



Calhoun: The NPS Institutional Archive
DSpace Repository

Faculty and Researchers

Faculty and Researchers' Publications

2009-04-01

**Arms Control in the Obama Administration:
Coming in from the Cold; Strategic Insights, v.
8, issue 2 (April 2009)**

Larsen, Jeffrey A.

Monterey, California. Naval Postgraduate School

Strategic Insights, v.8, issue 2 (April 2009)

<https://hdl.handle.net/10945/11258>

This publication is a work of the U.S. Government as defined in Title 17, United States Code, Section 101. Copyright protection is not available for this work in the United States.

Downloaded from NPS Archive: Calhoun



Calhoun is the Naval Postgraduate School's public access digital repository for research materials and institutional publications created by the NPS community. Calhoun is named for Professor of Mathematics Guy K. Calhoun, NPS's first appointed -- and published -- scholarly author.

Dudley Knox Library / Naval Postgraduate School
411 Dyer Road / 1 University Circle
Monterey, California USA 93943

<http://www.nps.edu/library>

Arms Control in the Obama Administration: *Coming in from the Cold*

by [Jeffrey A. Larsen, Ph.D.](#)

Strategic Insights is a quarterly electronic journal produced by the [Center for Contemporary Conflict](#) at the [Naval Postgraduate School](#) in Monterey, California. The views expressed here are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the views of NPS, the Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government.

Introduction

Arms control may be coming in from the cold. The phrasing is appropriate, taken from one of the most famous Cold War novels by John Le Carré and made into one of the first successful Cold War spy movies, since arms control was birthed in the Cold War and, one can reasonably argue, helped keep it cold long enough for the West to win. With victory came a flurry of arms control activities that reached its zenith in the mid-1990s as both sides used the end of the conflict to codify lower numbers of forces and ensure that the war was really, truly over.

By the late 1990s, however, arms control had lost its luster, as had arms control's cousin, nuclear weapons, and both became less important to a national security stance that no longer recognized the importance of such weapons, or such policies (arms control), or even such strategies (deterrence) in the globalizing post-Cold War world. With the arrival of President George W. Bush and the attacks of September 11th that put the country on a war footing against a dramatically different kind of enemy, arms control seemed passé, if not dead. The Bush administration did all it could to make sure it stayed that way.^[1]

With the investiture of Barack Obama as president, the United States may find itself restoring the tool of arms control to its formerly central place in the toolbox of American diplomacy. Arms control—even nuclear arms control—may once again be seen as a legitimate activity of government after eight years wandering the wilderness. Even without the change in political philosophies heralded by the new administration, the agenda facing the new president in the next year and a half would require his renewed attention on this policy approach. Probably the most urgent policy consideration in this agenda will be what to do about the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START I,) set to expire in December 2009, and new talks with Russia for some sort of follow-on nuclear reduction treaty. Congress has mandated the preparation of a survey of strategic issues, as well as a Defense Department-drafted Nuclear Posture Review, both in 2009. And the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) will hold its five-year review conference in 2010. This administration has already signaled that it intends to make deeper reductions in nuclear weapons—deployed or reserve, strategic or tactical—a centerpiece of its foreign policy, and the 2010 NPT review conference will likely be a significant turning point for this policy.

For these reasons, and others, the Obama administration finds itself facing the return of arms control. We can expect to see the administration making the effort to reinvigorate arms control organizations in both the State and Defense Departments to enhance the visibility of the approach, and to rebuild the diplomatic capacity to negotiate and carry out agreements in multiple arenas. Radical ideas in this arena may not carry much weight in what initially appears to be a

relatively centrist cabinet for the Obama administration, but the core concepts of arms control and disarmament are falling on much more fertile soil than they have for the past eight years. As but one example, reference the following quotation from the Obama White House website under the category “foreign policy objectives:”

Obama and Biden will... always maintain a strong deterrent as long as nuclear weapons exist. But they will take several steps down the long road toward eliminating nuclear weapons. They will stop the development of new nuclear weapons, work with Russia to take U.S. and Russian ballistic missiles off hair trigger alert, seek dramatic reductions in U.S. and Russian stockpiles of nuclear weapons and material, and set a goal to expand the U.S.-Russian ban on intermediate-range missiles so that the agreement is global.[2]

As an aside, it is interesting from an academic point of view that the value of nuclear weapons and deterrence have fallen to such a low standing that they are seldom considered worthy of separate and distinct studies or analyses anymore. All recent studies on “arms control” have included sections on new nuclear weapons, the value and purpose of said weapons, and the role of missile defenses.

Arms control was created and used in the Cold War as a tool for enhancing a state’s national security, regardless of the types of weapons systems, so this expansion of the concept of arms control to include nuclear weapons and strategic defenses is indeed illustrative and surprising. Today’s studies should more accurately be labeled examinations of strategic force structure and purpose, rather than arms control. Yet such is the linkage in the mind of today’s bureaucrats and even some academics that arms control, deterrence, nuclear weapons, and even missile defenses are conjoined in one intellectual muddle. Even the Obama White House lists what few arms control objectives it has under “foreign policy,” and then under the sub-heading “nuclear weapons,” rather than where I would argue they rightfully belong, under “defense policy.”

