



A Strong Case for a New START

A National Security Briefing Memo

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What is New START and why do we need it?

New START, the agreement between the United States and Russia on a successor to the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, is a historic achievement that will increase the United States' safety and security. It will help us move beyond the outdated strategic approaches of the Cold War and reduce the threat of nuclear war, and marks a significant step in advancing President Barack Obama's vision of a world without nuclear weapons. It also shows that his policy of constructive engagement with Russia is working.

New START strengthens and modernizes the original START Treaty that President Ronald Reagan initiated in 1982 and George H.W. Bush signed in 1991. That agreement significantly reduced the number of nuclear weapons and launchers, but it also embodied Reagan's favorite Russian proverb "trust but verify" by establishing an extensive verification and monitoring system to ensure compliance. This system helped build trust and mutual confidence that decreased the unimaginable consequences of a conflict between the world's only nuclear superpowers.

Yet President George W. Bush's reckless policies left this cornerstone of nuclear stability's fate in doubt. Bush effectively cut off relations between the United States and Russia on nuclear issues by unilaterally pulling out of the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty and refusing to engage in negotiations on a successor to START even though it was set to expire less than a year after he left office. The two countries had lost the ability to work together on arms control by the end of Bush's presidency.

The Obama administration restored these ties by adopting an approach of constructive engagement with Moscow, and in little over a year it succeeded in negotiating an extensive new agreement that continues the legacy of Reagan's verification system, which brought stability to U.S.-Russia nuclear relations for two decades.

New START has the U.S. military's full backing. It has been endorsed by the country's leading voices on national security from across the political spectrum, including prominent Republicans such as Sen. [Richard Lugar](#) (R-IN), ranking member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and former Secretaries of State [Henry Kissinger](#), [Colin Powell](#), and [George Schultz](#).

But New START, like any treaty, requires the approval of a two-thirds majority (67 votes) of the Senate for ratification, and there is a danger that it will have difficulty overcoming the intense partisan obstructionism in that body. Since the agreement answers all of the concerns that were raised during the negotiation process there should be no doubt about the motives of those who would block ratification: ideological opposition to arms control or a partisan strategy to uniformly obstruct and reject anything President Obama proposes.

Senators would do well in their deliberations to consider the consequences of not ratifying the treaty. If the Senate rejects New START, we would enter a period of nuclear instability and potentially a new arms race. This would be disastrous for U.S. national security.

The United States and Russia are no longer adversaries. Yet two decades after the end of the Cold War they still possess more than 20,000 nuclear weapons—95 percent of the world's total. This new treaty represents an important step toward moving us beyond this haunting legacy.

What does New START accomplish?

The new agreement maintains and modernizes the existing verification system, places significant limits on deployed strategic warheads, lays the groundwork for stronger international action on arms control and nonproliferation, and restores U.S.-Russia nuclear relations.

It establishes a robust verification regime that modernizes the framework contained in Reagan's START agreement. This treaty enables the United States and Russia to continue to monitor each other's nuclear stockpiles, ensuring that both sides are living up to the agreement. U.S. and Russian negotiators reportedly leveraged their experience with START's verification and monitoring measures to streamline some of the more lumbering procedures to build a more efficient and effective verification regime. The actual text of the treaty has yet to be released, but early information indicates that this new verification regime will deepen trust and confidence between the two nuclear superpowers and even go further than START in ensuring compliance. The original treaty's verification system only counted delivery vehicles, such as the number of deployed missiles. It didn't actually count the number of warheads contained inside of each missile, and this new system will.

It limits the number of nuclear warheads to levels not seen since the days of the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations. New START will limit the number of deployed strategic nuclear warheads to 1,500—a 30 percent drop from the 2,200 currently allowed.

The allowable number of nuclear launchers—land-based missiles, submarine-based missiles, and bombers—will see their aggregate limit reduced from 1,600 to 800. No more than 700 launching systems can be deployed at a given time.

It significantly bolsters upcoming efforts to combat nuclear terrorism and proliferation. The signing of New START comes just days before President Obama convenes the [Nuclear Security Summit](#), a meeting in Washington, D.C. with 44 heads of state on April 12 and 13 that will focus on strategies for preventing nuclear terrorism. These meaningful limits on the United States' deployed nuclear weapons will put the United States in a stronger position to convince other world leaders to take steps to secure nuclear stockpiles and prevent nuclear trafficking.

The new agreement also gives fresh momentum to next month's Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference in New York, which is meant to bolster the agreement that is the backbone of international efforts to counter nuclear proliferation. Nuclear-armed states under the Non-Proliferation Treaty agree to reduce their arsenals and provide non-nuclear-armed countries with access to civilian nuclear technology in exchange for an agreement from non-nuclear-armed states to forgo the pursuit of nuclear weapons. New START gives the United States credibility to bolster the NPT by showing progress on its end of the nuclear bargain and puts us on a much better standing from which to forge a strong international diplomatic effort to confront North Korea and Iran over their nuclear programs.

