

Obama To Retain “Safe, Secure, Effective” Nuclear Overkill Capacity

By John LaForge

The United States and Russia, which together possess 95 percent of the world’s nuclear weapons, announced on July 6, an agreement on a plan to someday reduce their arsenals by up to one-third.

The proposed treaty could cut long-range thermonuclear weapons systems for each side — known in jargon as “strategic” weapons — to between 1,500 and 1,675. Mainstream news reports said this was “down from the limit of 2,200 slated to take effect in 2012.”

In fact, according to the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* in 2007 the U.S. had 9,938 warheads. It is obligated under the 2002 Moscow Agreement to reduce that number to 5,470 by the end of 2012. The July proposal is intended to replace the 1991 Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty which is due to expire in December 2009.

“The limit on delivery vehicles — land-based ICBMs, submarines and bombers — would be somewhere from 500 to 1,100 down from the 1,600 currently allowed,” *The New York Times* reported.

Maintaining a total of 1,500 warheads, at 335 kilotons each (today’s Minuteman III missile warheads), is equivalent to 502,500,000 tons of TNT, or 502 “megatons” of nuclear firepower.

There are 188 cities on Earth with over 2 million people. With the arsenal reduced to 1,500, the U.S. could explode seven warheads on each one of them. “That should do it,” quipped Nukewatch staffer Bonnie Urfer.

President Obama and Russia’s Dmitri Medvedev said they want to impose even deeper cuts in their nuclear

arsenals and put the world on a path toward eliminating nuclear weapons altogether. During their July 6 news conference Obama said, “This is an urgent issue, and one in which the U.S. and Russia have to take leadership. ... showing ourselves willing to deal with our own nuclear stockpiles in a more rational way.”

Obama’s less rational embrace of the nuclear arsenal was presented April 5 in Prague where he said, “As long as these weapons exist, the United States will maintain a safe, secure and effective arsenal to deter any adversary, and guarantee that defense to our allies.”

The president’s language was reminiscent of the 1980s Reagan Administration.

In a July 29 speech to the Strategic Command which controls the U.S. arsenal, the director of the U.S. Arms Control Association, Daryl Kimball, outlined the Pentagon’s current nuclear warfare policy, complaining that it hasn’t essentially changed since the U.S.-Soviet Cold War. Kimball reported, “Unfortunately, even after two post-Cold War Nuclear Posture Reviews, the United States still has a nuclear force posture that calls for ... the same basic roles and retains all of the essential characteristics it had during the Cold War.

“Current doctrine,” Kimball noted, “calls for:

- “A nuclear arsenal and readiness posture capable of delivering a devastating counterforce attack against Russia, China, and other potential regional nuclear-armed foes.
- “The possible use of nuclear weapons to defend U.S. forces and allies against massive conventional military attacks; and
- “The possible use of nuclear weapons to counter suspected chemical or biological weapons threats.”

Depleted Uranium Weapons Under Siege

German Armed Forces Contradict U.S. Denials Over DU in Afghanistan

A classified German Army manual flatly contradicts U.S. and UK claims that no depleted uranium (DU) has been used in Afghanistan.

A military manual that was handed over to German campaigners has reignited allegations that the U.S. used DU ammunition in Afghanistan. The manual, a war-fighting guide for Germany’s Bundeswehr (Armed Forces) contingents in Afghanistan is marked “classified” and for official NATO use only. It was published in late 2005.

The section on DU munitions begins with:

“During the operation “Enduring Freedom” in support of the Northern Alliance against the Taliban-Regime, U.S.-aircraft used, amongst others, armor-piercing incendiary munitions with a DU-core. Because of its pyrophoric character, when this type of munition is used against hard targets (e.g. tanks, cars) the uranium burns. During the combustion, toxic dusts can be deposited, particularly at and around the targets, which can then be resuspended easily.”

It then warns troops how to recognize contaminated targets and of the potential health threat from DU munitions, suggesting precautions that troops should take. It is notable that they suggest the use of full Nuclear Chemical and Biological warfare suits:

“DU-munitions can therefore induce toxic and radiological damage to exposed personnel through heavy metal poisoning and very low-level radiation. When it is suspected that these weapons have been used (burnt out cars or tanks, burnt out convoys, typical 30 mm bullet holes) NBC (nuclear, biological and chemical) protection suits and NBC masks have to be worn in the vicinity of the munitions’ impact, until NBC security troops can rule out any threat.”

