

## Young Deep Cuts Policy Brief #3

# Revitalizing U.S.-Russia Arms Control: An Integrated Approach

By Vladislav Chernavskikh, Jarret Fisher and Patricia Jaworek

### Summary

- This paper presents an integrated approach to advance the U.S.-Russian arms control agenda through building on the bilateral strategic stability dialogue. It also suggests to move towards global nuclear risk reduction through utilizing the P5 process and engaging NATO.
- The United States and Russia should address mutual concerns impacting strategic stability in the Strategic Stability Dialogue and create the foundation for a follow-on to New START. Both sides should also consider flexible approaches to arms control, including deeper cuts to existing arsenals via executive agreements.
- Within the P5 process, nuclear weapon states should establish permanent working groups and a standing track 1.5 dialogue on risk reduction to increase transparency and reduce the risk of miscalculations, address U.S. and Chinese ratification of the CTBT and collectively reaffirm existing moratoria on nuclear testing.
- NATO can play a crucial role by reforming its dual-track strategy to reduce reliance on nuclear weapons and rebalancing (nuclear) deterrence in favor of arms control. It should also begin negotiations with Russia on an achievable legal agreement on the non-deployment of INF-range missiles.

## Introduction: Getting Back on Track

The United States and Russia left the bilateral arms control architecture fragile after a series of setbacks. The current environment of heightened political tensions and diminished trust nurtures arms race dynamics and miscalculations, thereby increasing the risk of accidental nuclear weapons use. The state of U.S.-Russia relations directly impacts Euro-Atlantic security, highlighting European allies' legitimate interests in achieving diplomatic progress on arms control. A phased approach towards revitalizing arms control between Russia and the United States, which builds on initial dialogue, can later be shaped into legally binding commitments as well as tangible stockpile reductions to reduce the reliance on and risk of nuclear weapons. Beyond the bilateral format, this integrated approach also addresses possible measures towards global nuclear risk reduction and disarmament by engaging the United States and Russia through the P5 process. Lastly, it describes opportunities for NATO to play a more active role in shaping the European security environment and arms control talks between Russia and the United States.

## Next Steps in Bilateral Arms Control Between the United States and Russia

Arms control contributes to strategic stability between nuclear-armed states by bringing transparency and restraint to mutual relations. That way, the escalatory pressure of faulty assumptions and worst-case-scenario thinking can give way to a certain degree of predictability. Therefore, confidence- and transparency-building measures between Russia and the United States that create new, or revitalize already existing venues for

dialogue can build trust and maintain stability in the short-term. Building on the existing architecture, a framework for regular bilateral engagement could lead to lasting nuclear arms reductions between the United States and Russia.

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## Strategic Stability and Risk Reduction Measures

The establishment of an integrated **bilateral Strategic Stability Dialogue (SSD) as agreed during the Biden-Putin summit on June 16, 2021**, is an important first step towards rebuilding the U.S.-Russia arms control process. SSD discussions should continue to be comprehensive, structured and address nuclear capabilities, emerging technologies, and the offense-defense relationship between the United States and Russia more broadly. After the September 2021 SSD meeting, the two countries announced the formation of two working groups on:

- i. Principles and Objectives for Future Arms Control and
- ii. Capabilities and Actions with Strategic Effects.

The first working group will begin preliminary discussions on what comes after New START. The

second one will discuss strategic stability. In accordance with stated security concerns of both Russia and the United States, the working groups should be sure not to leave out discussion of outstanding issues such as strategic and non-strategic, including forward-deployed, nuclear weapons, hypersonic systems, missile defenses, and weaponization of space.

