

Nuclear Trojan horse or why the issue of a joint arms reduction with Russia has been raised in the USA

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Before the State of the Union address by Barack Obama at a joint session of the Congress on 13 February, we heard two reports from the United States. Their content was rather unusual, as are the possible political and military consequences.

Firstly, the news agency Associated Press reported that some secret studies by the US DoD have questioned the capability of the US missile defence system to be deployed in Europe to protect the country from Iranian ballistic missiles. Apparently, this is based on the data presented recently at a secret briefing of the US Government Accountability Office.

Secondly, the New York Times, quoting an anonymous source within the Obama Administration, stated that Washington would call upon Russia to jointly reduce further strategic offensive weapons, which are limited by the START 3 Treaty to 1,550 strategic nuclear warheads and 800 operationally deployed and operationally non-deployed warheads, as well as their means of delivery, for each Party. It is worth noting one of the comments made on these reports, to the effect that the White House, with the support of the military, would be ready, on a mutual basis, to reduce strategic offensive weapons by one third, whilst other comments mentioned even 50%. And these would be allegedly Washington's "innovative" ideas in the area of arms control for President Obama's second term.

As far as the first news item on missile defence is concerned, it is only partially plausible. Indeed, US government circles and the expert community have been conducting studies to determine the advisability of deploying a European and global missile defence system for quite some time. And this, despite the announcement made by Barack Obama in September 2009 -- the famous plan for a 'European Phased Adaptive Approach' (EPAA) -- to deploy a layered missile defence infrastructure on the European continent, and even a grand declaration made at the NATO Summit in Chicago last May on the successful completion of its first phase two years ago and the achievement of an Initial Operational Capability.

It is true that the US operational missile defence systems to be deployed in Romania and Poland in 2015 and 2018 respectively are not designed to intercept potential ballistic missiles launched by Iran. This is the task of the MD systems of the United States and its Allies deployed in the Gulf region, which will soon reach the overall number of 800 interceptors of the first and second layers. Whereas the only purpose of the US MD assets deployed in Europe is to destroy a certain part of the Russian ICBMs.

The fact that our country is never mentioned in the EPAA as a potential 'co-author of the project' proves that it is aimed first of all at Russia. It is missing in both the NATO Missile Defence Action Plan and the US and Alliance's "rules of engagement" concerning the use of antimissiles, endorsed shortly after the NATO Chicago Summit.

As for the second 'news injection', on a further reduction of strategic offensive weapons, it was denied by Jay Carney, White House spokesperson, almost immediately (on 11 February 2013). He stated that he was not expecting any new announcements in this regard in the President's next address to Congress. Indeed, in his speech on 13 February the American President only said that Washington was ready to involve Russia in a "nuclear weapons reduction", without giving any quantitative parameters.

This address has not provided us with an answer to the question which is a matter of a principle for our country: will the USA reduce its MD structure in Europe or will it increase the build-up? Russia would also like to know in what maritime areas the US long-range interceptors would be based. Around 30 US ships have already been equipped with such assets, and each ship could carry between 30 and 40 such missiles. Will the US ground-based antimissiles, to be deployed at Deveselu base in Romania and near the Polish town of Redzikovo, be replaced with more capable ballistic missile interceptors, thus augmenting their capability to cancel out the Russian nuclear deterrence forces?

Other questions arise as well. Why do these "new" ideas on strategic weapons reduction put forward by Washington still not mention that the United States are ready to take back their tactical nuclear weapons from Europe, as Russia did more than 18 years ago? Does

Washington plan to retain weapons of this type on the continent for several more decades, especially as the Pentagon has already announced their future upgrade by 2030 at least? How could one explain that the US Air Force has completed the building of new underground warehouses at 13 air bases in six NATO member countries to store precision nuclear air bombs designed to destroy hard targets? Why do the US and its NATO Allies insist on counting the number of Russian tactical nuclear weapons, determining their location and state of readiness before the official discussions on these assets begin?

