reducing further, placing more emphasis on 'hedging' and reconstitution of reduced nuclear forces, and both are investing enormous sums of money in modernising their nuclear forces over the next decade." ➤ Pages 2-3

The Frightening Scenario of the Nuclear War



NORTHAMPTON, U.S. - Soon after President Barack Obama was elected in 2008, hundreds of leaders of the global medical community wrote an open letter to him, and to newly elected Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, urging them to make the abolition of nuclear weapons their highest priority: "You face many urgent crises at this difficult moment, but they all pale in comparison to the need to prevent nuclear war. A thousand years from now no one will remember most of what you will do over the next few years; but no one will ever forget the leaders who abolished the threat of nuclear war...Please do not fail us." ➤ Pages 4-5

Changing the Game to Achieve Nuclear Disarmament



LONDON - Twenty-five years ago, on Dec. 8, presidents Mikhail Gorbachev and Ronald Reagan signed the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty. This historic agreement eliminated a modern class of land-based "theatre" weapons – the SS20s, cruise and Pershing missiles – that had been brought into Europe in the early 1980s. The breakthrough surprised most mainstream military and political analysts, but was hailed by European peace activists whose efforts to achieve this outcome had been derided by experts right up to the Reykjavik Summit between Reagan and Gorbachev in October 1986. ➤ Pages 5-7

Opportunity Missed for Nuclear-Free Middle East

JERUSALEM - After the cancellation of an international conference to create a nuclear-free Middle East, leading experts have warned that an important opportunity to create stability in the region has been squandered. "The 2012 meeting in Helsinki was a precedent. For the first time, the important decision (was taken) of convening a special meeting to study the requirements of a weapons-of-mass-destruction-free zone in the Middle East," Ayman Khalil, director of the Amman-based Arab Institute for Security Studies said. ➤ Pages 7-8

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Explosive State of a Nuke World Order ☐ Pages 10-12

Who Should Manage The Nuclear Weapons Complex? ☐ Pages 12-15

Civil Society Perspective

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Rate of U.S., Russian Nuclear Disarmament 'Slowing'

By CAREY L. BIRON



WASHINGTON (IPS) - Although the United States and Russia have massively reduced their collective number of nuclear weapons since the heyday of the Cold War, the rate of that reduction is slowing, the Federation of American Scientists (FAS) warned on December 17.

Further, these two countries alone continue to account for more than 90 percent of the world's total nuclear arsenal, 15 times the rest of the seven nuclear weapon states combined.

“The pace of reducing nuclear forces appears to be slowing compared with the past two decades,” Hans M. Kristensen, director of the FAS Nuclear Information Project, said. “Both the United States and Russia appear to be more cautious about reducing further, placing more emphasis on ‘hedging’ and reconstitution of reduced nuclear forces, and both are investing enormous sums of money in modernising their nuclear forces over the next decade.”

Since 1991, the United States has reduced its number of nuclear weapons from around 19,000 to roughly 4,650 today, according to data in a new FAS report, authored by Kristensen, looking at the next decade of nuclear disarmament. Although the corresponding Russian numbers are not publicly known, FAS estimates that the decline has been even more significant, from around 30,000 to 4,500 today. (Though between the two countries, another 16,000 are awaiting dismantlement.)

Those are nearly fivefold decreases, echoed by reductions in non-strategic (or short-range) nuclear weapons by both Washington and Moscow of some 85 and 93 percent, respectively.

Such numbers represent a major success in international negotiation and engagement, but the FAS analysts suggest that tracking this trend in the long term is “becoming less interesting and relevant”.

Although a new bilateral treaty – the New Strategic Arms Reduction (START) Treaty – entered into force between the U.S. and Russia in 2011, it now appears that by the time of the agreement’s 2018 deadline, the number of strategic nuclear weapons deployed by the two countries will be only “marginally smaller” than today. Further, the new treaty is set to sunset just three years later.

Given the new data, the implication is that either a new set of arms-reduction treaties will need to be agreed in coming years, or each country will need to embark on new unilateral programmes of reduction. If neither of those takes place, “large nuclear forces could be retained far into the future.”

With the election over, Kristensen is calling on President Barack Obama to “once again make nuclear arms control a prominent and visible part of his foreign policy agenda”. He also suggests that, with the U.S. debt and government spending currently front and centre in a rancorous debate, now might be a good time to gain traction on unilateral reductions of the U.S.’s own arsenal.

According to the Ploughshares Fund, a peace and security-focused foundation in Washington that supported the FAS report, the United States looks set to spend around 640 billion dollars on its nuclear weapons programmes over the coming decade. ➡

Picture: The MGM-5 Corporal missile. Since 1991, the United States has reduced its number of nuclear weapons from around 19,000 to roughly 4,650 today Credit: White Sands Missile Range Museum/U.S. Army



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President Obama began his first presidential term by almost immediately giving a forceful speech, in April 2009 in Prague, in which he noted that the continued presence of nuclear weapons “matters to all people, everywhere”.

The president, who had taken over office only months before, also admitted that the United States has a unique responsibility in this regard. “As the only nuclear power to have used a nuclear weapon, the United States has a moral responsibility to act ... So today, I state clearly and with conviction America’s commitment to seek the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons.”

The subsequent four years have seen some limited legislative movement on the issue in Washington, with the most significant being the ratification of the New START Treaty. Yet Kristensen and others have characterised even this as “modest”, while Washington has continued to fail to ratify the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty.

However, following the recent presidential election here, President Obama has made initial suggestions that he remains deeply interested in undertaking a major new disarmament push. In early December, in his first major address on foreign policy since the election, the president noted that, despite past nuclear-reduction successes, the United States was “nowhere near done – not by a long shot.”

He also stated: “Russia has said that our current agreement hasn’t kept pace with the changing relationship between our countries. To which we say, let’s update it.”

