

New START Treaty

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Introduction

The central limits of the 2010 New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) took full effect on February 5, and the United States and Russia each reported that it had met those limits. By its terms, New START remains in effect until 2021, though it can be extended by up to five years by agreement by the sides.

The Russian military is midway through a modernization of its strategic offensive forces, while the U.S. military is preparing a strategic modernization program that will accelerate in the 2020s. Thus far, the two modernization programs appear configured to fit within New START's limits. However, the low state of the broader U.S.-Russia relationship, compliance issues regarding the 1987 Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, and uncertainties about the commitment of Washington and Moscow to continued nuclear arms control raise questions about New START's future.

While New START will likely last until 2021, its future thereafter is uncertain. There are three possibilities: the treaty lapses; the sides agree, as a minimum step, to extend New START until 2026; or the sides negotiate a new treaty to supplant New START. At a minimum, the United States and Russia should agree to extend New START.

Background

Presidents Obama and Medvedev signed New START in April 2010. The treaty entered into force on February 5, 2011. It has three central limits, which took full effect on February 5, 2018: each side may have no more than 1,550 deployed strategic warheads; no more than 700 deployed intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs), and nuclear-capable bombers; and no more than 800 deployed and non-deployed launchers for ICBMs and SLBMs and deployed and non-deployed nuclear-capable bombers.¹

New START provides a variety of verification and transparency measures. The sides exchange extensive data regarding their strategic offensive forces every six months. They exchange notifications—at a rate of about 2,000 per year—regarding certain changes to their strategic forces. Each side is permitted to carry out 18 inspections per treaty year of the other side's strategic forces. These measures give each side significant information about the strategic forces of the other.

On February 5, the U.S. State Department and Russian Foreign Ministry each separately announced that their country had met the New START limits. The State Department cited U.S. numbers as of August 2017, noting that those numbers would be updated at the next regular data exchange in March. The Foreign Ministry gave a current number. On February 22, the State Department released the U.S. numbers as of February 5.

U.S. and Russian New START Levels, February 5, 2018

	Deployed Strategic Warheads (1,550)	Deployed Strategic Missiles + Bombers (700)	Deployed + Nondeployed Missile Launchers and Bombers (800)
United States	1,350	652	800
Russia	1,444	527	779

Under its terms, the New START Treaty will expire on February 5, 2021. It can, however, be extended by up to five years by agreement by the sides.

The Obama administration saw New START as a quick deal and negotiated it with the goal of having a treaty in place by the time that START I expired in December 2009 or as soon as possible thereafter. U.S. officials hoped to follow New START with a more ambitious agreement providing for additional reductions and covering all U.S. and Russian nuclear arms—strategic and non-strategic, deployed and non-deployed.

Russian officials, however, indicated concerns about other issues, which they insisted had to be addressed before further nuclear arms cuts could be agreed. Those issues included missile defense and conventional precision-guided strike systems. Russian officials stated that the next round of negotiations should include other nuclear weapons states. They have also said that withdrawal of U.S. nuclear weapons from Europe would be a prerequisite for any discussion on non-strategic nuclear weapons.

Possible Threats to New START

The sides could not resolve their differences over these issues in 2011-2013. The broader relationship took a major downturn in 2014

following the Ukrainian crisis. Issues such as concerns about compliance with the INF Treaty, differences over Syria, and charges of Russian interference in the 2016 U.S. presidential election have brought bilateral relations to an even lower point.

At the start of 2018, the U.S.-Russia relationship remains at a post-Cold War nadir. Since the entry-into-force of New START seven years ago, there has been virtually no U.S.-Russian nuclear arms control dialogue, and the prospects for further strategic arms control steps appear bleak.

At the highest level, President Putin has adopted a hard line toward the United States, while leaving the door ajar for an improved relationship with President Trump. On arms control, the Russian government, like the Trump administration, has shown no creative ideas for moving forward. For his part, President Trump has made confused remarks about nuclear weapons and has shown no personal interest in arms control. When President Putin raised the question of discussing a possible extension of New START in a January 2017 telephone conversation, the U.S. president reportedly did not know what the agreement was and then dismissed it as a bad Obama-era deal. His administration's Nuclear Posture Review appears to diminish the role of arms control in U.S. se-

curity policy and states that the administration will only be “receptive” to future proposals.

