

American

NEWS & VIEWS

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U.S. Senate Ratifies New START Treaty

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.
Staff Writer

Washington — The U.S. Senate ratified the New START arms reduction treaty between the United States and Russia that will reduce each nation's nuclear arsenals to their lowest levels in more than a half century.

The Senate gave its approval by a vote of 71 to 26 December 22. The New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty was signed by President Obama and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev on April 8 in Prague. For President Obama the treaty is a critical centerpiece to his foreign policy program and reflects his broader world view. He was awarded the 2009 Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts to foster arms control and nuclear nonproliferation efforts worldwide.

"This is the most significant arms control agreement in nearly two decades," Obama said after the Senate vote. "It will make us safer."

Obama said the treaty will help to reset relations with Russia, and it will once again place inspectors in each country to verify that the terms of the agreement will be met during the treaty's 10-year timeline.

"This treaty will enhance our leadership to stop the spread of nuclear weapons and seek the peace of the world without them," Obama said.

The treaty, which replaces the 1991 Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, required the approval of a two-thirds majority of the Senate, or 67 senators. The treaty now must also win approval in the Russian Duma.

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said the Senate's action was a significant step forward in enhancing U.S. national security.

"A responsible partnership between the world's two largest nuclear powers that limits our nuclear arsenals while maintaining strategic stability is imperative to promoting global security," Clinton said shortly after the Senate voted. "With New START, the United States and Russia will have another important element supporting our 'reset' relationship and expanding our bilateral cooperation on a wide range of issues."

Russian officials said they are ready to ratify the nuclear arms pact this year, but waited to take their vote at the same time the U.S. Senate votes.

Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman John Kerry said the treaty is essential for U.S. national security.

"The stakes are enormous," he said. Kerry told the Senate that by ratifying this treaty the United States will redouble international support for nonproliferation efforts.

The treaty limits the United States and Russia to 1,550 strategic nuclear warheads for each country, down from the current limit of 2,000 warheads, and 700 launchers. The treaty also requires on-site verification inspections, which had lapsed in December 2009 when the old START Treaty expired. Russia and the United States possess 90 percent of the world's nuclear weapons.

New START is designed to succeed the 1991 treaty and the 2002 Moscow Treaty. The treaty does not block efforts to create missile defense systems.

U.S. nuclear forces will continue to be based on the triad of delivery systems: land-based intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs), and strategic bombers. The treaty provides an upper boundary of 1,550 deployed warheads for each nation and up to 700 deployed ICBMs, SLBMs and heavy bombers. Additionally, the treaty would permit up to 800 deployed and nondeployed missile and submarine launchers or heavy bombers.

The treaty gives the United States and Russia seven years to reduce forces and remains in force for 10 years from ratification. It contains detailed definitions and counting rules that will help the parties calculate the number of warheads that count under the treaty limits. Additionally, the treaty provides for detailed, regular, on-site inspections of each country's nuclear arsenals to assure compliance and implementation of the immense technical aspects of nuclear arms reduction programs.

The first START Treaty in 1991 took the number of deployed nuclear weapons down from about 12,000 warheads on each side to about 6,000, then the Moscow Treaty in 2002 reduced that number to a range of 1,700 to 2,000.

U.S. Discussing Ways to Augment U.N. Force in Côte d'Ivoire

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — The Obama administration is in discussions with a number of countries in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) on how to ensure that U.N. forces "can continue to maintain peace and stability in Côte d'Ivoire as this situation unfolds," State Department spokesman P.J. Crowley said December 22.

The United States has joined ECOWAS in calling for Laurent Gbagbo to acknowledge his defeat in the country's November 28 presidential election and allow President-elect Alassane Ouattara to assume office.

Along with refusing to hand over power, Gbagbo has demanded that the 9,000-member U.N. peacekeeping force withdraw from the country. The U.N. Security Council unanimously passed a resolution on December 20 to extend the force's mandate until June 30, 2011.

"We believe that the United Nations force in Côte d'Ivoire has had a great stabilizing effect," Crowley said. Reinforcing the peacekeepers "could be another way to send a clear message" to Gbagbo that "he has to step down," he added.

Crowley said the United States hopes that the use of force will not be necessary to resolve the political standoff. But, given Gbagbo's call for the U.N. force to depart, "we can't rule out that at some point in time he may challenge the presence of that force through force of his own," and "we want to make sure that the U.N. has the capability to maintain peace and stability in Côte d'Ivoire while this is being worked through," he said.

He also refuted Gbagbo's claims that the situation inside Côte d'Ivoire has been peaceful. Crowley said the United States is concerned over abuses that reportedly have been committed by armed militia or "thugs" who are at Gbagbo's disposal.

"The international community is documenting widespread human rights abuses occurring in the country, from home abductions to a feared mass grave in Abidjan," Crowley said. The International Criminal Court is monitoring the situation and the United Nations Human Rights Council plans a special session on December 23 to address these abuses, he said.

Crowley said Gbagbo must accept the results of the November 28 election. "From our standpoint, this is not negotiable," he said.

"The certified results irrefutably show that President-elect Ouattara was the winner. Credible, accredited and independent election observers have declared the election to be fair, and reported no incidences of fraud that would change the outcome as announced by the electoral commission," he said.

The Obama administration wants to see Côte d'Ivoire remain stable and emerge under new leadership, Crowley said. "That's our objective, and we're doing everything that we can to achieve that objective."

U.N. Approves Inclusion of Sexual Orientation in Rights Measure

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — The Obama administration welcomes the U.N. General Assembly's adoption of a U.S.-sponsored amendment that restores lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people in its broad condemnation of extrajudicial, summary and arbitrary executions.

"Killing people because of their sexual orientation cannot be rationalized by diverse religious values or varying regional perspectives. Killing people because they are gay is not culturally defensible — it is criminal," White House press secretary Robert Gibbs said in a December 21 statement.

Gibbs said it is also important that conversations are now taking place around the world about inclusion, equality and discrimination.

"Protecting gays and lesbians from state-sponsored discrimination is not a special right, it is a human right," Gibbs said. "Today's vote in the United Nations marks an important moment in the struggle for civil and human rights. The time has come for all nations to redouble our efforts to end discrimination and violence against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people."

The U.N. draft measure urges member states to protect the right to life of all and calls on them to investigate killings based on discriminatory grounds. The resolution had included sexual orientation among its list of justifications often given for such killings, but the reference was removed by a November 16 vote. On December 21, the General Assembly voted overwhelmingly to restore the original language to the measure.

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said the United States introduced language to include sexual orientation in the U.N. resolution "to send an unequivocal message in concert with our many international partners: No one should be killed for who they are."

Many LGBT people continue to be targeted and killed because of their sexual orientation, and "these heinous crimes must be condemned and investigated wherever they occur," Clinton said in a December 21 statement.

"We look forward to continuing our work with others around the world to protect the human rights of those facing threats or discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation," Clinton said.

Rick Barton, the U.S. representative to the U.N. Economic and Social Council, said in New York December 21 that by adopting the amendment, the U.N. General Assembly "has sent a clear signal ... that justice and human rights apply to all individuals regardless of their sexual orientation." The vote ensures that the principles enshrined in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights "are put into practice and ... live on in the 21st century."

Barton echoed U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's December 1 International Human Rights Day statement that "violence will end only when we confront prejudice." Barton said the U.S. delegation is grateful to U.N. member states for hearing the voices of civil society and human rights defenders around the world.

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