

Russia and Arms Control: Extending New Start or Starting Over?

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Russia, China, Arms Control, and the Value of New START

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For more than fifty years, every U.S. President has proposed and pursued negotiations with Moscow as a means to regulate destabilizing nuclear arms competition and reduce the risk of the United States and its allies being destroyed in a nuclear war. They sought and concluded a series of treaties, with strong bipartisan support, that have made America and the world much safer.

The current Administration appears to be veering away from this tradition, to the detriment of our national security.

In November, the Trump administration announced, without a coherent military or diplomatic “plan B,” to terminate the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty in response to Russia’s testing and deployment of the non-compliant, ground-launched 9M729 missile.

The administration has not presented a viable diplomatic plan that might persuade Russia to remove its 9M729s and instead it is pursuing development and testing of U.S. ground-launched, INF-range missiles, which are not militarily necessary to counter the 9M729 and would if deployed, likely divide NATO, and lead Russia to increase the number and type of intermediate-range missiles aimed against NATO targets. Congress would be wise to withhold its support for a new Euromissile race.

Worse yet, Trump’s national security team has dithered for more than a year on beginning talks with Russia to extend the 2010 New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) before it expires in February 2021. In an interview published June 18, National Security Advisor John Bolton said of New START extension, “[T]here’s no decision, but I think it’s unlikely.”

Instead, Bolton has suggested the President wants to bring China into trilateral negotiations with Russia on a new agreement to limit nuclear weapons not covered by New START.

Pursuing talks with other nuclear-armed states and trying to limit all types of nuclear weapons is an admirable objective, which I support in principle. But such a negotiation would be complex and time-consuming. There is no realistic chance a new agreement along these lines could be finalized before New START expires.

It would be national security malpractice to discard New START in the hopes of negotiating a more comprehensive, ambitious nuclear arms control agreement with Russia and China to say nothing about getting it ratified and into force.

As the Chairman and the ranking member of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs have suggested, the first step should be a five-year extension of New START, which would provide a foundation for a more ambitious successor agreement.

Without the INF Treaty and without New START, there would be no legally binding, verifiable limits on the world's two largest nuclear arsenals for the first time in nearly half a century.

New START verifiably caps the number of deployed strategic nuclear weapons at 1,550 warheads and 700 delivery systems for each side; if those ceilings expires, Russia and the United States could upload hundreds of additional nuclear warheads to their long-range delivery systems. In fact, Russia, with its heavy missiles and several open missile production lines, could rapidly upload more additional warheads than the United States could). Each side would also have far less insight into the other's nuclear deployment and modernization plans. As a result, our already difficult and uneasy nuclear relationship with Russia would become even more complicated, the risks of renewed nuclear competition would grow, and our efforts to mitigate nuclear risks in other corners of the globe would become more difficult.

The Value of Nuclear Arms Control

Previous Presidents, since Dwight Eisenhower, have recognized the value of effective nuclear arms control. They understood that:

- Talking to an adversary, whether a superpower like the Soviet Union or a lesser challenger such as Iran, is not a sign of weakness, but a hardheaded and realistic means to reduce threats posed to the United States.
- Treaties provide rules of the road that enable the United States to pursue more effectively its economic and security interests. They constrain other nations' ability to act against our interests more than they constrain U.S. freedom of action.
- Arms control agreements are not a concession made by the United States, or a favor done to another nation, but an essential component of, and contribution to, our national security.
- In a world in which the U.S. claims global leadership, Washington must take the lead bilaterally and multilaterally, proposing initiatives that greatly reduce the risk that weapons of mass destruction (WMD) spread or are used.
- The pursuit of reductions of nuclear stockpiles and the eventual elimination of nuclear weapons is both a moral obligation, and since approval by the U.S. Senate of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty in 1969, it is a legal obligation as well, one that can and must be pursued regardless of the ups and downs of great-power relations.
- There can be no winners in a nuclear war. Mutual assured destruction is not a theory, or a philosophy; it is a reality. Since the time the Soviet Union achieved reliable intercontinental ballistic missiles in the 1960s, neither the United States nor Russia can launch a nuclear attack on the other's homeland without the near-certain destruction of its own homeland. Arms control agreements, and associated stability mechanisms, serve to reduce the risk that a cycle of assured destruction will begin.