The two presidents discussed the possibility of resuming the nuclear arms dialogue in their March 20 telephone conversation but apparently did not get into specifics.

The sides continue to charge one another with violating the INF Treaty. The U.S. government believes that the 9M729 ground-launched cruise missile (U.S. designator: SSC-8) is a prohibited intermediate-range missile. Russian officials deny that the 9M729 has intermediate-range capability. They instead have leveled three charges at the United States, the most serious of which is that the launchers for SM-3 missile interceptors at the Aegis Ashore missile defense site in Romania (and soon in Poland) violate the treaty, because they are capable of containing and launching cruise missiles.

Absent progress toward resolving these compliance questions, it is difficult to see how long the treaty, which is of indefinite duration, can last. Both sides suspect the other of wanting to evade the treaty’s limits. Should the INF Treaty collapse, or should it remain in force with continued mutual accusations about noncompliance, that could have a significant impact on the future of New START. In 2017, Republicans on Capitol Hill proposed language that would have denied any funding for extending New START beyond 2021 unless Russia was in full compliance with the INF Treaty. That language did not make it into final legislation, but it could be proposed again in the future. In October 2017, in response to a question

about the future of nuclear arms control and, in particular, the INF Treaty, President Putin said: “If the American partners have a desire to withdraw from the treaty, our response will be instantaneous, I want to say and warn about it, instantaneous and mirrored.”

Russia is well along in a major modernization of its nuclear forces, and the United States is preparing its own major modernization effort that will accelerate in the 2020s. The Russian military is currently building the Borey-class ballistic missile submarine, the Bulava SLBM, new variants of the SS-27 ICBM, and air-launched cruise missiles. Russia also is preparing to reopen the Blackjack bomber production line and is developing the Sarmat, a new heavy ICBM intended to replace the SS-18. Much of this modernization effort seems to be replacing old systems with new systems.

The United States is on a different modernization schedule. The U.S. military plans to produce in the 2020s the new Columbia-class ballistic missile submarine, a new ICBM (the Ground-Based Strategic Deterrent or GBSD), the B-21 bomber, and Long-Range Stand-Off (LRSO) air-launched cruise missile. Like the Russian program, much of this is merely replacing older systems that are aging out with new systems.

While both countries have substantial strategic modernization programs, it appears thus far that both are sized to fit within the central limits of New START. However, if New START is not extended beyond 2021 or if there is no follow-on agreement that maintains limits on

Russian Strategic Modernization Program

New System	Replacing
Borey-class ballistic missile submarine	Delta-class ballistic missile submarine
SS-N-32 Bulava SLBM	SS-N-18 and SS-N-23 SLBMs
SS-27 Yars ICBM	SS-19 and SS-25 ICBMs
Sarmat heavy ICBM	SS-18 heavy ICBM
KH-102 air-launched cruise missile	KH-55 air-launched cruise missile
Tu-160M2 Blackjack bomber (produce new and upgrade some existing aircraft)	Older Blackjack bombers, Tu-95 Bear bombers?

deployed strategic warheads, the United States possesses a significant upload potential that could allow it to increase its overall deployed strategic weapons level, and Russia appears to be building a similar upload capacity.

On March 1, President Putin in his state of the union speech described a number of new Russian strategic-range systems that have been developed and tested, which he said were in-

The deployment of the Avangard and Kinzhal systems has already begun.

