

WHY DOES AMERICA NEED NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT?

On April 6, Barack Obama announced a new nuclear doctrine of the United States, proclaiming that **the USA would not use nuclear weapons against any country that does not possess such weapons**. On April 8 in Prague, the presidents of Russia and America signed a new version of the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START). But does this almost simultaneous embrace of a new agreement actually reduce the probability of armed nuclear conflict?

After scrutinizing the documents, it appears that little has changed in comparison with previous versions. **America is still ready to use nuclear weapons against Iran and North Korea**, and that means that the list of 'rogue states' hasn't been seriously revised since the previous administration (with the exception of occupied Iraq).

The number of warheads that Russia and the US plan to keep (1550 units) is still more than enough for mutual obliteration. Further, signing of the treaty between two leading nuclear powers does not bind other countries that either possess nuclear weapons, or are on the verge of develop-

ing them.

Finally, on the day of the announcement of a new nuclear doctrine, Obama declared that henceforth America will rely mostly on conventional weapons. But, if we consider the military potential of America, conventional weapons are not only highly competitive with nuclear weapons, but in some parameters even surpass them.

So, what do we have? Has Obama's administration agreed to reduce nuclear confrontation with Russia only because, in fact, there is no further developmental potential in this sphere? Or has it become too expensive to maintain nuclear weapons? Or have they found some new and more effective means of applying pressure on potential opponents?

Perhaps Obama just needs to show by any means that he, unlike his predecessor, is 'a dove of peace' capable of flexible action in the international arena. After numerous failures in domestic policy, this task takes on even greater importance for the American president, a task from which Russia too can derive its own benefits.

RUSSIA SHOULD HAVE REDUCED ITS NUCLEAR WEAPONS?

Sergey Karaganov

■ *Dear Professor Karaganov, in your opinion, do nuclear weapons still have a deterrent value? If not, what can they be replaced with?*

The assessment of whether nuclear weapons have a deterrent value depends not so much on the United States as on other countries. No one wants to reject nuclear weapons as a deterrent factor, and many (or some) countries even want to obtain them.

■ *But the new nuclear strategy of Barack Obama places emphasis on conventional weapons.*

It really is true that Obama's doctrine places a somewhat greater emphasis on conventional weapons, because the Americans can afford to resolve a lot more of their security problems with conventional weapons. **Russia and**

other countries cannot afford it.

Accordingly, America has a certain psychological and propaganda advantage. I don't think that any change in their policy would influence anything in, say, Russian policy.

■ *Do you believe that nuclear weapons have, until now, been an important factor of scientific and technical progress? Do they maintain this role for the development of science, or they will be replaced by other military technologies?*

No, nuclear weapons will remain a factor of scientific and technical progress, as far as they have been. For example, significant expenditure and scientific and technical effort are needed in order to maintain the nuclear potential without carrying out real tests. On the other hand, countries such as Russia or

China will increase their reliance on their own nuclear weapons if there is a chance that some other weapons may be promoted, in order to exclude the possible emergence of other effective instruments of attack. **As for the United States, the uncontested leader in this area, they will find ways to develop new types of military technologies.**

■ *Right-wing critics in America see the fact that Obama decided to sign an agreement with Russia as 'backing down'. Do you agree with this view? Could it be that it is all simply about cost cutting?*

Both cost cutting and the desire to reset relations with Russia — which have been in an appalling state — stand behind the agreement. Barack Obama has simply decided to reset relations with Russia using exactly this method, in order to bring about

a chance for cooperation, for example, on the Iranian issue. I am not sure Russia really needs to reduce these weapons. Though, in principle, we will also benefit from this agreement.

■ *Maybe it has simply been too expensive to maintain nuclear weapons at the existing level?*

It is expensive, but, from a military point of view, nuclear weapons are the cheapest type of weapon there is. As the most recent past has shown, the respective parties have been spending only 15-20% of the military budget on maintaining their nuclear capability.

■ *Doesn't the fact that problems of ballistic missile defence in Europe are not mentioned in the agreement in any way make this agreement meaningless?*

The problem of ballistic missile defence in Europe is a nonissue. Such a problem does not exist at all. It has been discussed for 20 years, but nothing specific has been mentioned in these discussions so far. The Bulgarians and the Romanians were told that some missiles would be deployed on their territory in the future. It is not known what missiles, if any, will be deployed in these countries. Even if it happens, then, according to the available data, they will be interceptors of mid-range ballistic missiles, and Russia possesses none of those. There is nothing to intercept, so these systems don't pose any threat to Russia. The infrastructure, radars and everything else is another business. This could become a problem at a certain point of time in the future.

■ *How do you evaluate the chances for the ratification of this agreement? Obama does not have 67 votes in the Senate.*

I would rate the chances of that at 65 against 35, because the Republicans need to take a success away from Obama by any means. Irrespective of the merits of the agreement, the Republicans will try to torpedo it. The question is whether Obama will have enough energy to pursue it. As of now, it is not clear, but in principle it is a



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mutually beneficial agreement, and the Americans have not ceded anything important. Neither has Russia. In essence, both countries have just agreed to reduce excessive armaments.

■ *Do you think this agreement has any significance for the countries that already possess nuclear weapons, or for the so-called 'threshold' countries, such as Israel and South Africa?*

In principle, this agreement makes the positions of other countries somewhat worse. However, **it would be strange to suppose that this agreement could block the proliferation of nuclear weapons.** Countries

are striving to obtain nuclear weapons, because they are striving to obtain security and prestige, not because Russia or America have not disarmed.

■ *Is it possible to achieve the 'global zero' in nuclear armaments that Obama mentioned a year ago?*

No, it is not possible. **Aspiring to achieve this is absolutely undesirable and, moreover, it would be harmful.** Even more than that, it would be dangerous. If we are talking about complete nuclear disarmament, we need to assume that humanity has changed. But we have been killing each other in huge numbers for thousands of years. There have been no global wars during the last 60 or 70 years precisely because of the existence of nuclear weapons.

■ *If we read Obama's statement carefully, it turns out that strikes on Iran and North Korea are still regarded as possibilities. Do you agree?*

Of course it is possible. But in this case, it is almost all about psychology. In reality, any state could be under threat, even if it is not a rogue state. Even if it just deploys elements of the strategic ballistic missile defence within its territory, it would automatically be added to the list of possible targets in the event of nuclear war. Hence, all such statements have only a political and a psychological value. I would not overestimate their significance, just as, for example, the statement that 'Russia rejects a preventive strike' or that 'the US rejects a preventive strike' should not be overestimated in significance. A list of threats to US security has recently been provided in the document devoted to the development of American ballistic missile defence systems (I'm citing from memory here): the desire of many countries to increase the invulnerability of their missile forces from a preventive strike has been mentioned among the first-priority objectives. This means that the US has also kept the preventive strike doctrine in place. ■

Sergey Karaganov was speaking with Boris Volkhonsky