

INTERNATIONAL SECURITY / MIDDLE EAST UPDATE
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1. [Strong Progress Made on U.S.-Russian Arms Treaty](#) (03-25-2010)

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.
Staff Writer

Washington — American and Russian negotiators are “making strong progress” toward a historic nuclear arms reduction treaty that would move the world a little closer to President Obama’s vision of a nuclear-free world, a senior White House official says.

“We are, I think, very close to having an agreement on a START treaty, but won’t have one until President Obama and his counterpart, [Russian President Dmitry] Medvedev, have a chance to speak,” White House press secretary Robert Gibbs said at a press briefing March 24. The two leaders are expected to confer by telephone March 26.

The United States and Russia have been negotiating a new treaty to replace the expired Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, or START, signed in 1991 by President George H.W. Bush and Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev. The new 10-year treaty aims to reduce both nuclear arsenals to a range of 1,500 to 1,675 nuclear warheads, and cap long-range missiles and strategic bombers to 700 each.

Obama spoke with Medvedev for about 30 minutes by telephone March 13 and “had a good conversation” about the progress made by negotiators from both countries who are meeting in Geneva, National Security Council spokesman Mike Hammer said. At issue are a series of highly technical matters that require careful discussion, he added.

“The results of their talks are encouraging, and both leaders are committed to concluding an agreement soon,” Hammer said.

Gibbs said White House advisers have discussed returning to Prague, where Obama first announced his intention to pursue a world free from the threat of nuclear weapons, to sign a new treaty.

“We believe that a new START treaty begins to take many important steps between the two greatest holders of those nuclear weapons,” Gibbs told reporters. “So I would anticipate that when we have something to sign, it will be in Prague.”

The new treaty is not expected to restrict U.S. plans for a limited missile defense shield based in Europe.

Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman John Kerry and Senator Richard Lugar, the ranking Republican on the committee, met with Obama and his advisers for about an hour March 24 and received a full briefing on the proposed treaty and the support needed to win approval in the Senate, which requires a two-thirds majority. Any new treaty would also have to be approved by the Russian Duma before becoming law; the approval process could take months.

“A well-designed treaty will send an important message to the rest of the world that America is prepared to lead efforts with key stakeholders to reduce the threat of nuclear weapons,” Kerry said after the meeting with Obama. “Once the treaty and its associated documents are completed and submitted to the Senate, Senator Lugar and I look forward to holding hearings and giving the treaty immediate and careful attention.”

Lugar said the president is confident of signing a new treaty, which runs about 20 pages and contains a series of protocols or annexes.

State Department spokesman Mark Toner told reporters that negotiators in Geneva are extremely close to a final treaty. The original talks on the treaty were held in April 2009 in London when Obama met with Medvedev at the outset of the Group of 20 talks on the global economic crisis.

PRAGUE VISION

On April 5, 2009, Obama announced in a [major speech at Hradcany Square in Prague](#) that he envisioned a world free from the threat of nuclear weapons and would make reducing that threat a signature piece of his foreign policy agenda.

“Today, I state clearly and with conviction America’s commitment to seek the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons,” Obama told the Prague audience. “I’m not naive. This goal will not be reached quickly — perhaps not in my lifetime. It will take patience and persistence. But now we, too, must ignore the voices who tell us that the world cannot change.”

In agreeing to reduce nuclear arsenals, the United States and Russia are aiming to ease tensions substantially and strengthen mutual trust — both critical ingredients for enhanced relations.

“We’ve taken important steps forward to increase nuclear security and to stop the spread of nuclear weapons. This starts with the reduction of our own nuclear arsenals,” Obama said at a [July 6 press conference in Moscow with Medvedev](#).

As owners of more than 95 percent of the world's nuclear weapons, Obama said, the world's two leading nuclear powers must lead by example. The mutual agreement to reduce nuclear arsenals is part of a broader goal of reducing nuclear tensions across the globe, and of preventing rogue states and extremists from obtaining nuclear material.

