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Postscript on New START

The Senate was misinformed about the nuclear treaty.

In December of 2010, the Senate offered its advice and consent for the New START treaty. The debate over New START had been contentious, and the treaty finally passed the Senate with more votes against it than any other nuclear treaty the Senate has approved. The Russian Duma (parliament) is now in the process of approving the treaty (there has never been any serious doubt that it would). With New START essentially in hand, arms-control proponents in Washington already are gearing up with numerous exciting seminars and conferences to promote their next goals. The Obama administration also has begun to discuss publicly its future arms-control agenda, which includes further reductions in nuclear weapons and consultations with Russia regarding the U.S. missile-defense program.

Before moving on to the next step in the arms-control agenda, however, it is instructive to review the contentious debate that surrounded New START in the United States. This is a propitious time to do so because in the course of the Russian Duma's ongoing ratification process, Russian officials have made public statements confirming the validity of some American skeptics' concerns. The Obama administration may have been keen to secure Senate consent prior to the Duma's ratification process in part out of fear of statements like these, and the Russians may have been careful to have the Duma consider the treaty only after Senate passage for the same reason.

Early in the American New START debate, several skeptics pointed to articles in Russian military journals indicating that New START's ceilings on strategic nuclear forces would require few if any reductions by Russia; New START appeared to compel reductions only by the United States. For example, on June 24, 2009 — even prior to the president's signing of New START — I noted in open testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Committee that the number of Russian strategic nuclear forces appeared to be dropping dramatically in the absence of any agreement. This was happening because Russian forces were reaching the end of their service lives en masse — and in this context, Russia surely would like to negotiate an agreement that would compel reductions only in U.S. forces. Approximately a year later, with the details of New START publicly available, I noted in testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee that my previous concern had been realized: The treaty indeed appeared to necessitate reductions only by the United States. Russia appeared to have negotiated ceilings on strategic nuclear

launchers that were above its current stock (which would shrink further still even without New START). Russia would actually have room to build up its forces under New START.

How did the administration respond to the skeptics' concern that New START would not require real Russian force reductions? It almost always simply ignored or denied the point. When asked by Sen. Roland Burris if there was "any truth" to this concern during June 17, 2010, testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said that New START would require "reductions on the Russian side," and that claims to the contrary were a "perfect example" of how "analysts who just don't believe in arms-control treaties at all from my perspective are very unfortunately slanting a lot of what they say." When Sen. Kit Bond, the vice-chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, observed in a November 18 speech on the floor of the Senate that the treaty "forces the United States to reduce unilaterally" while "the Russians will actually be allowed to increase their forces," the U.S. State Department responded with "A Rebuttal to Sen. Kit Bond's November 18, 2010 Floor Speech" that flatly denied Senator Bond's claim.

Now — after the U.S. Senate has approved New START — senior Russian officials have confirmed the fears of U.S. skeptics. An *Interfax-AVN* article entitled "Russia's Current Number of Nuclear Arms Well Within START Limits" reports that in a speech to the Duma about New START, Russian Minister of Defense Anatoly Serdyukov said that Russia will not eliminate any nuclear launcher or warhead before the end of its service life: "We will not cut a single unit." The article reports that Serdyukov explained to the Duma that "Russia today has fewer nuclear warheads and delivery systems than the quantity set by the new Russian-American treaty" and that "by all the parameters, even launchers, we will only achieve the level that's in the treaty by 2028. As for nuclear weapons, we will get there by 2018." The Duma presumably appreciated the news.

Lest it be suggested that the Russian Defense Minister "misspoke," respected Russian defense journalist Alexander Golts reported the day prior to Serdyukov's speech that the number of Russian strategic nuclear launchers will be well below New START's ceiling of 700 deployed launchers "from the very beginning#...#and will decrease even further to roughly 390" launchers by 2017. The Russian Communist Party faction in the Duma has insisted that Russia maintain strategic nuclear launchers and warheads at numbers no lower than *10 percent below* the treaty's ceilings, according to *Interfax* — meaning that New START's nuclear-warhead and launcher ceilings are higher than the levels to which even the militant Russian Communist Party aspires.

This point — that Russian forces already are below New START’s ceilings and the treaty effectively mandates unilateral U.S. reductions — was made openly and with obvious glee by some Russian commentators months prior to the U.S. Senate’s consideration of the treaty. But the Obama administration typically presented the treaty as requiring Russian reductions, and senior Russian officials remained mum until after the Senate had acted. Now, senior Russian officials appear to have acknowledged publicly that U.S. critics — whom the Obama administration had accused of “slanting” information — were correct.

Even with a full understanding of the treaty’s ramifications, the Senate may well have passed New START. But, on this question, like Rick who went to Casablanca for the waters, the Senate appears to have been misinformed.

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