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New Treaty Reduces U.S., Russian Nuclear Arsenals

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.
Staff Writer

Washington — President Obama and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev finalized a landmark agreement that will cut the number of deployed nuclear weapons by 30 percent.

Obama and Medvedev completed the new Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, which had been in negotiation for almost a year, with a telephone call March 26.

"I'm pleased to announce that after a year of intense negotiations, the United States and Russia have agreed to the most comprehensive arms control agreement in nearly two decades," Obama said after talking with Medvedev.

"Since taking office, one of my highest priorities has been addressing the threat posed by nuclear weapons to the American people. And that's why, last April in Prague, I stated America's intention to pursue the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons, a goal that's been embraced by presidents like John F. Kennedy and Ronald Reagan," the president said.

Obama and Medvedev agreed to meet in Prague on April 8 to sign the treaty. It would replace the 1991 Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) agreed to by the United States and the former Soviet Union, and also the 2002 Moscow Treaty.

"Broadly speaking, the new START treaty makes progress in several areas," Obama said. "It cuts by about a third the nuclear weapons that the United States and Russia will deploy. It significantly reduces missiles and launchers. It puts in place a strong and effective verification regime. And it maintains the flexibility that we need to protect and advance our national security and to guarantee our unwavering commitment to the security of our allies."

"With this agreement, the United States and Russia — the two largest nuclear powers in the world — also send a clear signal that we intend to lead," Obama said. "By upholding our own commitments under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, we strengthen our global efforts to stop the spread of these weapons, and [help] to ensure that other nations meet their own responsibilities."

The agreement limits the countries to 1,550 nuclear warheads, which is 30 percent lower than the limit of the Moscow Treaty, which had set it at 2,200 warheads. The treaty also limits both nations to 800 deployed and nondeployed intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) launchers, submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM) launchers, and heavy bombers equipped for nuclear

armaments.

The treaty has a separate limit of 700 deployed ICBMs, SLBMs, and heavy bombers equipped for nuclear armaments.

The treaty's formal title is the "Treaty Between the United States of America and the Russian Federation on Measures to Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms." It is commonly known as the New START Treaty. It lasts 10 years and has a provision for a five-year extension.

The White House said this was the 14th direct meeting or telephone conference between Obama and Medvedev on the treaty and it represents "their shared commitment to 'reset' U.S.-Russia relations." Obama had made improving relations with Russia a major foreign policy objective of his administration, arguing that the Cold War of the 20th century is over and that the two superpowers are partners in the world.

The treaty includes a verification regime that will allow each side to monitor all aspects of the treaty. "At the same time, the inspections and other verification procedures in this treaty will be simpler and less costly to implement than the old START treaty," the White House said.

"The treaty does not contain any constraints on testing, development or deployment of current or planned U.S. missile-defense programs or current or planned United States long-range conventional strike capabilities," the White House said.

SENATE AND DUMA APPROVAL

Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman John Kerry and Senator Richard Lugar, the ranking Republican on the committee, met with Obama and his advisers for about an hour March 24 at the White House and received a full briefing on the treaty and the support needed to win approval in the U.S. Senate, which requires a two-thirds majority.

The treaty also has to be approved by the Russian Duma before becoming law.

"A well-designed treaty will send an important message to the rest of the world that America is prepared to lead efforts with key stakeholders to reduce the threat of nuclear weapons," Kerry said after the meeting with Obama. "Once the treaty and its associated documents are completed and submitted to the Senate, Senator Lugar and I look forward to holding hearings and giving the treaty immediate and careful attention."

PRAGUE VISION

On April 5, 2009, Obama announced in a major speech at Hradcany Square in Prague that he envisioned a nuclear-free world and would make reducing nuclear weapons a signature piece of his foreign policy agenda.

"Today, I state clearly and with conviction America's commitment to seek the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons," Obama told the Prague audience. "I'm not naive. This goal will not be reached quickly – perhaps not in my lifetime. It will take patience and persistence. But now we, too, must ignore the voices who tell us that the world cannot change."

The United States is hosting a Global Nuclear Summit April 12-13 in Washington to promote a worldwide discussion on ways to control nuclear weapons and to begin the effort to reduce them.

"Such actions invigorate our mutual efforts to strengthen the international nonproliferation regime and convince other countries to help curb proliferation," the White House announcement said.

