

ISSUE BRIEF

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Nuclear and Missile Defense Agenda for the U.S.–Russia Summit: Forget the Reset

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President Donald Trump is planning to meet his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin for a July 16 summit. U.S. nuclear weapons and missile defense agreements are likely items on the agenda, particularly as the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) is reaching its end in 2021 and Russia continues to violate its nuclear and conventional arms control agreements. Russia has violated the terms of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, the Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty, and the Chemical Weapons Convention, among others. Russia's belligerent conduct vis-à-vis its neighbors should also be raised at the summit.

Russia's actions, particularly its invasion and occupation of Ukraine, as well as its threatening stance toward U.S. allies in Europe, have caused the deterioration of relations between the two countries. The Trump Administration's National Defense Strategy clearly identifies Russia as a strategic competitor, and outlines the challenges that Russia poses to U.S. interests. Russia "seeks veto authority over nations on its periphery in terms of their governmental, economic, and diplomatic decisions, to shatter the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and change European and Middle East security and economic structures to its favor," the document states.¹

Similarly, the 2018 Nuclear Posture Review draws attention to Russia's extensive nuclear weapons modernization program as well as "adoption of military strategies and capabilities that rely on nuclear escalation for their success."²

In discussions and negotiations of nuclear weapon and missile defense policy, the United States must adopt a "protect and defend" approach.³ This approach focuses on preserving options to protect the U.S. population and those of allies, including maintaining nuclear weapons that can threaten what Russia values, particularly its leadership structures and military targets.

Do Not START

Early in his term, President Trump reportedly called New START a bad deal for the United States.⁴ The President is correct. The treaty is set to expire in 2021 but its terms provide for a five-year extension. The United States should neither request nor agree to such an extension. Rather, the Administration ought to appreciate the negotiating leverage that New START's expiration gives it, since Moscow has an inherent interest in limiting U.S. nuclear weapons, particularly as the U.S. nuclear weapons modernization program advances. The Administration should take New START's expiration as an opportunity to lay the groundwork for a better arms control agreement, one that actually benefits U.S. interests in the long run.⁵

The New START Treaty requires the United States to bear the majority of reductions while it permits Russia to build up to the treaty levels in some categories. The treaty is effectively unverifiable and continues to foster Russia's sense of parity in this

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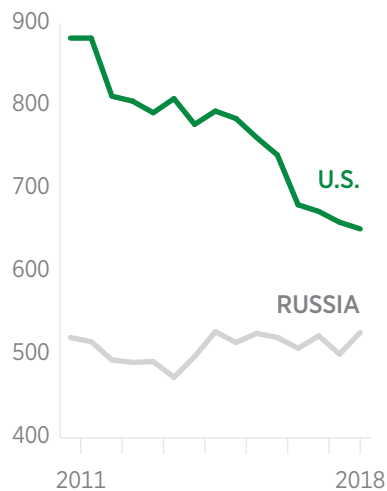
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CHART 1

How the New START Treaty Affects U.S., Russian Arsenals

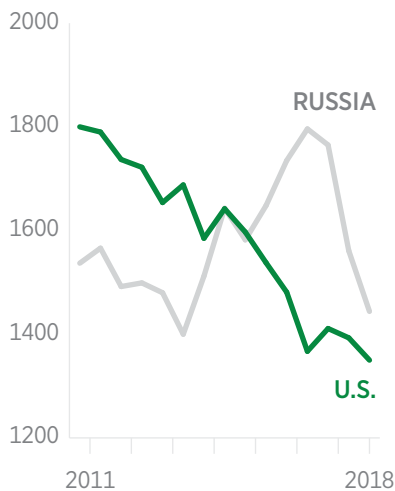
BALLISTIC MISSILES

Deployed ICBMs, deployed SLBMs, and deployed heavy bombers



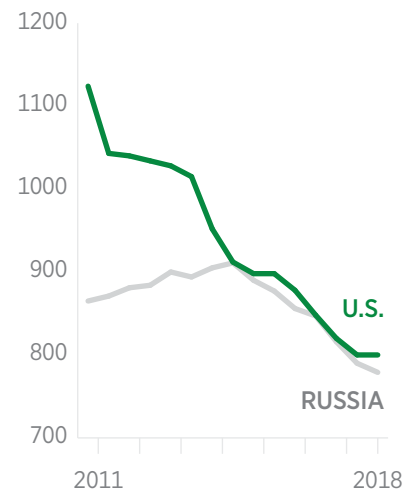
WARHEADS

Warheads on deployed ICBMs, on deployed SLBMs, and nuclear warheads counted for deployed heavy bombers




LAUNCHERS

Deployed and non-deployed launchers of ICBMs, deployed and non-deployed launchers of SLBMs, and deployed and non-deployed heavy bombers



NOTES: Figures are biannual except for 2018, which are for February.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Verification, Compliance, and Implementation, "New START: Fact Sheets," <http://www.state.gov/t/avc/newstart/c39906.htm> (accessed April 10, 2018).

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class of weapons. Such a perception is dangerous because Russia maintains a significant advantage over the United States in tactical nuclear weapons and is reportedly building and deploying intermediate-range nuclear weapons.⁶ The United States has extended deterrence commitments around the word, while Russia has no comparable such commitments, further exacerbating disparity between the two countries' nuclear arsenals.

