

SENATOR DeMINT: I'm sorry I wasn't able to hear the real experts speak about Russia. I don't pretend to be an expert, but I would love to share my perspective with you on the importance of a relationship the START treaty. I see a lot of youth in the room today. I think last time I spoke about START and Russia, I mentioned somewhere in my talk the Soviet Union. The liberal blogs just went crazy over that trying to remind me that the Soviet Union was no longer in existence.

Growing up when I did during the Cold War, during the 1960s -- I see a few folks who might be old enough, but the Soviet Union and Russia were synonymous. There were bomb shelters in almost every building that you went to. Some of my neighbors actually had dug huge holes in their backyards and put these bomb shelters underground that looked like big fuel tanks. You went down and had a lot of cupboards with food stored up. Really, some people thought this was going to happen any day.

They had a crank that you could crank air down. I don't know what that would do to filter out radiation. In the schools regularly, we would be told to climb under our desk and put our head down and practice what would happen if we were attacked by the Russians.

That may sound crazy but our strategy, as you know, was mutually assured nuclear destruction. We were not doing anything to try to prevent a missile attack. We were just hoping they

knew if they attacked us, we would attack them. We would both be destroyed and none of us wanted that. That was our strategy, mutually assured destruction.

As I look at the current relationship with Russia, the proposed START Treaty, I back up from it, and before I jump in and say what about the number of missiles, what about the verification, what about modernization, not the details of the Treaty, but what is the whole context that this Treaty is being offered in. For me, that is the most important thing, as we look at the role of the United States, the role of Russia today, and how this Treaty works with that.

As we all know, when the Berlin Wall came down, as the Soviet Union fell, a lot of the satellite countries that had been part of it broke off. They have all become free countries. We had a lot of hope that Russia would become democratic and a free market, more humanitarian, more rule of law.

Those things have really not happened. We thought for a while they were happening, but as we look at who we are doing business with today, I don't know what the panel said, but clearly, the Soviet Union as a democracy is a fraud. Very little free market activity, most of their economic wealth is through oil wealth and is pretty much dependent on that. Foreign investment is minimal. The rule of law is very loose. It's violent. Murders go unpunished. The Soviet Union, or Russia --

it is synonymous. Remember, The Russians are coming.

When I visit Latvia, the Ukraine and other countries around the Soviet Union -- excuse me, Russia, they are concerned because Russia is constantly involved with trying to manipulate their elections, undermine their freedom, and impose some control directly or indirectly. We know Russia is involved with India, Brazil, China and they are trying to undermine American strength in different parts of the world. And as we think about Russia, I think it's important for us to think about them as a country that is a threat to many but a protector of none.

When you think about the American role in the world, we are a protector of many and a threat to none. Over 30 countries depend on America for protection. Our nuclear umbrella, our nuclear capability is a stabilizing force in the world. Many countries do not feel the need to have their own nuclear arsenal because of our power as a country and our commitment to protect them.

It probably does more to reduce proliferation than anything else. Countries like Japan know they do not need to get into that business because we are and we are a very capable threat against any threat against them.

Our role is different. The Russians do not protect anyone. We have seen whether it is through leveraging their energy against other countries, what they have done in Georgia,

what they are doing around the world to assert their power, that they are very interested in expanding their power and reducing American power, but no nation counts on them for their support.

As I look at the START Treaty, the first thing that hits me in the face is it assumes there should be parity, nuclear parity, between the United States and Russia. That makes absolutely no sense to me today. Maybe it did in the '60s when Russia was an economic power, a super power militarily, we were an economic power, they were a super power. This idea of parity, mutually assured destruction, maybe made sense in an environment where we could not defend against missiles.

Today, it does not make sense to me. Russia is, in effect, a third world economy, a socialist economy, that is more of a threat than a protector of any nation. The United States is still the premiere world economy. Our military strength is a stabilizing force. For us to look at Russia as we did 30 or 40 years ago makes no sense to me.

The START Treaty, if you have already talked about it today, the Russians already pretty much comply with it, but it's not going to change other than some nominal verification, but it will reduce our offensive weapons, and at the same time, it takes away, I think, what should be the real vision of our missile defense system. This is something we argued about in Committee because the Administration keeps insisting this does nothing to

limit our ability to develop a missile defense system.

