

ARMS CONTROL ASSOCIATION

Fact Sheet

U.S.-Soviet/Russian Nuclear Arms Control

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According to the United States, the Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty reduces the number of “operationally deployed strategic warheads,” i.e., those warheads that are mated to their delivery vehicles and ready for launch. But the complete nuclear arsenals of the United States and Russia include many other weapons. In addition to those deployed strategic weapons, both countries deploy tactical nuclear weapons—which are designed for battlefield use, are generally less powerful, and have a shorter range—and store thousands of additional warheads.

Currently, the total U.S. nuclear stockpile is estimated to consist of almost 11,000 warheads, including almost 7,000 deployed strategic warheads; more than 1,000 operational tactical nuclear warheads; and almost 3,000 reserve strategic and

tactical warheads, which are not mated to delivery vehicles. (The United States also maintains thousands of nuclear warhead components that could be reassembled into functional weapons.)

The current Russian nuclear stockpile is estimated to include about 5,000 deployed strategic weapons, about 3,500 operational tactical nuclear weapons, and more than 11,000 stockpiled strategic and tactical warheads, for a total arsenal of about 19,500 nuclear warheads. Unlike the United States, Russia possesses these reserves at least in part because dismantling the warheads has proven prohibitively expensive. And unlike the United States, Russia continues to produce limited numbers of new nuclear warheads, largely because its warheads are designed to have far shorter operational lives and therefore must be replaced more frequently.

Strategic Nuclear Arms Control Agreements

SALT I

Begun in November 1969, the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) had produced by May 1972 both the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty, which bans nationwide strategic missile defenses, and the Interim Agreement, an executive-legislative agreement that capped U.S. and Soviet ICBM and SLBM forces. Under the Interim Agreement, both sides pledged not to construct new ICBM silos, not to increase the size of existing ICBM silos “significantly,” and capped the number of SLBMs and SLBM-carrying submarines. The agreement ignored strategic bombers and did not address warheads, leaving both sides free to enlarge their deployed forces by adding multiple warheads to their ICBMs and SLBMs and increasing their bomber-based forces. The agreement limited the United States to 1,054 ICBM silos and 656 SLBM launch tubes. The Soviet Union was limited to 1,607 ICBM silos and 740 SLBM launch tubes.

SALT II

In November 1972, Washington and Moscow agreed to pursue a follow-on treaty to SALT I. SALT II, signed in June 1979, initially limited U.S. and Soviet ICBM, SLBM, and strategic bomber-based nuclear forces to 2,400 delivery vehicles (defined as an ICBM silo, a submarine missile-launch tube, or a bomber) and placed a variety of other restrictions on deployed strategic nuclear forces. (The treaty called for reducing the limit to 2,250 delivery vehicles in 1981.) The agreement would have required the Soviets to reduce their forces by roughly 270 delivery vehicles, but U.S. forces were below the limits and could actually have been increased. However, President Jimmy Carter asked the Senate not to consider SALT II for its advice and consent after the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in December 1979, and the treaty was not taken up again. Both Washington and Moscow subsequently pledged to adhere to the agreement’s terms despite its failure to enter into force. But on May 26, 1986, President Ronald Reagan said that future decisions on strategic nuclear forces would be based on the threat posed by Soviet forces and “not on standards contained in the SALT structure.”

START I

The Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START I), first proposed in the early 1980s by President Ronald Reagan and finally signed in July 1991, required the United States and the Soviet Union to reduce their deployed strategic arsenals to 1,600 delivery vehicles, carrying no more than 6,000 warheads as counted using the agreement’s rules. The agreement limited deployed warheads by imposing limits on delivery vehicles and requiring the destruction of excess delivery vehicles. The destruction was verified using an intrusive verification regime that involved on-site inspections and regular exchanges of information, as well as national technical means (i.e., satellites). The agreement’s entry into force was delayed for several years because of the collapse of the Soviet Union and efforts to denuclearize Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Belarus by making them parties to the agreement and consolidating their nuclear weapons in Russia. START I reductions were completed in December 2001, and the treaty will remain in force until December 2009 unless extended by the parties.

START II

In June 1992, Presidents George H. W. Bush and Boris Yeltsin agreed to pursue a follow-on accord to START I. START II, signed in January 1993, called for reducing deployed strategic arsenals to 3,000-3,500 warheads and banned the deployment of destabilizing multiple-warhead land-based missiles. START II would have counted warheads in roughly the same fashion as START I and, also like its predecessor, would have required the destruction of delivery vehicles but not warheads. The agreement’s original implementation deadline was January 2003, but a 1997 protocol extended the deadline until December 2007 because of Russia’s concerns over its ability to meet the earlier date. Both the Senate and the Duma have approved START II, but the treaty has not taken effect because the Senate has yet to ratify the 1997 protocol and several ABM Treaty amendments, whose passage the Duma established as a condition for START II’s entry into force.

