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U.S.-Russian Nuclear Arms Control Agreements at a Glance

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Over the past four decades, American and Soviet/Russian leaders have used a progression of bilateral agreements and other measures to limit and reduce their substantial nuclear warhead and strategic missile and bomber arsenals. The following is a brief summary.

Strategic Nuclear Arms Control Agreements

SALT I

Begun in November 1969, the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) produced by May 1972 both the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty, which banned nationwide strategic missile defenses, and the Interim Agreement, an executive-legislative agreement that capped U.S. and Soviet ICBM and SLBM forces. Under the Interim Agreement, both sides pledged not to construct new ICBM silos, not to increase the size of existing ICBM silos “significantly,” and capped the number of SLBMs and SLBM-carrying submarines. The agreement ignored strategic bombers and did not address warheads, leaving both sides free to enlarge their deployed forces by adding multiple warheads to their ICBMs and SLBMs and increasing their bomber-based forces. The agreement limited the United States to 1,054 ICBM silos and 656 SLBM launch tubes. The Soviet Union was limited to 1,607 ICBM silos and 740 SLBM launch tubes. In January 2002, the United States unilaterally withdrew from the ABM treaty.

SALT II

In November 1972, Washington and Moscow agreed to pursue a follow-on treaty to SALT I. SALT II, signed in June 1979, limited U.S. and Soviet ICBM, SLBM, and strategic bomber-based nuclear forces to 2,250 delivery vehicles (defined as an ICBM silo, a submarine missile-launch tube, or a bomber) and placed a variety of other restrictions on deployed strategic nuclear forces. The agreement would have required the Soviets to reduce their forces by roughly 270 delivery vehicles, but U.S. forces were below the limits and could actually have been increased. However, President Jimmy Carter asked the Senate not to consider SALT II for its advice and consent after the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in December 1979, and the treaty was not taken up again. Both Washington and Moscow subsequently pledged to adhere to the agreement’s terms despite its failure to enter into force. However, on May 26, 1986, President Ronald Reagan said that future decisions on strategic nuclear forces would be based on the threat posed by Soviet forces and “not on standards contained in the SALT structure.”

START I

The Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START I), first proposed in the early 1980s by President Ronald Reagan and finally signed in July 1991, required the United States and the Soviet Union to reduce their deployed strategic arsenals to 1,600 delivery vehicles, carrying no more than 6,000 warheads as counted using the agreement’s rules. The agreement limited deployed warheads by imposing limits on delivery vehicles and requiring the destruction of excess delivery vehicles. The destruction was verified using an intrusive verification regime that involved on-site inspections and regular exchanges of information, as well as national technical means (i.e., satellites). The agreement’s entry into force was delayed for several years because of the collapse of the Soviet Union and efforts to denuclearize Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Belarus by making them parties to the agreement and consolidating their nuclear weapons in Russia. START I reductions were completed in December 2001 and the treaty expired on Dec. 5, 2009.

START II

In June 1992, Presidents George H. W. Bush and Boris Yeltsin agreed to pursue a follow-on accord to START I. START II, signed in January 1993, called for reducing deployed strategic arsenals to 3,000-3,500 warheads and banned the deployment of destabilizing multiple-warhead land-based missiles. START II would have counted warheads in roughly the same fashion as START I and, also like its predecessor, would have required the destruction of delivery vehicles but not warheads. The agreement’s original implementation deadline was January 2003, ten years after signature, but a 1997 protocol moved this deadline to December 2007 because of the extended delay in ratification. Both the Senate and the Duma approved START II, but the treaty did not take effect because the Senate did not ratify the 1997 protocol and several ABM Treaty amendments, whose passage the Duma established as a condition for START II’s entry into force. START II was effectively shelved as a result of the 2002 U.S. withdrawal from the ABM treaty.

START III Framework

In March 1997, Presidents Bill Clinton and Boris Yeltsin agreed to a framework for START III negotiations that included a reduction in deployed strategic warheads to 2,000-2,500. Significantly, in addition to requiring the destruction of delivery vehicles, START III negotiations were to address “the destruction of strategic nuclear warheads...to promote the irreversibility of deep reductions including prevention of a rapid increase in the number of warheads.” Negotiations were supposed to begin after START II entered into force, which never happened.