Such widespread fuzzy thinking makes it difficult to sort out the real value or purpose of any one of these factors. It also reflects the view held in Europe for some time that nuclear weapons are no longer useable as military weapons, but only have a political purpose. Such has been NATO’s formal position since the early 1990s. And while that position has never been clearly appreciated by most analysts, it has served the purpose of keeping the Alliance united in supporting a minimal deterrent force stationed on the European Continent, though for what use, if any, nobody could tell you. The same future may be in store for U.S. nuclear weapons. But I digress.

This paper shall attempt to focus on arms control, but given the nature of today’s thought processes on these subjects, it will also necessarily also touch on some of the other fields, as well.

Specific Policy Pronouncements

This section presents short overviews of the Obama administration’s publicly announced policy positions on a number of key arms control, disarmament, and nonproliferation issues.[3] Overall, there appears to be more continuity than differences from the Bush administration, with three exceptions: the follow-on to START treaty, the possibility of CTBT treaty ratification, and the next level for continuing nuclear reductions.

Nuclear Disarmament

President Obama supports the Four Statesmen approach to gradual reductions to global zero in nuclear weapons stockpiles, as enunciated in their *Wall Street Journal* op-ed piece in January 2007.[4] According to Ivo Daalder and Jan Lodol, some two-thirds of all living former Secretaries of State and Defense and National Security Advisors have signed on to this argument, so it would

appear that the four have breathed new life into the old disarmament debate.^[5] The Four Statesmen published a follow-up editorial in the same newspaper in January 2008, which included several actionable measures that they urged the world community, led by the United States, to take right away.^[6] Three of these would appear nearly verbatim on the White House web page on Obama administration goals that stood up on 20 January 2009: “extend key verification and monitoring provision of the 1991 START treaty and further reductions as agreed to in the Moscow Treaty;” “increase warning time for launch of nuclear-armed ballistic missiles;” and “accelerate work on securing nuclear weapons and nuclear materials worldwide and helping other nations comply with UN Resolution 1540.”^[7]

More generally, “move toward a nuclear free world” is one of the administration’s key objectives. In response to a Council for a Livable World questionnaire during the campaign, Obama promised that: “As president, I will take the lead to work for a world in which the roles and risks of nuclear weapons can be reduced and ultimately eliminated.”^[8] And in a similar questionnaire for the Arms Control Association, he stated that:

As president, I will set a new direction in nuclear weapons policy and show the world that America believes in its existing commitment under the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty to work to ultimately eliminate all nuclear weapons. I fully support reaffirming this goal, as called for by George Schultz, Henry Kissinger, William Perry, and Sam Nunn, as well as the specific steps they propose to move us in that direction.^[9]

He went on to say, “To make progress toward this goal, I will seek real, verifiable reductions in U.S. and Russian nuclear weapons—whether deployed or nondeployed, whether strategic or nonstrategic—and work with other nuclear powers to reduce global stockpiles dramatically by the end of my presidency.”^[10] This sounds like a sincere and strongly held policy position. Yet candidate Obama also made clear that “American will not disarm unilaterally. Indeed, as long as states retain nuclear weapons, the United States will maintain a nuclear deterrent that is strong, safe, secure, and reliable.”^[11] And President Obama, in his first weeks in office, was sober and cautious about repeating the rhetoric of immediate unilateral nuclear force reductions.

Nuclear Force Structure

Candidate Obama also made it quite clear that he would not authorize the development of new nuclear weapons. As a senator he voted against funding for the reliable replacement warhead (RRW). On the other hand, he did ask Robert Gates to remain in his cabinet as Secretary of Defense. Gates is known to favor the RRW program as necessary to ensure the reliability of the nuclear stockpile into the future, as he has recently written in *Foreign Affairs*.^[12] The new president may not be categorically opposed to modernization of the nuclear enterprise.

Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) Follow-On

The new administration has pledged to seek Russian agreement to extend the START I monitoring and verification provisions prior to the treaty’s expiration in December 2009. This will continue to serve as the verification protocol for the Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty (SORT, also known as the Moscow Treaty) through its completion date of December 2012. Obama also promises to work with Russia to increase missile launch warning and decision times.^[13] What this means remains to be seen, but relaxing nuclear force postures while retaining strategic stability and balance between the United States and Russia, and eventually between the United States, Russia, and others, is not as simple a proposition as some might have us believe. In fact, according to State Department personnel, the United States and Russia remain very far apart on a number of key issues related to further strategic arms reduction, making it unlikely that the two sides will be able to negotiate a new treaty by December 2009. As a result, they were saying early in the Obama administration, the most likely outcome this year will be a simple extension of

the existing treaty so as not to lose the verification measures associated with START that are needed for the Moscow Treaty.