— www.bandeduranium.org/en/a/283.html

Pentagon Think Tank Urges Accelerated Search For DU Replacement

A military think tank has urged Army planners to speed up the search for alternative metals due to the growing international opposition to DU weapons.

The U.S. Army Environmental Policy Institute (AEPI) assists the Army Department in developing mitigation policies and strategies to improve or resolve environmental issues that may have significant impact on the Army.

In its May 2008 report, the AEPI suggests that, “the military should continue pursuing R&D for substitutes and be prepared for increased political pressure for current and past battlefield cleanup.”

The opinion seems to have been triggered by the growing international campaign against the use of uranium weapons. In particular the report acknowledged the impact that repeated European Parliament resolutions have had on the international debate.

Last year, a July/August AEPI report quoted the U.S. Institute of Medicine, whose two studies of the health impact of DU and the health assessment of veterans concluded that, “...health impacts of depleted uranium exposure in military and veteran populations are difficult to determine with the available data and procedures and an assessment plan would not be easy to design.”

AEPI fully accepted the Institute of Medicine’s recommendations for, “... a prospective cohort study if future military operations involve exposure to depleted uranium and better integration and linkages of DOD [Dept. of Defense] databases for identifying health issues of current active-duty military personnel and veterans with potential DU exposure.”

In acknowledging the flaws in the Pentagon’s framework for surveillance of sick veterans and the dearth of reliable research into historical DU exposure, the AEPI made this stark recommendation to the U.S. Army:

“Since the DU controversy continues, with pressure for creation of international regulations to ban DU munitions, the military should continue to seek alternative high-density projectile materials and glean force health protection recommendations from such studies.”

— International Coalition to Ban Uranium Weapons, July 10, 2009, www.aepi.army.mil/rpt-weei.html

Uranium Travels Nerves From Nose to Brain

The journal *Toxicology Letters* reports in its July 31 online edition that troops and uranium workers who inhale radioactive uranium may see it bypass the brain’s protective barrier and follow nerves from the nose directly to the brain.

In a study conducted on rats, nerves, acting as a conduit, carried inhaled uranium from the nose directly to the brain. Once in the brain, the uranium may affect task and decision-related types of thinking. In his synopsis of the new study, Doctor of Veterinary Medicine Paul Eubig noted that “This study provides yet another example of how some substances can use the olfactory system — bypassing the brain’s protective blood barrier — to go directly to the brain. Titanium nanoparticles and the metals manganese, nickel and thallium have been shown to reach the brain using the same route.”

“Once in the brain, the uranium may affect task and decision-related types of thinking. [One] study of Gulf War veterans who have uranium shrapnel in their bodies showed that they perform more poorly on general brain cognitive tests of performance efficiency and accuracy,” Eubig wrote.

Belgian Parliament Votes Unanimously to Ban Depleted Uranium Weapon Investments

On July 2, the Belgian Parliament unanimously approved a law forbidding the financing of the manufacture, use and possession of DU weapons. Belgium is now the first country to prevent the flow of money to DU producers. The law complements the country’s ban on DU’s manufacture, testing, use, sale and stockpiling which came into force on June 21.

Vieques Aghast at Navy Exploding, Burning of Live DU and Other Munitions

The Navy has begun destroying live unexploded munitions — including depleted uranium — that litter the former test firing ranges on the island of Vieques. Nearby residents are flabbergasted to see this being done by detonation. About a third of the 18,700 munitions that Navy workers have found so far have been blasted in the open air.

To add insult to injury, the Navy proposes to burn up to 100 acres of dense jungle to locate and blow up unexploded cluster bombs. What has residents in an uproar is the threat to their health. “The great majority of emergency room visits here last year were for respiratory problems. Can they guarantee that contaminants or smoke won’t reach the population?” asked Evelyn Delorme Camacho, the mayor of Vieques.

