

the US strategic nuclear force. For a decade, the US Navy has successfully resisted all efforts to bring sea-based tactical nuclear weapons to the negotiating table. Brushing aside this position, on 27 September Bush announced that the United States would unilaterally denuclearize most of its naval vessels – “the bottom line is that under normal circumstances, our ships will not carry tactical nuclear weapons.”

AS FOR THE LINK BETWEEN NUCLEAR FORCES IN Europe and North America, this was already partly undermined by the growing European concerns about the continued deployment of short-range nuclear weapons in Germany and elsewhere. On 27 September, Bush performed a remarkable turnabout by accepting the long-standing Soviet position and proposing the elimination of about 2,300 ground-based theatre nuclear weapons. The Soviets, Bush said, “should go down the road with us,” meaning that they should dismantle and eliminate “their entire inventory of ground-launched theatre nuclear weapons.” Amen, say those who have been delegated to watch the Beirut docks.

While the Bush proposals of 27 September will certainly attract their critics, it would be foolish not to recognize the break with the past which has now taken place. Will the Bush administration be as keen to undertake further changes which will cut more deeply into the nuclear stockpile? It is here that certain characteristics of the new style will affect both the US moves to come and the interests of its allies, including Canada.

These proposals were not only a departure from the START processes, they were also taken with the minimum of allied contribution. “Consultations” took place just hours before the speech in order to protect its dramatic impact, reinforcing the growing sense that unilateralism is the new style in Washington. Increased impatience with the cumbersome procedures of multilateral alliance diplomacy may now follow, as well as greater indifference to the special pleadings of allies.

IN THE NEGOTIATIONS ON A CHEMICAL WEAPONS convention, for example, the United States has reneged on its previous commitment to a strict verification regime with few signs of embarrassment or respect for those allies, including Canada, who have continued to support the long-standing Western position on intrusive inspection. A similarly unilateral approach may be in the offing with regard to the amendment or abrogation of the ABM Treaty, where the view of allies are unlikely to weigh heavily in future US overtures to the Soviets.

If Canada and other states want to influence changing US approaches to strategic arms control, in the next year it will be necessary to reassess the direction and goals of US policy,

and to identify policies which serve broad national and multinational interests. Some of the leading agenda items are the following:

First, against whom are the post-START 8,000 US strategic weapons now to be targeted? Lacking any more convincing foe, the target is presumably still the Soviet Union, shrunk by the loss of the Baltic states and now further confounded by the emergence of self-declared nuclear-weapon free republics. The disintegration of the Soviet Union, therefore, points up the need to plan for radical reductions in strategic forces to bring them down to around 1,000 warheads by the end of the decade.

The Canadian interest in this process is direct. In his 27 September speech, President Bush also announced that all US strategic nuclear forces would be brought under a single Strategic Command. This is reminiscent of a report in January 1991, confirmed by Canadian officials, that the Pentagon was considering a proposal to combine in one strategic command, the surveillance assets and interceptor forces of the bi-national North American Aerospace Defence Command (NORAD) with the strategic offensive forces of the US air force and navy.

Second, the US Senate has now formally supported the deployment of a ground-based ABM system by 1996, and called for the amendment of the ABM Treaty to permit a country-wide defence. The coverage of the proposed system would include a very large area of Canada, and the ABM system would almost certainly be commanded by the proposed single Strategic Command. It is not too soon, therefore, to ask whether the Senate’s ABM system would help the search for very low levels of nuclear weapons, or whether, as many critics contend, the move to deploy ballistic missile defences will lead other nuclear weapons states to respond by increasing their offensive capability.

THIRD, IF EUROPE, NOW SEEKING TO DIVEST itself of nuclear weapons, is no longer the ignition point for a Soviet-American confrontation, the huge remaining strategic arsenals will confront each other, albeit at a very low level of tension, on a transpolar axis. Accordingly, this may be an ideal time to explore the possibilities of pooling radar warning information with a view to making the circumpolar north totally

transparent to all interested parties. This now includes not only Canada and the Scandinavian states, but also the new Baltic states, which, like Canada, will find themselves caught up in strategic nuclear issues as a consequence of their location.

Fourth, Canada should once again address the question of nuclear weapon testing. In his reply to Bush, Gorbachev announced a one-year moratorium on testing at Novaya Zemlya. All of the northern states have a strong interest in supporting this moratorium and preventing the reactivation of an environmentally fragile test site. But there is also a broader interest. A ban on nuclear weapon tests is likely to be just as important at the 1995 NPT Review Conference as it was in 1990, when the inability to agree on this issue ultimately reduced the conference to a stalemate.

THE NON-PROLIFERATION REGIME IS AT A CRUCIAL stage in its development: the number of its supporters, especially among the declared nuclear

weapon states and the near nuclear weapon states has never been greater, but the technologies which encourage proliferation are less and less controllable. The Soviet moratorium provides an opportunity to initiate a long-lead approach to the 1995 Review Conference. As a first step, a conference could be called of all the neighbours of the Soviet Union affected by Novaya Zemlya. There would, of course, be a prominent hold-out – the United States. Notwithstanding, there is not only safety, but also effectiveness in numbers. A circumpolar discussion to consider alternatives to further testing at Novaya Zemlya (if all else fails, why not let the Soviets test in Nevada?) could not be completely ignored in Washington. Half-hearted pleas by Canadian diplomats acting in isolation most certainly will be.

Of course, it is not these proposals that are new, but the political context. On 27 September, President Bush tried to reassert control of the politics of nuclear weapons, but in the light of the ongoing disintegration in the Soviet Union it is not clear that will be able to maintain the familiar nuclear dialogue. Arms control after the coup will not bear much resemblance to the encrusted processes of the past twenty years. The challenge now is to help shape the new agenda, and that can begin by defining the course which will make nuclear weapons increasingly irrelevant. □



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