

## **A Threat to Nuclear Disarmament**

**Experts say that U.S. missile defences and Prompt Global Strike weapons, far from promoting nuclear disarmament, may trigger a new arms race.**

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Hardly had Russia and the United States signed a nuclear arms reduction treaty, New START, the U.S. pushed ahead with the development of new conventional weapon system that threaten to stall nuclear disarmament and discredit U.S. non-proliferation efforts at the NPT Review Conference happening in New York on 3rd May 2010.

Testifying before the House Armed Services Committee Strategic Forces Subcommittee on April 15, Lieutenant General Patrick J. O'Reilly, U.S. Missile Defence Agency Director, said that his agency was going full steam with development of "advanced capability" anti-missile systems.

It is precisely this type of capability in missile defence that Russia said would force it to walk away from the New START treaty.

"The treaty... can operate and be viable only if the United States of America refrains from developing its missile defence capabilities quantitatively or qualitatively," Russia said in a statement issued at the signing of the New START treaty in Prague on April 8 2010.

According to Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, reference to "the interrelationship between strategic offensive arms and strategic defensive arms" included in the preamble of the treaty gives Russia a legal basis for pulling out from the START-2 treaty if the U.S. decides to upgrade regional missile defences it is currently deploying against Iran and North Korea to a strategic anti-missile system that could threaten Russia's long-range missile capabilities.

Russia's new military doctrine, adopted earlier this year, states that strategic missile defence will "undermine global stability and destroy the balance of power in the nuclear missile sphere." A nuclear war between the U.S. and Russia may no longer be an option, but Russia says the U.S. national missile defence could become an instrument for political blackmail. As Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin put it recently, the anti-missile umbrella would make the U.S. feel so secure that it could "act with impunity" towards Russia.

U.S. President George W. Bush's national security strategy signed in 2002, which argues the need for U.S. global military superiority is still in effect. Mr. Obama's new nuclear strategy document, the *Nuclear Posture Review* released two days before the New START

was signed, assigned critical role to missile defence as the U. S. shifts away from reliance on nuclear weapons.

After the New START was signed U.S. Secretary of Defence Robert Gates said "Missile defence is not constrained by this treaty".

In his testimony at the Congress hearings Lt. General O'Reilly said that by 2020 the U. S. will have the capability in Europe to shoot down, not only medium range, but also long-range missiles, and not just single missile attacks, but "large raids" of missiles "early in flight. This would effectively mean upgrading a regional missile defence to a strategic one that would threaten Russia's strategic missiles.

U.S. officials insist that the planned missile defences do not target Russia or China, but are only designed to give the U.S. and its allies protection against possible missile attacks by countries like Iran and North Korea.

"The United States made a unilateral statement at the signing of the New START to clarify that our missile defence systems are not intended to affect the strategic balance with Russia," U.S. Under Secretary for Arms Control and Security Ellen Tauscher said a week ago. Russia is unconvinced.

"In military affairs, you have to judge not intentions but capabilities," Mr. Lavrov once said quoting the 19<sup>th</sup> century German statesman Otto von Bismarck.

Russia has come up with a simple test of U.S. intentions: if your missile defence shield is not directed against us, Moscow told Washington, let's build it together. Mr. Putin first made the proposal to Mr. Bush in 2007. Nothing has come out of it because, as Mr. Putin revealed in an interview, the American response had boiled down to a request that "we should give them our missiles as targets" for U.S. missile interceptors.

President Dmitry Medvedev made the same proposal to Mr. Obama when the U.S. President visited Moscow a year ago and repeated it again when they were signing the New START in Prague on April 8. Mr. Obama responded by saying that he was looking forward to "launching a serious dialogue about Russian-American cooperation on missile defence."

However, at U.S. Congress hearings on missile defence a week later Russia was not mentioned as a possible partner, not even hypothetically. At the same time, it was stated that the U.S. planned to deploy missile interceptors in Romania by 2015 and in Poland by 2018 (Patriot missiles are to be setup in Poland as early as this May). Russia has

vehemently objected to these plans seeing them as steps towards building a destabilising strategic missile shield.

