

# WebMemo



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## START Follow-On Treaty Could Interfere with Conventional Strike Systems

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The Obama Administration is currently rushing to establish a treaty to succeed the expiring Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START). Early indications are that this new agreement will limit U.S. options to field conventionally armed missiles—something Congress warned the Administration not to do.

Conventionally armed missiles provide the U.S. with a valuable option in protecting and defending the U.S. and its allies against strategic attack. Without this option, the U.S. would be more—not less—dependent on the nuclear-armed missiles in its strategic arsenal.

**Limiting Delivery Vehicles.** There have been several signs that this new treaty could curtail America's ability to field conventionally armed missiles, including provisions limiting the number of both delivery vehicles.

Specifically, the treaty negotiators have been instructed to limit the number of strategic-delivery vehicles—intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs), and long-range bombers—to between 500 and 1,100. These instructions were provided in a July 6 “joint understanding” between President Obama and Russian President Dmitri Medvedev.

It appears that these delivery vehicles will be counted against the limit whether they carry nuclear or conventional warheads. This is not certain, however, because it is possible that the new treaty could use definitions that exclude conventionally armed, strategic-delivery vehicles—particularly ones that are not currently in the U.S. arsenal.

**Verification Problems.** Attempting to limit only nuclear-armed delivery vehicles and to leave conventionally armed, strategic-delivery vehicles unconstrained, however, is a dangerous proposition. The method used to verify the number of strategic-delivery vehicles is different from the method used to verify the removal of warheads from those vehicles. Therefore, if the delivery vehicle verification procedure is used, it will be unable to determine with sufficient confidence whether the delivery vehicles are carrying conventional or nuclear warheads. In turn, it will be impossible to confirm that the corresponding warhead limit of between 1,500 and 1,675 is being met in a way that Russia cannot obtain a significant advantage in deployed strategic nuclear warheads.

Instead of attempting to limit the number of strategic delivery vehicles, the Obama Administration should negotiate a verification and transparency protocol to the existing 2002 Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty (SORT), frequently referred to as the Moscow Treaty. The Moscow Treaty limits the number of operationally deployed strategic nuclear warheads, not delivery vehicles, to between 1,700 and 2,200.

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at:  
[www.heritage.org/Research/NationalSecurity/wm2704.cfm](http://www.heritage.org/Research/NationalSecurity/wm2704.cfm)

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This approach would focus on verifying the number of fielded strategic nuclear warheads on each side—not navigating the problems associated with limiting delivery vehicles. Focusing on strategic nuclear warheads would also sidestep any limitations on conventionally armed missiles.

**Guidelines for the Senate.** The new treaty, as with any treaty, will be subject to the advice and consent of the U.S. Senate prior to ratification. The U.S. Senate should consider whether ratification and entry into force of the new treaty will serve the security interests of the U.S. Specifically:

1. The treaty should not subject conventionally armed ICBMs and SLBMs or bombers to the limits on delivery vehicles. The new treaty is supposed to be about limiting deployed strategic nuclear weapons on both sides. By focusing on delivery vehicles that do not carry nuclear warheads, the treaty will undermine America's ability to deter and ultimately defeat strategic attacks. This guideline should extend not only to new delivery vehicles but also to existing ones that may be refitted with conventional warheads.
2. The treaty should exclude conventionally armed delivery vehicles from the definition of equipment subject to numerical limitation—particularly if it differentiates between conventionally armed delivery vehicles and those armed with nuclear warheads. Limiting delivery vehicles in a way that excludes those that are conventionally armed would be exceedingly difficult. The temptation would be to define “delivery vehicle” in a way that is unclear—and, in turn, result in

inconsistent interpretations between the parties and severe problems in executing the treaty. An arms control treaty that includes unclear definitions of the weapons to be reduced or limited should be unacceptable to the Senate.

3. The treaty should be adequately verifiable. The method used to verify the number of strategic-delivery vehicles is different from the method used to verify the removal of warheads from those vehicles. Therefore, if the treaty's verification system focuses on confirming delivery vehicle limitations, it would not be able to verify nuclear warheads, and, in turn, would not serve U.S. interests.

**Quality Control.** The Senate's role in the making of treaties is to serve as a quality-control mechanism. If the START follow-on treaty imposes limits on strategic delivery vehicles that do not carry nuclear warheads or fails to meet necessary verification standards, it would be a treaty of insufficient quality.

The Senate should not fail to perform its constitutional duty just because of the pressure applied by an Obama Administration infatuated with arms control. This START follow-on treaty could severely damage America's ability to defend itself against a strategic attack. The Senate's responsibility is to the America people—not the pleasures of the President.

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