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Barack Obama

START Treaty Signing Joint Presser with President Medvedev

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President Obama: Good afternoon, everyone. I am honored to be back here in the Czech Republic with President Medvedev and our Czech hosts to mark this historic completion of the New START treaty.

Let me begin by saying how happy I am to be back in the beautiful city of Prague. The Czech Republic, of course, is a close friend and ally of the United States, and I have great admiration and affection for the Czech people. Their bonds with the American people are deep and enduring, and Czechs have made great contributions to the United States over many decades -- including in my hometown of Chicago. I want to thank the President and all those involved in helping to host this extraordinary event.

I want to thank my friend and partner, Dmitry Medvedev. Without his personal efforts and strong leadership, we would not be here today. We've met and spoken by phone many times throughout the negotiations of this treaty, and as a consequence we've developed a very effective working relationship built on candor, cooperation, and mutual respect.

One year ago this week, I came here to Prague and gave a speech outlining America's comprehensive commitment to stopping the spread of nuclear weapons and seeking the ultimate goal of a world without them. I said then -- and I will repeat now -- that this is a long-term goal, one that may not even be achieved in my lifetime. But I believed then -- as I do now -- that the pursuit of that goal will move us further beyond the Cold War, strengthen the global non-proliferation regime, and make the United States, and the world, safer and more secure. One of the steps that I called for last year was the realization of this treaty, so it's very gratifying to be back in Prague today.



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I also came to office committed to “resetting” relations between the United States and Russia, and I know that President Medvedev shared that commitment. As he said at our first meeting in London, our relationship had started to drift, making it difficult to cooperate on issues of common interest to our people. And when the United States and Russia are not able to work together on big issues, it’s not good for either of our nations, nor is it good for the world.

Together, we’ve stopped that drift, and proven the benefits of cooperation. Today is an important milestone for nuclear security and non-proliferation, and for U.S.-Russia relations. It fulfills our common objective to negotiate a new Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty. It includes significant reductions in the nuclear weapons that we will deploy. It cuts our delivery vehicles by roughly half. It includes a comprehensive verification regime, which allows us to further build trust. It enables both sides the flexibility to protect our security, as well as America’s unwavering commitment to the security of our European allies. And I look forward to working with the United States Senate to achieve ratification for this important treaty later this year.

Finally, this day demonstrates the determination of the United States and Russia -- the two nations that hold over 90 percent of the world’s nuclear weapons -- to pursue responsible global leadership. Together, we are keeping our commitments under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, which must be the foundation for global non-proliferation.

While the New START treaty is an important first step forward, it is just one step on a longer journey. As I said last year in Prague, this treaty will set the stage for further cuts. And going forward, we hope to pursue discussions with Russia on reducing both our strategic and tactical weapons, including non-deployed weapons.

President Medvedev and I have also agreed to expand our discussions on missile defense. This will include regular exchanges of information about our threat assessments, as well as the completion of a joint assessment of emerging ballistic missiles. And as these assessments are completed, I look forward to launching a serious dialogue about Russian-American cooperation on missile defense.

But nuclear weapons are not simply an issue for the United States and Russia -- they threaten the common security of all nations. A nuclear weapon in the hands of a terrorist is a danger to people everywhere -- from Moscow to New York; from the cities of Europe to South Asia. So next week, 47 nations will come together in Washington to discuss concrete steps that can be taken to secure all vulnerable nuclear materials around the world in four years.

And the spread of nuclear weapons to more states is also an unacceptable risk to global security -- raising the specter of arms races from the Middle East to East Asia. Earlier this week, the United States formally changed our policy to make it clear that those [non]-nuclear weapons states that are in compliance with the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and their non-proliferation obligations will not be threatened by America’s nuclear arsenal. This demonstrates, once more, America’s commitment to the NPT as a cornerstone of our security strategy. Those nations that follow the rules will find greater security and opportunity. Those nations that refuse to meet their obligations will be isolated, and denied the opportunity that comes with international recognition.