During [talks in London April 1, 2009](#), before the start of the G20 economic summit, Obama and Medvedev said they wanted to take concrete steps toward the long-term goal of disarmament, while sending a powerful message to countries such as North Korea and Iran, whose controversial nuclear-development programs are subject to U.N. Security Council sanctions and expanded scrutiny.

This new treaty would expand on the 2002 Moscow Treaty signed by then-President George W. Bush and then-President Vladimir Putin that limited warheads to 2,200 by the close of 2012.

2. Pakistanis Will Prosper Under New Plans with United States (03-24-2010)

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, completing the first day of a U.S.-Pakistani strategic dialogue, said the United States is committed to advancing the Pakistani people's aspirations for greater peace and prosperity. The talks covered a variety of topics, from security to cooperation on agriculture, democracy promotion and energy.

In remarks with Pakistani Foreign Minister Makhdoom Shah Mahmood Qureshi in Washington March 24, Clinton said the two delegations discussed the shared goals of protecting their citizens from violent extremism, seeing Pakistan prosper as "a strong democracy in a stable region," and improving the daily lives of Pakistan's people.

"We have listened, and we will continue to listen. And we want to demonstrate by both word and deed our respect for Pakistan's concerns and ideas, and share our own," Clinton said.

The secretary announced that the Obama administration will sign a letter of intent to upgrade significant parts of the road infrastructure in northwest Pakistan. Acknowledging the country's heavy reliance on agriculture, she said the United States is taking "concrete steps" to boost Pakistani agricultural exports and improve its agricultural infrastructure.

Clinton said \$125 million is being devoted to Pakistani energy sector projects and that on March 25 the two countries will sign agreements implementing three thermal power station rehabilitation projects, with the goal of providing Pakistanis with "affordable and reliable power." She added that there are also plans to cooperate on new water projects.

These are the first ministerial-level talks in the strategic dialogue, which was launched in 2006. Qureshi told reporters he was "a happy man and a satisfied man," praising the upgrade in the level of the bilateral engagement and the expansion of the original four separate tracks of the strategic dialogue to 10.

"We have expanded those tracks to make this relationship people-to-people," he said. "I wanted to bring in areas that affect the lives of the ordinary people of Pakistan. ... I'm happy because I feel

I've contributed in redirecting this relationship in line with the aspirations of the people of Pakistan."

In a [March 22 interview](#) with Pakistan's Express TV Group, Clinton said the strategic dialogue is covering a broad bilateral agenda, and part of its importance will be to develop trust and confidence between the two leaders and the lower-level government employees on both sides who will be charged with implementing the projects that result from the talks.

"We know whatever we do will take time. It's not the kind of commitment that you easily produce overnight or even within a year. But it is important to get started, to sort it out," Clinton said, saying the next round will be held in Istanbul.

Along with developing the agenda of the dialogue, the talks will "start putting in place the mechanisms that we will be using" between the two government bureaucracies, she said.

Asked about cooperation on civil nuclear energy, similar to an agreement the United States has with India, Clinton said it took "many years of strategic dialogue" between the two countries before they reached that understanding, a process that "did not happen easily or quickly."

"I think on the energy issue, specifically, there are more immediate steps that can be taken that have to help with the grid, have to help with other sources of energy, to upgrade power plants and the like," she said. "And we are certainly looking at those, and we want to help Pakistan with its immediate and its long-term energy needs."

[Speaking with Pakistan's Dunya TV March 22](#), Clinton said the United States brings its technology and innovation to the table in its talks with Pakistan, particularly in areas such as agriculture and water projects, and wants to encourage cooperation between U.S. and Pakistani experts.

"What we want to do is to help Pakistan make better use of the water that you do have," she said. "Let's see what we do to protect our aquifers. Let's see what we do to be more efficient in the use of our water. Let's see what we do to capture more rainwater; how do we actually use less of it to produce more crops?"

Despite coming to office in the middle of a global economic recession, the Obama administration is also committed to increasing market access for Pakistani goods, she said.