Those remarks are “an important signal to his national security team, the Congress, the American public, and the world that (Obama) intends to complete unfinished nuclear risk reduction tasks,” Daryl G. Kimball, executive director of the Arms Control Association, a Washington watchdog, said in analysis e-mailed to IPS.

“By taking ... bold steps, President Obama could significantly reduce global nuclear dangers, reinforce the beleaguered nuclear non-proliferation system, and establish a lasting international nuclear security legacy.”

Recent weeks have seen mounting calls here in Washington for President Obama to build on this stance, both to push for new agreements with Russia and to take unilateral moves with regard to the United States’ own nuclear arsenal. Yet prospects look daunting on both fronts.

According to a recent policy brief from the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, a Washington-based think tank, the U.S. arms-control agenda is currently “a more partisan issue than at any time since the end of the Cold War.” The brief’s editor, James M. Acton, says that this is in part due to Republican disagreement with President Obama’s central goal, that of a world without nuclear weapons.

Further, U.S.-Russian relations have become increasingly strained in recent months, including over U.S. plans for a missile defence system in Europe, despite a high-profile attempt by President Obama to “reset” Washington’s Russia policy. A major new move by the U.S. Congress to normalise trade relations with Russia – for the first time in nearly four decades – has now been overshadowed by simultaneous punitive legislation that censures Moscow for its human rights record. The Russian government’s response has been incendiary, promising retaliation and noting that the law “will rather negatively affect the prospects for bilateral cooperation”. (IPS | December 17, 2012)

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The Frightening Scenario of the Nuclear War

By IRA HELFAND



NORTHAMPTON, U.S. (IPS) - Soon after President Barack Obama was elected in 2008, hundreds of leaders of the global medical community wrote an open letter to him, and to newly elected Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, urging them to make the abolition of nuclear weapons their highest priority:

“You face many urgent crises at this difficult moment, but they all pale in comparison to the need to prevent nuclear war. A thousand years from now no one will remember most of what you will do over the next few years; but no one will ever forget the leaders who abolished the threat of nuclear war...Please do not fail us.”

Unfortunately, as we feared, the demands of the economic crisis crowded out other issues and, so far, the leaders of Russia and the United States have failed us. The re-election of Obama offers him a new chance to move the world down the path to nuclear disarmament. It is an opportunity that must not be wasted.

Since 2008, we have gained a fuller understanding of the dangers posed by nuclear weapons. For decades we have known that a large-scale war between the U.S. and Russia would have catastrophic humanitarian consequences for the whole world.

We now understand that even a much more “limited”, regional nuclear war, as might take place in South Asia, would also pose a threat to all of humanity. Studies by Alan Robock, Owen Brian Toon, and their colleagues have looked at a scenario in which India and Pakistan each use 50 Hiroshima sized bombs – only 0.4 percent of the world’s nuclear arsenal of more than 25,000 warheads – against urban targets in the other country. The consequences would be beyond our comprehension.

The explosions, firestorms and radiation would kill 20 million people over the first week. But the worldwide consequences would be even more catastrophic. The firestorms would loft five million tonnes of soot into the upper atmosphere, blocking out sunlight and reducing temperatures around the world by an average of 1.3 degrees Celsius for an entire decade. This sudden drop in temperature, and the resulting decline in precipitation and shortening of the growing season, would cut food production in areas far removed from South Asia.

According to a study by Mutlu Ozdogan, U.S. corn production would fall an average of 12 percent for an entire decade. A study by Lili Xia has shown that Chinese middle season rice would decline 15 percent over a full decade. Recent preliminary studies have shown even larger shortfalls for other grains.

The world is not prepared to deal with a decline in food production of this magnitude. World grain reserves currently equal less than three months’ consumption and would provide an inadequate buffer against these shortfalls. Further, according to the most recent data from the United Nations, there are currently more than 870 million people in the world who are malnourished. An additional 300 million people receive adequate nutrition today but live in countries that import much of their food. All of these people, more than one billion in all, would be at risk of starvation in the aftermath of this “limited” war.

A large-scale war between the U.S. and Russia would be even more catastrophic. Hundreds of millions of people would be killed directly; the indirect climate effects would be even greater. Global temperatures would drop an average of eight degrees Celsius, and more than 20 degrees Celsius in the interior of North America and Eurasia. In the Northern Hemisphere, there would be three years without a single day free of frost. Food production would stop and the vast majority of the human race would starve. ☹

* Ira Helfand is co-president of International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War and recipient of the 1985 Nobel Peace Prize.



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Since the end of the Cold War we have acted as though this kind of war simply can't happen. But it can: the two nuclear superpowers still have nearly 20,000 nuclear warheads; more than two thousand of them are maintained on missiles that can be fired in less than 15 minutes, destroying the cities of the other power 30 minutes later.

As long as the U.S. and Russia maintain these vast arsenals there remains the very real danger that they will be used, either intentionally or by accident. We know of at least five occasions since 1979 when one or the other of the superpowers prepared to launch a nuclear attack on the other country in the mistaken belief that they themselves were under attack. The most recent of these events was in January 1995. The conditions that existed then, which brought us within minutes of a nuclear war, have not significantly changed today. The next time an accident takes place, we may not be so lucky.

Recognising this great danger, 35 nations joined in a new call for the elimination of all nuclear weapons at the United Nations this October. The International Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement has also called for the abolition of nuclear weapons. In March 2013, the Norwegian government will convene a meeting of all state parties to the Non Proliferation Treaty to discuss the humanitarian consequences of nuclear war.

The U.S. and Russia should embrace these initiatives and lead the way in negotiating a verifiable, enforceable treaty that eliminates nuclear weapons. These negotiations will not be easy, but the alternative is unthinkable. We cannot count on good luck as the basis of global security policy. If we do not abolish these weapons, someday our luck will run out, they will be used, and everything that we cherish will be destroyed. The stakes could not be higher. (IPS | December 18, 2012)

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Changing the Game to Achieve Nuclear Disarmament

By REBECCA JOHNSON*

LONDON (IPS) - Twenty-five years ago, on Dec. 8, presidents Mikhail Gorbachev and Ronald Reagan signed the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty. This historic agreement eliminated a modern class of land-based "theatre" weapons – the SS20s, cruise and Pershing missiles – that had been brought into Europe in the early 1980s.