Apparent desire by the Obama administration to improve relations with Russia on a more general level, however, may result in commitments to resolve this issue sooner rather than later. U.S.-Russian relations took a major step in that direction on 1 April 2009 when Presidents Obama and Dmitri Medvedev, meeting at the G-20 summit in London, agreed to begin immediate negotiations to achieve a follow-on to START treaty ready for signature by July 2009 and ratification by the December end date for START I. Obama also pledged to push for the ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty in the U.S. Senate. Senator Richard Lugar, a senior Republican advocate of arms control, called the agreement “truly remarkable... almost breathless in its optimism and scope.”^[14]

Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT)

Strengthening the NPT regime is the second key objective for the new administration listed on the White House web page. In September 2008 Obama was quoted as saying that “I will show the world that America believes in its existing commitment under the NPT to ultimately eliminate all nuclear weapons.”^[15]

Globalizing the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty

Referring to the 1987 INF Treaty between the United States and Russia, the new president has stated that he will “set a goal to expand the U.S.-Russian ban on intermediate-range missiles so that the agreement is global.”^[16] No more specifics have been proffered publicly, but this has been a long-standing goal of the disarmament community, and one supported by the Russian government.

Nonstrategic Nuclear Weapons

According to the *Ploughshares Monitor*, candidate Obama agreed to “start a dialogue, including within NATO and with Russia, on consolidating nuclear weapons designed for forward deployment to enhance their security, and as a first step toward careful accounting for them and for their eventual elimination.”^[17] Coupled with the comment from his *Arms Control Today* interview about wanting to control *all* nuclear weapons, strategic and non-strategic, this suggests a much broader nuclear arms control agenda than previously attempted.^[18] This desire to include non-strategic nuclear weapons runs up against current NATO policy as expressed in the Alliance Strategic Concept of 1999 (currently being updated for release in 2010), which places the Alliance’s ultimate deterrent on the nuclear weapons of the three NATO nuclear states: Great Britain, France, and the United States. Should the United States choose to remove any remaining U.S. nuclear weapons from forward deployment in Europe, NATO may be faced with an “agonizing reappraisal” of its defense requirements and ability to rely on American extended deterrence—or, more simply, it could choose to rely on U.S. off-shore forces, as the United States currently provides for Japan, Taiwan, South Korea, and other allies. Still, the loss of visible American weapons on European soil would require an adjustment on the part of NATO. Furthermore, Russia will have little incentive to bargain away those American bombs in exchange for its much larger cache of non-strategic nuclear weapons.^[19]

The United States extends its nuclear deterrent umbrella over more than just NATO. In a world of fewer nuclear weapons alliances and extended deterrence guarantees will become much more meaningful. With smaller numbers, and possibly with fewer options for nuclear forces within these numbers, the concept of extending U.S. deterrence to friends and allies around the globe may one day come into doubt. This too may lead to unintended or unanticipated consequences.

De-Alerting

Candidate Obama pointed out that while President Bush had campaigned on a pledge in 2000 to remove nuclear weapons from their ready to launch status, he failed to do so once in office. President Obama claims that he will work with Moscow make these changes to “outdated Cold War policies” in order to reduce the risk of catastrophic accident or miscalculation.[20] Not everyone agrees that this is a problem, however, and there is debate over whether the solutions carry acceptable costs.

Removing prompt responding systems like ICBMs from alert may be more art than science. Very prompt systems were postured the way they were in the Cold War for good reasons. Those reasons rested not on the merits of the system, but rather squarely on the state of the underlying relationship between the parties. While the Cold War is over, there are many who are not yet convinced the relationship between the United States and Russia has reached a state where de-alerting is possible. Further, de-alerting, which imposes delays in these prompt systems and could, if miscalculated, lead to the operational loss of that system, requires stronger means of verification, particularly in a world of fewer nuclear weapons and delivery systems.

De-Posturing

In a new twist, candidate Obama sated in his *Arms Control Today* interview that “I will also immediately stand down all nuclear forces to be reduced under the Moscow Treaty and urge Moscow to do the same.”[21] The latest publicly released numbers placed the U.S. arsenal of deployed strategic warheads a year ago at 3,000 to 3,500, or about where they would have been if the START II treaty had entered into force. Unverified reports say that the United States is well ahead of schedule in reducing its arsenal to meet Moscow Treaty limits, and may have already reached the treaty agreed level of 2,200 warheads—making the United States compliant with the treaty nearly four years early.[22] Even if we are not at that level yet, President Obama’s statement implies that shortly after entering office the number of operationally deployed strategic delivery weapons may drop to the range of 1,700 to 2,200 called for in the SORT treaty.

As with de-alerting, shrinking forces to these levels at an accelerated pace will require strong verification of reciprocal actions. Without reciprocity, or the ability to confidently ensure that these forces are not seen as threatening in a world where small numbers of nuclear weapons are consequential to stability and deterrence calculations, de-posturing will be a challenge.

