

# WebMemo



Published by The Heritage Foundation

No. 2771

January 21, 2010

## Arms Control: One Year Later, the Obama Administration Needs a New Strategy

*Owen B. Graham*

At the end of the week, National Security Advisor Jim Jones, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Mike Mullen, and Undersecretary of State for Arms Control and International Security Affairs Ellen Tauscher will travel to Moscow to try to conclude negotiations for the successor to the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START).

Unfortunately, it is clear that the successor treaty—now two months overdue—will not adequately address verification, nuclear modernization, and the missile defense needs of the United States and will compromise U.S. national security. President Barack Obama's haste to conclude the treaty and make progress on the "road to zero" (a world without nuclear weapons) is damaging the arms control process. The U.S. needs a different strategy.

**Uncharted Waters.** The U.S. is now in uncharted waters. The Obama Administration failed to meet its deadline to complete the START follow-on treaty by December 5. This resulted from a far too ambitious agenda and an unrealistic deadline. A better agenda would have included the negotiation of a protocol on verification and transparency to the 2002 Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty, or the Moscow Treaty, which remains in force until 2012. Instead, the Administration focused the first half of last year on negotiating a "joint understanding" for reductions in each side's strategic arsenal.

Before START expired on December 5, Moscow and Washington issued a short statement saying that in order to "support strategic stability," the U.S.

and the Russian Federation pledge to "work together in the spirit of the START Treaty." Yet because the treaty and its verification and transparency provisions have expired, this pledge has no legal standing.

The situation is particularly troublesome considering the U.S. Senate's "advice and consent" role in the making of treaties and that it could be months before a successor treaty is ratified. For instance, it took 429 days to ratify the 1991 START agreement after it was submitted to the Senate. Any attempt by the Administration to honor selective provisions of the treaty would be to uphold a provision where no legal obligation exists. This would also circumvent the role of the U.S. Senate.

By focusing intently on the reduction in each nation's strategic arsenal, the U.S. has lost some negotiating ground on the issue of verification. For example, when the treaty expired the U.S. had to abandon a monitoring station for Russian weapons at the entry and exit portals in Votkinsk, Russia. By agreeing to leave this station, the U.S. will be unable to monitor the production of Russia's highly destabilizing RS-24 mobile multi-warhead intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBMs). Open sources

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at:  
[www.heritage.org/Research/RussiaandEurasia/wm2771.cfm](http://www.heritage.org/Research/RussiaandEurasia/wm2771.cfm)

Produced by the Douglas and Sarah Allison  
Center for Foreign Policy Studies

Published by The Heritage Foundation  
214 Massachusetts Avenue, NE  
Washington, DC 20002-4999  
(202) 546-4400 • [heritage.org](http://heritage.org)

Nothing written here is to be construed as necessarily reflecting the views of The Heritage Foundation or as an attempt to aid or hinder the passage of any bill before Congress.

indicate that this missile will be the mainstay of Russian strategic forces by 2016.<sup>1</sup>

Additionally, Undersecretary Tauscher has stated that Russia has not accepted a U.S. proposal for exchanging technical data on offensive-missile tests. Sharing such data under START encouraged confidence on both sides and reduced uncertainty over the capabilities of each nation's nuclear weapons. With the expulsion from the Votkinsk monitoring plant, the Russians appear to be using the START follow-on treaty as a means to codify a lower standard of verification.<sup>2</sup>

Lawmakers are concerned about potential concessions that might be linked directly or indirectly to the new treaty. According to the Russian press, Kremlin sources are saying that Moscow feels it has the upper hand in the negotiations because the follow-on treaty is perceived as more important to the U.S. than Russia.<sup>3</sup> The Obama Administration's haste to get to zero and concessions to cancel the Bush-era missile defense site in Europe and exclude non-strategic weapons from the new treaty appears to have fueled this perception. Washington's actions have emboldened Moscow's negotiating position. There are also concerns among lawmakers that the U.S. will make further concessions.

**Nuclear Modernization.** On December 16, 41 U.S. Senators voiced their concerns and signed a letter saying they will oppose the new treaty if it does not include specific plans for U.S. nuclear modernization as stipulated in the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2010. The letter stated: "We don't believe further reductions can be

in the national security interest of the U.S. in the absence of a significant program to modernize our nuclear deterrent."<sup>4</sup> The high number of Senators opposing the Administration's concessions calls into question whether this successor agreement is capable of garnering the 67-vote supermajority necessary for treaty ratification.

Some arms control advocates insist that the U.S. has a robust nuclear modernization program. This claim is simply inaccurate. Indeed, many Americans likely believe that the U.S. nuclear arsenal is in top shape and is not an issue of concern for U.S. national security. Unfortunately, the truth is that America's nuclear infrastructure is rapidly aging, in deep atrophy, and struggling to maintain its reliability and effectiveness. The U.S. is not producing new nuclear weapons, and its ICBM force is shrinking and not being modernized. In contrast, Russia and China are engaged in a major modernization effort.

