

March 19, 2009

The Honorable Hillary Clinton
Secretary of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Madam Secretary:

Congratulations on your successful meeting with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov in Geneva on March 6. We were very pleased indeed by the progress to move forward with a follow-on to the START agreement and your commitment to complete a new agreement before the expiration of START at the end of the year.

While we recognize that the negotiation of a START follow-on will be complex and the timeframe for completing an agreement is tight, we urge you to pursue an agreement that mandates dramatically lower ceilings for strategic warheads and strategic delivery systems than is required under START and outlined in the Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty (SORT).

The United States and Russia are both already on track to achieve further reductions in deployed strategic warheads, which is a small step forward. But deeper reductions -- to 1,000 total warheads or fewer within the next five years -- are within reach if each side is bold and visionary.

Massive nuclear arsenals capable of annihilating entire nations within an hour are more of a liability than an asset because they breed mistrust and worst-case assumptions among other states. They also perpetuate the risk of an accidental or unauthorized launch. Given that no other country possesses more than 300 nuclear warheads and given that nuclear weapons do not serve any practical role in dealing with non-nuclear adversaries or terrorists, such reductions are possible and prudent.

Dramatically deeper U.S.-Russian reductions would also open the possibility for the administration to fulfill another campaign pledge before the end of President Obama's first term: "Initiating a high-level dialogue among all the declared nuclear-weapon states on how to...move toward meaningful reductions and the eventual elimination of all nuclear weapons." A new agreement mandating such reductions would also provide strong and positive momentum to U.S. efforts to forge a consensus for strengthening nonproliferation commitments at the 2010 nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty Review Conference.

To provide stability and predictability for the United States and Russia, we also believe it is vital that the new START follow-on agreement include provisions that ensure that non-deployed warheads cannot be used to quickly increase the size of either nation's deployed strategic stockpile. This could be achieved by limiting the number of warheads that may be loaded on any given delivery system and/or reducing the overall ceilings for nuclear-capable strategic delivery systems

We also encourage you to incorporate in the START follow-on agreement a streamlined system of START-style data exchanges and on-site inspections, plus new non-deployed warhead monitoring techniques, that could give each side sufficient confidence for both sides.

We congratulate you on the good progress so far in pushing the "reset button" on U.S.-Russian relations and look forward to a successful completion of the START follow-on negotiations, as well as Senate advice and consent for ratification.

Sincerely,

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