

As Obama Talks Of Arms Control, Russians View U.S. As Global Aggressor

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U.S. and NATO military expansion along Russia's western and southern flanks diminishes the need for Cold War era nuclear arsenals and long-range delivery systems appreciably. Washington can well afford to reduce the number of its nuclear weapons and still maintain decisive worldwide strategic superiority, especially with the deployment of an international interceptor missile system and the unilateral militarization of space. And the use of super stealth strategic bombers and the Pentagon's Prompt Global Strike project for conventional warhead-equipped strike systems with the velocity and range of intercontinental ballistic missiles to destroy other nations' nuclear forces with non-nuclear weapons.

On March 26th U.S. President Barack Obama and his Russian counterpart Dmitry Medvedev reached an agreement on a successor to the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START 1) of 1991.

The new accord, if it is ratified by the U.S. Senate, will reportedly reduce U.S. and Russian active nuclear weapons by 30 per cent and effect a comparable reduction (to 800 on each side) in the two nations' delivery systems: Intercontinental ballistic missiles, strategic long-range bombers and ballistic missile submarines.

After a phone conversation between the two heads of state to "seal the deal," Obama touted it as "the most comprehensive arms control agreement in nearly two decades." [1]

The START 1 agreement expired almost four months earlier, on December 5 of last year, and its replacement has been held up by, among other matters, Russian concerns over increasingly ambitious American interceptor missile system plans for Eastern Europe, on and near its borders.

Judging by the lengthy ordeal that has been the Obama administration's health care initiative - so far the bill has only been passed in the House (by a 219-212 vote) where his party has a 257-178 majority - and the opposition it confronts in the Senate, a new nuclear arms accord with Russia will be a captive to domestic American political wrangling at least as much as less important and potentially controversial issues traditionally are.

Though even if approved by both houses of Congress there will be nothing to celebrate in Moscow. (Or in Iran, which will be the main target of Washington's next "disarmament" drive after the momentum gained from Friday's announcement.)

The new treaty would reduce both nations' deployed nuclear warheads to 1,550, but the U.S. only acknowledges currently possessing 2,200 in storage while in fact having 3,500.

On the day of the telephone conversation between Obama and Medvedev, U.S. Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security Affairs Ellen Tauscher stated there would be “no constraints” on the expansion of American and allied nations’ interceptor missile deployments, a new treaty notwithstanding.

Three days earlier Russian Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces Nikolai Makarov was interviewed by one of his country’s major newspapers and warned: “If the Americans continue to expand their missile defenses, they will certainly target our nuclear capability and in this case the balance of forces will shift in favor of the United States.” [2]

On March 27 Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov stated, “Nothing in this treaty contains clauses which would make it easier for the U.S. to develop a missile shield which would pose a risk to Russia,” [3] but neglected to add that nothing would prohibit it either.

Perhaps Lavrov needs to listen more closely to Ellen Tauscher.

It is a matter of speculation why Russia’s political leadership consistently defers to the U.S. on issues ranging from the war in Afghanistan to so-called missile shield deployments near its northwest frontier, and from the Pentagon acquiring new military bases in the Black Sea nations of Bulgaria and Romania to NATO establishing a cyber warfare facility (politely named Cooperative Cyber Defence Center of Excellence) in neighboring Estonia.

Whatever combination of perceived comparative military weakness, over-willingness to oblige, national inferiority complex, eagerness to be seen as the junior partner of the world’s only superpower and fear of the results of confrontation actuates Russia’s government, the policy of accommodation has only left its nation more isolated, encroached upon by U.S. and NATO military presence, and regarded as a less than dependable ally by other nations prepared to challenge bids by the U.S. to achieve global dominance. In short, it doesn’t work. Not for Russia and not for the world at any rate. It is splendidly effective for the U.S. and NATO, however.

On the very day that an Obama administration beset by a series of foreign policy frustrations, setbacks and debacles scored a public relations victory at Russia’s expense, the Pentagon announced that it was allotting funds from a \$350 million war chest “set aside for countries that need help developing their counterterrorism activities, conducting stability operations, or assisting U.S. forces” to Georgia, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Croatia, and Hungary, ostensibly “to help build those countries’ military capabilities for the U.S.-led campaign in Afghanistan.” [4]

The first four nations border Russia and the other two are not too far from its western border.

