The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Duma Crafts Amendments to New START

December 05, 2010



The State Duma is preparing amendments to the New START arms treaty in case U.S. legislators request changes, Speaker Boris Gryzlov said.

Gryzlov said in an interview for state television that he had ordered the International Affairs Committee to prepare the amendments, RIA-Novosti reported Saturday.

"I hope the U.S. Congress will ratify START, though there is information that there are attempts to add all kinds of remarks and elaborations to the text of the agreed treaty," Gryzlov said.

New START, signed by Presidents Barack Obama and Dmitry Medvedev in April, would cut each country's deployed nuclear warheads by about a third. Medvedev said Nov. 20 that it would be "very unpleasant" if the U.S. Senate failed to ratify it and expressed hope that legislators would demonstrate a "responsible" approach.

U.S. Republican leaders have stalled consideration of the treaty, vowing to block passage of all

bills until Congress takes up legislation extending 2001 and 2003 tax cuts and passes a stopgap funding bill to keep the federal government operating until appropriations measures for fiscal year 2011 are enacted.

On Wednesday, several Senate Republicans signaled a willingness to support New START by the end of the year, once those matters are resolved.

But 21 Republicans — just over half the Republican lawmakers now in the Senate — wrote Friday to their leader, Mitch McConnell, urging him not to allow the debate to be rushed in the outgoing Congress' session.

"We have numerous amendments requiring significant debate to the treaty as well as the resolution of ratification that we would like to offer and have votes on," the senators wrote. "It would be unwise and improper to do this in a hurried fashion over the course of only a few days."

Also Friday, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said the Obama administration had made progress toward an agreement with the Republicans to vote on the treaty this year.

"We've made a lot of progress, but it's not done until it's done," Clinton told The Cable, a blog published on Foreign Policy magazine's web site, in an interview in Bahrain, where she was attending a security conference.

Senate majority leader Harry Reid expressed confidence on Thursday the U.S. Senate would debate New START this year.

"I'm confident and hopeful that we can work our way through all these things. All those things are on my agenda," Reid told reporters on Capitol Hill. "I think if we set our mind to it, we can get it done."

(Bloomberg, AP, Reuters)

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