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Policy or posturing

The US nuclear posture review in an international context

On 6 April 2010 the long-awaited nuclear posture review report was released, “fulfilling a promise from Prague,” as the White House blog proclaimed.¹ A year earlier, in Prague, President Barack Obama had pledged that the United States would take concrete steps towards a world without nuclear weapons. On the 40th anniversary of the entry into force of the nuclear nonproliferation treaty in March 2010, Obama pledged that the forthcoming review would “move beyond outdated Cold War thinking” and reduce the number and role of nuclear weapons in US strategy.² The administration clearly saw the review as a key element of the positive narrative regarding

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1 “Nuclear posture review report,” US Department of Defense, 6 April 2010, www.defense.gov.

2 “Statement by President Obama on the 40th anniversary of the nuclear nonproliferation treaty,” the White House, 5 March 2010.

US nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament policy that it wanted to convey prior to the Washington nuclear security summit in April and the nonproliferation treaty review conference in New York in May. Now that these major multilateral events have successfully been held and the anniversary of the review's release has passed, it is worth considering its real impact on the international strategic environment. Did the review represent a genuine reform of US nuclear policy or was it more of a public relations exercise designed to position the US favourably in the context of a major meeting of the nonproliferation treaty parties? This article will consider the review from an international perspective, and in particular how its content responds to the obligations of states party to the treaty and the decisions of its quinquennial review conferences. The review, as an authoritative policy statement of the world's leading nuclear power, was addressed to a foreign as much as a domestic audience. The nature and timing of the review was intended to influence states active in international nuclear affairs in a manner coincident with US policy objectives. Issued a month before the opening of the May 2010 review conference of the nonproliferation treaty, and after a decade of difficulties for this core international security treaty, the nuclear posture review was undoubtedly going to have an impact on the perceptions of participating states as well as on the atmosphere of the conference itself.

Despite the timing of its release and its deployment as a public diplomacy vehicle in the lead-up to the US-hosted nuclear security summit and treaty review conference, the nuclear review was nevertheless very much a home-grown product. It had domestic roots as a congressionally mandated review of all aspects of US nuclear weapons policy and posture, as well as the related infrastructure of the nuclear weapons complex. An early decision was taken to issue the review solely in an unclassified form, thus ensuring full transparency of the results to the public, both domestic and foreign. The Obama administration was not going to repeat the mistake of the previous administration, which conducted a classified nuclear posture review in 2001 and saw excerpts of it leaked, including controversial text on nuclear deterrence and preemption that provoked international consternation. The 2010 review was designed to be viewed as a progressive statement on US nuclear weapons policy that would complement the administration's foreign policy aims of strengthening the treaty and enlisting international support in shoring up the global nonproliferation regime. At the same time, it was also meant to send a reassuring message to US allies and partners who rely on extended deterrence that American commitments are as solid as ever.

Finally, it was intended to placate various domestic constituencies with vested interests in the continuation of nuclear forces and the associated nuclear weapons complex. Given the inherent tensions, if not downright incompatibility, among these various aims, it is not surprising that in the end the review delivered a rather mixed message to the international audience.

The salient issues of the review from an international perspective were the definition of the role for nuclear weapons in US strategy; the nature of the security assurances the US was prepared to give to non-nuclear weapons states; what action the US would take on outstanding nuclear disarmament commitments; what would be done to strengthen nonproliferation and nuclear security; and how the US would approach relations with other nuclear weapons-possessing states. While the review also addressed the sustainment of a safe and effective nuclear arsenal, this chapter of the study was of greater interest to the domestic audience and in particular those engaged in the nuclear weapons complex and their supporters. This article will consider each of these issues and evaluate how successful the administration has been in getting its desired message—of compliance with its treaty obligations and its constructive contributions to global nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament goals—across to the international audience. In addressing the international response, it is necessary to get beyond the public reactions. These, with the notable exception of Iran's supreme religious leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who decried the review as constituting "atomic threats against Iranian people," were invariably polite and positive.³ Of more significance is the extent to which the review coincided with or deviated from positions regarding nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament held by the international community and the treaty membership in particular.