As a consequence of American diplomatic leadership and the support of Congress, a series of

bilateral agreements between the United States and the Soviet Union/Russia verifiably capped, and later, helped lead to significant cuts in the two superpowers arsenals by more than 85% from their Cold War peaks. The total destructive power of those weapons has been reduced from the equivalent of over a million Hiroshima-size bombs to the somewhat less insane equivalent of 80,000 such weapons. One of those agreements, the INF Treaty, verifiably eliminated an entire class of destabilizing missiles that threatened European security and increased the risk of superpower miscalculation.

The United States helped lead the way to the negotiation and conclusion of the 1996 Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, which prohibits any nuclear test explosion, no matter what the yield. Although the CTBT has not formally entered into force due to the failure of eight key states to ratify, the treaty has been signed by 184 nations including all of the P-5 states, has established a global monitoring network that is operating 24/7 to help detect and deter clandestine testing, and created a global norm against nuclear testing. Today no state is actively engaged in nuclear testing.

U.S.-led efforts to reduce the role and the number of nuclear weapons, to end nuclear testing, combined with political pledges from the United States and the other nuclear-armed states to take further disarmament steps, have helped to solidify international support for the nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT), and paved the way for its indefinite extension in 1995.

Many of these positive trends have been reversed and others are at risk. This is due in part of a deficit of American leadership and the growing body of thought in the Administration and Congress today, which believes

- The U.S. should not discuss vital national security issues, or consider compromise, with adversaries such as Russia and Iran until they have fully met U.S. demands in all fields.
- International treaties are inherently disadvantageous to the United States, as they constrain the freedom of action of the world's leading military and economic power.
- That because arms control agreements involve a degree of compromise, they grant unwarranted concessions to opponents.
- Such agreements are of no value if they do not solve EVERY problem between the parties, an all-or-nothing approach exemplified by the U.S. decision to withdraw from the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).
- In the Cold War fallacy that there is a way to win a nuclear war, that a numerical or technical advantage can give the United States a dominance of power that would spare our country from destruction in a nuclear exchange. Sadly, no U.S. official today is able to repeat the obvious fact that motivated Presidents Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev to declare: "A nuclear war can never be won and must never be fought."

Over the last two years, this line of thinking is evident in the Administration's retreat from global leadership, its embrace of authoritarian leaders, its weakening partnership with democratic allies. its withdrawal from international agreements, and its inability to make any new and meaningful agreements. The Administration has weakened restraints on Iran's ability to enrich uranium. It has refused to reconsider ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty or otherwise reinforce the de facto nuclear testing moratorium, which has preserved America's important technical advantage in the nuclear field.

Now, as the termination date for the INF Treaty approaches and the expiration date for New START

looms on the near horizon, the administration has failed to put forward a serious plan for constraining Russia's nuclear arsenal. There is a serious risk that without extension of New START and without mutual restraints on INF missile systems after the end of the treaty, the conditions for an expensive, risky and destabilizing nuclear weapons race will emerge, similar to - but riskier and more expensive than - the arms race we ran in the 1950s and 1960s.

In the absence of responsible steps to prevent a dangerous new U.S.-Russian nuclear arms race, Congress can and should be ready to point the way forward.

The INF Treaty

The INF Treaty was a signature foreign policy achievement of President Reagan. It was unprecedented in requiring the destruction of nuclear warheads and delivery systems, resulting in the elimination of 2692 Soviet and U.S. missiles. It established the principle of on-site inspection, a concept still central today to effective agreements and to our understanding of Russian systems. It resolved a dangerous split within the NATO Alliance and reduced a genuine threat to our Allies and to peace in Europe. It was central to establishing the opportunity for genuine cooperation between Washington and Moscow.

