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The NPR, NPT and the Prospects for Disarmament

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Abstract

In Prague's Hradcany Square on April 5, 2009, President Barack Obama offered a bold vision of the nuclear future that encompasses both reducing nuclear dangers and pursuing the goal of a world without nuclear weapons while maintaining, as long as nuclear weapons remain, a safe, secure, and effective arsenal, to deter potential adversaries and to assure U.S. allies and other security partners that they can count on America's security commitments.

The agenda put forward in Prague involves the full range of issues from deterrence to nonproliferation and disarmament. The 2010 Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) report, reflecting the twin objectives of the Prague speech, for the first time places the United States effort to lead expanded international efforts to rebuild and strengthen the global nuclear nonproliferation regime at the top of the U.S. nuclear agenda. This attention underscores the fact that the top priority of the United States is to discourage additional states from acquiring nuclear weapon capabilities and to stop terrorist groups from acquiring weapon-usable nuclear materials. It also reinforced the view that positively influencing the 2010 Review Conference (RevCon) of the Parties to the Treaty on the

¹ The views expressed are the author's own and not those of the Los Alamos National Laboratory, the National Nuclear Security Administration, the Department of Energy or any other agency.

Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) was a key objective of the Obama Administration.

The NPR developed both the vision and the policy, but details of implementation will need to be developed and better understood. This paper will address the Nuclear Posture Review and its implementation, as well as its relation to, and impact on, the NPT RevCon and the long term prospects for nonproliferation and disarmament.

Introduction

The 2010 Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) report, reflecting the twin objectives of the Prague speech, for the first time places the United States effort to lead expanded international efforts to rebuild and strengthen the international nuclear nonproliferation regime at the top the U.S. nuclear agenda. This attention underscores the fact that the top priority of the United States is to discourage additional states from acquiring nuclear weapon capabilities and to stop terrorist groups from acquiring weapon-usable nuclear materials. It also reinforced the view that positively influencing the 2010 Review Conference (RevCon) of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) was a key objective of the Obama Administration. This paper will address the U.S. Nuclear Posture Review implementation, as well as its relation to, and impact on, the NPT RevCon and the long term prospects for nonproliferation and disarmament.

The NPR and the NPT

The Nuclear Posture Review has to be seen in the context of the 2010 NPT Review Conference. Success at the RevCon was not assured. Iran was clearly positioning itself for a fight with the United States on the NPR, disarmament and peaceful uses of nuclear energy, among other issues. It was feared that Iran and other states would use the consensus rule to prevent a final declaration or even substantive discussion and debate. There was an effort by the United States and other parties to find alternative ways to define success and to manage expectations, to work around any disruptions that might occur, to promote discussion and, if possible, to reach substantive agreements with key states on the margins of the meeting.

A tally sheet before the conference seemed weighted to failure, with a deep North-South divide and NAM skepticism on Articles IV, VI and X of the treaty. Article VI dissatisfaction included, at first, the prospect that there would be no new strategic arms reduction treaty. After New START was concluded, some argued that it would not advance goals of disarmament significantly, that it would not be ratified and that there may be contentious issues for ratification that appeared publicly during the ratification process related to missile defenses, conventional strike forces and verification. As for the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), there was a sense that nothing had been done and that the prospects for U.S. ratification and entry into force were not high. On the Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty (FMCT), it was increasingly seen that negotiations were unlikely. UN Security Council Resolution 1887 was challenged on substance and

procedure by the Nonaligned Movement (NAM), who viewed it as weak on disarmament and as an unwelcome mandate.

In this environment, it became increasingly clear that the NPR would be seen as a critical indicator of U.S. policy regarding nuclear posture, stockpile size, stockpile stewardship, infrastructure modernization, etc. It was held that it would also be a key indicator of Administration policy at the NPT Review Conference in 2010, especially since the signature arms control initiatives of the Administration were unlikely to be fully realized by that time. As a consequence, it appeared that if the NPR did not address a broader set of issues involving the NPT and nonproliferation, it would lead to a questioning of the Administration's commitment to the treaty regime in both domestic and international audiences.

There was considerable anxiety about how far the NPR could go to meeting these needs. It was feared the NPR would at best be a distraction at the RevCon, and that it could undermine support for the Administration's nonproliferation initiatives. This centrality of the NPR for the RevCon would have occurred under any circumstances, but the Administration probably increased expectations.

Secretary of State Clinton stated in the questions for the record (QFR) at her confirmation hearings that: "The Obama Administration plans to set a new direction in nuclear weapons policy, one that reflects the changed security conditions of the 21st century and that shows the world that the U.S. takes seriously its existing commitment under the

Nonproliferation Treaty to pursue nuclear disarmament. Such a new direction should be fully explored and elaborated in the upcoming Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) that is mandated by statute.” It would be difficult to address this matter, and send the message Secretary Clinton suggested without an expansion of the scope of recent NPRs to directly include NPT and related proliferation issues. Other Administration officials and documents make the same point: The NPR should reflect the interests of the United States in nonproliferation and related issues.