THE ROLE FOR NUCLEAR WEAPONS

In his 2009 Prague speech, Obama had promised to reduce the role of nuclear weapons in national security strategy and to urge others to do likewise. For many around the world, there was an expectation that the Obama administration would reverse the tendency of the Bush administration to enlarge the role of nuclear weapons in its declaratory policy and provide a highly restricted definition of the objective nuclear weapons serve. The international commission on nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament, an Australian-Japanese initiative co-chaired by former foreign ministers

3 For Khamenei's reaction, see Nazila Fathi and David E. Sanger, "Iran ayatollah assails US on new nuclear strategy," *New York Times*, 22 April 2010.

Gareth Evans and Yoriko Kawaguchi, had issued a report in December 2009 calling for adoption of a doctrine that would specify that the “sole purpose” of nuclear weapons was to deter nuclear attack by others.⁴ Although only a doctrinal declaration, the role ascribed to nuclear weapons is seen as reflective of the status of these weapons in global strategic parlance and a key factor in facilitating their eventual elimination. If the world’s leading nuclear power ascribes an exclusively nuclear deterrent role to its nuclear arsenal, it will influence other nuclear powers to respond in kind and should inherently facilitate sharp reductions of nuclear weapons. If employment of these weapons is only to be conceived of in the most remote circumstances, then it becomes easier to eliminate them progressively from strategies and arsenals. While embracing this logic in part, the nuclear posture review does not go as far as specifying deterring nuclear attack as the “sole” purpose of US nuclear weapons. Instead it refers to this as “the fundamental role” for US nuclear weapons. The “sole purpose” limitation is mooted as a future goal, but one that cannot be safely adopted at present. The review also continues to hedge this restriction by claiming a nuclear deterrent role against future biological weapons threats, as well as against conventional, chemical, and biological weapons attacks by states possessing nuclear weapons. Encumbered with these exceptions, the review fails to make a clear and comprehensive break with the past as its deterrence doctrine is still striving to be multi-purpose.

SECURITY ASSURANCES

These assurances are to a large extent the glue that holds the treaty and the entire nonproliferation regime together. They take two basic forms: negative security assurances, which are commitments by nuclear weapons states not to use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapons states, and positive security assurances provided to non-nuclear weapons states (which are allied to nuclear weapons states) if they are threatened by other nuclear weapons-possessing states. Negative security assurances in particular are seen as one of the principal benefits of adhering to the treaty for the 184 non-nuclear weapon states party to the treaty. All five of the treaty-recognized nuclear-weapons states issued unilateral negative security assurances as well as a collective negative assurance in the form of UN security council resolution 984 at the time of the 1995 treaty review and

4 “Eliminating nuclear threats: A practical agenda for global policymakers,” report of the international commission on nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament, December 2009, 172, www.icnnd.org.

extension conference. It was this conference that agreed to the indefinite extension of the treaty, a major accomplishment for the global nuclear order. The negative security assurances set out at that time are seen as part of the political-strategic context that permitted this extension to occur. For non-nuclear weapon states it was important that the posture review not weaken in any way the negative security assurances previously issued by the United States. In actuality, the review reformulated the traditional negative security assurances in a manner that has increased ambiguity in a realm where clarity is prized. On the one hand, it dropped the Cold War caveat that the assurances would not apply to a non-nuclear weapon state engaged in an attack on the US in association with a nuclear-weapon state. On the other hand, it introduced a new requirement for the non-nuclear weapon state to be a treaty state in compliance with its nuclear nonproliferation obligations. The problem thus introduced is one of scope (which obligations exactly?) and authority (who decides what constitutes noncompliance?). Given the complexity of the nuclear nonproliferation regime and its varied requirements, this is not an academic question. Violations of International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguard agreements would seem to constitute noncompliance, and yet countries such as Romania, Egypt, and South Korea have all been found in violation of some elements of these accords. There are also some 20 states that still have not concluded a safeguards agreement with the IAEA, a basic obligation under the treaty. Of course there have been more problematic cases such as Iran, Iraq, Libya, North Korea, and Syria, but each of these situations has been approached differently. Regarding decision-making, what legitimacy would unilateral judgments on noncompliance have? How would the various judgments of the IAEA and/or the United Nations security council be factored into a noncompliance calculation that could lead to a non-nuclear weapon state being subjected to nuclear coercion? It is noteworthy that the UK government, in setting out its recent version of a negative security assurance, has simply stated that it applies to all non-nuclear weapon states parties to the treaty.⁵

