

Duma Tackles New START

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State Duma deputies on Wednesday drafted a bill containing conditions for Russia to fulfill the New START nuclear arms pact with the United States that already has been ratified by the U.S. Senate.

Konstantin Kosachyov, head of the Duma's International Affairs Committee, said the Russian ratification bill would not affect the text of the New START treaty. But he said it should counterbalance a resolution that the U.S. Senate resolution passed when it ratified the treaty last month.

"It's not a mirror reflection of the Senate resolution, but it will balance the situation and return it to the format set by presidents of Russia and the United States," Kosachyov said of the Russian ratification bill.

New START would limit each country to 1,550 strategic warheads, down from the current ceiling of 2,200 and also re-establish a system for monitoring and verification that ended with the expiration of a previous arms control pact.

While the Senate resolution said the treaty shouldn't restrict U.S. plans to develop a missile

defense system, the Duma draft ratification bill said the treaty can only be fulfilled if emerging missile defenses don't erode the Russian nuclear deterrent.

The Russian draft bill also emulated the Senate resolution that mentioned increased funding for the U.S. nuclear arsenal by emphasizing the need to modernize Russia's nuclear forces.

The Duma gave a preliminary approval to the pact in the first of three readings on Dec. 24 and is set to have a second reading Friday. Kosachyov said the last one would be held on Jan. 25 after which the document will be sent to the Federation Council for the final approval.

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