

COUNCIL *on* FOREIGN RELATIONS

[Home](#) > [International Peace And Security](#) > [Debating The New START Treaty](#)

Expert Roundup

Debating the New START Treaty

Authors: **[Ariel Cohen](#)**, Senior Research Fellow, the Heritage Foundation's Kathryn and Shelby Cullom Davis Institute for International Studies

[Lawrence J. Korb](#), Senior Fellow, Center for American Progress

[Henry Sokolski](#), Executive Director, Nonproliferation Policy Education Center, Nonproliferation Policy Education Center

[Morton H. Halperin](#), Senior Adviser, Open Society Institute

Interviewer(s): **[Greg Bruno](#)**

July 22, 2010

The Senate Armed Services Committee [wrapped up testimony July 20](#) on the new [Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty](#) (START) with Russia, part of President Obama's overall nuclear nonproliferation strategy. The Senate must now decide whether to ratify or shelve the measure. But while action may wait until later this year, battle lines are already being drawn. The White House and congressional Democrats have warned against rejection of the treaty, the [terms of which](#) were agreed to by Obama and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev in April. On the other side of the debate are analysts and Republican lawmakers who warn that the treaty will devastate U.S. national security and be a strategic victory for Russia.

In written responses to questions, four experts in Russian affairs and nuclear nonproliferation examine whether the New START treaty should be ratified, and if doing so would affect the United States' missile defense capabilities, cloud reduction limits, and hand Russia a strategic win at the United States' expense. [Ariel Cohen](#), an expert on U.S.-Russian relations, argues that the treaty would all but ensure "Russia's role as a dominant nuclear power" and should be rejected. [Henry Sokolski](#), executive director of the Nonproliferation Policy Education Center, says until more details about the negotiation are known, it's hard to know whether the treaty represents a "bright future, or a diplomatic dead-end." By contrast, [Lawrence J. Korb](#) of the Center for American Progress, and [Morton H. Halperin](#) of the Open Society Institute, suggest that the Senate should move to ratify immediately, with Korb arguing that there can be no progress on nonproliferation without it, and Halperin noting that it would also help create strategic stability between Washington and Moscow.

[Ariel Cohen](#), Senior Research Fellow, the Heritage Foundation's Kathryn and Shelby Cullom Davis Institute for International Studies

The New START treaty imposes significant limitations on U.S. ballistic missile defenses, and new limitations [continue to be revealed](#) as the treaty is scrutinized. The newest restriction--which has not yet been addressed by the administration or proponents of the treaty--is a limitation on test-target missiles and their associated launchers, which are used to test U.S. ballistic missile defense systems. Testing is an essential element of the research and development needed to produce the best missile defenses. Consequently, such limitations are unacceptable.

When viewed together, it is clear that the treaty's preamble, the Russian unilateral statement on missile defense, and remarks by senior Russian officials suggest an attempt by Russia to limit or constrain current and future U.S. missile defense capabilities by threatening to withdraw from the treaty should the United States expand its missile defenses "qualitatively" or "quantitatively."

Considering the rising threat from Iran's nuclear and missile programs, not to mention North Korea's existing threat, limiting America's ability to defend itself should be a non-starter.

Furthermore, there are reports that U.S. negotiators actually told the Russians that the United States had no intention of deploying strategic missile defenses in Europe. Only a careful review of the negotiating record can set the record straight.

Beyond missile defense, there are also concerns about the inadequacy of the verification regime. The treaty also fails to account for Russia's enormous tactical nuclear arsenal, which might be up to ten times larger than America's. Also troubling is the complete exclusion of mobile Russian rail-based ICBMs and launchers from New START language. In their absence, the Russians could deploy an unlimited number of these systems.

In addition to these drawbacks, what is clear regarding New START and missile defense is that a pattern is emerging: the slow surfacing of specific provisions within New START that limit U.S. missile defense options, followed by explanations and excuses from the administration. Considering the rising threat from Iran's nuclear and missile programs, not to mention North Korea's existing threat, limiting America's ability to defend itself should be a non-starter.

This treaty solidifies Russia's role as a dominant nuclear power by putting the Russian arsenal on par with ours. [It's negotiation] was a classic example of unsuccessful nuclear diplomacy and may result only in Russia seeking further concessions down the road. As this is the case, it is clear why this treaty is wrong for the United States.

Lawrence J. Korb, Senior Fellow, Center for American Progress

Opponents of ratification of New START make misleading arguments and ignore the downside of rejection.

The most frequently cited argument is that the treaty would impede our ability to build missile defenses. But the language dealing with missile defense isn't in the treaty itself, but in nonbinding preambular language that requires no restriction on missile defense and cannot be used to enforce an obligation under the treaty. As the director of the [Missile Defense Agency] points out, "The new START treaty reduces constraints on the development of the missile defense program," a view held by six current and former secretaries of State and Defense.

A second objection is that Russia won't have to reduce its strategic warheads, while the United States will be forced to make significant cuts. According to Secretary [of Defense Robert] Gates, the Russians will be reducing the number of warheads. Since Russia currently deploys 2,600 warheads while the United States deploys 1,950, the Russians will have to cut twice as many as the United States to reach the START limit. Moreover, New START updates the original verification and monitoring regime, which expired in December.

