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Presidential Q&A

# Democratic Nominee Barack Obama on Arms Control

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Publication date: Wednesday 15 October 2008

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**As has been done for presidential elections stretching back more than three decades, [Arms Control Today](#) (ACT) asked both major party presidential nominees to answer a series of detailed questions on arms control and nonproliferation issues. Below are the answers ACT received on Sept. 10 from Sen. Barack Obama of Illinois, the Democratic nominee for president, to the dozen questions posed to him and Republican presidential nominee Sen. John McCain of Arizona.**

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**ACT:** *Dozens of senior U.S. statesmen, led by former Secretary of State George Shultz and former Senator Sam Nunn (D-Ga.), are urging the United States to lead the world toward nuclear disarmament through such steps as ratifying the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), rendering nuclear forces less ready to launch on short notice, and eliminating tactical nuclear weapons, including U.S. bombs stationed in Europe. Do you support the goal of nuclear disarmament, and what actions should be given priority to make progress toward that objective or to reduce global nuclear dangers?*

**Obama:** As president, I will set a new direction in nuclear weapons policy and show the world that America believes in its existing commitment under the nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty to work to ultimately eliminate all nuclear weapons. I fully support reaffirming this goal, as called for by George Shultz, Henry Kissinger, William Perry, and Sam Nunn, as well as the specific steps they propose to move us in that direction.[1] I have made it clear that America will not disarm unilaterally. Indeed, as long as states retain nuclear weapons, the United States will maintain a nuclear deterrent that is strong, safe, secure, and reliable. But I will not authorize the development of new nuclear weapons. And I will make the goal of eliminating nuclear weapons worldwide a central element of U.S. nuclear policy.

To make progress toward this goal, I will seek real, verifiable reductions in all U.S. and Russian nuclear weapons—whether deployed or nondeployed, whether strategic or nonstrategic—and work with other nuclear powers to reduce global stockpiles dramatically by the end of my presidency. As a first step, I will seek Russia's agreement to extend essential monitoring and verification provisions of the [Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty] START I before it expires in December 2009. I will work with Russia in a mutual and verifiable manner to increase warning and decision time prior to the launch of nuclear weapons.

I will initiate a high-level dialogue among all the declared nuclear-weapon states on how to make their nuclear capabilities more transparent, create greater confidence, and move toward meaningful reductions and the eventual elimination of all nuclear weapons. As president, I will reach out to the Senate to secure the ratification of the CTBT at the earliest practical date and will then launch a diplomatic effort to bring onboard other states whose ratifications are required for the treaty to enter into force. Finally, I will lead a global effort to negotiate a verifiable treaty ending the production of fissile materials for weapons purposes and will work with other interested governments to establish a new nuclear energy architecture.

**ACT:** *What role, if any, should nuclear weapons have in U.S. security policy? Can existing U.S. warheads and the current nuclear weapons complex support those roles, or do you believe new warheads and capabilities are needed?*

**Obama:** The most important objective with respect to nuclear weapons is doing everything we can to prevent the use of any such weapons, anywhere in the world. So long as nuclear weapons exist, the United States needs to retain nuclear weapons to prevent this from happening. But we need to do more. I will restore America's leadership in reducing the role of nuclear weapons and working toward their ultimate elimination. A world free of nuclear weapons is a world in which the possibility of their use no longer exists.

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As long as nuclear weapons exist, I will retain a strong, safe, secure, and reliable nuclear deterrent to protect us and our allies. But I will not authorize the development of new nuclear weapons and related capabilities. And I will make the goal of eliminating nuclear weapons worldwide a central element of U.S. nuclear policy.

**ACT:** *Many Americans fear that terrorists might acquire biological, chemical, or nuclear weapons and use them against the United States, its troops, or allies. What more should be done to prevent that tragic possibility from occurring?*

**Obama:** Conventional thinking has failed to keep up with new nuclear, chemical, and biological threats. Today we confront the possibility of terrorists bent on our destruction possessing a nuclear weapon or bomb-making materials. We need a president who understands these new security threats and who has effective strategies for addressing them. Since early on in my time in the Senate, I have worked with Senator Dick Lugar (R-Ind.) and others across the aisle to expand efforts to stop smuggling of nuclear material and keep nuclear and conventional weapons out of terrorists' hands.

As president, I will lead a global effort to secure all nuclear weapons materials at vulnerable sites within four years—a critical way to prevent terrorists from acquiring a nuclear bomb. I will work with Russia in this effort and with other countries to develop and implement a comprehensive set of standards to protect nuclear materials from theft. I will also phase out highly enriched uranium from the civil sector; strengthen policing and interdiction efforts; build state capacity to prevent theft, diversion, or spread of nuclear materials; and convene a summit on preventing nuclear terrorism.

