

# Arms Control Association Answers Questions About Bush-Putin Arms Talks

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(Washington, D.C.) Making his first visit to Russia since taking office, President George W. Bush will meet with his counterpart Vladimir Putin May 23-26 in Moscow and St. Petersburg. President Bush announced May 13 that the two sides have "agreed to a treaty which will substantially reduce our nuclear arsenals." The agreement is expected to be signed at the summit and will call

upon the United States and Russia to reduce their nuclear forces to 1,700 to 2,200 deployed strategic warheads apiece.

What is likely to be agreed on nuclear forces? What will the likely agreement do? The Arms Control Association, an independent, nonprofit membership organization, answers these and other basic questions about the upcoming summit.

## QUESTIONS

- 1.) *What sorts of nuclear weapons do the United States and Russia currently field?*
- 2.) *How many nuclear weapons do the United States and Russia currently have?*
- 3.) *What agreements might Presidents George W. Bush and Vladimir Putin sign at their upcoming May 23-26 summit in Russia?*
- 4.) *What have the two countries proposed for the nuclear reductions agreement and what is the likely result?*
- 5.) *How does an agreement on strategic nuclear reductions relate to the threat posed by Russia's vulnerable weapons of mass destruction and related infrastructure?*
- 6.) *Does this possible agreement fulfill President George W. Bush's promise to move the United States and Russian relationship beyond "mutual assured destruction"?*
- 7.) *How does the nuclear arms agreement that Washington and Moscow are discussing compare to the reductions planned under previous arms control accords?*
- 8.) *Is it true that previous arms reductions treaties have not required the dismantlement of warheads removed from service?*
- 9.) *Reports indicate the United States and Russia have disagreed about "counting rules." What are counting rules, and why are they controversial?*
- 10.) *Have U.S. officials said they want a clause in the agreement that allows them to exceed its limits on short notice?*
- 11.) *Will there be an agreement on missile defenses signed at the summit, particularly in light of the fact that the United States will formally withdraw from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty on June 13?*
- 12.) *Some analysts say that Russia's nuclear forces will decline no matter what. If that is true, why should the United States seek an agreement with Russia?*
- 13.) *U.S. and Russian officials are seeking a legally binding agreement that would be submitted to each side's legislature for approval. President Bush said it will be a treaty. What were the options under consideration?*

## Questions and Answers

1.) *What sorts of nuclear weapons do the United States and Russia currently field?*

The United States and Russia both deploy nuclear weapons that fall into two general categories: strategic and tactical. Strategic weapons generally consist of more powerful nuclear warheads deployed on long-range delivery systems (missiles, submarines, and bombers) capable of striking the other side's territory. Tactical nuclear weapons, which generally incorporate less powerful nuclear warheads deployed on shorter-range delivery systems, are intended for battlefield use and are deployed today in far fewer numbers than they were during the Cold War.

2.) *How many nuclear weapons do the United States and Russia currently have?*

The United States currently deploys approximately 6,000 strategic nuclear warheads on its strategic triad of land-based missiles, submarines, and bombers, according to START I counting rules. (See question 8 for more on counting rules.) It is estimated that the United States deploys over 1,000 tactical nuclear weapons and more than 5,000 total nuclear weapons in reserve stockpiles.

Russia currently deploys an estimated 5,500 strategic nuclear warheads on its strategic triad of land-based missiles, submarines, and bombers. Russia deploys an estimated 4,000 tactical nuclear weapons and is believed to stockpile more than 13,000 strategic and tactical nuclear warheads.

3.) *What agreements might Presidents George W. Bush and Vladimir Putin sign at their upcoming May 23-26 summit in Russia?*

The United States and Russia are currently working on at least two documents on security issues for the upcoming summit. One document, which will take the form of a treaty or executive-legislative agreement (see question 13), will set out legally binding U.S. and Russian commitments to reduce their deployed strategic nuclear arsenals to 1,700-2,200 warheads apiece. The second document will likely be much broader in scope and will cover the so-called "new strategic framework" between the two sides. This document, which will likely be politically but not legally binding, will address other security and arms control issues aside from strategic reductions, such as nonproliferation, counterproliferation, anti-terrorism, and missile defenses.

4.) *What have the two countries proposed for the nuclear reductions agreement and what is the likely result?*

Initially, the Bush administration proposed that the United States and Russia reduce their deployed strategic arsenals without an agreement. For its part, Washington volunteered to reduce the number of strategic warheads deployed on its ICBMs, submarines, and bombers to 1,700-2,200 and encouraged Moscow to do the same. Russia, however, called for a formal agreement and recommended that future deployed strategic warheads number no more than 1,500-2,200.

