



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on December 21, 2010

## START's Ratification Appears Imminent

The new START Treaty appears to be on its way to ratification as pressure to move forward on the treaty has increased.

According to the AFP, President Obama, Vice President Joe Biden, and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton have targeted wary lawmakers to encourage support of the treaty. Meanwhile, a vote to end debate on the treaty is expected to take place today or tomorrow.

The AFP writes, "The White House and its Democratic allies expressed confidence they would rally the 60 votes needed to end debate and the two-thirds majority needed to give the treaty [final approval](#) — 67 if all 100 senators vote."



White House spokesman Robert Gibbs announced, "The White House believes that before the Congress leaves town the Senate will ratify the new START Treaty."

Secretary Clinton has reportedly been in contact with 17 Republican Senators and conservative Democrat Joe Manchin of West Virginia to gain support for the treaty.

Staunch critics of START include Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, Senator Lindsey Graham of South Carolina, and Senator Jon Kyl of Arizona. At issue for opponents is language found in the preamble that is believed to inhibit missile defense capabilities, as it links missile defense and strategic offensive weapons for the first time. Also at issue is the fact that the treaty represents unilateral disarmament for the United States because Russia is below the number of "strategic" missiles called for under the treaty and the fact that Russia has a vast numerical superiority of "tactical" nuclear weapons, which will be unaffected by the treaty.

The support of nine Republicans is necessary in order to ratify the treaty, though it appears that 10 Republicans will vote in its favor. Senator Scott Brown of Massachusetts was the ninth Republican to announce publicly his intent to vote in favor of ratification. Senator Johnny Isakson of Georgia became the 10th.

Other Republicans have remained on the fence, including Arizona Senator John McCain. McCain sponsored a failed amendment to the preamble that would have sent the treaty back for further negotiations. McCain has announced that he is undecided on the treaty, particularly as his colleague Jon Kyl and close ally Lindsey Graham have both denounced it.

Republican Senator Bob Corker has voiced overwhelming support of the treaty and has encouraged his Republican colleagues to "look at our military leaders that support this," while citing "a-to-z" backing at the Pentagon.

In a letter addressed to lawmakers, Admiral Mike Mullen wrote, "This treaty has the full support of your uniformed military, and we all support ratification," ignoring the fact that 30 leading generals,



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diplomats, and national security experts have signed an [open letter](#) calling for rejection of the treaty and outlining its dangers.

He adds, "I continue to believe that ratification of the New START Treaty is vital to U.S. national security."

Senate Democrats have successfully defeated three Republican-sponsored amendments that would have sent the treaty back to the negotiating table, but Republicans continue to seek amendments that would assuage concerns about the treaty's potential impact on U.S. missile defense plans.

Opponents accuse the Democrats of rushing the agreement through the lame-duck session simply to tout a year-end victory.

Senator McConnell states, "No senator should be forced to make decisions like this so we can tick off another item on someone's political checklist before the end of the year."

The Russian Parliament plans to ratify the treaty only after the U.S. Senate has voted. However, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has expressly stated that the treaty "cannot be reopened," asserting that any changes will kill it.

The START Treaty will restrict both the United States and Russia to a maximum of 1,550 deployed warheads, a decrease of nearly 40 percent from the 2002 limit. It also permits U.S. inspectors to return to monitor Russia's arsenal, but it gives U.S. inspectors access to only some vital areas, not all, meaning that Russia can spurn the treaty at will — as it has so often done in the past.

According to Mullen, START "allows us to retain a strong and flexible American nuclear deterrent that will allow us to maintain stability at lower levels of deployed nuclear forces."

All 58 members of the Democratic caucus lean strongly in favor of ratification, including two independents, Senators Bernie Sanders of Vermont and Joe Lieberman of Connecticut.

*Russian President Dmitry Medvedev in front of a mobile intercontinental ballistic missile: AP Images*



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