PHYSICISTS COALITION FOR NUCLEAR THREAT REDUCTION

After New START: Opportunities for Enhanced Nuclear Arms Control

Steering Committee, Physicists Coalition for Nuclear Threat Reduction
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The Physicists Coalition for Nuclear Threat Reduction welcomes proposals to mitigate the most immediate effects of the expected expiration of the U.S.-Russia New START Treaty on February 5, 2026. With no currently planned negotiations for a follow-on agreement, and proposals in the U.S. for a nuclear arsenal buildup, the Coalition calls on the U.S. and Russia to, at a minimum, uphold the central limits of the treaty (1,550 deployed warheads; 700 strategic delivery vehicles) for one year after the treaty expires, as proposed by President Putin of Russia. President Trump has made positive comments about the proposal, but this is not enough- a formal agreement should be concluded as a matter of urgency. However, maintaining the status quo is insufficient. More significant action is needed to end the nuclear arms race.

The Physicists Coalition advocates for substantive changes in nuclear arsenals, force postures, and declaratory policies. We also call for fulfillment of the long-standing international obligation to achieve nuclear disarmament.

We call for negotiations toward a new nuclear arms control agreement between the United States and Russia that would end their arms race and chart a path to nuclear disarmament. Such an agreement could include further reductions in nuclear arsenal, limits on tactical nuclear weapons and new delivery systems, an end to stationing nuclear weapons in other countries, and constraints on ballistic missile defense.

Nuclear arsenal reductions*:* From 1985 to about 2005, the United States and Russia, driven by a succession of arms reduction treaties, reduced their overall nuclear arsenals by about 85% through a series of steps. The trend to reduce arsenals stalled after New START entered into force in 2011. Since then, the two countries have failed to negotiate a new nuclear arms control treaty, marking the longest period since the process began in the 1970s.

Treaty limits on ballistic missile defense: The U.S. should be prepared to cancel, or accept strict limits on, its strategic missile defense plans to enable the next stage of arms control negotiations. Missile defense development not only undermines nuclear force reductions, it also incentivizes increases in arsenal sizes and the development of new delivery technologies as a response. The U.S. plan for the Golden Dome strategic missile defense system, particularly its focus on countering Russian and Chinese nuclear arsenals, impedes nuclear arsenal reductions. Given the clear technical assessment that the Golden Dome strategic missile defense is infeasible and expensive, the U.S. should abandon this plan.

Treaty limits on new nuclear weapon systems: Following the U.S. withdrawal from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty in 2002, Russia is developing new nuclear weapon systems, including hypersonic glide vehicles, a nuclear-armed and nuclear-powered cruise missile, and undersea nuclear torpedoes. The United States, for its part, is developing nuclear-tipped sea-launched cruise missiles, nuclear-armed bunker busters, and strategic missile defenses. Eliminating these new systems should be a priority in upcoming treaty negotiations.

Once implemented, the above measures would help the U.S. and Russia meet their obligations under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty to end the arms race. They also would reinforce the call for other nuclear-weapons states, particularly China, France, and the U.K., to declare and freeze their nuclear arsenals, and to engage in multilateral arms reduction negotiations.