Against the backdrop of Obama's pledge to strengthen the treaty, it is also noteworthy that the review does not acknowledge the decision from the 2000 treaty review conference that the conclusion of legally binding negative security assurances would strengthen the nuclear nonproliferation regime. The review eschews codifying negative security assurances in any multilateral

5 "Securing Britain in an age of uncertainty: The strategic defence and security review," October 2010, 37.

fashion in favour of declaratory policy that would leave any administration free to change its assurances at will. For those non-nuclear weapon states looking for unequivocal and legally binding negative security assurances, the review may be seen as a disappointment. Confined by the US position set out in the nuclear posture review, the 2010 treaty review conference was unable to advance the objective of negative assurance codification. The best the treaty states were able to agree on was a contorted statement in the final document that would have the conference on disarmament “begin discussion of effective international arrangements to assure non-nuclear weapon States against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons.”⁶ Instead of aligning itself with the guidance from the treaty review process, the administration maintained a unilateral negative assurance stance on the basis of ambiguous criteria that are subject only to US national interpretation.

On the positive security assurance front, the review seeks to strike a balance between reaffirming extended deterrence on behalf of allies and partners while moving towards greater reliance on conventional capabilities in deterring attack. The overall messaging on security assurances is confused, perhaps reflecting the different orientation of the working groups that developed the separate chapters of the posture review and that could not be fully ironed out editorially. The assertion of reduced reliance on nuclear weapons does not mesh well with affirmations of the “essential role” US nuclear weapons play in extending deterrence to US allies and partners. In the NATO context, the review claims that US nuclear weapons in Europe “contribute to Alliance cohesion and provide reassurance to allies and partners who feel exposed to regional threats.”⁷ Contrary to the commitment to seek to reduce reliance on nuclear weapons in security policy, the review is studiously noncommittal in its reference to the revision of the nuclear section of NATO’s strategic concept, which was released at the alliance’s Lisbon summit in November 2010. The review simply notes that any changes in NATO’s nuclear posture should be taken only after a thorough review within the alliance. As the revision of NATO’s strategic concept and the finalization of the review occurred during the same time period, this “holding pattern” tack reflected Washington’s decision not to proceed with any major change in its NATO-relevant nuclear deployments.

6 Final document of the 2010 nonproliferation treaty review conference, New York, 18 June 2010, 22.

7 Nuclear posture review, 32.

The review's cautious, status-quo friendly approach was mirrored in the revised strategic concept's lack of any significant nuclear arms-control initiative. Instead there was a reaffirmation of deterrence and its nuclear component: "Deterrence, based on an appropriate mix of nuclear and conventional capabilities, remains a core element of our overall strategy."⁸ At a time when major European allies such as Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, and Norway were calling for the removal of US nuclear weapons, the ambivalence of the review on these questions did not appear consistent with the nuclear reform thrust Obama had promised. In particular, the review's approach and subsequent American diplomacy concerning NATO's nuclear posture suggested that allies should not look to the United States to take a lead in advocating a reduction in the reliance on nuclear weapons in NATO's own security strategy. The tautological statement from the revised strategic concept that "as long as there are nuclear weapons in the world, NATO will remain a nuclear Alliance" does not put the US-led alliance in the forefront of nuclear policy modernization.⁹ This status-quo posture also detracts from US standing within the treaty context, as a reduction in the salience of nuclear weapons in security policies was one of the commitments agreed to at the 2000 treaty review conference and reaffirmed at the 2010 review conference.

ACTION ON NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT

The Obama administration's acknowledgment of the importance of compliance with the disarmament as well as the nonproliferation obligations of the treaty is helpful in reinforcing it. The posture review explicitly recognized a link between the pursuit of nuclear disarmament and garnering international support to strengthen the nonproliferation regime. "By demonstrating that we take seriously our NPT obligations to pursue nuclear disarmament, we strengthen our ability to mobilize broad international support for the measures needed to reinforce the non-proliferation regime and secure nuclear materials worldwide," the review states.¹⁰ This acknowledgment is useful given the importance of balanced compliance across the three pillars of the treaty, but still displays some reserve as to the utility of disarmament in its own right. Understandably, the nuclear posture review puts emphasis on the strategic arms reductions

8 NATO's "strategic concept," November 2010, paragraph 17, www.nato.int.

9 *Ibid.*, preface.