As part of this framework, the United States and Russia should establish a **dialogue on cooperation on missile defense in Europe**. To address Russian concerns over U.S. ballistic missile defense systems, the United States should explore the option of engaging Russia on ways of providing **greater transparency regarding missile defense infrastructure of both countries**. The two countries may commit not to target each other's offensive forces with their interceptors. The United States could regularly update Russia on its plans regarding missile defense R&D and deployment. The two countries should also revisit the idea of establishing a joint data exchange center which would allow for sharing of early-warning information and other intelligence data specific to missiles – similar processes were underway between the Obama and Medvedev administrations but did not ultimately come to fruition.<sup>1</sup>

As for unilateral steps, the Biden administration has an opportunity to shift U.S. declaratory policy through the ongoing Nuclear Posture Review by **adopting a “sole purpose” doctrine**. This would clarify that the United States will not use nuclear weapons in response to any conventional, chemical, biological, or cyber attack against the United States or its allies, and would reduce the role of nuclear weapons in U.S. security policy. Russia

currently reserves the right to use a nuclear weapon in the event of a nuclear attack or an overwhelming conventional attack “when the very existence of the state is in jeopardy.”<sup>2</sup> Given Moscow's concerns over U.S. high-precision long-range conventional systems and perceived conventional military superiority, adoption of sole purpose by Russia will first require successfully addressing those issues within the Strategic Stability Dialogue framework to ensure sole purpose aligns with a common vision of a stable strategic relationship.

### Ensuring Adoption of a Follow-on Agreement to New START

New START will expire in February 2026 without the possibility of extension. The U.S.-Russia SSD is expected to lead to a negotiation on New START's successor or successors. China is modernizing its nuclear arsenal and has increased its stockpile to 350 warheads.<sup>3</sup> However, China still will not be anywhere near numerical parity with the United States and Russia in the next decade, so it should not distract from important progress the United States and Russia can make on a bilateral basis. The P5 process in the meantime can be used as the venue to advance China's comfort with arms control and involve Beijing in the discussion on crisis management and risk reduction.

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New START currently places a limit of 800 deployed and non-deployed delivery vehicles for each country (a maximum of 700 can be deployed), and 1,550 deployed strategic warheads for each country. In the follow-on treaty to New START, the United States and Russia should institute a limit of 450 total deployed and non-deployed delivery vehicles, and 750 deployed strategic warheads. In addition, the next Russia-U.S. arms control agreement should go further by enshrining deep cuts to each country's total nuclear warhead stockpile. Within this subsequent treaty, each country could commit to fully dismantling and disposing of all currently retired warheads within a period of six and a half years from the time of entry into force, and second, fully retire, dismantle, and dispose of at least 40% of current non-deployed warheads within a period of ten years from the time of entry into force. This is achievable at a rate of 300 warheads dismantled per year, which each country has the capacity to perform safely.<sup>4</sup> These two measures would ultimately reduce the Russian stockpile to 3,339 total warheads and the U.S. stockpile to 2,920 total warheads ten years after entry into force of New START's successor. This approach does not preclude other additions to the next treaty; in fact, one or both countries will want to include provisions on ballistic missile defense, novel systems, and avoiding weaponization of outer space, at the very least.

The SSD will take time to develop into a practical and trusted venue, yet we cannot allow it to take three years to move to full-fledged negotiations if the above stockpile reductions are to be negotiated. Working backwards, New START expires in February 2026, and the goal is to have a successor in place before that expiration date. **Russia and the**

	<b>Russia</b>	<b>United States</b>
<b>Current total warheads</b>	6,257	5,600
Retired	1,760	1,900
Stockpiled, nondeployed	2,897	1,950
Deployed	1,600	1,750
<b>Proposed stockpile reductions under New START successor treaty</b>		
Dismantle and dispose all currently retired	-1,760	-1,900
40% reduction of current stockpiled, nondeployed	-1,158	-780
<b>NEW WARHEAD TOTAL</b>	<b>3,339</b>	<b>2,920</b>

Source for table: Hans M. Kristensen and Matt Korda, "Status of World Nuclear Forces. Table: Estimated Global Nuclear Warhead Inventories, 2021," Federation Of American Scientists, October 2021, <https://fas.org/issues/nuclear-weapons/status-world-nuclear-forces/>.

**United States have to budget at least 1.5 years for negotiation plus an additional year for ratification in each country's legislature.** This results in targeting the summer of 2023 as the latest date to dive into serious and earnest treaty negotiations.

