



## ANALYSIS

### **TIME TO END NEW START: THE TREATY IS NOT IN AMERICA'S SECURITY INTEREST**

**James H. Anderson and David J. Trachtenberg**

Various analysts and arms control proponents are salivating over President Trump's recent comment that Vladimir Putin's proposal to extend the numerical limits of the New START arms control treaty for one year after its formal expiration next February "sounds like a good idea."<sup>1</sup> Arms control advocates see New START—the last remaining strategic nuclear arms control treaty still in force—as a necessary brake on a nuclear arms race that could spiral out of control and lead to massive increases in nuclear weapons. Even foreign governments are urging Trump to agree to Putin's proposal and to negotiate further arms reductions. For example, the Austrian Foreign Ministry stated, "We welcome the readiness by Russia & the U.S. to adhere to the #NewSTART limits for a year after expiry. More nuclear weapons won't make anyone safer – neither the U.S., nor Russia nor the rest of the world. Let us use this time to get to deeper cuts through a new agreement."<sup>2</sup>

Such thinking is misplaced and naïve. It ignores the lessons of history, the extensive record of Russian arms control cheating, the disparity in Russian and U.S. nuclear modernization programs, and the wildly divergent strategic goals and objectives of both sides. New START also imposes no restrictions on China's burgeoning nuclear force while restricting America's flexibility to adapt its nuclear force posture to meet dynamic and increasingly demanding deterrence requirements. This includes preventing the United States from uploading nuclear weapons to strengthen deterrence in the face of extensive nuclear weapons buildups by both Russia and China. In short, the New START Treaty is not in America's national security interest and President Trump should kill it or at least let it die a natural death.

Here is why proponents of extending the treaty are mistaken. First, the treaty was negotiated 15 years ago when the relationship between Russia and the United States was thought to be improving. That world no longer exists. Since then, Russia has illegally annexed Crimea, invaded Ukraine, signed a "no limits" friendship treaty with China, expanded military cooperation with North Korea and Iran, launched aerial incursions into NATO airspace, upgraded its existing nuclear arsenal, developed more modern and exotic nuclear weapons unrestricted by any arms control agreement, and brandished nuclear threats against the

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<sup>1</sup> Andrea Shalal, "Trump says Putin's offer on nuclear arms control 'sounds like a good idea'," *Reuters*, October 5, 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/trump-says-putins-offer-nuclear-arms-control-sounds-like-good-idea-2025-10-05/>.

<sup>2</sup> MFA Austria, X Post, October 6, 2025, [https://x.com/MFA\\_Austria/status/1975265278444642357](https://x.com/MFA_Austria/status/1975265278444642357).



United States, NATO, and Ukraine. Clearly, Russian actions belie Putin's expressed desire to avoid "steps that would undermine or disrupt the existing balance of deterrence."<sup>3</sup>

Second, Russia has been violating the treaty for years. Despite President Biden agreeing in 2021 to extend the treaty for five years, Moscow ceased allowing mandatory inspections required by New START in August 2022, effectively eviscerating the transparency and predictability that the treaty was intended to guarantee.<sup>4</sup> In February 2023, Russia officially "suspended" its participation in the treaty.<sup>5</sup> Moscow has reportedly armed some of its bombers with long-range cruise missiles, refusing to count them as strategic systems even though the treaty makes them legally accountable. This would place Russia above the New START limits. And there is mounting evidence of other Russian missile and warhead deployments that exceed allowable New START levels.<sup>6</sup> It makes no sense to extend the numerical limits of a treaty when the other party is a serial violator of it.

Third, Moscow has been engaged in a massive, across-the-board nuclear modernization program that has resulted in the deployment of an up-to-date, sophisticated nuclear arsenal and has used coercive nuclear threats to deter the United States and NATO from providing more robust support to Ukraine. Early last year, Putin declared Russia's strategic modernization efforts to be 95 percent complete.<sup>7</sup> By contrast, the U.S. nuclear modernization program has been long delayed and is under constant siege by those who support an anti-nuclear, pro-disarmament agenda.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, virtually all U.S. nuclear forces are accountable under New START while thousands of Russian nuclear warheads are unconstrained by the agreement.<sup>9</sup> Given this gross asymmetry, the assertions of arms control advocates that New START is necessary to cap the "arms race" lacks credibility when only one side—Russia—is racing.

Fourth, the treaty is a bilateral agreement between the United States and Russia. China is not a party to it and its nuclear forces are unconstrained by its limitations. Beijing is engaged in an extensive, quantitative and qualitative nuclear expansion program that the former commander of U.S. Strategic Command has referred to as "breathtaking" and a "strategic

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<sup>3</sup> Xiaodon Liang, "Russia Proposes One-Year New START Extension," *Arms Control Today*, October 2025, <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2025-10/news/russia-proposes-one-year-new-start-extension>.

<sup>4</sup> "Russia halts US inspections of nuclear arsenal under New START treaty," *BBC*, August 8, 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-62466998>.

<sup>5</sup> "Putin: Russia suspends participation in last remaining nuclear treaty with U.S.," *Reuters*, February 21, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/putin-russia-suspends-participation-last-remaining-nuclear-treaty-with-us-2023-02-21/>.

<sup>6</sup> Mark B. Schneider, "Recent Evidence of Russian Arms Control Violations," *RealClear Defense*, September 12, 2025, [https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2025/09/12/recent\\_evidence\\_of\\_russian\\_arms\\_control\\_violations\\_1134367.html](https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2025/09/12/recent_evidence_of_russian_arms_control_violations_1134367.html).