START III Framework

In March 1997, Presidents Bill Clinton and Boris Yeltsin agreed to a framework for START III negotiations that included a reduction in deployed strategic warheads to 2,000-2,500. Significantly, in addition to requiring the destruction of delivery vehicles, START III negotiations were to address “the destruction of strategic nuclear warheads...to promote the irreversibility of deep reductions including prevention of a rapid increase in the number of warheads.” Negotiations were supposed to begin after START II entered into force, which never happened.

SORT

On May 24, 2002, Presidents George W. Bush and Vladimir Putin signed a treaty under which the United States and Russia will re-

duce their strategic arsenals to 1,700-2,200 warheads each. Although the two sides have not agreed and appear unlikely to agree on specific counting rules, the Bush administration has made clear that it will reduce only warheads deployed on strategic delivery vehicles in active service, i.e., “operationally deployed” warheads, and will not count warheads removed from service and placed in storage or warheads on delivery vehicles undergoing overhaul or repair. Russia disagrees with this interpretation of the treaty and hopes to negotiate stricter counting rules at a later date. The agreement’s limits are similar to those envisioned for START III, but the treaty does not require the destruction of delivery vehicles, as START I and II did, or the destruction of warheads, as had been envisioned for START III. The treaty has yet to be approved by the Senate or Duma.

STRATEGIC NUCLEAR ARMS CONTROL AGREEMENTS

	SALT I	SALT II	START I	START II	START III	SORT
DEPLOYED WARHEAD LIMIT	Limited Missiles, Not Warheads	Limited Missiles and Bombers, Not Warheads	6,000	3,000-3,500	2,000-2,500	1,700-2,200
DEPLOYED DELIVERY VEHICLE LIMIT	U.S.: 1,710 ICBMs & SLBMs U.S.S.R.: 2,347 ICBMs & SLBMs	2,250	1,600	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
STATUS	Expired	Never Entered Into Force	In Force	Never Entered Into Force	Never Negotiated	Signed, Awaits Ratification
DATE SIGNED	May 26, 1972	June 18, 1979	July 31, 1991	January 3, 1993	Not Applicable	May 24, 2002
DATE ENTERED INTO FORCE	October 3, 1972	Not Applicable	December 5, 1994	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	?
IMPLEMENTATION DEADLINE	Not Applicable	December 31, 1981	December 5, 2001	December 31, 2007	December 31, 2007	December 31, 2012
EXPIRATION DATE	October 3, 1977	December 31, 1985	December 5, 2009	December 5, 2009	Not Applicable	December 31, 2012

Nonstrategic Nuclear Arms Control Measures

Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty

Signed December 8, 1987, the INF Treaty required the United States and the Soviet Union to verifiably eliminate all ground-launched ballistic and cruise missiles with ranges between 500 and 5,500 kilometers. Distinguished by its unprecedented, intrusive inspection regime, the INF Treaty laid the groundwork for the verification component of the subsequent START I agreement on strategic nuclear reductions. The INF Treaty entered into force June 1, 1988, and the two sides completed their reductions by June 1, 1991, destroying a total of 2,692 missiles. The agreement was multilateralized after the breakup of the Soviet Union, and current active participants in the agreement’s implementation include the United States, Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine. Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan are also parties to the agreement but do not participate in treaty meetings or on-site inspections. The ban on intermediate-range missiles is of unlimited duration.

Presidential Nuclear Initiatives

On September 27, 1991, President George H. W. Bush announced that the United States would remove almost all U.S. tactical nuclear forces from deployment so that Russia could undertake similar actions, reducing the risk of nuclear proliferation as the Soviet Union dissolved. Specifically, Bush said the United States would eliminate all its nuclear artillery shells and short-range nuclear ballistic missile warheads and remove all nonstrategic nuclear warheads from surface ships, attack submarines, and land-based naval aircraft. Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev reciprocated on October 5, pledging to eliminate all nuclear artillery munitions, nuclear warheads for tactical missiles, and nuclear landmines. He also pledged to withdraw all Soviet tactical naval nuclear weapons from deployment. However, significant questions remain about Russian implementation of its pledges, and there is considerable uncertainty about the current state of Russia’s tactical nuclear forces.