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## Next Steps Toward a World Free of Nuclear Weapons: the View from Washington

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Nearly a year ago, President Barack Obama’s campaign to confront global nuclear weapons threats started with a bang. In April in Prague, Obama reiterated the U.S. commitment to “seek the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons” beginning with renewed U.S. leadership to reduce the role and number of nuclear weapons, permanently outlaw nuclear testing, strengthen the NPT, and accelerate U.S. and global efforts to secure vulnerable nuclear materials.

Since then, Obama has achieved important progress and shifted the terms of debate.

Just weeks after Obama’s Prague address and days after the U.S. delegation reiterated that it recognizes commitments made at past nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conferences, States Parties agreed on an agenda for reviewing the treaty later this year.

In April, Obama and President Dmitry Medvedev met to “reset” of their strategic relationship and called on their negotiators begin work on a new, verifiable Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, which U.S. and Russian negotiators have nearly finalized. The Obama administration’s decision to shelve the controversial George W. Bush plan to deploy 10 unproven ground-based strategic missile interceptors in Poland in favor of a more flexible and less provocative missile defense architecture has helped facilitate progress.

The administration also took steps to renew the diplomatic dialogue with Iran and North Korea to find ways to deal with the risks posed by their nuclear activities and safeguards violations.

The administration set into motion technical studies to explain the case for U.S. approval of the CTBT, and in September Secretary of State Hillary Clinton addressed the Article XIV Conference on Facilitating CTBT Entry Into Force and called on others who have not done so to ratify.

Also, in September, Obama won UN Security Council support for Resolution 1887, which outlines a comprehensive plan to advance nuclear nonproliferation, disarmament, and security objectives.

Now, the hard part begins. Within the next few months, the administration must finish and win Senate approval of the new START, secure international support for measures to strengthen the nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty at the May review conference, and begin to persuade undecided Senate Republicans that the time has finally come to ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty.

To succeed, the president and his cabinet must devote far more energy to these goals and ensure that his administration’s top-to-bottom Nuclear Posture Review (NPR), due by March 1, fully supports his Prague

In the next few minutes I'm going to review the situation on the major disarmament-related priorities in Washington, highlight some of the obstacles in the way of progress, and offer a few thoughts about what needs to be done to advance progress, including some suggestions about how U.S. allies can be part of the solution.

## **New START**

Let's start with START. This week U.S. and Russian negotiators are entering their ninth round of talks on a new strategic nuclear arms reduction deal that would build upon and update the highly successful 1991 START, which expired Dec. 5.

Lower, verifiable limits on still-bloated U.S. and Russian strategic nuclear arsenals are long overdue. Today, the United States and Russia each deploy more than 2,000 strategic warheads, most of which exist only to deter a massive nuclear attack by the other.

As President Barack Obama, Sens. John McCain (R-Ariz.) and Richard Lugar (R-Ind.), and many prominent national security leaders have argued, deeper U.S. and Russian strategic nuclear reductions are possible and prudent.

Unfortunately, the Bush administration did not seek to extend START or replace it with a new treaty before leaving office. To their credit, Obama and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev have decided to pursue a new pact that will reduce deployed strategic warheads to somewhere between 1,500 and 1,675 each (about a 30 percent cut from current levels) and reduce strategic delivery vehicles to a level between 500 and 1,100. Washington currently possesses approximately 900 strategic nuclear delivery vehicles, while Moscow deploys an estimated 600-800, so the new ceiling will likely be around or perhaps even below 700, which would constitute about a 25 to 30 percent reduction.

The new agreement will carry forward the most essential of START's verification and monitoring provisions, which are still needed for predictability and to provide each side with high confidence that the other is complying with the terms of the treaty. It will also put in place new and innovative verification systems to monitor the new deployed strategic warhead ceilings.

The New START will also open the way for more comprehensive U.S.-Russian arms reduction talks that may begin later this year, which the Obama administration says should address all types of nuclear warheads: deployed and nondeployed; strategic and nonstrategic.

There is widespread support for the New START deal in the Senate and I expect that eventually the Senate will approve it by well more than a two-thirds margin.

However, there are some who oppose Obama's broader nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament strategy who are already trying to undermine, delay, and/or condition the Senate's approval of the treaty before it arrives.

Sen. Jon Kyl (R-Ariz.) and a few other Republicans have suggested that the Obama administration should have extended START rather than "rush" toward a new treaty that reduces strategic stockpiles further. That approach of course is now out of the question and was not realistic to begin with. At this point, Moscow will not agree to an extension, and without the lower limits on deployed warheads under a new START deal, Russia could and would likely maintain a deployed strategic arsenal in excess of 2,000 warheads indefinitely.

