

Don't Give Up on New START

By [Mikhail Margelov](#)

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The reset of U.S.-Russian relations started with the signing of the New START treaty. In other words, the two sides made security the cornerstone of their new relationship, and the first thing they agreed on was a reduction of warheads. Presidents Barack Obama and Dmitry Medvedev signed New START to reduce nuclear weapons arsenals in a difficult and more complicated modern age.

Today, most security regimes, established during the Cold War, have become weak. This includes, of course, the regime of nonproliferation of nuclear weapons. It has reached the point that regarding nuclear weapons as an instrument of restraint is today considered an anachronism. In this sense, the signing of New START must be considered as a positive example set by the world's two largest nuclear powers.

The treaty is designed to ensure that neither the United States nor Russia will suffer any loss of security as soon as it comes into effect. That is why the ratification of the agreement is in the interests of both countries.

Bilateral security will remain at the cornerstone of our relationship, and New START should

be regarded in the wider context of improving relations between the United States and Russia. The bigger story is a shift away from the Cold War mentality that has complicated our relationship for so many years after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The Cold War between two nations with diametrically opposed political ideologies was also a relationship that was based on bilateral security. Nuclear weapons were the ultimate deterrent that guaranteed global security.

Today, it is inconceivable that our two nations might attack each other. We share the same interests in building civil societies led by democratically elected leaders. We are both focused on protecting our nations from rogue states who aspire to use those weapons to threaten global security. While the Cold War mentality still affects politics between the two countries, we have become increasingly engaged at a number of levels — political, economic and even military. New START and its ratification reflect this closer relationship. It is designed to protect both our nations in a changing global landscape. It is an important part, but it is only one part of the larger reset.

The reset is already substantive. Russia agreed to a hardening of sanctions against Iran, there is real progress on Russia joining the World Trade Organization, and the Obama administration is prepared in the coming months to cancel the archaic Jackson-Vanik amendment. In addition, Russia refused to provide Iran with the S-300 air defense system, and ties between Russia and NATO broken in 2008 are back on track. With regard to Afghanistan, we are talking not only about the provision of transit routes for U.S. supplies through Russia, but also joint actions in the battle against Afghan drug trafficking. Recently, U.S. and Russian special forces carried out a joint operation to destroy three drug laboratories in Afghanistan — the first joint operation in our history together.

It is well known that coalition forces were heavily criticized, including by Russia, of a failure in the fight against narcotics coming across the Afghan border. Now, Russia and the United States have taken this responsibility on their own shoulders. This is important for Russia because every year 30,000 to 40,000 people die as a result of drugs brought across from Afghanistan. We are losing twice as many people to drugs every year than the Soviet Army lost in total during the nine-year war in Afghanistan. Russia is planning to send additional specialists in the fight against narcotics, including the formation of local units.

We urgently need to agree on terms for bilateral verification of nuclear arsenals. It has been more than a year since the original START lapsed, and in that time we have been unable to check deployment or technical status of either sides' weapons. The longer there is no new treaty in place, the more confident will be those who seek to acquire weapons. Not ratifying New START will send a dangerous signal to those who aspire to become members of the nuclear club. This will likely lead to an increase in countries that we suspect will be either building their own weapons or obtaining them by other means.

New START is much more than a check and balance between the two leading nuclear powers. It is a signal that both the United States and Russia are committed to a modern security agreement, and this will have important implications for all those who are in or who want to be in the nuclear club. The reset is on track, and New START remains an important building block of the new relationship. More important, it demonstrates that Russia and the United States are focused on global security in the modern age.

Mikhail Margelov is head of the Foreign Relations Committee in the Federation Council and is chairman of Global Zero, the international movement dedicated to the elimination of all nuclear weapons.

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