Biological weapons similarly pose a serious and increasing national security risk. To prevent bioterror attacks, I will strengthen U.S. intelligence collection overseas to identify and interdict would-be bioterrorists before they strike, assist states to meet their obligations under UN Security Council Resolution 1540 [2] and the Biological Weapons Convention, strengthen cooperation with foreign intelligence and law enforcement agencies, build capacity to mitigate the consequences of bioterror attacks, improve local and state emergency responses to cope with catastrophic emergencies, and accelerate the development of new medicines, vaccines, and production capabilities.

**ACT:** *Countries are expressing greater interest in nuclear power at a time when there is mounting concern that the spread of nuclear technologies and expertise for energy purposes could contribute to secret weapons options or programs. What can be done to prevent countries from acquiring and misusing latent nuclear weapons production capabilities, particularly uranium-enrichment and spent fuel reprocessing technologies and know-how?*

**Obama:** Our nuclear security and that of our allies requires that the expansion of nuclear reactors for electricity generation is not accompanied by the expansion of sensitive nuclear fuel-cycle facilities that can produce bomb-grade plutonium and uranium. As president, I will make it a top priority to prevent nuclear fuel from becoming nuclear bombs. I will work with other interested governments to establish a new international nuclear energy architecture—including an international nuclear fuel bank, international nuclear fuel-cycle centers, and reliable fuel supply assurances—to meet growing demands for nuclear power without contributing to the proliferation of nuclear materials and fuel-production facilities. An international system that ensures access to reasonably priced fuel will encourage developing countries that they do not need sensitive nuclear fuel-cycle facilities to grow their economies, while ratcheting up pressure on any states seeking to disguise their nuclear weapons ambitions.

**ACT:** *START is set to expire December 5, 2009, and the Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty (also known as the Moscow Treaty) limits end December 31, 2012. Should the United States and Russia continue the process of negotiating nuclear cuts through verifiable bilateral agreements or manage their nuclear relationship in other ways? How should the two countries minimize strategic distrust and overcome decades of strategic competition?*

**Obama:** The United States and Russia should seek real, verifiable reductions in all U.S. and Russian nuclear weapons-whether deployed or nondeployed, whether strategic or nonstrategic. I am committed to working with Russia and other nuclear-weapon states to make deep cuts in global stockpiles by the end of my first term. This process should begin by securing Russia's agreement to extend essential monitoring and verification provisions of START I prior to its expiration in December 2009. As president, I will also immediately stand down all nuclear forces to be reduced under the Moscow Treaty [3] and urge Russia to do the same.

Keeping nuclear weapons ready to launch on a moment's notice is a dangerous relic of the Cold War. Such policies increase the risk of catastrophic accidents or miscalculation. I believe that we must address this dangerous situation-something that President Bush promised to do when he campaigned for president back in 2000, but did not do once in office. I will work with Russia to end such outdated Cold War policies in a mutual and verifiable way.

**ACT:** *Ballistic missiles can be used to deliver biological, chemical, and nuclear weapons. What should be done to address threats posed by ballistic missiles, and how much of that effort should be devoted to developing anti-missile systems, including the possible deployment of U.S. missile interceptors in Europe or space?*

**Obama:** Nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons pose serious national security risks, especially when delivered on ballistic missiles that can strike our homeland, our troops abroad, or our allies. Missile defenses can be a significant part of a plan to reduce these dangers, but they must be proven to work and pursued as part of an integrated approach that uses the full range of nonproliferation policy tools in response to the full range of threats we face. As president, I will make sure any missile defense, including the one proposed for Europe, has been proven to work and has our allies' support before we deploy it. I will also strengthen the Missile Technology Control Regime and explore other arms control measures to reduce the ballistic missile threat.

But in our haste to deploy missile defenses, we cannot lose sight of the real 21st-century threats. The biggest nuclear security risk is not from a rogue state lashing out with ballistic missiles, but a terrorist smuggling a crude nuclear device across our borders. We spend more than \$10 billion a year on missile defense, but far too little on securing nuclear materials around the world and improving security (including detection) at our ports and borders. We must focus our defenses on the most likely threats.

**ACT:** *As China increases its military spending and modernizes its nuclear forces, what role, if any, should arms control play in preventing a regional arms competition or crisis and improving relations between the United States and China?*

**Obama:** China appears to be developing a credible retaliatory capability as part of its evolving nuclear deterrent. As president, I will ensure that the United States continues to maintain our own military capabilities so that there can be no doubt about the strength and credibility of our security commitments in the Asia-Pacific region. I support the continuation of military-to-military exchanges with China, including efforts by the Bush administration to sustain a dialogue on strategic nuclear issues and resume laboratory-to-laboratory exchanges that were terminated in the 1990s.