Among the toxic chemicals that may be inside the shells are TNT, napalm, depleted uranium, mercury, lead and PCBs. According to the Navy, between the mid-’60s and 2003 the Pentagon fired 300,000 munitions into the Live Impact Area in Vieques during training operations.

Islanders suspect the tested weapons toxicants have caused “what Puerto Rico’s health department found were disproportionately high rates of illnesses like cancer, hypertension and liver disease on the island.” — *New York Times*, Aug. 7, 2009, & Naval Facilities Engineering Command.

This archaic posture, once known as nuclear madness, was described as long ago as 1985 in the *Washington Quarterly* which reported that, “The climatic consequence of such a conflict would appear to afford no sanctuary. ... A superpower could not isolate itself from the effects of its own weapons.”

What the U.S. Could Do Now

The use of nuclear weapons is legally prohibited because their effects are indiscriminate and uncontrollable, because radiation is a poison which is explicitly forbidden under all circumstances by the Hague Regulations and because their radiation-induced mutagenic and multigenerational effects long outlast the end of hostilities in violation of the Geneva Conventions.

Even Cold War architect and former Reagan administration national security advisor, Paul Nitze, writing Oct. 28, 1999 in the *New York Times*, said: “I see no compelling reason why we should not unilaterally get rid of our nuclear weapons. To maintain them ... adds nothing to our security. I can think of no circumstances under which it would be wise for the United States to use nuclear weapons, even in retaliation for their prior use against us ...”

If the U.S. government were genuinely interested in pursuing general nuclear disarmament, as it pledged to do in ratifying the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, it could immediately undertake six independent actions that would illustrate its good faith:

1. Take all nuclear weapons off hair-trigger “alert” status, ending the Pentagon’s threatening, accident-prone policy of “launch on warning”;
2. Declare a nuclear “no first use” policy similar to that of China;
3. Announce a blanket refusal to attack non-nuclear states using nuclear weapons;
4. Withdraw all U.S. nuclear weapons from Europe;
5. Separate nuclear warheads from delivery vehicles which will increase the time needed to prepare any use of the weapons;
6. Halt the production of fissile materials nationwide.

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U.S. Nuclear Arsenal

By Robert Norris and Hans Kristensen, “Nuclear Notebook,” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*

We believe the number of warheads will decline from approximately 9,938 today to about 5,470 by the end of 2012.

Current plans call for retaining about 2,000 W76 warheads,¹ modifying them, extending their service lives, and improving their military capabilities. It took almost 10 years, 1978–1987, to produce 3,250 W76 warheads for the Trident submarine missile system.

[We] estimate that U.S. “operationally deployed” strategic forces under the 2002 Moscow Treaty will number 2,192 warheads by the end of 2012, and that another 3,275 warheads will not be counted under the treaty.

* Land-based ICBMs: 500 warheads:

There are 450 Minuteman III ICBMs with 150 W87² warheads deployed at Warren Air Force Base (AFB) in Cheyenne, Wyoming and 150 more at Malmstrom AFB, in Great Falls, Montana. Another 200 W78³ warheads are on Minuteman IIIs at Minot AFB in North Dakota.

* Submarines: 1,152 warheads:

There are 646 W76-1s, and 506 W88 warheads (475 kilotons⁴ each), which are on missiles on 12 nuclear-powered ballistic missile [Trident] submarines (2 in overhaul not counted).

* Heavy bombers: 540 warheads:

There are 32 B-52 bombers⁵ and 16 B-2 Combat Coded bombers at AFBs at Barksdale, Louisiana, Minot, North Dakota and Whiteman, Missouri. — *Footnotes on page 6.*



In September, German farm residents opposed to using salt caverns under Gorleben as a permanent nuclear waste dump made a week-long tractor trek to Berlin to press their case. They were joined by thousands of people from around the country for the Sept. 5 protest. Wide-spread public opposition and proof of high-level scientific fraud in the siting process moved Environment Minister Sigmar Gabriel to call consideration of the site “dead.” In nation-wide polls, 59 percent oppose nuclear power and want to retain federal legislation that will phase out Germany’s 17 reactors by 2025.