

White House to Maintain Nuclear “First Strike” Policy

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On Tuesday, the New York Times published as its front-page lead article a piece, written by longtime military/intelligence insider David Sanger, reporting internal White House discussions that the Obama administration is planning on maintaining the United States’ “first strike” nuclear weapons policy.

In recent months, the *Washington Post* and *Times* had published reports that President Obama had considered formally adopting a policy of not using nuclear weapons unless the US was attacked by such weapons first.

On July 10, The *Washington Post* reported, “The Obama administration is determined to use its final six months in office to take a series of executive actions to advance the nuclear agenda the president has advocated since his college days,” including the possible adoption of a “no first use” policy.

But Tuesday’s report in the *Times* declared that Obama “appears likely to abandon the proposal after top national security advisers argued” that it would “embolden Russia and China.”

The move takes place amidst a series of US provocations against both countries, including the deployment of thousands of troops on Russia’s border in Eastern Europe and ongoing “freedom of navigation” operations in the South China Sea. In their statements to the *Times*, White House and military officials were sending a clear signal that it will abide no scaling back of the US threat to kill millions of people to facilitate its geopolitical aims.

The White House decided ultimately to agree to the demands of Commander of Strategic Command Admiral Hane, Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter, Secretary of State John Kerry and others who declared, according to the *Times*, that “new moves by Russia and China, from the Baltic to the South China Sea, made it the wrong time to issue the declaration.”

Both before and during his presidency, Obama had postured as a proponent of nuclear non-proliferation. In his April 2009 speech in Prague, Obama declared that “as the only nuclear power to have used a nuclear weapon,” the US is committed “to seek the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons,” and that “to put an end to Cold War thinking, we will reduce the role of nuclear weapons.”

Earlier this year, Obama visited Hiroshima, Japan, becoming the first sitting US president to do so since President Truman made the decision to incinerate the city with an atomic weapon at the end of the Second World War. Despite ruling out any apology for this war

crime, Obama hypocritically called on countries that possess nuclear weapons to “have the courage to escape the logic of fear and pursue a world without them.”

Yet Obama’s real “nuclear legacy” is something else entirely. Over his eight years in office, the White House has initiated one of the most sweeping expansions of its nuclear capabilities in US history.

The Pentagon has embarked upon a \$1 trillion nuclear modernization program, seeking to make US nuclear weapons smaller, faster, more maneuverable and easier to use on the battlefield. The effect of this program is, as General James E. Cartwright, a retired vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told the *Times* earlier this year, “to make the weapon more thinkable.”

At a cost of some \$97 billion, the Navy is on track to replace its Ohio-class submarines, each of which is by itself equivalent to the world’s fifth-ranking nuclear power, with a new generation of ballistic missile submarines.

The Air Force, meanwhile, has contracted Northrop Grumman to build up to 100 next-generation B-21 nuclear-capable bombers, at a cost of nearly \$60 billion. It is also in the midst of developing, at the cost of \$20 billion, the so-called Long-Range Stand-Off Missile, which is capable of maneuvering at high speeds to deliver a nuclear payload behind enemy air defenses.

Experts have warned that the development of such a “dual use” nuclear-capable cruise missile makes the potential for a catastrophic miscalculation substantially greater, as countries attacked by these weapons, in addition to having little time to respond, have no way of knowing whether their payload is “conventional” or nuclear.

On Tuesday, *Bloomberg* reported that the Air Force also plans to spend another \$85 billion to develop a set of new intercontinental ballistic missiles. The Pentagon is moving ahead with plans to buy some 642 of the new ICBMs “at an average cost of \$66.4 million each to support a deployed force of 400 weapons.”

The dizzying pace of the US nuclear modernization program comes in the context of a deepening global geopolitical crisis, at the center of which is the ever expanding war drive of American imperialism.

Beginning with economic crises of the late 1960s and early 1970s, the American ruling class sought to offset the economic decline of US capitalism through the naked use of military force. With the dissolution of the Soviet Union, this process went into overdrive, kicking off a quarter century of intensifying war around the globe. Now, US-led regional wars and proxy conflicts, particularly in Syria, are metastasizing into ever-more direct conflicts with larger competitors, including Russia and China.

With the crisis-ridden US election dominated by allegations from the Clinton campaign of Russian cyberattacks and political subversion, together with ongoing and deepening tensions with China, the United States is sending a clear signal that it is thinking about the “unthinkable.”

Eighty years ago, Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky warned, “In the period of crisis the hegemony of the United States will operate more completely, more openly, and more ruthlessly than in the period of boom.” Anyone who believes that the US would never again

use nuclear weapons is underestimating not only the extent of the internal and external crisis confronting American imperialism, but the level of violence and criminality of which the American ruling class is capable.

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