DEFENSE TREATY INSPECTION READINESS PROGRAM · READINESS THROUGH AWARENESS

BI-WEEKLY TREATY REVIEW

15 December – 28 December 2009

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CHEMICAL WEAPONS CONVENTION (CWC)

Russia Meets Obligations for Chemical Weapons Decommissioning

RIA Novosti, 17 December 2009, accessed via Lexis Nexis

Russia remains on schedule in fulfilling its commitments under the chemical weapons convention, and has met the end-of-year deadline for reducing its stockpiles by 45 percent from the 1990s level, a government official said. *(280 words)* ***Click here for full text.***

Army Can't Speed Up Chem Demil Project

The Pueblo Chieftain (Colorado), 18 December 2009, accessed via Lexis Nexis

Defense Department officials say that delays over the last few years have set back the program so far that no amount of money is going to speed things up beyond the current goal. *(531 words)* ***Click here for full text.***

Defense Appropriations Bill Will Help Keep Pueblo Chemical Weapons Destruction on Track

U.S. Fed News, 21 December 2009, accessed via Lexis Nexis

$154.4 million for weapons destruction at Pueblo Chemical Depot has been included in the Department of Defense Appropriations Conference Report, which passed the Senate today by a vote of 88 to 10. *(426 words)* ***Click here for full text.***

PBCDF Surpasses 50 Percent Completion of Final Disposal Campaign

U.S. Army Chemical Materials Agency, 23 December 2009, ***http://www.cma.army.mil/***

The Pine Bluff Chemical Agent Disposal Facility (PBCDF) successfully surpassed the 50 percent completion mark for processing the mustard agent-filled ton containers, the final disposal campaign of the Arsenal's chemical weapons stockpile, December 23, 2009. *(346 words)* ***Click here for full text.***

COMPREHENSIVE NUCLEAR TEST-BAN TREATY (CTBT)

CTBTO Executive Secretary Tibor Toth Welcomes the Report of the International Commission on Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament

CTBTO, 15 December 2009, ***http://www.ctbto.org/***

The report of the International Commission on nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament was presented in Tokyo, Japan, earlier today… *(373 words)* ***Click here for full text.***

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CONVENTION ON CLUSTER MUNITIONS

New Zealand, Belgium Ratify UN Cluster Bomb Ban Convention

RIA Novosti, 23 December 2009, accessed via Lexis Nexis

New Zealand and Belgium ratified on Wednesday a UN convention banning the production and use of cluster bombs, bringing it closer to becoming international law. *(240 words)* ***Click here for full text.***

INTEGRATED SAFEGUARDS

Distrust Mires Effort to Develop International Nuclear Forensics Database

Global Security Newswire, 24 December 2009, http://gsn.nti.org/

The international community faces a number of challenges in developing nuclear forensics capabilities, possibly chief among them nations' reluctance to share samples in a database that proponents hope could be used to deter nuclear terrorism. *(989 words)* ***Click here for full text.***

STRATEGIC ARMS REDUCTION TREATY (START)

Russia Says Destroyed 9 ICBMs in 2009 under START Arms Pact

RIA Novosti, 16 December 2009, http://en.rian.ru/

Russia has destroyed nine intercontinental ballistic missiles this year under a Russian-U.S. strategic arms reduction treaty (START 1), the Strategic Missile Forces (SMF) chief said on Wednesday. *(246 words)* ***Click here for full text.***

Russian-U.S. Talks on New Strategic Arms Cuts to Resume in January

Interfax-AVN Online, 23 December 2009, accessed via Open Source Center

The U.S. delegation at the negotiations on a new strategic arms reduction treaty with Russia has returned to Washington for Christmas holidays, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Philip Crowley said. *(218 words)* ***Click here for full text.***

New Russian-U.S. Arms Treaty Expected Soon—Foreign Minister

RIA Novosti, 25 December 2009, http://en.rian.ru/

A new U.S.-Russian strategic arms reduction treaty should be signed in the very near future, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said on Friday. *(155 words)* ***Click here for full text.***

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STRATEGIC ARMS REDUCTION TREATY (START) (CONT.)

New START Treaty "Practically Ready": Russian FM

Xinhua, 27 December 2009, http://www.chinaview.cn

A new strategic arms reduction treaty expected to be signed between Moscow and Washington was "practically ready," said Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov on Saturday.