The U.S. Nuclear Posture

The 2010 NPR was able to address these issues and concerns in unprecedented ways. The Nuclear Posture Review report outlines the Administration’s approach to promoting the agenda put forward by President Obama in Prague on April 5, 2009, for reducing nuclear dangers and pursuing the goal of a world without nuclear weapons while maintaining, as long as nuclear weapons remain, a safe, secure and effective arsenal, both to deter potential adversaries and to assure U.S. allies and other security partners that they can count on America’s security commitments.

Reflecting the twin objectives of the Prague speech, for the first time, the 2010 NPR places the United States effort to lead expanded international efforts to rebuild and strengthen the global nuclear nonproliferation regime at the top the U.S. nuclear agenda, reflecting the fact that the top priority of the United States is to discourage additional states from acquiring nuclear weapon capabilities and to stop terrorist groups from acquiring weapon-usable nuclear material.

According to the NPR, in the post Cold War world, “nuclear weapons play a much more circumscribed role in U.S. national security strategy, a change reflected in the U.S. nuclear posture today. The NPR noted that since the Cold War ended, the United States reduced deployed strategic weapons by around 75 percent and also substantially reduced the overall nuclear stockpile of deployed and non-deployed weapons. While the role of nuclear weapons had thus already been reduced significantly, the NPR recognized that “further steps can and should be taken.”

The NPR stated: “working to reduce the salience of nuclear weapons in international affairs and moving step-by-step toward eliminating them, we can reverse the growing expectation that we are destined to live in a world with many nuclear-armed states, and decrease incentives for additional countries to hedge against an uncertain and dangerous future by pursuing nuclear options of their own.”

In particular, the United States strengthened its long-standing negative security assurance (NSA) by removing Cold War and chemical-biological weapon exceptions (although it stated the need to continue to monitor the biological threats in this context). It declared: “The United States will not use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapons states that are party to the NPT and in compliance with their nuclear non-proliferation obligations.”

While the NSA is not a “sole purpose” declaration, it moved in this direction. Moreover, the NPR reflects the U.S. commitment to “continue to strengthen conventional capabilities and reduce the role of nuclear weapons in deterring non-nuclear attacks, with the objective of making deterrence of nuclear attack on the United States or our allies and partners the sole purpose of U.S. nuclear weapons.”

The NPR committed the United States to the lowest numbers of weapons consistent with security, stability and nonproliferation objectives.

The NPR provided the analyses on which the U.S. New START negotiating position was developed and which resulted in the United States and Russia agreeing to mutual limits under the New START of:

- 1,550 accountable strategic warheads;
- A separate limit of 700 deployed intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), deployed submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs) and deployed nuclear-capable heavy bombers; and
- A combined limit of 800 deployed and non-deployed ICBM launchers, SLBM launchers and nuclear capable heavy bombers.

In this context, the NPR states that the United States will “structure the reduced U.S. force in a way that promotes stability, including ‘de-MIRVing’ U.S. ICBMs.”

The NPR declared that the President directed a review of post-New START arms control objectives, to consider future reductions that included non-strategic and non-deployed nuclear weapons on both sides.

“Following substantial further reductions with Russia,” the NPR stated that the United States would “engage other states possessing nuclear weapons, over time, in a multilateral effort to limit, reduce, and eventually eliminate all nuclear weapons worldwide.”

The NPR recommitted the United States to forego nuclear testing and to pursue ratification and entry into force of the CTBT. It supported the negotiation of a verifiable FMCT. It supported “measures to reinvigorate the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the broader non-proliferation regime, and secure vulnerable nuclear materials worldwide against theft or seizure by terrorists.”

Beyond these concrete steps to a world without nuclear weapons, the NPR pledged to initiate a “comprehensive national research and development program to support continued progress toward a world free of nuclear weapons, including expanded work on verification technologies. This will be essential if we are to realize the objective of a nuclear-weapon-free world.”

The NPR also argued that promoting strategic stability with Russia and China and improving transparency and mutual confidence served this long-term objective, stating

that enhanced stability “can help create the conditions for moving toward a world without nuclear weapons and build a stronger basis for addressing the threats of nuclear proliferation and nuclear terrorism.” Given the high stakes involved, the NPR promised that the “United States will pursue high-level, bilateral dialogues on strategic stability with both Russia and China which are aimed at fostering more stable, resilient, and transparent strategic relationships.”

