

Media reports say that pop artist Edward Ruscha's painting (I think I'll...) adorns the walls of the White House, reflecting the modern artistic tastes of its new occupants. The canvas displays the words, "Maybe...Yes...", "Wait a minute...", "On second thought" and "Maybe... No...".

These expressions of indecision and hesitancy – ominously reminiscent of the one-term Carter Administration – are of course a marked contrast to the robust conviction and activist determination of the 'Yes, we can' slogan of the Obama campaign which got him elected.

The transition from campaigner to incumbent inevitably brings about change as the sober realities of power and its limitations impinge. That does not have to result in erosion, let alone a change of policies, which have received the indisputable mandate of the American people and the wide acclaim of a broad swath of global public opinion.

Any hesitancy or indecision will be especially dangerous in implementing President Obama's nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation policies. The path-breaking Obama-Medvedev Joint Statement of 1 April, followed by Obama's Prague speech of 4 April, set the goals for those policies. These have begun to be implemented through:

- A swift commencement of bilateral US-Russian negotiations for a follow-up to the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) expiring in December, with significant nuclear-weapon reductions.
- Lifting US impediments to the negotiation of a Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty (FMCT) in the Geneva-based Conference on Disarmament, posing a challenge to other countries to reciprocate.
- An unprecedented special message sent by Obama to the parties to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), at their Preparatory Committee meeting in New York in May this year, stressing US commitment to the NPT in all its aspects.
- The presence and statement of Secretary of State Hillary Clinton at the Article XIV Conference of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT).
- President Obama's statement from the chair of the UN Security Council on 24 September and the unanimous adoption of Resolution 1887 (2009) – albeit weighted more to non-proliferation than to nuclear disarmament.
- The return to multilateral diplomacy laced with realpolitik resulting in a modest breakthrough in the talks with Iran held in Geneva on 1 October – and with similar good news coming out of Pyongyang,



MEDIA SERVICES PHOTOFILE (US EMBASSY)

The Nobel Peace Prize has given the US President the moral authority to pursue his vision of nuclear disarmament, writes **Jayantha Dhanapala**.

with direct US-North Korean talks to come.

Clearly though, there are miles to go and campaign promises to keep before we begin to cheer. The Republican right has not been idle. Fearful scenarios of 'death panels' are being conjured up to block Obama's domestic health-reform plans. Similar obstructionist tactics are evident in the nuclear-disarmament area, both within the US and with some NATO allies.

Despite this, Obama has succeeded inter alia in holding his course and has announced, as a confidence-building measure, that US Ballistic Missile Defence plans will not involve systems in the Czech Republic and Poland. But the unfulfilled agenda is huge, as is the task of setting the right conditions for a successful NPT Review Conference in May next year – 40 years after this beleaguered treaty came into force.

The US Senate must "advise and consent" to two treaties: the US-Russian START now being negotiated and CTBT. This will require 67 senators, which will have to include Republicans, some of whom may have voted negatively the last time CTBT came up for ratification.

A well-organised campaign is thus needed with compromises being reached that are not so Faustian as to vitiate the final achievement, and diminish the domestic and international support Obama now has.

This is where the international community has a role to play.

As we know, the Nobel Peace Prize Committee recently clothed Obama with added moral authority to continue to pursue his "vision of a world free from nuclear arms [which] has powerfully stimulated disarmament and arms control negotiations".

Western European leaders, especially those in NATO, and the heads of countries enjoying the shelter of the UN nuclear umbrella must step up to the plate and help persuade US senators of the global importance of ratifying the new START and CTBT.

Instead, what we have now is the timorous spectacle of Obama supporters in the US and the world retreating to their bunkers and warning in hushed whispers of the need to lower expectations and settle for compromises with the right wing in the US.

They should take a lesson from the courageous affirmative action of the Nobel Peace Prize Committee. Clear-headed strategising and a reaching out by political leaders, parliamentarians and eminent civil society figures in countries with close ties to the US Senate could help especially through the hearings that the US Senate plans to hold.

This will contribute towards defining the global context and the intersection of all the burning issues of our times – nuclear weapons, climate change, terrorism, poverty, international finance and human rights.

With the elimination of nuclear weapons. We will have – in the words of UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, "a global good of the highest public order".



Jayantha Dhanapala is currently an Overseas Visiting Scholar at St. John's College, Cambridge, and the President of the Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs.