

## Letter on Obama 'Deep Cuts'

Written by John Hallam

Friday, 24 February 2012 15:43 - Last Updated Sunday, 08 February 2015 22:24

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PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA NATIONAL SECURITY ADVISER TOM DONILON CC GARY SAMORE, WMD COORDINATOR, NSC,

JON B. WOLFSTHAL OVP

LEON PANETTA, SECY FOR DEFENCE

DR JAMES N. MILLER, UNDERSECY OF DEFENCE FOR POLICY,

ELLEN TAUSCHER, UNDERSECY FOR DISARMAMENT

JOHN P. HOLDREN OFFICE OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

### **HOUSE ARMED SERVICES CTTEE – STRATEGIC FORCES SUBCOMITTEE SENATE COMITTEES ON DEFENCE AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

Dear President Obama, National Security Adviser Tom Donilon, Gary Samore and Jon Wolfsthal:

PND Nuclear Flashpoints is writing as one of the originators of a recent letter signed by 85 NGOs and 4 nobel prize winners to Presidents Obama and Medvedev on missile defence and nuclear disarmament.

We write in connection with the ongoing reviews of nuclear targeting strategy and posture being undertaken by your administration.

The world as a whole has a legitimate and strong, indeed an existential, interest in the nuclear postures, doctrines, and force – levels of the United States and Russia, who between them possess approx 95% of the worlds nuclear weapons. That interest was specifically recognised by the final declaration of the 2010 NPT Review conference.

That same conference yet again reaffirmed that there is an obligation to negotiate nuclear arsenals to zero.

We write also because we are deeply worried by the reaction of certain Republican members of the US Congress to the possibility of deep, meaningful, and significant cuts in US nuclear forces. The number of 300 warheads has been floated in one working paper along with lesser reductions. That number has also been suggested in a paper by airforce officers in 2010, so it is not new. The CATO institute has previously suggested a number of 500 warheads.

While it has sparked outrage amongst some, it must be noted that others (such as Carnegie's Joseph Cirincione[Foreign Policy 17 Feb]) have suggested 300 warheads may not be sufficiently ambitious. Cirincione notes that: “....the options that the Pentagon and the White House national security staff are reportedly preparing for the president's consideration are well within the mainstream of today's strategic thinking. It is those defending the existing nuclear complex and arguing for its expansion who occupy fringe.”

We regard deep cuts to the US nuclear arsenal, coupled with changes in nuclear posture,

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that create real increases in decision-making time during a crisis or putative 'missile event' that may or may not be real, as absolutely essential to the ongoing safety and security of not only the US, but the whole world.

We regard the mischaracterisation by some congresspeople of proposed changes to the US nuclear arsenal as 'reckless and irresponsible', as being themselves reckless and irresponsible. This mischaracterisation ignores the utterly terrifying dangers that large nuclear arsenals on high alert pose to both the societies that possess them, and to the rest of the world. These very real dangers can be taken off the agenda only by changing nuclear posture to afford key decision-makers more than zero to eight minutes to make utterly apocalyptic decisions, by reducing warhead numbers significantly, and by taking the path to zero to which we are legally obligated under the NPT.

Congressional and other prescriptions for increasing rather than decreasing US nuclear forces, as well as plans to spend more (according to some sources) than has EVER been spent on US nuclear weapons infrastructure modernisation,

(a) Have budgetary implications that in the current economic climate, and with current US debt levels, are clearly financially unsustainable.

(b) Even if US debt levels are not as they in fact are, these prescriptions would be likely to lead to 'tit-for-tat' increases in the nuclear forces of Russia and possibly China – Increases that, notwithstanding claims in the letter from congresspeople that they are taking place, are NOT currently taking place, but will certainly take place in response to US modernisation moves.

The recommendations in that letter from congresspeople would be likely to lead to a renewed arms race that has no end and that like the arms races of the cold war, risks everybody and everything in the US and worldwide. This must surely be the most reckless, irresponsible, and ideologically blind, outcome of all.

I am sure that you do not need reminding that peer-reviewed research (referenced in our previous letter to Obama and Medvedev which we enclose once more), on the climatic effects of large (and not-so-large)-scale use of nuclear weapons, indicates that the 'nuclear winter' theory of the 1980s, was not only correct but actually understates the problem. The catastrophic global climatic consequences of nuclear weapons use are longer-lasting, and emerge at lower warhead numbers, (depending on precise targeting strategy) than was thought in the '80s.

We now know that even a 'regional' India-Pakistan nuclear war, fought with 1-200 Hiroshima-sized warheads used for city destruction amounting to 0.3% of global nuclear arsenals, would produce global famine. A US-Russia nuclear exchange would of course, bring about the complete destruction of both societies and a number of other countries, and would be a global environmental catastrophe that would put a question mark after human (and most other species) survival.

The letter from republican congresspeople completely (purposefully?) ignores these considerations.

You will, we are sure, be well aware of the resolutions that are adopted by the General Assembly (both the Switzerland-NZ-Nigeria-Malaysia-Chile resolution and other resolutions), on operational readiness of nuclear weapon systems and the regular panels of experts including former US and Soviet military, that have spoken in favour of decreasing operational readiness. You would also be aware of the prominence given to this issue by the International Commission on Nuclear Nonproliferation and Disarmament. (ICNND). None of this is addressed by the congresspeople's letter.

On one issue we do agree with this letter however. In what is itself a blindly ideological letter,

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it says that nuclear weapons issues are too important to be left to 'blind ideology'.

We agree completely.

A fact-based, reality-based, look at the real security needs of the US and the world can only conclude that neither the US nor the rest of the world needs nuclear weapons at all, and that the risks they pose are of such a fundamental, existential, nature, that we are better off without them.

The current US budget and security position points entirely unambiguously to further deep cuts in warhead numbers and changes in nuclear posture that allow proper consideration of courses of action that involve the possible destruction of other societies as well as the US's own society.

Warnings that such decreases in warhead numbers are 'risky' or 'irresponsible' , themselves give rise to risks that dwarf utterly any possible risk in reducing warhead numbers.

A truly responsible and non-ideological look at the real security needs of the US and the world must see as vital, reductions in warhead numbers and changes in posture that reduce the risk of catastrophe to the US and to the world.

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