

Obama Urges Senate to Ratify New START

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WASHINGTON — U.S. President Barack Obama urged the full Senate to move quickly to ratify the New START arms reduction treaty after three Republican senators joined Democrats in backing it in a Senate committee.

"I encourage members on both sides of the aisle to give this agreement the fair hearing and bipartisan support that it deserves and that has been given to past agreements of its kind," Obama said in a statement.

The New START still faces hurdles in gaining ratification by the full Senate, but the 14-4 vote Thursday in favor of the treaty in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee demonstrated that cooperation from Republicans on a top Obama priority was possible despite the charged political atmosphere ahead of November's congressional elections.

It remained unclear whether the full Senate will consider the treaty this year. Democrats will need at least eight Republican votes on the Senate floor to have the two-thirds majority needed for ratification.

Progress on the treaty has been slow since Obama and President Dmitry Medvedev signed it in April. It would reduce the limit on strategic warheads to 1,550 for each country from the current ceiling of 2,200. It also would set new procedures that allow both countries to inspect each other's arsenals to verify compliance.

Some Republicans say the pact does not set adequate procedures to ensure that Russia honors its provisions. They also have expressed fear that Moscow could use the treaty to limit U.S. missile defense plans.

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