A report from a pro-government Georgian news source dispensed with public relations pabulum and described the development in less evasive terms:

“The Pentagon said on Friday it would build the military capabilities of Georgia and the Baltic states bordering Russia to ready them for operations in Afghanistan.

“The Pentagon announcement came on the same day U.S. President Barack Obama and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev sealed an agreement on a landmark nuclear arms reduction treaty that they are to sign on April 8 in Prague.

"In notifications sent to Congress, the Pentagon said military assistance programs for Georgia, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Croatia and Hungary were designed to build their capacities `to conduct stability operations alongside U.S. forces in Afghanistan,` Pentagon spokesman Bryan Whitman said.

"Russia defeated Georgia`s military bid to retake a pro-Moscow region from rebels in a five-day war that rekindled tension between the Kremlin and the West. Russia has since accused Washington of re-arming the Georgian `war machine.'" [5]

The operative phrases are "build the military capabilities of Georgia and the Baltic states bordering Russia," "conduct stability operations alongside U.S. forces," and "re-arming the Georgian war machine."

The day before the Obama-Medvedev conversation Russian Information Agency Novosti reported on a poll conducted by the Levada Center independent polling and sociological research organization on the attitude of Russians toward the U.S. The results showed that only 9 per cent of those contacted viewed the U.S. as promoting "peace, democracy and order" in the world, while 73 per cent viewed Washington as "an aggressor seeking to establish control over all countries." [6]

A poll Medvedev, Lavrov and others in the Kremlin may want to pay some attention to if for no other reason that to pretend to represent the interests and the opinions of their people.

The survey also showed that a majority of Russian citizens saw no value in improving relations with the U.S. After all, why cultivate friendlier contacts with a nation, whose head of state last December boasted of it being "the world`s sole military superpower" and which have a record \$708 billion military budget next year, when it is an aggressive power bent on dominating your own country and every other one on the planet?

It would be ludicrous to attribute the above-documented sentiments, almost a full generation after the breakup of the Soviet Union and 25 years after Mikhail Gorbachev became its last leader, to the residual effects of "anti-American propaganda." (Though in the unlikely event Western news media notice the poll that is how they can be depended upon to construe its results and meaning.)

In fact any informed and impartial populace attending to world developments in the post-Cold War period would reach a similar conclusion, and no doubt outside of the "Euro-Atlantic family," as NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen while in a maudlin mood recently deemed it, comparable percentages could be expected worldwide if people truly spoke their minds.

Well-founded Russian suspicions of U.S. global geopolitical objectives can only be reinforced by several recent developments.

The Pentagon is dispatching a first contingent of 100 troops to run a Patriot Advanced Capability-3 missile battery in Poland next month, 35 miles from Russian territory.

On March 26 it was reported that the defense ministers of the pro-American governments of Latvia and Poland - both neighboring Russia - "called on NATO to locate more of the alliance`s facilities in central and eastern Europe," with Polish defense chief Bogdan Klich adding, "We are aware that NATO institutions are unequally distributed between Western

and Central Europe.” [7] Central Europe is the current designation for what was formerly called Eastern Europe. A nation makes that geographical leap when it joins NATO.

While delivering a presentation on his bloc’s new Strategic Concept in the Polish capital on March 12, NATO chief Rasmussen twice employed the Western mantra of “Europe whole, free and peace.”

Ten days later Polish Chief of General Staff General Franciszek Gągor presided over a ceremony for the deployment of his nation’s seventh contingent of troops to NATO’s Afghan war front – Poland will soon have 2,600 soldiers there, its largest-ever overseas military deployment – and said “the experience gained in the mission has tangibly accelerated the modernization of the Polish armed forces.” [8]

Last autumn Defense Minister Klich divulged plans to spend \$16.2 billion (12.4 billion euros) “to modernize Poland’s armed forces,” with fourteen new programs including “air defense systems, combat and cargo helicopters, naval modernization, espionage and unmanned aircraft, training simulators and equipment for soldiers...” [9]

Seven years ago the Polish government signed a contract to purchase 48 U.S. F-16 fighter jets, reported to be the most expensive arms deal in the nation’s history.

Why Poland requires a modernized army nineteen years after the end of the Warsaw Pact and moreover in a Europe “whole, free and at peace” was not addressed.

