Prospects for U.S.-Russian Strategic Nuclear Arms Control after the 2018 Nuclear Posture Review

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Bottom Line Up Front: Key Takeaways

- National security implications of failing to extend, renegotiating, withdrawing from, or violating New START are increasingly destabilizing from a strategic stability perspective.
- The case for extending New START offers real deterrence, verification, and cost benefits that should be underscored.
- These arguments must be framed differently than in the past to resonate with current USG stakeholders.
Implications of 2018 Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) for New START

- Dec. 2017 National Security Strategy emphasizes “peace through strength” in a “new era of great power rivalries.”
- Russian nuclear weapons, not proliferating rogues and terrorists, are once again “the most significant existential threat” to the U.S.
- NPR heavily emphasizes deterrence and nuclear arsenal modernization over arms control and diplomacy.
- Arms control agreements must be “verifiable and enforceable.”
- Russian non-compliance with various arms control obligations makes further arms control progress “difficult to envision.”
- Word search of “extension” and “extended” in NPR:
  - 12 references to arsenal Life Extension Program
  - 15 references to extended deterrence
  - 1 reference to extending New START.
U.S.-Russian Arms Control Developments of Concern

- INF Treaty violations alleged by both sides (e.g., Russian production, possession, flight testing of banned ground-launched cruise missile).
- Ongoing Open Skies treaty violations remain an issue.
- Russia has suspended implementation of CFE Treaty.
- Alleged Russian use of prohibited novichok-type nerve agent on British soil would violate the Chemical Weapons Convention.
- Russian support for Syria in U.N. Security Council and for Assad regime, despite Syria’s use of chemical weapons, threatens the global norm against WMD use.
- Bellicose Putin public statements on new nuclear weapons development have heightened tensions.
- Russia-hostile arms control skeptics have ascended to senior U.S. national security positions.
Four Options for the Future of New START

1) Leave New START in place.
   - Pursue five-year extension
   - Announce no extension will be sought
   - Initiate “Next START” negotiations to get a “better deal”.

2) Seek to amend New START before expiry.

3) Withdraw from New START.

4) Suspend implementation or violate the Treaty without withdrawing.
Option 1: Leave New START in Place

- Most stabilizing option from strategic stability perspective.
- Several potential variants:
  - Pursue five-year extension as provided by the Treaty; may be unlikely under this Administration unless U.S.-Russian relationship changes.
  - Announce no extension will be sought. This would be destabilizing but could be reversed later, including under a new Administration post-2020.
  - Initiate negotiations on a bilateral or multilateral “Next START”; the latter would be a game-changer, but is highly unlikely.
Option 2: Seek to Amend New START by 2021

- Likely goal would be to negotiate a “better deal.” For instance:
  - Amend set of treaty-limited items to capture hard-to-track items the Russians favor, like rail-mobile ICBMs.
  - Resurrect START II limits on MIRVed ICBMs not currently captured.
  - Tighten generous counting rules for heavy bombers exploited by Russia.
  - Strengthen robustness of verification regime.
  - Strengthen penalties for non-compliance.
Option 3: Withdraw from New START

Both sides acknowledge the other to be in compliance; a rare bright spot in U.S.-Russian arms control.

NPR says we will continue to comply; withdrawal would normally seem unlikely.

However, likelihood of withdrawal has increased with appointment of New START skeptics to senior Administration positions.
Option 4: Suspend New START Implementation or Violate without Withdrawal

U.S. could suspend implementation to pressure Russia to come back into compliance with INF Treaty; Russia could suspend implementation in response to sanctions or for many other reasons.

- Status would be similar to Conventional Forces in Europe treaty, suspended since 2007.

A party could deliberately violate the treaty for deterrence or messaging purposes. Certain Administration officials view formal international agreements ranging from the Paris Accord and Trans-Pacific Partnership to INF, New START and more with deep skepticism.

- Such an action would be highly destabilizing.
Three Likely Outcomes for New START

U.S. and Russian brinksmanship (e.g., threatened treaty withdrawal) is followed by a transactional agreement to discuss extension in exchange for other concessions.

U.S. may seek to renegotiate the treaty for a better deal (e.g., the NAFTA approach) with stronger verification, more flexibility for the U.S. stockpile, or to capture non-treaty-limited items (e.g., rail-mobile ICBMs.)

Administration may plan for no extension and lay groundwork for stockpile growth post-2021 beyond New START limits.

These approaches may be pursued intermittently or in parallel.
Given these Uncertainties, What Should Be Done?

- Time is ripe for vigorous public dialogue on why New START extension is a good deal for the U.S.

- However, the argument of “arms control for the sake of arms control” as a guidepost on the road to global zero is doomed to failure in the current political environment.

- Arguments in favor of New START extension should be cast in America-centric language and conveyed in layman’s terms through both traditional and non-traditional channels.
We have an opportunity and an obligation to protect the American people. Russian nuclear weapons pose an existential threat to American survival. New START prevents a nuclear arms race and minimizes any Russian incentive to attack—making America more secure. New START leaves the U.S. an ample nuclear arsenal sufficient to inflict an overwhelming response on any aggressor. New START’s verification regime is extensive and Russia is complying. Through New START, we have gained much and sacrificed little. We can modernize the nuclear arsenal and comply with New START. It’s not an either/or decision. It’s a win-win.
Extending New START is economically the smart thing to do. It offers maximum freedom to U.S. defense strategy for minimum cost.

New START lets us focus U.S. dollars on modernizing the arsenal and maintaining the non-deployed stockpile as a “hedge” against future threats—all without violating the Treaty.

New START constrains the Russians from behaviors that would require a costly U.S. response (like growing the stockpile.) We reap the economic benefits, making more money available for job creation, homeland security & other America-first imperatives.

Stockpile modernization, reinvesting in America’s conventional superiority, and New START extension are a winning combination. They work together to keep America safe.
Group Discussion

► What key issues in this analysis were not assessed?

► What key factors were assessed imperfectly?

► What are the next steps? What is the best path forward for making this case to arms control-skeptical USG senior stakeholders in the current political environment?

► Your questions, suggestions and comments are welcome!