

# The Washington Post

## Senate ratifies new U.S.-Russia nuclear weapons treaty

By Mary Beth Sheridan and William Branigin  
Washington Post Staff Writers  
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The U.S. Senate on Wednesday approved a new nuclear arms-reduction treaty with Russia, the broadest such pact between the former Cold War foes in nearly two decades.

The Senate ratified the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, known as New START, by a vote of 71 to 26, easily clearing the threshold of two-thirds of senators present as required by the Constitution for treaty ratification.

The final vote came after Senate Democrats accepted two amendments designed to placate Republicans who had qualms about the treaty. The amendments, which passed on voice votes with bipartisan support, emphasized the administration's commitment to a limited missile-defense program and to continued funding to modernize the aging U.S. nuclear weapons complex.


The amendments were to the resolution of ratification accompanying the treaty, a nonbinding statement that codifies the Senate's understanding of the pact but does not directly affect its language. Republican efforts to alter the treaty language were defeated, with supporters of the pact arguing that such changes would have forced new negotiations with Moscow and effectively

killed the treaty.

Thirteen Republicans joined all of the Senate's Democrats in voting for ratification, helping to exceed the 67 votes required. Three senators - all Republicans - were not present.

In a floor speech shortly before the ratification vote, Sen. John F. Kerry (D-Mass.), the Foreign Relations Committee chairman who shepherded the treaty through the Senate, implored senators to put politics aside and take a broad view. "This is one of those rare times in the United States Senate . . . when we have it in our power to safeguard or endanger human life on this planet," he said. "More than any other, this issue should transcend politics. . . . More than at almost any other time, the people of the world are watching us because they rely on our leadership."

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Kerry also chided Republicans who had argued against taking up New START ratification so close to Christmas, thus delaying their departures for the holidays. "The question is not whether we get out of here for a holiday; the question is whether we move the world a little more out of the dark shadow of nuclear nightmare," he said.

Kerry said after the vote: "The winners are not defined by party or ideology. The winners are the American people, who are safer with fewer Russian missiles aimed at them." He said the treaty's impact "will echo around the world," showing that the United States remains determined to work with Russia and other countries to reduce the global threat from nuclear weapons.

"With this treaty, we send a message to Iran and North Korea that the international community remains united to restrain the nuclear ambitions of countries that operate outside the law," Kerry said.

New START cleared a key hurdle in the Senate on Tuesday, advancing to a final vote with a margin that appeared to guarantee ratification and a major foreign-policy victory for President Obama. Senators voted 67 to 28 to invoke "cloture" to limit further debate and move to the ratification vote, with 11 Republicans joining all 56 Democrats present in the chamber.

The stakes were high: Defeat of the pact would have severely damaged Obama's global standing, hampering his ability to negotiate other treaties, and would have dealt a major setback to the president's "reset" of relations with Russia.

"It's one of those things in life where failing to get it would be more important than actually what you get with it," said George Perkovich, a scholar on nuclear nonproliferation at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

Perkovich noted that Washington's NATO allies had strongly supported the pact. "We would really lose credibility" if it failed, he said Tuesday.

The treaty, if also ratified by Russia as expected, would replace the pact that was credited with ensuring stability between the

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countries that maintain 95 percent of the world's nuclear weapons. Since the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty I ended last year, the atomic giants have had no inspections of their strategic nuclear arsenals, a gap that worries the U.S. military.

The pact does not represent a dramatic step forward in disarmament, but it will reduce deployed, long-range nuclear warheads by up to 30 percent on each side. Republicans voiced concern that the treaty could be interpreted to limit development of a U.S. missile shield and had worked to extract additional commitments from the administration to fund the modernization of the aging U.S. nuclear arsenal.

Although the treaty easily reached the two-thirds threshold for Senate ratification, the vote marked the tightest margin to date for a nuclear arms-control pact with Russia. The top two Republican leaders in the Senate opposed passage of New START, demonstrating the difficulty for Obama to move further on his sweeping goal of a world without nuclear weapons. His embrace of that idea helped him win the Nobel Peace Prize.

Kerry had predicted Tuesday that the treaty would pick up at least three more votes on ratification, noting that three supporters were absent Tuesday - Democrats Evan Bayh (Ind.) and Ron Wyden (Ore.) and Republican

Judd Gregg (N.H.).

Wyden, who is recovering from prostate cancer surgery, showed up Wednesday and voted for ratification, as did Bayh and Gregg.

In a reference to the partisan wrangling that has erupted over the treaty, Kerry told reporters Tuesday: "I would say to you that in today's Washington, in today's Senate, 70 votes is yesterday's 95," the sort of support enjoyed by earlier arms-control efforts.

In a week of debate on New START, Republican critics expressed concern about several substantive issues. One was missile defense: Although the pact does not legally bar the U.S. government from proceeding with its plans for a missile shield, Republicans worried that a few brief mentions of missile defense in the pact could provide Russia with a political pretext to

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pressure Washington. The administration said it will not be constrained.

Some senators also said they were not happy with the verification procedures in the treaty.

But in the background was a power struggle: Republicans tried to push the vote into next year, when they will have six more senators and could extract more concessions from Obama.

In the weeks leading to the vote, Obama had committed to spend an extra \$14 billion to modernize the U.S. nuclear weapons complex over the next decade, the result of tough negotiations with Sen. Jon Kyl (Ariz.), the second-ranking Republican in the Senate. Kyl voted Tuesday against ending debate and voted no again Wednesday on ratification.

"From a Republican point of view, it's not about aborting START. It's about getting the best deal possible, and I just don't understand why we can't wait five more weeks," said Sen. Lindsey O. Graham (R-S.C.).

But the White House clearly feared it could face continual delays if the treaty returned to committee.

Vice President Biden and Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton traveled to the Senate for Tuesday's vote, huddling outside the chamber with Democratic leaders to

strategize and talking to other senators.

They, and Obama, had conducted an intensive lobbying effort in recent weeks after the treaty's passage became imperiled.

The 11 Republican senators who voted in favor of moving ahead with the treaty Tuesday were Richard G. Lugar (Ind.), Lamar Alexander (Tenn.), Robert F. Bennett (Utah), Scott Brown (Mass.), Thad Cochran (Miss.), Susan Collins (Maine), Bob Corker (Tenn.), Johnny Isakson (Ga.), Lisa Murkowski (Alaska), Olympia J. Snowe (Maine) and George V. Voinovich (Ohio).

All also voted in favor of ratification Wednesday, as did Gregg. In addition, Sen. Mike Johanns (R-Neb.) voted for the treaty, pushing the total yes votes to 71.

Three Republican senators were not present

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for Wednesday's vote: Sens. Christopher S. Bond (Mo.), Sam Brownback (Kan.) and Jim Bunning (Ky.). All were believed to oppose the treaty.

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New START sets a cap of 1,550 deployed, long-range nuclear warheads for each side. It trims the number of deployed nuclear-capable submarines, long-range missiles and heavy bombers to 700, with an additional 100 in reserve.

Pentagon officials said failure to ratify the pact would force the military to plan for worst-case scenarios, devoting more money and satellite coverage to Russia at a time when resources are stretched because of the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Obama has portrayed the pact as enhancing U.S. leadership globally in pressing countries not to acquire the bomb. In particular, U.S. diplomats say, it will show that Washington is complying with the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, the global pact that bars countries from developing nuclear weapons. In exchange, the original nuclear powers promised to gradually disarm.

Obama has made it a priority to strengthen the pact, which has been under strain.

*Staff writer Felicia Sonmez contributed to this report.*

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