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Colin Powell joins push on New Start nuclear treaty



Colin Powell met US President Barack Obama in the Oval Office to discuss the New Start treaty

Former Secretary of State Colin Powell has called on the US Senate to ratify a new nuclear arms treaty with Russia.

"I hope that the Senate will move quickly," Mr Powell said, after meeting President Barack Obama. He joins three other former Republican secretaries of state in backing the deal.

The New Start treaty would reduce both countries' nuclear arsenals and allow each to inspect the other's facilities.

Some Republicans have argued it should not be voted on this year.

Republican Senator Jon Kyl has pledged to block action on the pact during the lame duck session of Congress, the time between November's congressional elections and the January start of the new Congress.

Other Republican senators have argued any action on the arms pact can only come after the Senate addresses an extension of Bush-era tax cuts and after Mr Obama addresses issues surrounding the modernisation of the US nuclear arsenal.

'More dangerous world'

Mr Powell, a retired four-star Army general, said failure to ratify the treaty soon could put the US in a vulnerable position.

"When you have uncertainty in the area of nuclear weapons, that's a much more dangerous world to live in," he said.

Mr Powell added that he believes Mr Obama has adequately addressed Republican concerns over modernisation and verification systems.

The former secretary of state is due to join his Republican predecessors George Shultz, James Baker and Henry Kissinger in writing a piece endorsing the treaty in Thursday's edition of the

Washington Post newspaper.

Meanwhile, Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin warned in an interview with the CNN news channel on Wednesday that Moscow would probably build up its arsenal if the treaty failed.

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Biden warns failure to pass nuclear treaty endangers US



Mr Biden said the treaty

language had been vetted in 18 Senate hearings

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Vice-President Joseph Biden has warned the US that failure to ratify a new nuclear arms control treaty with Russia will "endanger our national security".

He was reacting to comments by Jon Kyl, a Republican senator who said he did not think ratification of the New Start treaty should be considered this year.

Mr Biden said without such approval, the US would be unable to inspect and track the Russian nuclear arsenal.

The treaty aims to reduce the nuclear arsenal of the two countries.

Signed in April by US President Barack Obama and his Russian counterpart Dmitri Medvedev New Start replaces the Start treaty which expired in December of last year.

"The New Start treaty is a fundamental part of our relationship with Russia, which has been critical to our ability to supply our troops in Afghanistan and to impose and enforce strong sanctions on the Iranian government," Mr Biden said in a statement released by the White

House.

Senate fight ahead

BBC State Department correspondent Kim Ghattas says there is an all out effort by the Obama administration to get ratification during the lame duck session of Congress.

In January the Democratic majority in the new Congress shrinks to 51. Sixty-seven votes are required to pass the treaty.

Our correspondent says that frustrated Democrats believe Republicans are keen to deprive Barack Obama of any political victory after the mid-terms elections but warn that voters will not want their representatives to play with the country's national security.

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TREATY LIMITS

- Warheads: 1,550 (74% lower than the 1991 Start Treaty and 30% lower than the figure of 2,200 that each side was meant to reach by 2012 under the 2002 Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty (Sort))
- Launchers: 700 deployed intercontinental and submarine-launched ballistic missiles, and deployed heavy bombers equipped for nuclear armaments
- New limit on delivery systems less than half current ceiling of 1,600

The treaty was designed in part to replace the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty of 1991, which expired in December 2009.

It commits the former Cold War enemies each to reducing the number of deployed strategic warheads and delivery vehicles, and establishes a compliance and verification regime.

Senate Republicans have said they need further reassurance about America's deterrent capability after Start.

Mr Kyl said in a statement: "When Majority Leader Harry Reid asked me if I thought the treaty could be considered in the lame duck session, I replied I did not think so given the combination of other work Congress must do and the complex and unresolved issues related to Start and modernization."

But Mr Biden noted the treaty had been vetted in 18 Senate hearings and had been endorsed by prominent former national security and diplomatic officials of both parties.

The vice-president said the Obama administration had made clear its plans to spend \$80bn (£50.4) to upgrade the nuclear arsenal over the next decade, and plans to request an additional \$4.1bn.