10 Nuclear posture review, 12.

to be effected under the new START treaty between Russia and the United States which was signed in April and finally ratified by the US senate in December 2010.¹¹ The review acknowledges however, that “conservative assumptions” were used to calculate the levels of reductions under this accord. The achievement of deeper reductions as well as the inclusion of nonstrategic and nondeployed nuclear weapons is to await further analysis and negotiation at some undefined point in the future.

Measured against the benchmarks on disarmament agreed upon at the 2000 treaty review conference (the so-called 13 practical steps), the performance of the United States has been spotty. While the strategic arms reductions have progressed to a degree, “new START” may be something of a misnomer when the actual impact on strategic nuclear weapons is considered. The reduction target of 1550 deployed warheads (nondeployed warheads are not addressed and remain unconstrained) is a modest lowering, compared to the 2002 SORT range of 1700-2200 warheads. The timeline for accomplishing these reductions has also lengthened, compared to SORT which would have required its reductions to be achieved by 2012, whereas new START reductions will only need to be effected by the end of 2017 at the earliest (seven years after ratification of the treaty). Despite the requirement agreed at the 2000 treaty review conference for cuts in nonstrategic nuclear weapons, there has been no action on reducing this category of arms, although the review suggests that they will figure in some future round of bilateral negotiations.

The reduction of the operational status of deployed nuclear forces, another one of the 13 steps, is rejected by the review. Despite its invoking Obama’s direction to transcend “Cold War thinking,” the review concludes that current high alert levels should be maintained and that lowering them could negatively affect crisis stability. According to this scenario, an adversary would be given the incentive to attack before “re-alerting” was complete. This thinking perpetuates the sort of Cold War calculus that yields high alert postures despite the dramatic change in the bilateral relationship between Russia and the United States. A similar Cold War outlook is discernable in the review’s comments on force structure and its decision to retain all three legs of the strategic triad (intercontinental ballistic missiles, ballistic missile submarines, and heavy bombers). Heavy bombers are seen to have a unique role in being able to be visibly forward-deployed to signal US resolve in a crisis. This positive highlighting of the potential for nuclear escalation in a

11 See “Key facts about the new START treaty,” the White House, 26 March 2010.

crisis does not sit well with the administration's overall thrust to reduce the role of nuclear weapons in national security policy. It reflects the bifurcated aims of the nuclear posture review, trying on the one hand to show a progressive engagement in arms control and disarmament, while on the other demonstrating US nuclear resolve and capacity to support its interests and those of its allies.

While the abrogation of the antiballistic missile treaty by the Bush administration complicates the fulfilment of the specific step from the 2000 treaty review conference relating to US-Russian agreements, the strategic stability intent of that step remains valid. The key issue of strategic missile defences (and their interrelationship with offensive arms) is still relevant, although it only gets a preambular acknowledgment in new START and remains unaddressed in substance. The priority tasks of entry into force of the comprehensive test ban treaty and the conclusion of a ban on fissile material production for nuclear weapons (the fissile material cut-off treaty) remain wholly unfulfilled, despite the administration's express commitment to ratify the former and support the latter. While any progress in meeting nuclear disarmament obligations is to be applauded, the fact remains that US compliance with the disarmament commitments it made within the treaty context is insufficient, and this in turn weakens its ability to hold others to account for noncompliance with nonproliferation commitments.

