New START Implementation and Future: An Assessment of US Progress and Outlook

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**US Implementation Status**

Since Feb 2011: reduction of 141 launchers and 319 warheads

Dropped below warhead limit in late-2015

2011-2015: “phantom launchers” (B-1B, B-52G, empty silos)

2015-2018: reduction of real weapons:

- Bombers: De-nuke 30 operational and 12 non-operational B-52Hs. Leaving 41 nuclear for total of 60 deployed nuclear bombers
- ICBM: Offload 50 MM3s from silos, leaving 400 (all single warhead; ½ can still MIRV)
- SSBN: Reduce tubes from 24 to 20, leaving no more than 240 deployed SLBMs on 12 operational submarines

New START Force level also constitutes long-term (beyond 2021) strategic nuclear force planning

Images top-down: last B-52G destroyed; ICBM silo elimination at Malmstrom AFB; ICBMs removed from 50 silos; first B-52H de-nuclearized at Barksdale AFB; SSBN tubes to be reduced from 24 to 20.
US Perceptions of Value

**Government:** reductions are nice but main values attributed are:

- Limit on launchers
- Verification Regime (notifications and inspections)
- “providing predictability about the Russian nuclear arsenal at a time of continued poor relations with Moscow.” (Gottemoeller 2016)
- “more important now than when it went into effect. It gives us the confidence and level of oversight we need – and could not otherwise have – by allowing U.S. inspectors unprecedented access to Russian nuclear facilities.” (Kerry 2016)

Russia is in compliance (despite some technical implementation issues)

Would like to see more reductions

**Congress:** Privately treaty is OK but issues raised publicly are:

- Unbalanced: necessitates greater reduction of US reductions than Russian launchers
- Russia not in full compliance (Topol issues from April 2016 inspection; issue not publicly raised by government who considers it as issue for Bilateral Consultative Commission)

**Public:** Good but limited effect on force levels and planning. General confusion about numbers (aggregate numbers versus stockpile numbers – 1,550 versus 4,500 warheads)

“Based on the information available as of December 31, 2015, the United States certifies the Russian Federation to be in compliance with the terms of the New START Treaty.”

“The United States does not assess that there is a strategic imbalance between the United States and the Russian Federation.”

US Criticism and Confidence

No serious criticism, but debate issue that:

• Russia deploys more (198) warheads than when the treaty entered into force in 2011
• Russia has not reduced deployed launchers compared with 2011
• Russia has reduced total launchers by nine launchers since 2011

Even though Russia is expected to be in compliance with New START by 2018, the overall increase of deployed warheads compared with 2011 gives impression that Russia is not demonstrating good faith and fuels uncertainty about period after 2018

Nonetheless, US military is very confident about its strategic nuclear forces and is not concerned about New START fluctuations or even plausible break-out scenarios

Even if Russia deployed additional strategic warheads to conduct a disarming first strike, even significantly above the New START Treaty limits, it “would have little to no effects on the U.S. assured second-strike capabilities that underwrite our strategic deterrence posture.”

The “Russian Federation...would not be able to achieve a militarily significant advantage by any plausible expansion of its strategic nuclear forces, even in a cheating or breakout scenario under the New START Treaty...”

Future and Possibilities

Implementation not in doubt

Obstacles:

- INF: Alleged Russian treaty violation makes it very hard for the US government to propose New START follow-on and very easy for hawks in Congress to oppose. Issue must be resolved!
- East-West crisis: erosion of trust and resurgent of military standoff and adversarial relationship pollutes everything
- Crisis deepens role and perceived salience of nuclear weapons
- Growing concern about Russian limited nuclear use scenarios

Possibilities:

- Incentives: Even if new bi-lateral treaty is not possible now, both sides have national incentives to limit forces to reduce costs and risks, and tone down rhetoric
- Treaty extension beyond 2021 until 2026. Extension would not be subject to the advice and consent of the Senate
- Executive order (or hand-shake follow-on agreement) to cut through bureaucracy, suspicion, and worst-case mindsets
- Next New START: ~500 launchers with ~1,000 warheads (would not require changes to US strategy – and possibly not Russian)
- Another Treaty: ~500 launchers, ~500 warheads, no or limited MIRV, no or limited ALCMs. Involvement of China?
- Dream Treaty: limits on strategic deployed, non-strategic, non-deployed, readiness, exercises (size, frequency, location), modernizations.

“Stability in the nuclear relationship between the United States and the Russian Federation depends upon the assured capability of each side to deliver a sufficient number of nuclear warheads to inflict unacceptable damage on the other side, even with an opponent attempting a disarming first strike.”