The breakthrough surprised most mainstream military and political analysts, but was hailed by European peace activists whose efforts to achieve this outcome had been derided by experts right up to the Reykjavik Summit between Reagan and Gorbachev in October 1986.



Gorbachev, however, has paid tribute to the role of civil society. Asked a few years ago what made him "trust" Reagan, the former Soviet leader said that he didn't trust Reagan at all; he took the risk to go to Reykjavik and propose nuclear disarmament because he trusted the European peace movement and Greenham Common women to make sure that the U.S. would not take unfair advantage if he took the first step. ☺

Picture: U.S. President Ronald Reagan and Soviet General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev signing the INF Treaty in the East Room at the White House in 1987. Credit: Wikimedia Commons



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Gorbachev also spoke about being moved to act after reading about studies by Russian and American scientists that showed how life on Earth could be obliterated by the “nuclear winter” aftermath of a nuclear war.

Such a thorough understanding of the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons has been missing from mainstream debates since then. Groupthink among government officials, arms controllers, funders and security experts have served to perpetuate the realpolitik notion that nuclear disarmament is an extraordinarily difficult military-technical process that only the nuclear-armed states can take forward.

Such an attitude has given increased power to the nuclear states, forcing nuclear-free countries into the supplicant role of calling for disarmament while simultaneously being marginalised as cheerleaders on the sidelines of the real game.

The nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) - the jewel in the crown of cold war arms control - has long been in trouble, but its adherents keep hoping that enough band-aids can be applied to keep the NPT regime and review process going. Squandering the opportunities created by the end of the cold war, diplomatic gesture politics have failed to address the major nuclear threats in the real world, while the NPT paradoxically reinforces a prominent role for nuclear weapons in the security policies of a handful of governments.

It came as little surprise, therefore, to hear from the U.S. Department of State on Nov. 23 that the much heralded conference on a Middle East zone free of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) “cannot be convened because of present conditions in the Middle East and the fact that states in the region have not reached agreement on acceptable conditions for a conference”.

Iran, which only agreed to participate in the conference a few weeks earlier, predictably seized the high ground and castigated the U.S. for holding the conference – that had been mandated by the 2010 NPT Review Conference – hostage “for the sake of Israel”.

Nabil Elaraby, the Arab League’s secretary-general, warned that failure to convene the conference “would negatively impact on the regional security system and the international system to prevent nuclear proliferation”.

As Israel bombs Palestinians in Gaza, Israelis are being frightened and hurt by missiles on buses that are being fired in retaliation. Nuclear weapons bring no security, but their deployment in volatile regions like the Middle East, South Asia, North-East Asia and also Europe distract from genuine security requirements and add a massive additional threat to peace.

The nuclear possessors make the situation worse by talking about preventing nuclear terrorism while hiding behind the voodoo of nuclear deterrence - as if by wearing the weapons they can avoid having to worry about anyone using them.

Recent initiatives by the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), the Red Cross and a growing number of governments have begun to arouse global interest in the humanitarian effects of nuclear weapons.

On Nov. 22, Norway’s Foreign Minister Espen Barth Eide invited all United Nations governments to send senior officials and experts to participate in an international conference on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons on March 4-5, 2013, in Oslo.

The aim of the conference is “to provide an arena for a fact-based discussion of the humanitarian and developmental consequences associated with a nuclear weapon detonation. All interested states, as well as U.N. organisations, representatives of civil society and other relevant stakeholders are invited to the conference.”

This conference aims to bring together not only scientists and doctors to talk about the immediate blast, flash-burns, fires and radiation that would incinerate and contaminate millions, but also agencies that deal with refugees, food insecurity and the medical needs of millions of homeless, starving people, all of which will be compounded by predicted longer term effects such as nuclear winter and global famine that the detonation of less than one percent of today’s nuclear arsenals would cause. ➡



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Leaders have to think in humanitarian and environmental terms, as Gorbachev did.

The nuclear free countries have to stop behaving like passive supplicants, giving veto powers to their nuclear-armed neighbours. Unlike traditional arms control, humanitarian disarmament approaches recognise that everyone has the right and responsibility to take steps to prevent the use of nuclear weapons.

The best way to do this is to ban and eliminate nuclear weapons. Once the nuclear-free countries acknowledge their own power and responsibility, they will find that a nuclear ban treaty can be far quicker and simpler to achieve than they thought. By changing the legal context, such a treaty would be a game changer, draining power and status from the nuclear-armed governments and hastening their understanding of their own security interests, increasing the imperative for concerted nuclear disarmament rather than perpetual proliferation. [IPS | December 12, 2012]

*Rebecca Johnson is executive director and co-founder of the Acronym Institute and vice chair of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN).

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Opportunity Missed for Nuclear-Free Middle East

By JILLIAN KESTLER-D'AMOURS

JERUSALEM (IPS) - After the cancellation of an international conference to create a nuclear-free Middle East, leading experts have warned that an important opportunity to create stability in the region has been squandered.

"The 2012 meeting in Helsinki was a precedent. For the first time, the important decision (was taken) of convening a special meeting to study the requirements of a weapons-of-mass-destruction-free zone in the Middle East," Ayman Khalil, director of the Amman-based Arab Institute for Security Studies told IPS.

"That in and of itself was an important decision and a milestone. Sadly, this didn't materialise."

Sponsored by the United Nations and backed by Russia, the United States and the United Kingdom, the conference on building a nuclear-free Middle East was set to take place in December in Finland.

