

# WebMemo



Published by The Heritage Foundation

No. 3030  
September 28, 2010

## Senate Must Scrutinize Deeply Flawed New START Verification Measures

### *New START Working Group*

From the moment President Obama signed New START—the pending strategic nuclear arms control treaty with Russia—one thing has been clear: The treaty’s verification regime has serious shortcomings. These shortcomings have prompted the Administration to spruce up the appearance of the verification regime in order to convince the Senate to rush to consent to the ratification of New START. The Senate should not be fooled. The New START verification regime deserves careful scrutiny, and there is no need to rush the Senate consent process. The Senate needs to look beyond the façade of misinformation built up by proponents of New START.

Accordingly, it is appropriate for Senators to examine the specific claims coming from the Obama Administration regarding New START’s verification regime. These claims, when taken together, form a narrative that asserts that the U.S. faces a festering national security crisis sparked by the expiration of the original START treaty’s verification regime. Early ratification and entry into force of New START, with its verification regime, will resolve this crisis—or so goes this narrative.

Yet the Administration’s narrative is wrong on both fronts. The expiration of START’s verification regime does not represent a national security crisis, and New START’s verification regime will not do a great deal to foster greater Russian transparency regarding its strategic nuclear forces. The following is a list of the Obama Administration’s claims regarding the issue of verification along with an explanation of the truth.

**ADMINISTRATION CLAIM #1: There is an urgency to ratify this treaty because America currently lacks verification measures with Russia, which only hurts U.S. national security interests.<sup>1</sup>**

**EXPLANATION: By seeking a five-year extension of the START I treaty, the Administration could have avoided any lapse in the now defunct START verification regime.**

A simple extension, which would not have required Senate advice and consent, could have provided the breathing space necessary to negotiate and ratify the current agreement.

Obviously, the Obama Administration did not believe the expiration of START’s verification regime was overly important when it became apparent that it could not conclude the negotiations for New START before START expired in December. Further, the two sides, in a December 4, 2009, joint statement, expressed their commitment, as a matter of principle, to continue to work together in the spirit of the START treaty following its expiration. Is the Administration now suggesting that Russia might violate this spirit of cooperation while the Senate does its due diligence on New START?

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at:  
<http://report.heritage.org/wm3030>

Produced by the Douglas and Sarah Allison  
Center for Foreign Policy Studies

Published by The Heritage Foundation  
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Washington, DC 20002-4999  
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aid or hinder the passage of any bill before Congress.

Finally, the U.S. has 15 years of data on Russian strategic forces thanks to START, and the Russians are unlikely to significantly change their forces while the Senate takes its time.

**ADMINISTRATION CLAIM #2: Without New START's verification measures, the U.S. would have much less insight into Russian strategic forces and would require its military to plan on the basis of worst-case assumptions.**

**EXPLANATION: The U.S. does not rely on treaty-based verification measures alone for insight into Russian strategic forces.**

Instead, it employs a variety of reconnaissance for gaining insight into Russian strategic forces. Further, the Departments of Defense and State have stated that Russian cheating under the New START would have little effect on the strategic balance. If this is the case, why would the military base its planning on worst-case assumptions?

**ADMINISTRATION CLAIM #3: New START would result in more intensive on-site inspections.**

**EXPLANATION: Under New START there is no on-site monitoring of mobile missile production facilities.**

This procedure was deemed necessary under START to help keep track of new mobile missiles entering the Russian force. New START has fewer on-site inspections, and Russia may declare certain locations to be maintenance areas, which are not subject to warhead inspection. And so long as the Russians continue to deny inspectors the ability to confirm the true number of warheads on a missile, such inspections are of little value.

**ADMINISTRATION CLAIM #4: It is New START's verification regime and the flexibility and survivability of the U.S. strategic nuclear force that would deter Russian cheating under New START.**

**EXPLANATION: In reality, U.S. military leaders would, and should, rely more on flexible stra-**

**tegic nuclear and strategic defense postures to ensure U.S. security.**

The Obama Administration, however, seeks a U.S. strategic nuclear force that is less flexible, and it downplays the value of defenses by focusing on "second strike" nuclear options.

**ADMINISTRATION CLAIM # 5: New START's intrusive verification provisions would provide predictability in Russian strategic nuclear force deployments.**

**EXPLANATION: New START would provide little help in detecting illegal activity.**

New START's verification provisions would provide little or no help in detecting illegal activity at locations the Russians did not declare, are off-limits to U.S. inspectors, or are hidden from U.S. satellites. Inspectors would only inspect declared sites—and they would never find anything the Russians successfully hide from view. In a country as large as Russia, it is not inconceivable that huge numbers of missiles and warheads could be hidden.

**ADMINISTRATION CLAIM #6: The simplified verification regime in New START, compared to START, would create a more effective verification regime.**

**EXPLANATION: The simplified verification regime in New START would provide more options to Russia to hide its strategic nuclear force development and deployment activities.**

These options include encrypting telemetry, hiding the pace of mobile missile construction, and deploying more long-range missiles with multiple warheads. Further, gimmicks such as placing "unique identifiers" on delivery vehicles would not make up for the deficiencies in the broader verification regime.

**ADMINISTRATION CLAIM #7: New START's verification regime permits more effective direct accounting for the number of warheads in the Russian strategic nuclear arsenal.**

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1. New START Working Group, "New START: Potemkin Village Verification," Heritage Foundation *Backgrounder* No. 2428, June 24, 2010, at <http://www.heritage.org/Research/Reports/2010/06/New-START-Potemkin-Village-Verification>.

**EXPLANATION: It is far certain that Russia would not exceed New START's central limit of 1,550 warheads.**

Depending on their modernization capacity, it is possible the Russians could far exceed this central limit by the end of the 10-year life of the treaty, and some of the individual warheads could remain undetected.

**Serving the National Interest.** The Senate should pay attention to concerns about New START's verification regime raised by two of its Members who are especially experienced in matters pertaining to national security and arms control. Both Senators Kit Bond (R–MO) and John McCain (R–AZ) have expressed these concerns in the course examinations of the treaty by the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence and the Senate Armed Services Committee, respectively. In the end, the Obama Administration's claim that New START's

verification regime is better than no verification regime sets a ridiculously low standard.

The Senate's central role in the treaty-making process is to ensure that high standards are observed for any treaty that comes before it. In doing so, the Senate ensures that the treaty in question serves the national interest—especially when it relates to the defense of the American people.

—*The New START Working Group has been established by The Heritage Foundation to educate the Senate and the American people on the content of New START and its implications for the national security of the United States. The Working Group will include analysts from The Heritage Foundation and other organizations. The Working Group's papers will in some cases be authored by an individual participant. In other cases, as in this WebMemo, the Working Group itself will be the author of record.*