The Russian military was never happy about Gorbachev's 'surrender' in signing the INF Treaty, and has developed a cruise missile in violation of the range prescribed by the treaty. I think it unlikely that the Russian Defense Ministry consulted with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs about the legality of this action. Deployment of the 9M729 has proven to be of double benefit to Russia, apart from the marginal utility of a new means to threaten NATO territory. Moscow is pleased to continue a long-running debate about the actual range of the 9M729, because it distracts from a less comfortable topic: the several dozen European cities and sites now within range of the new system. The U.S. withdrawal from the treaty will free the Russian military to plan new generations of missiles aimed at Russia's neighbors, (both NATO and non-NATO), all while plausibly blaming the United States for the treaty's demise.

Barring a diplomatic miracle, U.S. withdrawal from the INF Treaty will become effective August 2, and it is 'justifiable' as a response to Russia's violation. But 'justifiable' is not the same as 'smart,' or even well-considered.

The President's decision was taken without the benefit of senior-level interagency discussion, and without any plan to counter effectively the slight military advantage that Russia might gain by its deployment. That meant that the U.S. diplomatic strategy on the INF Treaty essentially amounted to the expression of "hope" that Russia will "change course" and return to compliance, which is of course not serious strategy.

The decision to terminate the treaty, combined with the possibility of new U.S. ground-launched cruise missiles in Europe, is risky and unwise. It opens the door to a new phase of destabilizing INF-range missile competition with Russia.

The Administration has yet to answer repeated Congressional calls for information on its decision to withdraw from the treaty or a strategy for a post-treaty world. The Pentagon's FY 2020 budget request for new INF-range missiles lacks key details about the types of missiles DoD plans to develop or justification of the need for such missiles.

The United States should ensure that Russia gains no military advantage from its violation of the INF Treaty. Given that the United States and NATO forces currently can hold hundreds of key Russian military targets at risk using their existing array of sea-, land-, and air-based conventional strike weapons and missiles, new U.S. intermediate-range missiles are militarily unnecessary. If additional military measures are required, such as air- and sea-launched cruise missiles and cruise missile defenses, these can be pursued without the provocative and escalatory deployment of new ground-based missiles.

In addition, new missiles would have to be deployed on the territory of allies neighboring Russia or China to have military value. No ally has yet said it would be willing to serve this function. Any such

deployment in Europe would require unanimous approval by NATO members, which cannot be assumed.

These missiles, whether nuclear- or conventionally-armed, American or Russian, would be able to strike targets deep inside Russia and in western Europe. Their short time-to-target capability increases the risk of miscalculation in a crisis. Any nuclear attack on Russia involving U.S. intermediate-range, nuclear-armed missiles based in Europe could provoke a massive Russian nuclear counterstrike on Europe and on the U.S. homeland.

This leaves open the question: what happens next and what can be done to mitigate the risks?

The Trump administration is clearly seeking to deploy new, intermediate-range missiles in Europe, to counter Russia's nuclear-capable, but very likely conventionally-armed, 9M729 ground-launched cruise missiles that have been deployed so far.

Rather than spur Russia to deploy more 9M729s that put our allies at risk, a new and more serious NATO commitment to arms control is needed to protect Europe and the United States.

One option would be for NATO to declare as a bloc that no alliance members will field any INF Treaty-prohibited missiles or any equivalent new nuclear capabilities in Europe so long as Russia does not deploy treaty-prohibited systems where they could hit NATO territory.

This would require Russia to dismantle or move at least some currently deployed 9M729 missiles. As the United States and Russia dispute the range of that missile, they could simply agree to bar deployments west of the Ural Mountains, or beyond. The U.S. and Russian presidents could agree to this "no-first INF missile deployment plan" through an executive agreement that would be verified through national technical means of intelligence, monitoring mechanisms available through the Open Skies Treaty and Vienna Document, and as necessary, new on-site inspection arrangements.

