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New START treaty to be signed on April 8 - Presidents

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President Dmitry Medvedev and US President Barack Obama have agreed upon the final details of the new START treaty aimed at cutting stockpiles of nuclear warheads. The treaty will be signed in Prague on April 8.

The sides will reduce their nuclear arsenals by 25 per cent, leaving 700 strategic warheads to each. The number of deployed nuclear charges will be cut to 1,550.

Also, there will be a legally binding provision concerning the link between offensive and defensive strategic weapons, according to Russia's Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov. All strategic weapons will be based strictly on the territory of the two countries. A bilateral body will be set up to oversee the implementation of the treaty.

"The new treaty includes specific provisions concerning notifying each other, verification procedures and confidence-building measures. The verification mechanism will be simpler and less expensive compared with the old treaty. It will be fully based on parity," Lavrov told a news conference in Moscow.

[Watch Foreign Minister Lavrov's news conference](#)

"I want to thank President Medvedev for his personal and sustained leadership as we worked through this agreement. We've had the opportunity to meet many times over the last year. We both agreed that we can serve the interests of people through close co-operation," said President Obama at a media briefing just after telephone talks with President Medvedev.

President Medvedev said the document "reflects the balance of interests of both sides," according to his press secretary Natalya Timakova.

"The talks have not been easy, but constructive approach of both sides has allowed us to do a huge job in quite a short period of time," Timakova quoted President Medvedev as saying.

She also informed journalists that in Prague the two leaders will also hold negotiations on a number of issues of international importance.

The announcement of the new treaty has been praised by leading politicians beyond Russia and the US.

NATO Secretary General, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, said the agreement makes the world safer, and will boost security ties with Russia.

European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso described it as a positive signal for Europe's non-proliferation efforts.

And British Foreign Secretary David Milliband called the move "historic" and stated that the UK is ready to join the nuclear disarmament process.

Nikolay Makarov, Chief of the General Staff of the Russian Forces, said *"the text of the new treaty has been fully coordinated."* *"The sides agreed on the acceptable level of strategic nuclear forces. The declared targets will be achieved in seven years. The agreement will alleviate mutual concerns and fully meet national security interests of Russia."*

The START Treaty represents a major step forward in the "reset" of Russian-American relations that has been underway since Obama came to office.

But in terms of nuclear disarmament, the agreement is true to its name – a new beginning as part of a long process.

"Unless the Russians and the Americans are seen to be making progress in reducing their own weapons, they can't logically expect the other people to take on new obligation," said Ambassador Robert Grey from the Global Security Institute.

"We demonstrate that we can reduce these weapons, we plan to reduce these



Nikolay Makarov

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Russia has no choice but seek response to US AMD

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weapons and therefore that gives us together a stronger hand with other countries," acknowledged initial START treaty negotiator, Ambassador Thomas Graham.

[Watch Robert Grey and Thomas Graham in RT's Washington studio](#)

Nikolay Petro, professor at the University of Rhode Island, said both sides did not get exactly what they wanted. Still he greeted the treaty as a major achievement for Obama.

"This would be his first major international victory – something not quite on a par with the domestic achievement of the healthcare accord. It certainly shows that he has cards to play and can be successful in international negotiations," Petro told RT.

[Watch the full interview with Nikolay Petro](#)

Adrian Pabst, political analyst from the University of Kent, says the treaty is important for both countries:

"I don't think there's an overall winner in the sense of either the US or Russia. I think this is a victory for the foreign policy strategy for both presidents. This does cement the reset in Russia-US ties."

As for the ratification of the document in both countries, Pabst believes President Obama may face opposition from the Republicans.

[Watch the full interview with Adrian Pabst](#)

Apart from being beneficial for Russia and the US, cooperation between the countries could influence security in other parts of the world, John Laughland from the Institute of Democracy and Cooperation told RT.

"Both sides do benefit," he said. "Barack Obama made it clear in his statement, which he read out today, he said that when Russia and America cooperate that it is good for prosperity and security of the whole world."

Laughland added that US-Russia bilateral relations have visibly improved since Obama took the office.

"George Bush for eight years adopted a very hostile foreign policy towards Russia. And in all the key areas, America has now abandoned that hostility and I am glad to say that Moscow has now responded in kind."

[Watch the full video with John Laughland](#)

Paul Ingram from the British American Security Information Council thinks the two countries should also co-operate in other fields in order to make the world more secure.

"The treaty makes the world a safer place. It is just a question of how much. Iran and North Korea remain a problem both for Russia and US and if they can come closer together in trying to tackle those two countries and the general problem of proliferation then they will have much greater chance of success," he told RT.

