

# Opposing the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty in the U.S. Congress: Ideological analysis of Senate Armed Services and Foreign Relations Committee Hearings

**Teemu Mäkinen**

University of Tampere

**Abstract:** *The United States Senate voted to ratify the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty with Russia in 2010 by 74-26, all 26 voting against being Republicans. The change in the voting outcome compared to the 95-0 result in the 2003 SORT vote was dramatic. Using inductive frame analysis, this article analyzes committee hearings in the Senate Foreign Relations and the Armed Services committees in order to identify competing narratives defining individual senators' positions on the ratification of the New START. Building on conceptual framework introduced by Walter Russel Mead (2002), it distinguishes four schools of thought: Jacksonian, Hamiltonian, Jeffersonian, and Wilsonian. The argumentation used in the hearings is deconstructed in order to understand the increase in opposition to the traditionally bipartisan nuclear arms control regime. The results reveal a factionalism in the Republican Party. The argumentation in opposition to ratification traces back to the Jacksonian school, whereas argumentation supporting the ratification traces back to Hamiltonian, Jeffersonian and Wilsonian traditions. According to opposition, the Obama administration was pursuing its idealistic goal of a world-without-nuclear-weapons and its misguided Russia reset policy by any means necessary – most importantly by compromising with Russia on U.S. European-based missile defense.*

**Keywords:** *Congress, committee, ideology, foreign policy, arms control*

## Introduction

In November 2017 the rising tensions in the Korean peninsula led the Senate Foreign Relations Committee to hold hearing on “Nuclear Weapons Authority” – first of its kind in four decades (Zengerle, 2017) – and to debate the president’s unilateral power to pre-emptively use nuclear weapons, as well as the U.S. Congress’ role in this process.<sup>1</sup> While the Trump presidency may have raised concerns over the president’s authority to start a nuclear war without a congressional declaration of war, the role of the Congress in foreign policy – the constitutional “invitation to struggle” (Corwin, 1954) over the direction of American foreign policy – is as old as the United States. The ratification process of the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (The New START) by the United States Congress on 22 December 2010, provides a suitable contextual framework for analyzing the deliberational aspects of executive-legislative relations in American foreign policy. The treaty was a successor to previous bilateral arms control treaties with Russia, and one of the hallmarks of the Obama administration’s now infamous Russia reset policy (see Kuchins, 2011). Despite the strong bipartisan support for previous agreements, and the bipartisan campaign by former statesmen during the New START ratification process (see Baker et. al, 2010), the New START faced strong opposition as 26 Republican senators voted against its ratification.<sup>2</sup>

At a time when executive agreements had become the method-of-choice to conduct foreign affairs (see Krutz & Peake, 2009), the New START was ratified as a treaty in the constitutional sense, requiring a two-thirds majority in the Senate (U.S. Const. Art. 2 Sec. II). The Congress had passed the Affordable Care Act in a partisan fashion, and the polarization of the Congress along party lines paved way for the Tea Party revolution in the 2010 midterms. The institutional role of the Senate – passing the New START as a treaty instead of a commonly used executive agreement – and the fiercely partisan nature of the U.S. Congress following the 2008 and 2010 elections, combined with the long-term divisions in foreign policy ideology,

1 This article is based on my doctoral dissertation “Debating Transatlantic Security in the United States Congress: A Study of Senate Armed Services and Foreign Relations Committees in 111th and 112th Congress (2009-2012),” defended in February 2018.

2 Democrats held the Senate in the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress by a 56-42 margin, with two Democratic-leaning independents leading to *de facto* Democratic majority of 58-42. Of 42 Republicans only 16 voted for the ratification.

formed the context of the debate. For analytical purposes, this represented a unique opportunity to observe – in a methodologically novel manner – the ideological features of congressional discourse on a subject of significant importance for U.S., European and global security.

This essay analyzes congressional hearings in the Senate Armed Services (SASC) and Foreign Relations (SFRC) committees in order to examine the argumentation made both for and against the ratification of the New START, the emphasis being on the argumentation against. It does so for the purpose of recognizing competing framings and characterizations. Focusing on the ideological aspects in the argumentation, this paper seeks to understand why the 2010 New START ratification faced considerably stronger congressional opposition than previous strategic arms treaties.<sup>3</sup> This essay quantifies the argumentation used by individual senators, before deconstructing the debate based on contextual and historical understanding of American foreign policy tradition. In order to identify different ideological positions characterizing the deliberations, this article uses Walter Russel Mead's distinction between four schools of American foreign policy tradition: *Jacksonians* as nationalistic and often rural Republicans, *Jeffersonians* as intellectual constitutionalists of both political parties, *Hamiltonians* as commercially-oriented internationalists, and *Wilsonians* as idealistic internationalists (Mead, 2002). Mead's categorization helps link American foreign policy to domestic politics, and thus offers a more comprehensive framework for analyzing congressional foreign policy attitudes than traditional ideological categories in international relations. Qualitative research focusing on substantive argumentation is ill-suited for liberal-conservative divide commonly used in roll-call based analysis. The goal here is to identify the ideological foundations of competing narratives of an issue that previously faced little partisan or ideological opposition. I will use a method highlighting the deliberative aspects of foreign policy debate and a theory on foreign policy tradition linked to American domestic politics, thus emphasizing the interrelatedness of American foreign and domestic politics.<sup>4</sup>

3 The first treaty (SALT) was negotiated by Richard Nixon and ratified in 1972 by a vote of 88-2, START I was ratified by a vote of 93-6 on October 1992, START II by a vote of 87-4 on January 1996, and SORT by a vote of 95-0 on March 2003. (See ACA, 2017.)