Kyl and many of his fellow Republicans are also arguing that deeper strategic nuclear reductions are unwise without a significant new investment in the U.S. nuclear delivery systems and the weapons complex, including expanded plutonium pit production capacity and a new “modern” warhead. Part of his aim may be to undermine support for the CTBT later on down the line.

The Obama administration will and should argue that such a condition is unnecessary given that the Obama administration already supports targeted investments in key stockpile maintenance work and facilities that advance the work of the existing warhead Life Extension Programs, and given that from a technical perspective new design replacement warheads are unnecessary and are counterproductive to nonproliferation goals. As Bill Perry, George Shultz, Henry Kissinger, and Sam Nunn pointed out in their January 20 op-ed in *The Wall Street Journal*, a new independent report from the JASON scientific advisory group found that, “[L]ifetimes of today’s nuclear warheads could be extended for decades, with no anticipated loss in confidence.”

New START critics have also complained that it will not provide an adequate verification system to ensure compliance. To the contrary, without the New START deal, there will be no verification at all. With START there will be an ongoing verification and monitoring system that more than adequately ensures compliance with its limitations, which will be different than the original START.

These and other issues will be debated soon. If the treaty can be finalized within the next month, we can expect that the Senate will begin its consideration of the New START deal by April or May and hold a vote before July 1. Ratifying treaties is never easy, but if the Obama administration devotes high-level effort to this common sense next step, it will be approved this year.

### **“Immediate and Aggressive” Action on the CTBT**

After the New START agreement, the Obama administration wants the Senate to take on the CTBT. While U.S. approval of the CTBT is overdue, there is more work to get the job done.

The Obama administration’s CTBT effort started off well with the President pledging “immediate and aggressive” action to win Senate support for the treaty. In May, Vice-president Biden was tapped to play a leadership role in the effort.

The case for U.S. approval of the CTBT is stronger than ever. Since the CTBT was briefly considered by the U.S. Senate in 1999, there have been technical advances in the U.S. stockpile stewardship program and verification and monitoring capabilities that should address earlier concerns that led many Senators to vote “no.”

For example, contrary to claims that “concerns about aging and reliability [of the U.S. arsenal] have only grown,” confidence in the ability to maintain U.S. warheads is increasing. Through the Stockpile Stewardship Program, which includes nuclear weapons surveillance and maintenance, non-nuclear and subcritical nuclear experiments, and increasingly sophisticated supercomputer modeling, each warhead type in the U.S. nuclear arsenal has been determined to be safe and reliable through a rigorous certification process each year since 1994. The 2002 National Academy of Sciences panel, which included three former nuclear weapons lab directors, found that the current Stockpile Stewardship Program provides the technical capabilities that are necessary to maintain confidence in the safety and reliability of the existing seven types of nuclear warheads in the active stockpile. “provided that adequate resources are made available, and are properly focused on this

As a result, with or without the CTBT, it is highly unlikely that the United States will ever conduct another nuclear explosive test. There is neither the scientific need nor political will to do so. A growing list of bipartisan leaders agree that by ratifying the CTBT, the U.S. stands to gain an important constraint on the ability of other states to build new and more deadly nuclear weapons that could pose a threat to American security.

As Sigfried Hecker, former director of Los Alamos National Laboratory, recently put it: “the single most important reason to ratify the CTBT is to stop other countries from improving their arsenals.”

For example, a new round of nuclear weapon test explosions would allow China to perfect smaller warhead designs and allow it to put multiple warheads on its relatively small arsenal of strategic ballistic missiles—a move that could allow it to increase its nuclear strike capability. Without nuclear weapon test explosions, potential nuclear-armed states like Iran would not be able to proof test the more advanced, smaller nuclear warhead designs that are needed in order to deliver such weapons using ballistic missiles.

National and international capabilities to detect and deter possible clandestine nuclear testing by other states will be significantly greater with the CTBT in force, but U.S. ratification is essential to spur action by the eight other states whose ratification is required for entry into force. And of course, U.S. ratification of the CTBT will help build support for measures needed to strengthen the NPT.

Through the course of 2009, we saw a number of prominent national security experts express their support for Senate approval of the CTBT, including former George H. W. Bush National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft and former NNSA administrator Linton Brooks. It is a good list but it needs to grow longer.

As of today there are at least 60 likely CTBT supporters in the Senate, putting the Obama administration with striking distance of a 2/3 majority.

