

Washington nuclear conference promotes US campaign against Iran, North Korea

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President Barack Obama opened the Nuclear Security Summit in Washington Monday, a two-day event that, in the guise of promoting disarmament and opposing terrorism, seeks to line up international support for the US campaign to isolate, pressure and ultimately overthrow the governments of Iran and North Korea.

Far from representing a break from the aggressive approach of the preceding Bush administration, the Obama policy is an effort to accomplish the same goal—US military domination of the Middle East, Central Asia and the world—using different language and somewhat altered tactics.

Instead of the confrontational posturing of Bush, Cheney and Rumsfeld, the Obama administration employs the trappings of multilateralism and global summitry, hosting the largest gathering of heads of state on US soil since the 1945 San Francisco conference that founded the United Nations.

The aim, however, is the same: to create the conditions for stepped-up sanctions against Iran, to threaten North Korea with retaliation over its alleged trafficking in missiles and nuclear technology, and to sustain US military hegemony, both in conventional and nuclear weapons, against potential challenges from more formidable powers, including China and Russia.

The summit is part of a systematic effort by the Obama administration to prepare US and world public opinion either for outright US military aggression against Iran, or for the imposition of sanctions so severe that they would amount to economic warfare. Such sanctions could well provoke an Iranian response and allow the US to cloak its aggression in the guise of defending Israel, Saudi Arabia or another US ally in the region.

The entire conference is conducted on the basis of a grotesque double standard. The US government ostentatiously refused to invite the governments of three countries that are deemed hostile—Iran, North Korea and

Syria—claiming they were in violation of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

This claim has no validity under international law: Iran and Syria are both signatories to the NPT and are cooperating with inspections conducted by the International Atomic Energy Agency, the arm of the United Nations charged with overseeing compliance with the NPT. North Korea was in the past a signatory to the NPT, but withdrew, as is permitted under the treaty, in 2006.

By contrast, the Obama administration invited three countries that have publicly flouted the NPT and conducted extensive and successful programs to develop nuclear weapons—Israel, Pakistan and India—because they are all key US allies.

Pakistan and India are represented at the Washington conference by their heads of government. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who had initially planned to attend, abruptly reversed course and sent a deputy instead, amid reports that Arab countries were planning to raise the issue of Israel's nuclear weapons arsenal in the course of the summit.

The summit agenda, as mapped out by the White House and State Department, excludes any actual discussion of the main nuclear danger confronting humanity—the enormous arsenals in the possession of the United States and Russia, still more than sufficient to wipe out every person on the planet. Nor will the large nuclear weapons stockpiles of Britain, France, China and the three non-NPT countries, Israel, Pakistan and India, be in question.

Instead, the entire focus is on preventing “non-state actors,” such as Al Qaeda, from obtaining access to nuclear materials. Despite the well known hostility of Al Qaeda towards the Shi'ite clerical regime in Iran, the danger of nuclear-armed “terrorism” is being used as a pretext and cover for the US-led campaign against Tehran.

The hypocrisy is staggering. The nuclear-armed and nuclear-capable states represented at the Washington conference have an estimated 2,100 tons of nuclear material among them, enough to make 120,000 atomic weapons and

destroy the planet thousands of times over.

But far from destroying nuclear weapons, the aim is to maintain the monopoly on these means of mass murder in the hands of the states that currently possess them, with the largest share controlled by the United States, the only country that has used nuclear weapons in war, in the incineration of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945.

Like most international summits, the actual proceedings, which are to take place Tuesday, are for show. The communiqué to be adopted has already been drafted and circulated to the major powers. It calls for a crackdown on smuggling highly enriched uranium and plutonium, for intensified security measures on national stockpiles, to be implemented over the next four years, and for the voluntary relinquishment of such materials by individual countries.

Chile and Ukraine both announced they would give up their stocks of highly enriched uranium as the summit opened—actions for which they expect considerable financial reward from Washington.

More significant than Tuesday's proceedings, however, are the series of bilateral meetings before and during the conference. Among those participating in one-on-one meetings with Obama are the leaders of China, Pakistan, India, South Africa, Kazakhstan, Nigeria and Jordan.

The essential premise of the Washington summit, as enunciated by Obama, is the claim that “the single biggest threat to US security, both short-term, medium-term and long-term, would be the possibility of a terrorist organization obtaining a nuclear weapon.” But the “single biggest threat” to mankind is not Al Qaeda, whatever its reactionary aspirations, but the danger of new imperialist wars involving capitalist states that already possess substantial nuclear arsenals.

While Obama spouted vague rhetoric about a world free of nuclear weapons, his top national security lieutenants, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, were making the rounds of the Sunday television talk shows, boasting of the military strength of the United States and its robust nuclear capabilities.

Clinton threatened unnamed US adversaries—clearly implying Iran and North Korea—with potential nuclear attack. She was repudiating criticism by congressional Republicans who claimed that the nuclear war doctrine issued by the Pentagon last week was too restrictive.

“We leave ourselves a lot of room for contingencies,” she said. “If we can prove that a biological attack originated in a country that attacked us, then all bets are off.”

Gates used identical language when asked why Iran and North Korea were considered exceptions: “Well, because they're not in compliance with the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. So for them, all bets are off. All options

are on the table.”

The broader US nuclear agenda is geared toward an upcoming conference at the United Nations next month, the eighth review conference for the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. When the NPT was first ratified in 1970, the nuclear-armed powers pledged to reduce and eventually eliminate their arsenals, in return for agreement by the non-nuclear powers not to develop similar weapons.

In the 40 years that have passed, nearly all the non-nuclear powers have complied with the treaty, without the slightest sign that the nuclear powers would scrap their weapons systems. Instead, the regular five-year reviews have become the occasion for the United States to flex its muscles against regimes regarded as hostile—in the past, Saddam Hussein's Iraq and Muammar Gaddafi's Libya; today, Iran and North Korea.

The upcoming NPT review session is expected to feature US demands for more intrusive inspection of the nuclear programs of member states, something that many NPT signatories are reluctant to undergo, since they regard the IAEA as largely an instrument of the United States.

The US has also raised the possibility of amending the NPT so as to abolish the right of all countries to have a full-cycle civilian nuclear program, including the production of nuclear fuel. This would provide a legal cover for its current campaign against Iran.

Besides the immediate focus on Iran and North Korea, the Obama administration champions a non-proliferation regime with an additional purpose: to lock in the tremendous advantages that the US now enjoys in the size and technical sophistication of its nuclear arsenal.



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