In asking questions to Secretary Clinton, Secretary Gates, and Chairman John Kerry agreed, when they talk about missile defense now, it only is a nominal system that can shoot down one or two missiles from a rogue state or accidental missile launching. When they talk about missile defense, it has nothing to do with defending against Russian missiles. I asked them, I said, "Do you mean what this START Treaty does is continue the strategy of mutual assured destruction?" And they said yes.

That's no longer acceptable to me. They said that's the strategy under the Bush Administration, only because our technology was not to the point where we could defend against hundreds of missiles, but to accept the idea that over the next ten years that we could not achieve the vision of Ronald Reagan that we would render nuclear missiles in the world useless because of our ability to defend against them, that is a vision that I believe should stand.

It's in direct contrast with all the implied and explicit agreements in the START Treaty. The START Treaty agrees to parity. It agrees to mutually assured destruction, and it agrees that we will not develop a defense system against Russian missiles, Chinese missiles, or any other country that can fire multiple missiles at us. Anyone who wants to argue with that needs to look at the tapes from the hearing. They said the

ability to shoot down and defend against multiple missiles from Russia would de-stabilize the relationship.

That's unacceptable to me. I would love to reduce nuclear missiles in the world, but as we reduce our missiles and agree not to develop a missile defense system, the 30 countries or more that depend on us are going to start to question whether or not they can depend on us.

I think the START Treaty will do more to encourage the proliferation of nuclear missiles than no START Treaty at all, because countries will realize that they are going to have to defend themselves, that we are not going to even try to develop a defense system that can protect them.

I think it's a real problem. I think if we can tell the American people, and this is part of what I want to do, do you want to live as the Russians have said, that we are not safe. That is what Putin has said, that the purpose of this agreement is to make sure Americans do not feel safe. That is not acceptable. I think we have the capability, the technology to develop over the next ten years the ability to defend against hundreds of missile launches against the United States.

If we don't pursue that, I think we are going to encourage more countries to develop more missiles because our missile defense will only defend against a singular launch. I don't think that makes any sense today. I would certainly like

to have good relationships with the Russians. They have effectively said if we try to develop a missile defense system that defends against their missiles, they will get out of the Treaty.

I think the Treaty is worthless from the start. I think we can have a stronger and better relationship with Russia and other potential enemies through strength. I think Reagan's philosophy still goes for me today. Unless we have the strength to back up our talk, the Russians or Iran or North Korea are not going to listen to us, and our allies are not going to trust us to defend them.

I oppose the START Treaty as it is. I oppose the context with which it is being presented. I particularly oppose the Administration's view that we should not use the creative, innovative technological resources of the United States to develop a defense system that can defend against any missile strike from any country in the world.

I will stop there and take a couple of questions, and then I'd probably better run.

QUESTION: (Inaudible.)

SENATOR DeMINT: That's a great question. I think anyone who knows us and looks at history knows we're not going to -- we don't want anything from Russia. We don't want to take their land. They know we're not going to attack them, if they

knew us.

What we want in an international relationship is peace, a good trading environment, good travel environment. But we have never had imperialistic aspirations, even when we have defeated countries in war, we have helped build them back up and gotten out. I would want the Russians to know that we are not a threat, don't want to be a threat. We don't want anyone in the world to be able to threaten our people.

As someone who has taken an oath of office to defend the Constitution, I feel like my primary responsibility to the people of this country is to defend them against any foreign threat. If we develop a philosophy and sign treaties where we agree to the opposite, I think that is a dereliction of duty. I would love for the Russians to know that we have no goals to interfere with their plans to be prosperous but we will interfere with their plans to expand to our allies, to threaten our allies in any way.

I think it's irrational for any country to look at us and think we're building up a missile defense system in order to threaten someone. Even when Reagan was first talking about a missile defense system, he was saying we will share it with the world. We will share it with the Russians.

By doing that, we will render nuclear missiles obsolete. Why would Iran want to develop missiles if we could

shoot them all down? I think if we ask ourselves that, the way to stop proliferation of nuclear weapons is just to make sure they are useless.

