

Administration of Barack H. Obama, 2010

The President's Weekly Address

November 20, 2010

Today I'd like to speak with you about an issue that is fundamental to America's national security: the need for the Senate to approve the new START Treaty this year.

This treaty is rooted in a practice that dates back to Ronald Reagan. The idea is simple: As the two nations with over 90 percent of the world's nuclear weapons, the United States and Russia have a responsibility to work together to reduce our arsenals. And to ensure that our national security is protected, the United States has an interest in tracking Russia's nuclear arsenal through a verification effort that puts U.S. inspectors on the ground. As President Reagan said when he signed a nuclear arms treaty with the Soviet Union in 1987, "Trust, but verify."

That is precisely what the new START Treaty does. After nearly a full year of negotiations, we completed an agreement earlier this year that cuts by a third the number of long-range nuclear weapons and delivery vehicles that the United States and Russia can deploy, while ensuring that America retains a strong nuclear deterrent, and can put inspectors back on the ground in Russia.

The treaty also helped us reset our relations with Russia, which led to concrete benefits. For instance, Russia has been indispensable to our efforts to enforce strong sanctions on Iran, to secure loose nuclear material from terrorists, and to equip our troops in Afghanistan.

All of this will be put to risk if the Senate does not pass the new START Treaty.

Without ratification this year, the United States will have no inspectors on the ground and no ability to verify Russian nuclear activities. So those who would block this treaty are breaking President Reagan's rule. They want to trust, but not verify.

Without ratification, we put at risk the coalition that we have built to put pressure on Iran and the transit route through Russia that we use to equip our troops in Afghanistan. And without ratification, we risk undoing decades of American leadership on nuclear security and decades of bipartisanship on this issue. Our security and our position in the world are at stake.

Indeed, since the Reagan years, every President has pursued a negotiated, verified, arms reduction treaty. And every time that these treaties have been reviewed by the Senate, they have passed with over 85 votes. Bipartisan support for new START could not be stronger. It has been endorsed by Republicans from the Reagan administration and both Bush administrations, including Colin Powell, George Shultz, Jim Baker, and Henry Kissinger. And it was approved by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee by a strong bipartisan vote of 14–4.

Over the last several months, several questions have been asked about new START, and we have answered every single one. Some have asked whether it will limit our missile defense; it will not. Some, including Senator Jon Kyl, have asked that we modernize our nuclear infrastructure for the 21st century. We are doing so, and plan to invest at least \$85 billion in that effort over the next 10 years, a significant increase from the Bush administration.

Finally, some make no argument against the treaty, they just ask for more time. But remember this: It has already been 11 months since we've had inspectors in Russia, and every

day that goes by without ratification is a day that we lose confidence in our understanding of Russia's nuclear weapons. If the Senate doesn't act this year—after 6 months, 18 hearings, and nearly a thousand questions answered—it would have to start over from scratch in January.

The choice is clear: a failure to ratify new START would be a dangerous gamble with America's national security, setting back our understanding of Russia's nuclear weapons, as well as our leadership in the world. That is not what the American people sent us to Washington to do.

There is enough gridlock, enough bickering. If there is one issue that should unite us—as Republicans and Democrats—it should be our national security.

Some things are bigger than politics. As Republican Dick Lugar said the other day, "Every Senator has an obligation in the national security interest to take a stand, to do his or her duty."

Senator Lugar is right. And if the Senate passes this treaty, it will not be an achievement for Democrats or Republicans, it will be a win for America.

Thanks.

NOTE: The address was recorded at approximately 5:51 p.m. on November 18 in the Blue Room at the White House for broadcast on November 20. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on November 19 but was embargoed for release until 6 a.m., e.s.t., on November 20. In the address, the President referred to former Secretaries of State Colin L. Powell, George P. Schultz, James A. Baker, III, and Henry A. Kissinger. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of this address.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Weekly addresses.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Baker, James A., III; Bush, George H.W.; Bush, George W.; Kissinger, Henry A.; Kyl, Jon L.; Lugar, Richard G.; Powell, Colin L.; Shultz, George P.

Subjects: Afghanistan : U.S. military forces :: Deployment; Arms and munitions : Nuclear weapons and material :: Nonproliferation efforts; Arms and munitions : Nuclear weapons and material :: Security; Arms and munitions : Nuclear weapons and material :: Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) with Russia, expansion; Congress : Bipartisanship; Defense and national security : Missile defense; Defense and national security : Potential terrorist attacks, preparedness efforts; Iran : U.N. Security Council Sanctions; Russia : Military equipment transit into Afghanistan, agreement with U.S.; Russia : Nuclear weapons stockpile, reduction; Russia : relations with U.S.; Russia : Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) with U.S., proposed expansion; Russia : Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) with U.S., expansion; State, Department of : Former Secretaries.

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