(188 words) *Click here for full text.*

FULL TEXT OF WEEKLY ARTICLES FOLLOWS:

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Russia Meets Obligations for Chemical Weapons Decommissioning

RIA Novosti, 17 December 2009, accessed via Lexis Nexis

Russia remains on schedule in fulfilling its commitments under the chemical weapons convention, and has met the end-of-year deadline for reducing its stockpiles by 45 percent from the 1990s level, a government official said.

"In line with Russia's federal program for destroying chemical weapons, in spite of all the difficulties in implementing this program, Russia will have fulfilled its obligations under the third stage of the Chemical Weapons Convention as of December 31, 2009," Deputy Russian economics minister Oleg Savelyev said.

In November the Russian Foreign Ministry reported that Russia had reached this year's target of 45 percent ahead of schedule.

The ministry said Russia is committed to destroying its entire declared arsenal "within the timeframe established by the Convention."

Russia signed the Chemical Weapons Convention banning the development, production, stockpiling, transfer, and use of chemical arms in 1993, and ratified it in 1997. The country aims to destroy its entire arsenal by 2012.

Russia destroyed 1 percent of its chemical weapon stockpiles in 2003 and had destroyed 20 percent as of 2007.

The country has allocated $7.18 billion from the federal budget for the implementation of the program, and has so far built five chemical weapon destruction plants—in Gorny (Saratov Region), Kambarka (Republic of Udmurtia), Nizhny Novgorod, the Maradykovo complex (Kirov Region), and Siberia's Kurgan Region. Another two are under construction.

Western nations pledged at the 2002 Kananaskis G8 summit to help Russia financially and technologically to destroy or convert its chemical weapons and production facilities as part of the Global Partnership against the Proliferation of Weapons and Materials of Mass Destruction.

The United States has contributed over $1 billion for the construction of the Shchuchye facility in the south Urals.

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Army Can't Speed Up Chem Demil Project

The Pueblo Chieftain (Colorado), 18 December 2009, accessed via Lexis Nexis

If Congress can come up with the money to accelerate the destruction of chemical weapons to meet its own deadline of 2017, why can't it bankroll an effort to meet the deadline set in an international treaty and get the job done by 2012?

Defense Department officials say that delays over the last few years have set back the program so far that no amount of money is going to speed things up beyond the current goal.

A spokesperson for the Assembled Chemical Weapons Program, whose plants at the Pueblo Chemical Depot and Blue Grass Army Depot will be the last to close, said this week, "2012 is not achievable for Pueblo and Blue Grass under any circumstances or funding profile. That is, there is no amount of funding that would enable all of the activities to be conducted (i.e., plants built, tested and operated) to destroy the stockpiles by 2012."

The Chemical Weapons Convention, the international treaty signed by the United States, Russia and other nations, set a deadline of 2007 but the commission overseeing the pact extended that to 2012. However, in 2006, then Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld said the United States wouldn't be finished until 2023.

That delay was due in part to stalled work at Pueblo and Blue Grass.

While all the other destruction programs were being operated by the Army's Chemical Materials Agency, those two were placed under ACWA, a separate Defense Department agency, after community pressure and Congressional action ordered that an environmentally friendly water neutralization method rather than incineration, like the Army wanted. …

[I]n 2007, Congress mandated a 2017 deadline with a pledge to provide the funding needed to achieve it.

Pueblo probably will meet that now with its stockpile of mustard agent weapons, although the nerve agent weapons at Blue Grass pose some greater challenges.

The Congressional delegations appear satisfied with that. U.S. Senator Mark Udall, D-Colorado, said Tuesday, "It's my understanding that it is not technically or legally possible to destroy these weapons by 2012. I know how important it is to the people of Pueblo to have these weapons cleaned up safely and efficiently.

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"So I've worked hard to expedite this program. At the insistence of Congress, the Department of Defense finally committed to providing the funding to get this done much earlier than we thought possible by 2017. "I will continue to work to ensure that DoD meets this deadline."

Deirdre Murphy, spokeswoman for Senator Michael Bennet, D-Colorado, added, "An official Department of Defense report found there are 'no options to achieve 100 percent destruction of the national stockpile by the 2012 deadline.'

"Southern Coloradans have waited a long time to see weapons destruction at the Chemical Depot completed and Michael will continue to fight to ensure that this project has the funding needed to meet the 2017 completion deadline."

A spokesman for U.S. Representative John Salazar, D-Colorado, said, "Even before he came to Congress the 2012 deadline was looking unlikely."

