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JULY 21, 2011 4:00 A.M.

After New START

Russia's actions prove the treaty's critics right.

Last year, the Obama administration promised that when “fully implemented,” the New START treaty “will result in the lowest number of deployed nuclear warheads since the 1950s.” Critics, including the Republicans on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, charged that while the treaty would require the United States to reduce its nuclear stockpile, it would allow Russia to actually expand its arsenal. Russian defense minister Anatoliy Serdyukov agreed, stating three times that Russia was already below the New START limits on both deployed nuclear warheads and delivery vehicles and intended to build up to them.

The Senate approved the treaty in December anyway, and New START won't expire until 2020. The information that's become available since then has only supported the critics' arguments. Russia is indeed below New START's caps, and is working to build its nuclear capabilities.

On June 1, the State Department confirmed that Russia was below both the limit of 1,550 deployed warheads and 700 deployed delivery vehicles: Russia declared 1,537 and 521, respectively. Thus, we traded 25 percent of American operational nuclear missiles for a Russian nuclear buildup — and Russia is already working to modernize and grow its nuclear arsenal. This is a direct result of the Obama administration's weak approach to arms control, in which diplomatic agreement for its own sake, not advancing the national interest, becomes the objective.

Before New START, Russia had already announced plans to build about 130 nuclear missiles of various post-Cold War designs, as well as eight new missile submarines. The country was developing a new strategic bomber to be available in 2025–2030. Moreover, Russia was working to modernize the SS-N-23/Sineva, which had gone into service only in 2007, to have precision accuracy.

After New START, Russia announced the largest nuclear buildup since the Cold War. It revived the symbol of the Cold War, the heavy intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM). First Deputy Defense Minister Vladimir Popovkin revealed the development of “a heavy liquid-propellant ICBM” to replace the aging SS-18 (Voyevoda), which itself carries ten warheads. The new missile is to be available by 2018.

Russia announced this missile after New START because the treaty, unlike the original START, failed to prohibit new heavy ICBMs. Prior to the ratification of New START, Russia's final decision on such a missile was not expected before 2012 or 2013. In addition, because it will be able to carry more warheads, the new missile vastly increases Russian cheating and breakout potential. Russia could cheat by hiding two warheads under each cover that the inspectors count, or break out of the treaty by redeploying missiles that are not completely armed at full capacity.

Gerbert Yefremov, the general director of the design bureau that will develop the new heavy ICBM, claims that the missile is needed to reach the New START warhead limit. That is not true. The Russian Defense Ministry said that it could add warheads to another missile, the SS-27, and the Russian press reported that warheads could be added to the Bulava-30 as well. What these missiles can't do is meet the Soviet-era objective of being able to destroy the U.S.'s first-strike ICBMs in a single attack, which the new heavy ICBM can.

Now 200 SS-27s will reportedly be deployed, most of them MIRVed – that is, capable of carrying several warheads to strike different targets. In March, Minister Serdyukov said that Russia will buy 36 strategic ballistic missiles, two strategic missile submarines, and 20 strategic cruise missiles this year. Vladimir Putin added that “in 2013, missile production is expected to increase twofold.” The official news agency *Ria Novosti* reported that “Russia's proposed fifth-generation nuclear submarines will be armed with both ballistic and cruise missiles.” Andrei Kokoshin, a member of the Russian assembly, or Duma, confirmed this program. In May, Russian strategic missile force commander Lt. Gen. Sergei Karakayev said, “Fifth-generation ICBMs will make up at least 80 percent of the . . . arsenals by the beginning of 2018.” Also in May, Russia reportedly tested an “in-depth modernization” of the Sineva. In June, Russia announced the Bulava-30 would be operational this year.

Under the announced program, the decline in Russian nuclear forces resulting from the retirement of aging missiles will reverse in 2016, and Russia will meet the warhead limit by 2018. Russia typically follows through on its plans for nuclear-force modernization, although it generally takes longer than predicted.

In contrast, the Obama administration's 2010 Nuclear Posture Review involves another 20-year moratorium on significant strategic-force modernization. The Obama administration claims it is sustaining “robust” nuclear capabilities, but “sustainment” means little more than maintaining functionality, which does not equate to effective deterrence against Russia or China. If we take the Obama program at face value, in 2030 we will have 60-year-old ICBMs, 40-year-old

submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs), and 35- to 70-year-old bombers. The earliest possible follow-up to the Minuteman ICBM is in 2030. A Trident SLBM replacement is not projected until 2042. While the Obama administration pays lip service to deterrence, including extending deterrence to our allies, the effectiveness of every element of the U.S. nuclear deterrent will decline over the next 20 years. Worse still, in 2008, the Defense Science Board concluded that “industrial base skills . . . are in danger of significant further erosion in the areas of ballistic missiles.” The Obama administration’s termination of NASA’s Aries space-booster program makes this situation worse.

Putin’s Russia believes it is a “great power,” has a 19th-century worldview, regards the U.S. as the enemy, and is paranoid. It has about 2 percent of the world’s GNP, and yet has more nuclear weapons than the rest of the world combined. When Russia does not get its way, its leaders resort to blatant nuclear threats. Pres. Dmitry Medvedev’s threat of a “real arms race” after 2020 if Russia does not get its way on missile defense should not be ignored. The Russians are not ten feet tall, but they see themselves that way. And we are deliberately weakening our defenses.

— *Mark B. Schneider, a senior analyst at the National Institute for Public Policy, served until 2011 in the Office of the Secretary of Defense.*