We're not going to stop proliferation by reducing our missiles to the level the Russians are already at, while we see what North Korea, Iran and other countries are doing, and it's not unrealistic to think in ten years there could be five or six countries with the ability to fire multiple missiles. It is unacceptable for us not to develop the technology to stop it.

QUESTION: Cooper Waterman from George Washington University. You mentioned Reagan a lot. My question is Reagan seemed to be able to follow along in conversation with the Russians about limiting warhead numbers as well as going along with missile defense. He did Star Wars as well as continue conversations with START. Where has this Administration really pointed out to you that it's more of an either/or, that we're reducing or we're doing missile defense?

SENATOR DeMINT: They were very clear, Secretary Clinton and Secretary Gates in the hearing, that they had no intentions of developing a missile defense system that threatened Russian offensive weapons. That is what they have said. When they speak of missile defense, they are speaking of that nominal system that can shoot down a single missile from a rogue nation.

We essentially have that technology now. It certainly

needs to be deployed. But the Administration has given every indication it wants this Treaty so bad, it will agree to almost anything. Clearly, they are agreeing not to defend the country against missiles.

QUESTION: Michaela Bendikova, with the Heritage Foundation. I would like to ask what is your opinion on the prospect of negotiating records for this Treaty?

SENATOR DeMINT: This is something I have requested. There is a precedent for asking for these negotiating records. The reason we are interested in negotiating records is because there is an obvious contradiction between what we said we agreed to and what the Russians said we agreed to.

The negotiating records would tell us what we really agreed to, what were the verbal agreements about missile defense and other agreements.

The Senate has been provided these records for other agreements, not all of them, but it's not completely unprecedented to ask for them. We have been told we will not get them.

There are some summaries that have been provided, but again, because there is so much disagreement at the outset as far as what this Treaty means, I think before the Senate agrees to anything, we need to know what the agreement really means. We will continue to insist on it. I don't think they will give it

to us because I don't think they want us to know what's in it.

QUESTION: Malkhaz Mikeladze from the Embassy of Georgia. On acceptance of the Zone of Influence of the Russian Federation, how can we translate this in practical words? What does it mean for the United States and how can we proceed on that? Numerous times, it was announced that the U.S. administration supported the idea of non-acceptance of the Zone of Influence of the Russian Federation. What does it mean in practical words? Thank you.

SENATOR DeMINT: I didn't get all that.

MR. FLY: He says the Administration has said we won't accept a zone of influence in Russia's neighborhood. He's asking what do you think that should mean in practice, with countries like Georgia, the Ukraine and other allies?

SENATOR DeMINT: These are free countries and they should be able to operate freely outside the influence of Russia if they want to. Certainly, if they want to have trading relations and other cultural relations, that should be the freedom of these countries, but it should be initiated by these countries and not imposed by Russia.

I don't pretend to know exactly how to define that, but I don't think Russia can claim an influence outside their borders or some control unless it is a mutual relationship, which is what we seek with Russia. I want a good relationship with Russia, but

understanding their political environment right now, the only way we can work with them is to demonstrate that we have the resolve, the commitment and the strength to back up what we say.

Getting back to Reagan, Reagan would not take the strategic defense off the table even though Gorbachev demanded it, and they walked away from the table several times, but they eventually walked back to the table because we were by our build up of strength bankrupting their nation trying to keep up with us, and it was our strength and our commitment to have that strength that brought them to the table.

I think now we are negotiating out of weakness because we want an agreement. We're not getting anything in this agreement that the Russians have not already agreed to, and there are real concerns about our commitment to modernize the missiles that we have and the ability to produce modernized weapons in the future, nothing about tactical nuclear weapons in here.

A lot of holes in the Treaty, but before we jump in and get involved in the detail, let's back up and say is parity rational in this environment. Is mutually assured destruction rational in this environment, and does it make sense for us to decide as a nation not to use our technology to develop a missile defense system in this environment.

My answer is no to all those. I don't need to turn to the first page of the START Treaty because it makes no sense.

I better run. Thanks a lot.

[Applause.]

MR. FLY: Thanks again to Senator DeMint and our panel from earlier, and thanks to all of you for coming.

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Thanks.