

OPEN SKIES TREATY FULFILLS ARMS CONTROL NEEDS

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Washington — It may seem unusual to describe formalized treaties among nations as vital instruments in a toolbox. But in the somewhat arcane arena of arms control and nonproliferation, where the nuanced phrase and carefully chosen technical term is critical, the toolbox analogy is significant.

During three days of talks in Vienna, senior negotiators from 34 nations that stretch from Vancouver in the west to Vladivostok in the east met to assess implementation of the 10-year-old Open Skies Treaty — a step that is taken every five years. The treaty permits nations to conduct unarmed aerial observation flights over the territories of the treaty's members, with notification, as a practical means of verifying compliance with arms control and nonproliferation agreements.

Verification of treaty compliance is among the toughest challenges facing nations after a treaty enters into force. The Open Skies Treaty was designed to enhance understanding and confidence by giving all participants, regardless of their size, a direct role in gathering and sharing information.

Openness in matters of national security does not come easily, especially in a world where weapons of mass destruction are a factor and proliferation a constant threat.

Assistant Secretary of State Rose Gottemoeller said June 9, at the close of the second review conference of the Open Skies Treaty, that it has become one of the most successful and valuable efforts to promote arms control openness. The United States served as chair of the review conference that was held June 7–9.

[Gottemoeller told delegates](#), “The United States believes that it is essential for the Open Skies Treaty to remain a vital instrument in our Euro-Atlantic conventional arms control toolbox.”

Gottemoeller is the State Department's assistant secretary for verification, compliance and implementation, and she and Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Celeste Wallander served as co-chairwomen of the Open Skies review conference.

The consensus among members of the treaty coming out of the conference is for robust implementation, and the United States said it wants to consult with others in charting a new course for the treaty.

“The results of continued observation flights will contribute toward our security and stability as a group of nations,” Gottemoeller told delegates.

The timing of the treaty's review conference was not lost on delegates, as it relates directly to events occurring in Europe, but also in the Middle East and in Northeast Asia, where the spread of nuclear weapons technology has become a central security issue.

Wallander [told delegates in earlier remarks](#) that the 34-nation treaty group is trying to evaluate the effectiveness of the treaty and support European security in an evolving political, economic and military environment.

"This is reflected in the reset in U.S.-Russian relations, the New START [arms reduction] Treaty [between the United States and Russia], discussions about a new NATO Strategic Concept, and our collective efforts to respond to a new global security environment that focuses largely on transnational threats rather than conflict among states," Wallander said.

Issues that will form the focus of further study include:

- Moving away from old film cameras to new digital sensors in all treaty categories.
- Updating the Open Skies fleet of aircraft used in aerial observation.
- Developing options for more shared observation flights by all members.
- Expanding membership of the treaty within the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe.
- Determining if the imagery and other sensor data collected serve evolving security needs.

Gottemoeller told the delegates that the United States wants to work with treaty members on a five-year transition plan for the next review conference.

Wallander said the Open Skies Treaty faces two significant issues that have to be addressed now and in the next few years: an austere fiscal environment and the emerging digital era. The challenges intersect, she said.

All nations are facing more austere fiscal environments, and one means for sharing costs and reducing operating costs is through an international pool of aircraft and sensors, she said. The second challenge involves modernizing to an era that no longer relies on photographs that have to be developed in dark rooms, instead using imagery that can be taken by digital cameras and transmitted around the world in seconds.

"Apart from the up-front investment with upgrading to digital sensors, making that change will also require us to think through new implementation mechanisms and the costs associated with them," Wallander said.

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