Russia's tactical and intermediate-range nuclear weapons threaten U.S. deployed forces and allies in Europe, all the while the United States does not possess an in-kind response to Russia's potential deployment of these weapons. Russia's exercises, nuclear doctrine, and statements all suggest that Russia may view it as advantageous to use nuclear weapons in conflict to "de-escalate" and to signal its willingness to prevail. The United States is years from developing

1. U.S. Department of Defense, *2018 National Defense Strategy*, summary, <https://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf> (accessed July 5, 2018).
2. U.S. Department of Defense, *2018 Nuclear Posture Review*, <https://media.defense.gov/2018/Feb/02/2001872886/-1/-1/1/2018-NUCLEAR-POSTURE-REVIEW-FINAL-REPORT.PDF> (accessed July 5, 2018).
3. Andrei Shoumikhin and Baker Spring, "Strategic Nuclear Arms Control for the Protect and Defend Strategy," Heritage Foundation *Background* No. 2266, May 4, 2009, https://www.heritage.org/defense/report/strategic-nuclear-arms-control-the-protect-and-defend-strategy#_ftn10.
4. Jonathan Landy, "In Call with Putin, Trump Denounced Obama-Era Nuclear Arms Treaty—Sources," Reuters, February 9, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trump-putin-idUSKBN15O2A5> (accessed July 5, 2018).
5. Shoumikhin and Spring, "Strategic Nuclear Arms Control for the Protect and Defend Strategy."
6. U.S. Department of State, "Adherence to and Compliance with Arms Control, Nonproliferation, and Disarmament Agreements and Commitment," April 2018, <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/280774.pdf> (accessed July 5, 2018).

in-kind capabilities, and not extending New START is a short-term signal to Moscow that the United States is serious about countering Moscow's aggressive nuclear weapons modernization. Additionally, extending New START while Russia is blatantly disregarding its other arms control obligations would send a signal that the United States does not care about compliance with international agreements.

Raising the Issue of Russia's INF Treaty Violations

President Trump ought to raise the issue of Russia's violations of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty. Over the course of the past decade, Russia has been researching, developing, and even deploying prohibited weapons. So far, the United States has been unable to effectively bring Russia back into compliance—all the while it continues to be only partially bound by the terms of the treaty. In the long-term, in the absence of immediate actions by Russia to return to compliance, the United States should withdraw from the treaty and take measures, including deploying advanced missile defense systems, to counter any military advantage Russia might obtain by deploying these systems. The United States must also continue to increase transparency with European allies about the nature of Russian violations and their military implications for the continent.

Protecting U.S. Missile Defense

At the summit, Russia is likely to object to U.S. missile defense assets and sites in Europe, and perhaps even U.S. missile defense efforts writ large. In the past, Moscow went as far as to threaten U.S. European allies hosting U.S. missile defense sites with nuclear strikes. The United States must continue its European missile defense deployments and continue its missile defense efforts despite Russia's objections. This should be a clear U.S. message at the summit.

U.S. missile defenses are an integral part of addressing the spread and increased sophistication of ballistic missiles. U.S. sites in Europe are designed to counter the Iranian ballistic missile threat. They cannot counter Russia's massive ballistic missile arsenal. Similarly, U.S. missile defense sites in Alaska and California, meant to defend the U.S. homeland primarily from North Korean long-range ballistic missiles, pose no threat to Russia's long-range nuclear weapon arsenal and are vulnerable to a ground attack that Russia has the ability to execute. Mos-

cow appreciates the danger posed by ballistic missile threats; after all, Russia is deploying and developing missile defense systems of its own, including nuclear-armed interceptors.

Toward a Better Nuclear Weapons and Missile Defense Agenda

The United States is currently a party to nuclear agreements that, over time, disadvantage it in a great power competition with Russia, particularly since Russia is developing nuclear weapons either in violation or out of bounds of these agreements. At the summit, President Trump will have an opportunity to lay the groundwork for nuclear and missile defense policies that make the United States and allies safer in a great power competition with Moscow. The Administration and the President should:

- **Focus on discussing nuclear weapon and missile defense policy issues in line with the “protect and defend” approach.** This means preserving capabilities that threaten what Moscow values, and protecting U.S. and allied lives.
- **Reject an extension of New START.** Letting New START expire will give the Administration an opportunity to negotiate a better agreement since Moscow will likely be interested in arms control as U.S. nuclear modernization programs take off.
- **Raise Russia's violations of the INF Treaty, as well as its other arms control violations.** Drawing attention to these issues is important for reminding Moscow that the United States will not ignore the issue. In the long term, the Trump Administration needs to develop comprehensive political and military responses that increase the costs of noncompliance and violations and deny Russia the military and political benefits of those violations.
- **Refuse to accede to Russia's likely demands to stop U.S. missile defense efforts.** The United States must continue to work with allies and partners and deploy ballistic missile defenses to protect itself and its allies from ballistic missile threats. Russia's concerns and propaganda ought not impact necessary steps as ballistic missile threats advance.

- **Appreciate the value of continued discussions.** Nuclear and missile defense policy discussions are a worthwhile endeavor and particularly important to U.S. allies in Europe. The United States ought to keep communications channels open while coordinating a comprehensive response to Russia's belligerent behavior toward its European allies. Mutual engagements help to counter Russia's propaganda in allied nations.

These steps would put the United States and its allies in a better geopolitical position should Russia continue its aggressive actions. At the same time, they open an opportunity to maintain channels of communication open for future discussions and negotiations.

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