

Extending New START Protects the United States and Saves Billions

Unless the U.S. and Russian governments agree to extend the New START treaty by Feb. 5, 2021, the last remaining limits on their nuclear weapons will expire. Dave Lawler of Axios *reports* “both sides have warned that without a deal, they’re prepared for an arms race.”

New START is the only remaining agreement limiting Russian and U.S. nuclear weapons or providing for cooperative verification of nuclear force levels. If it expires, the United States will lose valuable data about Russian warheads and delivery systems, as well as the ability to conduct on-site inspections of Russian bases. Without such monitoring systems, each side will face increased pressure to build up their nuclear arsenals, at great cost and unnecessary risk.

What is New START?

- New START is a 2010 treaty committing the United States and the Russian Federation to mutually verified reduction of their strategic nuclear forces to no more than 1,550 deployed strategic nuclear weapons and 800 total launchers, of which 700 can be deployed.
- New START is the only legally binding limit on Russian and U.S. nuclear weapons.
- The Senate voted 71-26 to ratify the New START treaty in December 2010, with the support of more than a dozen Republicans.
- New START will expire on Feb. 5, 2021, but it can be extended by the U.S. and Russian governments for up to 5 years. The extension does not require Senate approval.
- New START (formally, the Treaty Between the United States of America and the Russian Federation on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms) takes its nickname from the acronym of the prior Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) signed by President George H.W. Bush and Soviet Premier Mikhail Gorbachev in 1991 to help codify the end of the Cold War through the elimination of most U.S. and Russian strategic nuclear weapons.

- START was intended to begin a further process of deep cuts to nuclear forces. A START II Treaty was ratified, but never entered into force as the Russians withdrew in 2002 in response to U.S. withdrawal from the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty.
- Later in 2002, the U.S. and Russian governments agreed to a two-page Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty (SORT) providing nominal arms control continuity until replacing it with New START in 2010.
- One of the most important features of New START is its detailed verification system. The process includes 18 “boots on the ground” on-site inspections a year, notifications of the location, movement, and status of strategic nuclear weapons, an annual data exchange on launches of intercontinental and submarine-launched ballistic missiles, and non-interference with relevant U.S. monitoring techniques.

What About...

- **Russian cheating?** The Trump administration certified “the Russian Federation to be in compliance with the terms of New START” in its April 2020 *report* on Adherence to and Compliance with Arms Control, Nonproliferation, and Disarmament Agreements and Commitments. While both Russia and the United States have concerns about the other’s compliance with other agreements, neither claims the other has cheated on New START. New START establishes agreed rules and mechanisms to resolve disputes about these rules. As New START negotiator Rose Gottemoeller *wrote* in The Washington Quarterly in September 2020, the United States “can be confident that Russia is not violating the Treaty.” Vigilance remains important, but it is more certain with New START’s verification system in place.
- **Russian tactical nuclear weapons not covered by New START?** The fact that not all Russian nuclear weapons are covered by this treaty is not a reason to forego the limits and verification measures that New START provides. Other weapon systems can be addressed as a priority in the next arms reduction treaty.
- **Verification?** New START’s highly effective verification system builds on more than two decades of detailed and technically sophisticated verification experience under START. In turn, New START’s verification success, will make it possible to negotiate even better verification in the future, but doing so will take years. As a practical matter, extension of New START is the only way to limit Russian nuclear weapons during that time.

- **The Chinese?** The United States and Russia have thousands of nuclear weapons – more than 90% of the world’s total – and each poses the only threat to the retaliatory capacity of the other. China should be included in future nuclear arms reduction negotiations, but this will only be possible if arms reduction treaties between the U.S. and Russia remain in force.
- **The aging U.S. nuclear arsenal?** New START does nothing to prevent U.S. nuclear weapons modernization. Because it caps the total number of deployed and stockpiled nuclear weapons, it provides the level of confidence needed to negotiate a bigger and better arms control deal.

New START Strengthens U.S. National Security

- New START contributes to strategic stability between the United States and Russia. By exchanging detailed data about each other’s nuclear forces, building personal relationships among military officials through routine communications, and establishing a track record of making and keeping commitments and resolving differences, the treaty builds confidence and reduces fear.
- New START provides irreplaceable insight into Russian nuclear forces. Admiral Charles Richard, Commander of the U.S. Strategic Command (STRATCOM) overseeing all U.S. nuclear forces, *observes* that the New START “verification regime allows insights into the Russian strategic TRIAD which significantly contributes to our understanding of their force posture.”
- New START reduces U.S. nuclear weapons requirements. The Treaty limits Russian nuclear weapons, thereby limiting the number of targets for which U.S. weapons could be assigned. Each Russian nuclear weapon that is negotiated away is one fewer the American taxpayer will be charged millions of dollars to plan to destroy,
- New START is strongly supported by the U.S. military. During Senate consideration of the Treaty for ratification in 2010, then Secretary of Defense Bob Gates *wrote* in the Wall Street Journal, “the New START Treaty has the unanimous support of America’s military leadership—to include the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, all of the service chiefs, and the commander of the U.S. Strategic Command, the organization responsible for our strategic nuclear deterrent.”

- Former national security leaders support a New START extension. Former Secretary of State George Shultz, former Secretary of Defense William Perry, and former Senate Armed Services Committee Chair Sam Nunn *wrote* in the [Washington Post](#) on Oct. 22, 2020 that “the United States and Russia should seal the deal now to extend New START.”

Immediate, unconditional extension of New START for the maximum five years is in the best interest of the United States. A bigger, better deal will be easier to achieve with the stability, predictability, insights and confidence New START provides.