As a result, since Salazar has been there he's fought to increase the budget for the depot every year to get the program back on track and get the weapons destroyed as quickly as possible, the spokesman said.

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Defense Appropriations Bill Will Help Keep Pueblo Chemical Weapons Destruction on Track

U.S. Fed News, 21 December 2009, accessed via Lexis Nexis

Today, U.S. Senators Mark Udall and Michael Bennet and Congressman John Salazar announced that the $154.4 million for weapons destruction at Pueblo Chemical Depot has been included in the Department of Defense Appropriations Conference Report, which passed the Senate today by a vote of 88 to 10.

The funding for fiscal year 2010 will help the federal government stay on track to destroy the chemical weapons stored there by the congressionally mandated date of 2017. The Defense funding is in addition to $92.5 million for construction at Pueblo Chemical Depot, which was approved by the Senate earlier this month as part of the Omnibus Appropriations Act of 2009.

"This funding, combined with the funding we approved in the military construction appropriations bill, is a great first step to finally beginning the process of destroying the weapons stored at Pueblo Chemical Depot," said Senator Udall, a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, who previously served on the House Armed Services Committee. "After years of pushing hard, we're finally on track to keep faith with the people of Pueblo, and I'm going to keep fighting to ensure Congress keeps its commitment and keeps the money flowing in the years to come."

"2017 is a long ways away, but for folks in Pueblo, it couldn't come soon enough," said Bennet. "We're headed in the right direction, but we need to make sure we stay on course. We need to ensure the federal government makes good on its promise and gets these weapons destroyed on-site and on-time."

The Pueblo Chemical Depot holds 2,611 tons of liquid mustard agent. The Chemical Weapons Convention, ratified by Congress in 1997, requires these munitions to be destroyed by 2012. But because of schedule delays, management problems, and funding shortfalls for the ACWA program, the DoD has acknowledged that the U.S. will not meet the Chemical Weapons Convention treaty deadline.

This year, the Administration announced it was committed to speeding up the schedule for weapons destruction and clean-up at Pueblo Chemical Depot. And this year's funding for Pueblo Chemical Depot is part of a $550 million request by the Pentagon to pay for the Assembled Chemical Weapons Alternatives (ACWA) program, which manages chemical weapons destruction at the Pueblo Chemical Depot and the Blue Grass Army Depot in

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Kentucky. The funding would enable the Pentagon to complete the work at Pueblo by 2017, as Congress mandated in 2007.

Construction has already begun in Pueblo on a neutralization facility for the mustard agent, as well as a biotreatment facility that would break down the hydrolysate byproduct.

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PBCDF Surpasses 50 Percent Completion of Final Disposal Campaign

U.S. Army Chemical Materials Agency, 23 December 2009, http://www.cma.army.mil/

The Pine Bluff Chemical Agent Disposal Facility (PBCDF) successfully surpassed the 50 percent completion mark for processing the mustard agent-filled ton containers, the final disposal campaign of the Arsenal's chemical weapons stockpile, December 23, 2009.

"This is truly a significant processing achievement. More than 2.8 million pounds of mustard agent have been safely destroyed," said Mark Greer, PBCDF site project manager. "The amount of agent already safely processed during the mustard campaign is more than the combined amount processed during our three previous campaigns."

Ton container disposal operations began in December 2008. The ton containers are the last disposal campaign at the Arsenal. Operations are scheduled to last three years.

"We are confident that we will complete disposal operations by the Chemical Weapons Convention Treaty date of April 29, 2012," said Mark Greer, PBCDF site project manager. "Currently we are operating ahead of schedule. The early completion estimate in the Transition Planning Guide predicts the end of the ton container disposal campaign to be in December 2010."

Following the completion of disposal operations, PBCDF will begin its facility closure phase. During this time the disposal facility will be decontaminated and dismantled in accordance with the site's Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA) permit.

"This milestone represents the dedicated safety culture and focus on operational excellence demonstrated by our people to achieve this status of the project," said Guy Campbell, acting project general manager for Washington Demilitarization Company, LLC EG&G Division of the URS Corporation, which operates the plant for the Army.

Chemical weapons disposal operations began at the Arsenal in March 2005 with the GB nerve-agent filled rockets. The second disposal campaign, VX nerve-agent filled rockets, ended in February 2008; and the third disposal campaign, VX nerve-agent filled landmines, ended in June 2008. Unlike the previous disposal campaigns that dealt with nerve agent, the final disposal campaign deals with mustard, a blister agent.