Clinton, Gates Cautiously Optimistic About Marjah

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington – As President Obama's new strategy for the U.S. role in Afghanistan continues to be implemented, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton tells U.S. lawmakers that the military and civilian effort in securing Marjah from Taliban control has been encouraging thus far, and its Afghan residents are beginning to see improvements in the areas of governance and the economy.

Speaking to the Senate Appropriations Committee March 25 with Defense Secretary Robert Gates, Clinton said Marjah "is a proving ground for our strategy," which Obama announced in December 2009. It calls for additional coalition forces and robust civilian assistance. "The story thus far is an encouraging one," she said.

Within hours after U.S. Marines and Afghan security forces secured the town as part of Operation Moshtarak, civilian experts had begun arriving to establish economic, agricultural and rule-of-law assistance projects designed to address needs identified by the Afghan people and encourage them to have a more favorable view of the Afghan government.

The civilian experts "quickly stood up a district-support team that has helped already to open two schools and a prosecutor's office," Clinton said. "They've registered more than 7,000 farmers to begin receiving supplies for

licit crops. They've employed more than a thousand residents a day through cash-for-work projects."

Personnel from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) have built a nearby airstrip that is facilitating contact between Afghan government agricultural officials and Marjah's farmers, and a USAID contract has employed a firm owned by an Afghan woman to rebuild the highway near the town.

Experts from the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the National Guard have been involved through the Afghanistan Vouchers for Increased Production in Agriculture Plus program, and Clinton said so far they have distributed 7,000 vouchers to farmers to provide them with fertilizers, new seeds and trellises for grapes.

The secretary said the Obama administration has already tripled the number of civilian experts in the country to nearly 1,000. "Each one leverages on average about 10 other civilians," she said, such as workers from international nongovernmental organizations, the United Nations and Afghan employees.

"It is these civilian-led efforts that will translate the bravery of our troops into stability," Clinton said.

Secretary Gates said he believes there are "grounds for guarded optimism" as the Obama administration's strategy "gains momentum" and the Afghan government "shows an increasing willingness to take on additional responsibilities."

However, he said, it could take several months to achieve visible results and warned of "tough days ahead" as Afghan and international forces try to build security and stability "in a place that has known nothing but war for three decades."

As efforts in Marjah continue, Gates said, "the next major campaign will be in the Kandahar area," and will involve a similar integrated civil-military campaign with weeks of preparation and consultation between Afghans and the international coalition.

The effort to reverse the momentum of the Taliban is "about changing the psychology for the people about who's going to win this struggle," Gates said.

"The Taliban may be vicious, but they're also incredibly unpopular in Afghanistan," with polls indicating that the Taliban has the support of only 10 percent of Afghans.

"These people aren't fond of the Taliban – they're just intimidated by them, for the most part," Gates said. The key is having Afghan army and police forces provide their security and win popular confidence.

"The average Afghan is going to come down one side or the other only when he thinks he's spotted who's going to win. And that's part of what our endeavors are about," Gates said.

"We're beginning to see that in some places in Afghanistan, where the local population is figuring, you know, maybe this is going to go the way of the Afghan government and the coalition. And so they're beginning to cooperate with us and support us," he said.

START Reflects U.S. Intent to Create Nuclear-Free World

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — The landmark agreement between Russia and the United States to reduce their nuclear-weapon stockpiles by 30 percent marks a commitment by the Obama administration to its long-term goal of eliminating nuclear weapons, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton says.

Speaking at the White House March 26 with Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Mike Mullen and Under Secretary of State for Arms Control Ellen Tauscher, Clinton said the steps the Obama administration is taking to reduce the number of nuclear weapons, stop nuclear proliferation and advance nuclear security around the world mark "a very clear statement of intent" to follow through on its vision of a world without nuclear weapons.

The new Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) that President Obama and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev will sign in Prague April 8 demonstrates that "the Cold War really is behind us, and these massive nuclear arsenals that both of our countries maintained as part of deterrence no longer have to be so big," she said.

The new treaty is the first comprehensive deal to reduce nuclear arms since its predecessor was signed by the two former Cold War rivals in July 1991.

"We do not need such large arsenals to protect our nation and our allies against the two greatest dangers we face today, nuclear proliferation and terrorism," Clinton said.

The treaty "shows the world, particularly states like Iran and North Korea, that one of our top priorities is to strengthen the global nonproliferation regime and keep nuclear materials out of the wrong hands," and demonstrates the U.S. commitment for progress toward disarmament under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), she said.

