

Former Senator Sam Nunn
Co-Chairman, Nuclear Threat Initiative

Re: New START Treaty

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TONY HARRIS: Sam Nunn spent 24 years in the U.S. Senate. He is now co-chairman of the Nuclear Threat Initiative, which works to reduce the global peril from nuclear weapons, and he joins me from New York. Senator, it's good to see you. Thanks for your time. Thanks for working it out in your schedule. We've been trying to get you on for a couple of weeks now. Thanks.

SAM NUNN: Thank you, Tony, glad to be with you.

HARRIS: As I mentioned, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee is set to vote on the New START treaty. What's your view, your overarching view, of the New START treaty?

NUNN: Tony, I would start by saying that the threat has fundamentally changed since the cold war. At that time, we were concerned about an invasion of Europe. We were concerned about the Soviet Union's overwhelming conventional capability. We were concerned about a deterrent to any kind of war with the Soviet Union. And today, some of those things remain relevant, but most of them have fundamentally changed.

Today, the United States and Russia have a real stake in working together to avoid proliferation in the world, to prevent countries like Iran and North Korea from becoming nuclear powers, to make sure that we secure nuclear materials around the globe and make sure we do not have catastrophic nuclear terrorism. So the threat has fundamentally changed. Arms control was important during the cold war, but it is even more important now, because the United States and Russia have so many threats in common, and we have such a stake in, basically, making sure we do not lose confidence in verification, making sure that we limit the number of launchers, making sure that we are credible in terms of trying to prevent proliferation around the globe.

For all of those reasons, the treaty is very important, particularly on the verification bit.

HARRIS: Well, let me follow up this way. If this agreement is that important, right now it's just between the United States and Russia, how does it help us reduce the nuclear threat from, say, Iran and North Korea?

NUNN: The United States and Russia working together is important, and this builds confidence. That is fundamental, and that would be true with the challenges in Iran and North Korea -- we are much more likely to get Russian assistance on that -- Russian pressure and Russian sanctions. All those are difficult, but Russian leadership on nonproliferation is important, and Russia securing, not only its own, but helping secure global nuclear materials that could be seized by

terrorists all over the world, is enormously important. The United States and Russia need a partnership on that.

When you sort of back off of it and get away from some of the details, and look at the fact that the United States and Russia still have 90-95% of all the nuclear weapons in the world, we have enough nuclear weapons to destroy God's universe. Or we can work together to make nuclear energy a positive force for mankind. Not all of that is in this treaty, but the treaty is a step in recognizing how important it is for the United States and Russia to work together and then to get other nations to join us, of course.

HARRIS: Well Senator, is there anything in the treaty, because you hear this as push-back sometimes, that limits US missile defense capabilities?

NUNN: No, there's nothing in the treaty. The Joint Chiefs have testified to that fact. The people in charge of the missile defense program at the Pentagon have testified to that fact. Secretary Gates has testified to that. The Russians have their own position on missile defense and they assert certain things themselves, but that is not in the treaty -- it is not binding on us.

If you get beyond the treaty itself, it's in the United States' interest to work with Russia on missile defense -- not to give them a veto -- but President Reagan had that as a vision. It was perhaps premature, but it is very relevant. Because if we begin working with Russia on missile defense, I think we will understand that there is no need in having the kind of major offensive force pointing at each other, on hair trigger, that could basically destroy each other's countries in an amount of one hour or so. We've taken all sorts of safeguards to prevent that from happening. But this treaty itself is a confidence builder because without the treaty there is no verification. So "trust but verify" remains very important in our dealings with Russia and other nuclear powers.

HARRIS: So we are hearing that some Republicans, particularly Republican moderates, are on the fence on this treaty. What do you think of the analysis? And is it principled, in your view? Or are we just talking about politics here?

NUNN: I think there is, perhaps, some politics involved when you get within a couple of months of an election. That's probably one of the reasons that both Sen. John Kerry and Sen. Dick Lugar, working together on this by the way -- I think we all ought to note that this is a very positive development in partisan Washington today for two leaders to be working together. I know that Senator McCain and Senator Levin are working together on a number of items, including perhaps this. I hope that Senator McCain will end up voting for this.

I think that there's distrust going back to the cold war. Russia has the same kind of distrust. But what we have to understand is that without this treaty, the distrust is going to go up because we will have no way of verifying. With this treaty, we have on-site inspections where needed, we have a certain amount of telemetry exchange, we have all sorts of things that give mutual reassurance and allow us to both move ahead and try to put some of the cold war great tensions behind us. That's enormously important to the security of the American people and to the security of the people in Russia and indeed, to global security.

HARRIS: That leads me to my last question here. The treaties that the countries have signed over the years, SALT I signed by President Nixon, the treaty signed by President Reagan in

1987, that was what, the Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, the treaties signed by the Presidents Bush, have the treaties made this country safer?

NUNN: I would say yes. I would say all of them have. We and the Russians have outlawed intermediate range missiles. We have also regulated and started building down missiles, instead of increasing them. Most people around the globe indeed don't know that we are dramatically lower than we were 10-15 years ago. We still have a lot of challenges where we need to work together including, as I mentioned, securing nuclear materials, wherever they are, everywhere.

We also have to have a breakthrough in dealing with the Russians on bio. We have not made nearly as much progress in dealing with the biological threat, which is going to be one of the threats of the future. We also have a real need to work with them on cyber security, as well as the Chinese. So there are a lot of things we need to work together with them on, including energy and climate change.

This treaty is a confidence builder. It's not going to do all that -- I don't want to exaggerate the treaty. It's a modest step forward, but it's an important step forward.

HARRIS: Senator Nunn, thanks for your time.

NUNN: Thank you, Tony.