4 Mead describes his taxonomy as four foreign policy *traditions*, not as *ideology* per se. Especially the *Jacksonian* school is defined more as a cultural tradition than a theoretical ideology. The term ideology in this article refers to substance-based argumentation used to either oppose or support the START treaty. The argumentative logic and the substantive foundation of senator's position on the issue is then linked to Mead's taxonomy of four schools of American foreign policy tradition.

### **Overseers of American Foreign Policy**

Congressional committees are the workshops of the Congress. Their importance in legislating, overseeing and investigating has risen due to the growing workload of the Congress and the decentralization of congressional decision-making. They act as “safety valves” and “outlets for national debates and controversies” (Davidson et. al. 2011. 176). They also evaluate administration policies, promote policy alternatives, identify problems and offer solutions (Skinner, 2014. 1-3). The analysis in this article has been limited to two committees characterized as the “most visible and consequential overseers of U.S. foreign policy” (Fowler, 2015. 202) – SFRC and SASC – although also other committees do influence foreign policy. Major foreign policy agencies – the State Department and the Department of Defense – fall under congressional oversight of SASC and SFRC. Senate committees tend to hold more prestige than their counterparts in the House (Fowler, 2015. 4-5), making them ideal locations for analyzing congressional foreign policy discourse.

Both committees need to balance between electoral realities and institutional responsibilities (Fowler, 2015. 9-10). This has led to the committees “furthering the personal and partisan agendas of the members” and being “overly sensitive to budgetary politics and routine administration at the expense of more consequential matters.” (Fowler, 2015. 202; see also Lee, 2009). Brent Rockman (2005, 35-37) argues, “our national legislators... have much to lose by investing a great deal of time in complicated foreign policy issues.” This makes it less likely for individuals to risk their electoral fortunes by abandoning partisan unity. Fowler’s notion of sensitivity to budgetary politics is highlighted in the SASC, which is responsible for the annual defense appropriations. It is difficult to overestimate the importance of the defense appropriations process as during the 111<sup>th</sup> and 112<sup>th</sup> Congress the U.S. defense budget ranged from \$645 billion to \$691 billion. Funding the Pentagon limits reflexive partisanship (Fowler, 2015. 99). Everyone wants to partake in bringing home the bacon, and SASC is likely to engage itself in budgetary hearings with distributional consequences (e.g. Davidson et. al., 2011; Mayhew, 2000; 2004). In SFRC the role of budgetary politics is less visible, making the committee prone to ideological conflict due to its deliberative nature and institutional responsibility over divisive issues like U.S. foreign aid (Fowler, 2015).

### Foreign Policy Ideology in the Congressional Context

Helen Milner and Dustin Tingley (2015) postulate two features affecting congressional foreign policy behavior: *distributional* and *ideological*.<sup>5</sup> The New START included both; the nuclear modernization aspect had distributional consequences, and the general U.S. nuclear arms policy was debated on ideological basis. Overall, presidents have more difficulty passing policies when “distribution of gains and losses is large and concentrated.” (Milner & Tingley, 2015. 39). When the distributional features of a policy are high, special interests are activated and parochial interests of individual lawmakers are highlighted. The higher the distributional effects, the higher the domestic restraints on president’s policies. Nuclear modernization fits in the category of *domestic military spending* invoking heightened congressional activity (Milner & Tingley, 2015. 42-51). Ideological considerations affect the lawmakers’ foreign policy position, and ideology shapes the foreign policy instruments (i.e. policies) they believe lead to the desired policy outcomes. According to Milner & Tingley (2015. 57), “they [the public] have different causal stories in their heads about how policies connect to outcomes.” Individuals might perceive enhancing *national security* as the desired policy outcome but disagree fundamentally on how the U.S. nuclear arms policy ought to be conducted to reach the agreed-upon goal – in the case of the New START, *unilateralism* versus *international nonproliferation framework*.

To frame is to make the “causal links” salient, and to “promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation...” (Entman, 1993. 52). In Congress, the ideological divide becomes salient when Congress is divided in its policy response. Calculating ideological effects in Congress is complicated by the ambiguity between ideological polarization and partisan conflict – the idea of ideological purity against the self-serving interests of politicians placating their voter base.<sup>6</sup>

Instead of analyzing a liberal-conservative divide, this article adopts Walter Russel Mead’s distinction of four distinct schools of American foreign policy tradition; Jacksonian, Jeffersonian, Hamiltonian, and Wilsonian

5 Ideology in this article is understood in Gerring’s definition (see 1997), as a consistent approach to specific issues over time.

6 See Lee’s (2009, 3) rather parochial view: “Congressional parties hold together and battle with one another because of powerful competing *political interests*, not just because of members’ *ideals* or *ideological preferences*.”

(Mead, 2002). Hamiltonians can be described as globalists, who define America's interests primarily in economic terms, yet value America's involvement in the global arena as the leader of the "free world" and successor of Great Britain. International economic system created after World War II and George H. W. Bush's "new world order" and his argumentation justifying the Gulf War aptly exemplifies the Hamiltonian school. Wilsonians are globalists who define America's interests in terms of values. U.S. foreign policy highlighting international framework, human rights, democracy, and rule-of-law has its roots in a Wilsonian tradition, exemplified by the support for humanitarian interventions, such as U.S. involvement in the Balkans.

Jeffersonians are the so-called "realists" of the four schools. They perceive risk-aversion as the first rule of U.S. foreign policy and see foreign entanglements as harmful for American democracy at home. International framework is positive when it reduces risks of war – such as international nuclear arms control agreements – yet Jeffersonians believe in the constitutional practice of America's foreign policy (i.e. war powers question).