The deeper relationship that both sides are seeking will not happen overnight, Clinton said, despite a strong interest in and commitment to the U.S.-Pakistan partnership.

"We want to build a very strong foundation because we don't want this to be a year or two of strategic dialoguing. We want this to be ... an enduring part of our relationship and our foreign policy priorities," she said.

[Joint Statement on U.S.-Pakistan Strategic Dialogue in Washington](#) (03-25-2010)

3. Mideast Peace Requires "Difficult but Necessary Choices" (03-22-2010)

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton told supporters of Israel that the status quo in the Middle East is unsustainable and threatens Israel's long-term future, urging the Jewish state to pursue a two-state solution with the Palestinians based on its 1967 borders with agreed land swaps.

Speaking at the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) policy conference in Washington March 22, Clinton said all parties to the conflict will need to make "difficult but necessary choices" to create a future where Israelis and Palestinians can "grow up free from fear and to have that same opportunity to live up to their full God-given potential."

As Israeli and other officials have observed, demographic trends "are hastening the hour at which Israelis may have to choose between preserving their democracy and staying true to the dream of a Jewish homeland," she said. "Given this reality, a two-state solution is the only viable path for Israel to remain both a democracy and a Jewish state."

The secretary also noted a struggle "between those in the region who accept peace and coexistence with Israel and those who reject it and seek only continued violence." The status quo promises more violence and strengthens the rejectionists, who have argued that peace is impossible. Instead, "[t]hose willing to negotiate need to be able to show results for their efforts, and those who preach violence must be proven wrong," she said.

Peace negotiations must be "built on a foundation of mutual trust and confidence," Clinton said, and for that reason both Israel and the Palestinians need to refrain from statements and actions that "undermine the process or prejudice the outcome of talks."

The Obama administration's [March 9 condemnation](#) of Israel's building plans in East Jerusalem was neither "about wounded pride" nor a U.S. "judgment on the final status" of the holy city, she said. "This is about getting to the table, creating and protecting an atmosphere of trust around it, and staying there until the job is finally done."

Along with undermining mutual trust between Israel and the Palestinians and endangering proximity talks that have recently been announced, Israeli settlement activity also "undermines America's unique ability to play ... an essential role" in helping to end the conflict.

"Our credibility in this process depends in part on our willingness to praise both sides when they are courageous, and, when we don't agree, to say so and say so unequivocally," Clinton said.

Clinton also condemned a Palestinian municipality's decision to rename a public square after a terrorist who had killed Israeli civilians. She also condemned instigators who "deliberately mischaracterized" the rededication of a Jewish synagogue in Jerusalem to foment incitement and unrest.

The proximity talks are meant to "prepare the ground" for the resumption of direct negotiations between the two sides, she said. They "are a hopeful first step, and they should be serious and

substantive,” but ultimately there will need to be direct negotiations to work through the issues and reach an agreement to end the conflict.

“The United States knows we cannot force a solution, we cannot ordain or command the outcome. The parties themselves must resolve their differences. But we believe that through good-faith negotiations, the parties can mutually agree to an outcome which ends the conflict,” she said, pledging U.S. readiness to “play an active and sustained role in these talks and to support the parties.”

The end of the decadeslong conflict offers “a future of promise and possibility” for both sides, Clinton said, with the freedom to travel and trade freely in the region, increased personal security, self-determination and mutual cooperation “on issues of common concern, like water, infrastructure and development, that build broadly shared prosperity.”

4. Remarks by Secretary Clinton, Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov (03-19-2010) **Leaders discuss bilateral relations, START agreement, Iran and Afghanistan**

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov
Moscow, Russia, March 19, 2010

FOREIGN MINISTER LAVROV: (Via interpreter) I would like to reaffirm that the recent meeting between Her Excellency Secretary of State of the United States Madam Hillary Clinton and the Russian President Dmitry Medvedev reaffirmed the fact that our relations are now on the rise. They’ve obtained new dynamics (inaudible) and reaching quality to a new level.