The Avangard HGV might be captured by New START, given that it is launched on an ICBM that would be captured by New START. However, Pentagon officials in 2010 expressed the view that an HGV warhead that did not fly a ballistic trajectory would not be captured by New START. The Poseidon would appear to

U.S. Strategic Modernization Program

New System	Replacing
Columbia-class ballistic missile submarine	Ohio-class ballistic missile submarine
Ground-based Strategic Deterrent (GBSD, a new ICBM)	Minuteman III ICBM
B-21 Raider bomber	B-2 bomber
Long-Range Stand-Off (LRSO, air-launched cruise missile)	AGM-86 air-launched cruise missile

tended to circumvent U.S. ballistic missile defenses: the Avangard hypersonic guide vehicle (HGV), apparently to be carried by the SS-19 and Sarmat ICBMs, and the Burevestnik nuclear-armed and nuclear-powered cruise missile, supposedly of almost unlimited range. He also mentioned the Poseidon nuclear-armed drone torpedo of very long-range and the Kinzhal nuclear-capable hypersonic air-to-surface missile.

be a new type of strategic nuclear weapon, as would the Burevestnik nuclear-powered cruise missile, presuming that it will be ground-launched. (Article V of the New START Treaty provides that the sides may use the Bilateral Consultative Commission to discuss new types.) The Kinzhal hypersonic air-to-surface missile would not be directly constrained by New START, though any strategic bomber

carrying it would be captured by the treaty's limits. These systems raise questions about New START and its effectiveness in capping the strategic nuclear arms competition in the future.

Also of concern are non-strategic nuclear arms. The Russian military maintains a panoply of land-, sea-, and air-based non-strategic nuclear weapons. The 2018 U.S. Nuclear Posture Review indicated that the United States would produce a nuclear-armed sea-launched cruise missile, restoring a capability that had been removed from U.S. warships in the early 1990s. The U.S. Navy also plans to take a number of Trident D5 ballistic missile warheads and convert them to a low-yield variant.

The Pentagon is concerned about the “escalate to de-escalate” doctrine and believes that Russia has lowered the threshold for use of nuclear weapons. This is disputed by Russian experts and some Western analysts. However, driven by its belief, the U.S. military is adjusting its nuclear posture to include more low-yield options, as noted above. The United States now also includes “non-nuclear strategic attacks” as an extreme circumstance that could lead to U.S. nuclear use.

Options for the Future

U.S. and Russian officials conducted a round of strategic stability talks in September 2017 and agreed to hold a second round in the first quarter of 2018, which was postponed. Further bilateral exchanges on the INF dispute may resume later in 2018. The two sides should use strategic stability talks to explore ways to defuse tensions, including by measures to reduce the risk of accident or miscalculation when U.S. and Russian military forces operate in close proximity, and the future of New START.

It would be useful for the talks to look broadly at strategic stability. The traditional bipolar U.S.-Soviet/Russian model, which focused on types and numbers of strategic offensive forces, is outdated. Strategic stability today must take into account the actions of third countries, such as China and North Korea, and should address missile defense, advanced conventional strike systems, and new domains such as cyber and space.

Looking forward, there are three general options for the future of New START.

First, the treaty could simply lapse on February 5, 2021. Assuming that the INF Treaty had also collapsed by that point, it would mean that no nuclear arms control arrangements would be in place to constrain U.S. and Russian nuclear forces for the first time since the early 1970s. Such an outcome could have significant adverse impacts on the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty regime.

In the absence of limits, other reasons (such as limited budgets) might keep Washington and Moscow from embarking on a major strategic nuclear expansion. But there might be upward creep in deployed warhead numbers, for example, if the United States uploaded Trident D5 SLBMs or Russia uploaded Sarmat ICBMs with additional warheads.

The loss of transparency from New START's verification and monitoring provisions would have a significant negative impact on predictability and stability. It would be expensive for the sides to gain unilaterally through national technical means the information they now receive from the treaty's data exchanges, notifications, and inspections. Absent such information, the sides would resort to worst-case assumptions, which would lead to more expensive decisions about how they equipped and operated their own strategic forces.

