



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on December 20, 2010

START Treaty Debate Contentious

As the Senate continues to debate passage of the START Treaty, the future of the nuclear arms pact with Russia is all but certain. Republican opposition to the treaty has been adamant, but the Democrats vow to see to its passage.

Fox News reports, "Democratic senators will continue to try to win over reluctant Republicans to the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, START, but may find several unwilling to budge on ratification because of language in the preamble that Republicans say will inhibit U.S. authority to develop its missile defense capabilities."



The treaty negotiated between President Obama and Russian President Dmitri Medvedev links missile defense and strategic offensive weapons for the first time, a point of contention for the treaty's opponents.

On Sunday, the Senate rejected a Republican-sponsored amendment on the treaty addressing the issue that would have sent it back to the negotiating table with Russia.

The amendment, sponsored by Senator Jim Risch of Idaho, reportedly "changed the preamble to include language on tactical weapons and the 'inter-relationship between non-strategic and strategic offensive arms.'"

It failed by a vote of 32-60.

The Senate resumed debates on the treaty today, but is expected to move into a closed session on the treaty shortly.

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid says he hopes the Senate will vote on START before the holiday break, but guarantees a vote before the 112th Congress convenes.

Democrats had hoped to see a vote as early as Tuesday, but Republicans have stated they will not vote in favor of the treaty until the Russians express an understanding that the United States will not link its missile defense to the strategic offensive weapons that would be taken out of the arsenal.

On CBS' *Face the Nation*, Republican Senator Lindsey Graham of South Carolina remarked, "You want to create chaos in the world, sign a treaty where everybody thinks the world is safer and down the road then withdraw because we intend to do something they don't want us to do. I need to know the answer to that. Our military leaders are not in line with asking to give me the Russian view, I want the Russians to tell me their view of our ability to build a strategic missile defense and we can wait [until] next year."

Senator John Kerry, chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, contends that Republican concerns are unfounded:

There is no legal binding statement whatsoever. There's a sort-of statement that for political purposes was necessary to achieve what we achieved. The important thing is the Russians wanted



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to have a binding statement precluding us from having a missile defense. There is nothing in there that restricts our missile defense system.

Senate Minority leader Mitch McConnell has indicated that he will not vote in favor of ratification, and that other Republicans are still in the process of making a decision.

McConnell explains, "Members are uneasy about it, don't feel thoroughly familiar with it, and I think we would have been a lot better off to take our time. Rushing it right before Christmas strikes me as trying to jam us ... I think that was not the best way to get the support of people like me."

According to Senator Jon Kyl of Arizona, a staunch opponent to the treaty, former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice is also concerned by the preamble's language. Likewise, he is not comfortable with President Obama's pledge to construct a missile defense system in Europe.

Kyl's opposition to the treaty surprised the White House, which worked feverishly to win him over. Once Democrats recognized the futility in campaigning for Kyl's support, President Obama reportedly worked the phones this weekend to garner support elsewhere.

The support of nine Senate Republicans is needed in order for the treaty to pass. Currently, four have indicated their support, two others seem likely to vote in its favor, and seven others indicate their support if key issues are addressed, notes the *New York Times*.

One Republican in support of the treaty is Senator Dick Lugar of Indiana, member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Lugar claims that several Republicans support the treaty and that the necessary votes are there.

"The problem is getting to that final vote," notes Lugar.

Senator Jim Risch continues to assert that the treaty should be renegotiated. "Let's tell the negotiators, go back to the table and at least agree that the interrelationship between strategic and tactical weapons is a really, really important issue and we're not just going to go on like we have over the last 40 years."

Kerry contends that any change to the treaty forces it back on the table, something to which Kerry believes the Russians would not react well.

Meanwhile, Republicans were warned that no more amendments would be permitted on the treaty. The warning followed a failed vote on an amendment proposed by Senator John McCain of Arizona.

"Well what are we going through this exercise then for?" Kyl asked.

The *New York Times* attributes much of the partisanship surrounding the treaty to residual anger over the legislative repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell":

With some prominent Republicans angry over passage of legislation ending the ban on gay men and lesbians serving openly in the military, the mood in the Senate turned increasingly divisive and Mr. Obama and Democratic lawmakers scrambled to hold together a coalition to approve the treaty.

There may be some truth to that. According to the *Times*, Senator Graham "cited the sour mood engendered by Democrats forcing votes on other topics in recent days," including DADT.

"If you really want to have a chance of passing Start, you better start over and do it in the next Congress because this lame duck has been poisoned," Graham told *Face the Nation*.

Vice President Joe Biden claims that there are enough votes in the Senate to ratify the treaty, but as



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time ticks by, attitudes toward the treaty continue to evolve.

It's worth noting that a major nuclear arms control treaty has never been approved during a lame-duck session, or without the support of the Senate Minority leader.

Photo: Senate Minority Whip Sen. Jon Kyl of Arizona gestures on Capitol Hill on Dec. 15, 2010, to discuss the ratification of the New Start Treaty:

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