

What is New START, and how frequent were inspections?

The New START treaty was signed in Prague in 2010 as a continuation of the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, which had expired the previous year and oversaw a drawdown of nuclear forces between the two superpowers in the 1990s. The Obama-era agreement put further limits on American and Russian nuclear stocks from the initial treaty.

The number of deployed warheads — warheads that are placed on missiles or in military bases with operational forces — was capped at 1,550 and there are additional ceilings on the individual number of deployed missiles, bombers and launchers as well.

To ensure the level of stocks, the two countries have conducted 328 on-site inspections, more than 25,000 notifications regarding the status of nuclear delivery vehicles and launchers, and 19 bilateral meetings, according to the State Department.

Within President Joe Biden's first month in office, he reached an agreement with Putin to extend New START for five years. (It had been set to expire in February 2021, after the Trump administration failed to hammer out an agreement.) Just last year, the U.S. and Russia committed to creating a new agreement "to achieve deeper, irreversible, and verifiable reductions in their nuclear arsenals," according to a joint statement.

That commitment came despite Russia's continued postponement of on-site inspections, which were suspended due to the pandemic, and increased tensions between the two countries since Putin's decision to invade Ukraine in February 2022. The State Department told Congress earlier this month that Moscow's resistance to on-site inspections — the last was conducted in March 2020 — had put it in a position of noncompliance with the treaty.

~~Putin's clearly trying to inject nuclear leverage into both Ukraine and his relationship with the United States.~~

~~JON WOLFSTHAL, FORMER NSC OFFICIAL WHO HELPED NEGOTIATE NEW START~~

In his speech on Tuesday, Putin suggested that the U.S. would share information about Russia's nuclear facilities with Ukraine while calling a full return to the treaty "absurd." Despite ending its adherence to inspections, the Russian Foreign Ministry said Tuesday the country intends to observe and adhere to the limits "within the life cycle" of the arms control treaty, which is set to expire in 2026.