The second option is agreement by the sides to extend New START to 2026. This would maintain the constraints, predictability, and stability provided by the treaty and provide greater time for Washington and Moscow to consider what arms control measures, if any, might follow New START. In a statement on February 5, 2018, Moscow supported New START, stating: “We hope for a constructive approach by the United States, as well as for the extension of the treaty in a form that will serve both sides.” It is conceivable that further mutual reciprocal reductions in deployed strategic warheads and strategic delivery vehicles could be agreed upon by both sides while utilizing the original New START framework to monitor and verify each side’s actions.

As part of any agreement to extend New START, the sides might agree to use the Bilateral Consultative Commission to discuss new types of strategic weapons and their implications for the treaty.

The third and more ambitious option is to supplant New START with a new treaty. Ideally, that treaty would involve reductions that go beyond those required by New START and would cover all types of U.S. and Russian nuclear weapons, including reserve and non-strategic. This would be a complex undertaking, involving limits on weapons not previously constrained by treaty and requiring new verification measures, for example, provisions for monitoring numbers of nuclear warheads in storage.

Based on past Russian government statements, such a treaty would be possible only if Washington were prepared to address, at least in part, Moscow’s concerns on issues such as missile defense and conventional precision-guided strike systems. For the foreseeable future, how-

ever, it does not appear possible that the U.S. Senate would ratify any treaty that contained limits on missile defense. On the other hand, Russia’s development and deployment of such systems as the Avangard, Burevestnik, and Kinzhal, could, in principle, remove Moscow’s concern about U.S. missile defense systems and thereby remove one of the main obstacles to negotiations on a new treaty.² If Russia continues to seek to constrain missile defenses, there are measures short of treaty limits, such as an executive agreement on missile defense transparency and NATO self-declared constraints on missile defense numbers, that might be possible.

Conventional precision-guided strike systems would be a new area for any negotiation. How much progress could be made is difficult to predict, given the importance such systems play in U.S. (and, increasingly, Russian) power projection capabilities.

The other question to be addressed is Russia’s call that the next nuclear arms negotiation be multilateral. It is difficult to see how a multilateral agreement would be structured, given the disparity between U.S. and Russian nuclear weapons numbers on the one hand (3,800-4,500 each) and the nuclear weapons numbers of third countries (no more than 300). Russian officials have not described how they would structure such an agreement. Negotiation of an agreement along the lines of the 1922 Washington Naval Treaty, which set unequal limits, is unlikely. One possibility might be to accompany a new bilateral U.S.-Russian nuclear arms reduction treaty with unilateral, politically-binding no-increase commitments by at least Britain, France, and China.

This discussion could build on—though would go well beyond—the exchanges that have taken

place over the past eight years among the UN Security Council Permanent Five. Those five countries might also begin a dialogue on how to maintain and strengthen strategic stability in a multilateral, multi-domain model.

Negotiating such agreements would be complicated and require considerable time. Unfortunately, it is difficult to see such negotiations in the current international context.

Recommendation

Perhaps the best outcome that could be hoped for in the near-term is extension of New START to 2026 with some commitment by Washington and Moscow to begin exploring the issues that they would have to address in a new negotiation. That would maintain New START's contribution to predictability and stability and give the two countries more time to decide how they might next proceed. The United States and Russia should agree as soon as possible to extend New START until February 2026.

1 A deployed strategic warhead is a warhead on a deployed ICBM or SLBM; as nuclear-capable bombers normally have no weapons on board, each deployed bomber is attributed as one deployed strategic warhead (even though bombers can carry many weapons). A deployed ICBM or SLBM is an ICBM or SLBM in a launcher. A non-deployed launcher is a ballistic missile launcher that does not contain an ICBM or SLBM.

2 In a recent interview, Megyn Kelly asked President Putin "Are you interested in conducting new negotiations on a new treaty on the reduction of strategic offensive arms?" Putin said "The term of START III [New START] is coming to the end soon. We are ready to continue this dialogue. For us, after all, what is important? We agree to reduce either the continuation of existing conditions, the reduction of carriers, the reduction of warheads. But now, when we have a weapon that easily overcomes all ABM systems, it is not so critical for us to reduce the number of ballistic missiles and warheads." See <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/interviews/57027>.

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