



Los Alamos Study Group

Nuclear Disarmament • Environmental Protection • Social Justice • Economic Sustainability

U.S. Policies Belie Claims of Article VI Compliance

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U.S. statements to this Review Conference claim that gradual nuclear disarmament is underway in the United States. Nothing could be further from the truth.

No effort or cost is being spared to upgrade and modernize every part of the U.S. nuclear arsenal, including every delivery system, every launch platform, command and control, and all the factories required to build thousands of modified and new warheads and bombs over the decades to come. Every nuclear weapon system will have new military characteristics, such as greater stealth and air-defense penetration ability, higher accuracy, variable yields, and greater killing power against silos and command centers with shorter flight times and less early warning for adversaries. New long-range stealthy nuclear cruise missiles, not subject to any treaty limitations, are to be built in large quantities. All this, and not gradual disarmament, is the U.S. program of record.¹

Even the acknowledgement of nuclear parity vis-à-vis Russia, which made arms control possible in past decades, is now absent, replaced by a nuclear modernization program that is doing virtually *everything possible* within rapidly-rising budgets, to gain military advantage, exactly as if nuclear weapons were conventional weapons. Our organization has never, over many years of close involvement, heard or seen the humanitarian impacts of nuclear weapon use openly discussed or even acknowledged in domestic nuclear policy debates, which are almost nonexistent in any case.

Today's audacious modernization plan was negotiated within government in 2010, the year after President Obama's Prague speech and Nobel Peace Prize award, concurrent with submission of the New START treaty to Congress for ratification. Since then the plan has been successfully presented to Congress for authorization and funding every year, and is fully funded. While a (very) few members of Congress have unsuccessfully argued that some parts of the modernization plan are excessive, not one member of Congress has argued for any process that could lead to complete nuclear disarmament.

Thus at the moment there is unanimity within the U.S. government *against* pursuit of "negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament," in the words of Article VI. In response to the President's 2009 Prague speech, Congress has repeatedly passed (and the President has signed) laws that restrict the President's authority to negotiate further disarmament, or unilaterally retire nuclear weapons.²

The plan of record would increase nuclear weapons spending for many years to come, indeed for the foreseeable future. U.S. spending for warhead design, testing, and production already exceeds its highest Cold War level, in constant dollars. Despite vast weapons-usable fissile material stocks, the U.S. also now plans to resume production of highly-enriched uranium (HEU) in order to produce more tritium, reportedly in part to raise the readiness level of the reserve ("hedge") arsenal.³

Deploying, sustaining, and modernizing the huge U.S. nuclear arsenal is expected to cost at least one trillion dollars through the early 2030s, a huge expense even for the United States, a commitment that

demonstrates the perfect vacuum of sincerity in U.S. disarmament promises and claims. Nuclear weapons are, and are slated to remain, central to U.S. national security and foreign policy.

Large-scale production of submarine warheads with new fuzes for enhanced detonation placement and effectiveness is already well underway. In a speech in Washington last month, former Pentagon and MIT missile expert Dr. Theodore Postol stated that each modified W76-1 warhead created under the current life extension program will have at least twice the silo-killing power of the current W76-0.⁴

Meanwhile no nuclear weapons are actually being retired, and only obsolete warheads retired by previous administrations are being dismantled. These are dismantled only partially, with hard-to-produce nuclear components (plutonium cores, and perhaps others) retained for potential reuse. The Obama administration has retired fewer warheads than any other in post-Cold-War history.

Any dismantlement of the relatively few warheads retired since 2009 is being deferred indefinitely under current policy, pending successful production of new warheads and bombs in the factories now under design and construction, slated for completion in the mid-to-late 2020s.⁵

Given these realities, how are we to interpret statements like this from Ambassador Wood, on May 1?

Disarmament is taking place every day in the United States. Over the past two decades alone the United States has dismantled 10,251 nuclear warheads. That works out to dismantling an average of more than one warhead per day, every day, for 20 years. And this complex and costly work continues.

Yes, the partial dismantlement of warheads that were retired many years ago is still taking place as warhead modernization allows, in order to level workloads. The pace of dismantlement has dramatically slowed since the early 1990s however, and may stop altogether in 2022 when dismantlement of obsolete warheads can be stretched out no further.⁶ Calling what is essentially a cleanup process “disarmament,” while thousands of more modern weapons are being upgraded and replaced as rapidly as possible, is as ridiculous as it is shameful.

As the State Department’s fact sheet prepared for this conference indicates, the number of warheads in the U.S. arsenal has all but plateaued.⁷ Even the 50 ground-based missiles slated for removal under New START – which expires in 2021 unless extended for up to 5 years – are to be stored and their silos maintained for possible redeployment.