President Obama has invited one of the largest gatherings

of international leaders since the end of World War II to Washington April 12-13 to discuss preventing rogue regimes and violent extremists from obtaining nuclear materials, and both the United States and Russia "come with more credibility" because of the treaty, Clinton said.

In May, the international community will also gather in New York for the NPT Review Conference, which Clinton said will discuss how to bring the nuclear nonproliferation regime "into the 21st century, when we know unfortunately that terrorist groups are seeking nuclear weapons."

As the United States and Russia "uphold our commitments and strengthen the NPT, we can hold others accountable to do the same," Clinton said.

"I'm going to reaffirm our commitment to convincing countries that the path of nonproliferation, of lowering the temperature when it comes to nuclear weapons, which we are doing with this treaty, is the path they want to be on," she said.

Secretary Gates said having a nuclear arsenal is still "an important pillar of the U.S. defense posture" as both a deterrent to potential adversaries and to provide reassurance to "more than two dozen allies and partners who rely on our nuclear umbrella for their security." But "it is clear that we can accomplish these goals with fewer nuclear weapons."

"The journey we have taken, from being one misstep away from mutual assured destruction to the substantial arms reductions of this new agreement, is testimony to just how much the world has changed, and all of the opportunities we still have to make our planet safer and more secure," he said.

"I don't think anybody expects us to come anywhere close to zero nuclear weapons any time soon," Gates said, but the new treaty and efforts to control fissile material and strengthen the NPT "are concrete steps to move in that direction."

Iraqi Women Leaders on Building Democracy

Civil society, increased awareness are keys to a stronger Iraq, they say

By Carlyn Reichel
Staff Writer

Washington — Democracy in Iraq is being bolstered by the emergence of strong civil society institutions and the remarkable women often involved with them, a group of 15 Iraqi elected female officials said during a two-week exchange of ideas with U.S. policymakers.

The women, each an elected member of an Iraqi

provincial council, visited the United States for the Iraqi Woman Provincial Council Leadership Conference to discuss the needs of democracy and civil society in their country. In their conversations with U.S. officials and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), the Iraqis stressed the need for support from the international community and how women, through increased education and awareness, can play a key role.

"This is not an easy thing for us," Nasrin Delewi, a member of the Diyala Provincial Council, said through an interpreter. "This is a very difficult thing. Democracy is a new concept in Iraq, so we need a lot of time and effort."

As part of this effort, several of the women stressed the important role Iraqi NGOs have begun to play in shaping democracy.

Iraq's ambassador to the United States, Samir Sumaidaie, remarked specifically on ways that women are taking a major part in shaping Iraq's civil society. "The thing which gives me more hope is that I know our women are very strong," said Sumaidaie. "They are a formidable force, and they become more formidable when they are organized, and that is why I am so happy to see so many NGOs mushrooming in Iraq with women at the helms. They are making a big difference, and they are transforming society."

Faten Abdulqader Lateef, who is a journalist and member of the Salah Ad Din Provincial Council, said she was lucky to have personal relationships with civil society organizations in Iraq. "They taught us the fundamentals of true democracy and how to deal with this new and wonderful experience, and we learned a lot from them," she said through an interpreter. "I entered a lot of training programs for capacity building to prepare women for such a role and to learn how to manage our campaigns in a scientific fashion." She recently put those campaign methods to practice in a run for the Iraqi Parliament and is waiting to find out the results of the March 7, 2010, elections.

Delewi also said it was her position in civil society that initially brought her into political life. "The first thing that happened after democracy was presented to Iraq was the presence of civil society organizations," she said. Her organization, for the disabled and those with special needs, was assisted by U.S. organizations such as Mercy Corps and ACDI/VOCA as well as Netherlands-based NGOs, she added.

Delewi highlighted the role civil society played in overseeing and monitoring the recent elections in Iraq, as well as raising awareness about the elections and instructing people about the process of voting. "Democracy was a dream for us," said Abdulqader

Lateef. "We were hoping to achieve democracy and to implement it, and when we finally reached democracy, we did not know how to deal with it. We considered it to be an absolute freedom without implementing the law, and this is where we found a lot of bumps in the way."

The women also participated in training sessions in political campaigning, public speaking, coalition building and government management as part of their visit. They will return home with new tools to help them leverage their positions as community leaders and their dedication to strengthening the pillars of democracy in their country.