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That includes accountability for those that break the rules -- otherwise the NPT is just words on a page. That's why the United States and Russia are part of a coalition of nations insisting that the Islamic Republic of Iran face consequences, because they have continually failed to meet their obligations. We are working together at the United Nations Security Council to pass strong sanctions on Iran. And we will not tolerate actions that flout the NPT, risk an arms race in a vital region, and threaten the credibility of the international community and our collective security.

While these issues are a top priority, they are only one part of the U.S.-Russia relationship. Today, I again expressed my deepest condolences for the terrible loss of Russian life in recent terrorist attacks, and we will remain steadfast partners in combating violent extremism. We also discussed the potential to expand our cooperation on behalf of economic growth, trade and investment, as well as technological innovation, and I look forward to discussing these issues further when President Medvedev visits the United States later this year, because there is much we can do on behalf of our security and prosperity if we continue to work together.

When one surveys the many challenges that we face around the world, it's easy to grow complacent, or to abandon the notion that progress can be shared. But I want to repeat what I said last year in Prague: When nations and peoples allow themselves to be defined by their differences, the gulf between them widens. When we fail to pursue peace, then it stays forever beyond our grasp.

This majestic city of Prague is in many ways a monument to human progress. And this ceremony is a testament to the truth that old adversaries can forge new partnerships. I could not help but be struck the other day by the words of Arkady Brish, who helped build the Soviet Union's first atom bomb. At the age of 92, having lived to see the horrors of a World War and the divisions of a Cold War, he said, "We hope humanity will reach the moment when there is no need for nuclear weapons, when there is peace and calm in the world."

It's easy to dismiss those voices. But doing so risks repeating the horrors of the past, while ignoring the history of human progress. The pursuit of peace and calm and cooperation among nations is the work of both leaders and peoples in the 21st century. For we must be as persistent and passionate in our pursuit of progress as any who would stand in our way.

Once again, President Medvedev, thank you for your extraordinary leadership.

[Address by Medvedev - deleted text and audio]

President Obama: ...from missiles launched from third countries. We recognize, however, that Russia has a significant interest in this issue, and what we've committed to doing is to engaging in a significant discussion not only bilaterally but also having discussions with our European allies and others about a framework in which we can potentially cooperate on issues of missile defense in a way that preserves U.S. national security interests, preserves Russia's national security interests, and allows us to guard against a rogue missile from any source.



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So I'm actually optimistic that having completed this treaty, which signals our strong commitment to a reduction in overall nuclear weapons, and that I believe is going to strengthen the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty regime, that sends a signal around the world that the United States and Russia are prepared to once again take leadership in moving in the direction of reducing reliance on nuclear weapons and preventing the spread of nuclear weapons, as well as nuclear materials, that we will have built the kind of trust not only between Presidents but also between governments and between peoples that allows us to move forward in a constructive way.

I've repeatedly said that we will not do anything that endangers or limits my ability as Commander-in-Chief to protect the American people. And we think that missile defense can be an important component of that. But we also want to make clear that the approach that we've taken in no way is intended to change the strategic balance between the United States and Russia. And I'm actually confident that, moving forward, as we have these discussions, it will be part of a broader set of discussions about, for example, how we can take tactical nuclear weapons out of theater, the possibilities of us making more significant cuts not only in deployed but also non-deployed missiles. There are a whole range of issues that I think that we can make significant progress on. I'm confident that this is an important first step in that direction.

[President Medvedev's Response - deleted text and audio]

Reporter's Question [in Russian and translated to English]: I have two questions. To each of the Presidents, one. The first is to Mr. Obama. Moscow and Washington, not for the first time, agree on a reduction of strategic offensive arms, but as you have mentioned, Russia and the United States are not the only countries having nuclear weapons. So how specifically can the documents achieved -- well, similar to today's document on limitation on nuclear arms -- how soon we will see others sign this document? And will you move along this track together with Russia? And to the President of the Russian Federation, you have mentioned the fact that sometimes there's an impression that Moscow and Washington are unable to agree on anything else but a mutual reduction of arms. So will we see any things that will counter such a statement? And what will the agreement be?