Nuclear Nonproliferation and Loose Nukes

The Obama campaign committed to securing all loose nuclear weapon materials around the world in the first four years of his term, a promise he reiterated on the White House web page listing his foreign policy objectives, and again at his first news conference after taking office on 9 February 2009.[23] He also pledged to work with Russia and other countries to create and implement a comprehensive set of standards to protect materials from theft, phase out the use of highly enriched uranium from the civil power industry, and convene a summit on nuclear terrorism. Taken together, this category alone certainly represents a major undertaking, but one with multiple levels of potential payback if done properly. One can presume this means continued support for the multiplicity of existing bilateral and multinational programs meant to achieve this result, primarily run by the Departments of State, Defense, and Energy.[24]

Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT)

President Obama was not in the Senate for the first vote to ratify the CTBT in 1997, but he has vowed to make ratification a central policy goal of his administration. From the *Arms Control Today* questionnaire he states: “I will reach out to the Senate to secure the ratification of the

CTBT at the earliest practical date and will then launch a diplomatic effort to bring onboard other states whose ratifications are required for the treaty to enter into force.”[25]

Secretary Gates however, in response to a question in October 2008, threw some cold reality onto the discussion about the CTBT. The treaty failed to achieve Senate advise and consent in 1997, he said, because of doubts about its verifiability. Secretary Gates indicated he didn't oppose the treaty, but believed the verifiability concerns of the Senate needed to be addressed. The global network of sensors put in place by the CTBT Organization over the past 12 years and its proven capabilities may overturn some earlier congressional skepticism about the ability to truly verify a comprehensive test ban.

Whether verifiability of the CTBT is a real concern or a canard for those seeking a reason not to vote for it is debatable, however: with 59 or 60 Democrats in the Senate in 2009, versus a Republican majority in 1997, there is a possibility this Senate may not see verifiability as the same obstacle as in the past. With some of the more hawkish Senate Republicans from a decade ago now out of office, and many more chastened, it is conceivable that enough Senators may cross the aisle in the spirit of bipartisanship and pass this treaty without the changes Secretary Gates believes necessary. They are likely to get their chance to do so in 2009 since the president announced his desire to see the treaty ratified as part of the U.S.-Russian strategic agreement at the London G-20 Summit.[26]

Fissile Materials Cutoff Treaty

President Obama has called for a “global effort to negotiate a verifiable treaty ending the production of fissile materials for weapons purposes.” He has also called upon other interested governments to join with the United States in establishing a global nuclear energy architecture.[27]

Missile Defenses

It is unclear why today's national security community insists on including missile defenses in categories like nuclear weapons, except for the juxtaposition of strategic defenses with strike forces as two legs of the new strategic triad introduced in the 2001 Nuclear Posture Review. Nonetheless, there is a historical case for combining these categories. The Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) of the 1960s started out as discussions of offenses and defenses within the context of nuclear forces.

While the new administration's plans are uncertain, particularly how they intend to tie missile defenses to strategic offense discussions, President Obama has said that while he supports missile defenses in principle, he wants to delay further deployments of any system until it has proven workable. (Presumably if it proves unworkable, it could still be useful as an arms control bargaining chip, as were the ABM systems of the 1960s).

This is also true of a third missile site in Europe, which the president might oppose on political grounds if the development process appeared likely to cause a split between Old Europe and New Europe. On the other hand, given allied support President Obama may choose to go ahead and deploy European-based U.S. missile defenses.

The president also stated that he wants to increase the warning and decision times for the launch of nuclear armed ballistic missiles, thereby further reducing the risk of miscalculation in response to an accidental or small scale rogue strike.[28] Presumably this is yet another end of the thread that weaves through the previous discussion about de-alerting prompt delivery systems.

Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI)

Candidate Obama promised to expand PSI from its current focus on stopping illicit nuclear shipments to a broader goal of eliminating nuclear black market networks. Analysts are busy contemplating ways and means to expand the PSI beyond what's been done in the past, and a fresh look by a new president may be just what is needed for PSI. PSI started off dramatically, but more recently is having a less noticeable effect on proliferation. There could be a number of reasons for this. Perhaps proliferator networks are not shipping as much WMD-related material as they used to. Or they are choosing shipping modes that are harder to intercept. Or they're getting better at avoiding detection.

Space Arms Control

In addition to points made about missile defenses, the Obama administration has made it clear that it will maintain American leadership on space issues, and will seek "a worldwide ban on weapons that interfere with military and commercial satellites."^[29]

Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW)

The new president has expressed support for "international initiatives to limit harm to civilians caused by conventional weapons," including land mines, anti-aircraft missiles, small and light arms, and cluster munitions.^[30] However, given the large slate of topics already on his plate, the chances of the new administration focusing on these supposedly "lesser evils" may be slim.

South Asia

Senator Obama voted in favor of the U.S.-India nuclear deal, though he also voted for restrictive caveats. He supported the Hyde Act, meant to reduce incentives in South Asia for either side to test and deploy new nuclear weapons. Achieving his goal of ratifying the CTBT, he hopes, will have a calming effect on the region, as well. And he promises help in resolving the underlying Kashmir crisis.^[31] This alone could occupy any president for eight years.