[Watch the full interview with Paul Ingram](#)



However, Jeremy Corbyn, British Labour MP, says it is not yet clear whether the new agreement signals that the US has agreed to end its plans for missile defense.

"There is some curious wording in it. It says 'national missile defense must be confined to national territories,'" says Corbyn. "Well, the US territory is clearly a very long way away...and so one wonders then

what the NATO component in this is, and the placement of the missile shield facilities in Poland and the UK."

[Watch the full interview with Jeremy Corbyn](#)

Former Italian Member of the European Parliament Giulietto Chiesa told RT that despite the agreement being reached, the key issue of US missile defense systems in Europe still remains unresolved.

"The treaty is certainly important but the biggest question is the new arms system that the United States will deploy in Europe," he said. "This is a very serious issue for Russia and I believe that it is absolutely clear that discussing the main question has been postponed."

[Watch the full interview with Giulietto Chiesa](#)

Vladimir Kotlyar, head of the Center for Security Issues, says that the big concern in



Blasts hit Moscow Metro



New strategy for strategic weapons

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Obama and Medvedev START talking

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Russia demands "action, not words" over NATO, US anti-missile system

Moscow is about the linkage between the limits on strategic nuclear arms and ABM systems: "We insisted on a legally binding link between the two – now we hear that there will be a link but it will be reflected in the preamble".

The expert also added: "I'm not sure what will happen if the ABM defense system is built in the US or by the US in Europe, which might endanger the strategic stability, strategic balance between our states."

[Watch the full interview with Vladimir Kotlyar](#)

Political analyst Dmitry Babich says the treaty will remove a great financial burden from Russia's economy:

"Both Russia and the US are interested in cutting the number of warheads. And Russia is even more – because it costs a lot of money to maintain the nuclear capability that we have now. Russia is more short of money than the US," Babich told RT.

[Watch the full interview with Dmitry Babich](#)

Many experts have noted the limitations of the new treaty, saying that it is too soon to hail it as a reset in relations. But Ivan Timofeev, from the Moscow State University of International Relations, warns of downplaying the importance of this step.

"The differences in positions regarding other dimensions of our mutual relations will remain," says Timofeev. "But this is normal, because we are partners and partners should have differences."

[Watch the full interview with Ivan Timofeev](#)

According to Irina Kobrinskaya, a leading analyst from the Institute of World Economy and International Relations in Moscow, both Russia and the US share strong interests in continuing cooperation.

"Russia needs this cooperation for modernization, for innovation of the country, for a prosperous future," she said. "The United States really needs Russia in the security field. They need Russia in Afghanistan, they need Russia to solve the North Korea problem, the Iranian problem, the Middle East problems and that is why it seems to me that this progress will continue."

[Watch full video with Irina Kobrinskaya](#)

Mikhail Troitsky from the Moscow-based MacArthur Foundation, which campaigns for global security, says despite the fact that the specific wording of the treaty still remains to be seen, it has allowed both sides to argue that their expectations and their concerns have been addressed.

"As we know, both sides have their own anxieties about other side's conduct with regard to strategic arms reductions," Troitsky told RT. "For Russia, clearly, a reason to consider walking out of this treaty would be an unlimited development of US strategic missile defenses, which, I think for the US is already not an option."

[Watch full interview with Mikhail Troitsky](#)

Journalist and former politician Brent Budowsky believes that a generation that remembers the fears of the Cold War will enjoy watching the two countries building mutual trust.



"It's about building a working relationship on big issues," Budowski told RT. "So when we go to the other big issues – WTL, strategic defense initiative etc – they have their basis of trust. And I think when President Medvedev and President Obama meet... the world will see two young, dynamic leaders trying to make the world a better place together, and they are sitting on the same side of that table."

[Watch full video with Brent Budowski](#)

Hammering out the deal

The wait for the new START treaty has been a long time coming. Despite missing last year's December 5th deadline, work on the follow-up to the expired treaty has been intense for both Russia and the US.

The START I treaty, signed in 1991, substantially reduced strategic nuclear weapons deployed by the US and Soviet Union.

But getting down to details of the new accord and making sure they satisfy and protect both sides' interests has not been easy for either party, particularly in relation to the missile defense issue.

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Over the last decade the Bush Administration's missile defense plans in Eastern Europe were a major hurdle halting negotiations. Russia saw the Bush-era plans to deploy missiles just kilometers from its border as a direct threat to its national security.



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