A few days ago U.S. media reported that the Pentagon had won Mr. Obama's support for a new generation of conventional strategic weapons that may further upset strategic stability. The Pentagon last week tested a new hypersonic winged missile system, the Falcon Hypersonic Test Vehicle-2, developed under the Prompt Global Strike project. Launched into the upper atmosphere by a long-range ballistic missile Falcon glides down to its target with pinpoint accuracy. It is the first weapon system since the creation of ballistic missiles that will be capable of hitting a target anywhere around the globe within less than an hour.

Speaking in Congress Lt. General O'Reilly confirmed that the future U.S. missile shield would include a strong space component. Last Thursday the U.S. took a major step towards weaponisation of space with a test launch of the X-378 orbital space plane. Former Russian Air Force chief General Anatoly Kornukov said the test showed that "the U.S. plans to deploy weapons in space to target Russia."

Mr. Lavrov warned last month that "states will hardly accept a situation in which nuclear weapons disappear, but weapons that are no less destabilising emerge in the hands of certain members of the international community". The U.S. has consistently rejected a joint Russia-China proposal to sign an international agreement banning space weapons.

Experts say that U.S. missile defences and Prompt Global Strike weapons, far from promoting nuclear disarmament, may trigger a new arms race. In its new report on China's nuclear strategy published on April 20 the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) comes to the conclusion that "the advent of more advanced conventional weapons, including missile defences and space-based weapons, places further pressures on China to revisit its policies and practices on the role of nuclear weapons," and upgrade and expand its nuclear deterrent potential.

Russia also pursues modernisation of its nuclear arsenals. In recent years it has developed new long-range nuclear missiles armed with multiple warheads that are said to be capable of piercing U.S. missile defences. The land-based RS-24 missile is due to be deployed next year, and the submarine-launched Bulava missile is still under going tests. By 2016 Russia plans to build a heavier land-based missile.

The U.S. emphasis on missile defence and other high precision conventional weapon systems - an area where it has overwhelming superiority casts in a new light Mr. Obama's declared goal of achieving "a world free of nuclear weapons." It is seen as away for the U.S.

to consolidate its military supremacy. "Obama's nuclear disarmament initiative will effectively allow the U.S. to assert its global military hegemony at a quantitatively higher level," says Prof. Alexander Radchuk, adviser to the Chief of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces.

At the NPT Review Conference this week the U.S. is expected to push for all non-NPT states including India and Pakistan to join the nuclear accord. However, Washington's policy of global domination through supremacy in non-nuclear weapons may push more states to seek the n-bomb.

"Whereas in the 20th century nuclear weapons were a privilege of the powerful and technologically advanced nations, in the 21st century the opposite tendency is emerging: nuclear weapons attract countries that want to compensate for their technological weaknesses, " Prof. Radchuk opines.

Despite worrying signals from Washington. Moscow is in no hurry to give up on Mr. Obama. The Kremlin sees the New START as evidence of a significant shift in the U.S. policy from Mr. Bush's refusal to sign any legally binding disarmament pacts with Russia to a revival of the system of maintaining strategic stability through verifiable arms control and reduction treaties. Mr. Medvedev, who met Mr. Obama 12 times over the past year, has a very high opinion of his U.S. counterpart. Comparing Mr. Obama with his predecessor in a recent interview Mr Medvedev said Mr. Obama was a "thinker" who "tries to listen to his partner," has "in-depth" knowledge of issues discussed, and overall, is "a great personality to deal with." Moscow is well aware of the challenges the Obama Administration faces in getting the New START treaty through the Republican-controlled Senate. The Kremlin hopes that once the ratification hurdle is cleared and the two sides embark on strategic dialogue proposed by the White House, they will be able to carry forward the disarmament agenda on the basis of equal security and credibly "reset" bilateral relations.