

Time for Kerry to Face Facts

As America's top diplomat heads to Moscow, here are some tough questions he needs to answer about the Obama administration's flawed nuclear treaty.

BY ROBERT JOSEPH, ERIC EDELMAN | MAY 6, 2013, ForeignPolicy.com



On the third anniversary of the signing of New START, the Obama administration's strategic arms agreement with Russia, Secretary of State John Kerry published the administration's best case for the success of the treaty, titled "**Time to Face Facts**." In it, he urges us to "relentlessly" follow the facts about the treaty. We agree, but by doing so, we are led to very different conclusions from his about the treaty's purported accomplishments. And with Kerry in Moscow this week, reportedly to discuss, among other issues, following up on National Security Advisor Tom Donilon's discussions with Russian officials about pursuing additional reductions in nuclear force, the stakes couldn't be higher.

Let's begin with the basic purpose of strategic arms reductions agreements: to reduce the nuclear arsenals of the parties and strengthen U.S. national security. While praising the treaty as working "exactly as advertised," Kerry fails to mention anything about actual cuts in nuclear forces, in stark contrast with his comments prior to ratification, when, as chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, he repeatedly emphasized White House talking points that the agreement would reduce the maximum number of strategically deployed U.S. and Russian nuclear forces by one-third. Those of us who testified that this was simply false -- because of the bomber-counting rule and the fact that the treaty would require cuts in U.S. forces only -- were either ignored or derided.

Our assessments of the treaty as unilateral disarmament in the guise of a two-party agreement were summarily rejected.

So what are the facts? In the initial New START data exchange, Moscow announced that it was already well below the new limits on deployed delivery vehicles set by the treaty. This should have come as no surprise. The Russian defense minister at the time, Anatoly Serdyukov, had earlier **told the Duma**, "We will not have to make any cuts to our strategic offensive weapons" because Russia's strategic nuclear weapons were already under the treaty limits for both warheads and launchers. Contradicting statements by Kerry and Obama, Serdyukov **announced** that Russia intended to build up to the treaty limits.

In other words, New START provided Moscow an incentive to go *up*, not down, in strategic nuclear arms. As for the United States, New START will reduce the number of deployed delivery vehicles by about one-fourth. Given these facts, it is perhaps understandable why the new secretary of state chose to say nothing about nuclear reductions, which was, after all, the treaty's ostensible objective. The one-sided nature of the actual reductions certainly looks more like unilateral disarmament than mutual, bilateral reductions.

While ignoring the facts on nuclear reductions, Kerry praises the treaty on two grounds. First, he declares that, because U.S. and Russian inspection teams have conducted multiple on-site visits, the "verification regime works." This assertion -- that "boots back on the ground" equals effective verification -- was a principal argument of treaty supporters.

But again, the facts belie the conclusion. Because the treaty eviscerates telemetry exchanges and ends the on-the-ground monitoring of Russia's missile production facility, the United States is no longer able to argue credibly what Kerry asserts -- that New START strengthens mutual confidence and predictability.

Second, Kerry lauds New START for setting a positive example that will elicit greater cooperation from others, increase pressure on states like Iran and North Korea to abandon

their nuclear ambitions, and strengthen the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty regime. Unfortunately, the facts tell a different story. Since the ratification of New START, Pyongyang and Tehran have continued to advance their nuclear and missile programs. The recent talks with Iran are widely viewed as a failure, and North Korea's threats of nuclear strikes on its neighbors and the United States speak for themselves. And finally, the much-hyped reset in U.S.-Russia relations as a consequence of New START has totally failed to produce more constructive Russian policies on Iran (the 2010 U.N. sanctions notwithstanding) and Syria, and it has done nothing to modify Russian military doctrine, which still envisions the United States and its NATO allies as the principal threat to its interests.

Finally, Kerry reminds us that Obama intends to pursue further reductions in nuclear weapons, "strategic and nonstrategic, deployed and non-deployed." But this fact should concern those who believe in a strong and secure America able to deter and defend against attacks on the U.S. homeland and on the country's friends and allies. For this administration, ideology trumps reality. No other country has adopted the U.S. policy of "no new nuclear capabilities" or unilateral disarmament. Russia, China, India, Pakistan, North Korea, and others are not following the U.S. example; all are modernizing and expanding their forces. The governments in London and Paris have restated their commitment to ensuring a modern deterrent in light of the uncertain, dangerous world in which we live. The Obama administration stands alone, leading from the front, but with no followers and in the wrong direction.

Although another agreement with Russia is possible, such an agreement would likely be even worse than New START and would have an even more detrimental effect on the U.S. ability to provide for extended deterrence and effective missile defenses. Here, the administration's willingness to pay a high price through concessions on missile defenses to Russia and China is clear, and ironies abound. It is the facts in Northeast Asia that presumably drove Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel's decision to deploy 14 additional interceptors in Alaska (a capability Kerry has long derided but now touts to America's Asian allies). Hagel, however, also revealed the decision to end the Aegis SM-3 IIB program that was to constitute Phase 4 of U.S. plans for missile defenses in Europe. This

concession, referred to as a "**significant signal**" by former Undersecretary of State Ellen Tauscher, was meant to entice Russia to the negotiating table -- a gift for which the administration received nothing in return. Moscow's predictable reaction was to demand more, just as it did when Obama canceled missile defense sites in Poland and the Czech Republic in September 2009, again with nothing in return.

When Kerry says it's time to face facts, he is right. We hope he will take his own advice.

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