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Time for a New Start on Abolition

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The Lawyers Committee on Nuclear Policy is pleased, with reservations, about the Senate's consent to ratification of the New START treaty. On the one hand, any reduction in the number of these weapons of super mass destruction and their delivery vehicles is to be welcomed. On the other hand, the price paid by the Obama administration to obtain the required number of Republican votes is shocking, to say the least: Eighty-five billion dollars for maintenance and "modernization" of the nuclear weapons infrastructure over the next decade, plus at least one hundred billion dollars for maintenance and modernization of delivery vehicles.

What is even more worrisome is the fact that, in the course of the eight day Senate debate, the original reason for the treaty as a step toward the President's vision of a nuclear weapons free world vanished from the dialogue altogether, to be replaced by repetitive arguments over whether the US would be "safer" with or without the treaty. Advocates of a truly nuclear weapons free world are now faced with the task of convincing the public and its representatives in Congress that safety from nuclear destruction does not lie in numbers, but in the total, worldwide, abolition of nuclear weapons and control of the fissile materials from which they are made. Nothing would be more harmful to the nation's and the world's security than for those who have worked so hard to negotiate and ratify this treaty to rest on their laurels and ignore, if only temporarily, the much bigger task ahead. As Senator Kerry said in his closing floor statement on New START: "Think of what is at stake here and of the role we now have to play, not only in the governing of our country but literally in the life of the world."