

A modest bilateral nuclear-disarmament treaty, concluded at an accelerated pace in the first 15 months of the Obama administration with the Russian Federation, has survived what departing Senator Arlen Specter calls the political “cannibalism” of his Republican Party, to be ratified in the US Senate by 71 votes for and 26 against.

It climaxes a spurt of Congressional action in a lame-duck session that saw President Barack Obama gain the extension of the Bush II tax cuts (albeit with the rich benefitting too) and repealing the ‘Don’t ask; Don’t tell’ Clinton policy regarding gays in the US military, *inter alia*.

Before we rush to acclaim this treaty ratification as an Obama victory for policy persistence or a tribute to bipartisanship, some perspective is necessary so that we realise this is not an unqualified success for nuclear disarmament – without which there can be no nuclear non-proliferation.

The renegade Cold Warriors – Schultz, Kissinger, Nunn and Perry – with their 2007 and 2008 Wall Street Journal op-eds call for abolishing nuclear weapons and an end to faith-based nuclear-deterrence fiction, influenced the US Presidential campaign of 2008 and reignited the civil-society movement for Global Zero.

Obama’s community-organis-er experience had taught him to temper idealism with pragmatism in seeking a consensus.

And so, the soaring rhetoric of a nuclear-weapon-free world vision was grounded in the caveats he wrote into his Prague speech of April 2009 (“Perhaps not in my lifetime...”).

To those who only saw the vision, the New START with Russia, the Washington Nuclear Security Summit, the Nuclear Posture Review and the success of the 2010 NPT Review Conference were milestones on an irreversible road to zero nukes.

Sceptics who saw through it all as ‘nuclearism’ or make-believe nuclear disarmament were not surprised when at the



TWO CHEERS FOR A NEW START

Jayantha Dhanapala analyses the Obama administration’s policy on global nuclear disarmament in the face of mounting odds.

first salvo of pro-nuclear establishment protests, promoted of course by special-interest groups, Obama wilted.

First, he ensured that the weapons laboratories, which are central in the nuclear-weapon establishment, are funded beyond their wildest dreams (US\$ 85 billion over 10 years); then he denied he was doing anything but upholding the scientifically unproven and politically provocative missile-defence system of past Republican administrations; and he granted other Republican requests, despite their negative impact on the deficit.

In Europe, the NATO Strategic Concept Review



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ended predictably with a ‘business as usual’ document, despite European allies wanting US nuclear weapons removed from their soil.

When New START was signed on 8 April 2010, it was rightly hailed as a return to traditional nuclear-arms control via verifiable and irreversible treaty arrangements between the two nuclear giants who owned an estimated 95 per cent of the nuclear weapons in the world.

This was also part of the overdue ‘resetting’ of US-Russian relations, which had been allowed to slide under both Bill Clinton and George W. Bush – and almost resulted in a clash over Georgia.

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13,905,000; Boeing US\$ 9,430,000; and Northrop Grumman US\$ 9,080,000.

Amidst this sordid spectacle was the shining example of Senator Dick Lugar and his other Republican colleagues whose principled vote for ratification was never in doubt.

The US Senate ratification of New START has thus exposed the strength of the opposition by the Cold Warriors and the military-industrial complex to nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation.

They exist and work assiduously in many countries and represent, collectively, what President Dwight Eisenhower – in the wisdom distilled from an illustrious military career, followed by eight years as President of the US during the Cold War – warned us about in his farewell speech in January 1961.

Eisenhower said: “In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist. We must never let the weight of this combination endanger our liberties or democratic processes. We should take nothing for granted. Only an alert and knowledgeable citizenry can compel the proper meshing of the huge industrial and military machinery of defence with our peaceful methods and goals, so that security and liberty may prosper together.”

Doing the right thing for the wrong reasons is an old practice in politics, as T. S. Eliot said in *Murder in the Cathedral*: “The last temptation is the greatest treason; to do the right deed for the wrong reason.”

Many believed President Obama when he declared clearly and with conviction, “America’s commitment to seek the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons”. He added: “(We) must ignore the voices who tell us that the world cannot change. We have to insist, ‘yes, we can’.”

He can still redeem himself by continuing to seek the elimination of nuclear weapons, despite the odds he faces.

An estimated 30 per cent reduction of permitted deployed strategic nuclear weapons over a seven-year period is envisaged out of the total of 22,400 nuclear warheads in the arsenals of nine nuclear-weapon-armed countries, 7,500 of them on operational status.

Apart from visceral US Republican allergy to arms reductions, specific attention was focused by opponents of New START on its verifiability – a rich irony, when the 2002 Strategic Offensive Reduction Treaty (SORT) had no verification and the 1991 START I arrangements were allowed to lapse in December 2009 – and on the innocuous preambular language on missile defence leading to wild accusations of secret agreements to abandon what is in fact a wasteful and ineffective military programme with illusory defence.

Surprisingly, the Obama administration was in defensive mode both before and after the mid-term Congressional elec-

tions with its swing towards the GOP.

A readiness to compromise on fundamental principles disappointing the hopes raised by the Prague speech morphed from flexibility to ensure the right numbers to downright horse-trading as some Republican Senators upped the ante at the behest of lobbyists.

Just as Obama’s liberal supporters were disappointed over what finally came out as health reform, similar disappointment is now being voiced over the concessions made to secure the ratification.

First came the promise to maintain a credible nuclear deterrent under the euphemism of ‘modernisation’, which escalated into typical pork-barrel politicking to satisfy the insatiable appetite of Senators like Jon Kyl of Arizona who eventually reneged on his promises.

Then came the grovelling assurances on missile defence, painting the Obama administration into a corner that Clinton

cleverly stayed away from. Supporters of the Prompt Global Strike weapon system also joined the fray; and soon, the disarmament community began to portray New START as an ‘arms affirmation treaty’, rather than the beginning of a process towards a nuclear-weapon-free world.

The process leading to the US Senate ratification has, once again, proved that American politics is driven by special-interests groups, leaving the interests of the people in the lurch. Long before WikiLeaks websites monitoring how money lubricates the system disclosed legally available data.

For example, one report said that military contractors, with stakes in missile defence, spent an estimated 59 million dollars lobbying the Senate since New START was signed.

Another report revealed that between 8 April and 22 September 2010, Raytheon spent US\$ 22,750,000 on lobbying; Lockheed Martin US\$