Finally, given the two news “injections” on some nuclear weapons reductions, one could ask: why was it done, and why isn’t there any other information? And here, it seems, everything is very simple. It’s obvious that the United States still intend to go down the road of selective reduction of nuclear weapons, focusing only on a further reduction of strategic offensive weapons. But at the same time they completely exclude from the negotiations such important non-nuclear weapons as anti-missile systems, anti-satellite weapons and high-precision capabilities which could perform lightning strikes in any part of the world. One should also note Washington’s willingness to “strengthen the Missile Defence system”, as stated by President Obama in his address to the nation, in which he laid out key tasks for his administration during the second term.

This means that the United States use various “new proposals and ideas” in the area of arms control to obscure its far-reaching plans to deploy forward-based assets, i.e. tactical nuclear weapons and missile defence, destabilizing the global political and military environment and undermining the fragile strategic and military balance between Moscow and Washington, established over several decades.

For instance, repeatedly building up combat and data-collection missile defence assets, while repeatedly reducing strategic offensive weapons, could lead to a dangerous situation, described by the US leaders back in the 1960s and 70s: the nuclear missiles and anti-missiles arms race. Such an imbalance could tempt the US to launch a first nuclear strike, which they have not foregone from the doctrinal point of view, and they still have significant strategic and tactical nuclear capabilities.

The reality and the particular nature of developing modern offensive and defensive weapons today and in the coming years are such that they need to be considered, limited and reduced only in an “organic interrelationship”. Incidentally, this “linkage” of nuclear and conventional weapons with the anti-missile capabilities of the US and NATO as a whole was first endorsed at the Alliance Summit last May.

This is why, no matter how the “innovative” proposals coming from the White House are presented, the defence interests of the Russian Federation would not be served by a further reduction of its strategic offensive weapons, against the background of a US build-up of missile defence capabilities on a global scale, plans to upgrade its tactical nuclear weapons and keep them deployed on the European continent and in the Asian part of Turkey, and American intentions to place strike weapons in space and safeguard significant advantages for itself in the area of conventional weapons. The updated Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, issued in mid-February this year, states that our country has consistently supported constructive cooperation with the USA in the area of arms control, including taking into consideration the unbreakable link between strategic offensive and defensive capabilities and the urgency of making the nuclear disarmament process multilateral; it also assumes that negotiations on a further reduction of offensive nuclear weapons are possible “only taking into consideration all the factors affecting global strategic stability, without any exceptions”.

Moscow and Washington should agree once and for all not to use nuclear weapons first against

each other, and not to deploy their MD systems near the borders of the other Party. The Russian Federation has repeatedly declared its willingness to show restraint in the area of missile defence. A refusal by both Parties to use nuclear weapons in a first strike would make the deployment of American MD systems at the “forward lines” illogical and set an example of real cooperation for other nuclear states.

Obviously, Russia and the USA would maintain their right to deploy and upgrade their infrastructure for the intercept of ballistic missiles on their national territories. Washington should renounce its plans to implement not only the fourth, but all the other phases of the EPAA as well. This means the second phase, which has already started, as well as the third, and not only the fourth, as proposed by certain Western and, unfortunately, a number of Russian experts. If Washington cancels implementation of the fourth phase only, it will not meet the national security interests of the Russian Federation. In this case the US and NATO MD system will be deployed anyway. Instead of thinking how to encircle Russia with nuclear and missile defence weapons, the American side should think about how, together with our country and other interested states, to prevent “meteorite rains” from falling down on our planet.

It would be much cheaper for the US to forego the implementation of the EPAA in its entirety than to deploy a bulky missile defence architecture on a global scale. In this case no one will have to respond by taking military-technical or diplomatic measures. This, and the implementation of a number of important decisions in the area of arms control, is the only basis for transition from the concept of mutually assured destruction towards the concept of mutually assured security, which is proposed for implementation in US-Russia relations.