STRENGTHEN NUCLEAR NONPROLIFERATION AND SECURITY

The review states that "the United States will lead expanded international efforts to rebuild and strengthen the global nuclear non-proliferation regime and to accelerate efforts to prevent nuclear terrorism."¹² On this front, the administration's rhetoric is backed up by a series of practical actions, many of which build on existing programs initiated under the previous administration. The review notes US commitments to provide the IAEA with expanded financial support and urges all countries to adhere to the IAEA's additional protocol to strengthen the verification authority of the agency. The review repeats Obama's pledge to transform the proliferation security initiative (involving over 90 countries) and the global initiative to combat nuclear terrorism (involving 77 countries) into "durable international institutions."¹³ Referring to Obama's call for the development of a new framework for international nuclear energy cooperation, the review notes

¹² Nuclear posture review, 9.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 10 and 12.

that the United States is pursuing this aim through the global nuclear energy partnership (involving 25 partner and 31 observer nations). Aside from representing a significant continuity with Bush administration initiatives—all three of these international “coalitions of the willing” originated with that administration—these steps recognize the need for sustained international cooperation if the global nonproliferation regime is to be strengthened. This engagement is supported by an increased allocation of resources by the United States at the national level. The review indicates that funding in fiscal year 2011 for the National Nuclear Security Administration’s nuclear nonproliferation programs will be increased by more than 25 percent to a total of \$2.7 billion.¹⁴

With respect to nuclear security, the review refers to Obama’s hosting of 46 countries in a nuclear security summit in April 2010, viewing it as a high-profile demonstration of US leadership in the global effort to prevent terrorist groups from acquiring nuclear arms or fissile material. While the results of that summit fell short of establishing nuclear security as the fourth pillar of the treaty as the previous British government had called for, the gathering did consolidate international support for an important dimension of the nonproliferation effort. Critics will note, however, that combating nuclear terrorism represents one of the least controversial aspects of the global nonproliferation agenda. A more daunting challenge is how to reverse the nuclear ambitions of North Korea and Iran, which the review states the United States will strive to accomplish. It offers little in concrete terms on how to tackle the problems of a state that has withdrawn from the treaty and signalled its defiance by conducting two nuclear test explosions and another state that, while claiming to abide by the treaty, has failed to fulfil its nonproliferation obligations under IAEA agreements and UN security council resolutions. The review reiterates the vague promise of the administration to strengthen the treaty and its call to hold states to account for noncompliance, but does not elaborate any specific proposals for achieving these goals. While advocating institutionalization for cooperative international processes on nuclear security, such as the proliferation security initiative, the review has no vision for institutional reform of or support for the treaty as a whole and no proposal for treaty action to curb the ambitions of nuclear miscreants like North Korea and Iran.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 11.

APPROACH TO OTHER NUCLEAR WEAPON STATES

The review clearly states that reinforcement of strategic stability is a major goal in the US relationship with the non-allied nuclear weapons states, namely Russia and China. It states 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.”¹⁵ With Russia and its predecessor, the Soviet Union, such a strategic dialogue has been ongoing for decades and in part has been institutionalized through the provisions of bilateral strategic arms accords. The review’s reaffirmation of this dialogue is an acknowledgment of the status quo. Issues such as the interrelationship between strategic offensive and defensive arms or the implications of conventionally armed long-range ballistic missile systems on strategic stability are identified in the review as topics for future discussions. Similarly, how to address nonstrategic and nondeployed nuclear weapons in further negotiated reductions is a question it puts off to the future, one to be engaged once a presidential review of post-new START arms-control objectives is completed. One may have hoped for the review to have been the vehicle for setting out such longer-term objectives and to have generated answers as well as questions as to what strategic arms control goals the United States would pursue with its partners. The promise to maintain a strategic dialogue with Russia is nonetheless a reassuring gesture in the direction of cooperative security in the nuclear field, even if it does not go much beyond existing commitments.

With China, the engagement to pursue a strategic dialogue is more significant as the bilateral experience with Beijing on this subject matter has been far more limited than it has been with Russia. The review argues that the goal of a US-China dialogue is to “enhance confidence, improve transparency, and reduce mistrust.” It repeats a conclusion from the 2010 ballistic missile defence review report that “maintaining strategic stability in the US-China relationship is as important to this Administration as maintaining strategic stability with other major powers.”¹⁶ Of course it takes two willing partners to sustain a dialogue, strategic or otherwise. The US-China strategic interaction has been far more restricted and subject to vagaries in the broader bilateral relationship, such as arms sales to Taiwan or visits by the Dalai Lama, than has been the case with Russia. Little in practical terms is likely to be immediately forthcoming from a US-China

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, x.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, xi.

strategic dialogue, the reticence essentially being on the Chinese side and its traditional suspicion of “transparency” exercises in the military field. Nevertheless, the review’s implicit acknowledgment that China’s strategic concerns will be taken into account by the United States is a confidence-building measure in and of itself.