United States State Department spokesperson Victoria Nuland stated that the conference was cancelled due to "a deep conceptual gap (that) persists in the region on approaches towards regional security and arms control arrangements," and because "states in the region have not reached agreement on acceptable conditions" for the meeting.

The meeting is now expected to be held in early 2013. ☞

Picture: U.S. State Department spokesperson Victoria Nuland | Credit: Wikimedia Commons





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Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

According to the Egyptian Council for Foreign Affairs (ECFA), holding the conference was especially important at this time given “Iran’s non-response to the requirements of the International Atomic Energy Agency on one hand, and Israel’s threat to launch a military attack on Iran on the other hand.”

The ECFA stated that the Arab Forum for Non-Proliferation would hold a meeting Dec. 12 in Cairo to discuss how to get the process re-started. “Making the Middle East free of mass destruction weapons will create the appropriate environment for regional stability and security in the region,” it stated.

The decision to hold a special conference on the creation of a nuclear-free Middle East was made during a 2010 review meeting of states that are party to the Nuclear

Signed into force in 1970, the NPT aims to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and nuclear weapons technology, and further the goal of nuclear disarmament around the world. Currently, 190 parties have signed the treaty, including the five official nuclear-weapons states: China, Russia, the United Kingdom, France and the United States.

There are currently five nuclear-weapon-free zones in the world, according to the UN: Latin America and the Caribbean, the South Pacific, South-East Asia, Central Asia, and Africa.

Israel, which has long been believed to possess nuclear weapons yet maintains a policy of “nuclear ambiguity”, has not signed the NPT. Many have said that the decision to cancel the Helsinki conference may be linked to Israeli fears that it would be singled out for criticism.

According to Paul Hirschson, deputy spokesman for the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Israel was never formally invited to the Helsinki conference, and therefore never agreed or disagreed to participate.

“I think that we probably agree with the Americans that the conditions aren’t right...I don’t think we’ve really got much to talk about anything,” Hirschson told IPS.

“The subject’s a nice subject, but what we’re really interested in is peace with the Palestinians, diplomatic relations with the Saudis; we’ve got a hundred things ahead of us before we start devoting time to that.”

Over the past year, Israel has publicly voiced its opposition to Iran working to acquire nuclear weapons, a charge that Iranian officials have denied. Israeli leaders have gone so far as to suggest that they might pre-emptively strike Iranian nuclear facilities, causing diplomatic tensions with its largest ally, the United States.

According to Ayman Khalil, however, Israel’s nuclear ambiguity remains the “elephant in the room”, and it, not a nuclear Iran, constitutes the biggest obstacle to building a nuclear-free Middle East.

“All countries in the region have basically signed the (nuclear) non-proliferation treaty, including Iran. One country, and one country alone, remains outside of these arrangements, and that is Israel,” Khalil said.

“Arabs wanted this meeting (in Helsinki) to take place in good faith to reach an acceptable arrangement with Israel. If this meeting would have taken place as planned, it would have been a massive confidence building measure between members of the region.” [IPS | December 2, 2012]

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What Others Say

A New Agenda for U.S.-Russia Cooperation

By MADELEINE ALBRIGHT and IGOR IVANOV

Editors' Note Appended

Over the last couple of weeks, we have been witnessing a rapid deterioration in the climate in U.S.-Russian relations. The long-term strategic interests of our two countries or international security interests at large. Our relations cannot be held hostage to politics in either country. Instead, we should come up with a new roadmap for 2013 and beyond.

With President Obama re-elected and President Vladimir Putin solidly in charge in Moscow, now is time for both leaders to reinvigorate U.S.-Russian cooperation to the benefit of the two countries. They can also act together to strengthen global security in general and pave the way for a more stable and predictable world.

American and Russian interests converge on a number of significant and timely issues.

As we have written together in the past, the two countries share a common objective in reducing the nuclear danger. The New Start Treaty was an important achievement, but more can be done, including accelerating implementation of the reductions required by the treaty (why wait until 2018 to have the limits take full effect?), and launching a new bilateral negotiation to further cut nuclear stockpiles.

Russia and the United States control 90 to 95 percent of the world's nuclear weapons. We can readily continue negotiations of further reductions and still safely ensure our security. If we do, we will be more persuasive when asking other nuclear-weapons states to join in the nuclear-arms reduction process and will enhance the credibility of our diplomacy in mobilizing international pressure on Iran to refrain from trying to build a nuclear weapon.

Next year will mark the 50th anniversary of the signing of the Limited Test Ban Treaty, the first nuclear arms control agreement. It would be an appropriate year for the U.S. Senate to consent to ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, which has been languishing for 13 years. The United States could then join Russia among the countries that have ratified, thus bringing the treaty closer to entry into force.

The long-running dispute over missile defense continues to cast a shadow over possible progress on arms control, even though both NATO and Russia say they want to cooperate in that sphere. Now is the time to be creative. With some imagination on both sides, missile defense could prove a game-changer, making NATO and Russia allies in protecting Europe.

We have focused on arms control issues not just because of the important security implications for Russia and the United States. Progress on arms control can also help stimulate gains in the broader relationship, as has been demonstrated in the past.

Cooperation between Russia and the United States makes sense on a range of other issues. ➡

**Madeleine Albright served as U.S. secretary of state from 1997 to 2001. Igor Ivanov was Russia's foreign minister from 1998 to 2004.*

Editors' Note: December 31, 2012

This opinion article has been amended at the authors' request to put in context the recent rise in U.S.-Russian tensions.





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For example, neither the United States nor Russia wants Afghanistan to revert to control by the Taliban or become a failed state. That is why Russia has been so helpful in facilitating the flow of supplies to U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan. As the end of major operations by coalition forces draws near, Washington and Moscow, together with others, should support Afghan leaders in constructing a stable society, able to withstand pressure from violent extremist groups.

