

U.S. To Offer Russia Extension To Nuclear Disarmament Treaty - Reports

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The United States could offer Russia an extension to the New START nuclear disarmament treaty, taking the decision to renew the deal out of the hands of the next U.S. administration, the Washington Post newspaper reported Monday.

U.S. President Barack Obama is set to work on a number of nuclear arms policies in an attempt to secure his legacy in the final months of his presidency, the Washington Post claimed. Nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament have been key aims of Obama's presidency, including his famous attempt to "reset" relations with Russia with the signing of the New START treaty in 2008.

Under the terms of the 2008 treaty, the U.S. and Russia must reduce numbers of long range nuclear missiles by 50 percent and reduce their total number of warheads by 75 percent by February 2018. Both sides must then keep their arsenals at these levels until 2021, but the treaty can be extended by up to five years.

A five year extension in the last months of Obama's presidency would see the treaty's conditions in place until 2026, taking the decision to renew out of the control of Obama's successor, who will be elected in November this year.

Independent military expert Alexander Golts said he had "no doubt" that the Kremlin would take an extension if offered. "The New START treaty has worked in Russia's favour, allowing it to streamline and modernize its nuclear arsenal without reducing its attack capability," he said.

Golts told The Moscow Times that while Russian President Vladimir Putin was determined to "reach the ceiling" of the New START treaty's limitations, an extension would be welcomed due to continuing uncertainty over Obama's successor.

"[Hillary] Clinton would 100 percent offer an extension," said Golts, "but we know nothing about Donald Trump's aims or who will be advising him."

The Kremlin denied Monday receiving any offer to extend the New START treaty. "We know nothing about this," said Kremlin Spokesman Dmitry Peskov.

While the United States is widely considered to possess stronger conventional military forces than Russia, Moscow maintains relative parity in the area of nuclear weapons. Russia's nuclear arsenal has recently received increased investment as part of the country's military rearmament and modernization.

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