The Moscow Times
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Gorbachev Expects Biden to Extend U.S.-Russia Arms Curbs

By AFP

January 11, 2021



Gorbachev said Russia and the United States should involve other countries in weapons control talks.
Sergei Bobylev / TASS

Former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev said on Monday he expected U.S. President-elect Joe Biden to extend a landmark arms agreement with Russia and urged the two sides deepen arms reductions.

The New START Treaty is the Cold War rivals' last remaining nuclear reduction pact and is set to expire Feb. 5.

The fate of the accord is hanging in the balance with tensions between Moscow and Washington at a fever pitch over hacking allegations and the threat of a new White House administration taking a tougher stance on Russia.

While Biden has signalled support for a five-year renewal of the treaty, the former Soviet

leader said in an interview that such a move would be "only the first step."

"We need to negotiate further reductions," Gorbachev told state-run news agency RIA Novosti.

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With the expiration date approaching, Moscow and Washington last year made last-ditch efforts to salvage an extension but failed to reach an agreement.

Biden's aides have said the incoming president intends to work quickly to prolong the 2010 accord that limits both sides to 1,550 nuclear warheads.

Negotiations stumbled over a U.S. demand that China becomes party to the agreement — Beijing having shown no interest in joining.

Gorbachev said Russia and the United States should involve other countries in weapons control talks, describing the aim as "very difficult."

But he said, "if the United States and Russia really take it on, then they and everyone else will win".

During US President Donald Trump's tenure, the United States withdrew from two major international accords — the Iran nuclear deal and the Open Skies treaty — and pulled out from a centrepiece arms control agreement with Russia, the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) treaty.

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