<sup>7</sup> "Putin says nearly all of Russia's nuclear forces have been modernized," *Reuters*, February 23, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/putin-says-95-russias-nuclear-forces-have-been-modernised-2024-02-23/>.

<sup>8</sup> Robert Peters, "Modernizing America's Nuclear Arsenal," *The Heritage Foundation*, July 2, 2025, <https://www.heritage.org/defense/commentary/modernizing-americas-nuclear-arsenal>.

<sup>9</sup> Pranay Vaddi, "Beware Russia Bearing Arms Control Gifts," *RUSI*, October 3, 2025, <https://www.rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/beware-russia-bearing-arms-control-gifts>.

breakout.”<sup>10</sup> Indeed, the Department of Defense has considered China to be the “pacing threat” governing the development, acquisition, and deployment of U.S. military capabilities. Beijing has been developing and deploying nuclear capable systems—including intermediate-range nuclear forces—that the United States was prohibited from fielding for just over three decades because of its strict adherence to the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty it signed with Moscow.<sup>11</sup> China’s consistent refusal to engage in arms control discussions with the United States exposes the fallacy of abiding by a treaty that allows the nuclear forces of America’s main rival to grow unconstrained.

Fifth, continuing to abide by the numerical limits of New START will prevent the United States from uploading weapons on existing delivery platforms. As a recent National Institute for Public Policy study concluded, weapons upload is the only near-term and affordable option to strengthen deterrence against Russia and China in the face of their extensive nuclear modernization programs.<sup>12</sup> This is consistent with the 2023 bipartisan recommendations of the Strategic Posture Commission, which called on the Air Force and Navy to “[P]repare to upload some or all of the nation’s hedge warheads” and to do so “with urgency.”<sup>13</sup> Uploading nuclear weapons will also bolster the credibility of the U.S. extended deterrent and help assure allies in both Europe and Asia of America’s unwavering commitment to their own security, especially in light of repeated coercive nuclear threats by Moscow and Beijing.

Sixth, continuing to lock the United States into strict numerical force levels limits U.S. flexibility to respond to changes in the overall strategic environment. In today’s dynamic international environment, where the United States now faces not one, but two, major nuclear adversaries—both of which are significantly expanding their own nuclear weapons and capabilities—preventing the United States from adding, as necessary, to its nuclear force levels will ensure a period of U.S. nuclear inferiority vis-à-vis America’s two main geopolitical rivals. When considering Moscow’s and Beijing’s escalatory nuclear threats and penchant for provocations, such a situation is the antithesis of stability, which is what the New START Treaty was supposed to promote.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, arms control treaties cannot address the profound underlying political differences that define the U.S.-Russian relationship. The United States has looked to arms control in general, and New START in particular, to enhance strategic stability. Yet, Russia is not interested in preserving the stability of a world in which the United States is the dominant power. Indeed, Russia is seeking to overturn the existing

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<sup>10</sup> Aaron Mehta, “STRATCOM Chief Warns Of Chinese ‘Strategic Breakout,’” *Breaking Defense*, August 12, 2021, <https://breakingdefense.com/2021/08/stratcom-chief-warns-of-chinese-strategic-breakout/>.

<sup>11</sup> The Trump Administration withdrew the United States from the INF Treaty in August 2019 as a result of Russian cheating.

<sup>12</sup> Dr. Keith B. Payne, et al., *A New Strategic Review for a New Age: 2025* (Fairfax, VA: National Institute Press, 2025), [https://nipp.org/monographs\\_cpt/a-new-strategic-review-for-a-new-age/](https://nipp.org/monographs_cpt/a-new-strategic-review-for-a-new-age/).

<sup>13</sup> Madelyn R. Creedon Jon L. Kyl, et al., *America’s Strategic Posture: The Final Report of the Congressional Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States*, October 2023, pp. 48, 99, <https://www.ida.org/-/media/feature/publications/a/am/americas-strategic-posture/strategic-posture-commission-report.ashx>.

world order and displace the United States as the predominant global power.<sup>14</sup> Putin himself has declared that “a serious, irreconcilable struggle is unfolding for the development of a new world order.”<sup>15</sup> Under these conditions, where the strategic goals and objectives of the parties are intractably at odds, the belief that arms control can benefit U.S. national security interests is wishful thinking at best and dangerous naivete at worst.

The New START Treaty is a relic of a bygone era, and its expiration should be welcomed, not lamented. Given that China is unshackled from its limits, along with Russia’s massive nuclear weapons buildup, violations of New START, frequent coercive nuclear threats, and desire to overturn the existing U.S.-led world order, Washington should move expeditiously to strengthen its deterrent by fully modernizing its own ageing nuclear arsenal and deploying a robust Golden Dome missile defense system to protect the American people in the event deterrence fails.

After Biden extended New START, Putin suspended it. President Trump should not make the same mistake. The president should rethink his initial reaction to Putin’s “good idea” and just say “nyet.” It is time to end New START.

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<sup>14</sup> David J. Trachtenberg, “Why Arms Control Must Fail,” *Information Series*, No. 627 (Fairfax, VA: National Institute Press, June 12, 2025), available at [https://nipp.org/information\\_series/david-j-trachtenberg-why-arms-control-must-fail-no-627-july-12-2025/#\\_edn16](https://nipp.org/information_series/david-j-trachtenberg-why-arms-control-must-fail-no-627-july-12-2025/#_edn16).

<sup>15</sup> Vladimir Putin, “Valdai Discussion Club Meeting,” November 7, 2024, available at <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/75521>.