

OP-ED

by

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Securing the Future

Many Americans share President Obama's goal of eliminating nuclear weapons from the face of the earth. As the current administration celebrates the signing of a new START agreement with the Russians and their completion of our nation's Nuclear Posture Review (NPR), the questions remain: Is this the best way to ensure the safety and security of the United States and our allies? Will the Senate ratify the negotiated agreement? The driving factor appears to have been to get a treaty at all costs hoping we're lucky enough that the treaty miraculously provides for the security and safety of the U.S. and our allies...neither hope nor luck are good plans.

The President's decision to sign a new bilateral arms reduction treaty with Russia this April replacing the START agreement that expired December 2009 reduces strategic warheads by 74 % and delivery vehicles by over 50%. It is interesting to note the administration has allowed the Russian's eight to one tactical nuclear weapon advantage to be totally excluded from the new START. Additionally, the Russians have retained a nuclear weapons production capability while the U.S has not.

Deterrence is a delicately balanced equation which isn't achieved simply through coming to terms with Russia; the equation must also factor in the reaction of our friends and allies. Unlike Russia, the United States has global commitments to many allies. Hopefully the President's administration has correctly calculated the impact on our friends and allies reaction to further reductions in U.S. weapons to extend deterrence. Japan, South Korea and Taiwan are among two dozen countries which rely on our

nuclear deterrent for regional stability. North Korea's nuclear capabilities make our extended deterrence guarantee even more important. The U.S. nuclear umbrella doesn't just protect our allies; it also dissuades them from pursuing their own nuclear weapons thus preventing further nuclear proliferation.

As the President works tirelessly to push towards a world without nuclear weapons, it is imperative he remember: eliminating nuclear warheads, of which we have a stockpile, is one thing. Eliminating strategic capability through a hasty reduction of delivery systems – our deterrence triad of missiles, submarines and bombers, -- is quite another. The nation can always build another submarine or bomber. Some delivery systems however, such as any of the land-based *ICBMs*, like the ones here at Malmstrom AFB, are irreplaceable! Should it turn out the ability to execute national security imperatives were miscalculated, it is critical we retain the capability to amend our actions in order to ensure the safety and security of the U.S. and our allies.

Interestingly enough the NPR doesn't appear to have an implementation plan. DoD is tasked to define force structure under the New START Treaty after taking account of the NPR. That begs the question; how will the implementation occur? It is here we rely upon and thank our Senator's, Max Baucus and Jon Tester, to stand firm on the value of the ICBM leg of the triad. The Minuteman is the most stabilizing and effective on-alert US deterrent (24-7 alert status) maximizing Presidential decision time. The Minuteman is also the most cost-efficient strategic weapon, costing less than one-fifth of 1 percent of the Pentagon's budget.

Until it is clear how the NPR and New START Treaty are to be implemented we should be particularly vigilant and concerned about the fate of our ICBM force based at Malmstrom AFB. The local Central Montana Defense Alliance and Chamber of Commerce are working very hard supporting the 450 Minuteman ICBMs nuclear deterrence mission here in Montana, Wyoming and North Dakota. Montana can be proud of the role Malmstrom AFB plays in our global nuclear deterrence, and the dedication of the base's almost 3,400 military members and more than 1,300 civilian employees.

It would appear the best way for President Obama to reduce nuclear proliferation is to make sure anyone seeking a peaceful way forward may be confident that Americans are wise enough to seek reductions, yet responsible enough to only embrace reductions which do not place our nation and our allies at risk. In order to earn that confidence and encourage two thirds Senate ratification, it is vitally important implementation of the NPR and NEW START Treaty is transparent so that we fully understand how the President's steps toward global zero secure the future.