President Obama: First of all, as I mentioned in my opening remarks, the United States and Russia account for 90 percent of the world's nuclear weapons. And given this legacy of the Cold War, it is critical for us to show significant leadership. That, I think, is what we've begun to do with this follow-on START treaty.

Other countries are going to have to be making a series of decisions about how they approach the issue of their nuclear weapons stockpiles. And as I've repeatedly said, and I'm sure Dmitry feels the same way with respect to his country, we are going to preserve our nuclear deterrent so long as other countries have nuclear weapons, and we are going to make sure that that stockpile is safe and secure and effective.

But I do believe that as we look out into the 21st century, that more and more countries will come to recognize that the most important factors in providing security and peace to their citizens will depend on their economic growth, will depend on the capacity of the international community to resolve conflicts; it will depend on having a strong conventional military that can protect our nations' borders; and that nuclear weapons increasingly in an interdependent world will make less and less sense as the cornerstone of security policy.



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But that's going to take some time, and I think each country is going to have to make its own determinations. The key is for the United States and Russia to show leadership on this front because we are so far ahead of every nation with respect to possession of nuclear weapons.

The primary concerns that we identified in a recent Nuclear Posture Review, essentially a declaratory statement of U.S. policy with respect to nuclear weapons, said that our biggest concerns right now are actually the issues of nuclear terrorism and nuclear proliferation -- more countries obtaining nuclear weapons; those weapons being less controllable, less secure; nuclear materials floating around the globe. And that's going to be a major topic of the discussion that we have in Washington on Monday.

The United States and Russia have a history already, a decade-long history, of locking down loose nuclear materials. I believe that our ability to move forward already on sanctions with respect to North Korea, the intense discussions that we're having with respect to Iran, will increasingly send a signal to countries that are not abiding by their Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty obligations, that they will be isolated. All those things will go toward sending a general message that we need to move in a new direction. And I think leadership on that front is important.

Last point I'll make, I will just anticipate or coach the question about other areas of cooperation. Our respective foreign ministers -- Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Foreign Minister Lavrov -- have been heading a bilateral commission that has been working intensively on a whole range of issue. And President Medvedev and myself identified a series of key areas on the economic front, in trade relations, the potential for joint cooperation on various industries, how we can work on innovation and sparking economic growth. We've already worked together closely in the G20; I think we can build on that bilaterally.

There are issues of counterterrorism that are absolutely critical to both of us, and I just want to repeat how horrified all of America was at the recent attacks in Moscow. We recognize that that's a problem that can happen anywhere at any time, and it's important for Russia and the United States to work closely on those issues.

And then there are people-to-people contacts and figuring out how we can make sure that there's more interaction and exchange between our two countries on a whole range of issues within civil society.

So I'm very optimistic that we're going to continue to make progress on all of these fronts. But I think we should take pride in this particular accomplishment because it speaks not only to the security of our two nations but also the security of the world as a whole.

[President Medvedev's response - deleted text and audio]

Reporter's Question: Thank you, President Medvedev and President Obama. For President Obama first, could you elaborate on how the yearlong negotiations over the New START treaty have advanced U.S. cooperation with Russia on Iran, and give us a sense of when you will pursue, move forward in the United Nations and next week with sanctions discussions, and what those sanctions might look like? And for President Medvedev, could you address whether Russia could accept sanctions against Iran specifically dealing with its energy industry and energy sector? Thank you.



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President Obama: Discussions about sanctions on Iran have been moving forward over the last several weeks. In fact, they've been moving forward over the last several months. We're going to start seeing some ramped-up negotiations taking place in New York in the coming weeks. And my expectation is that we are going to be able to secure strong, tough sanctions on Iran this spring.