Recent statements by Russian President Vladimir Putin have revealed just how serious Russia is about nuclear modernization.<sup>5</sup> For instance, he linked the new treaty with missile defense and stated that Russia must develop new offensive weapons to defeat U.S. defenses. This comment was not surprising considering that under Putin, Russia has been actively modernizing its nuclear arsenal and boosting the role of nuclear weapons in national strategy and doctrine.

Russia's nuclear doctrine stipulates a strong commitment to nuclear modernization, a lower-use threshold, reliance on first strike, and deployment of thousands of tactical nuclear weapons prohibited

1. RIA Novosti, "Russia to Improve Missile Defense Penetration Capability by 2016," October 6, 2009, at [http://en.rian.ru/military\\_news/20090610/155219177.html](http://en.rian.ru/military_news/20090610/155219177.html) (January 21, 2010); *Russia Today*, "New Missile Can Beat Any Defence System," November 26, 2008, at [http://rt.com/Top\\_News/2008-11-26/New\\_missile\\_can\\_beat\\_any\\_defence\\_system.html](http://rt.com/Top_News/2008-11-26/New_missile_can_beat_any_defence_system.html) (January 20, 2010).
2. Ariel Cohen and Baker Spring, "Arms Control Folly," *The Foundry*, January 14, 2009, at <http://blog.heritage.org/2010/01/14/arms-control-folly>.
3. Pavel Felgenhauer, "Time Running Out to Achieve New Arms Control Treaty," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, November 19, 2009, at [http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no\\_cache=1&tx\\_ttnews%5Bsword%5D=8fd5893941d69d0be3f378576261ae3e&tx\\_ttnews%5Bany\\_of\\_the\\_words%5D=pavel&tx\\_ttnews%5Btt\\_news%5D=35750&tx\\_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=7&cHash=f003965947](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Bsword%5D=8fd5893941d69d0be3f378576261ae3e&tx_ttnews%5Bany_of_the_words%5D=pavel&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=35750&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=7&cHash=f003965947) (January 20, 2010).
4. Global Security Newswire, "Russia Accuses U.S. of Delaying Arms Control Progress," December 17, 2009, at [http://www.globalsecuritynewswire.org/gsn/nw\\_20091217\\_8800.php](http://www.globalsecuritynewswire.org/gsn/nw_20091217_8800.php) (January 21, 2010).
5. Agence France-Presse, "Putin: Russia Must Develop 'Offensive' Weapons," December 29, 2009, at <http://www.defensenews.com/story.php?i=4436639&c=AIR&s=TOP> (January 20, 2010).

by prior U.S.–Russia agreements. It is also significant that behind this doctrine is a dark threat perception of the U.S. and NATO. Moreover, of particular concern is Russia’s commitment to first use in local conflicts as announced by Russia’s National Security Council secretary, General Nikolay Patrushev.<sup>6</sup>

The danger in the current negotiations is that the new START agreement will not address these issues in Russia’s nuclear posture adequately, effectively codifying an adversarial stance toward the U.S. and its allies.

**START Successor Recommendations.** To safeguard U.S. interests, the Obama Administration should:

- Move Moscow away from a nuclear posture based on ability to threaten or intimidate the U.S.

and its allies and toward a fundamentally more defensive posture.<sup>7</sup>

- Submit a plan for the modernization of the U.S. nuclear weapons complex and arsenal—a plan that is sufficient to sustain an effective nuclear arsenal.
- Ensure that the new treaty is adequately verifiable. There is absolutely no rationale for rushing to sign the treaty if the verification mechanisms fall by the wayside.

These are the prerequisites for an acceptable treaty and the foundation for a new U.S. strategy.

—Owen B. Graham is a Research Assistant in the Allison Center for Foreign Policy Studies at The Heritage Foundation.

---

6. Ariel Cohen, “Dangerous Trajectories: Obama’s Approach to Arms Control Misreads Russian Nuclear Strategy,” Heritage Foundation *Backgrounder* No. 2338, November 9, 2009, pp. 8–9, at <http://www.heritage.org/Research/RussiaandEurasia/bg2338.cfm>.

7. See Andrei Shoumikhin and Baker Spring, “Strategic Nuclear Arms Control for the Protect and Defend Strategy,” Heritage Foundation *Backgrounder* No. 2266, May 4, 2009, at [http://www.heritage.org/Research/NationalSecurity/upload/bg\\_2266.pdf](http://www.heritage.org/Research/NationalSecurity/upload/bg_2266.pdf).