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Obama Won't Promise Not to Launch Nuclear First Strikes

By Jason Ditz
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Though it has been over 70 years since the United States last used nuclear weapons in an offensive manner during a war, US governments have continued to retain some deliberate ambiguity on their policy toward the future use of such weapons.

Though there was considerable speculation that would change, President Obama is now believed to have abandoned any plans for a no first use statement with respect to America's massive nuclear arsenal, facing too much opposition from the rest of the administration and giving up on the idea pretty quickly.

At present, China and India are the only two nations with a well-established no first use policy. North Korea has hinted at a similar position, though somewhat nebulously, and the Soviet Union also had such a position, though Russia does not retain that policy, saying it might use nuclear weapons in defense against an overwhelming conventional attack.

NATO as an alliance has historically rejected a no first use policy, though Obama was seen to be in favor of it as part of a general support of arms reduction. Secretary of Defense Ash Carter was said to have told Obama that such a statement would be seen as a “sign of weakness.”

Secretary of State John Kerry is also said to be opposed to such a statement, believing America’s nuclear deterrent would be weakened if it was committed to only being used in a retaliatory manner. Kerry is said to have cited China’s expansion in the South China Sea as a region to not make such a statement.

Indeed, it appears few advisers favored such a move, and Obama abandoned the matter quickly in the face of such opposition. Neither Hillary Clinton nor Donald Trump is believed to be in favor of a similar measure, and the matter will likely be dropped entirely as the election nears.