

New START Verification: Up to the Challenge

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The New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) promises to lock in significant reductions in U.S. and Russian strategic arsenals by establishing lower ceilings on both deployed and non-deployed weapons. The treaty's verification provisions would provide the means for determining compliance with those lower limits. New START would permit the same high confidence in compliance achieved during the 15 years (1994-2009) when the original START was in force, but it would do so with more focused and up-to-date methods, including innovative verification provisions for monitoring deployed warhead ceilings. START's multilayered limits and the elaborate verification measures flowing out of them were born of the Cold War. The modified verification regime in the successor treaty is an appropriate response to post-Cold War realities. It is streamlined in accordance with the new treaty's simplified limits and well suited to fulfill its core function.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The purpose of including verification provisions in an arms control agreement is to provide mechanisms for increasing confidence that the sides are complying with the limits of the treaty and to provide sufficient time for a response if they are not.
- Effective verification provisions often enhance the collection of security information, but enhancing collection per se is not a sufficient rationale for including them in a treaty. Verification provisions can be justified as essential only through their relationship to the limits agreed on and their utility in monitoring, assessing, and encouraging treaty compliance.
- New START verification is based on reciprocal obligations, consistent with the force structures currently in place.
- The new treaty's inspection regime is the most intrusive ever negotiated for active nuclear forces, facilitating the counting of deployed warheads, one of the most challenging tasks of verification. Thus, the United States will be able to effectively monitor Russia's mobile intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) launchers and deployed warheads and both parties will be able to effectively monitor the other's submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM) launchers and deployed warheads.
- The new treaty sheds some of the elaborate verification provisions of START, which were designed in response to Cold War circumstances more dire than those we confront today and intended to guard against cheating scenarios even less plausible today than they were then.
- Two decades after the negotiation of START, national technical means of verification are more sophisticated, U.S. familiarity with Russia's strategic force structure and operations is much greater, Russia's overall military capability is much diminished, and bilateral relations are much improved. These developments account for the more streamlined verification package in New START.
- The New START agreement is effectively verifiable.

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The multilayered limits of the original Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) and the elaborate verification measures flowing out of them were born of the difficult negotiations conducted in the waning days of the Soviet Union. The streamlined verification measures in the New START agreement, finalized in April 2010, are an appropriate response to the replacement treaty's specific limits, which are designed to address post-Cold War realities. Combining proof-tested measures from 15 years of START implementation with new approaches to contemporary challenges, New START verification provisions are well suited to fulfill their core function. These provisions promise to permit the same high confidence in compliance achieved when the original START was in force, but will do so with more focused and up-to-date methods, including innovative verification provisions for monitoring deployed warhead ceilings.

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