Northeast Asia

President Obama supports restoring military and laboratory exchanges with China to show them that "we are not enemies."^[32] He applauds efforts made by the Bush administration to sustain a dialogue on strategic nuclear issues. With respect to North Korea, President Obama has pledged direct and aggressive diplomacy with Pyongyang. Here again, another undertaking that in and of itself could occupy an administration for a long, long time.

Iran

President Obama has promised to open direct dialogue with Tehran. But he has also made it clear that Iran must suspend its uranium enrichment activities, and is willing to support tough UN or international sanctions on Iran, and even military options, if necessary, to get Iran to stop.^[33] He reiterated these points in his 9 February 2009 press conference. Yet aside from offering dialogue, it is difficult at this point to see what's different in this arena. Time will most certainly tell.

Recommendations from Outside Organizations

Given the new administration's policy positions enumerated above, a number of organizations that advocate arms control and disarmament are feeling their oats as the new president takes office. Many of these groups published reports, studies, open letters to the president, and email

suggestions as 2008 turned into 2009 and President Obama took office. Here are a few of the more interesting suggestions derived from this fairly large body of literature.[\[34\]](#)

Strategic Issues

Several organizations call on the new president to chart a new direction in nuclear policy, emphasizing minimum deterrence so that the United States can continue to lead the way toward even greater reductions in its stockpile. They suggest that he announce this new vision in time to inform the framers of the 2009 Nuclear Posture Review. They also suggest he begin negotiations with all other nuclear powers and potential adversaries to determine which levels of (lower) nuclear weapons numbers make sense to all concerned. Some suggest that we extend START and begin negotiations with Russia toward a next step of 1,500 or even 1,000 deployed strategic warheads by each party. Others have suggested unilateral U.S. nuclear reductions to 1,000 total warheads, based primarily at sea. Regarding de-alerting, several studies say to “just do it,” in the process making any re-targeting a minimum 24-hour process to allow time for reflection in a crisis.

On the CTBT, the new administration will have to conduct some re-education of the Senate as to the value of the treaty to the United States, as well as the technological progress made in monitoring technologies to detect cheating since the treaty was first considered over a decade ago. It remains to be seen whether this Senate or this Secretary of Defense will object to CTBT ratification again because of concerns about verifiability.

With respect to the NPT, the real issue is how to strengthen the global nonproliferation regime. Most studies suggest that the United States finally commit to the “Thirteen Steps” that were agreed upon at the 1995 Review Conference and reconfirmed at the 2000 gathering. Many states see arms reductions by the P5 nuclear powers as one measurable element in building the political good will to advance the agenda to strengthen the NPT regime. (When you consider that many of the people in the United States who will be making the decision about whether to adhere to these steps were also in office when we committed to it in 1995, I would suggest this is pretty likely.)

Several articles have appeared on both sides of the issue of space arms control and space dominance. The debate is ongoing as to the importance of this new strategic high ground, and whether U.S. interests would be best served with or without arms control restrictions on military operations in space. The new administration has come down in favor of both: U.S. superiority in the region, and agreements to limit weapons in space that can threaten satellites.

Finally, most advocates applaud the president's goal of securing all fissile materials within four years. Some of them oppose the use of plutonium as a civil fuel source. And all agree that it is time to make countering nuclear terrorism the number one priority of the U.S. government, finally getting the United States to comport with the international consensus that the time has come to make all activities related to loose nuclear weapons and materials illegal.

Dealing with Other States

Most advocates concur with the announced Obama plan to negotiate with Iran without the condition that Tehran first suspend its uranium enrichment activities. They believe the White House should appoint a special envoy with the charge of improving U.S. relations with Russia, and coordinate with them to institute some of the recommendations suggested by Alexei Arbatov and Rose Gottemoeller in their 2008 article.[\[35\]](#)

Other Issues

The U.S. State Department, says one study, should be reorganized to restore the importance of arms control. Perhaps the government should consider recreating the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency to replace the independent organization that existed from 1961 to 1998. One challenge in doing so, of course, will be finding the people with enough expertise to manage these issues. As in the case of the nuclear enterprise and other strategic issues, there are very few experts left who remember how to do this. This is perhaps good news for defense contractors, with their large staffs of experts who formerly served in government or the military services dealing with nuclear, strategic, or arms control issues. But it will be challenging for the current administration to find and place all those people.

Conclusion

It would appear that arms control is, indeed, back. For more than a generation arms control negotiations with the Soviet Union stood for traditional diplomacy, before falling off the radar screen for a decade during the waning years of the Clinton presidency and the entirety of the Bush administration. In parallel, as the importance of nuclear weapons decreased, so, seemingly, did the value of arms control, tainted as it was as a Cold War vestige. That thinking, it turns out, was faulty. Arms control still has a role to play in helping enhance a state's national security. And long-dormant thoughts of global nuclear disarmament are experiencing something of a renaissance, as well.

