

Mistrust between Russia and America: New START Seen Facing Political, Technical Challenges in Russia

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WASHINGTON — The successor agreement to a landmark U.S.-Soviet nuclear arms control treaty faces a number of political and technical challenges to its chances for ratification in Russia, a leading foreign policy expert said yesterday (see [GSN](#), April 1).

“I would be happy to say that the Russian people enthusiastically wait for the new [Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty] to be ratified and implemented,” Alexei Arbatov, head of the Russian Academy of Sciences’ International Security Center, said during an event at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. “But that would be a great exaggeration.”

Russians have “great doubts” about the new compact because “nuclear weapons are for the Russian people now much more important than decades ago” during of the Cold War and are viewed as the last reliable pillar of the country’s national security, according to Arbatov.

Articles have already started appearing in respected Russian military magazines and newspapers calling the original Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty “traitorous” and “detrimental” to national security, Arbatov said.

Such publications represent the “opening salvo” of a campaign that would be waged against the new treaty once it is signed and presented for ratification by the lower house of the Russian parliament. He did not say what else the public opinion campaign might involve.

Members of Russia’s political elite are worried about what the agreement says or does not say about U.S. ballistic missile defense and “prompt global strike” systems, according to the analyst.

Last week, U.S. President Barack Obama and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev approved the final terms of a follow-on agreement to the 1991 arms control agreement. The new accord requires the former Cold War adversaries to lower their respective strategic arsenals to 1,550 deployed warheads (see [GSN](#), March 26).

That represents a nearly 30 percent reduction from a 2,200-weapon limit the states were to meet by the end of 2012 under the 2002 Moscow Treaty. Some experts, though, have questioned the size of the cut because of an apparent loophole that would count a nuclear bomber as a single warhead despite each aircraft’s ability to carry multiple weapons (see [GSN](#), March 31).

Both countries would also cap their deployed nuclear delivery vehicles — missiles,

submarines and bombers — at 700, with another 100 held in reserve.

Obama and Medvedev are slated to sign the new accord April 8 in Prague, but there has already been significant debate on whether the administration can muster the required 67 votes needed for ratification in the U.S. Senate. That process could prove difficult, with Republicans opposed to any language that would constrict the U.S. missile defense activities and possibly looking to link support for the treaty to updates to the nation's nuclear arsenal.

In addition, work must still be finished on the technical annexes to the compact that lay out details of inspection and verification regimes, Ellen Tauscher, undersecretary of state for arms control and international security, told reporters this week (see [GSN](#), March 30).

"It is clear that the signing of the Prague agreement will only be the first in a very long series of steps that the entire governments of the United States and Russia — not just their presidents — will have to take if they are to move further along the 'road to zero' [nuclear weapons] and to improve U.S.-Russian strategic relations," according to Miles Pomper, a senior research associate with the James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies, who attended the Carnegie event.

Yesterday, Arbatov said the main argument against the new treaty in Moscow is that it would not place limits on U.S. ballistic missile defenses while instituting stringent restrictions on Russia strategic forces for at least the next 10 years.

The Kremlin vehemently opposed Bush administration plans for Europe-based defense as a threat to its strategic security. It has expressed skepticism about Obama's revised plans — which emphasize use of land- and sea-based systems around the continent as a defense against short- and medium-range threats — and has reserved the right to withdraw from the new compact if those defense systems appear overly threatening.

The accord also does not address the prompt global strike systems being developed in the United States, the analyst noted.

The anticipated first such weapon, the Air Force's Conventional Strike Missile, could hit a target halfway around the world within an hour of launch. It could be fielded as early as 2012.

Arbatov said it would be particularly troublesome if part of the reductions called for in the new treaty were conducted by converting strategic nuclear weapons into conventional prompt global strike systems.

The lead argument in favor of the successor agreement inside Russia is that it is mainly about U.S. nuclear reductions, according to Arbatov. Moscow would have no trouble making the cuts as it is already moving to replace its older systems with a smaller number of newer weapons, he said.

The Kremlin has stated it intends to modernize at least 70 percent of the country's strategic forces in the next 10 years.

Also, "nothing in the treaty prevents Russia from introducing new systems," he told the audience, adding that Moscow already has plans to develop and deploy a new heavy missile, referring to the RS-24 mobile multiwarhead ICBM that could be fielded by 2016.

To assuage Russian fears the United States must be able to demonstrate that nuclear disarmament would not affect the nation's prestige in the world and that even with fewer warheads Moscow's interests will receive the same amount of attention in Washington, Arbatov said.

The United States must also show it is "serious" about disarmament, he said, noting the new treaty's "artificial counting rules" that would tally an individual U.S. bomber aircraft as one launcher and one warhead. In that respect, the new agreement sends "conflicting signals," he said.

Russian observers also lack confidence that the U.S. political bureaucracy would see the new reductions carried out, as well as further nuclear cuts in the future, according to Arbatov.

Lastly, the United States needs to prove it is pursuing warhead cuts in order to improve and strengthen international security and not enhance its "huge superiority" in other weapons systems such as prompt global strike, Arbatov told the audience.

The Obama administration should also directly engage Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, who has remained largely silent on the new accord, he said. The former president is the leader of the majority party in the Duma, United Russia.

Arbatov, who served in the lower house of parliament for nearly 10 years, also noted that the 1993 Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty II took the Kremlin seven years to ratify. The pact never entered into force and Moscow later withdrew from the treaty when the Bush administration pulled out of the Antibalistic Missile Treaty.

Russia, meanwhile, can take steps to increase chances for ratification in the United States by being more "constructive" on ballistic missile defense, including endorsing the idea of a Joint Data Exchange Center, which would enable the two countries to share information on missile launches, the analyst said.

He emphasized that the new treaty should serve as the basis for better relations between the two countries, whose strategic relationship experienced a rough period in the later years of the Bush administration. The Obama administration came into office promising to "reset" its relationship with Moscow.

Arbatov warned the former Cold War adversaries should ratify the agreement because it would be the first legally binding compact on disarmament in nearly 20 years and not because it would allow them to accelerate other weapons programs, such as ballistic missile defense in the case of the United States or the RS-24 missile system for Russia.

The challenges laid out yesterday resonated with those in attendance.

"There are prospects of improved cooperation on issues such as missile defense and Iran, but to seize them both countries will have to demonstrate a deep commitment to a new relationship that heretofore has been lacking and a willingness to overcome deep wells of mistrust in both countries that still seems far from evident," Pomper told Global Security Newswire yesterday by e-mail. "And there is the danger that the upcoming ratification battles in both countries may increase, rather than decrease that mistrust."

A new nuclear treaty would be important in “improving bilateral relations and ongoing Russian concerns over U.S. and [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] military dominance,” Paul Walker, head of the Security and Sustainability program at the environmental organization Global Green USA, said today by e-mail.

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