Prior to chemical weapons disposal operations, the Pine Bluff Arsenal safely stored approximately 3,850 tons of chemical agent or 12 percent of the Army's original chemical weapons stockpile for more than 60 years.

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CTBTO Executive Secretary Tibor Toth Welcomes the Report of the International Commission on Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament

CTBTO, 15 December 2009, http://www.ctbto.org/

"The report's recommendations on the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) are very timely. It is indeed of utmost importance that all states that have not already done so should sign and ratify the CTBT unconditionally and without delay", said Tibor Tóth, the Executive Secretary of the Preparatory Commission for the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO).

It is also of crucial importance that "all signatories should provide the necessary financial, technical and political support for the continued development and operation of the CTBTO, including completing the global coverage of its monitoring systems, facilitating on-site inspection when warranted, and establishing effective national data centers and information gathering systems", he said.

The report of the International Commission on nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament was presented in Tokyo, Japan, earlier today, on Tuesday 15 December, to the Prime Ministers of Australia and Japan by the Commission Co-Chairs, former foreign ministers Gareth Evans and Yoriko Kawaguchi.

The report emphasizes that it "is difficult to overstate the importance of the CTBT as a crucial building block for both non-proliferation and disarmament. It sets, in effect, a qualitative cap on the capacity of both existing weapons possessors and potential new ones to develop new nuclear weapons."

The report also underlines that a "U.S. ratification would be a circuit-breaker, having an immediate impact on the other CTBT hold-out states, and creating much new momentum in itself for the broader non-proliferation and disarmament agenda."

It also recommends that the Nuclear Suppliers Group "should develop a criteria-based approach to cooperation agreements with states outside the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT), taking into account factors such as ratification of the CTBT, willingness to end unsafeguarded fissile material production, and states' record in securing nuclear facilities and materials and controlling nuclear-related exports."

The International Commission on Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament was initially proposed by Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd following his visit in July 2008 to the

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Hiroshima peace memorial, and launched in New York in September 2008 by him and Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda as a joint initiative of the Australian and Japanese Governments.

The Commission's stated aim was to reinvigorate, at a high political level, global debate on nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament, in the context both of the forthcoming 2010 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference, and beyond.

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New Zealand, Belgium Ratify UN Cluster Bomb Ban Convention

RIA Novosti, 23 December 2009, accessed via Lexis Nexis

New Zealand and Belgium ratified on Wednesday a UN convention banning the production and use of cluster bombs, bringing it closer to becoming international law.

"New Zealand plans to be an active advocate for this convention. The more states that commit to it, the stronger the norm against cluster munitions will become," the country's disarmament and arms control minister, Georgina Te Heuheu, was quoted by regional media as saying. …

A total of 104 countries have signed the convention, and four more ratifications to bring them to 30 are needed for the agreement to enter into force and become a binding international law six months later.

The United States, China and Russia, which produce cluster bombs, and India, Pakistan and Israel that use them have refused to join the convention.

Belgium was the first country in February 2006 to enact a national prohibition on cluster munitions, and it was the first to pass legislation in March 2007 to ban investment in cluster munitions producers.

New Zealand is the first Pacific nation to complete ratification of the Convention on Cluster Munitions.

Cluster munitions are packed into artillery shells, bombs, missiles and are scattered over vast areas. Many do not explode on impact and remain lethal for years, killing or maiming civilians.

One third of all reported cluster munitions casualties are children, 60 percent of cluster bomb casualties are injured while undertaking their normal everyday activities, according to the international Cluster Munitions Coalition.

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Distrust Mires Effort to Develop International Nuclear Forensics Database

Global Security Newswire, 24 December 2009, http://gsn.nti.org/

The international community faces a number of challenges in developing nuclear forensics capabilities, possibly chief among them nations' reluctance to share samples in a database that proponents hope could be used to deter nuclear terrorism.

The U.S. government plans to join with the European Union and the International Atomic Energy Agency [IAEA] in advocating development of a database that would ostensibly receive information and samples from all advanced nuclear nations. Washington already has a domestic system filled with samples from its own nuclear weapons test program.

This global database could take the form of a network of national nuclear "libraries" that could help in tracing the origins of materials seized in transit or used in an attack. Backers believe the collected information might lead states to maintain tighter global controls over sensitive substances and technologies, keeping them out of the hands of rogue nations or terrorist organizations.