I will urge China to increase transparency of its nuclear weapons policies and programs - indeed, of its military and defense policies more generally. We are not enemies. I will engage the Chinese leadership in discussions that convey how greater openness in military spending and nuclear force modernization is consistent with China's and the United States' national interests and more likely to lead to greater trust and understanding.

**ACT:** *China and the United States recently have each destroyed one of their own satellites with missiles, raising concerns about space-based weapons and arms that target objects in space. What, if anything, should be done to*

*limit such developments?*

**Obama:** While steps such as improving procurement to ensure timely, cost-effective delivery of satellites and diversifying our remote-sensing capabilities are important, satellites will remain vulnerable as well as indispensable to our national interests for the foreseeable future. We cannot ignore dangers and should thoroughly assess possible threats to U.S. space assets. This will include establishing contingency plans to ensure that U.S. forces can maintain or duplicate access to information from space assets and accelerating programs to protect U.S. satellites against attack. I will take whatever military and diplomatic steps are needed to safely assure the survivability of our satellites and respond appropriately if another country targets them. But our national security—as well as that of our strategic competitors—requires that we work in concert to prevent military conflict in space, to address the practical problems that the growth of satellite launches and operations have created, and to help all nations reap the benefits that peaceful uses of space can provide. That is why I have endorsed an international code of conduct to clarify the rules of the road to manage traffic in space and prevent satellites from being put at risk. In addition to unilateral steps needed to protect our interests in space, I will pursue negotiations of an agreement that would ban testing anti-satellite weapons.

**ACT:** *How would you build on U.S. efforts through the six-party process to denuclearize North Korea and prevent it from proliferating nuclear weapons-related technology and missiles?*

**Obama:** As president, I will work from the very beginning of my term in office to reduce nuclear dangers in Northeast Asia. I will continue to pursue the kind of direct and aggressive diplomacy with North Korea that can yield results, while not ceding our leverage in negotiations unless it is clear that North Korea is living up to its obligations. North Korea will be offered a stark choice: if it verifiably eliminates its nuclear weapons programs and does not engage in any proliferation activities whatsoever, it will receive meaningful economic, political, and security benefits. If North Korea refuses, it will face a bleak future of political and economic isolation. The objective must be clear: the complete and verifiable elimination of North Korea's nuclear weapons programs, which only expanded while we refused to talk.

Pyongyang's recent nuclear declaration was a step forward, but there will be many more steps to take in the days ahead. I will aggressively follow up to ensure a complete, accurate, and verifiable accounting of North Korea's past plutonium production; confirm its prior uranium-enrichment activities; and get answers to disturbing questions about its proliferation activities with other countries, including Syria. As my administration moves forward, I will also work with our friends and allies in the region to assure that the six-party process addresses all issues on the agenda, including that of abductees.

**ACT:** *The current administration has stated that it is committed to a diplomatic solution to the Iranian nuclear issue. Although the United States has worked to impose a variety of sanctions on Iran and has offered to negotiate an incentives package along with the other permanent members of the Security Council and Germany if Tehran suspends enrichment, Iran continues to expand its nuclear capabilities. What steps would you take to address Iran's nuclear program?*

**Obama:** The Iranian nuclear threat is growing. Last fall's National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) confirmed that Iran has engaged in nuclear weapons design activities, and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) warns that it continues to enrich uranium using more sophisticated technology. Together these activities could soon put Iran in the position of building nuclear weapons. That must not happen. And I will do everything I can as president to prevent it from happening.

My goals are clear: Iran must come clean on its past and present nuclear activities, and it must suspend its uranium-enrichment activities. To get there, I will prepare for and engage in direct talks with Tehran to test its intentions. I strongly support tougher action by the UN Security Council, as well as steps by our friends and partners

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in Europe and Asia to impose additional economic costs on Tehran beyond those that can be agreed to at the United Nations. A united diplomatic front with the P5+1 [4] directly calling on the Iranians to end any nuclear weapons activities will, in turn, maximize international pressure and remind Iran's people that it is their government that is choosing to isolate them from the world. It will also send Iran a clear message: live up to your obligations now; by waiting, you will only face greater isolation. A credibly military option must also be kept on the table.

We still have time to address the Iranian nuclear issue diplomatically, but we need to use that time wisely. While we have stood on the sidelines until recently, Iran has defiantly expanded its nuclear program. I call on Iran not to wait for a new administration to reach agreement on the nuclear issue. Such an outcome is possible if we pursue the kind of tough, sustained, and unconditional diplomacy-backed by tough sanctions-that I have long supported and that the NIE concluded can prove effective in dissuading Tehran from pursuing a nuclear weapons capability.

