

ARMS CONTROL

Arms control agreements have been effective tools for advancing U.S. interests, decreasing the likelihood of interstate conflict, and limiting proliferation of nuclear weapons. Yet, at a time when Washington seeks an agreement with Pyongyang about its nuclear weapons program, America has withdrawn from two historic deals (the INF and the JCPOA) and is unlikely to extend New START. Instead of undermining and degrading the existing arms control infrastructure, America should strengthen and modernize it to address new technologies and changing international dynamics.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Extend New START.** Prolonging the treaty before it expires in February 2021 would be positive for U.S.-Russia relations and buy time to negotiate New START's successor.
- **Reenter the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.** The JCPOA is best path to peacefully prevent Iran from becoming a nuclear state.
- **Update arms control to take new technologies and distribution of power into account.** America's approach to arms control needs to be innovative to be successful.

BACKGROUND

The United States has been the global leader on arms control agreements for nearly 50 years. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, U.S. policymakers understood that well-structured arms control agreements with the Soviet Union provided strategic advantages for America. In addition to limiting the nuclear arsenals of America's adversaries, such agreements also provide valuable insights into their capabilities. Today, for example, inspections and information-sharing measures created by New START have provided data about Russia's nuclear forces that would otherwise have to be obtained through more expensive and potentially less accurate intelligence operations.

In addition to recognizing the strategic benefits of arms control agreements, U.S. leaders should ensure that agreements reflect new realities. The death of the INF Treaty is a cautionary tale in this regard. The treaty was a major accomplishment when it was created in 1987, but the proliferation of ground-launched ballistic and cruise missiles made it harder for the United States and Russia to remain in the treaty. Both Russia (violating the treaty) and the United States (withdrawing from the treaty) ought to have handled the situation differently, but the fact remains that the INF Treaty failed to serve the interests of its two major parties as the strategic picture changed.

The administration's call for arms control agreements that include Russia, China, and the United States is promising but will require fresh, innovative approaches. China will be unlikely to agree to a treaty that reduces its number of nuclear weapons because it has a much smaller arsenal than the others. Trilateral agreements will also likely have to contend with missile defense, cyber, and outer space capabilities because these all impact nuclear deterrence and stability.

New technologies and shifting distributions of power don't make arms control impossible, but serious efforts to reduce nuclear dangers through arms control must address new realities instead of focusing on old approaches. Policymakers should prioritize arms control and negotiate deals that promote global stability and advance U.S. security interests.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[“Preserving the U.S. Arms Control Legacy in the Trump Era”](#) by Maggie Tennis, in *America’s Nuclear Crossroads: A Forward-Looking Anthology*, eds. Caroline Dorminey and Eric Gomez (Washington: Cato Institute, 2019).

[“Nuclear Arms Control Without a Treaty? Risks and Options after New START”](#) by Vince Manzo, CNA, March 2019.

[“Strategic Stability, Uncertainty, and the Future of Arms Control”](#) by Heather Williams, *Survival*, April–May 2018.