A chief difficulty to building this international capability is the mindset of leaders—including some top officials in the United States—who generally regard anything having to do with nuclear weapons programs as "the most highly held state secrets," according to Daniel Chivers, a researcher at the University of California, Berkeley's nuclear engineering department.

Chivers said that both the United States and Russia—which together possess the vast majority of weapon-grade nuclear material—have steered clear in the past of allowing international access to their nuclear samples.

Some policy-makers in Washington fear that fledgling nuclear nations could learn how to improve their own weapon designs if they had access to samples from more technologically advanced countries. …

Building a Capability

Sometimes compared to the work done by police crime-scene technicians, nuclear forensics applies a broad range of sciences and cutting-edge technology with the intent of identifying the place of origin of a radioactive sample—down to the nuclear program that produced it and the reactor it came from.

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The United States has sought to establish a significant nuclear forensics capability through the Homeland Security Department's National Technical Nuclear Forensics Center. … U.S. efforts in the field, though, suffer from a lack of personnel. …

Separate from any U.S. forensic efforts, the IAEA already possesses environmental nuclear samples collected during inspections in nuclear nations that have agreed to comprehensive safeguard agreements in addition to signing the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT). …

Individual nuclear nations also have their own laboratories where some nuclear samples are stored that have potential to be used in a nuclear forensics program.

Nuclear forensics ultimately seeks to allow for nuclear attribution—in which foreign policy is applied to scientific analysis and a nation is singled out as the originating source of material used in a bomb or seized in mid-shipment. Once the originating nation is known, a course of proper action can be determined. …

Chivers emphasized that nuclear forensics is not an exact science, which is why he dislikes it when the technique is promoted as a deterrent to nuclear proliferation. Rather, he said, it should be seen as a collaborative framework in which all participating nations have an incentive to participate and monitor one another. …

Calls for Greater Cooperation

A report published last year by the American Association for the Advancement of Science and the American Physical Society called for greater international cooperation in the field of nuclear forensics. …

Without the United States and Russia stepping forward to allow access to their nuclear samples in an international capacity, other recognized nuclear-weapon states—China, France and the United Kingdom—or unrecognized nuclear states—such as India and Pakistan—are not likely to contribute their own samples, Chivers said. …

The United States, European Union and the IAEA are expected to seek a broader consensus for their proposal to build a system of nuclear "libraries" at the 2010 plenary meeting of the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism. The initiative, which today has 76 member partners, was formed in 2006 with the intention of preparing for and combating nuclear terrorism. … The nuclear summit is intended to provide governments with a platform for, among other things, planning cooperative efforts for the tracking and securing of weapon-grade material.

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Going forward, gaining Russian support for an international forensics effort will be critical to achieving success, experts in the field have said. …

Russia's refusal to allow the United States to collect any nuclear material for use in a forensic database stands in contrast to Moscow's greater willingness in the past to engage in other forms of military confidence-building.

For example, the United States carried out more than 600 nuclear site inspections to certify Russian compliance with the recently expired Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty [START], according to American Prospect Senior Editor Tara McKelvey...

"[Russia] does not give permission to analyze the material of these samples," said Michael May, a retired director of the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory in California. …

In the event of the detonation of a nuclear weapon by terrorists, there is a reasonable likelihood that the material used would have come from Russia … May said. …

[I]t is not known how much material has gone missing from Russia and former Soviet Republics since the Soviet Union collapsed. Western nations have supplied Russia with billions of dollars to help [Russia] track and safeguard its nuclear material.

"At one time, the material was not well guarded though there has been significant improvement [in that area] in the last few years," said May, adding that the potential still exists for some nuclear material to be stolen from Russia.

Former Soviet republics Belarus, Kazakhstan and Ukraine also have stockpiles of highly enriched uranium and processed plutonium, which experts worry could be used as source material for a radiological bomb, according to the Council on Foreign Relations.

With negotiations on a START replacement agreement nearing a conclusion, much of the focus of Russia and the United States has shifted away from securing existing nuclear material to arms reduction, May said. …

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Russia Says Destroyed 9 ICBMs in 2009 under START Arms Pact

RIA Novosti, 16 December 2009, http://en.rian.ru/

Russia has destroyed nine intercontinental ballistic missiles this year under a Russian-U.S. strategic arms reduction treaty (START 1), the Strategic Missile Forces (SMF) chief said on Wednesday.

