



Written by [William P. Hoar](#) on May 11, 2010

A Bad START and Other Perilous Nuclear Posturing

Item: In an article entitled, “Republicans expected to line up behind New START,” the Associated Press reported on April 9: “Despite near gridlock in the Senate, Republicans were expected to swing behind a new arms control treaty with Russia that President Barack Obama said they will like, even though some are reserving judgment until Obama can assure them the pact won’t set back U.S. defenses against other potential foes such as North Korea and Iran. Obama called the pact signed Thursday a fresh beginning with Russia and predicted the Senate will ratify the agreement by the end of the year.”



Obama was in Prague, noted the AP, “following the signing of a treaty that would shrink the one-time rivals’ arsenals to their lowest levels since the frightening arms race of the 1960s.”

The so-called New START Treaty is a successor to the 1991 Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty. It signaled, said the wire-service account, “a bold opening in previously soured U.S.-Russia relations. If ratified by both nations’ legislatures, it will shrink the limit of nuclear warheads to 1,550 each over seven years, down about a third from the current ceiling of 2,200.”

Item: *The Economist* for April 17 offered measured praise to President Obama’s “nuclear push,” — pointing to his arms treaty with Russia, the recasting of U.S. nuclear policy, and a nuclear summit held in Washington. “It is the most eye-catching piece of nuclear theatrics since Ronald Reagan squared up to Mikhail Gorbachev in Reykjavik.” Critics of the results, complained the London-based publication, were “too harsh.” *The President’s “diplomacy, bolstered by his success over health-care reform, has in fact secured real gains, even if they are more modest than all the hoopla suggests.”*

Item: *On the CBS Evening News* for April 6, David Martin enthused: “The Cold War ended more than two decades ago, and today American nuclear strategy finally caught up with history.” The network reporter proclaimed: “For the first time ever, the new policy limits the circumstances under which the U.S. would resort to nuclear weapons, assuring nations which do not have them and do not try to get them they have nothing to worry about.”

Correction: Keep in mind President Obama’s avowed goal: a world free of nuclear weapons. He claims his atomic diplomacy is designed to make the United States a safer place. No doubt it will be a wonderful day when the unicorns trade in their wings to help pigs fly, but we’re not wasting our time waiting for that flight of fantasy either.

In the real world, there are nuclear weapons, aggressive militaries, desperate fanatics, and malicious dictators who have no intention of playing by rules or letting peace reign. Outside of fanciful pipe dreams and mythical utopias, you don’t disarm the nation or negotiate from weakness without opening the door to even greater risks.



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So what have the recent nuclear theatrics actually wrought? The summit in D.C. was essentially all show, produced nothing enforceable, and actually did not even include on the agenda the rather significant matter of a nuclear Iran.

The Obama administration's posturing, with the issuance of a revised national nuclear policy, is obfuscatory at best and suicidal at worst. The Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) vows that the United States will not use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear states that have signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty even if such powers were to attack the homeland with biological or chemical weapons. There are seemingly crafty loopholes and vague language, all of which are supposed to make us feel more secure. Or perhaps you will feel better knowing that the new policy also stipulates that the United States will not modernize our aging nuclear weapons?

Then there is the deal that the administration has made with Moscow about how many weapons we will be allowed to have — but to which the two parties to the agreement have diametrically opposed interpretations. The administration is trying to sell the treaty at home with promises that it places no restraints on U.S. missile defenses. Meanwhile, Russia insists there is a “legally binding linkage between strategic offense and strategic defensive weapons.” There is a reason that the Russian leader was grinning when Obama signed the treaty document: Virtually the only alleged concessions made by Moscow were agreements to reductions that were already planned.

When your stated aim is a world without nukes, and the presumed means to that end is an ambiguous pact, and the deal allows either party to withdraw — as this treaty does — you are in effect giving the other side veto power over your actions. Russia has already been blunt about its intentions, saying the treaty will only last if the United States “refrains from developing its missile defense capabilities quantitatively or qualitatively.” This President or his successor should expect to face a threat from the Kremlin to pull out of the New START if Russia is unhappy with stronger American defenses. Does it seem likely that Obama would suddenly opt for a spinal implant to defy Moscow's understanding if it meant his vaunted pact and dreams would evaporate? The question answers itself.