So the President highlighted that last year we’ve managed to perform a true reset in our relationship to turn down, to turn back the – reverse the degrading of our relations that was in place before the Obama Administration came to power and increase the intensity on our content at all levels of executive power.

Our relations today are conducted in accordance with the principles of honesty, openness and full compliance with all agreements arranged. The President highlighted specifically that he is very satisfied with how Geneva negotiators comply with tasks that are formulated for them by Presidents Obama and Medvedev accordingly and that he hopes that in short period of time they will be able to complete negotiations of the new START Treaty.

He also highlighted that they would reach specific agreements that would allow to step up our cooperation that would modernize Russian economy, would put it in on more nominative tract and that will be done using specific instruments.

As to international agendas, special attention was given to the Iranian nuclear program and Afghanistan sentiment. We share understanding that along those two problems, just like in many other cases, we need come up with coordinated, collective approaches and then implement them efficiently. And in this context, Russian president reaffirmed Russia’s readiness and desire to cooperate with the U.S. and other partners along this and other tracts.

So in conclusion, let me say a few words about my personal impressions from this meeting. I believe that the reset was a true success and we needn’t stop. At this point we need to continue advancing. We need to avoid any interruptions in this cooperation. And I believe that this visit of Madam Secretary of State can be considered as fueling in the air.

SECRETARY CLINTON: Thank you. Let me echo Minister Lavrov's comments. As President Medvedev said at the very beginning of our meeting, the reset has been a success. And now we have to build on the relationships that we have developed, starting between our two presidents, and going throughout our governments.

The bilateral commission that Sergey and I direct under the leadership of our Presidents is making a lot of progress. Let me give you just one example. Just recently there was a delegation from the United States consisting of high technology companies that came to Russia, visited with many businesses and academic institutions and innovators looking for ways to deepen the relationship between our high-tech businesses and academic institutions.

Later this spring there will be an exchange between young people as part of our sports program where young Russians will come to the United States for the purpose of playing basketball. So our relationship is not just between our governments, it is increasingly between the American and Russian people.

As Sergey said, we are very encouraged by progress on a new START agreement. Our negotiating teams have reported that they have resolved all of the major issues and there are some technical issues that remain, but we are on the brink of seeing a new agreement between the United States and Russia.

We also discussed a range of other issues from Iran to Afghanistan and so much more as our part of our ongoing consultation. And we look forward to welcoming President Medvedev back to Washington for the Nuclear Security Summit in a few weeks.

Again, I thank Minister Lavrov for his hospitality and the very cooperative working relationship that we enjoy.

QUESTION: (Via interpreter) Russian TV channel NTV. So my question goes to both ministers. You've mentioned that in terms of new START agreement negotiations only some technicalities remain to be agreed. So my question is as follows: Does the link between the reduction of strategic offense arms and the deployment of U.S. ABM system facilities in Europe exist and whether – as far as I understand, you have not identified the timeframes for signing this new START Treaty. But do you think it might happen? Have you at least come up with a location? Will it happen in Washington or some rumors ago that it might be in Kiev, or are you for Prague?

And Sergey – Minister Lavrov, do you really think – do you really expect to hear – answer to that question immediately?

FOREIGN MINISTER LAVROV: (Via interpreter) So answering your first question I can say last April, when the first meeting of the two presidents took place, they issued a statement in which they stated that there is a link between strategic offensive and defensive weapons and the current teams of negotiations when they – and they've instructed their governments to take this relationship into account. And current teams of negotiators that work in Geneva at the moment act in accordance with the tasks that were formulated by the president – in particular in accordance with the tasks formulated by the president. I want to be interpreted exactly – literally, I would say.

SECRETARY CLINTON: Let me say that we are very pleased by progress that has been made. And we hope and expect that there will be a signing in the near future. But as Sergey said, we are not going to preempt any announcement of place or time on this occasion.

Because I'm not bilingual, you can say anything and I'll agree.