"In accordance with the START 1 treaty, the Strategic Missile Forces destroyed nine ICBMs in 2009, including seven RS-18 and two RS-20 ICBMs," Lt. Gen. Andrei Shvaichenko said.

The new document to replace the START 1 treaty, which expired on December 5, could significantly reduce the number of nuclear weapons on both sides.

The outline of the new pact was agreed on during a U.S.-Russia summit in Moscow in July and includes cutting nuclear arsenals to 1,500-1,675 operational warheads and delivery vehicles to 500-1,000. A new treaty is expected to be drafted by the end of 2009.

The commander also said the United States had conducted 15 on-site inspections of SMF facilities this year.

He said the SMF would carry out 13 ICBM test launches next year.

The commander said the SMF were currently armed with six types of fourth- and fifth-generation missile systems, four of them silo-based and two road-mobile.

Silo-based missiles make up 45 percent of the SMF's total and 85 percent of its nuclear capability.

Shvaichenko said Russia planned to develop a new liquid-propellant ICBM to replace the Voyevoda (SS-18 Satan), capable of carrying 10 warheads, by 2016.

The general earlier said the development of the SMF prioritized the introduction of advanced missile systems although the existing systems would be kept operational until their extended service life expired.

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Russian-U.S. Talks on New Strategic Arms Cuts to Resume in January

Interfax-AVN Online, 23 December 2009, accessed via Open Source Center

The U.S. delegation at the negotiations on a new strategic arms reduction treaty with Russia has returned to Washington for Christmas holidays, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Philip Crowley said.

"Since we haven't chatted in several days because of the weekend and the snow here in Washington, over the weekend the U.S. delegation led by Assistant Secretary Rose Gottemoeller has returned for a recess from the START negotiations in Geneva," Crowley said at a news briefing on Tuesday.

"Our goal remains to conclude a solid treaty for the president's signature as soon as possible, and we expect that the teams will resume their negotiations in Geneva in mid-January," he said.

"There are still issues that we continue to work through, so there's still more work to be done," Crowley said.

"But I think we remain confident that given good faith and the ongoing efforts of both sides, that this will get done," he said.

Crowley suggested that the pause in the talks would enable the parties to better analyze the outstanding issues and readdress them in January with new proposals on both sides.

"Over the course of these two months, we have made dramatic progress," and the U.S. is "not particularly concerned, given the complexity of these issues, that it's taking a longer period of time," he said.

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New Russian-U.S. Arms Treaty Expected Soon—Foreign Minister

RIA Novosti, 25 December 2009, http://en.rian.ru/

A new U.S.-Russian strategic arms reduction treaty should be signed in the very near future, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said on Friday.

"The work has effectively entered the home stretch," he said. "Just a little is left to be done: The presidents have issued unambiguous instructions, and now it is up to professionals and experts to commit that to paper."

Moscow and Washington are expected to sign a new document at the beginning of 2010 to replace the START 1 treaty, which expired on December 5.

Lavrov said last week the new treaty envisions "radical" cuts in the number of strategic offensive weapons.

Medvedev and his U.S. counterpart Barack Obama announced at their first meeting in April that the countries would replace the START I treaty as part of their efforts to "reset" bilateral ties.

The treaty's outline agreed by the presidents included cutting nuclear arsenals to 1,500-1,675 operational warheads and delivery vehicles to 500-1,000.

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New START Treaty "Practically Ready": Russian FM

Xinhua, 27 December 2009, http://www.chinaview.cn

A new strategic arms reduction treaty expected to be signed between Moscow and Washington was "practically ready," said Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov on Saturday.

"The (new) START treaty is practically ready. I hope the experts will finalize it quickly enough," said the Russian top diplomat in a TV interview.

Russia and the United States have been in intense talks over the past few months, trying to clinch a deal on a replacement document to the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START-1) that expired on Dec. 5.

Lavrov also said the new treaty "is based on some fundamentally new principles," such as "equal rights, parity, and reciprocal trust."

"For the first time in history the levels of strategic offensive arms will be unprecedentedly low," said the minister as quoted by the Itar-Tass news agency.

Lavrov said Russia-U.S. relations "do have prospects," due to a "new, decent economic dialogue in progress."

The two countries meanwhile are working over a string of international issues including Afghanistan, Middle East, Iran's nuclear program and the Korean Peninsula nuclear issue, he said.

"Thus, we won't have to be bored next year," he added. …

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