Jacksonians – often coming from rural areas – are the most vehemently nationalist and populist, and the foreign policy ideology for them is more of an instinct than a well-thought ideology. They support military, social security and Medicaid, but see the role of federal government as mainly harmful and intrusive. For them the United States is a nation state based on blood and ethnicity, rather than on abstract ideals. International organizations are viewed with suspicion, and unilateralism is encouraged. Limited warfare, humanitarian interventions and foreign aid are strongly opposed. In general, Hamiltonians and Wilsonians – the so-called east coast elite – took control of the American foreign policy from 1945 until the election of George W. Bush in 2000. George W. Bush began as a Jacksonian, Barrack Obama as a Jeffersonian, and finally Donald Trump as a Jacksonian. In partisan terms, Jacksonians are almost exclusively Republicans, Jeffersonians both left-leaning Democrats and libertarian Republicans, Hamiltonians primarily Republicans, and Wilsonians Democrats (see Mead, 2002; 2004; 2017).

Executive-legislative relations in foreign policy are a much-studied subject. Some scholars have observed increased presidential authority, calling it the *imperial presidency* (see Schlesinger, 1974; Rudalevige 2006a; 2006b; 2012; 2016; Bose, 2011), some congressional assertiveness (see Carter & Scott; 2009; Hersman, 2000; Howell & Pevehouse, 2005; 2007a;

2007b; Lindsay, 1993; 1994; Owens, 2009), and some argue the Congress has knowingly deferred its constitutional authority (see Fisher, 2004; 2005; 2009; 2010; 2012; 2015 & 2017, Fisher, Hendrickson & Weissman, 2008). Some have seen congressional motivations as parochial by nature (see Lee, 2009; Rockman, 2005; 2012), some based on domestic politics ideology (see Gries, 2014; Mead, 2002; 2017), and some see variance depending on foreign policy instrument (see Milner & Tingley, 2015).

### Research Design

Methodologically, this study employed inductive framing analysis of SASC and SFRC hearings on the ratification of the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty in the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress (2009-2010).<sup>7</sup> By analyzing the hearings transcripts statement by statement, question by question, the goal was to identify *frames*, as well as logical framing devices and reasoning devices that promote a certain interpretation of a topic (Berbers et al. 2015. 802).<sup>8</sup> Congressional response to a problem is dependent on the congressional understanding of the problem, i.e. problem definition. According to Deborah Stone (1989, 282), problem definition is a: "process of image making, where the images have to do fundamentally with attributing cause, blame and responsibility." Congressional committees have a role in defining problems by setting the agenda and organizing hearings on selected issues. The public nature of congressional hearings makes them a suitable arena to create causal stories and to fight to defend and sustain specific interpretations of reality (Stone, 1989. 293) by framing the debate. Framing refers to "arguments and justifications embedded in political discourse" (Kinder & Nelson, 2005. 103), with the goal of making complex realities accessible for the people by creating "...cognitive structures that help citizens make sense of politics" (ibid) through political discourse. How individual senators made sense of the complex realities of the New START treaty to promote their interpretation thereof represents the leading question in this article. Presenting issues like the New START to a wide audience in comprehensible terms links domestic politics to complex foreign policy issues. As argued by Peter Gries (2014) and Mead (2002), foreign policy beliefs

7 Not that the purpose here is not to conduct a rhetorical study, but a substantive reading of the argumentation used.

8 Available at Government Printing Office, [www.gpo.gov](http://www.gpo.gov).

are closely linked to one's domestic policy views, and as noted by Quentin Skinner (2002, 5), "...what it is rational to believe depends in large measure on the nature of our other beliefs."

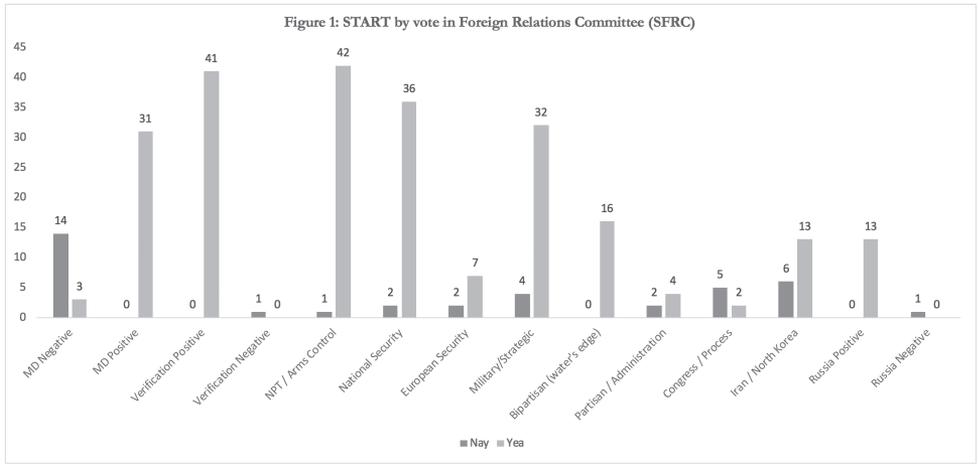
According to Robert Entman (1993, 52), attempts to frame the debate can be identified by "the presence or absence of certain keywords, stock phrases, stereotyped images, sources of information, and sentences that provide thematically reinforcing clusters of facts or judgements." Once the arguments were identified, I analyzed both the competing and dominant frames. The quantitative presentation of the results further divided the arguments in two columns based on whether the senator behind individual *frame* voted against or for the ratification (see figures 1 & 2). Inductive analysis has been criticized for too small of a sample size and difficulties in replicating the results (see de Vreese, 2005, 53; Hertog & Mcleod, 2011). To counter possible biases, first, the argumentative logic of *frames* identified was deconstructed. Second, specific criteria to identify and categorize statements into *framings* was established: the reading of the debates recognized mutually exclusive framings (such as *missile defense negative* and *missile defense positive*) labeled as *competing frames*, and *frames* frequently used by both sides of the debate (such as *national security*), labeled as *dominant frames* (D'Angelo & Kuypers, 2010). Third, Claes de Vreese (2005, 54) set four criteria to analyze frames: 1) *identifiable conceptual and linguistic characteristics*, 2) frames must be *commonly observed*, 3) frame must be *reliably distinguishable*, and 4) have *representational validity*. Overall, the research methodology used in the article can be summarized as follows:

- 1) Examination of the political, historical, ideological, and institutional context.
- 2) Recognition of dominant and competing framings.
- 3) Recognition of key players and competing factions.
- 4) Deconstruction of the debate in context.