Another possible approach would be to negotiate a new agreement, perhaps as part of a New START follow-on, that verifiably prohibits ground-launched, intermediate-range ballistic or cruise missiles armed with nuclear warheads. As a recent United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research study explains, the sophisticated verification procedures and technologies already in place under New START can be applied with almost no modification to verify the absence of nuclear warheads deployed on shorter-range missiles.

Such an approach would require additional declarations and inspections of any ground-launched INF Treaty-range systems. To be of lasting value, such a framework would require that Moscow and Washington agree to extend New START.

The Future of New START

The 2010 New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty brought the deployed arsenals of the United States and Russian Federation to their lowest level since the 1960s. It built upon previously agreed systems of notification, verification and inspection. To date, the two sides have exchanged over 10,000 notifications of movement of delivery systems and have conducted dozens of on-site verification inspections on each other's territory.

As a result, the United States has a significantly clearer picture of Russian strategic capabilities than it could attain by national intelligence means alone. There have been no credible allegations of Russian violations of the agreement and, despite some questionable Russian concerns about verifying the conversion of U.S. strategic nuclear systems to conventional roles, the United States also continues to fully implement the treaty.

In one of my last meetings before leaving the State Department in 2017, I suggested to Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov that Russia should seek early in the new Administration to extend the treaty, before any big thinkers in either Washington or Moscow got the brilliant idea that extension could become a bargaining chip. Although he agreed with that concern, what we both feared has occurred: a myth has taken hold in this city that Russia 'needs' New START more than the

United States needs it, and that it can be “leveraged” to gain something more from Moscow.

Taking all these factors into account, the most important step that the two sides could take would be to take advantage of the option, as described in Article XIV, to extend the Treaty by five years to 2026.

To do so, it is important that the two sides promptly begin consultations on key issues raised by each side. Russia has raised concerns about the verification of the permitted procedures to convert some U.S. nuclear weapons delivery systems to conventional roles. The United States has understandably suggested that new Russian strategic nuclear weapons systems, including the Status-6 nuclear-armed, long-range torpedo and the proposed nuclear-propelled, long-range cruise missile, should be accounted for under New START. If both sides are willing to engage in a professional dialogue relatively soon, using the mechanism contained in the treaty, the Bilateral Consultative Commission, these issues can be addressed in a mutually agreed manner either before or soon after a decision to extend New START is taken.

New START extension is the most significant step this President could take with Russia that would improve national security, lay the basis for progress in other areas of Russian misbehavior, and draw bipartisan (though not unanimous) support.

I want to welcome the initiative of Chairman Engel and ranking member McCaul, the “Richard G. Lugar and Ellen O. Tauscher Act to Maintain Limits on Russian Nuclear Forces” (H.R. 2529), which would express the Sense of Congress that the United States should seek to extend New START so long as Russia remains in compliance. The bill would also require an intelligence assessment of how the expiration of New START would affect the size and posture of Russian nuclear forces and the additional intelligence capabilities the United States would need to compensate for the loss of the treaty’s extensive transparency and on-site monitoring provisions.

We don’t need and cannot afford a new Cold War-style nuclear arms race. Nor do we need to give China a cynical excuse to expand its arsenal, as it will likely do if the United States and Russia discard New START without a replacement agreement and pursue expanded deployment of intermediate-range missiles in the wake of the INF Treaty collapse.

As an insurance policy against increased Russian and U.S. strategic warhead deployments in the absence of New START, Congress could prohibit the use of funds for the purpose of increasing U.S. strategic warhead and delivery vehicles above New START limits, so long as the U.S. intelligence community assesses that Russia remains under the New START limits.

During Senate consideration of the Treaty in 2010, the White House made a strong commitment to sustain the funding necessary to replace and modernize U.S. nuclear weapons delivery systems and for warhead life extensions. Since then, the cost estimates for those programs have grown significantly, and the Trump administration has added a number of new requests that would add new nuclear capabilities to the arsenal.

If this administration – whether through inaction or proactively – forces the end of New START, Congress should not supinely go along with the administration’s plan for spending on new nuclear weapons, which the Congressional Budget Office estimates to be \$1.7 trillion over the next 30 years. Instead, Congress should seek more cost-effective program alternatives that can save hundreds of billions of taxpayer dollars while still allowing for the deployment of a nuclear force more than sufficient to deter any and all nuclear adversaries.