Another area of mutual interest is promoting an expansion of U.S.-Russian trade and investment relations. The current level of bilateral commerce falls significantly short of its potential, given the size of the countries' economies. An increase would benefit both. Russia's recent entry into the World Trade Organization will help, as will full implementation of the important trade and market access provisions that made that agreement possible. The U.S. Congress decision to remove Cold War restrictions and finally extend permanent normal trade relations status to Russia was long overdue.

Obviously, cooperation on some issues does not mean that Moscow and Washington will see eye-to-eye on every question. Because we interact on so many issues, it is too much to expect agreement in every case. Differences of perspective can sometimes be sharp, as over Syria, human rights and democracy. Nevertheless, disagreements, no matter how complex and painful, must not block the development of ties along other lines. It is essential not to interrupt dialogue even on those issues where positions differ substantially.

The history of relations between Washington and Moscow teaches the importance of presidential engagement and leadership. If our countries are to derive the maximum benefit from our shared interests, Presidents Obama and Putin must make our potential for partnership a priority.

Some speculate that, with Mr. Putin's return to the Russian presidency, managing U.S.-Russian relations will become more difficult. We see no reason to assume that. The reset improved bilateral ties, which are certainly stronger today than they were in 2008; that progress would not have happened had Mr. Putin opposed it. The challenge for our two presidents is to move now to the next stage — to embark on a historic mission to start a new chapter in bilateral relations between Russia and the United States. [Source: New York Times | December 30, 2012] □

Explosive State of a Nuke World Order

By GEOFFREY ROBERTSON*

The first war of 2013 - Israel's attack on Iran - is threatened for "spring or early summer", the time by which the Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, who is likely to be re-elected next month, believes that the Mullahs will be "nuclear weapons capable". The White House may prevail upon him to postpone until Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is replaced in June, but his successor as president will just be another proxy for the international criminal who really rules Iran - its Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei.

The US President, Barack Obama, has promised that a US-led coalition will prevent Iran from obtaining the bomb, and when a US president talks of "coalition" he generally means Britain and Australia.

Will next year see the West drift into another bloody Middle East engagement? The evidence that Iran's theocratic government wants the bomb is compelling and it could choose to manufacture several over the next few years. It is a criminal state - given under Khamenei's rule to killing those who disagree with its politics or religion. He was the president in 1988 when his death squads entered Iran's jails to execute some 7000 Marxist, atheist and Islamic non-conformists. Mainly students who had been imprisoned for protesting or pamphleteering, these victims were buried in mass graves at which their families are still not permitted to mourn. ☹

*Geoffrey Robertson, QC, is the author of *Mullahs Without Mercy: Human Rights and Nuclear Weapons*, Vintage, RRP \$34.95.



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Later, as Supreme Leader, Khamenei issued orders to assassinate hundreds of the regime's overseas enemies (the author Salman Rushdie was one who got away) and to blow up a synagogue and community centre in Buenos Aires. In 2009 he unleashed the militia that tortured and killed many Green Movement protesters.

The prospect of this merciless mass murderer obtaining nuclear weapons is certainly alarming - but does Israel, even if backed by a US-led coalition, have any right to stop him? Israel and its allies are entitled to attack an enemy in self-defence under Article 51 of the United Nations Charter but only if an attack from that country is "imminent" - meaning that the onslaught must be about to happen.

Over Iraq, George W. Bush and his bush lawyers tried to develop a doctrine of "pre-emptive self defence", namely the right of the US to invade any nation that might one day have the weapons to threaten the US - but this doctrine has no place in international law. Iran will not actually have a bomb in 2013 (even if it manages to enrich its uranium to weapons-grade, it will still take time to weaponise and to develop a delivery system), so a strike on its nuclear facilities in 2013 would be flagrantly unlawful.

It would also be irresponsible. Supporters of Israel assume it will be a "surgical strike" such as the one on Osirak, the Iraqi facility that Israel bombed in 1981 with few casualties. But Natanz - a prime target in any strike on Iran because it is where most of its centrifuges are whirring to enrich uranium - employs 5000 workers around the clock. The other potential targets store 371 tons of uranium hexafluoride, so bombing them would set off a toxic cloud that could asphyxiate thousands if the wind were to blow in the wrong direction. The attack would prompt reprisals - rockets on Israel from Hezbollah and doubtless Iran would close or mine the strait of Hormuz and attack US naval vessels there: a wider war might follow.

The flaw in the argument for attacking Iran is that nuclear capability does not mean nuclear culpability. While Ahmadinejad is a vicious anti-Semite, Iran has no quarrel with its own Jewish population and although its leaders are fond of imagining a world without Israel, they are referring to millennialist prophecies about wiping all unbelievers from the map, and are not planning to drop a nuclear bomb on Tel Aviv.

The Mullahs are at least as rational as a gang of serial killers and are well aware that Israel itself has 200 nukes, some on submarines stooing the eastern Mediterranean, which would be shot at Tehran in immediate reprisal for any attack. The real danger of Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapons is that the ruling Mullahs will be invincible and proliferation will follow throughout the Middle East.

Saudi Arabia is already negotiating "off the peg" atom bombs from Pakistan and the Muslim Brotherhood has long had a policy to obtain nuclear weapons for Egypt. The UN has cancelled this month's long-awaited conference in Helsinki on the subject of "a nuclear-free Middle East", for the very good reason that the Middle East will soon be nuclear-full.

While Australia must be careful not to be drawn into another unlawful war in that region, the most urgent problem of nuclear proliferation lies closer to home. North Korea is believed to have made 12 bombs so far, each many times more powerful than the device that flattened Hiroshima.

Its recent ballistic rocket test was successful: once it works out how to fit a nuclear warhead and to prevent that warhead from exploding when it re-enters the earth's atmosphere, this uncontrollable country and its unpredictable dictator will be able to deliver a nuclear bomb to California or Sydney or to those American bases planned for Darwin and the Cocos Islands, which may themselves harbour nuclear arms. North Korea may not be as big or as brutal as Iran, but not long ago it sank a South Korean corvette with the loss of 46 young lives, while China - which voted in the Security Council to condemn the latest ballistic test - can no longer exercise control over this impossible state.