### **Deconstruction of the Debate**

SFRC held nine hearings devoted to the new Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, whereas the SASC held five (S. Hrg. 111-779 & S. Hrg. 111-897). Senators in the SFRC were considerably more likely to support the ratification; out of 278 framings identified, 240 were statements made by senators

voting for the ratification, whereas 38 framings were statements made by senators arguing against the ratification (see figure 1). Senators in the SASC were much more likely to oppose the ratification. Of the 138 framings identified, 77 were identified in statements by senators voting against the treaty, 61 in those voting for it (see figure 2)



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9 *MD Negative*: Statements arguing that ratifying START would have negative consequences for U.S. missile defense.

*MD Positive*: Statements arguing that the New START does not affect U.S. missile defense.

*Verification Positive*: Statements arguing that verification regime in would enhance U.S. security.

*Verification Negative*: Statements arguing that verification regime would either be detrimental to U.S. security or that U.S. has no reason to trust Russia in the matter.

*NPT / Arms Control*: Statements arguing for importance of ratification to overall nuclear nonproliferation.

*National Security*: Statements arguing START's effects on national security.

*European Security*: Statements stressing START's implications to European security.

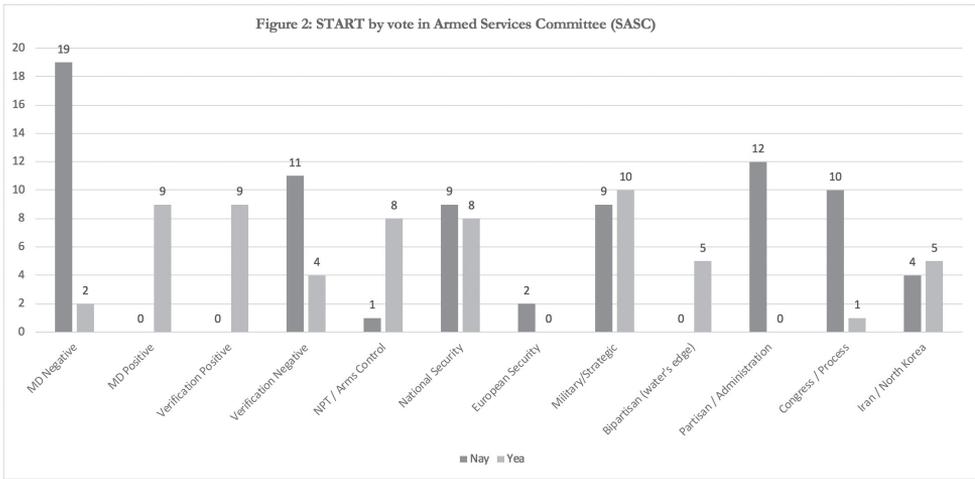
*Military / Strategic*: Arguments based on military / strategic implications.

*Bipartisan / Water's Edge*: Statements arguing START's ratification is a bipartisan matter.

*Partisan / Administration*: Statements arguing that other side's argumentation is based on partisanship rather than U.S. interests.

*Congress / Process*: Statements arguing the role of U.S. Congress in the overall legislative process.

*Iran & North Korea*: Statements arguing for or against the treaty based on threat by Iran and North Korea.



### Competing Frames

*Missile defense negative* -framing was the dominant argument of the opposition. In the SFRC it constituted 37% of all the arguments against, in the SASC 25% (see figures 1 & 2). Argumentatively statements identified within the framing emphasized negative consequences to the American missile defense infrastructure in Europe, and the Obama administration's decision to cancel the Bush-era ground-based missile defense system in Europe was presented as an appeasement to Russia. In other words, the Obama administration was granting Russia a veto power over American missile defense:

I continue to have serious concerns about why the administration agreed to this language in the treaty text, after telling Congress repeatedly during the negotiations that they would do no such thing, and I fear it could fuel Russia's clear desire to establish unfounded linkages between offensive and defensive weapons. [...] I would reiterate my long-held view that any notion of a Russian veto power over decisions on our missile defense architecture is unacceptable, and we should oppose any attempts by any administration to do so (Senator McCain (R-AZ), S. Hrg. 111-779, 2010. 4).

The argument made by SASC Chairman John McCain (R-AZ) demonstrated the logic of Republican opposition. It established a negative link between the New START and the 2009 decision to cancel U.S. missile defense plans in Poland and Czech Republic. It also critiqued the negotiating

process, which, according to McCain, included misleading the Congress. Granting Russia veto over missile defense – or any other issue for that matter – is framed as an appeasement to the Russian federation. Thereby the *missile defense negative* -framing was closely linked to *partisan / administration* and *Congress / process* -framings, prevalent in the SASC (figure 2). The “language in the treaty text” Senator McCain referred to is the legally nonbinding signing statement by the Russian side, which claimed that the treaty “...can operate and be viable only if the United States of America refrains from developing its missile defense capabilities...” (Woolf, 2016. 15). Although the signing statement itself was not legally binding (see Woolf, 2016), McCain’s statement implied *de facto* understanding between presidents Barack Obama and Dmitri Medvedev. Such agreement – legally binding or not – was unacceptable.