A Broader Arms Control Agreement?

The Administration has delayed any action on extension of New START and has proposed instead expanding New START to include China as a treaty party, and to set new limits on non-strategic (tactical) nuclear weapons, which are not covered by New START. When described this way, such an approach may seem to make sense. Involving other nuclear-armed states and all types of nuclear weapons in the disarmament process should be a medium-term goal of any Administration

However, given the antipathy expressed toward New START (and all other treaties) by President Trump's National Security Advisor, John Bolton, it strikes me and many others as a poison pill, a pretext for withdrawing from or allowing New START to expire, rather than to sustain meaningful limits on Russia's most dangerous nuclear weapons – their strategic arsenal – which is an essential foundation for any new, broader and more ambitious follow-on agreement.

There are several obstacles in the way of a more ambitious trilateral nuclear arms control deal with China and Russia:

- First, China has very little incentive to participate. With a nuclear arsenal less than one-tenth the size of America and Russia, it argues that these two sides need to reduce before including China in their discussions. Nor has the United States defined what agreement it would want China to embrace: would it be to commit to the limitations New START imposed on Moscow and Washington? This would mean giving our blessing to a five-fold increase in China's weapon stockpile, which is hardly in our interest. Or would we agree to reduce American and Russian deployments to the level of China (300+)? That would be a real contribution to reducing the risk of nuclear war, but it is not currently achievable, for both political and security reasons.
- Second, Russia counts the French and British nuclear deterrents like the American arsenal, as belonging to a potential adversary. It has suggested that multilateral discussions should include not only Beijing, but also Paris and London. Further, Moscow is not ready at this time to discuss its non-strategic arsenal, particularly if the US is not prepared to discuss issues of greatest concern to Moscow, such as US plans for ballistic missile defense.
- Third, the United States would not be ready to discuss reducing its own non-strategic nuclear stockpile before completing consultations with NATO partners, which would inevitably be complex and time-consuming.
- Finally, even under ideal conditions, a bilateral negotiation on a single topic takes years. Even if Russia and China were willing to discuss the proposed American agenda, a trilateral discussion of multiple topics would inevitably take considerably longer, even if it were pursued by an Administration committed to the topic and with successful experience in negotiations. This is not such an Administration. Between Mr. Bolton's long-standing opposition to New START, and the nearly complete absence of experienced officials in the State Department, it is utterly unrealistic to expect such an agreement could be achieved before the scheduled expiration of New START in 19 months.

Beyond New START: Strategic Stability

If New START is not extended, we will find ourselves in 2021 - for the first time in nearly 50 years - with no legal restraints on the American and Russian arsenals. This absence would be a foreboding political signal: if the two main nuclear powers cannot even agree on the urgency of reducing the nuclear threat hanging over them both, what chances will there be for reducing other areas of tension?

As our intelligence leaders have testified, our national technical means alone - even if upgraded at great expense - could not fully substitute for the insight into the Russian arsenal we gain from New START's notification requirements. In the absence of confidence about the other side's capabilities, both U.S. and Russian planners will have greater incentive to engage in worst-case scenario planning, driving a spiral of increased spending on destabilizing systems.

A deep strategic stability dialogue between Washington and Moscow is necessary today to reduce

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the risk of unintended escalation and will be even more essential tomorrow if New START is allowed to expire. Central to this effort is the intensification of U.S.-Russian military-to-military contacts. The “no-contact” policy dating back to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in 2014 was meant to show Moscow there can be no business as usual, but it now works against American security interests, as it prevents the kind of information exchange and relationships that could help prevent an incident from becoming a conflict.

Beyond military channels, it is to be hoped that last week’s meeting between American and Russian diplomats will lead directly to a continuing, intensive strategic stability dialogue that will focus on enhanced understanding of each other’s doctrines and capabilities, less name-calling and more problem-solving.

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