On February 5, 2002, Secretary of State Colin Powell announced the United States had agreed to negotiate a "legally binding" agreement. The two countries have now reportedly settled on the proposed U.S. range of 1,700-2,200 deployed strategic warheads as the target level. U.S. officials have proposed that the reductions be completed by 2012.

In the negotiations, Russia has sought to limit the size and deployment readiness of warheads removed from service, including calling for their dismantlement. Moscow's intent is to limit the ability of either side to quickly redeploy the warheads after they have been removed from their respective delivery systems.

The United States has opposed the Russian proposal. Instead, Washington is planning to store rather than dismantle warheads removed from their delivery vehicles under the agreement, although it has said it will dismantle some warheads and their delivery vehicles. The Bush administration says it wants the flexibility to quickly redeploy warheads in the future to respond to new threats or to guard against a change in strategic relations, e.g. a more hostile relationship with Russia or a growing Chinese threat. To facilitate this flexibility, the Bush administration plans to keep at least 2,400 of the warheads removed under the agreement in a so-called "responsive force," which would mean keeping the warheads in a state that would permit them to be redeployed within weeks, months, or years. This would enable the United States to deploy a total of 4,600 strategic warheads within three years of completion of the agreement's reductions in 2012 if it chose to do so. In addition, the United States will keep several thousand more warheads in lower stages of readiness that could also be redeployed over a longer period of time.

If the United States maintains substantial nuclear reserves, Russia has said it will do the same.

Tactical nuclear weapons do not appear to have been discussed in the current negotiations, and neither side has made public plans to reduce deployed or stockpiled tactical nuclear forces.

5.) *How does an agreement on strategic nuclear reductions relate to the threat posed by Russia's vulnerable weapons of mass destruction and related infrastructure?*

If the United States maintains substantial warhead reserves, as currently planned, Russia is likely to do the same. But Russia's nuclear complex is far less secure than the United States', so stockpiled weapons and weapons components, including fissile material, pose a substantial, long-term proliferation threat. The United States currently funds programs that help upgrade security at vulnerable Russian nuclear complex sites, but those programs have not yet fully secured many sites viewed as potential proliferation risks. There are significant concerns that terrorists or rogue states could steal or buy nuclear weapons or weapons-usable materials from Russia's vast nuclear weapons complex, which reportedly has enough nuclear material available for building another 40,000 nuclear weapons.

6.) *Does this possible agreement fulfill President George W. Bush's promise to move the U.S. and Russian relationship beyond "mutual assured destruction"?*

No. While the removal of more than 4,000 strategic warheads from their delivery vehicles over the next decade is a welcome step, the United States and Russia will continue to deploy approximately 2,000 strategic warheads each—more than enough warheads for either country to inflict total destruction on the other. This reality is further compounded by the fact that both countries will likely maintain several thousand warheads that could be redeployed and targeted against each other.

Although President Bush has said that the United States should no longer size its nuclear arsenal relative to that of Russia, the Bush administration's retention of thousands of nuclear warheads reveals that this is not the case. No other possible scenarios could warrant the retention of thousands of nuclear warheads except for the mir-

roring of Russian force levels. In its recent nuclear posture review, the Bush administration stated, "In the event that U.S. relations with Russia significantly worsen in the future, the U.S. may need to revise its nuclear force levels and posture."

7.) *How does the nuclear arms agreement that Washington and Moscow are discussing compare to the reductions planned under previous arms control accords?*

The 1991 START I deal, which was negotiated by President George H. W. Bush and fully implemented by the United States and Russia last December, limits the two countries to 6,000 deployed strategic warheads each.

The 1993 START II deal, which was signed in the final weeks of the previous Bush administration, called for the reduction of deployed strategic warheads for the United States and Russia from 6,000 warheads each to 3,000-3,500 warheads apiece. The treaty called for these reductions to be completed by 2007. START II, however, has never entered into force and now appears unlikely to do so in the future.

In 1997, Presidents Bill Clinton and Boris Yeltsin agreed to a framework for START III negotiations that included a limit of 2,000-2,500 deployed strategic weapons and "measures relating to the transparency of strategic nuclear warhead inventories and the destruction of strategic nuclear warheads...to promote the irreversibility of deep reductions including prevention of a rapid increase in the number of warheads." START III negotiations were supposed to begin after START II entered into force, which is unlikely to occur.

The Bush administration has suggested counting rules for the agreement currently under negotiation with Russia that would make the proposed 1,700-2,200 limit roughly comparable to the proposed START III limits. For example, the Bush administration does not want to count missiles deployed with submarines undergoing overhaul in port, which the START agreements counted as deployed weapons.