It restores U.S.-Russia nuclear relations and lays the groundwork for more far-reaching agreements. U.S.-Russia relations on nuclear policy issues had fallen apart by the time President Bush left office. His unilateral withdrawal from the Anti-Ballistic Missile treaty in 2001 helped poison nuclear relations, and the three-page arms reduction treaty he signed in 2002 was a weak agreement that contained no verification measures to ensure compliance. The Bush administration also did essentially no work in its final years to lay the groundwork for a START successor agreement. The Obama administration had to start from scratch on a new treaty with only months left before the original START expired amid a completely dysfunctional relationship with Moscow on nuclear issues. The successful conclusion of negotiations puts this relationship back on track and sets the stage for future talks. The administration should immediately begin working with Russia after New START is signed on a more far-reaching arms control agreement that addresses tactical nuclear weapons and seeks reductions in nondeployed strategic nuclear warheads.

The Obama administration's approach to Russia

When President Obama took office in January 2009, the U.S.-Russia relationship was at its lowest point since the end of the Cold War. President Bush was presented just five months earlier with the option of conducting military strikes against the Russian military units that had invaded Georgia. Such a move would have had catastrophic consequences, but the bilateral relationship was in a state of near-complete disrepair even before the Russia-

Georgia war. Ties between the two governments declined rapidly following a brief period of intense cooperation after 9/11. The Bush administration largely neglected Russia policy and spent little effort on the bilateral relationship, leaving it to hinge on the personal rapport between the two presidents. The Georgia war was merely the immediate catalyst of the complete unraveling of a relationship that had already hollowed out.

The Obama administration worked to improve U.S.-Russia relations in order to advance core U.S. national security interests. The Obama administration came into office with the conviction that an improved U.S.-Russia relationship would be crucial for its attempts to make progress on top priorities, including counterterrorism, nonproliferation, and nuclear security. It decided to adopt a new approach and engage Moscow on critical issues facing both countries—a tactic Vice President Joseph Biden described as pressing “the reset button.” It sought to work with Moscow on matters of mutual concern while avoiding needlessly provocative rhetoric and demonstrating greater transparency with the expectation that the other side would do the same. There were to be no trade-offs in return for Russia’s cooperation: the administration did not silence criticism of Russia’s violations of its international commitments, backtrack on American values, or otherwise appease the Kremlin. The administration argued instead that U.S. objections to some of the Russian government’s actions should not prevent cooperation on questions where interests converge, but that this cooperation would not serve as a pretext for ignoring the objections.

Engagement with Russia is not capitulation. The United States is capable of working with the Russians on key national security priorities and at the same time pushing back on disagreements. Engagement is anything but capitulation, and over time it might create conditions that allow us to address our concerns about Russia’s actions more effectively by opening up channels of communication and diminishing antagonism. The Bush administration’s isolation tactic produced the opposite result.

New START is definitive proof that engagement with Russia has paid off. The reset restored a degree of trust and created an atmosphere that allowed the two countries to produce what is a landmark document. Engagement has raised the prospects for future cooperation between Washington and Moscow, both on arms control and the vast array of other issues on the bilateral agenda, ranging from stabilizing Afghanistan to confronting Iran to deepening trade. As President Obama put it, “When the United States and Russia can cooperate effectively, it advances the mutual interests of our two nations, and the security and prosperity of the wider world.” His policy of engagement put this key relationship on a productive footing and made New START possible.

New START addresses critics’ concerns

The Senate should expedite New START’s ratification. The treaty builds on Reagan’s legacy and has widespread bipartisan support from leading voices on national security. Yet ratification is far from a sure thing in this hyperpartisan political environment. It is clear

from what we now know about the treaty that votes against New START in the Senate will reflect either ideological opposition to arms control or a crass partisan desire to deny the president a victory—even on an issue so vital for U.S. national security. Indeed, ideological arms-control opponents have raised questions about the Obama administration’s approach to the negotiations for months—some frivolous politically motivated arguments and others substantive concerns—but New START addresses all of these.

New START will not constrain missile defense. Anti-arms control ideologues have long predicted that the Obama administration would agree to provisions limiting our capacity to implement missile defense programs. They were wrong. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates put it bluntly, saying, “missile defense is not constrained by this treaty.” And Sen. Lugar has concurred. According to administration officials, there will be a brief line in the preamble of New START that acknowledges that there is a relationship between offensive and defensive systems—essentially a repetition of language from a U.S.-Russia joint understanding released in July 2009. Yet this language is not actionable and will in no way restrict the United States from developing missile defense capabilities, despite what some conservative opponents of the administration claim.