Rejecting the treaty would mean there would be no verification and monitoring regime, no future agreement on tactical nuclear weapons, and no real progress on nonproliferation.

A third objection is that the treaty does not deal with tactical nuclear weapons where the Russians have a clear numerical advantage and can threaten NATO nations. But Russian tactical nuclear weapons have such a short range that they aren't a threat to our NATO allies. In fact, the missiles that could threaten Europe were eliminated by Presidents Reagan and Gorbachev when they signed the INF [Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces] Treaty in 1987, which required the Soviets to destroy 1,750 missiles and the United States, 846.

The fourth objection is that Russia can escape limits on the number of strategic nuclear warheads because each bomber counts as one warhead, regardless of how many weapons it carries. True, but the provision also applies to us and our bombers

have greater nuclear weapon capacity than Russia's.

Rejecting the treaty would mean there would be no verification and monitoring regime, no future agreement on tactical nuclear weapons, and no real progress on nonproliferation.

Henry Sokolski, Executive Director, Nonproliferation Policy Education Center, Nonproliferation Policy Education Center

Until the Senate stops framing the New START agreement as a take-it-or-leave-it proposition and begins deliberating to clarify its ambiguous provisions, we won't know [its value]. The administration claims that the treaty is a major plus and that it is free of limits on U.S. nonnuclear offensive and defensive missiles. Critics question this and administration assurances that the treaty bans Russian rail-mobile ICBM launchers, which they say are not specifically called out in the treaty's text.

Blocking the Senate from classified access to the New START negotiating record will only feed suspicions about the administration's claims regarding the lack of limits on U.S. nonnuclear missiles and missile defenses.

To clarify these matters, the critics have requested access to the treaty's negotiating record. Senate treaty supporters have so far rebuffed their requests. This is a mistake. As a former Senate aide, who had classified access to the INF Treaty negotiating record in the 1980s, I can vouch for the value of reviewing it. Was it boring to read? Absolutely, but it was also useful. Back then, the worry was that the INF Treaty lacked a precise definition of what missiles were banned. The lack of anything in the record on this point forced our diplomats back to negotiate a detailed definition in a separate aide memoire.

Blocking the Senate from classified access to the New START negotiating record will only feed suspicions about the administration's claims regarding the lack of limits on U.S. nonnuclear missiles and missile defenses. If nothing was there, the Senate could get by agreeing to a Senate "understanding" that reiterated the administration's view. If there was something troubling in the record, a Senate reservation might be necessary. Similarly, if there was nothing in the record on rail-mobile ICBMs, an INF-like aide memoire might be desirable.

Finally, the administration insists that ratifying New START is critical to secure more substantial follow-on arms control agreements. Yet, the administration has said little about what these agreements might be or when they might be reached. There is reason to believe that any follow-on agreement with Russia to limit its thousands of tactical nuclear weapons would take years to reach. Does it make sense to bog ourselves down in such talks without also working on other strategic threats, such as China's growing nuclear and non-nuclear long-range strike systems?

The Senate has yet to press the administration on such questions, but until it does, it will be difficult to know if New START is an arms control beginning with a bright future, or a diplomatic dead-end.

Morton H. Halperin, Senior Adviser, Open Society Institute

The New START Treaty does not limit the number of launchers the United States can deploy or otherwise constrain the ability of the United States to deploy effective ballistic missile defenses (BMD). The concerns expressed are that the preamble acknowledges the link between offense and defense, that the treaty bans placing BMD launchers in strategic missile silos, and that the Russians have asserted a right to withdraw from the treaty if they determine that American missile defense deployments threaten their deterrent.

The statement in the preamble is nothing more than a statement of the obvious and has no binding legal affect. The Russian unilateral assertion is nothing more than a restatement of what is in the treaty. Both governments would need to consider withdrawal from the treaty if the other builds a very large missile defense aimed at taking away the other's deterrent. The U.S. missile defense program will in no way be affected by this declaration. The military and civilian leadership of the Department of Defense have concluded that placing defensive missiles in existing offensive silos is not cost-effective.

The Senate should consent to ratification of the treaty. It will strengthen strategic stability between the United States and Russia and reduce the risk of a nuclear exchange between

The treaty makes modest reductions on the forces on both sides. It in no way prevents the United States from continuing to [rely on a triad \(PDF\)](#) and to make further reductions if it views that to be desirable. It gives no strategic advantage to Russia. Both governments and much of the world see the treaty, correctly, as in their mutual interest and consistent with their NPT [[Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty](#)] obligations. *them.*

The Senate should consent to ratification of the treaty. It will strengthen strategic stability between the United States and Russia and reduce the risk of a nuclear exchange between them. It will also help the United States to secure the international cooperation it needs to deal with nuclear proliferation and the threat of terrorists gaining control of a nuclear weapon.

Weigh in on this issue by emailing CFR.org.

The Council on Foreign Relations takes no institutional position on policy issues and has no affiliation with the U.S. government. All views expressed in its publications and on its website are the sole responsibility of the author or authors.

Copyright © 2011 by the Council on Foreign Relations, Inc. All rights reserved.