

'Synced' Approval Of Treaty In Doubt

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U.S. Senators John Kerry and Richard Lugar smiling during a press conference after the Senate ratified the New START nuclear arms reduction treaty. **Jonathan Ernst**

Russian lawmakers said Thursday that they were ready to quickly follow the U.S. Senate in ratifying a bilateral nuclear security treaty after weeks of intense pressure by President Barack Obama's administration to get the pact approved.

But the exact timing and procedure of Russia's ratification will depend upon the wording of a last-minute resolution adopted by the Senate, which said the New START treaty should not contain the U.S. anti-missile program's development.

Main Elements of NEW START

The State Duma could ratify the New START nuclear arms reduction pact with the United States by year end and possibly as early as Friday, leading Kremlin-allied lawmakers said Thursday.

The U.S. Senate voted 71-26 on Wednesday to approve the treaty. The pact must also be ratified by the Federation Council to enter into force.

Here are some key provisions of the treaty as well as background leading to the present treaty:

NEW START:

- Each side agrees to reduce its deployed nuclear warheads to no more than 1,550 within seven years. That is up to 30 percent lower than the 2002 Moscow Treaty and down nearly two-thirds from the 1991 START I treaty.
- Each agrees to limit its intercontinental ballistic missile launchers, submarine ballistic missile launchers and heavy bombers to no more than 800, whether deployed or not.
- Each side agrees to deploy no more than 700 intercontinental ballistic missiles, submarine ballistic missiles or heavy bombers.
- Most of the text of the treaty is devoted to technical issues to assist with verification and compliance, including:
 1. Establishing an agreed system for counting the nuclear arsenals of the two different forces to ensure that they are roughly equivalent.
 2. Agreeing on procedures for removing nuclear weapons from service and whether they may be converted to conventional use.
 3. Setting out where strategic weapons may be located, when and how they may be inspected and what technical information must be exchanged between the two sides to assist in verification.

COLD WAR START TREATY:

- The START Treaty, originally signed in July 1991 by U.S. President George H.W. Bush and Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev, led to the largest bilateral reductions of nuclear weapons in history.
- It was the result of nearly a decade of sporadic talks between the United States and the Soviet Union in the final years of the Cold War.
- It entered into force in 1994 and by Dec. 5, 2001, its limits had been met by both sides. It was due to expire on Dec. 5, 2009, but the United States and Russia decided to extend it while they searched for a new treaty. A START II Treaty, signed by Presidents Bush and Boris Yeltsin in 1993, never entered into force because of disputes between Washington and Moscow.
- U.S. President Barack Obama and President Dmitry Medvedev signed the new strategic arms agreement in April 2010 and it was sent to the U.S. Senate in May.

— Reuters

Unlike in Washington, both houses of the Russian parliament must ratify the treaty, although only by a simple majority. President Dmitry Medvedev on Thursday praised the U.S. Senate's approval of the deal and expressed hope that the State Duma and Federation Council would ratify it too.

"If the conditions stated in the resolution do not touch the core text of the treaty, then we can ratify it tomorrow," Duma Speaker Boris Gryzlov, who heads the majority United Russia

faction, told reporters Thursday.

The resolution he referred to was pushed through by the Republican John McCain, perhaps the most regular opponent of rapprochement with Russia in the U.S. political establishment. He voted against ratification.

Plans to build missile defense installations in Europe without Russia's participation — or without offering Moscow an adequate level of cooperation — remain the biggest potential irritants in the relations between Moscow and Washington.

New START, signed in April by Obama and Medvedev in Prague, sets lower caps on the numbers of nuclear warheads, both stored and deployed, in the countries' arsenals. It also establishes procedures for the exchange of information and verification.

The presidents agreed at the time that the treaty would be ratified by both sides "synchronously."

Kremlin press secretary Natalya Timakova told Interfax on Thursday evening that Obama would call Medvedev at 7 p.m. Moscow time to remind him that it was Moscow that "required a synchronized ratification of the document."

Several senior Russian officials, including the head of the Duma's Defense Committee, Viktor Zavarzin, said the "synchronous" ratification did not mean an immediate action following passage in the United States.

Konstantin Kosachyov, chairman of the Duma's Foreign Affairs Committee, said there were now three scenarios for ratification of the treaty in Russia.

"The first variant is to approve the presidential draft as it had been sent to the Duma and, technically, it can be done tomorrow," he said in televised remarks Thursday.

The second option would be for Medvedev to resubmit the treaty to the Duma along with the "additional positions," which would be considered by the lawmakers in a single reading, Kosachyov said.

The third scenario, he said, would be for the Duma to start deliberations and go through three readings, with lawmakers submitting their amendments.

A 4 p.m. meeting of the Duma's executive council, which was to decide on the ratification procedure, was postponed, however. As of Thursday evening, the Duma's leadership had not commented on when the body would convene.

Mikhail Margelov, chairman of the Federation Council's Foreign Affairs Committee, said his committee and colleagues on the Defense Committee would gather to consider the treaty Friday at noon to make a recommendation that Russian senators approve it.

The Federation Council will gather for the last time this year on Friday, and it was not immediately clear whether the full body would have time to vote on the measure.

Communists and the Liberal Democrats in the Duma said they would vote against ratification.

United Russia and A Just Russia — both of which are loyal to the Kremlin — have pledged their support. The parties control more 78 percent of the Duma's votes and also dominate the Federation Council.

The treaty will take effect after Obama and Medvedev exchange ratification missive letters, which Russian analysts say could happen in February or March.

Adopted by a vote of 71-26 in the U.S. Senate, the treaty is expected to further improve U.S.-Russian relations, including in trade, and help a general rapprochement between Russia and the West.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel and British Foreign Minister William Hague praised the U.S. ratification. U.S. Ambassador to Moscow John Beyrle wrote on his blog Thursday that surviving the contentious U.S. ratification process was "the best Christmas gift."

The American Chamber of Commerce in Russia said in a statement that the ratification cleared the way for the U.S. business community to advocate to Congress that it should abrogate the 1976 Jackson-Vanik amendment.

The Soviet-era trade restrictions have been a sore point in ties, and eliminating them would bolster the Obama administration strategy for securing Russia's accession to the World Trade Organization, the statement said.

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