QUESTION: Good afternoon. Mark Landler from The New York Times. Also a question for both of you. It has been seven months since the disclosure of the secret Iranian nuclear facility at Qom, three months since the Iranian government rejected the offer of enrichment for the Tehran research reactor, and one month since the government of Iran announced it would begin enriching uranium up to 20 percent. And yet, after (inaudible) an international solidarity on how to confront Iran are continuing and taking by all accounts longer than anyone had hoped, there have been some comments recently from diplomats that we might not see a UN resolution until June.

My question is simply whether you worry that the clock is in some sense running out? And what you would hope to do to speed up this process?

SECRETARY CLINTON: Well, first of all, we have pursued the diplomatic track and thought it was correct to do so. We are now, however, at the stage where we are asking for action and are working very hard in the Security Council to attain a resolution expressing the international community's disapproval of Iranian actions and pulling together the world in a regime of smart sanctions, as President Medvedev has referred to them, that will try to change the behavior of the Iranian leadership. And we believe we are making progress because many countries are seeing what you have briefly summarized along with the latest report from the International Atomic Energy Agency, and we expect to reach consensus around an appropriate response.

FOREIGN MINISTER LAVROV: (Via interpreter) What I can add is that we follow very closely all the information that is published in the media including your media, The New York Times, about new facts that are somehow in one way or another linked with any suspicions on the Iranian nuclear program. We would, of course, prefer that those people that obtain such information publish it immediately without any delays. But I want to highlight that we do follow it closely. But of course, we're guided not by assessments given by media people or political analysts but the IAEA specialists, which is an internationally recognized instrument of the international community in this world. And reports that IAEA Director General publishes on regular basis contains very precise assessment that do not give reasons to any sort of alarms.

But that does not mean that we are satisfied with the Iranian actions. What we see is that they are letting the opportunity to establish normal, respectful, mutually beneficial dialogue with the international community slip away. And this dialogue was put on the table by the IAEA and the 3+3 format.

So we are continuing our consultations with Iran. We believe that they need to comply with statements made or with requirements that were once put on the table by the IAEA and were reaffirmed on numerous occasions by the Security Council. So we'll try to make them comply with them, but we do not exclude the possibility that additional work in the UN Security Council might be required.

As President Medvedev put it on numerous occasions, sanctions are never beneficial, but there are some instances where they are impossible to avoid, and the Iranian case might be one of such instance. And as President Medvedev also mentioned on a number of occasions and he reaffirmed that today that sanctions must be smart. They must not be aggressive. They must not paralyze the life of Iranian state. They must not degrade the humanitarian situation and the country. They must not be targeted against the population but rather against those people that are in charge of the decision making process and that identified already in position on the international arena.

And we reaffirmed to our U.S. partners today that we are prepared to continue our cooperation in accordance with the outlined principles. I thank you.

5. Middle East Quartet Calls for Peace Talks (03-19-2010)

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.
Staff Writer

Washington — The Quartet for Middle East Peace has called for Israel and the Palestinians to resume peace negotiations that would end with the creation of an independent Palestinian state in 24 months.

The Quartet also urged Israel to freeze all settlement construction in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, including natural growth; to dismantle outposts built since March 2001; and to refrain from further demolitions and Palestinian evictions in East Jerusalem.

[The Quartet statement](#) came at the end of two days of meetings in Moscow and was read to the press by U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. The Quartet for Middle East Peace was created in 2002 to help find a way to end the violence between the Israelis and Palestinians. The members are the United Nations, the European Union, Russia and the United States.

George Mitchell, the U.S. special envoy for Middle East peace, had brokered an agreement between Palestinians and Israelis to resume indirect talks. These talks were stalled, however, after the Israelis on March 9 announced [new settlement construction](#) of 1,600 homes in East Jerusalem. Mitchell, in Moscow with Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, leaves for the region over the March 20–21 weekend.