As some authors point out, even with a return of arms control we are unlikely to see a return to long, drawn-out negotiations leading to complex formal treaties. More likely will be cooperative security arrangements and executive agreements, which are simpler to create and easier to implement. These agreements may even be ad hoc and informal, allowing states and interested non-state actors to respond in a manner they deem fitting. We can also expect to see a shift from traditional agreements that limit state actions, to new types of arrangements that require states to take action in pursuit of a common good (such as UNSCR 1540's call for securing fissile materials to prevent nuclear terrorism). If the Obama administration can induce a renewed spirit of innovation and urgency, the world may become motivated to more directly combat the trafficking of the most dangerous materials.[\[36\]](#)

There are today multiple deliberative processes underway examining the United States' strategic posture, forces, and requirements: decisions on what to do about START extension or replacement; the Congressionally mandated Strategic Posture Commission of 2009, which will in turn tee up the Nuclear Posture Review; and preparations for the 2010 NPT Review Conference, which could push issues over CTBT, FMCT, and RRW to the forefront. At the same time, the United States military and its supporting nuclear enterprise must make decisions on near-term stockpile levels. And strategic partners like Russia are trying to link all these issues to broader concerns over the third ballistic missile site in Europe and U.S. development of conventional prompt global strike capabilities.[\[37\]](#)

But this is an optimistic period for arms control and disarmament advocates. As one recent study put it, "the agenda which the president-elect has set out is built around key actions that the disarmament community has been urging for a long time. The very fact that these actions will now find sympathy in the new White House is worth celebrating."[\[38\]](#) We shall see. The issues are vitally important, but it may take some serious resuscitation to restore the vitality of arms control as a diplomatic tool worthy of the struggle. Those of us who have waited through the lean years for a return of this noble concept applaud the effort.

About the Author

Jeffrey A. Larsen is President of Larsen Consulting Group LLC, Senior Scientist at SAIC, Adjunct Professor of International Studies at the University of Denver, and Adjunct Professor of National Security Studies at Northwestern University. This paper was originally prepared for presentation to the Annual Convention of the International Studies Association, New York, NY and updated on 1 April 2009. This paper is the personal work of the author and does not reflect the views of SAIC or Larsen Consulting, the U.S. government, or any other clients of either corporation.

For more insights into contemporary international security issues, see our [Strategic Insights](#) home page. To have new issues of *Strategic Insights* delivered to your Inbox, please email ccc@nps.edu with subject line "Subscribe." There is no charge, and your address will be used for no other purpose.

References

1. I have come to agree with this conclusion about the Bush administration's anti-arms control leanings, a position long held by most of the pro-arms control, disarmament, and anti-nuclear community, notwithstanding my own article several years ago in which I argued that all of the Bush administration's strategic policies were, in fact, a type of neo-arms control that served the original goals put forth by Thomas Schelling and Morton Halperin in their classic 1961 work *Strategy and Arms Control*. See Jeffrey A. Larsen, "Neo-Arms Control in the Bush Administration," *Disarmament Diplomacy*, No. 80, Autumn 2005. I wrote that piece as a contribution to the debate, but in retrospect it is obvious that the Bush administration really did not believe in arms control and tried to rid the U.S. government of any vestiges of the concept and even the name.
2. "[Foreign Policy](#)," White House website, January 2009, (page no longer active.)
3. Thanks to two of my SAIC colleagues, Paul Bernstein and Timothy Miller, for their close review and comments of a draft version of this paper, particularly for their substantive suggestions for this section.
4. Henry Kissinger, George Schultz, William Perry, and Sam Nunn, "[A World Free of Nuclear Weapons](#)," *Wall Street Journal*, 4 January 2007. In their opinion piece the authors called upon the United States government to initiate a major new effort to re-think traditional deterrence and begin the process of achieving the long term goal of eliminating nuclear weapons. The situation is grave, they said: "the world is now on the precipice of a new and dangerous nuclear era."
5. Ivo Daalder and Jan Lodol, "[The Logic of Zero: Toward a World Without Nuclear Weapons](#)," *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2008, 81.
6. George Schultz, William Perry, Henry Kissinger and Sam Nunn, "[Toward a Nuclear Free World](#)," *Wall Street Journal*, 15 January 2008.
7. Sarah J. Diehl, "[Four Statesmen Promote Revitalized Interest in Nuclear Disarmament Efforts](#)," *WMD Insights*, October 2008.
8. John Isaacs, "[In a Nutshell: McCain vs. Obama on National Security](#)," Center for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation, 1 July 2008.