Besides the negative consequences to America’s freedom of action as a sovereign actor in Europe, McCain delegitimized the Russian “desire to establish unfounded linkages between offensive and defensive weapons.” Denying the legitimacy of the Russian assertion that U.S. missile defense would affect the strategic balance vis-à-vis European security setting suggested that such calculations should not form the basis of U.S. assessment of the situation. The limited missile defense systems the U.S. was planning formed a regional system against limited ballistic missile launches (for example Kelleher & Peter, 2015. 1). Besides the Bush-era plans to deploy ground-based missiles to Poland and a radar system in the Czech Republic were meant to deter limited missile attacks from Iran (Acton, 2015. 37-38). McCain’s argumentation suggested that the ten interceptors deployed in Poland under Bush administration’s plan would not affect the strategic balance vis-à-vis Russia.<sup>10</sup>

Senator James DeMint (R-SC) challenged the logic of mutually assured destruction (MAD). In his view, the New START would continue the logic of MAD and establish as U.S. policy not to develop missile defense capabilities that “could shoot down multiple missiles...” (Senator DeMint (R-SC), S. Hrg. 111-738, 2010. 236). DeMint further argued that this understanding of U.S. missile defense policy had been made clear to Russia, even though the American people would find it objectionable that the United States would not attempt to “use our technology to develop a system that could not only protect us against the Soviet Union but multiple

<sup>10</sup> Russia was estimated having 2,000 operationally deployed tactical nuclear missiles deployed on its western border (Zenko, 2010. 7-8).

missiles from China or some other nation that was capable of developing multiple systems.” (ibid.). For DeMint, the question was of great strategic significance. United States as the one true superpower with an enormous economic edge relative to Russia ought not to limit its policy based on the MAD doctrine. United States was “a protector of many and a threat to none”, whereas Russia was a “a protector of none and a threat to many...”, the many including American allies in Europe: “Over 30 countries count on us.” (Senator DeMint (R-SC) S. Hrg. 111-738, 2010. 385). If the debate in Congress on missile defense and nuclear arms ranged from a comprehensive missile defense layer to voices arguing for the technical and fiscal impossibility of such systems (see Gallagher, 2015. 94), DeMint supported the idea of pursuing the strategic mindset behind Ronald Reagan’s “Star Wars”; the opposite of the framework established by the New START. Given the post-Cold War strength of America’s strategic and economic position, the United States ought to push its advantage, argued DeMint, rather than concede to second tier powers by considering symmetric nuclear arms reductions automatically positive.

*Missile Defense positive* -framing was a reactive response to the opposition. In both committees, *missile defense positive* ranked amongst the most frequently invoked framings (see figure 1 and 2).

Fundamentally, this treaty is a treaty that limits strategic offensive nuclear arms. It does not limit anything else. Some might want it to limit more. Some might fear that it does limit more. But it does not. For instance, there have been statements made suggesting that the treaty imposes constraints on our missile defense plans and programs. That is simply incorrect (Senator Levin (D-MI), S. Hrg. 111-897, 2010. 35).

Chairman Carl Levin (D-MI) denied the linkages between offensive and defensive weapons. In his view, the treaty did not limit defensive systems, despite Russia’s desires. The unilateral signing statement by Russia was based on the false premise that U.S. missile defense would alter the strategic balance between Russia and the U.S., thus delegitimizing assertions made by Russians. According to Levin, the U.S. did not acknowledge the linkage between offensive and defensive weapons – in the New START context – and thus assertion that ratifying the New START would constrain U.S. missile defense was “simply incorrect” (ibid).

Whereas Levin’s argumentation relied on delegitimizing Russia’s concerns and refuting Republican arguments that secret deals were made to obtain Russian approval of the treaty, the SFRC Ranking Member Richard

Lugar (R-IN) went a step further. Lugar questioned the overall feasibility of a national missile defense system capable of altering the logic of MAD. According to Lugar, neither Russia nor America had at any time “seriously discussed creating a sufficient missile defense that would stop several thousands of missiles...” (Senator Lugar (R-IN) S. Hrg. 111-738, 2010. 240). Referring to arguments made by some Republicans, Lugar argued that a policy pursuing unrealistic missile defense system would be “as wild as it can be and no really a part...of any serious talk about arms control.” (ibid, 381). Following Lugar’s argumentation, the advocates of “wild” missile defense policy at the expense of ratifying the New START were either acting outside the sphere of rationality, or simply motivated by factors other than reality-based calculations. Lugar suggested that opposition to the New START based on its supposed limitations to the U.S. missile defense was based on domestic calculations: “If this treaty somehow inhibits in any way the defense of our country and accepts or ensures mutually assured destruction...” – as suggested by fellow Republicans like Senators McCain and DeMint – “...that becomes a rather volatile message that somehow or other we were derelict in our duties, myopic with regard to the world in which we are” (Senator Lugar (R-IN) S. Hrg. 111-738, 2010. 240).

The international arms control regime was another visible point of contention. The Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) and its viability formed a core argumentative framework for senators supporting the ratification. This line was more salient in the SFRC (42 *NPT / Arms control regime* -framings) than in the SASC (8 framings) (figure 1 & 2). The argumentative logic was simple; ratifying and implementing a New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty would further the global grand strategy of nuclear non-proliferation and arms control. Chairman Levin described his view in his opening statement during a New START hearing: “...each nation clearly has more weapons than needed [...] proliferation threat is real and includes the possibility that nuclear weapons and materials could fall into the hands of terrorists or others who wish to threaten the use of or use nuclear materials” (Senator Levin (D-MI), S. Hrg. 111-897, 2010. 2-3). According to Levin, ratifying the New START did not diminish the effectiveness of American nuclear arsenals, and the ratification answered the more critical threat against American national security, i.e. the proliferation of nuclear arms. Two key elements of the *NPT / Arms control regime* -framing were evident in Levin’s statement; bilateral arms control with Russia and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction to terrorists. The third element was the global nuclear non-proliferation re-

gime. According to Republican Senator Lugar, the treaty "...addresses our Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, NPT, obligations, and therefore assists in gaining cooperation from other countries on key nonproliferation priorities...", and thus "helps strengthen broader United States-Russia cooperation, which is important in responding to proliferation challenges from Iran and North Korea" (Senator Lugar (R-IN) S. Hrg. 2010. 343). Both Democrats and Republicans voting for the ratification highlighted the importance of institutionalized international nuclear non-proliferation regime as a key element of American national security, a notion that remained unchallenged within the *NPT / Arms control regime* -framing – only one statement by senators voting against the ratification was identified (figure 1 & 2).