John Bolton, a former Undersecretary of State for Arms Control and International Security, former U.S. Ambassador to the UN, and a senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, faults President Obama's “national-security psychology” for what it has produced. Writing in National Review Online, Bolton notes that the President “has repeatedly said he believes lowering U.S. nuclear-warhead levels will encourage support for the Non-Proliferation Treaty's weapons prohibitions on non-nuclear-weapons states.” Bolton continues:

This is the purest form of theology, since the empirical evidence is entirely to the contrary. As the Cold War ended, Moscow and Washington made dramatic reductions in warhead levels, huge in percentage and absolute terms. Nonetheless, nuclear proliferation continued, and the pace is quickening. After START I and II, India, Pakistan, and North Korea tested nuclear weapons, and Iran rapidly approaches that point. Syria had a clandestine nuclear reactor until Israel destroyed it in September 2007. And if current and aspiring nuclear proliferators keep or develop weapons, this will encourage still more proliferation activity.

The dazzling international get-together in D.C. can hardly have deterred North Korea or Iran, even if they heard themselves called “outliers.” It's tough to hurt the feelings of the rulers in Pyongyang, for example, who have no compunctions about building nukes as quickly as they can while millions of their people have been forced to eat grasses and roots to stay alive. The D.C. summit, as is often the case in the realms of starry-eyed folks with their heads in the clouds, operated from false premises. This is not



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just delusional, but dangerous.

Columnist Mark Steyn took note of the President's "pledge to set a good example by reducing America's nuclear arsenal," and explained that "there's no correlation between peace and the number of weapons — except insofar as states with only a few nukes are more likely to use them than states with gazillions: If you've only got a dozen, you're under more pressure to let 'em fly before they're taken out by incoming."

Steyn continued:

It would be greatly to the advantage of civilization if responsible powers were to develop new forms of limited, highly targeted, bunker-busting nukes. As is well understood by our enemies, the modern West has no stomach for large-scale casualties: On the morning of September 11th, for example, Mullah Omar had no fear that Washington would nuke even remote and lightly inhabited parts of the Hindu Kush. As we learned the hard way in Iraq and Afghanistan, stupid, ill-trained illiterates with primitive explosives who don't care who they kill can inflict quite a lot of damage on the technologically advanced, highly trained warriors of civilized states. That's the "asymmetric warfare" that matters.

So virtuously proclaiming oneself opposed to nuclear modernization ensures a planet divided into civilized states with unusable weapons and barbarous regimes happy to kill with whatever's to hand.

Those who build castles in the sky aren't dissuaded from making yet another deal with a power that has a lengthy, insidious history of cheating. This does bother realists. Some are even Republicans, although far too few GOP leaders objected when the Bush administration was making similar hazardous moves.

Rep. Tom Price (R-Ga.), chairman of the Republican Study Committee, is rightfully uneasy about the new nuclear posture and potential arms-control treaty. Says Price:

The Nuclear Posture Review contains several very troubling changes in American policy. It is simply reckless for the Obama administration to take the nuclear option off the table for any reason. Changing our posture in the event we are attacked with biological or chemical weapons by non-nuclear states would actually put Americans in greater danger by encouraging the proliferation of these weapons. And by prohibiting the development of new nuclear capabilities, this administration is ensuring that America's nuclear arsenal, our strongest deterrent against WMD attacks, will grow older and less reliable. This is not a policy for security.

In similar fashion, the Heritage Foundation rather calmly points to the precedents, saying in a fact sheet: "Russia has a history of violating arms-control agreements, and verifying the number of deployed warheads in its arsenal is difficult. The treaty will allow for warhead estimates based on the number of launchers, but it is unclear whether it will provide a method to ensure Russia doesn't put more than the estimate on each launcher."

Moreover, the negotiations with Moscow were made from a position disadvantageous to the United States. When the former START treaty expired in December 2009, points out the Heritage analysis, "the U.S. had to abandon a monitoring station for Russian weapons in Votkinsk. The United States is now unable to monitor Russia's production of the highly destabilizing RS-24 mobile multi-warhead intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM). Open sources indicate that this missile will be the mainstay of Russian strategic forces by 2016."

It seems a foregone conclusion that most of the cutting is going to be done by the United States, that is,



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if the Senate goes along with this proposed disarmament accord with Moscow. Frank Gaffney, a former U.S. Assistant Defense Secretary who is the head of the Center for Security Policy in Washington, D.C., says the Russians “are aggressively modernizing their strategic forces with both new missiles and warheads. They claim that by 2015 roughly 80 percent of their long-range arsenal will have been upgraded — an activity we are subsidizing by paying to dismantle their old weapon systems, freeing up funds for Moscow’s modernization programs.”

It is quite another matter for the United States. This country, observes Gaffney, “has not introduced a new nuclear weapon in over fifteen years. Its missiles, submarines and bombers are, by and large, even older, with some dating back to the 1950s and ’60s. Today, the nation has no capability to produce new nuclear weapons and could not manufacture them in quantity for many years — the only nuclear power of whom that can be said.”

In short, this is not a place for a new START. It is past time to stop disarming ourselves. It’s time to reload.

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