

How New-START will improve our nation's security

By John F. Kerry
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Even in these polarized times, anyone seeking the presidency should know that the security of the United States is too important to be treated as fodder for political posturing. Sadly, former governor [Mitt Romney failed that test in arguing that ratification of the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty \(New START\) with Russia](#)

[would be a mistake](#) [op-ed, July 6]. He disregarded the views of the best foreign policy thinkers of the past half-century, but more important, he ignored the facts.

No threat to our national security is greater than the danger from nuclear weapons. Responsible political figures across the spectrum need to support every step possible to control the spread of nuclear weapons. New START is one of those steps. This view is shared by most who have taken the time to understand the treaty and the international context in which it was negotiated. Rather than pander to politics, we need to ratify this agreement quickly. Every day without its verification regime is a day without a clear view of Russia's nuclear arsenal.

From the first Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing in April, Richard Lugar, the panel's ranking Republican, and I have made clear that there is no room in this debate for domestic politics. Serious people may differ over elements of the agreement, but after 10 hearings we have produced a public record that makes the case for ratification and rejects the narrow, uninformed political objections advanced by Romney.

Let's examine the key objections: Romney says that New START impedes our ability to build missile defenses against attack from rogue countries. This is a myth. The treaty will have no impact on our ability to build ballistic missile defenses against Iran, North Korea or other threats from other regions. The Obama administration is free to proceed with missile defense plans it announced last year.

Like others unfamiliar with previous arms control agreements, Romney warns that Russia could use language in the treaty's preamble as a pretext for withdrawal if the United States builds up its missile defense. In a word, baloney. The preamble is not legally binding. Every arms control treaty since the Kennedy administration has allowed either party to withdraw if it felt its national interests were jeopardized. Surely Romney would not want to give up that right.

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Similarly, Romney is flat wrong in claiming that the Bilateral Consultative Commission is broadly empowered to amend the treaty with regard to missile defense. The language is clear that any amendment proposed by the commission would have to be ratified just like a new treaty.

Another red herring is the notion that the treaty allows Russia to escape limits on the number of strategic nuclear warheads. The same limits apply to the United States and Russia, including the ability to count each nuclear-equipped heavy bomber as a single warhead. The new treaty's approach to counting bomber weapons is consistent with the strategic relations between the United States and Russia and works to our advantage because our fleet has a great nuclear-weapons capacity.

Romney's claim that Russia can mount an unlimited number of intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) on bombers is a strategic concept that was rejected in the 1960s because submarine-launched missiles were deemed far more effective. If Russia were foolish enough to pursue this path, we could either get the new weapons incorporated in the treaty or withdraw. His argument that the treaty abandons limits on multiple independently targeted reentry vehicles, known as MIRVs, is equally flawed; the Bush administration decided it did not care what missiles Russia retained when it negotiated the 2002 Moscow Treaty. Similarly, concerns about restrictions on converting launchers for ICBMs and those launched from submarines for missile defense purposes are misplaced because those conversions would be more expensive and less effective than alternatives and thus unnecessary.

New START will not constrain our ability to defend ourselves. On the contrary, it will improve our national security by reducing the number of nuclear weapons held by the United States and Russia, and by improving relations with our old adversary. Ratification will also show the international community that we are honoring our commitments on nonproliferation.

Many of the strongest voices for ratification are Republican. Henry Kissinger, national security adviser and secretary of state to presidents Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford, [testified in May that the Senate should ratify the accord](#). He objected to injecting politics into such a momentous decision, saying, "It is, by definition, not a bipartisan, but a nonpartisan, challenge."

I have nothing against Massachusetts politicians running for president. But the world's most important elected office carries responsibilities, including the duty to check your facts even if you're in a footrace to the right against Sarah Palin. More than that, you need to understand that when it comes to nuclear danger, the nation's security is more important than scoring cheap political points.

The writer, a Democrat from Massachusetts, is chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

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