

U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
Chairman John F. Kerry
Opening Statement
May 19, 2010

Chairman Kerry Opening Statement At Hearing: “The History and Lessons of START”

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman John Kerry (D-MA) today delivered the following opening statement at a hearing titled, “The History and Lessons of START” with former Secretary of State James Baker.

The full text of his statement as prepared for delivery is below:

This afternoon, we are pleased to welcome one of our nation’s leading statesmen. James Baker was a top adviser to three presidents over the course of two decades, including serving as the 67th Secretary of the Treasury and the 61st Secretary of State.

Most significantly for our purposes today, as President George H.W. Bush’s chief diplomat he negotiated and concluded the original START agreement. In fact, some of us have been around here long enough to remember his visit to this Committee to present that treaty in June 1992. All of us are fortunate to have Secretary Baker here to put today’s treaty in the context of decades of arms control efforts, and to explain how they advanced American interests and diplomacy during the Cold War and after.

When President Bush and President Gorbachev signed the original START Treaty in July 1991, it was a remarkable moment. It was the first time that America and Russia agreed to reduce the number of strategic nuclear weapons they deployed.

But less than six months later—before the treaty was even ratified—the Soviet Union fell apart, ending the Cold War and leaving us in a transformed world. Some suggested that START became irrelevant when our enemy of many decades disappeared. But Secretary Baker argued that the treaty remained important because it strengthened strategic stability between nations that still possessed thousands of nuclear weapons and still didn’t fully trust each other. As he testified, that stability rested on “the predictability that START mandates through its openness and transparency provisions.”

The fact is that because America and Russia were no longer engaged in an arms race, they could begin to work together. At an uncertain moment, arms control was a familiar mechanism through which to extend habits of cooperation as our two countries wrestled with contentious issues like the reunification of Germany. As Secretary Baker testified, START was a “gateway” to a “new era of cooperation.”

As much as times have changed, there are parallels with today.

Like its predecessor, New START will significantly reduce the number of nuclear weapons that the United States and Russia can deploy, and it will revitalize our relations with Moscow.

When Secretary of Defense Gates testified before this committee yesterday about the benefits of New START, he cited many of the same advantages that Secretary Baker had enumerated two decades earlier: transparency, predictability, and strategic stability. Then, as now, verification remains vital.

Unfortunately, the verification measures that Secretary Baker negotiated expired on December 5th of last year. Since then, day by day we have been losing crucial visibility into the Russian nuclear program. This new treaty will restore that visibility, and in some ways enhance it. As Admiral Mullen said yesterday, the United States should ratify this agreement “as soon as possible because we are in our sixth month without a treaty.”

But the confidence this new treaty builds extends far beyond the verification measures it puts in place. It presents an opportunity to expand U.S.-Russian cooperation on a range of issues, including Iran. In fact, as we learned from Secretary Clinton yesterday, Russia and the United States have agreed on a draft UN resolution sanctioning Iran for its nuclear activities.

Further, as Secretary Baker can testify, the original START treaty was a powerful demonstration of how bilateral arms control can strengthen our global effort to halt the spread of nuclear weapons. Today, New START is winning us new credibility and leverage at this month’s conference on the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Our progress on U.S.-Russian arms control has helped ensure that Iran cannot distract the world with charges of nuclear hypocrisy.

Yesterday, some of my colleagues raised questions about the New START Treaty. In response, Secretary Gates and Admiral Mullen made absolutely clear that it does nothing to inhibit our missile defense plans. They affirmed that its verification procedures are excellent—and far better than what we have with no treaty. And they assured us that the \$80 billion the administration has committed to our nuclear weapons infrastructure will maintain the safety and effectiveness of our stockpile.

Today is the third in a series of hearings on the treaty, and we will continue to give it the thorough review it warrants. I am confident that at the end of that process we will be able to reach a strong bipartisan consensus on advice and consent to ratifying New START, just as we did on the original START Treaty, which the Senate approved by a vote of 93 to 6, and the Moscow Treaty, which was approved 95 to 0.

We’re pleased to welcome Secretary Baker back to this Committee. We value his advice and insights, and we look forward to hearing from him today.

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