The purposes of the dialogue would be different for each country. For Russia, the dialogue would “allow the United States to explain that our missile defenses and any future U.S. conventionally-armed long-range ballistic missile systems are designed to address newly emerging regional threats, and are not intended to affect the strategic balance with Russia. For its part, Russia could explain its modernization programs, clarify its current military doctrine (especially the extent to which it places importance on nuclear weapons), and discuss steps it could take to allay concerns in the West about its non-strategic nuclear arsenal, such as further consolidating its non-strategic systems in a small number of secure facilities deep within Russia.

As for China, the purpose of the dialogue would be “to provide a venue and mechanism for each side to communicate its views about the other’s strategies, policies, and programs on nuclear weapons and other strategic capabilities. The goal of such a dialogue is to enhance confidence, improve transparency, and reduce mistrust.”

As nuclear disarmament is a long-term objective, the NPR recognized the need to “strengthen regional security architectures and reinforce security commitments to allies and partners by maintaining an effective nuclear umbrella.” However, it declared that it would do so “while placing increased reliance on non-nuclear deterrence capabilities (e.g., missile defenses and conventional long-range missiles).

In this context, the NPR called for a sound Stockpile Management Program for extending the life of U.S. nuclear weapons in order to ensure a safe, secure and effective deterrent without the development of new nuclear warheads or further nuclear testing.

The NPR declared that “the United States will not develop new nuclear warheads. Life Extension Programs (LEPs) will use only nuclear components based on previously tested designs, and will not support new military missions or provide for new military capabilities.”

Although modernization of the nuclear infrastructure has been criticized as inconsistent with our arms control and nonproliferation objectives, the NPR argues it is essential to realize those objectives.

According to the NPR: “By certifying the reliability of each weapon type we retain, the United States can credibly assure non-nuclear allies and partners they need not build their own, while seeking greater stockpile reductions than otherwise possible.”

Moreover, the NPR argued that infrastructure modernization and science, technology and engineering programs allow the United States to “improve the analysis of the reliability of our warheads, …[and] enhance our ability to assess and render safe potential terrorist nuclear devices and support other national security initiatives, such as nuclear forensics and attribution. Expert nuclear scientists and engineers help improve our understanding of foreign nuclear weapons activities, which is critical for managing risks on the path to zero. And, in a world with complete nuclear disarmament, a robust intellectual and physical capability would provide the ultimate insurance against nuclear break-out by an aggressor.”

Moreover, by modernizing the aging U.S. nuclear weapons-supporting facilities and investing in human capital, the NPR argued, “the United States can substantially reduce the number of stockpiled nuclear weapons we retain as a hedge against technical or geopolitical surprise, accelerate the dismantlement of nuclear weapons no longer required for our deterrent, and improve our understanding of foreign nuclear weapons activities.” In this context, the NPR also argued that this human capability would allow us to understand and better address the technical challenges of verification of deeper cuts along the path to zero.

Looking Ahead: NPR Implementation, the Goal of Disarmament and the 2015

RevCon

The 2010 Nuclear Posture Review report, reflecting the twin objectives of the Prague speech, for the first time places the United States effort to lead expanded international efforts to rebuild and strengthen the global nuclear nonproliferation regime at the top the U.S. nuclear agenda. This attention underscores the fact that the top priority of the United States is to discourage additional countries from acquiring nuclear weapons capabilities and stop terrorist groups from acquiring the materials to build nuclear bombs. It also reinforced the view that positively influencing the 2010 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons was a key objective of the Obama Administration.

The NPR clearly demonstrated that U.S. policy is consistent with Article VI and the NPR was a key element in the successful outcome of the RevCon. It provides a foundation for further progress toward disarmament, even though its 5-10 year time frame could not credibly include the development of a clear path to disarmament or even the conditions that would be required to achieve the long-term goal of disarmament. This time frame also raises questions about the impact of the NPR on nonproliferation in the lead up to the 2015 NPT RevCon.

Implementation over 5-10 years will focus on short-term actions that are related to regional security architectures, stockpile stewardship, infrastructure modernization and delivery system replacements. These actions are critical, and in the perspective of the

NPR, related to the goal of disarmament, but they will raise questions and disappointments in the disarmament community. Such reactions are likely to be exacerbated if progress in arms control is not evident. Yet, it is difficult to imagine much progress in this time frame. The CTBT could be ratified by the United States, but this is uncertain. In any case, entry into force is unlikely. If FMCT negotiations begin, the difficult issues that have stalemated it to date make it likely a treaty will not be included any time soon. The follow-on to New START, yet alone any movement to multilateralizing arms reductions, may not see progress.

In these circumstances, we may expect a difficult road to the 2015 NPT RevCon. As the NPR is being implemented, the details of programs and new initiatives will need to be developed and better understood. There will be a need to view the development of U.S. policy and concrete achievements in the next years realistically. Managing expectations will be critical as we look to the 2015 NPT RevCon and work for a successful outcome.