The fact is that we are entering a new era of nuclear proliferation so dangerous that we may soon be nostalgic for the Cold War.

Then, bombs were kept under tight security and the five nations that possessed them were run by men with children, retirement plans and no wish for Armageddon ☹



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(when the Cuban missile crisis came, it was solved by a rational deal: the US promised to withdraw its nukes from Turkey, in return for Khrushchev pulling his nuclear-tipped rockets out of Cuba). The supreme leaders of North Korea and Iran are not men of the same mould and Pakistan under any leadership will remain insecure.

It already has 110 nukes, some kept at Minhas air force base, which Islamic jihadists attacked in August. They were beaten back, but there will be a next time: proliferation makes both nuclear accident and terrorist acquisition much more likely. The fact that we have not had a bomb dropped in anger since Nagasaki, more than 67 years ago, seems to have induced a complacency that can no longer continue.

Proliferation is here to stay and Obama's promise of "a world without nukes", which won him the Nobel peace prize in 2009, now seems fraudulent. Ironically, international law has managed to outlaw the poisoned arrow and the dum-dum bullet, the landmine and the cluster bomb, but nuclear weapons have thus far been too hot for it to handle. It is plain that their use is a breach of the law of war: their ionising radiation cannot distinguish between soldier and civilian, military target and hospital or school. They cause disproportionate suffering and they pose an existential threat to the environment. Even a limited war, for example between India (which has 100 nukes) and Pakistan over Kashmir or between North Korea and the US, would probably change the climate before climate change.

But how is the problem of proliferation to be addressed, short of opportunistic use of force by the US and its allies on countries such as Iran? Many states (the movement is led by Mexico and has not yet been joined by Australia) plan to make the acquisition of nuclear weapons a crime against humanity by amending the Treaty of the International Criminal Court at its review conference in 2016. That would entitle the Security Council to authorise an attack on Iran or any other country outside the nine that already possess nuclear weapons to stop it from assembling a bomb.

But this will have to be accompanied by a binding agreement between the nuclear-armed states gradually to reduce the number of nukes in their arsenals to zero and by the establishment of a powerful UN inspection agency to replace the toothless International Atomic Energy Agency, which cannot inspect suspicious facilities, in Iran or elsewhere, without the permission of the suspect state.

Whether children will live in a world without nukes depends on whether the international community can be made sufficiently fearful of a nuclear war to reach an agreement on gradual but complete disarmament. If there is a silver lining in the mushroom cloud hypothetically hovering over the Middle East, it is that the prospect of merciless Mullahs with fingers on nuclear triggers will frighten the world sufficiently to produce and enforce a law to ban the bomb. [Source: The Sunday Morning Herald, December 30, 2012] □

Who Should Manage The Nuclear Weapons Complex?

By ROBERT ALVAREZ*

As the lame-duck Congress wraps up business, a serious debate is unfolding over the future of the US nuclear weapons complex. For the first time since the end of World War II, the long-held policy that places control of the design and production of nuclear weapons in civilian hands may be up for grabs. At issue: What is to be done with the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA), now located inside the US Department of Energy?

Created by Congress in 1999, the NNSA was granted semi-autonomous status within the Energy Department, with its own separate bureaucracy, in the hope that this structure would provide the agency the freedom to fix lapses in security at the national weapons labs. The agency is responsible for the maintenance and modernization of the US nuclear warhead stockpile, the operation of research laboratories and nuclear and non-nuclear weapons production sites, and the management of nuclear non-proliferation activities and naval reactors. ☺

*Robert Alvarez is a senior scholar at the Institute for Policy Studies, Alvarez served as senior policy adviser to the Energy Department's secretary and deputy assistant secretary for national security and the environment from 1993 to 1999. During this tenure, he led teams in North Korea to establish control of nuclear weapons materials. He also coordinated Energy's nuclear material strategic planning and established the department's first asset management program.



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Management of the labs had come into question after members of Congress concluded -- wrongly, as it turned out -- that secrets on the US hydrogen bomb program had been passed on to China by a Los Alamos employee. But there were a host of other security, safety, and financial problems at the labs, and the agency's chief sponsor, then-US Senator Pete Domenici, reasoned that "this new agency provided an opportunity to significantly improve the management of security, as well as all other areas, in the [Energy] Department."

After that, however, the safety and security situation in the nation's nuclear weapons complex grew worse, not better.

At the end of 2011, the Energy Department's inspector general found that NNSA management was fundamentally broken, consisting of "a costly set of distinctly separate ... operations that often duplicate existing [Energy Department] functions." The inspector general urged the government to establish a process to close and consolidate Energy Department labs, similar to the method by which the Defense Base Realignment and Closure Commission has decommissioned hundreds of military bases since the late 1980s.

But directors of the weapons labs -- and, until his retirement in 2008, Domenici himself -- argued that outside meddling was the main problem, and the Energy Department should have less responsibility for overseeing the safety, security, and financial matters of the NNSA. And, in the summer of 2012, the House Armed Services Committee adopted this same view, passing legislation that would eliminate DOE oversight and enforcement of safety, security and financial requirements, grant unprecedented governmental oversight of budgets and nuclear arms policies to the contractors that run the Los Alamos, Sandia, and Lawrence Livermore national laboratories, diminish decades-old standards for nuclear safety; and weaken the Defense Nuclear Facility Safety Board, established by Congress in 1988 as an independent overseer of nuclear safety.

The modern-day security equation. Part of the fiscal 2013 defense authorization bill, the House legislation would restore the Cold War management system known as "least interference," which largely shifts the burden of safety, security, and financial compliance from the Energy Department to the contractors that perform most of the department's work. The Government Accountability Office (GAO) describes least interference as "an undocumented policy of blind faith in [government] contractors' performance." It's not without good reason that the NNSA remains prominent on GAO's list of "high risk" federal programs that are vulnerable to waste, fraud, and abuse.

