

The START III Framework at a Glance

January 2003

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With the signing of the Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty (SORT), it appears unlikely that a START III agreement will be negotiated. President George W. Bush and Russian President Vladimir Putin signed SORT on May 24, 2002. The treaty calls for each country to deploy no more than 1,700-2,200 strategic warheads, effectively matching the limit of 2,000-2,500 warheads proposed for START III.¹ SORT does not, however, address strategic nuclear warhead destruction or tactical nuclear weapons limits, both ground-breaking arms control measures that were suggested for inclusion in START III.

START III's Origins

- During their March 1997 summit meeting in Helsinki, U.S. President Bill Clinton and Russian President Boris Yeltsin agreed on a framework for START III negotiations. At the Moscow Summit in September 1998, Clinton and Yeltsin reiterated their commitment to begin formal negotiations on START III as soon as Russia ratified START II.

Basic Elements

- By December 31, 2007, coterminous with START II, the United States and Russia would each deploy no more than 2,000 to 2,500 strategic nuclear warheads on intercontinental ballistic missiles, submarine-launched ballistic missiles, and heavy bombers. Russian officials stated that they were willing to consider negotiated levels as low as 1,500 strategic nuclear warheads within the context of a START III agreement.
- The United States and Russia would negotiate measures relating to the transparency of strategic nuclear warhead inventories and the destruction of strategic nuclear warheads, as well as other jointly agreed technical and organizational measures to promote the irreversibility of deep reductions.
- The United States and Russia would resolve issues related to the goal of making the current START treaties unlimited in duration.²

Other Issues

- The United States and Russia agreed that in the context of START III negotiations, their experts would explore (as separate issues) possible measures related to nuclear long-range sea-launched cruise missiles and tactical nuclear systems, including appropriate confidence-building and transparency measures.
- The United States and Russia would also consider issues related to transparency in nuclear materials.

NOTES

1. The Bush administration maintains that SORT specifies limits on "operationally deployed" strategic nuclear forces, a term that does not include warheads on bombers and submarines under refurbishment. Since those warheads are included under START counting rules, the ceiling specified in SORT and that proposed for START III are similar.

2. START I, which entered into force December 1994, runs for 15 years, but the treaty specifies that it can be extended for successive five-year periods if it has not been superseded by another arms control agreement. If it entered into force, START II would have remained in force as long as START I is in force.