Ban was joined at the Moscow talks by Clinton and Mitchell, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, Catherine Ashton, the European Union's high representative for foreign affairs and security policy, and Quartet Special Envoy Tony Blair, the former British prime minister.

“The Quartet believes these negotiations should lead to a settlement, negotiated between the parties within 24 months, that ends the occupation which began in 1967 and results in the emergence of an independent, democratic and viable Palestinian state living side by side in peace and security with Israel and its other neighbors,” Ban said.

Ban said a Palestinian state located in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip is in the best interests of the Israelis and Palestinians, other nations within the region and the international community.

Lavrov told reporters at a post-meeting press conference with other Quartet members that the first step is for Israeli and Palestinian negotiators to begin indirect talks, and then move to face-to-face negotiations as trust and confidence on each side improves.

Clinton said everyone involved in the peace process is committed to the start of indirect talks.

State Department spokesman P.J. Crowley announced March 18 that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had spoken with Clinton by telephone again after they had spoken March 12 in a 45-minute telephone conference. Netanyahu is scheduled to be in Washington the week of March 22 to attend the annual American Israel Public Affairs Committee meeting, and may meet

with the secretary during that visit, Crowley said, but it will depend on how schedules can be arranged.

“They discussed the specific actions that might be taken to improve the atmosphere for progress toward peace,” Crowley said in a prepared statement. “We are going to review the prime minister’s response and continue our discussions with both sides to keep proximity talks moving forward.”

6. Clinton to Co-Chair Strategic Dialogue with Pakistan (03-19-2010) **First ministerial-level dialogue opens in Washington March 24**

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — Ministerial-level strategic talks between the United States and Pakistan will open in Washington March 24.

U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan Richard Holbrooke anticipates a broad agenda for the discussions, which he said will mark “a major intensification” in the U.S. partnership with Pakistan.

“To me, a strategic dialogue means that we talk about our basic core objectives,” Holbrooke told reporters March 19 in Washington. The United States and Pakistan are working together to combat extremist groups including al-Qaida; empower Afghanistan so it can become self-reliant; and strengthen Pakistan’s security, democratic institutions, and economic development, including helping the country address its energy and water problems.

The strategic dialogue was [launched in 2006](#), but with Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton heading the American delegation, the March 24 meeting will be the first time the discussions are conducted at the ministerial level. Holbrooke said Defense Secretary Robert Gates, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Mike Mullen and high-level representatives from other sections of the Obama administration will also be participating, along with the “extremely high-caliber delegation which Pakistan is sending,” led by Foreign Minister Makhdoom Shah Mehmood Qureshi.

According to a March 18 State Department press notice, the delegations will discuss economic development, water and energy, education, foreign policy, communications and public diplomacy, agriculture, and security.

“This is an intense and serious dialogue bilaterally between the U.S. and Pakistan,” Holbrooke said. “We’re going to listen carefully to whatever the Pakistanis say.”

The ambassador said he expects working groups to be established to deal with separate bilateral issues. “We want to move into operational things in such areas as water, energy and other issues. And that’s what we’ll do,” he said.

Asked about the delivery of U.S. assistance under the 2009 Kerry-Lugar Act, Holbrooke said the Obama administration is “looking for every way to accelerate the obligations and the disbursement,” acknowledging that the money is not “moving as fast as we’d like it to.” Congress approved \$7.5 billion in nonmilitary aid for Pakistan under the Kerry-Lugar Act. The funds are released under congressional procedures that can be slow and complex.

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“We are doing more. We will announce more. We want to do as much as the Congress will support,” he said. “This is hard for people to understand in other parts of the world. But Congress writes the checks.”

Holbrooke also said both the United States and Pakistan have made huge advances in overcoming what both sides have called a “trust deficit” that has hampered the bilateral relationship in the past. Holbrooke also stressed that the Obama administration’s support for Pakistan is in the United States’ interest as well.

“Everyone’s aware of the popular public-opinion polls, and we think that our support for Pakistan deserves more recognition among the people,” he said. “I think we’ve made a tremendous amount of progress in the last year.”