What in fact is the case is that the war in Afghanistan is a mechanism employed by the U.S. and NATO to provide wartime combat training to the armed forces of several nations bordering Russia – Poland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Finland, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Ukraine, Norway and Mongolia – for contingency plans far closer to home. Last August Georgian Defense Minister Davit (Vasil) Sikharulidze “told The Associated Press in an interview that...training by the U.S. Marine Corps will not only give his troops the skills necessary to fight alongside NATO allies in Afghanistan, but also could come into play if another war broke out between Georgia and Russia.” [10]

Recently Lithuania’s Foreign Minister Audronius Azubalis visited NATO headquarters in Brussels where he was summoned over the bloc’s 21st century global military doctrine to be formally adopted in Lisbon, Portugal this December.

Azubalis “stressed that the Article Five of the North Atlantic Treaty, which sets out the principle of collective defence, had to remain the key element of the new Strategic Concept,” and said “it is necessary for NATO to be more visible in member states, when organizing exercises and trainings, and when developing infrastructure.” He also “highlighted the importance of U.S. nuclear presence in Europe and stated that an appropriate NATO’s policy had to be implemented with regard to new threats.” [11]

So-called collective defense under the rubric of NATO’s mutual military assistance clause, moving NATO bases and military equipment to Russia’s borders, and maintaining American nuclear weapons in Europe have nothing to do with the war in Afghanistan or defense against such new NATO casus belli as global warming, rising sea levels, water shortages, piracy, a drop in food production and others identified by the bloc’s secretary general last autumn in London.

Also last week the armed forces of Estonia and Lithuania participated in the opening

exercises of the Baltic Battalion Project (BALTBAT) Intelligent Eagle 10 operation in preparation for the two nations' forces serving with the NATO Response Force, "a high-readiness and technologically advanced allied force made of land, air and maritime components capable of quick deployment at any time in any place for a full spectrum of operations."

The maneuvers were "conducted in several phases: surveillance of a fictitious operation area and the elaboration on an operation plan and preparation for combat action training...." [12]

At the same time a NATO "group of experts" delegation arrived in the Estonian capital of Tallinn to deliver a presentation on the Alliance's Strategic Concept. Next month, April 22-23, NATO is to hold a meeting in Tallinn with the foreign ministers of 56 nations, 28 full members and an equal amount of military partners from around the world. The gathering "will mark the first time that the new Strategic Concept is discussed at the ministerial level." [13]

The U.S. Navy announced on March 23 that it was sending personnel from its military station in Rota, Spain to Latvia to lay the groundwork for the Baltic Operations (BALTOPS) 2010 exercises later this year. "BALTOPS is an operation sponsored by Commander, United States European Command, and is an exercise aimed to promote a mutual understanding of maritime interoperability between U.S. Navy, NATO, and non-NATO participants." [14]

Two years ago NATO opened a so-called cyber defense installation in Estonia, as the bloc itself described it at the time "after a major cyber attack on Estonian public and private institutions prompted NATO to conduct a thorough assessment of its approach to cyber defence." The alleged perpetrators were Russian of course.

"At their meeting in October 2007 Allied Defence Ministers called for the development of a NATO cyber defence policy which was adopted [in] early 2008." [15]

Last week Jamie Shea, NATO's Director of Policy Planning, identified what he called cyber attack capabilities as "the fifth dimension of warfare after space, sea, land and air...." [16]

Prominent Western, especially U.S., officials have been demanding a NATO Article 5 response to cyber attacks for the past three years.

Late this month a U.S. warship, the guided missile cruiser USS Vicksburg, joined a Norwegian counterpart for anti-submarine exercises, after which the two ships "proceeded above the Arctic Circle." The exercises included "a series of complex Air Defense Exercises (ADEX) supported by Norwegian F-16 squadrons out of [the] Bodo Main Air Station." [17]

In the Black Sea region, American ambassador to Georgia John Bass recently assured the government of former State Department fellowship recipient and New York resident Mikheil Saakashvili of continued Pentagon support in two spheres: Ongoing training of the Georgian armed forces by U.S. Marine Corps personnel stationed in the country (by all indications permanently) and "improvement of defense systems and support structures." [18]

Shortly afterward Saakashvili appeared at a joint press conference at NATO headquarters with Anders Fogh Rasmussen.

The Georgian leader's comments included:

"We are the biggest per capita contributor to the Afghan...to the ISAF [International Security Assistance Force]....But we also are willing to engage in training their troops in Georgia and on site in Afghanistan."