Unfortunately, this timeline does not exist in a vacuum, as the United States will see presidential and congressional elections in November 2024. While the Biden administration will initiate the negotiations on a follow-on to New START, ratification could stall during the chaos of election season depending on how long it takes to reach final

text. Furthermore, securing the two-thirds majority necessary in the Senate for advice and consent on a treaty is increasingly out of reach, which is why U.S. ratification of a follow-on agreement might be difficult to achieve. One way to improve the odds of achieving advice and consent is to physically bring members of Congress to observe rounds of negotiations and brief them regularly throughout the process, not only after negotiations are complete. The U.S. government can achieve this by **reviving the Senate Arms Control Observer Group (ACOG), which was active and influential in the 1980s**. In its original form, every member of the ACOG voted to ratify the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) in 1988 and START I in 1992, which passed easily in the full Senate, 93-5 and 93-6, respectively. Moving forward, select Senators who become members of the ACOG may occasionally join U.S. delegations to observe as the two states negotiate nuclear arms control treaties. This fosters unparalleled Congressional buy-in and is a proven approach to build bipartisan support for the U.S. President's arms control goals.

### Alternative Arms Control Options

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Legally binding and verifiable arms control treaties remain an important pillar of the future arms control architecture. However, **more flexible approaches** should be considered as an interim measure if the negotiation of traditional arms control treaties faces

roadblocks, in particular if the follow-on agreement to New START fails to be concluded and ratified by 2026.

To ensure that the United States and Russia have a backup plan to maintain continuity in arms control post-New START, both sides should consider and keep on the menu of options unilateral measures and arms control via either an executive agreement or a congressional-executive agreement.<sup>5</sup> Congressional-executive agreements require only a simple majority in both houses of Congress, making it relatively easier (as compared to treaties) for the U.S. administration to proceed with the arms control agenda in the time of unprecedented political polarization in Washington.

Russia and the United States can investigate the option of making **deeper cuts in strategic nuclear arsenals** via an agreement modelled after the 2002 Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty (SORT) which mandated a mutual decrease and limitation of strategic nuclear weapons while relying on the 1991 START verification regime for verifying implementation. This time around, such an agreement would not have to take the form of a treaty. The follow-on to New START will require a long and arduous negotiation process since the new treaty is poised to include a significant re-evaluation of the factors affecting strategic stability and will have to address a number of new security challenges. It might be prudent then for the United States and Russia to conclude a **congressional-executive agreement** in the interim, a New SORT. It would build directly on the arms control infrastructure provided by the extended New START treaty to lower numerical ceilings on deployed strategic warheads. A New SORT can

commit Russia and the United States to lower the ceiling on deployed strategic warheads to 1,000 each, as was previously proposed by President Obama in 2013.<sup>6</sup>

### *Engaging the US and Russia Through the P5 Process and Within the NPT Regime*

Countries, like individual human beings, can only increase trust and mutual understanding through expanded dialogue. The P5 need to maximize open lines of communication, increase opportunities to talk, and exchange as much information as possible without harming any one country's national security. The strategy of deterrence, which all P5 countries subscribe to, is inherently ambiguous; therefore, transparency and predictability are necessary to prevent miscalculation and misinterpretation. Accordingly, the P5 need tools that will increase time for decision-making on the use of a nuclear weapon and implement protocols that will allow a country to clarify the intent of another before unnecessary escalation unfolds. The P5 is a unique forum that can both contribute to the advancement of arms control at a time of deep mistrust between Russia and the United States, and lay the groundwork for the multilateralization of arms control.

The **reaffirmation of the 'Reagan-Gorbachev principle'** that a "nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought" issued by the P5 on January 3, 2022, represents a welcome first step.<sup>7</sup> Originally issued at the 1985 Reagan-Gorbachev summit in Geneva, the statement served as a foundation upon which arms control in the late 1980s gained

momentum. Its renewal and extension to China, France and the United Kingdom thus sets a positive example for multilateral cooperation prior to the 10th NPT Review Conference, which is now scheduled for August 2022. While the statement does not commit the countries to change their doctrines or reduce their stockpiles, it does strengthen the nuclear taboo, the international norm of non-use of nuclear weapons.