World Forum in Brazil Tackles Effects of Rapid Urbanization

For the first time, more than half the world's population lives in cities

By Cheryl Pellerin
Science Writer

Washington — At a time when more than half the people on Earth live in cities, 18,000 officials and experts gathered in Brazil March 22–26 to tackle the challenges of rapid urbanization and its effect on communities, cities, economies, climate change and policies.

The theme of the fifth World Urban Forum, held in Rio de Janeiro, "The Right to the City — Bridging the Urban Divide," recognizes the rights of the urban poor and promotes their inclusion in and equal access to cities. The United Nations established the forum, which held its first meeting in 2002 in Nairobi, Kenya.

By midcentury, 70 percent of the world's population — more than 6.4 billion people — will live in cities and metropolitan areas, experts predict. Twenty-seven megacities, with populations greater than 10 million, will include Tokyo, New York, London, Paris, Sao Paulo, Mumbai, Seoul, Buenos Aires and Lagos.

"What the U.S. experienced over a period of centuries is occurring around the world in a matter of years," Shaun Donovan, U.S. secretary of housing and urban development, said March 22 during the forum's opening ceremonies. "As a result, millions of people are increasingly vulnerable to the deprivations associated with overburdened infrastructure, inadequate housing and outmoded health systems."

The U.S. delegation included representatives from the Department of State, the U.S. Agency for International Development, the Department of Agriculture and the White House Office of Urban Affairs. More than 500 people attending from the United States included elected officials and representatives from the nonprofit community, academia, business, foundations and research centers.

"You only need look to the so-called megacities of Africa, Southeast Asia and Latin America – or more recently to the devastation in Haiti or Chile – to understand that we all have a stake in ensuring that every country can participate in this new era of sustainable economic growth," Donovan said.

"The truth is," he added, "when we open new markets for green technology, reverse the effects of global warming and work to ensure that billions of families live not in despair, but in communities of choice, opportunity and hope, we all benefit."

U.S.-BRAZIL PARTNERSHIP

This week at the forum, officials from the State Department and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development praised Brazil's efforts under the Energy and Climate Partnership of the Americas (ECPA) to promote sustainable urbanization across the Americas.

"The U.S.-Brazil relationship over the past year of the Obama administration reflects a healthy and productive alliance between our two nations," Maria Otero, U.S. under secretary of state for democracy and global affairs, said March 26 during a visit to the university Fundação Getulio Vargas in Brasilia.

"No matter the issue or challenge at hand – democracy in Honduras, relief for Haiti – we are working from a place of shared goals and mutual respect," she added. "We may not always agree, but we are in consistent, honest dialogue – and I believe both our nations are the richer for it."

Otero moderated the forum networking session on "Youth and Technology" on March 24, and on March 25 served as a panelist for a dialogue on "Governance and Participation" and answered questions about urbanization during a webcast from the meeting.

On March 29, Otero will travel to Brasilia for a meeting of the Common Agenda for the Environment, one of the bilateral dialogues between the United States and Brazil, and for other bilateral meetings. Otero will discuss a range of environmental policy issues, including responding to climate change through the Energy and Climate Partnership of the Americas, conservation and sustainable management of forests, and new areas for technical cooperation.

ENERGY AND CLIMATE PARTNERSHIP

Brazil's initiative under the ECPA promotes green buildings, energy-efficient housing, sustainable transport and greenhouse gas reductions from solid waste, particularly in low-income communities across the region.

The initiative includes participation from the governments of Argentina, Belize, Bolivia, Colombia, Costa Rica, El Salvador and Mexico.

At the April 2009 Summit of the Americas in Trinidad and Tobago, President Obama invited governments in the Western Hemisphere to join the ECPA, which supports voluntary initiatives on energy efficiency, renewable energy, cleaner fossil fuels, infrastructure and avoiding energy poverty.

At the June 2009 Americas Energy and Climate Symposium in Peru, Brazil offered to lead an ECPA initiative, "Building with Energy Efficiency and Sustainability," which focuses on urban development in low-income areas.

U.S. support for Brazil's initiative includes collaboration by the Department of State in developing a network of academics, funding policy dialogues with practitioners, launching technical and university exchanges and developing best practices on urbanization.

April 15-16, leaders will discuss this partnership and other ECPA initiatives during the Energy and Climate Ministerial of the Americas in Washington. U.S. Energy Secretary Steven Chu will host the meeting and Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton will participate.

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