

Liberty Nation

America Last In Biden's Bon-Bon New START Extension To Russia

Dave Patterson

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As with so many U.S. treaties embraced by the left, symbolism is the only demonstrable value. True to form, the Biden administration does not disappoint, unilaterally offering a five-year extension on the current New START agreement without anything in return. Resting U.S. national security on a symbolic nuclear arms treaty that does not include China, a reasonably formidable nuclear foe, or tactical nuclear weapons is a fool's errand. The Trump administration had been pushing to include China in the talks, but it refused to participate.

The New START agreement is a President Obama-legacy agreement between the United States and Russia, which the Senate approved at the end of 2010 and is set to Feb. 5, 2021. The treaty was intended to limit the number of nuclear warheads and strategic delivery systems each country retained and to establish protocols to verify them.

When Donald Trump came into office, his administration had concerns that the treaty put the United States at a disadvantage. In an interview with Reuters, Trump made clear he thought the treaty was "a one-sided deal," describing it as "[j]ust another bad deal that the country made." Nonetheless, members of the "peace-through-weakness" crowd see things differently. The CATO Institute's director of foreign policy studies, Eric Gomez, in a *Defense News* commentary, gushed over Biden's offer of a five-year extension:

"A five-year extension of New START is an encouraging sign that the Biden administration will try to repair the damage that Trump did to arms control. Extending the treaty will remove a looming foreign policy crisis from Biden's list of concerns at a time when the new administration's attention must be on ending the COVID-19 pandemic. If Biden is bold, this can be the beginning of a new era of US interest in arms control."

Extending a treaty that puts the United States at a disadvantage is terrible foreign policy, and the New START agreement was flawed from the beginning. President Trump's former special envoy for arms control, Marshall Billingslea, in a *Washington Times* interview, explained the problem:

"The Obama administration negotiated a very weak verification regime. It really has very little of what the original START treaty contained and has significant loopholes in the way verification is physically conducted, which the Russians have been exploiting. So those behaviors have to stop."

Well, now they don't have to stop for five years.

An additional problem — and one that the Trump administration tried to address — is that the New START does not consider tactical nuclear weapons, in which the Russians have an

advantage. The treaty covers only strategic nuclear weapons, warheads, capped at 1,550 on intercontinental ballistic missiles, submarine-launched ballistic missiles, and deployed heavy bombers, like B-52s, B-1s, and B-2s. Not considering tactical nuclear weapons was among the failings pointed out in a Heritage report, “Twelve Flaws of New START That Will Be Difficult to Fix,” released during the Senate debate on the treaty back in 2010, and one that remains today.

What makes the Biden offer so troubling is that Russian President Vladimir Putin had previously recommended to Trump’s negotiators a one-year extension. Giving the Russians more than they asked for is not bold. It’s feckless.

Quoting the Associated Press’ Vladimir Isachenkov, in an October 2020 article written with Aaron Mehta of *Defense News*: “Russian President Vladimir Putin on Friday made a strong call to save the last existing nuclear arms control pact between his country and the United States, proposing to extend it for at least one year.” Not to be out-negotiated, the Biden administration has in effect said to the Kremlin, “We’ll see your one year and raise you five years.” Not to belabor the poker metaphor, but both houses of the Russian parliament rapidly laid their winning hand on the table, as *The Hill* explained it:

“... both houses of Russia’s parliament voted quickly to approve a bill extending the treaty, which President Vladimir Putin is expected to sign into law. The unanimous votes came after President Biden discussed the extension during a phone call with Putin on Tuesday and followed comments by Russia’s top diplomat in Vienna earlier in the day expressing confidence that negotiations were moving quickly.”

This begs an obvious question: If there was such confidence that the “negotiations were moving quickly,” then why will it take five years? Simple, it’s the curse of the left’s persistent belief that adversaries will agree with the U.S. position eventually. Let them not forget that Neville Chamberlain tried appeasing Germany to deter Hitler from attacking Great Britain.

That didn’t work out so well. The Biden administration’s actions seem to demonstrate it won’t work out well for America, either. The generous multi-year extension of the New START is nothing more than a symbolic gesture that gives the United States and Russia five years to watch China increase its stockpile of nuclear warheads.