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U.S. Seeks Big Vote on New START

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UNITED NATIONS — The U.S. administration is hoping for an overwhelming Senate vote this year to ratify the new arms control treaty with Russia, the chief U.S. negotiator said.

Rose Gottemoeller said chances for ratification of the New START treaty in the "lame duck" session after the November midterm elections are "good."

She pointed to the 14-4 bipartisan vote in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee last month that sent the treaty to the full Senate, as well as the administration's efforts to build support including answering about 900 questions from senators and holding 18 hearings and four major briefings.

Gottemoeller recalled that the START treaty to reduce the nuclear arsenals of the United States and the Soviet Union was the last major treaty, signed on July 31, 1991, and ratified by the Senate on Oct. 1, 1992.

"We are hoping that we will have the same kind of vote [as the one] for the START treaty, 95-0 against," she said. "We're looking for that kind of vote this time around as well."

Gottemoeller, assistant secretary of state for arms control, verification and compliance, spoke to reporters Tuesday after addressing the UN General Assembly's disarmament committee, where she said that in addition to pressing for a vote "as soon as possible," the United States wants to begin negotiations on a treaty to ban production of atomic bomb material and try again to ratify the nuclear test ban treaty.

Progress on the New START has been slow since Presidents Barack Obama and 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.

When Gottemoeller was asked whether there were any chances for the treaty to be ratified this year, she replied: "Absolutely, yes."

She added that Obama's goal is to get the treaty "ratified and on its way to entering into force by the end of this year."

Gottemoeller reiterated a warning that either the Geneva-based Conference on Disarmament gets moving on a Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty, which would ban production of weapons-grade uranium and plutonium, or it would consider other options.

The warning was aimed at Pakistan, which has blocked negotiations in the main arms control forum where just one delegation can prevent the required consensus.

"Our patience is running out," she said. "So we need to look ... very carefully at what we need to do to get the process jump-started in the Conference on Disarmament. But at the same time, we need to start looking at some other options."

Gottemoeller wouldn't say what the options might be, but she said the United States would be discussing them with other countries in the General Assembly's disarmament committee.

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