**Suspension of New START**

[**Jai Kumar Dhirani**](https://www.nation.com.pk/columnist/jai-kumar-dhirani)

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In a speech commemorating one year since Russia’s extensive invasion of Ukraine, Vladimir Putin announced that Russia will end its involvement in New START, which is the final major nuclear arms control treaty with the United States. The Russian president claimed that the West aims to bring about a strategic defeat for Russia and take over its nuclear facilities. As a result, Putin stated that “In this regard, I am forced to state that Russia is suspending its participation in the strategic offensive arms treaty.” Throughout his speech, Putin expressed a litany of grievances against the West. The full implications of Putin’s threat were not immediately clear. Russia has already suspended mutual inspections of nuclear weapons sites and participation in a bilateral consultative commission. Later, the Russian foreign ministry announced that Moscow would continue to abide by the limits set by the treaty and would also continue to exchange information with the US on planned launches of intercontinental and submarine-launched ballistic missiles under the 1988 Ballistic Missile Launch Notification Agreement.

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The US secretary of state, Antony Blinken responded by stating, “The announcement by Russia that it’s suspending participation in New Start is deeply unfortunate and irresponsible.” Also, he said, “We’ll be watching carefully to see what Russia does. We’ll of course make sure that in any event we are postured appropriately for the security of our own country and that of our allies.” Historically, the New START (Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty), a nuclear arms control treaty between the United States and Russia, was signed on April 8, 2010, by then-US President Barack Obama and then-Russian President Dmitry Medvedev in Prague, Czech Republic. It replaced the original START I treaty that had expired in December 2009. The New START treaty aims to reduce the number of strategic nuclear weapons deployed by both the US and Russia. It limits the number of deployed strategic nuclear warheads to 1,550 each, down from the previous limit of 2,200. It also limits the number of deployed delivery vehicles, such as intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs), and heavy bombers, to 700 for each side.

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Interestingly, the treaty does not contain a provision about the parties (to the treaty) “suspending” their membership. Nevertheless, in article XIV the treaty recognizes the parties’ right to withdraw if they decide that “extraordinary events related to the subject matter” of the treaty have “jeopardized” their “supreme interests”. The withdrawing party would have to give notice containing “a statement of the extraordinary events”, which could jeopardize its supreme interests. The Western capitals united to oppose Russia’s objectives in Ukraine following the country’s invasion. Russia views its actions in Ukraine as tied to its essential security interests, exacerbating the situation. Western nations imposed sanctions on Russia and supplied weapons to Ukraine, allowing Kyiv to push back against Russian aggression. As a result, the tensions between Moscow and the West have reached their highest point since the Cold War. The intense zero-sum game dynamic that developed meant that positive-sum arrangements, such as arms control, were inevitably going to be affected, and this is precisely what happened.

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During his state of the nation address, Putin accused the US of repeatedly denying Russia’s requests to inspect American facilities. He also alleged that the West was directly involved in Ukraine’s attempts to strike Russian strategic aviation bases, claiming that NATO equipped and updated the drones used in the attacks. These attacks reportedly took place in December 2022 at Engels air base, which houses Russian long-range strategic bombers. The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) later claimed that the US attempted to “probe the protection” of Russian strategic facilities and launched attacks on the facilities with “military-technical and intelligence assistance”. Putin rejected the notion that strategic weapon systems could be dissociated from the war in Ukraine and Western efforts to inflict a “strategic defeat” on Russia. The Russian MFA argued that US policies aimed to undermine Russia’s national security, which violated the principle of “indivisible security” enshrined in the preamble of the New START. The antagonism caused by the war in Ukraine has spilled over into strategic arms control.

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The absence of arms control between the US and Russia could lead to a new and more intense strategic arms race. This is because, without any limitations on their strategic arsenals and delivery means, both countries would be free to develop and deploy new and more advanced nuclear weapons systems, which in turn would lead to an arms race. The absence of arms control could also increase the risk of nuclear accidents or miscalculations, as both countries would lack the mechanisms and channels of communication for managing crises and preventing escalation. Therefore, both the US and Russia must engage in serious and constructive negotiations to extend or replace the New START treaty and prevent a new arms race.