The attempt to move the National Nuclear Security Administration out of the Energy Department and insulate the national labs from outside oversight was stalled in an unusual way this summer: Peace activists, including an 82-year-old nun, penetrated the Y-12 National Security Complex in Oak Ridge, Tennessee, which stores hundreds of tons of highly enriched uranium. Since then, the Senate has rejected the House's language on oversight of the weapons complex and has agreed to a provision that would create a commission to study how and where the complex should be managed.

One of the options on the table appears to be a transfer of the NNSA to the Defense Department, a shift that the Obama administration entertained in the past. For the first time since 1946, this possibility reopens a debate about whether the nation's nuclear weapons production and maintenance complex should be under civilian or military control. It's anything but a trivial debate. Many of the scientists who founded the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists argued ardently for civilian control in the wake of Hiroshima and Nagasaki -- and they won. The scientists contended that atomic energy was too destructive and important to leave in the hands of the military. The secrecy inherent to the military, the scientists felt, would thwart scientific discovery and prove to be a major obstacle to international control and cooperation.

The question to be decided now is whether, some 65 years and a long Cold War later, the security equation has changed in a way that requires a new arrangement for overseeing the complex that stores and maintains the United States' nuclear weapons.

The struggle for control of the weapons complex. For 50 years, the national laboratories and other facilities that design and maintain the US nuclear weapons stockpile enjoyed an elite national security status. But with the end of the Cold War, the design and the production of new nuclear weapons stopped, and dysfunction in the complex has increased as the NNSA struggled to keep the country's largest and most hazardous government-owned enterprise operating efficiently and securely. ☞



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Even after closing many major nuclear material production sites, the NNSA continues to preside over an antiquated infrastructure of weapons labs and other nuclear facilities that cost more than \$500 million per year to maintain and repair. The Y-12 complex, for example, stopped production of nuclear weapons decades ago. Yet its annual budgets have more than doubled in order to maintain antiquated, oversized facilities that now handle a small number of weapons parts, store growing amounts highly enriched uranium from dismantled weapons, and process a large backlog of unstable HEU compounds. (Y-12's most notable recent achievement was to put an end to storing hundreds of tons of highly enriched uranium in a 66-year-old wooden building, 14 years after the Energy Department acknowledged its vulnerability to a major fire.)

For nearly 25 years, the government has tried to shrink the NNSA's footprint even as the agency was trying to build replacement facilities to fabricate nuclear weapons components and process excess plutonium for power reactors. These one-of-a-kind, high-hazard facilities have been plagued by delay and skyrocketing costs. A skilled workforce retiring in droves has not helped the downsizing and modernization effort.

Over the decades, the national laboratories – semi-autonomous, contractor-run components of the nuclear complex -- have not been shy about attempting to remain free of outside control. Lobbying by the nuclear weapons labs has gone largely unchecked; a White House official recently described the labs to me as being among "the biggest rogue elements in the US government." In 2009, for example, directors of the three labs overseen by the NNSA -- Sandia, Los Alamos and Lawrence Livermore -- personally lobbied the White House to push for higher funding levels.

The administration subsequently announced plans to increase Energy Department nuclear weapons spending to nearly 70 percent above Cold War levels. Over the next 20 years, the NNSA informed Congress in 2011, the agency plans to spend more than \$250 billion to maintain the US nuclear weapons stockpile and refurbish the weapons research and production complex. As the "fiscal cliff" looms, however, the Obama administration is trying to put on the financial brakes, threatening a veto that would block funding for a new plutonium-component manufacturing facility at Los Alamos. However, the House and Senate conferees have defied the president and authorized \$3.7 billion for this facility. They also gave the weapons labs carte blanche to bypass the Energy Secretary in formulating the Nuclear Posture Review for the Obama administration – the nation's policy guidance for nuclear weapons.

It is not just the lab directors who have worked to loosen oversight of the NNSA and the labs. In November 2009, Energy Secretary Steven Chu, a former national laboratory director, opposed a Defense Nuclear Facility Safety Board recommendation requiring contractors to comply with Energy Department safety requirements. This was the first time the department had spurned a safety recommendation in the 20-year history of the nuclear facility safety board. It also marked an extremely unusual position for Chu to take: In effect, the head of the Energy Department was arguing against his department's safety requirements at the national laboratories, which are run by outside contractors. Chu balked at the safety board recommendation because an Energy Department safety assessment for earthquake risks at a decades-old plutonium facility at Los Alamos indicated that it needed expensive upgrading due to its potentially extreme radiological hazards -- even as the Energy Department was trying to build its replacement, now estimated to cost almost \$6 billion.

Following Chu's lead, Deputy Energy Secretary Daniel B. Poneman issued a directive in March 2010, allowing weapons contractors the flexibility to tailor their own safety and security programs. Shortly thereafter, safety board vice chairman John E. Mansfield wrote to Poneman, declaring that the directive "undermines the principles of providing adequate protection of the public, workers, and the environment from DOE's defense nuclear facility operations."

Although Poneman subsequently backed away from his directive, Chu refused to budge in his opposition to the board's recommendation. By law, the dispute had to be sent to congressional Armed Services Committees, where the complex safety and engineering judgments involved were refereed in a highly politicized environment. In effect, Chu gave Ohio Representative Mike Turner, chairman of the House Armed Services Strategic Forces Subcommittee, a platform to end Energy Department oversight of the nation's nuclear weapons facilities.

Days after the House committee voted to support these drastic changes, the White House, alerted by unions representing Energy Department workers, opposed the provisions, saying they "severely hamper external, independent oversight ... require a weaker standard of contractor governance, management, and oversight, and eliminate DOE's flexibility to determine the appropriate means of assessing the unique risks that it confronts in its facilities." ➔



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Despite White House opposition, Turner prevailed, and the Republican leadership rammed the bill through the House in May, blocking all relevant amendments and floor debate.