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In the January 3 "Joint Statement on Preventing Nuclear War and Avoiding Arms Races," the P5 further acknowledge their collective responsibility to reduce the risk of "military confrontations, strengthen stability and predictability, [and] increase mutual understanding and confidence".<sup>8</sup> Similarly, the P5 reiterate their commitment to prevent the "unauthorized or unintended use of nuclear weapons".<sup>9</sup> To ensure effective implementation of these goals, the P5 – under the authority of the next coordinator the United States – **should therefore establish three permanent Working Groups** to increase transparency and reduce the risk of miscalculation or misunderstanding on:

- i. Nuclear Doctrine Transparency (including nuclear postures);
- ii. Nuclear Risk Reduction (crisis prevention, especially decision of use

timeline, crisis management, cyber norms, etc.); and

- iii. Nuclear Command, Control, and Communications (NC3) (architecture, security challenges, early warning, launch notifications, etc.). Accordingly, China, France, and the United Kingdom should establish their own Nuclear Risk Reduction Centers.

Further, serious discussions within the P5 process should take place to encourage the United States and China to ratify the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) and – collectively or individually – reaffirm the moratoria on nuclear weapons testing. The Biden administration supports treaty ratification, and entry into force, but needs advice and consent from two-thirds of the Senate. China has also signed but not ratified the CTBT, although it maintains that it supports an early entry into force of the CTBT. However, the treaty cannot enter into force until the eight remaining Annex 2 states ratify, which includes the United States and China.<sup>10</sup>

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A standing **Track 1.5 Dialogue on Risk Reduction** to discuss items such as (but not limited to) crisis management, prompt-launch status, cyber security,

offensive cyber capabilities, and unilateral or joint transparency measures would help build a strong arms control architecture should there be a gap in time between New START and its successor agreement. Besides the P5, the proposed dialogue should include representatives from non-nuclear weapon states and civil society. Strengthening global security is a collective responsibility. Potential fallout from instability and use of a nuclear weapon will not be limited to the United States and Russia alone but felt around the world. The dialogue should be led at the level of U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Arms Control, Verification, and Compliance – and counterparts from participating countries – as a complement to the continuing bilateral SSD (where U.S. officials are represented at the Deputy Secretary level).

Given Germany’s desire to “take on a leading role in bolstering international disarmament initiatives,”<sup>11</sup> its active engagement in the Stockholm Initiative, and co-chairmanship of the Risk Reduction Working Group as part of the Creating an Environment for Nuclear Disarmament (CEND) initiative, the new government should play a proactive role in organizing and convening such a track 1.5 engagement and actively support agenda setting.

### *Redefining NATO’s Dual-track Strategy in Favor of Arms Control and Nuclear Risk Reduction*

As the United States and Russia set a substantive agenda for new negotiations of a follow-on agreement to New START, each side will bring to the table particular priorities regarding nuclear systems it would like to see curtailed. U.S. Secretary

of State Antony Blinken announced in February 2021 that the United States wants to use the time provided by the extension of New START to “pursue with the Russian Federation, in consultation with Congress and U.S. allies and partners, arms control that addresses all of its nuclear weapons.”<sup>12</sup> It therefore appears likely that such a broad mandate for negotiations will include U.S. forward-deployed nuclear weapons in Europe, especially when the United States insist on discussing Russian non-strategic nuclear forces. Alongside U.S. missile defense systems, these elements have direct implications for European allies and NATO, warranting consideration of European security interests.

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The development of NATO’s new strategic concept by the summer of 2022 provides an opportunity for allies in Europe to play a more active role in shaping their security environment and arms control talks between Russia and the United States. Ever since the publication of the Harmel Report in 1967, the Alliance has pursued a two-pillared strategy vis-à-vis Russia based on deterrence and dialogue. Formally committed to arms control, disarmament and nonproliferation under the second pillar, NATO allies have supported discussions with Russia. At the same time, the Alliance has repeatedly reaffirmed that nuclear weapons will remain part of

its posture as long as they exist in the world, in order to prevent conflict and war.