9. "[Presidential Q&A: Democratic Nominee Barack Obama on Arms Control](#)," *Arms Control Today*, 15 October 2008.
10. [Ibid.](#)
11. [Ibid.](#)
12. Robert Gates, "A Balanced Strategy: Reprogramming the Pentagon for a New Age," *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2009, 28-40.
13. "[Presidential Q&A](#)," Op. Cit.
14. Associated Press, "[U.S., Russia Want New Nuclear Treaty](#)," *MSNBC.com*.
15. Deborah MacKenzie, "Obama to Usher in New Era on Arms Control," *New Scientist*, 3 December 2008.
16. "[Defense](#)," White House website, accessed April 6, 2009.
17. "[Obama on Nuclear Disarmament](#)," *The Ploughshares Monitor*, Winter 2008.
18. "[Presidential Q&A](#)," Op. Cit.
19. For more on NATO's nuclear forces, policy, and future, see Jeffrey A. Larsen, "[The Future of U.S. Nonstrategic Nuclear Weapons and Implications for NATO: Drifting Toward the Foreseeable Future](#)," *NATO Report*, 31 October 2006.
20. [Ibid.](#); also "[Obama Reaffirms Nuclear Reduction Goals](#)," *Global Security Newswire*, 10 February 2009.
21. "[Presidential Q&A](#)," Op. Cit.
22. Hans Kristensen, "United States Reaches Moscow Treaty Warhead Limit Early," The Nuclear Information Project "Nuclear Brief" email, 9 February 2009. According to Kristensen, America's total stockpile inventory includes 2,200 operationally deployed warheads, up to 3,000 warheads in reserve, and some 4,200 retired warheads awaiting dismantlement.
23. "[Presidential Q&A](#)," Op. Cit., and "[Foreign Policy: Nuclear Weapons](#)," White House web page.
24. Such as the Cooperative Threat Reduction program, lab-to-lab programs, Global Initiative to Prevent Nuclear Terrorism, Global Nuclear Energy Program, and various programs categorized under the category Materials Protection, Control, and Accounting.
25. "[Presidential Q&A](#)," Op. Cit.
26. "[U.S., Russia Want New Nuclear Treaty](#)," Op. Cit.
27. "[Presidential Q&A](#)," Op. Cit.
28. Ernie Regehr, "[Obama on Nuclear Disarmament](#)," Op. Cit.
29. "[Defense](#)," White House website.

30. [Regehr](#), Op. Cit.

31. "[Presidential Q&A](#)," Op. Cit.

32. [Regehr](#), Op. Cit.

33. [Ibid.](#)

34. There is really not that much new material, but it seems like a lot after the dearth of any writings on arms control since the mid-1990s, when the concept fell out of favor among all but a few academics and think tank analysts, followed shortly thereafter by the near-emasculcation of the concept under the direction of the Bush White House. The ideas in this section come primarily from the following sources: *Defense Priorities for the New Administration*, Defense Science Board report, December 2008; "[Memorandum to President-Elect Obama: A New Arms Control and Non-Proliferation Agenda](#)," The Center for Arms Control and Nonproliferation, June 2008; Deborah MacKenzie, "[Obama to Usher in New Era on Arms Controls](#)," *New Scientist*, 3 December 2008; James Wirtz, "The New Cooperative Security Paradigm," in *Arms Control and Cooperative Security*, ed. by Jeffrey Larsen and James Wirtz (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, forthcoming 2009); Pierce Corden, "[Organizing for Arms Control in the Obama Administration](#)," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 12 January 2009; Sarah Diehl, "[Four Statesmen Promote Revitalized Interest in Nuclear Disarmament](#)," *WMD Insights*, October 2008; Yousef Butt, "[Redefining Deterrence: How the Obama Administration Should Handle RRW](#)," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 15 December 2008; Barry Dresker, "[Priorities for the Obama Administration](#)," PacNet Newsletter, 29 January 2009; and Robert Gard, "[Strengthening U.S. Security through Arms Control and Non-Proliferation: Recommendations for the Obama Administration from 60 U.S. and International Security Policy Experts](#)," The Center for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation, December 2008.

35. Alexei Arbatov and Rose Gottemoeller, "[New Presidents, New Agreements? Advancing US-Russian Strategic Arms Control](#)," *Arms Control Today*, July/August 2008. The fact that Ms. Gottemoeller is likely moving into a senior position in the US State Department to deal with arms control and nonproliferation matters would seem to ensure that these points will be well considered at the highest levels.

36. For more on these ideas, see Wirtz, "The New Cooperative Security Paradigm," and Lewis A. Dunn, "The Role of Cooperative Security," both in Larsen and Wirtz, *Arms Control and Cooperative Security* (forthcoming).

37. Thanks for some of these ideas to Paul Bernstein and his presentation, "Some Thoughts on the Arms Control Environment," PPT presentation prepared for an SAIC workshop on strategic issues, 28 January 2008.

38. [Regehr](#), Op. Cit.

Recommended Sources

Arbatov, Alexei and Rose Gottemoeller, "New Presidents, New Agreements? Advancing US-Russian Strategic Arms Control," *Arms Control Today*, July-August 2008.

"[Arms Control Today 2008 Presidential Q&A: President-elect Barack Obama](#)," *Arms Control Today*, December 2008.

Bernstein, Paul, "Some Thoughts on the Arms Control Environment," PPT presentation for SAIC workshop, 28 January 2009.