Who should oversee the weapons complex? The effort to move the NNSA out of the Energy Department and greatly diminish outside oversight of national labs and other parts of the weapons development complex came off the tracks late in July, when three peace activists, including an 82-year-old nun, got past multiple barriers and trained snipers guarding a facility that stores hundreds of tons of highly enriched uranium at the Y-12 National Security Complex. The Energy Department and the National Nuclear Security Administration had been made aware of contractor security deficiencies at Y-12 two years earlier, but did not fix them.

At a House Energy and Commerce Committee hearing in September, Texas Representative Joe Barton asked the nun, Megan Rice, who was seated in the audience, to stand. "That young lady there brought a holy Bible (to the plant)," Barton said. "If she had been a terrorist, the lord only knows what could have happened."

With the myth of contractor competence punctured, the Senate passed a resolution rejecting the House provisions to end Energy's oversight and also has agreed to an amendment, sponsored by senators Jon Kyl and Tom Udall, that would create a panel to make recommendations on how the weapons complex should be managed, and by what agency. Congress is expected to take action on the defense authorization bill before it adjourns on December 24; the final version of the bill includes this advisory panel, which is to make an interim report in six months and a final report by February 2014.

Among the many possibilities to be considered on this panel is the transfer of the NNSA to the Defense Department. Shortly after President Obama took office, the White House initiated a process to consider such a shift. The New York Times editorialized in favor of the move, but stiff public opposition from the nuclear weapons labs and congressional supporters led the White House to shelve the effort. But now it's likely being dusted off.

In 1946, scientists -- including many who founded the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists -- banded together in a major political effort to prevent the military from maintaining its control over atomic energy. Before the atomic bombs were dropped on Japan, prominent scientists sought to warn President Truman of the consequences of nuclear weapons use, including a nuclear arms race that threatened humanity. They carried their concerns into the congressional debate over the post-war development and control over atomic energy, helping to convince Congress to pass the 1946 Atomic Energy Act that created the civilian Atomic Energy Commission.

But decades have passed since the end of the Cold War, and nuclear weapons no longer hold the high status they once did, particularly in a US military establishment facing an era of budget austerity. The continuing battle over management of the nation's aging and bloated nuclear weapons complex raises a series of serious questions: Will putting the National Nuclear Security Administration in the Defense Department have a streamlining effect, forcing the nuclear weapons program to compete with higher priorities, such as readiness and personnel? Or will putting the weapons research, production, and maintenance complex under Pentagon control open the way to ever-higher spending on the weapons complex, and even less oversight of its safety and security? Would the weapons complex facilities now owned by the Energy Department actually be transferred to Pentagon control? Would the Defense Department even want the facilities, many of which include large amounts of nuclear waste and radioactively contaminated property in need of extraordinarily expensive remediation?

How this will play out is not clear. But prospects have improved for creation of a congressional commission that would make recommendations on the National Nuclear Security Administration's future, and the door appears to be opening, for the first time in more than two generations, for a public debate about the institutional fate of nuclear weapons in the United States. It's a debate worth having. The disposition of the NNSA is more than a bureaucratic turf battle; it could well determine the future size and scope of the US nuclear arsenal. Given that military nuclear spending now dominates the Energy Department budget, a shift in management of the weapons complex may also allow that department the first real opportunity, since it was created in 1977, to focus on its original mission: The ushering in of a new energy future for the United States. [Source: <http://thebulletin.org/node/9499> | December 21, 2012] □



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Civil Society Perspective

IPPNW To President Obama: Stop Subcritical Nuclear Tests!

[The United States conducted a subcritical nuclear test on December 5. Subcritical tests do not involve a chain reaction leading to an actual nuclear explosion and are legal because of a loophole in the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, which the US has signed but not ratified. Nevertheless, they undermine one of the purposes of the CTBT, which is to prevent the development of new warhead designs. IPPNW has sent the following letter to President Obama, protesting this most recent test and calling for a cessation of subcritical testing in the future.]

December 18, 2012
President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave.
Washington, DC 20001

Dear President Obama:

As fellow Nobel Peace Laureates who share your desire to rid the world of nuclear weapons and the danger they pose to our common survival, we would like to congratulate you on your election to a second term as President. We encourage you to use the next four years to make rapid and significant progress toward the global elimination of the only weapons capable of extinguishing life on Earth.

With that goal in mind, we want to express serious concern with the continued program of subcritical nuclear tests that have been conducted by the US since it signed the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty in 1996. We understand that you have received letters from the mayors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and from groups of atomic bomb survivors protesting the most recent subcritical test on December 5—the fourth such test since you took office—and we join them in urging you to cancel this unnecessary and provocative practice.

While subcritical tests are permitted under compromise language that was meant to facilitate ratification of the CTBT by the Senate— but failed to do so—they go against the intent of the Treaty, which is to ensure that no new nuclear weapons will be designed and that no new capabilities will be developed for weapons that already exist. The nuclear-weapon states—and the US in particular—have a significant technological edge with regard to computer simulation of nuclear tests, derived from decades of actual test explosions. This advantage is not lost upon the rest of the world, which sees any such tests, with or without a nuclear chain reaction, as a means to extend and perpetuate the role of nuclear weapons in security policy, and not as a step toward disarmament.

The message subcritical testing sends to other States is that nuclear weapons are here for the long term and that their designs can be modified and enhanced simply by making use of a loophole in a treaty to which the US says it is otherwise committed. At the very least, this is a demoralizing message for the large majority of States who have made nuclear disarmament an urgent priority. For at least a few who may be questioning the wisdom of remaining non-nuclear in the future, subcritical tests are seen as a hypocritical practice that undermines the arguments for non-proliferation.

While nuclear disarmament will require complex and careful negotiation among many States, you can end future US subcritical tests with the stroke of a pen. We urge you to take this step without delay. □

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