

Witness Quotes from Senate Foreign Relations Committee Hearings on the New START Treaty

Following are testimony excerpts from current and former administration officials, including:

Current administration officials

Robert Gates, Secretary of Defense

Admiral Michael Mullen, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

General Kevin Chilton, USAF, Commander, United States Strategic Command

Lieutenant General Patrick J. O'Reilly, USA, Director, Missile Defense Agency

Former administration officials

Brent Scowcroft, National Security Advisor to Presidents Ford and George H.W. Bush

Henry Kissinger, National Security Advisor and Secretary of State to Presidents Nixon and Ford

James Baker, Secretary of State to President George H.W. Bush

James Schlesinger, Secretary of Defense to Presidents Nixon and Ford

Stephen Hadley, National Security Advisor to President George W. Bush

On the New START Treaty:

Gates: “This treaty reduces the strategic nuclear forces of our two nations in a manner that strengthens the strategic stability of our relationship and protects the security of the American people and our allies.”

Gates: “I first began working on strategic arms control with the Russians in 1970, 40 years ago, a U.S. effort that led to the first strategic arms limitation agreement with Moscow two years later. The key question then and in the decades since has always been the same: Is the United States better off with a strategic arms agreement with the Russians or without it? The answer for successive presidents of both parties has always been with an agreement. The U.S. Senate has always agreed, approving each treaty by lopsided bipartisan margins. The same answer holds true for New START. The U.S. is better off with this treaty than without it, and I am confident that it is the right agreement for today and for the future. It increases stability and predictability, allows us to sustain a strong nuclear triad, and preserves our flexibility to deploy the nuclear and non-nuclear capabilities needed for effective deterrence and defense. In light of all these factors, I urge the Senate to give its advice and consent to ratification of the new treaty.”

Mullen: “The chiefs and I believe a New START treaty achieves important and necessary balance between three critical aims. It allows us to retain a strong and flexible American nuclear deterrent. It helps strengthen openness and transparency in our relationship with Russia. It also demonstrates our national commitment to reducing the worldwide risk of nuclear incidents resulting from the continuing proliferation of nuclear weapons.”

Schlesinger: “I think that it is obligatory for the United States to ratify. And any treaty is going to have limitations, questionable areas. There are some in this treaty. We need to watch them for the future, but that does not mean that the treaty should be rejected.”

Kissinger: “In deciding on ratification, the concerns need to be measured against the consequences of non-ratification, particularly interrupting a [bilateral arms control] process that has been going on for decades, the relationship to the NPT, and to the attempt to achieve a strategic coherence. And so, for all these reasons, I recommend ratification of this treaty....”

Baker: “Although I am not an expert on the nuances of the proposed new treaty, Mr. Chairman, it appears to take our country in a direction that can enhance our national security, while at the same time reducing the number of nuclear warheads on the planet. It can also improve Washington's relationship with Moscow regarding nuclear weapons and delivery vehicles—a relationship that is going to be vital if the two countries are going to cooperate in order to stem nuclear proliferation in countries such as Iran and North Korea.”

Scowcroft: “I believe this treaty will achieve the purposes for which it's intended, and I support its ratification. ... I think the principal result of non-ratification would be to throw the whole nuclear negotiating situation into a state of chaos.”

Hadley: “I would urge the committee to deal with some of the questions that have been raised. I think they can be addressed, and when they are, I think the treaty should be ratified. And it'll make a modest but useful contribution in this overall process.”

Chilton: “I was fully consulted during the treaty negotiation process and I support ratification of New START. ... [O]ur nation will be safer and more secure with this treaty than without it.”

Chilton: “[I]f we don't get this treaty, (A) [the Russians] are not constrained in their development of force structure; and (B) we have no insight into what they're doing. So it's the worst of both possible worlds.”

On U.S.-Russian Relations:

Kissinger: “I want to emphasize the point that both the Chairman and the ranking member have made: the importance of a continuing dialogue with a country that together with us possesses 95 percent of the world's nuclear weapons on the measures to deal with these weapons. Without such a dialogue, the world would be rudderless in front of its greatest dangers.”

Hadley: “I think you do need to see this treaty in context of really a 20-year effort spanning Republican and Democratic administrations.... And quite frankly, it's an indication of one more thing where Russia and the United States have found it in their common interest to work together cooperatively, and that's an important contribution to the overall environment between Russia and U.S. relations.”

On Non-Proliferation:

Baker: “If we have a good arms control agreement with Russia that is being observed by both countries, that will help us in my opinion in this U.N. Security Council deal with the problem of Iran. And that is extraordinarily important.”

Schlesinger: “[F]or the United States at this juncture to fail to ratify the treaty in the due course of the Senate's deliberation would have a detrimental effect on our ability to influence others with regard to particularly the nonproliferation issue.”

On U.S. missile defense plans:

Gates: “[T]he treaty will not constrain United States from deploying the most effective missile defenses possible nor impose additional costs or barriers on those defenses.... As the administration's ballistic missile defense review and budget plans make clear, the United States will continue to improve our capability to defend ourselves, our deployed forces, and our allies and partners against ballistic missile threats.”

Mullen: “I see no restrictions in this treaty in terms of our development of missile defense.”

Scowcroft: “I would say that on both sides, [the discussion about missile defense] is an issue of domestic politics. And the treaty is amply clear. It does not restrict us.”

Kissinger: “Concerns have been raised with respect to missile defense and with respect to [nuclear] modernization. I agree with the Chairman. I do not believe this treaty is an obstacle to a missile defense program or modernization. Those are decisions that the United States can and should take as part of its own strategic design.”

Baker: “There is, in fact, no restriction on the United States of America's ability to move forward on missile defense in whatever way it wants, except one. That is, we cannot use our current platforms, offensive weapons platforms, for missile defense interceptors. That's the only restriction.”

Schlesinger: “I think that the reality is that there is nothing in the treaty [regarding missile defense] that is problematic.”

Chairman John Kerry: “So in your judgment, will this treaty prevent the MDA from pursuing any aspect of the phased adaptive approach to missile defense in Europe that the administration has outlined?”

O’Reilly: “No, sir, it will not prevent or affect in any way our plans.”

O’Reilly: “Throughout the treaty negotiations, I frequently consulted with the New START team on all potential impacts to missile defense. The New START does not constrain our plans to execute the missile defense program.”

Chilton: “As the combatant command also responsible for synchronizing global missile defense plans, operations and advocacy, this treaty does not constrain any current missile defense plans.”

O’Reilly: “Although Article V of the New START prohibits the conversion of ICBM or submarine-launched ballistic missile launchers to missile defense launchers while grandfathering five former ICBM silos already converted for launching ground-based interceptors, MDA has never had a plan to convert additional ICBM silos. ... [F]rom a technical basis, and being responsible for the development of our missile defenses, I would say that either one of those approaches of replacing ICBMs with ground-based interceptors or adapting the submarine-launched ballistic missiles to be an interceptor, would actually be a setback—a major setback—to the development of our missile defenses.”

On Verification:

Chilton: “Senator, [if New START is not ratified] we would have no verification regime because there is none under the Moscow Treaty. And of course, START I has expired. And so I think that's a significant point—that we would lose any transparency or a right to inspect the Russian force structure, and I think that's important that we have that visibility into their forces.”