Senators supportive of the treaty made several statements stressing the bipartisan nature of arms control, constituting the *Bipartisan (water's edge)* -framing (figure 1). This argument reminded that previous arms control agreements were reached by a bipartisan consensus over the benefits of international agreements limiting both American and Russian nuclear arsenals. Given the bipartisan nature of the issue, the treaty should have been considered as a national security issue – wherein politics stop at the *water's edge* – as opposed to a domestic politics issue defined by partisanship. Because highly regarded Republicans have supported efforts to limit U.S.-Russian nuclear arsenals, current opposition must not have its roots in national security, but parochial domestic politics considerations. As Chairman John Kerry noted; "...it was Ronald Reagan who began negotiations on the original START treaty, and George H.W. Bush completed them. That treaty was approved with the overwhelming support of Democrats" (Senator Kerry (D-MA) S. Hrg. 111-738, 2010. 2). According to Kerry, this was a continuum of a policy initiated by an iconic Republican Ronald Reagan and pushed forward by George H.W. Bush. Despite possible differences of opinion, Democrats supported the Republican efforts, and Republicans ought to have followed the advice of their own. And if Republican presidents did not convince those suspicious of the New START, references were made to an op-ed published by prominent Republicans Henry Kissinger, George Shultz, James Baker and Colin Powell, which claimed that "it is, however, in the national interest to ratify New START" (The Washington Post, 2010).

Republicans opposing the ratification did not challenge the bipartisan history of arms control agreements. They did not engage in significant debates over the value of past agreements or attempt to challenge the authority of Republican statesmen of the past. Instead, the *Congress / process*

-framing (figure 1 & 2) postulated that the process by which the treaty was pushed through the Congress was biased. Committees could not engage in meaningful debates because only witnesses supportive of the ratification were invited to the hearings. Senator James Inhofe (R-OK) argued that all the 17 witnesses invited by the SASC and the SFRC were supportive of the treaty; “I don’t know who thinks that can be reasonable, because it’s not” (Senator Inhofe (R-OK) S. Hrg. 111-738, 2010. 354). Furthermore, the *partisan / administration* -framing argued that the whole idea behind the New START was to promote the Obama administration’s leftist agenda with the end-goal of a nuclear free world. This notion was not necessarily unfair as the 2010 Nuclear Posture Review by the Department of Defense did conclude that one of the key objectives of U.S. nuclear policy was “reducing the role of U.S. nuclear weapons in U.S. national strategy” (Department of Defense, 2010. iii). This notion of the administration’s preferences made opposing Republicans like Senator Jeff Sessions (R-AL) wary: “I think this administration has a progressive, leftist aversion to national missile defense and to nuclear deterrence. They don’t like it, emotionally and otherwise. That vision, I think, is affecting policy, and it causes me to be uneasy” (Senator Sessions (R-AL) S. Hrg. 111-897, 2010. 313). According to Sessions, not only was the process itself rigged but the entire endeavor was given a highly ideological overtone by framing it as “leftist” policy based on “emotionally” charged perceptions of American nuclear arms policy.

### **Dominant Frames**

*National Security* and *military / strategic* -framings constituted dominant framings of the issue. In terms of framing theory, *national security* and its relation to both *military / strategic* and *Iran / North Korea* framings can be explained by the strength of the thematic framing of nuclear policy and overall security policy in a broader context (Schnell & Callaghan, 2005. 4-5). For an argument to be perceived as legitimate, it needs to satisfy the requirements of a broader concept of *national security*. The ratification of the New START and the *military / strategic* implications for national security formed a strong *generic frame* (Schnell & Callaghan, 2005. 6), which had the capability to “transcend issue, time, and space limits” (de Vreese et al. 2001, 109). In short, regardless of the issue, the pros and cons of a specific policy proposal were defended or opposed by its implications to national security. National security set the limits for the debate. In terms of

the New START, both sides invoked *national security, military / strategic* and *Iran / North Korea* -framings (figure 1 & 2). The logic of *military / strategic* -framing was rather simple; those opposing the ratification argued that the Obama administration was ideologically opposed to nuclear arms, and thus had suspicions over the administration's willingness to commit to nuclear modernization.<sup>11</sup> These sentiments were echoed by Senator Jeff Sessions: "The only problem is that if the President had his way, the three of you [American nuclear weapons scientists working at a nuclear weapons research facility and who were witnesses at the hearing] wouldn't have jobs because he wants no nuclear weapons" (Senator Sessions (R-AL) S. Hrg. 111-897, 2010. 148). According to Sessions, President Obama had a personal conviction to rid the world of nuclear weapons, and he would be willing to compromise nuclear modernization – and consequently American national security – to achieve his ideological objectives.