In light of deteriorating relations with Russia, escalating tensions with Ukraine, ongoing nuclear modernization, the disruptive impact of emerging technologies, and narrower communication channels between NATO and Russia after the recent expulsion of Russian diplomats and Russia’s subsequent suspension of its diplomatic mission to NATO it is questionable if this strategy will hold up to its purpose. While these developments generally necessitate the strengthening of deterrence, the purpose to “preserve peace, prevent coercion, and deter aggression”<sup>13</sup> will not be achieved through existing instruments alone. Allies should therefore consider recalibrating NATO’s deterrence posture as well as the balance between the two pillars of deterrence and dialogue to counter current escalation dynamics. This could help pave the way for gradually reducing the reliance on nuclear weapons and open new avenues in U.S.-Russian arms control talks.

### Forward-deployed Nuclear Weapons

As one of five states hosting U.S. nuclear weapons in Europe (despite their unpopularity with the broader public), Germany has a natural role to play in leading a forward-looking approach. Given the numerical superiority of the Russian stockpile of non-strategic nuclear weapons (NSNW), the United States has been focused on placing limitations on these weapons and establishing numerical parity while balancing the security interests of its NATO allies. Should Russia consider including NSNW in negotiations of a successor agreement to New START, it will likely demand the removal of these weapons from European territory in line with other

strategic offensive arms that currently fall under the treaty (Article IV) or require limitations on U.S. BMD.<sup>14</sup> At this point, a united stance within the Alliance on what measures would be acceptable to uphold NATO's security interests could provide a useful and necessary bargaining chip for bilateral negotiations given the different perspectives within NATO on the role of U.S. nuclear weapons in Europe. Reenergizing NATO's internal political dialogue would also limit Russia's ability to exploit political divisions within the Alliance. Domestic differences on how to handle NATO's nuclear sharing arrangements and awareness of the security interests of its eastern neighbours make it unlikely that Germany will go at it alone. However, as part of a coalition of like-minded NATO allies, Germany could propose several elements to reform NATO's deterrence posture, capitalize on the Alliance's commitment to arms control and create leverage for future arms control talks with Russia.

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As a first step, allies could reenergize NATO's **Special Advisory and Consultation Committee on Arms Control, Disarmament and Non-Proliferation** as a forum for discussion and structured consultation with the United States. Established with the mandate to advise the development of a unified position on NSNW transparency, this body would provide the Biden

administration with an opportunity to report back on the status of negotiations in the SSD with Russia and factor controversial issues such as potential limitations on NSNW and broader strategic stability issues into consultations with European allies. This would establish a direct channel of communication reminiscent of the Special Consultative Group during negotiations of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF Treaty) in the 1980s where close consultations with allies formed an integral part of the U.S. negotiation approach.

In addition, NATO allies should conduct a detailed assessment of the Alliance's **conventional deterrence and defense capabilities** as part of the NATO 2030 Agenda to identify gaps that would need to be filled to provide credible assurance in the absence of the B61 bomb, in particular to NATO allies that share a border with Russia. Shifting the emphasis on and bolstering conventional deterrence within the mix of conventional, nuclear, and ballistic missile defense capabilities that currently form NATO's deterrence posture is a prerequisite for the Alliance to eventually reduce the reliance on its nuclear sharing arrangements. Part of this more forward-looking approach should be initial discussions on the introduction of **transparency and risk reduction measures** short of removal of the B61 bombs, such as the establishment of a potential data and information exchange on the number and location of U.S. and Russian non-strategic nuclear warheads or ballistic missile defense systems.