8.) *Is it true that previous arms reductions treaties have not required the dismantlement of warheads removed from service?*

START I and START II did not require the dismantlement of warheads removed from operational service, but the treaties did require the destruction of delivery vehicles (missiles, submarines, and bombers) removed from service, significantly reducing the ability of either side to quickly redeploy reserve warheads.

The Bush administration, however, says it plans to preserve some delivery vehicles, which would allow warheads removed from service to be quickly redeployed if the United States opts to increase the number of its weapons systems ready for action. By mandating the destruction of delivery vehicles, the START agreements made it more difficult for a country to quickly add to its deployed force level, providing confidence to both the United States and Russia that neither would face a dramatic increase in the other's forces that could jeopardize its own security.

9.) *Reports indicate the United States and Russia have disagreed about "counting rules"? What are counting rules and why are they controversial?*

How weapons are counted determines the actual impact on deployed forces of any agreement. Russia has sought START I-style counting rules in which warheads are counted according to the maximum capacity of deployed delivery vehicles-missiles, bombers, and submarines. The United States has sought to count only

"operationally deployed" strategic warheads, i.e. those warheads that could actually be used shortly after a decision to do so.

Under the U.S. proposal, a missile capable of carrying ten warheads, but deployed with only one, would be counted as one warhead under the agreement. The U.S. proposal would give both sides far more flexibility, since warheads removed from delivery vehicles to meet the agreement's limits could be rapidly redeployed on those delivery vehicles. And without intrusive transparency measures it would be difficult to verify that each side was only arming each missile with the exact number of warheads that it was declaring. This could cause greater uncertainty about how many warheads the other side is actually deploying, lessening the predictability and stability afforded by an arms control agreement.

10.) *Have U.S. officials said they want a clause in the agreement that allows them to exceed its limits on short notice?*

Yes. U.S. officials have said that in addition to a formal "supreme national interest" withdrawal clause included in most arms control agreements, they would like the right to exceed the agreement's limits with 45-days' notice if warranted by a change in strategic circumstances. Under the U.S. proposal, which is consistent with the U.S. negotiating position of limiting constraints and maximizing flexibility, either party could exceed the limits without violating the agreement if it gave the requisite notice. If agreed to, this mechanism could further undermine the confidence one party, or both, would have that the other intended to abide by the agreement for the foreseeable future.

11.) *Will there be an agreement on missile defenses signed at the summit, particularly in light of the fact that the United States will formally withdraw from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty on June 13?*

President Putin has pressed for limits on future U.S. strategic missile defense deployments, but the Bush administration has said it will not accept constraints on its missile defense programs. The expected summit outcomes on missile defense will likely be minimal. There may be a joint statement outlining possible opportunities for future cooperation on theater missile defenses and possibly a U.S. declaration that its proposed strategic missile defenses are not directed at Russia and do not threaten Moscow's deterrent, even at the proposed lower force levels of 1,700-2,200 deployed strategic warheads.

12.) *Some analysts say that Russia's nuclear forces will decline no matter what. If that is true, why should the United States seek an agreement with Russia?*

The size of Russia's deployed strategic nuclear arsenal is declining, in large part due to the country's financial woes. This process is likely to accelerate as existing forces reach the end of their service lives in the coming decade. However, Russia could decide to allocate more funds to maintaining its strategic forces, if it deems this a sufficient priority. In addition, Russia could field its remaining forces in ways that undermine U.S. security. For example, it could continue to field destabilizing multiple-warhead land-based missiles, limit bilateral transparency initiatives, and maintain weapons on high alert despite deteriorating early warning systems, thereby increasing the chance of an accidental or mistaken launch.

13.) *U.S. and Russian officials are seeking a legally binding agreement that would be submitted to each side's legislature for approval. President Bush said it will be a treaty. What were the options under consideration?*

On May 13, President Bush said the agreement would be in treaty form.

There are two types of legally binding international agreements that can be submitted to the U.S. Congress for approval: executive-legislative agreements and treaties. The two options are considered the same under international law, but vary in their domestic approval mechanisms.

An executive-legislative agreement must be approved by a majority in both the Senate and the House of Representatives. If the two bodies attach different conditions to their approval of the agreement, the two bodies would need to hold negotiations to iron out their differences.

A treaty must be submitted to the Senate for "advice and consent" by a two-thirds majority. Senators Joseph Biden (D-DE) and Jesse Helms (R-NC), the ranking members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, wrote a March 15 letter to the president voicing their preference for a treaty.

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*The Arms Control Association is an independent, nonprofit membership organization dedicated to promoting public understanding of and support for effective arms control policies.*

*For more information on the Bush-Putin summit visit the Association Web site at [www.armscontrol.org](http://www.armscontrol.org).*