As stated before, this was not a completely inaccurate notion, although it distorted the stated goals of the Obama administration. In the administration's 2010 *National Security Strategy* document, U.S. nuclear strategy was to "[invest] in the modernization of a safe, secure, and effective stockpile without the production of new nuclear weapons" (White House, 2010. 23). The *Nuclear Posture Review* called for "maintaining strategic deterrence and stability at reduced nuclear force levels" (Department of Defense, 2010. iii). So, from a specific perspective of America's investment in its nuclear weapons infrastructure, the stated goal was to do "more with less," which was interpreted by parts of the Republican party as a substantial shift in the American nuclear arms policy. In the end, President Obama did commit to nuclear modernization by investing approximately \$185 billion over the decade to upgrade or replace nuclear submarines, create nuclear capable bomber and fighter aircraft, and update nuclear bombs, missiles and warheads (Lieber & Press, 2011). In Europe, the Obama administration made the decision to modernize European tactical nuclear weapons (Borger, 2015).

The argumentation for the treaty painted a different picture. *Vis-à-vis* the threat posed by Iranian and North Korean ambitions to pursue nuclear arms, not-signing the treaty would have had severe implications to the interna-

11 See for example: "...major concern for me has been this issue of modernization and, in particular, the commitment not just of this administration but a commitment of Congress to put the dollars in place to make sure that we have the capability to modernize" (Senator Chambliss (R-AL), S. Hrg. 111-897, 2010. 320.)

tional NPT regime and thus hinder the global effort to curb both Iranian and North Korean ambitions. This was not simply a Democratic notion. The Ranking Member Lugar (R-IN) noted that the treaty "...addresses our Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, NPT, obligations, and therefore assists in gaining cooperation from other countries on key nonproliferation priorities..." which in turn "...helps strengthen broader United States-Russia cooperation, which is important in responding to proliferation challenges from Iran and North Korea" (Senator Lugar (R-IN) S. Hrg. 111-738, 2010. 343). Thus, according to Lugar, the treaty strengthened the U.S. position regarding agreed-upon threats against U.S. interests, namely the so-called "rogue states" Iran and North Korea. The global security benefits of the ratification were not lost to Democrats either, as Senator Russ Feingold inquired "should we be concerned about the kind of message we'd send to other nations, for example Iran, about the United States-Russian ability to work together on nonproliferation concerns if we failed to ratify a treaty that brings mutual security benefits?" (Senator Feingold (D-MI) S. Hrg. 111-738, 2010. 16).

### **Against the foreign policy establishment – Jacksonian opposition to the New START**

Previous treaties limiting strategic nuclear arms between the two nuclear-superpowers were introduced and ratified on bipartisan basis. In the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress 26 out of 100 senators decided to vote against the New START introduced by President Obama, all those senators being Republicans. This development is surprising in the context of previous similar treaties. In 2003, George W. Bush passed the New START's predecessor the Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty (SORT) through the Senate by 95-0. Of the 26 Republicans voting against the treaty in 2010, 15 voted for SORT in 2003 (Pifer, 2013). Why the difference? Based on the argumentative breakdown of the relevant committee hearings, I would argue that the New START treaty – like many foreign policy decisions – ought to not be seen in the context of the treaty's substantive merits, but in the partisan context highlighting the existing ideological divisions in the United States Congress. Despite the efforts by the Democrats and some Republicans to compare the New START with the previous bipartisan framework of nuclear arms reductions, the New START reflected the factional nature of the Republican Party already evident in previous treaties limiting weapons of mass

destruction. Thus, rather than comparing the New START to the previous START or SORT agreements, it's congressional reception reflected that of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) signed by George H.W. Bush in 1993 but ratified in 1997 by a vote of 74-26 (Krutz et al. 2009. 137-138). The CWC, as well as for example the 1999 Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), demonstrated the factional nature of Senate Republicans, as the GOP was divided into *internationalists* voting for the treaties, and *unilateralists* voting against. The *unilateralists'* ideological opposition is largely based on "a radical hostility of unilateralists to national defense through treaties." (Deibel, 2005. 86-87).

These unilateralists can be identified in Mead's terms as Jacksonians. In the Congress, the Jacksonian forces were active in breaking down the arms control regime put in place with the Soviet Union by fighting the ratification of international agreements and actively pushing for the adoption of a national missile defense system (Mead, 2002. 290-291). Jacksonians were also pushing back on what they saw as concessions to the Soviet Union during the Cold War (Mead, 2002. 297). Appeasing the vastly weakened Russia by agreeing on nuclear parity – in an international framework – was the continuation of a strategy opposed by the Jacksonian faction of the Republican Party. During the New START debates, this idea was demonstrated by the dominance of *missile defense negative* -framing, which was the most salient point of contention among the opposing Republicans (figure 1 & 2). The Jacksonians did support the globalist Cold War strategy due to the necessities imposed by an existential security threat, but the end of the Cold War revealed a chasm between the Hamiltonian and Wilsonian globalism and Jacksonian nationalism (Mead, 2002. 298). The development which led to the stronger-than-expected opposition to the New START was already evident in the 1990's when Jacksonians such as the SFRC Chairman Jesse Helms (R-NC) reactively opposed President Clinton's Hamiltonian / Wilsonian foreign policy agenda by holding detested arms control agreements as a political hostage for conservative reforms (Krutz et al. 2009. 137-138). Like in the late 1990's, the opposition strategy was to emphasize the defense against nuclear threats (national missile defense system) rather than to attempt affect the international arena through agreements (nonproliferation regime) (see Deibel, 2002).<sup>12</sup>

During President Obama's first term, the administration seemed to push

12 The question of national missile defense system has always been highly ideological: "...the debate over missile defense is often mired in ideology more than it is grounded in real fact" (O'Hanlon, 2009).

for policies in direct opposition to the policies supported by congressional Republicans of late 1990's and early 2000's. President Obama announced the cancellation of the Bush era plans for a ground-based missile defense system in Europe, continued by a "leftist" – and naïve – nuclear strategy highlighting idealistic goals over concrete security concerns. The results of this study reveal that the dominance of *missile defense negative* – and *partisan / administration* -framings in statements and the argumentative logic of individual statements – made by senators opposing the treaty were evidence of an ideological opposition following the Jacksonian school.