SORT

On May 24, 2002, Presidents George W. Bush and Vladimir Putin signed the Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty (SORT or Moscow Treaty) under which the United States and Russia are reducing their strategic arsenals to 1,700-2,200 warheads each. The warhead limit takes effect and expires on the same day, December 31, 2012. Although the two sides have not agreed on specific counting rules, the Bush administration had asserted that the United States would reduce only warheads deployed on strategic delivery vehicles in active service, i.e., “operationally deployed” warheads, and will not count warheads removed from service and placed in storage or warheads on delivery vehicles undergoing overhaul or repair. The agreement’s limits are similar to those envisioned for START III, but the treaty does not require the destruction of delivery vehicles, as START I and II did, or the destruction of warheads, as had been envisioned for START III. The treaty was approved by the Senate and Duma and entered into force on June 1, 2003. SORT will terminate when New START enters into force.

New START

On April 8, 2010, the United States and Russia signed New START, a legally binding, verifiable agreement that limits each side’s deployed strategic nuclear warheads to 1,550 and strategic delivery systems to 800 deployed and nondeployed, such as submarines in overhaul, with a sublimit of 700 deployed. The treaty-accountable warhead limit is 30 percent lower than the 2,200 limit of SORT, and the delivery vehicle limit is 50 percent lower than the 1,600 allowed in START I. The treaty has a verification regime that combines elements of START I with new elements tailored to New START. Measures under the treaty include on-site inspections and exhibitions, data exchanges and notifications related to strategic offensive arms and facilities covered by the treaty, and provisions to facilitate the use of national technical means for treaty monitoring. To increase confidence and transparency, the treaty also provides for the exchange of telemetry (missile flight-test data on up to five tests per year) and does not limit missile defenses or long-range conventional strike capabilities. The treaty limits take effect seven years after entry into force, and the treaty will be in effect for 10 years, or longer if agreed by both parties.

Strategic Nuclear Arms Control Agreements							
	SALT I	SALT II	START I	START II	START III	SORT	New START
Status	Expired	Never Entered Into Force	Expired	Never Entered Into Force	Never Negotiated	In Force	To Be Ratified
Deployed Warhead Limit	N/A	N/A	6,000	3,000-3,500	2,000-2,500	2,200	1,550
Deployed Delivery Vehicle Limit	US: 1,710 ICBMs & SLBMs USSR: 2,347	2,250	1,600	N/A	N/A	N/A	700; 800 including non-deployed
Date Signed	May 26, 1972	June 18, 1979	July 31, 1991	Jan. 3, 1993	N/A	May 24, 2002	April 8, 2010
Date Ratified, U.S.	Aug. 3, 1972	N/A	Oct. 1, 1992	Jan. 26, 1996	N/A	March 6, 2003	
Ratification Vote, U.S.	88-2	N/A	93-6	87-4	N/A	95-0	
Date Entered Into Force	Oct. 3, 1972	N/A	Dec. 5, 1994	N/A	N/A	June 1, 2003	
Implementation Deadline	N/A	N/A	Dec. 5, 2001	N/A	N/A	Dec. 31, 2012	Seven years after entry into force
Expiration Date	Oct. 3, 1977	N/A	Dec. 5, 2009	N/A	N/A	Dec. 31, 2012 or when New START takes effect	Ten years after entry into force

Nonstrategic Nuclear Arms Control Measures

Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty

Signed December 8, 1987, the INF Treaty required the United States and the Soviet Union to verifiably eliminate all ground-launched ballistic and cruise missiles with ranges between 500 and 5,500 kilometers. Distinguished by its unprecedented, intrusive inspection regime, the INF Treaty laid the groundwork for verification of the subsequent START I. The INF Treaty entered into force June 1, 1988, and the two sides completed their reductions by June 1, 1991, destroying a total of 2,692 missiles. The agreement was multilateralized after the breakup of the Soviet Union, and current active participants in the

agreement include the United States, Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine. Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan are also parties to the agreement but do not participate in treaty meetings or on-site inspections. The ban on intermediate-range missiles is of unlimited duration.

Presidential Nuclear Initiatives

On September 27, 1991, President George H. W. Bush announced that the United States would remove almost all U.S. tactical nuclear forces from deployment so that Russia could undertake similar actions, reducing the risk of nuclear proliferation as the Soviet Union dissolved. Specifically, Bush said the United States would eliminate all its nuclear artillery shells and short-

range nuclear ballistic missile warheads and remove all nonstrategic nuclear warheads from surface ships, attack submarines, and land-based naval aircraft. Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev reciprocated on October 5, pledging to eliminate all nuclear artillery munitions, nuclear warheads for tactical missiles, and

nuclear landmines. He also pledged to withdraw all Soviet tactical naval nuclear weapons from deployment. However, significant questions remain about Russian implementation of its pledges, and there is considerable uncertainty about the current state of Russia's tactical nuclear forces.