Secretary Kerry’s very modest promise to this Conference to increase the rate of dismantlement by 20% was immediately attacked by the congressional majority, and is now essentially dead. In response to Kerry’s promise language was added to the annual military authorization bill to limit dismantlement spending to the current level – which was also the administration’s requested amount, raising the question of just how Secretary Kerry’s promise was to be paid for in the first place.⁸

U.S. diplomats invariably cite the disarmament “progress” made since 1967, when the U.S. fielded 31,255 nuclear warheads and bombs, or since 1970, when the NPT entered into force. Needless to say, stockpile quantity does not tell the whole tale. A staggering variety of “improvements” have been made in the U.S. arsenal since then in the quest for nuclear warfighting advantage, especially improvements in accuracy.⁹

Today's U.S. arsenal is just as capable of ending civilization as was the arsenal of 1967. Should deterrence fail and nuclear weapons be launched, the fully-planned outcome would be still be that – the end of civilization. Not even counting the direct effects of blast, radiation, and fallout, which would utterly destroy any nation targeted, detonation of even a small fraction of today's nuclear arsenals over cities would send so much smoke into the stratosphere that food harvests would be badly curtailed if not eliminated for many years, among other catastrophic effects. Some large fraction of humanity would die, possible all. Many of earth's species would be driven to extinction.¹⁰ Nuclear reactors and spent fuel pools, each containing a staggering radioactive inventory, would be at immediate high risk from the loss of grid power and backup fuel even if not targeted directly. Many if not most would certainly melt down. Many spent fuel pools would burn when the flow of cooling water was lost, contaminating large land areas. The humanitarian impacts of nuclear war have not as yet been fully explored, and to repeat they are never, ever openly discussed on the record by the U.S. government.

To conclude, the statements about Article VI compliance made by U.S. diplomats to this Conference are preposterous. Former Obama White House nuclear czar Gary Samore recently said, far more truthfully, "Nuclear disarmament is not going to happen...It's a fantasy. We need our weapons for our safety, and we're not going to give them up."¹¹

And that's the way things will remain unless the non-nuclear weapons states decide, on their own, to close the legal gap that lends legitimacy to nuclear weapons and prestige to the states which possess them, with a treaty banning the production, possession, sharing, and use of nuclear weapons. Such a ban would be an "effective measure" to end the nuclear arms race and bring about nuclear disarmament, as envisioned by Article VI.

¹ Further details and references are available in the U.S. chapter of *Assuring destruction forever: 2015 edition*. See also "Air Force Wants 1,000 New Cruise Missiles," Kingston Reif, Arms Control Association, May 7, 2015, http://www.armscontrol.org/ACT/2015_05/News/Air-Force-Wants-Thousand-New-Cruise-Missiles.

² See for example sections 1041-1047 under Section E, "Nuclear Forces," in the FY2012 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/BILLS-112hr1540enr/pdf/BILLS-112hr1540enr.pdf>. Subsequent NDAs expand on these first post-New START limitations.

³ "[T]o raise:" anonymous government official to Greg Mello.

⁴ Key portion of Postol talk: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GbrfR2yrsEE#t=151>. For details see George Lewis and Theodore A. Postol, "The Capabilities of Trident against Russian Silo-Based Missiles: Implications for START III and Beyond," presentation at "The Future of Russian-US Strategic Arms Reductions: START III and Beyond" conference, Cambridge, MA, USA, 2 February 1998, and also "That Old Designing Fever," Greg Mello, *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, January 2000, pp. 51-57, archived without paywall at <http://lasg.org/DesigningFever.pdf>. The author is grateful to John Ainslie of Scottish CND for his discussion of these issues in a draft paper, "Sharpening Trident," not currently posted on-line.

⁵ "U.S. claims of nuclear weapons retirement, dismantlement "may be misleading – GAO." Los Alamos Study Group, May 1, 2014, discussion of Government Accountability Office, "Actions Needed by NNSA to Clarify Dismantlement Performance Goal," GAO-14-449, Apr 30, 2014, <http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-14-449>.

⁶ U.S. Department of State, "Transparency in the U.S. Nuclear Weapons Stockpile," April 27, 2015, <http://www.state.gov/t/isn/npt/statements/241165.htm>.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ "HASC Republicans Oppose Admin. Plan to Accelerate Dismantlement Work by 20 Percent; Kerry Announces Current Stockpile Size of 4,717," Todd Jacobson, *Nuclear Security and Deterrence Monitor*, May 1, 2015 (paywall). Modest increases in dismantlement spending over the authorized and appropriated amounts could be done but would

require approval of congressional committee chairs and ranking members, which under present conditions would almost certainly not be forthcoming.

⁹ Peak blast pressures decline in proportion to the third power of the radius from an explosion of a given size, making accuracy by far the dominant factor in counterforce targeting, as opposed to yield.

¹⁰ See references and discussion at <http://www.nucleardarkness.org/index2.php>.

¹¹ “U.S. unease about nuclear-weapons fuel takes aim at a South African vault,” Birch, Douglas, and Smith, R. Jeffrey, Center for Public Integrity, 14 March 2015, http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/africa/us-unease-about-nuclear-weapons-fuel-takes-aim-at-a-south-african-vault/2015/03/13/b17389f6-2bc1-4515-962d-03c655d0e62d_story.html.