### **Moratorium on INF-range Missiles**

Another way by which arms control, disarmament and nonproliferation could be reaffirmed would be to reconsider engaging Russia on a **legal agreement**

**concerning the non-deployment of INF-range missiles.** After the breakdown of the INF Treaty over the assumed deployment of the Russian SSC-8 (9M729) missile, Russia proposed to develop a legal “moratorium” on all ground-based INF-range missiles including mutual verification measures.<sup>15</sup> NATO and the United States have rejected the idea for Europe, stating that Russia has already deployed the SSC-8.<sup>16</sup> In addition, some researchers posit that since Russia’s proposed verification measures would have only applied to Kaliningrad, it would leave room for potential stationing of the missiles on Russian territory outside of the oblast.<sup>17</sup> In contrast to that, NATO has called for an unconditional destruction of the system. Monitoring of the elimination of the missile in question would, however, equally require a functioning verification regime.<sup>18</sup>

” *NATO should identify an achievable “sweet spot” between complete destruction, a moratorium on all, nuclear-capable or conventionally-armed INF missiles, and a comprehensive verification regime.*

In response to recent Russian accusations that NATO might intend to deploy nuclear weapons on the territory of Central or Eastern European nations, NATO Allies reconfirmed they are not planning to deploy nuclear INF-range missiles in Europe. It is simply not realistic to assume that Moscow will agree to an unconditional verifiable destruction of its system. At the same time, it would neither serve NATO nor European security to agree to a moratorium that would keep a door open and

preserve flexibility for future Russian deployments. Instead, NATO should – first individually among allies and later in discussions with Russia – identify an achievable “sweet spot” between complete destruction, a moratorium on all, nuclear-capable or conventionally-armed INF missiles, and a comprehensive verification regime.

Despite legitimate doubts about the credibility of the Russian INF-proposal, engaging with the “moratorium” could therefore be a good starting point and represent a pragmatic way to initiate discussions on this issue. Russia also recently confirmed the validity of its offer and readiness to negotiate, which it says has “become more topical in the current conditions.”<sup>19</sup>

### Recommendations

Facilitating change and realizing our shared vision of a multilateral and flexible arms control architecture in the future will not be possible without political will from nuclear weapons states (NWS) and their allies, as well as creative ideas from research communities in Russia, the United States and Europe.

Bilaterally, the United States and Russia should:

- Proceed with structured sustainable engagement via the Strategic Stability Dialogue to address the existing mutual concerns impacting strategic stability and create the foundation for new strategic arms control agreements as soon as possible;

- Commence negotiations on a follow-on to New START by summer 2023 at the latest;
- Consider more flexible approaches to arms control, including deeper cuts to existing arsenals via executive agreements which would build directly on the arms control infrastructure provided by the extended New START treaty or new agreements.
- Reenergize NATO's Special Advisory and Consultation Committee on Arms Control, Disarmament and Non-Proliferation to ensure structured and detailed consultations between the United States and its allies;
- Begin negotiations with Russia on an achievable legal agreement on the non-deployment of INF-range missiles.

To ensure a more comprehensive coverage of contemporary nuclear risks, the P5 states should:

- Establish three new working groups on i. nuclear doctrines ii. nuclear risk reduction, and iii. nuclear command, control, and communications (NC3);
- Commence discussions on U.S. and Chinese ratification of the CTBT and collectively reaffirm existing moratoria on nuclear weapons testing.
- Establish a standing Track 1.5 Dialogue on Risk Reduction, also including representatives from non-nuclear weapon states and civil society.

Finally, within the NATO alliance, the United States and its allies should:

- Reform NATO's dual-track strategy as part of the new strategic concept by gradually reducing reliance on nuclear weapons and rebalancing (nuclear) deterrence in favor of arms control and nuclear risk reduction;

## Endnotes

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## About the Young Deep Cuts Commission

The Young Deep Cuts Commission (YDCC) is a group of twelve young arms control experts from Germany, Russia, and the United States with diverse academic and professional backgrounds. The Young Commissioners develop fresh ideas to strengthen and revitalize nuclear arms control and disarmament. YDCC is part of the Deep Cuts project, an independent, nongovernmental initiative, which provides decision-makers as well as the interested public with concrete policy options based on realistic analysis.

For further information please go to [www.deepcuts.org/young-deep-cuts](http://www.deepcuts.org/young-deep-cuts)  
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