

START II and Its Extension Protocol at a Glance

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Russia announced on June 14, 2002, that it would no longer be bound by its START II commitments, ending almost a decade of U.S.-Russian efforts to bring the 1993 treaty into force. Moscow's statement came a day after the United States withdrew from the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty, and a few weeks after the two countries concluded a new nuclear arms accord on May 24. The Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty (SORT), which requires the United States and Russia to reduce their deployed strategic arsenals to 1,700-2,200 warheads apiece by December 31, 2012, effectively superseded START II's requirement for each country to deploy no more than 3,000-3,500 warheads by December 2007. Yet other key START II provisions, such as the prohibition against deploying multiple independently targetable reentry vehicles (MIRVs) on intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), were not addressed in the SORT agreement.

START II's ratification process began after U.S. President George H. W. Bush and Russian President Boris Yeltsin signed the agreement on January 3, 1993. The United States ratified the original START II agreement in January 1996, but never ratified a 1997 protocol extending the treaty's implementation deadline or the concurrently negotiated ABM Treaty succession, demarcation, and confidence-building agreements.¹ On May 4, 2000, Russian President Vladimir Putin signed the resolution of ratification for START II, its extension protocol, and the 1997 ABM-related agreements. Russia's ratification legislation made exchange of START II's instruments of ratification (required to bring it into force) contingent on U.S. approval of the extension protocol and the ABM agreements; Congress never voted to ratify the entire package.

Basic Terms²:

- Deployment of no more than 3,000 to 3,500 strategic nuclear warheads on ICBMs, submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs), and heavy bombers by December 31, 2007.
- "Deactivation" of all strategic nuclear delivery vehicles slated for elimination under the treaty by removing their nuclear reentry vehicles (warheads), or taking other jointly-agreed steps, by December 31, 2003.³

Additional Limits:

- No multiple warheads (MIRVs) on ICBMs.
- All SS-18 "heavy" Russian ICBMs must be destroyed.
- No more than 1,700 to 1,750 warheads may be deployed on SLBMs.
- Reductions in strategic nuclear warheads, as well as de-MIRVing ICBMs, may be achieved by "downloading" (removing) warheads from missiles. Once removed, warheads may not be restored to downloaded missiles.

ENDNOTES

1. The START II extension protocol shifted the deadline for completion of START II reductions from January 1, 2003 to December 31, 2007. The succession agreement formalized the former Soviet republics' status as parties to the 1972 ABM Treaty. The demarcation agreements clarified the demarcation line between strategic and theater ballistic missile defenses. On September 26, 1997, the extension protocol was signed by the United States and Russia and the ABM-related agreements were signed by the United States, Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine.

2. START I definitions, limits, procedures, and counting rules applied to START II, except where explicitly modified. Unlike START I, which substantially undercounts weapons deployed on bombers, the number of weapons counted for bombers would be the number they are actually equipped to carry. Provided they were never equipped for long-range nuclear air-launched cruise missiles, up to 100 heavy bombers could be "reoriented" to conventional roles without physical conversion, which would not count against the overall limits. The reoriented bombers could be returned to a nuclear role, but thereafter could not be reoriented and exempted from limits.

3. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and former Russian Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov codified the deactivation agreement through an exchange of letters in September 1997. Primakov's letter also contained a unilateral declaration that Russia expected START III would be "achieved" and would enter into force "well in advance" of the START II deactivation deadline.