Unilateral declarations on missile defense from Moscow will not affect the treaty. Sens. Kyl, McCain, and Lieberman voiced concern recently that Russia will issue a unilateral statement when New START is signed that ties its compliance with the treaty to the development of U.S. missile defense programs and that Russia could therefore hold our missile defense plans “hostage.” But this argument is a smokescreen. Unilateral statements have no affect on the terms of the treaty. What’s more, all treaties allow signatories to withdraw when they see fit, just as President Bush withdrew from the ABM Treaty. A unilateral signing statement issued by Russia changes nothing about New START or the administration’s declared plans for a phased, adaptive missile defense system. Those making this argument are simply looking for an excuse to oppose New START.

The treaty in no way hinders our ability to protect and defend ourselves or our allies. New START preserves an overwhelming deterrent to protect the United States and our allies. Secretary Gates explained that, “it is clear that we can accomplish these goals with fewer nuclear weapons. The reductions in this treaty will not affect the strength of our nuclear triad.” Admiral Mullen concurred, saying that, “this treaty enhances our ability to do that which we have been charged to do: protect and defend the citizens of the United States.” The U.S. nuclear arsenal is being modernized and well maintained, leaving no doubt that it is the most advanced and reliable in the world.

There are no limits on prompt global strike or other conventional systems. Anti-arms-control ideologues’ predictions that the treaty would constrain the development of prompt global strike—the conversion of ICBMs from nuclear to conventional missiles—or other conventional systems were proven wrong. New START has no restrictions on conventional systems, which protects, as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Michael

Mullen stated, “our ability to develop a conventional global strike capability should that be required.” Some conservative arms-control opponents are now trying to move the goal posts even further by arguing that the treaty by definition restricts conventional systems by limiting the number of launchers. But this argument would have led them to oppose Reagan’s initial START treaty.

The United States will have access to Russian missile test data. Direct exchanges of data on missile tests, or telemetry, with the Russians are no longer of great significance to the United States due to technological advances that allow for access to the missile test data independently. And Russian negotiators strongly opposed further data exchanges because they would receive no information in return since the United States no longer conducts missile tests. Yet some conservatives voiced concerns about the loss of the data exchange nonetheless. The Obama administration therefore pushed hard and succeeded in keeping exchanges of telemetry data in New START over strong Russian objections.

The consequences of rejection

Blocking New START in the ratification process would not simply result in a continuation of the nuclear status quo. The original START treaty expired on December 5, 2009 and Russia and the United States reached an informal interim agreement to comply with the “spirit” of the START treaty, enabling much of the verification and monitoring measures to continue despite not being legally binding. Yet if START were to fail in ratification, this existing nuclear status quo would evaporate, resulting in potentially disastrous consequences that could push the world past a nuclear tipping point.

Nuclear stability between the United States and Russia would shatter if START fails in ratification. Conservative arms-control opponents’ worst fears would come true if the Senate fails to ratify New START. It would eliminate the framework that has created nuclear stability for nearly two decades since the end of the Cold War. Senator Kyl, perhaps the most outspoken opponent, has even warned of what would occur in the absence of a treaty: “For the first time in 15 years, an extensive set of verification, notification, elimination and other confidence building measures will expire. The U.S. will lose a significant source of information that has allowed it to have confidence in its ability to understand Russian strategic nuclear forces.” Senator Kyl is right, and the implication is clear: failure to ratify the New START would have dangerous consequences for U.S. security.

Failure to ratify New START will jeopardize the concrete security gains from the U.S.-Russia reset. Rejection would send the message to Moscow that the United States is not a reliable partner, empowering the “hawks” in the Russian political and military establishments who look for any opportunity to make the argument that the Obama administration’s engagement policy is a cover-up for the U.S. strategic intention of weakening Russia. Such a move would obliterate any sense of trust between the two countries, closing

off channels of communication and making impossible dialogue on issues critical to U.S. national security. The most immediate concern is the U.S. mission in Afghanistan: rejection could lead Russia to cease its facilitation of the massive logistical operations needed to supply our forces there. About 30 percent of nonlethal material to support our troops in Afghanistan currently goes through or over Russian territory. The climate of antagonism that would result from rejection would put this at risk.

The nonproliferation regime could collapse. Should New START ratification fail, it could push the world past a nuclear tipping point. It would undermine the NPT's foundational bargain, possibly leading to an overall weakening of the nonproliferation regime. Efforts to clamp down on loose nuclear materials that could be acquired by terrorists would be severely undermined, as would efforts to stop states from acquiring nuclear weapons. Efforts to confront Iran and North Korea's nuclear programs would also lose steam, since the failure to cut the U.S. nuclear arsenal would be seen as hypocritical abroad, leading to an erosion of international will.