

Re – **START!**

Stephen L. Bakke – November 28, 2010

"To model our political system upon speculations of lasting tranquility, is to calculate on the weaker springs of the human character." --Alexander Hamilton, Federalist No. 34, 1788

Well, That Was Fun!

Most of the responses I received were in agreement with the basic premise of my recent report “Should It START or Must It Stop?” But as I expected, not all respondents agreed with me. And I’m sure that some who didn’t respond also disagree with me. The most dramatic disagreements came from a couple individuals who felt I was agreeing with Obama and/or ignoring history. Another criticism is that I picked a topic that is not terribly controversial; and “don’t you realize people our age don’t give much thought to the New START Treaty – not interested.” Thanks for the opinions, which I solicited. They were sincere and appreciated – but they prompt me to respond.

I DO NOT agree with Obama’s original motivations and intentions for New START.

The attention I gave to history is part of what led me to my conclusions. As to the “people our age” comment, may I suggest that people of all ages should pay attention to international implications of nuclear arms. As to the suggestion that START should not be considered controversial, that person may be right – and perhaps this follow-up discussion may shed some light on why I agree. In any case, I may be wrong in my interpretations of fact and my conclusions, but ignorance of the facts is one transgression I’m not guilty of. While my opinion on this is certainly not totally consistent with some ideologues, I believe I bring informed arguments, logical reasoning, and a practical flavor to the debate.

Remember that my prior report expressed the following:

- Obama’s support for the original START legislation was a “cram down.”
- The original START negotiations had certain earmarks of “giving away the farm” – but some understandings and interpretations have been, or can be, changed.
- Obama is obviously resisting the ramifications of Senator Kyl’s insistence on certain “deliverable commitments” before supporting the bill – I support Senator Kyl in that.
- And of course the President doesn’t want a delay until 2011 for a vote. That’s pure politics! I support this delay because it will inevitably lead to a better treaty.
- I previously concluded that “If all this comes to pass, and if Senator Kyl and others obtain what they are after, I believe the Senate should, and will, ratify this treaty with at least the required 67 bipartisan votes in the affirmative. In fact, I predict an overwhelming vote to ratify New START, if the loyal opposition receives the very reasonable changes, limitations, and deliverable assurances it is seeking.”

Should all this be crammed into a lame duck session after November's historical election? Should New START be a priority for December 2010?

Analyst Robert Robb recently reminded us of some important things to remember when we are confronting anyone criticizing Senator Kyle's efforts to slow down the Obama START "cram down."

- Senator Kyl is being blamed for holding up consideration of the START Treaty. That is a "spin" on reality. Kyl is a member of the minority party in the Senate and has no say as to when things are scheduled for a vote – that's Harry Reid's job. He can bring it to a vote any time he wants, but he doesn't have the required 67 votes for ratification.
- Actually, Senator Kyl is doing Harry Reid a favor by not refusing to support it outright. Kyl is permitting consideration of the treaty to "live on" because he understands that a good treaty will, at least marginally, advance U.S. interests and national security. Without Kyl's support, it stands no chance of eventual passage. And if brought to the floor during the "lame duck" session, the treaty has NO chance of passage in any form.
- Kyl is simply doing what the Constitution requires of the Senate – exercising independent judgment. And the fact that a two-thirds vote is required further reinforces the fact that our Founders intended that it be difficult for a President to bind the country by a treaty.

For whatever marginal advantage it represents, I support and predict an overwhelming Senate vote to ratify the Start Treaty if Senator Kyl and others receive the very reasonable information and deliverable assurances they are seeking.

But should all this be crammed into a lame duck session after November's historical election? Absolutely not! Not when what needs to be addressed are:

- The need to pass a "continuing resolution" within a few days to fund governments.
- The need to deal with extending current tax rates which expire January one. This would remove one of the major uncertainties which discourage hiring and economic expansion.

Given historical realities, and also focusing on recent history, are the details of this New START Treaty really the issue?

Some of the historical realities upon which I based my conclusion include:

- Reagan's "trust but verify" policies can only be achieved/renewed by signing another nuclear arms treaty. Complete rejection would require complete renegotiation which I don't think is a good thing.
- We should remember history or we are destined to repeat our mistakes. Remember the "cold war"? I believe that if no quality treaty gets approved, including the assurances sought by the Republicans, it could threaten to "START" us on the road to another "cold war" with Russia. I don't want that. It would distract us from the real nuclear threats.

- History teaches us that there are no perfect solutions for the problems of a terribly flawed outside world.
- Attention to history certainly reminds us of Russia's devious history regarding nuclear arms. But complete attention requires that our Senate consider where the Russians have been, where they are now, and what they can realistically achieve, in nuclear weaponry.
- A treaty would be symbolic of at least nominal cooperation between the U.S. and Russia. Treaties are usually mostly symbolic anyway. We may want Russia on our side very soon.

Then what's the Issue?

Is Russia Really Relevant? We may in fact soon find ourselves on the same side of a more pressing security problem – the real Axis of Evil.

This is where the “rubber hits the road”:

- We are now in a post-Soviet world.
- While there are certainly downsides to what will eventually be the New START Treaty, I agree with Charles Krauthammer who suggests that a nuclear exchange between the U.S. and Russia is inconceivable anyway, and is by no means a pressing issue. Deserving of attention? YES! But a top priority in December 2010? NO!
- This treaty, in relative terms, addresses a non-pressing problem – U.S. Soviet relations. We may in fact soon find ourselves on the same side of a more pressing security problem – the real Axis of Evil.

Let us therefore re-focus on boldly addressing the more threatening nuclear threats – **Iran and North Korea – the real Axis of Evil!**

Enough on New START! Now what should I work on? How about something to do with President Obama, his administration, and his policies for a change of pace?