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Topic 2: Nuclear Deterrence After the New START Treaty
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On February 5, 2026, the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) officially expired. This marks the first time since the Cold War that the United States and Russia are not bound by a mutual nuclear arms control treaty.[1] In 2010, U.S. President Barack Obama and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev signed the treaty, designed to limit and reduce strategic nuclear arsenals, building on decades of similar agreements.[2] Its expiration removes legal limits on warhead numbers and formally ends the on-site inspections and data-sharing system that once provided transparency, increasing the risk of unrestrained global nuclear escalation.

During the Cold War, the United States and the Soviet Union built massive nuclear arsenals in an uncontrolled arms race, driven by the idea that neither side would launch a nuclear attack because doing so would result in Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD).[3] As the Cold War came to an end, both sides agreed to negotiate a treaty that would actively reduce nuclear stockpiles. U.S. President George H.W. Bush and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev signed the first START Treaty in 1991, which expired in 2009.[4] Later attempts to add further limitations through a second START Treaty were unsuccessful.[5] Once the first START Treaty expired, a new agreement was needed to maintain prior nuclear constraints. New START, signed in 2010, was set to last ten years, and in 2021 both parties extended it for an additional five years.[6]

The New START Treaty set both nuclear weapons limitations and accountability measures for nuclear programs. Each side was allowed a maximum of 1,550 deployed strategic warheads, 700 deployed missiles and bombers, and 800 launchers, both deployed and non-deployed.[7] The treaty also banned stationing strategic offensive arms outside national

[1]https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/new-start-expired-now-what-global-nuclear-stability
[2]https://www.af.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/117047/president-obama-president-medvedev-sign-new-start-treaty/
[3]https://blogs.cornell.edu/info2040/2016/09/09/mutually-assured-destruction-game-theory-and-the-cold-war
[4]https://www.nps.gov/articles/start-treaty-1991.htm
[5]https://www.history.com/articles/start-nuclear-treaties
[6]https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/new-start-glance
[7]https://2021-2025.state.gov/new-start/

territory. While the treaty capped deployed weapons, it did not limit stockpiled warheads, nonstrategic weapons, or newer types of systems. Each side could conduct up to 18 on-site inspections a year, was required to exchange detailed data twice a year, and had to notify the other of changes to its forces.[8]

In 2025, Russian President Vladimir Putin offered to extend New START's limits for one more year if the U.S. pledged to do the same. After the treaty expired, U.S. President Donald Trump rejected this, calling instead for a new treaty that would include both modern weapons technology and the inclusion of China.[9] China has an estimated 600 warheads, compared with about 4,000 each for the U.S. and Russia, and continues to expand its arsenal.[10]

While other nuclear treaties exist, such as the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), these treaties are not universally accepted or enforced. Several nuclear-armed states are not party to the NPT, and none of the nuclear-armed states have joined the TPNW. The 2026 NPT Review Conference, where participants tried to reintroduce nuclear arms agreements, ended without consensus, marking its third consecutive failure. The next Review Conference is scheduled for 2031.

Without the New START Treaty, there are no longer any legal constraints or transparency measures governing the world's two largest nuclear arsenals, signaling a dangerous return to an unpredictable nuclear era. Moreover, China's rapidly expanding nuclear arsenal raises the stakes even further, as the world may now face a three-way arms race.

Questions to consider while researching your country's position:

1. What is your country's current position on nuclear deterrence, disarmament, and nonproliferation?
    a. Is your country a member of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) or the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW)?
        i. How have they voted on resolutions at previous NPT Review Conferences?

[8]https://2021-2025.state.gov/new-start/
[9]https://www.reuters.com/world/china/new-nuclear-age-beckons-clock-ticks-down-last-russia-us-arms-deal-2026-02-04/
[10]https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/arms-control-and-proliferation-profile-china

2. How should the international community respond to the growing nuclear arsenals of the United States, Russia, and China?
    a. What steps, if any, should be taken to prevent the United States and Russia from expanding their nuclear arsenals?
    b. Should China be subject to the same limits on nuclear weapons as the United States and Russia? Why or why not?
    c. How should the international community address nuclear weapons possessed by countries that are not members of the NPT?
3. What changes, if any, should be made to the international nuclear arms control system?
    a. What countries and weapons should be included in future agreements?
    b. How can the international community prevent nuclear weapons from falling into the hands of terrorists or hostile countries?
    c. How can countries be encouraged to join international nuclear arms control agreements and ensure that they follow them?
        i. Are sanctions and inspections enough, or is greater involvement needed?

As you prepare this topic for the conference, remember that you are representing the official positions of your assigned countries, not your personal views. Please note that YUNMUN follows Yeshiva University's Level 1 AI policy, which permits the use of AI to check and correct the grammar, vocabulary, spelling, and mechanics of text you have already written. AI may not generate, rewrite, or restructure your content. All position papers will be submitted through Turnitin, and any use beyond what is allowed will affect your eligibility for awards.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to reach out to me via email at tstrulow@mail.yu.edu.

Sincerely,

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