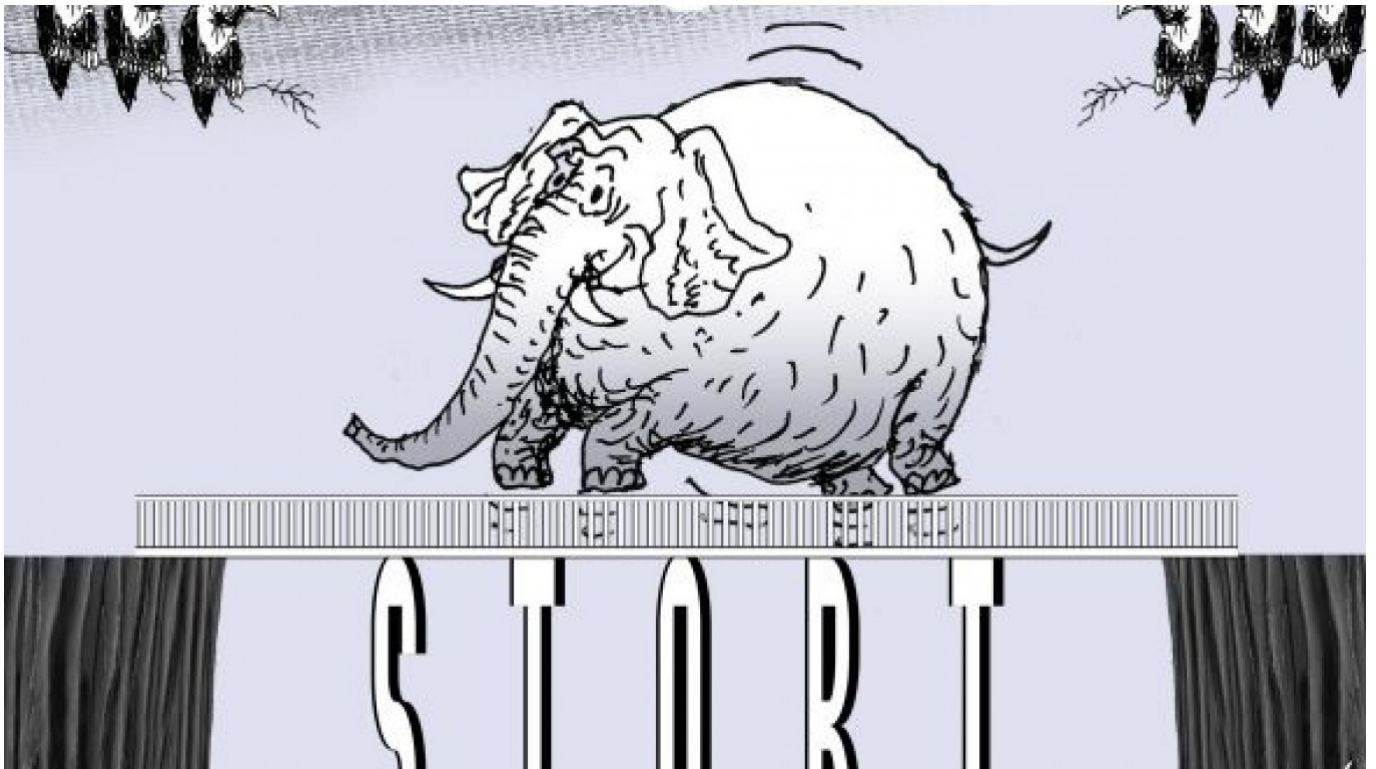


New START's Failure Wouldn't Be Fatal

By [Andrei Kortunov](#)

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What would happen if the New START treaty failed? That is a question many are reluctant to ask. Many politicians and analysts believe that New START will be ratified and implemented by both sides. But there is good reason to consider the consequences should it fail, especially in light of the recent U.S. congressional midterm elections.

Of course, even if one side — and it is clear which side — were to reject the treaty, it would not be the end of the world. Neither the Kremlin nor the White House wants a new Cold War. What's more, there is reason to believe that both sides will de facto abide by the terms of the treaty — at least pertaining to reductions in their nuclear arsenals. A new arms race between Russia and the United States is highly unlikely owing to the budget deficits, economic problems and numerous national security problems that both sides face. If New START were to fail, Presidents Barack Obama and Dmitry Medvedev would undoubtedly do everything in their power to minimize the negative repercussions to relations between the two countries, especially because both have already invested too much in the process to admit defeat or to abandon the “reset.” A New START failure might even encourage politicians and analysts on both sides of the Atlantic to vigorously develop a more substantial model of cooperation on

national security.

Still, a New START failure would be a serious setback. The treaty remains the most visible and significant result of the reset in relations that began nearly two years ago. Other achievements in the field of security such as the transit corridor Russia provided for Western countries supplying troops in Afghanistan and cooperation on Iran are more tactical than strategic. At the same time, for all their importance, these agreements are much easier to re-evaluate, alter or water down than New START. Whether or not the treaty succeeds, U.S.-Russian cooperation on matters of security effectively boils down to a mutual commitment not to push on the other side's "sore spots" — Russia will not interfere with the United States in Iran and Afghanistan, and the United States will not create additional problems for Russia in Ukraine and Georgia. That might be a decent start for a "reset," but it represents little substantial progress for what are supposed to be improved relations between the two countries.

But that is not the main problem. New START also serves as an indication of the state of relations between the two countries. Whether we like it or not, many Russians and Americans would interpret the failure of New START as the end of improved relations and the beginning of a downward slide toward the more familiar territory of rivalry and brinksmanship. There are powerful forces in both countries that never really believed in the reset. They have been waiting these past two years for a shift in the positive trend and are using every opportunity to push relations back into familiar territory. A failure of New START would send a powerful signal to all the skeptics and hawks who wax nostalgic over the Cold War, believing that relations are essentially impossible to change and the two countries are doomed to a never-ending standoff.

What must be done to prevent that scenario from becoming a reality? With regard to New START, there is nothing much Russia can do except hope that Obama skillfully manages negotiations between the White House and Capitol Hill over ratification of the treaty. Beyond that, Moscow and Washington must try to "diversify" their mutual agenda. There are a number of non-START-related issues in the area of national security alone that might be shifted to the front burner: U.S. plans for creating a strategic missile defense system, a Russian proposal to create a European security pact, trade in arms and military technology and others.

Beyond the framework of traditional security issues, the areas for cooperation are even greater — from energy to innovation, and from education and science to reforming international institutions. It must be admitted that the "reset" achievements in all of those areas have been modest, despite the personal efforts of the two presidents and their working groups. Not a single significant breakthrough has been achieved in economic or humanitarian issues. It is regrettable that the two leaders focused so heavily on extending the START treaty and not, for example, on achieving a sharp increase in the number of Russian students studying in U.S. universities.

How exactly might New START fail? It is unlikely that the U.S. Senate would unequivocally and categorically reject the treaty during its current lame-duck session simply because proponents do not have the required number of votes. The worst that might happen is that ratification will be postponed until the new Senate takes it up next spring or even summer. That would provide time to create a more solid foundation for U.S.-Russian relations that

would go beyond the framework of a single — albeit very important — treaty. Let's hope that the time will be used constructively.

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