Blank, Stephen J., *Russia and Arms Control: Are there Opportunities for the Obama Administration?* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, March 2009).

Blechman, Barry, ed., "Unblocking the Road to Zero: Perspective of Advanced Nuclear Nations," Nuclear Security Series, France/ United Kingdom, Stimson Center, February 2009.

Bodman, Samuel and Robert M. Gates, *National Security and Nuclear Weapons in the 21st Century* (Washington: Departments of Defense and Energy, September 2008).

Butt, Yousaf, "[Redefining Deterrence: How the Obama Administration Should Handle RRW](#)," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 15 December 2008.

"Can the New President Change Outdated US Nuclear Weapons Policy?" Arms Control Association Editorial Advisory, emailed 19 January 2009.

Corden, Pierce S., "[Organizing for Arms Control in the Obama Administration](#)," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 12 January 2009.

Daalder, Ivo, and Jan Lodal, "[The Logic of Zero: Toward a World without Nuclear Weapons](#)," *Foreign Affairs*, November-December 2008, 80-95.

Defense Imperatives for the New Administration, Report of the Defense Science Board, August 2008.

"[Democratic Nominee Barack Obama on Arms Control](#)," Presidential Q&A, *Arms Control Today*, 15 October 2008.

Diehl, Sarah, "[Four Statesmen Promote Revitalized Interest in Nuclear Disarmament Efforts](#)," *WMD Insights: Issues and Viewpoints in the International Media*, October 2008.

Dresker, Barry, "Priorities for the Obama Administration," *PacNet Newsletter*, emailed 27 January 2009 from pacnet@hawaii.biz.

Gard, Robert, Jr., "[Strengthening U.S. Security Through Non-Proliferation and Arms Control: Recommendations for the Obama Administration from 60 U.S. and International Security Policy Experts](#)," The Center for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation, December 2008.

Gates, Robert, "[A Balanced Strategy: Reprogramming the Pentagon for a New Age](#)," *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2009, 28-40.

"[In a Nutshell: McCain vs. Obama on National Security](#)," Center for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation, 1 July 2008.

Isaacs, John and Leonor Tomero, "[Obama vs. McCain: A Side-by-Side Comparison on Arms Control](#)," 17 October 2008, Center for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation.

Larsen, Jeffrey A., ed., *Arms Control: Cooperative Security in a Changing Environment* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2002)

Larsen, Jeffrey A., "[The Future of U.S. Nonstrategic Nuclear Weapons and Implications for NATO: Drifting Toward the Foreseeable Future](#)," *NATO Study*, 31 October 2006.

Larsen, Jeffrey A., "[Neo-Arms Control in the Bush Administration](#)," *Disarmament Diplomacy*, No. 80, Autumn 2005, 49-54.

Larsen, Jeffrey A. and James J. Wirtz, eds., *Arms Control and Cooperative Security* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, forthcoming 2009)

Lewis, Jeffrey G., "[Nuclear Disarmament and the US Presidential Campaign](#)," SIPRI Update: Global Security and Arms Control, April 2008.

MacKenzie, Debora, "[Obama to Usher in New Era on Arms Controls](#)," *New Scientist*, 3 December 2008.

"[Memorandum to President-elect Obama: A New Arms Control and Non-Proliferation Agenda](#)," The Center for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation, 9 June 2008.

Moore, Mike, "[An Agenda for Obama: End America's Counterproductive Pursuit of Space Dominance](#)," Carnegie Council: The Voice for Ethics in International Policy, 12 January 2009.

"[North Korean, Iranian Nuclear Efforts Pose Early Test for Obama](#)," *America.gov*, U.S. State Department, 16 January 2009.

O'Hanlon, Michael, "[A New Old Nuclear Arsenal](#)," *The Washington Post*, 25 December 2008.

Pifer, Steven, "[Traveling the Road to Reduction](#)," *The Boston Globe*, 9 June 2008.

Regehr, Eric, "[Obama on Nuclear Disarmament](#)," *The Ploughshares Monitor*, Winter 2008.

Schoenfeld, Gabriel, "[The Failed Theology of Arms Control](#)," *Los Angeles Times*, 24 May 2008.

Steinbruner, John, "[Engagement with Russia: Managing Risks, Repairing Rifts](#)," *Arms Control Today*, February 2009, 6-9.

Waller, Forrest E., Jr., and John F. Reichart, "The Utility of U.S. Nuclear Weapons in a Proliferated World: A Glimpse at Evolving American Strategic Culture," unpublished paper, Center for the Study of Weapons of Mass Destruction, National Defense University, Washington, Fall 2008.

White House web site, especially "Agenda" sections on Defense and Foreign Policy, www.whitehouse.gov/agenda/foreignpolicy, accessed 26 January 2009 (no longer active.)

Woolf, Amy F., Marty Beth Nikitin, and Paul K. Kerr, *Arms Control and Nonproliferation: A Catalog of Treaties and Agreements*, CRS Report for Congress, No. RL33865 (Washington: Congressional Research Service, 10 February 2009).