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## START stalled by Republican senator

By Joseph Picard

President Obama, last Saturday in Japan, reiterated his administration's commitment to Russian President Dmitri Medvedev to get the new START Treaty approved by the lame-duck U.S. Senate before the year is out.

But a prominent GOP lawmaker may be playing Grinch to that Christmas present.

Sen. Jon Kyl, R-AZ, said Tuesday that he did not think the START Treaty could be considered by the Senate in lame duck, "given the combination of other work Congress must do and the complex and unresolved issues related to START and modernization."

The administration was apparently sandbagged by Kyl, since the treaty was approved on Sept. 16 by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, with three Republican senators joining 11 Democratic senators in advising the entire Senate to ratify the agreement.

"We've engaged senators for many months over the details of the treaty," State Department Assistant Secretary Philip J. Crowley said Tuesday. "We believe that we've answered all their questions. We've addressed their concerns, including concerns that Senator Kyl and others have expressed about ensuring that there is an effective modernization program as a companion to the new START Treaty."

There are currently 57 Democratic senators, two Independents who caucus with the Democrats and 41 Republican senators. Most legislation before the chamber requires a three-fifths majority, so that Democrats often have to find a Republican or two to vote with them to get the necessary 60 votes.

But in the matter of treaties, a two-thirds majority is needed. That would mean - if Democrats and Independents stay solid - at least eight Republicans would have to cross the aisle. Kyl is a member of the GOP leadership. It is unlikely that eight Republicans would risk leadership disapproval to vote to allow the treaty to come to the senate floor.

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, despite Kyl's remark, is not yet ready to throw in the towel.

Clinton came to the U.S. Capitol building today, an unusual move for a Secretary of State, and, flanked by Senators John Kerry, D-MA, and Richard Lugar, R-IN -- the chairman and ranking member, respectively, of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee -- Clinton called upon the Senate to ratify the treaty as a matter of national security.

"We can and we must go forward now on the New START treaty during the lame duck session," Clinton said.

Clinton met earlier with several key senators, including Sen. Ricard Durbin, D-IL and Sen. John McCain, R-AZ, in an attempt to garner bipartisan support from the administration's plan to add an extra \$4.1 billion to the existing \$80 billion already appropriated to be spent over 10 years for weapons modernization.

Although the \$4.1 billion would appear on the 2012 budget, a draft of which will not be public until February 2011, Clinton and her allies are hoping to get consensus support for the measure, so as to answer Kyl's concerns.

Kyl was not at the meeting.

Although failure to pass START this year would be a political embarrassment for President Obama, no prominent Democrat has yet accused Kyl of playing politics. Kerry said he took his Republican colleague at his word that he had legitimate concerns.

"I do not believe the door is closed to considering the New START during the lame duck session," Kerry said. "I look forward to continuing to work with Senator Lugar, Senator Kyl, our colleagues, and the Administration to get the New START treaty ratified by the Senate this year. Ratifying New START is not a political choice, it's a national security imperative."

Clinton made a veiled reference to political games.

Ratifying START "is exactly what the American people expect us to do, to come together and do what is necessary to protect our country," she said.

Clinton, Kerry and Lugar, as well as Defense Secretary Robert Gates and U.S. Vice President Joe Biden, have all said they are willing to continue to work with Kyl on trying to get the treaty ratified this year.

Steven Pifer, senior fellow at the Brookings Institute, said he remains optimistic "that the treaty will be ratified."

Pifer said Kyl is a "serious person on national security" and that what we may be seeing is Kyl "bargaining" for a firmer commitment on nuclear modernization.

Pifer said that, since all current U.S. military leaders, as well as numerous past leaders and most of the heavyweights of the Republican Party, have expressed approval of the treaty, for Kyl "to step on the brakes now would really open him to a charge of not acting in good faith."

Pifer said it is better to get the treaty ratified as soon as possible because, only when START is in place, will the U.S. military again be able to monitor the Russian military.

"And the Russians will be much less helpful to us in places where we need their help, like Afghanistan, if START is not put in place," Pifer said.

The treaty must also be approved by the Russian Duma. That body is currently considering the agreement.

According to the new treaty, each side would be allowed 1,550 deployed warheads, 700 deployed delivery vehicles, and 800 deployed and non-deployed launchers. A deployed weapon is one that is ready for use, and a non-deployed launcher is one that is part of a test or training facility.

If the new START is approved and goes into effect, it will lower the nuclear arsenals in each nation by roughly 30 percent.

The U.S. and Russia currently have more than 90 percent of the world's nuclear weapons, according to U.S. government figures. The original START Treaty expired 11 months ago. According to Christopher Preble, director of Foreign Policy Studies at the Cato Institute, through START, the U.S. and Russia have reduced nuclear arsenals by 90 percent since the height of the Cold War, and can afford to reduce them further.

Preble and other analysts say START promotes a safer world because it shows that the world's most powerful nations can behave reasonably and lower the chances for a devastating conflict.