Another class of nuclear powers conspicuous by their absence in the review are the non-treaty states possessing nuclear weapons. Beyond citing North Korea as an example of a country whose nuclear ambitions need to be reversed, the review is silent on India, Pakistan, and Israel, states for which this goal could also apply. Its authors may have simply seen these cases as being in the too-tough-to-deal-with category. This may also explain the review’s neglect of the Middle East and the nuclear-weapon-free zone long sought by states in that region. It is awkward in a document that affirms the administration’s commitment to renew and strengthen the treaty to omit support for its universalization, a goal regularly reaffirmed at treaty review conferences, including at the May 2010 meeting. The elephant in the room is of course the US-India nuclear deal that granted New Delhi most of the benefits and few of the obligations of treaty membership. It will be difficult for an administration complicit in this weakening of the treaty’s authority to argue why such an exemption from treaty-endorsed policy was perpetrated or why it should not be extended to other non-treaty nuclear states. The review’s references to China’s military modernization efforts, including its nuclear arsenal, as a source of concern to its Asian neighbours can also be construed as endorsing a rationale India has long cited in defence of its decision to go nuclear.¹⁷

CONCLUSION: DOMESTIC CONTEXT AND INTERNATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

As noted earlier, the nuclear posture review was prepared with both a domestic and foreign audience in mind. On the home front, the review is explicit in stating that one of its chief purposes is to help forge a bipartisan consensus on nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament policy. This aim has shaped its contents of the review to a great extent. The largely status-quo outcome on nuclear posture, the modest targets set for strategic arms reductions, the convoluted formulas on the purpose of US nuclear forces, the continuity with Bush administration’s nuclear security programs, and the increased funding given the nuclear weapons complex are all results of the domestic considerations that figured prominently in the review. These

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, v.

considerations also go a long way to explain why many major nuclear policy issues mentioned in the review are only to be substantively addressed at some unspecified future point. By trying to fashion a review that would be nonthreatening to opponents on the hill, the administration was also preparing the ground for achieving senate consent for the ratification of new START and the comprehensive test ban treaty, key commitments of the administration.

While the domestic factors noted above are fully understandable in the crafting of the review, this document was also designed to appeal to a foreign audience.¹⁸ In particular, it was to complement the impressive rhetoric used by Obama in Prague in setting out for international political and public consumption his administration's vision of a world without nuclear weapons and the policy course the US would follow to achieve this goal. The Prague speech aimed to influence state behaviour in favour of greater cooperation with the United States in implementing its preferred nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament objectives. What the review ultimately delivered may not be perceived internationally as commensurate with what the president promised two years ago. The gap between the review's promise and its reality could have implications for the administration's future success in obtaining support for its global policy aims. In the international diplomatic realm, sovereign states are expected to fulfil their obligations pursuant to treaties they have freely entered into regardless of changes in governments or administration. The compromises that are reflected in the review, however explicable in domestic terms, may detract from the international assessment of the administration's performance in implementing its treaty-related commitments. The international community would give scant credence to an Iranian president excusing his country's failure to fulfil IAEA or security council demands by citing his troubles with the Iranian parliament. The administration has to be careful therefore in justifying shortcomings in its implementation of existing commitments with reference to the demands of a contrarian congress. Obama pledged in his 2009 Prague speech to reduce the role of nuclear weapons in US national security strategy and the review issued last April will be considered internationally the chief expression of this promise. As described above, its

¹⁸ See, in this regard, comments by Gary Samore, National Security Council coordinator for arms control, at a Carnegie Endowment meeting, "International perspectives on the nuclear posture review," 22 April 2010. Samore stated, "We very consciously, as we crafted the document, very consciously intended to influence the perceptions of different foreign audiences."

contents may be judged to be inadequate. However significant declaratory policy such as the nuclear posture review is in characterizing a state's stance on nuclear issues, it will be the action taken on these issues that will be most influential in shaping perceptions of that state's contribution to the health of the global nonproliferation and disarmament regime. In this light, the jury is still out on how Obama's administration will be judged internationally in fulfilling the president's ambitious nuclear agenda.