

Obama Pitches START

November 18, 2010

The  **Moscow Times**

WASHINGTON — A stern President Barack Obama on Thursday said it was a "national security imperative" for the Senate to ratify a pending nuclear arms treaty with Russia before ending its work this year.

Lobbying hard for votes, he expressed confidence that he would get enough of them to get the treaty passed.

To apply pressure, Obama surrounded himself at the White House with former secretaries of states and defense of both main U.S. political parties who all support the treaty, along with leaders of his administration. He said the United States "cannot afford to gamble" with its ability to verify Russia's strategic nuclear arsenal — a central element of the treaty — or risk losing Russia's support on other matters of national security, including pressure on Iran over its pursuit of nuclear weapons.

"This is not about politics," Obama said. "It's about national security. This is not a matter than can be delayed."

The president insisted that the administration has taken the time to do the treaty the right

way, even as a key Republican senator on the matter, Jon Kyl, has said ratification should not be rushed during the post-election session of Congress.

When Obama was asked by a reporter whether he had the votes, he said, "I'm confident that we should be able to get the votes."

Ratification would require 67 votes in the 100-member chamber.

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