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THE NEW START TREATY: WHAT NEXT?

Armen Oganessian, Editor-in-Chief of International Affairs; mail@interaffairs.ru

Ronald Reagan's signature phrase "Trust but Verify" surfaced every time the arms reduction talks were discussed in the United States. The "insidious" Russians, meanwhile, opted for "Verify Before Trusting" when dealing with the Americans, the formula suggested by the sad experience of America's unilateral withdrawal from the ABM Treaty and the extreme vagueness of Washington's strategic aims.

By the time the compromises had been agreed upon, the new American nuclear doctrine was still a talk of the town based on numerous leaks from unspecified sources. Made public it forced many to wonder about security guarantees in the "nuclear-free world": the U.S. current superiority in conventional and non-nuclear weapons of strategic capabilities is too obvious to be ignored. We can hardly expect a tighter nuclear non-proliferation regime in the world in which nuclear weapon remains for many countries the only shield against the vast assortment of high-tech smart weapons at the disposal of the United States and NATO.

The world is equally concerned with the attempts to justify the so-called preventive strikes: condemned in Nuremberg they violate the UN Charter yet Washington has not yet disavowed the odious provisions of the U.S. National Security Strategy adopted by the George W. Bush Administration which said, in part: "Even if uncertainty remains as to the time and place of the enemy's attack ... to forestall or prevent such hostile acts by our adversaries, the United States will, if necessary, act preemptively." In March 2006, Washington confirmed this in its upgraded National Security Strategy.

The new administration has not yet betrayed its stand on another no less radical tenet of the previous administration which said that it would never permit any country (how, I wonder!) to achieve military parity with the United States. According to the American media, President Obama turned a deaf ear to the calls from certain Democratic congressmen to pledge "the non-use of nuclear weapons first," yet The Washington Post wrote that officials of the Defense Ministry and the Department of State predicted that this might scare the allies covered by the U.S. "nuclear umbrella."

The recently signed START Treaty reinstated the ABM issue in the field of mutual agreements by binding the strategic offensive and the strategic defensive weapons. The very fact that the United States made public its intention to deploy ABM systems in Rumania and Bulgaria while the START talks were still underway casts doubts at Washington's long-term plans: they might easily move from the regional to the global level to become unacceptable for Russia. The working papers at the departmental level say that no agreements should be regarded as binding when it comes to America's ABM-related plans. This prompted two most important statements voiced by Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov: "The Russian Federation, in particular, will be entitled to withdraw from the Treaty if the quantitative and qualitative capacity building for the U.S. strategic missile defense begins to have a significant impact on the effectiveness of the Russian strategic nuclear forces." The Russian Foreign Minister offered the following comment on the "global nuclear zero": "We believe that in order to talk seriously about a world without nuclear weapons, it is necessary to draw attention to a whole array of factors that could potentially destabilize global strategic security. This is, first of all, the prospect of weapons appearing in outer space ... non-nuclear strategic offensive arms."

The calls to move away from the balance of fear and mistrust of the Cold War era toward mutual trust and cooperation sound noble but vague. Some people say that everything depends on President Obama who holds the key to the problem. His choice of the road as stated by the National Security Strategy will mean that he has either opted for a "new past" or a "new future"; in other words, to which extent will he discard the legacy of George W. Bush?

Speaking at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates said: "There's no Robespierre who comes and says 'off with their heads — we are going to do things differently'." Zbigniew Brzezinski, on his side, has pointed to the deepening ideological split: "The resulting polarization not only makes a bipartisan foreign policy less likely, but also encourages the infusion of demagoguery into policy conflicts. And it poisons the public discourse." In other words, both are troubled by a potential loss of foreign policy continuity if President Obama moves too far from the doctrinaire and practical tenets of the previous administration. It is generally accepted that President George W. Bush vulgarized American policies which means that it needs de-vulgarization rather than radical revisions. According to The New York Times the fact that the neo-cons planted a much more aggressive approach to the national security issues which relied on force to a much greater extent than the previous documents after the Reagan era. Today, together with America Russia, Europe and China, and the developing world for that matter, want to know which part of the heritage the Barack Obama Administration is ready to discard. To justify the hopes kindled by the new president of the United States a year ago it is not enough to move away from President Bush's vulgarizations and to cloth the neo-con ideas into new formulas or, to put it differently, "to put new wine into old wineskins."

Those who, like Brzezinski, want to see political continuity in the United States are growing impatient. Brzezinski's latest article "From Hope to Audacity" which appeared in the January-February 2010 issue of Foreign Affairs betrays concerns of the heavyweights in the American elite about President Obama's political course which remains vague in many respects. The author complimented the president by saying that "Obama proved that he was a master of both social conciliation and political

mobilization” in a hope that the new president would reconcile himself with at least part of what he inherited from George W. Bush. Brzezinski goes on to say that “he has not yet made the transition from inspiring orator to compelling statesman,” urges the president to move “from hope to audacity” and encourages him in a fatherly way: “In the tough realities of world affairs, leadership also requires an unrelenting firmness in overcoming foreign opposition, in winning support of friends, in negotiating seriously when necessary with hostile states, and in gaining grudging respect even from those governments that the United States has an interest in intimidating.” This might have come from any of the neo-cons close to the former president. Here is political continuity for you.

Today, the future of the START Treaty, an obvious breakthrough in the bilateral relations of Russia and America and much more else in world politics depend on America’s choice of the road. We shall live and we shall see.

Key words: The Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START), Ronald Reagan, George W. Bush, U.S. President Barack Obama, ABM