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Will Trump Be Another Republication Nuclear Weapons Disarmer?

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Publication date: Saturday 12 November 2016

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Posted on Nov.09, 2016 in Arms Control

Republicans love nuclear weapons reductions, as long as they're not proposed by a Democratic president.

That is the lesson from decades of US nuclear weapons and arms control management.

If that trend continues, then we can expect the new Donald Trump administration to reduce the US nuclear weapons arsenal more than the Obama administration did.

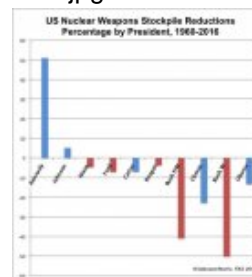
What? I know, it sounds strange but the record is very clear: During the post-Cold War era, Republican administrations have - by far - reduced the US nuclear weapons stockpile more than Democratic administrations (see graph below).

stockpilechanges1945-2016

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Even if we don't count numbers of weapons (because arsenals have gotten smaller) but only look at by how much the nuclear stockpile was reduced, the history is clear: Republican presidents disarm more than Democrats (see graph below).

It's somewhat of a mystery. Because Democratic presidents are generally seen to be more likely to propose nuclear weapons reductions. President Obama did so repeatedly. But when Democratic presidents have proposed reductions, the Republican opposition has normally objected forcefully. Yet Republican lawmakers won't oppose reductions if they are proposed by a Republican president.

Conversely, Democratic lawmakers will not oppose Republican reductions and nor will they oppose reductions proposed by a Democratic president.

As a result, if the Republicans control both the White House and Congress, as they do now after the 2016 election, the chance of significant reductions of nuclear weapons seems more likely.

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Whether Donald Trump will continue the Republican tradition remains to be seen. US-Russian relations are different today than when the Bush administrations did their reductions. But both countries have far more nuclear weapons than they need for national security. And Trump would be strangely out of tune with long-held Republican policy and practice if he does not order a substantial reduction of the US nuclear weapons stockpile.

Perhaps he should use that legacy to try to reach an agreement with Russia to continue to reduce US and Russia nuclear arsenals to the benefit of both countries.