The New START was supported by the Democratic Party and a faction of the Republicans. But to conclude that the support came from a bipartisan faction coined as internationalists or globalists would be misleading. For example, Terry Deibel (2005. 94) categorized John McCain as a Republican internationalist based on his voting behavior in the Senate, and John McCain was one of the strongest Republican supporters of the U.S. military operations in Libya (CNN, 2011). Yet McCain was very vocal in his opposition to the ratification of New START and based much of his argumentation on *missile defense negative* -framing. On the other hand, Richard Lugar was also categorized as a Republican internationalist by Deibel (2005. 94), and he was a strong advocate of the New START. Lugar was strongly opposed to U.S. military intervention in Libya (Rogin, 2011). This is where the globalist / nationalist or internationalist / isolationist divide falls short. Both Lugar and McCain were certainly globalists or internationalist – McCain perhaps with a *unilateralist* streak – yet their views differed starkly on Libya and the New START. Mead's (2002) division between Jeffersonians and Jacksonians seemed to better explain the difference between the two Republicans. Lugar's argumentation was consistent with Mead's Jeffersonian school. In Jeffersonian thought, the national missile defense system championed by Jacksonian Republicans was a great example of wasteful military spending and even harmful to America's security interests (Mead, 2002. 302). For Jacksonians, missile defense system such as Reagan's famous "Strategic Defense Initiative" was the Holy Grail (Mead, 2002. 303). It could establish the United States as the sole military hegemony on the planet, as it had the edge of mutually assured destruction (MAD). Jeffersonians see international arms control agreements as a tool to combat the adverse effects of nuclear arms and nuclear proliferation, whereas Jacksonians see such limitations as harmful for the U.S. interests. This Jacksonian logic manifested itself in the early stages of George W. Bush presidency

as his administration withdrew from international agreements such as the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty to pursue the long-awaited national missile defense system. Jacksonian war doctrine demands unconditional surrender from America's enemies (Mead, 2002. 259). The end of Cold War was anticlimactic for Jacksonian Americans, and now that Russia was no longer the existential threat it had been during the Cold War, the U.S. ought to pursue its hegemony regardless of Russian opposition. Voluntarily drawing down the U.S. nuclear arsenals would only weaken America's position in the world, as articulated by Senator Sessions (R-AL): "One of the problems we have is that as we draw down our weapons, it seems to me that China may have an incentive to seek equivalence with the United States, nuclear parity with the United States, as might other countries, frankly" (Senator Sessions (R-AL) S.Hrg. 112-228, 2011. 16).

Opposition to the New START continued the congressional post-Cold War dynamic of the Republican opposition to international agreements built in a bipartisan manner during the Cold War. This dynamic was established by the Republican takeover of the House in 1994 and the increasingly partisan nature of the institution under leadership of Republicans such as Newt Gingrich (see Dionne, Mann & Ornstein, 2017) and Jesse Helms. In Mead's terms, the Jacksonian school of thought was on the rise in the Congress, wherein the Jacksonian tendencies of the population are overrepresented due to the unique features of American political system. Mead's categorization falls short if one tries to categorize individuals into neat ideologically or intellectually coherent categories, and that much he admits himself (Mead, 2002. 95). In this context, Mead's distinction does separate the populist Jacksonian school opposing the ratification and the foreign policy elites of the three other schools who supported it. In terms of political parties, the Republican Party's factionalism became evident.

## **Conclusion**

The argument that the Obama administration was pursuing its "leftist" goal of a world-without-nuclear-weapons by any means necessary formed the core opposing argument against the ratification of the New START. The administration was seemingly prepared to compromise its missile defense capabilities in Europe in order to appease Russia and promote Obama administration's Russia reset policy. To explain the dominance of *missile defense negative* -framing in opposing the New START, one must understand

the characteristics of the Jacksonian school. According to the Jacksonian opposition to, the cause, blame, and responsibility for deteriorating America's national security by ratifying a treaty harmful to America's national interests was placed on the Obama administration and the idealistic ideology motivating it. According to the Jacksonian opposition, United States ought to have pushed its military advantage by abandoning the logic of mutually assured destruction and taking America's place as the global military hegemony. Parity in terms of nuclear capabilities did not serve the U.S. interests, as they were defined by the opposing faction of the Republican Party. The narrative was straightforward; the Obama administration, motivated by a leftist, globalist ideology was ready to compromise America's core interests to pursue its idealistic goals. In the face of America's traditional foe – Russia – the Obama administration was weak. Although the nuclear modernization played a considerable role, the framing of the New START created was based on the juxtaposition between the foreign policy elite and the Jacksonian understanding of America's national security interests.

The Trump presidency and the political forces behind the movement that won him the election follow closely the Jacksonian tradition defining the opposition to the New START. A comprehensive understanding of the American foreign policy and the domestic dynamics affecting congressional decision-making processes is required to understand the competing ideas battling over American relationship with the rest of the world. The foreign policy elite behind the post-World War II strategy was challenged during the New START process by a foreign policy tradition different from the globalist ideas of both Republican and Democratic Hamiltonians and Wilsonians. In fact, the factionalism of the Republican Party evident in the debates has since been eroded by the rising hyper-polarization restricting the individual senators' ability to agree with the opposition, much like Senator Lugar did during the debates analyzed in this article. Given the great influence of America's foreign policy on the rest of the world, a study of the deliberative side of congressional politics is needed to explain the ideas and beliefs at the foundation of American politics. Study of foreign policy elites and presidential remarks leave us with an incomplete picture; the beliefs and ideas defining American public opinion affect America's foreign policy through the Congress.

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