The NATO chief said:

"I have reiterated to the president that NATO's policy towards Georgia has not changed. We will continue to support Georgia in its Euro-Atlantic aspirations. NATO is fully committed to Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Our Allies stick to their policy of non-recognition of the Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions of Georgia....I can assure you that there will be no change of the wording of what the NATO summit decided at the Bucharest Summit in 2008. And you will recall that we decided that Georgia as well as Ukraine will become members of NATO....And we have no intention whatsoever to change this wording. So the NATO position is unchanged." [19]

On the same day it was reported that Georgia's State Minister for Euro-Atlantic Integration, Giorgi Baramidze, said his government "is pushing for rapid entry into NATO with plans to meet membership requirements within the next three years...." [20]

In February the governments of fellow Black Sea nations Romania and Bulgaria confirmed their willingness to accede to U.S. requests to base intermediate-range interceptor missiles on their territories. Shortly after the countries' NATO accession six years ago the Pentagon secured the permanent use of four new military bases in Romania and three in Bulgaria.

Last week the Romanian government disclosed it was purchasing 24 second-hand F-16 multirole jet fighters from the U.S. "to modernise its air force." [21]

Concurrently, the nation's foreign minister, Teodor Baconschi, met with NATO Secretary General Rasmussen, reiterating "the NATO open door policy" toward Georgia, Ukraine and the Balkans and a commitment "to the diversification of partnership relations with NATO countries in the Western Balkans and in the Black Sea region."

The two also insisted that "bilateral cooperation with the U.S. in the field of anti-missile defence represents one of Romania's contributions to the development of a NATO anti-missile defence system, to be based on the principles of indivisibility of security of the Alliance and allied solidarity, as stated at the Summit in Bucharest and reaffirmed at the Summit in Strasbourg-Kehl." [22]

Also last week, Romania's President Traian Basescu called on members of parliament to pass a new national security law in view of three recent developments: The nation's absorption into NATO, the deployment of U.S. military personnel to bases in the country, and "developments related to the anti-missile shield." [23]

On the same day it was reported that the Bulgarian Defense Ministry had "approved a memorandum to exchange military personal staff with the U.S. navy.

"The memorandum sets up a bilateral program in the framework of which the navies of Bulgaria and the U.S. will have the opportunity to exchange experience and experts." [24]

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need for Cold War era nuclear arsenals and long-range delivery systems appreciably. Washington can well afford to reduce the number of its nuclear weapons and still maintain decisive worldwide strategic superiority, especially with the deployment of an international interceptor missile system and the unilateral militarization of space. And the use of super stealth strategic bombers and the Pentagon's Prompt Global Strike project for conventional warhead-equipped strike systems with the velocity and range of intercontinental ballistic missiles to destroy other nations' nuclear forces with non-nuclear weapons.

Russia has only its nuclear capability to resort to in the event of a major attack on its territory, as it has no bases beyond its borders except for minor ones in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Armenia and Transdniestler. Surely none in nations facing the United States.

Notes

- 1) Wall Street Journal, March 26, 2010
- 2) Russian Information Agency Novosti, March 23, 2010
- 3) Russian Information Agency Novosti, March 28, 2010
- 4) Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, March 26, 2010
- 5) Rustavi 2, March 27, 2010
- 6) Russian Information Agency Novosti, March 25, 2010
- 7) Polish Radio, March 26, 2010
- 8) Polish Radio, March 22, 2010
- 9) Polish Radio, October 27, 2009
- 10) Civil Georgia, August 21, 2009
- 11) Baltic Course, March 25, 2010
- 12) Baltic Course, March 23, 2010
- 13) Eesti elu, March 23, 2010
- 14) Navy Newsstand, March 24, 2010
- 15) North Atlantic Treaty Organization, May 14, 2008
- 16) Defense News, March 23, 2010
- 17) United States European Command, March 22, 2010
- 18) Trend News Agency, March 22, 2010
- 19) North Atlantic Treaty Organization, March 25, 2010
- 20) Deutsche Presse-Agentur, March 25, 2010
- 21) Reuters, March 23, 2010
- 22) The Financiarul, March 24, 2010
- 23) The Financiarul, March 25, 2010
- 24) Focus News Agency, March 25, 2010

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