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## **New START Seen Bolstering Obama's Disarmament Credentials**

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Experts said U.S. President Barack Obama's nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament agenda could gain momentum from the recent completion of a new U.S.-Russian arms control treaty, Agence France-Presse reported today (see [GSN](#), April 2).

Obama and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev last month approved the final terms of the 1991 Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty's successor pact, which would require Moscow and Washington to both lower their respective strategic arsenals to 1,550 deployed warheads. Each nation's fielded nuclear delivery vehicles -- missiles, submarines and bombers -- would be capped at 700, with another 100 allowed in reserve. The leaders are expected to sign the document Thursday in the Czech capital of Prague.

Although the new treaty must still be ratified by U.S. and Russian lawmakers, the document's signing would be a key achievement in the lead-up to Obama's two-day Global Nuclear Security Summit -- scheduled to begin April 12 in Washington -- and next month's Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty review conference, said Andrew Kuchins, an expert with the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

"They absolutely had to have this done," Kuchins said of the treaty.

The deal is not a "magic key" that would prompt states to rethink possible nuclear-weapon ambitions, but Obama's nuclear agenda "would have suffered a great setback" if the agreement had not been reached, he said.

"There's no question that the role of nuclear weapons in U.S. security policy is diminishing slowly over time," Kuchins added.

"The most obvious benefit from an American standpoint is that it certainly signifies a better relationship with Russia," said Doug Bandow, a CATO Institute senior fellow. The agreement "does suggest that the Russian government is willing to deal with Washington on a more positive (framework) than it was with the Bush administration near the end of its term," Bandow said (Tangi Quemener, Agence France-Presse/[Yahoo!News](#), April 5).

The United States could cut its number of nuclear bombers from 44 to 20 or fewer to help meet the treaty's requirements, Arms Control Association analyst Tom Collina said, according to ITAR-Tass. Bombers would need a significant amount of time to be loaded with nuclear armaments and transport the weapons to targets, making the aircraft less capable of carrying out nuclear strikes than land- and submarine-launched ballistic missiles.

In a break from the terms of the 1991 treaty, the new agreement calls for deployed warheads to be counted individually rather than assuming that each ballistic missile type carries a specific number of the weapons, said Brookings Institution analyst Stephen Pifer.

The arrangement could benefit the United States, which intends to arm each of its Minuteman 3 ICBMs with a single warhead even though the missile can carry three such weapons, Pifer said. In addition, the terms would permit Washington to alternate numbers of warheads placed on its Trident D-5 submarine-launched ballistic missiles, he said.

Although nuclear bombers can carry multiple nuclear weapons, each plane is designated as a single warhead under the pact because neither Russia nor the United States deploys nuclear weapons continuously on such aircraft, according to ITAR-Tass (see [GSN](#), March 31; ITAR-Tass, April 5).

The treaty would prohibit conventionally armed bombers and submarines from being retrofitted for nuclear-weapon assignments, Kremlin foreign policy adviser Sergei Prikhodko said Friday, according to RIA Novosti. Terms of the deal could help pave the way for removing certain kinds of nuclear delivery systems from service, he noted.

The pact's monitoring system would cut by nearly half the expenses of verifying each government's compliance with the deal, the

official added ([RIA Novosti](#), April 2).

Meanwhile, local leaders in Montana, North Dakota and Wyoming are lobbying Congress to prevent ICBM reductions under the pact in a bid to protect businesses around missile installations in their communities, the Associated Press reported. There are 450 ICBMs managed by Air Force bases in the three states.

"I would keep Malmstrom [Air Force Base] at full strength, regardless," said Michael Winters, mayor of Great Falls, Mont. "Each and every facet of our economy has something to do with Malmstrom."

The ICBMs are less expensive to maintain and easier to protect than nuclear-armed bombers and submarines, advocates of the missiles have argued.

"You can sink a sub or shoot down a plane. That's very different from attacking American soil, and that's what you'd have to do (to get to the ICBM silos)," said Dale Steenbergen, head of the Greater Cheyenne Chamber of Commerce in Wyoming.

The United States is unlikely to significantly scale back its ICBMs because the weapons are relatively inexpensive and could someday be modified to accommodate non-nuclear armaments, said Senator Max Baucus (D-Mont.). He indicated he would vote in favor of the new pact.

"I see no change in American force structure in the foreseeable future," the lawmaker said (Matt Volz, Associated Press/[Google News](#), April 4).