**ACT:** *It has been 10 years since India and Pakistan each conducted a series of nuclear tests. Since that time, South Asia has witnessed a buildup of nuclear weapons and delivery systems, armed conflict and risks of nuclear escalation, and a nuclear technology smuggling network that aided the nuclear weapons programs of other countries. How will you work to reduce the risks posed by India's and Pakistan's nuclear arsenals and programs?*

**Obama:** The Bush administration's policies toward both India and Pakistan have allowed grave nuclear risks to grow in South Asia since the 1998 nuclear tests. I will work to reduce the region's nuclear dangers in a number of ways.

First, I will expand the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) from its current focus on stopping illicit nuclear shipments to eradicating nuclear black market networks, like the remnants of the Abdul Qadeer Khan organization. Second, the best way to reduce nuclear risks in South Asia is to reduce incentives to test and deploy new nuclear weapons. My two amendments in the Hyde Act [5] sought to accomplish these goals. Just as I will work with the U.S. Senate to secure ratification of the CTBT at the earliest practical date, I will prioritize diplomatic efforts with India and Pakistan to encourage them to move beyond their moratorium on nuclear testing toward the ratification of the treaty. Third, I will continue my work begun in the Senate to secure all dangerous weapons and materials against terrorist threats worldwide, including in South Asia. Fourth, I will encourage India and Pakistan to collaborate with IAEA experts to maximize security at nuclear power plants and related facilities. Fifth, and finally, I will continue support of ongoing Indian and Pakistani efforts to resolve the Kashmir problem in order to address the political roots of the arms race between India and Pakistan.

**ACT:** *There are several international initiatives under consideration or in place to reduce the threats posed by conventional weapons that take the lives of noncombatants, including a limit or ban on cluster munitions use, a global arms trade treaty to better regulate weapons transfers, and the Ottawa Convention against anti-personnel landmines. What steps, if any, should be taken to limit conventional arms dangers?*

**Obama:** In general, I strongly support international initiatives to limit harm to civilians caused by conventional weapons. In the Senate, I worked with Senator Lugar to pass legislation securing conventional weapons like shoulder-fired anti-aircraft missiles, anti-personnel landmines, and other small arms; co-sponsored legislation introduced by Senators Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.) and Arlen Specter (R-Pa.) prohibiting future procurement of victim-activated landmines; and voted for an amendment offered by Senators Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) and Leahy prohibiting the use or transfer of cluster munitions absent rules of engagement ensuring they would not be employed near concentrations of civilians.

As president, I will help lead the way on these issues. Our military has legitimate concerns on these issues, and I look forward to consulting closely with leadership at the Department of Defense as we shape policies on these key issues. At the same time, I recognize that our forces have been moving away from using cluster munitions and anti-personnel landmines ourselves, and these trends can be accelerated with targeted investments in innovative

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technologies. We also have a strong national security interest in preventing the illegal trade in small arms, including rocket launchers sought by terrorists and other extremists. I will regain our leadership on these issues by joining our allies in negotiations and honoring U.S. commitments to seek alternatives to landmines, while also ensuring that our service members have the tools that they need to do the dangerous missions that we ask them to perform.

\*Republican nominee John McCain did not respond to the ACT questionnaire.

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*Additional clarification is provided below by Arms Control Today. These comments were not provided by the candidate and should not be considered part of his official statement.*

1. George P. Shultz, William J. Perry, Henry A. Kissinger, and Sam Nunn, "A World Free of Nuclear Weapons," The Wall Street Journal, January 4, 2007, p. A15; George P. Shultz, William J. Perry, Henry A. Kissinger, and Sam Nunn, "Toward a Nuclear-Free World," The Wall Street Journal, January 15, 2008, p. A13.
2. The UN Security Council in April 2004 unanimously adopted Resolution 1540, which requires all countries to implement a variety of domestic measures to prevent nonstate actors from acquiring unconventional weapons, their means of deliveries, and related materials. The UN Security Council committee charged with monitoring, facilitating, and promoting national efforts to comply with the resolution had its mandate extended for two years by Resolution 1673 in 2006 and for three years by Resolution 1810 in 2008.
3. Formally the Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty (SORT), the May 2002 Moscow Treaty commits the United States and Russia to reduce their operationally deployed strategic nuclear forces to a level of 1,700 to 2,200 nuclear warheads apiece by December 31, 2012. The treaty's warhead limit expires at the end of that same day.
4. The P5+1 refers to the five permanent members of the UN Security Council (China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States) and Germany. They have engaged Iran in negotiations on its nuclear programs.
5. Signed by President George W. Bush into law December 18, 2006, the Henry J. Hyde United States-India Peaceful Atomic Energy Cooperation Act of 2006 sets the conditions for the United States to resume civil nuclear commerce with India for the first time since such trade was cut off roughly three decades ago.