CCNS NEWS UPDATE

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(THEME UP AND UNDER) This is the CCNS News Update, an overview of the latest nuclear safety issues, brought to you every week by Concerned Citizens for Nuclear Safety. Here is this week's top headline:

 **\*Obama Prepares to Cut U.S. Nuclear Weapons Arsenal**

On the weekend before the State of the Union address, a new report from the Center for Public Integrity said that President Obama was preparing to sign a classified directive written by senior officials in the Administration that called for reducing the U.S. stockpile of nuclear weapons from 1,550 to between 1,000 and 1,100 deployed warheads.

The size of this reduction exceeds the threshold set with Russia in the 2010 Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, called the New START. The move reflects the promise made by President Obama when he thanked the committee in Prague in April 2009 for awarding him the Nobel Peace Prize. In his speech, he promised to “take concrete steps towards a world without nuclear weapons.”

 The implications for the two national laboratories located in New Mexico, Los Alamos and Sandia, of this reduction of the nuclear stockpile depends on what specific reductions are proposed. For instance, the record shows that the shift from designing new weapons to maintaining old weapons has increased the workloads at the national laboratories. At the same time, such reductions might save billions of dollars in the budget.

The consensus document is the product of reviews last year by senior officials in the administration from the State Department, the Defense Department, the National Security Council, the U.S. Strategic Command and the Joint Chiefs of Staff, among others. Because of the November election and the need to select a new national security team, it was put on hold.

 The directive does not suggest unilateral arms reductions. Rather, the goal of the administration is to negotiate an addendum to the 2010 New START treaty, which will then be subject to ratification by the U.S. Senate and the Russian Duma.

The New START treaty does not limit the number of nuclear weapons in each country that are in storage or that are held for short-range use. Independent experts estimate them at roughly 2,700 in the U.S. and 2,680 in Russia. The administration plans for an agreement between Russia and the U.S. to go beyond cutting levels of deployed warheads but also for the first time setting limits for these other categories.

According to the Center for Public Integrity, United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon in a speech in California last month asked all nuclear-armed states to “reconsider their national nuclear posture,” and said that the U.S. and Russia had a special obligation to undertake deeper cuts. He said, “Nuclear disarmament is off-track. Delay comes with a high price tag. The longer we procrastinate, the greater the risk that these weapons will be used, will proliferate or be acquired by terrorists.”

This has been the CCNS News Update. To read an action alert about what you can do, please visit our website at nuclearactive.org.

For email version: [Vice-President Joe Biden and Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov opened discussions on the topic in Munich on February 2d and more talks are scheduled for Moscow this month.] As Obama said in his State of the Union Address, “[At the same time, we will engage Russia to seek further reductions in our nuclear arsenals, and continue leading the global effort to secure nuclear materials that could fall into the wrong hands – because our ability to influence others depends on our willingness to lead. “