However, over the course of the past several months, the administration has focused on putting into motion technical studies by the National Academies of Science and the Intelligence Community that will help build the case for the treaty and it has delayed effort to launch a systematic and high-level effort to win the support of key Senators.

As a result, the CTBT effort has fallen off pace and is now in jeopardy because of the slow pace of the New START negotiations and the crowded Congressional calendar. The White House nevertheless has an opportunity to increase its political engagement with the Senate on the CTBT.

With a robust and well-funded nuclear weapons stockpile management plan and new technical reports that make it clear that the treaty can be verified with high confidence and the U.S. stockpile can be maintained effectively without the renewal of nuclear testing, the administration will have the tools it needs to make the case, but it needs to make the case and at a high-level. Even if the CTBT is not formally voted on this year, it is essential that the Obama administration secure the public support of a few additional Senators for the CTBT.

U.S. allies, including Canada, also need to do their part by publicly expressing their strong desire for positive action toward ratification by Washington and other CTBT hold-out governments. This can have a powerful effect on both the White House and key Senators. In addition, it is important that Canada and other friends of the CTBT actively engage hold-out governments, including and most particularly China and India, to ratify the CTBT.

## The Nuclear Posture Review

Even before START and the CTBT are before the Senate, President Obama will have a chance to advance the nuclear disarmament effort with his Nuclear Posture Review, which is now scheduled to be completed March

In our view the NPR can and must effect transformational rather than incremental changes in U.S. nuclear weapons policy in at least four key areas.

First, the NPR should recognize that maintaining a large nuclear arsenal dedicated to performing a wide range of missions is unnecessary and contrary to U.S. security interests. Incredibly, even after two post-Cold War NPRs, the United States retains thousands of nuclear warheads to deter a Russian nuclear attack, defend U.S. forces or allies against conventional attack, and counter chemical and biological threats.

Given the U.S. conventional military edge and the catastrophic effects of nuclear weapons, no plausible circumstance requires or could justify the use of nuclear weapons to deal with a non-nuclear threat, and they are useless in deterring or responding to nuclear terrorism.

Accordingly, the new NPR should narrow the role of nuclear weapons to a core deterrence mission: maintain a sufficient, survivable nuclear force for the sole purpose of deterring the use of nuclear weapons by another country against the United States or its allies. This would reinforce existing U.S. negative security assurances and significantly reduce the salience of nuclear weapons.

Second, a core nuclear deterrence posture would allow the United States to reduce its nuclear inventory drastically, to no more than a few hundred deployed strategic warheads on a smaller triad of delivery systems within the next few years. To help engage Russia in talks to reduce its arsenal of tactical nuclear warheads, the NPR will open the way to a joint U.S.-NATO decision to withdraw the militarily obsolete stockpile of an estimated 200 U.S. tactical bombs from Europe.

Some suggest that deep U.S. nuclear weapons reductions would lead certain U.S. allies, namely Japan and Turkey, to consider building their own nuclear arsenals. Such assertions exaggerate the role of “extended nuclear deterrence,” underestimate the role of U.S. conventional forces, and ignore the risks and costs of going nuclear.

It is important for nations like Canada to counteract these myths and to make it clear that a reduction in the role and number of U.S. nuclear weapons would reinforce existing U.S. negative security assurances vis-à-vis non nuclear-weapon states and support our positive security assurances to allies in the event of nuclear attack on them, which would further strengthen support for the NPT.

Third, the NPR should eliminate the requirement and plans for rapid launch in response to a nuclear attack. As Obama noted during the campaign, “[K]eeping nuclear weapons ready to launch on a moment’s notice is a dangerous relic of the Cold War. Such policies increase the risk of catastrophic accidents or miscalculation.” As president, he now has a chance to order changes to operational procedures that give the commander-in-chief more time to consider his response to a nuclear attack or provocation and work with Russia to adopt a similar posture.

Finally, Obama's NPR should clarify his January 2009 pledge "not to authorize new nuclear weapons," by stating that it is U.S. policy not to develop new-design warheads or modify existing warheads to create new military capabilities.

Progress in each of these areas will be difficult but each is vital to reducing nuclear weapons dangers. If the United States, its allies, and its friends fail to significantly reduce the role and number of nuclear weapons and permanently ban nuclear testing, the global effort to stem the proliferation of nuclear weapons and prevent the use will falter.

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*The Arms Control Association (ACA) is a nonpartisan membership-based organization established in 1971 to promote greater public understanding and effective policy solutions to address the security challenges posed by the world's most dangerous weapons. ACA publishes the monthly journal **Arms Control Today**.*