Now, I think there are two ways in which these START negotiations have advanced or at least influenced Russia-U.S. discussions around Iran. The first is obviously that President Medvedev and I have been able to build up a level of trust and our teams have been able to work together in such a way that we can be frank, we can be clear, and that helped to facilitate, then, our ability, for example, to work together jointly to present to Iran reasonable options that would allow it to clearly distance itself from nuclear weapons and pursue a path of peaceful nuclear energy.

That wasn't just an approach that was taken by the United States and Russia, but it was an approach taken by the P5-plus-1 as well as the International Atomic Energy Agency, the IAEA.

So what we've seen from the start is that a host of countries, but -- led by countries like the United States and Russia, have said to Iran, we are willing to work through diplomatic channels to resolve this issue. And unfortunately, Iran has consistently rebuffed our approach. And I think that Russia has been a very strong partner in saying that it has no interest in bringing down Iranian society or the Iranian government, but it does have an interest, as we all do, in making sure that each country is following its international obligations.

The second way in which I think the START treaty has influenced our discussions about Iran is it's sent a strong signal that the United States and Iran -- or the United States and Russia are following our own obligations under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, and that our interest in Iran or North Korea or any other country following the NPT is not based on singling out any one country, but rather sends a strong signal that all of us have an obligation, each country has an obligation to follow the rules of the road internationally to ensure a more secure future for our children and our grandchildren.

And so I think the fact that we are signing this treaty, the fact that we are willing, as the two leading nuclear powers, to continually work on reducing our own arsenals, I think should indicate the fact that we are willing to be bound by our obligations, and we're not asking any other countries to do anything different, but simply to follow the rules of the road that have been set forth and have helped to maintain at least a lack of the use of nuclear weapons over the last several decades, despite, obviously, the Cold War.

And the concern that I have in particular, a concern that I think is the most profound security threat to the United States, is that with further proliferation of nuclear weapons, with states obtaining nuclear weapons and potentially using them to blackmail other countries or potentially not securing them effectively or passing them on to terrorist organizations, that we could find ourselves in a world in which not only state actors but also potentially non-state actors are in possession of nuclear weapons, and even if they don't use them, would then be in a position to terrorize the world community.

That's why this issue is so important, and that's why we are going to be pushing very hard to make sure that both smart and strong sanctions end up being in place soon to send a signal to Iran and other countries that this is an issue that the international community takes seriously.



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[President Medvedev's Response - deleted text and audio]

[Reporter's Question - deleted text and audio]

[President Medvedev's Response - deleted text and audio]

President Obama: The United States Senate has the obligation of reviewing any treaty and, ultimately, ratifying it. Fortunately there is a strong history of bipartisanship when it comes to the evaluation of international treaties, particularly arms control treaties.

And so I have already engaged in consultation with the chairmen of the relevant committees in the United States Senate. We are going to broaden that consultation now that this treaty has been signed. My understanding is, is that both in Russia and the United States, it's going to be posed on the Internet, appropriate to a 21st century treaty. And so people not only within government but also the general public will be able to review, in an open and transparent fashion, what it is that we've agreed to.

I think what they will discover is that this is a well-crafted treaty that meets the interests of both countries; that meets the interests of the world in the United States and Russia reducing its nuclear arsenals and setting the stage for potentially further reductions in the future.

And so I'm actually quite confident that Democrats and Republicans in the United States Senate, having reviewed this, will see that the United States has preserved its core national security interests, that it is maintaining a safe and secure and effective nuclear deterrent, but that we are beginning to once again move forward, leaving the Cold War behind, to address new challenges in new ways. And I think the START treaty represents an important first step in that direction, and I feel confident that we are going to be able to get it ratified.

All right? Thank you very much, everybody.

President Medvedev: Thank you, sir. Next time.