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QI Panel:

Extending New START and Revitalizing Great Power Nuclear Cooperation

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Marcus Stanley

Good afternoon, everyone, and Welcome to the Quincy Institute's webinar on new start and reviving nuclear arms control cooperation between the superpowers. My name is Marcus Stanley, and I'm the Research Director for the Quincy Institute. We are a trans partisan think tank that works to promote ideas that move US foreign policy and national security policy away from global domination and military adventurism and toward a new strategy of diplomatic engagement and the defense of our country based on the interests of the American people, not the corporate and political interests that have fueled American wars for the past 70 years.

I'm happy to welcome three distinguished guests to our webinar today, just to quickly introduce them before I hand it over to our experts to discuss arms control issues and and new start. Pavel Devyatkin is a non resident Fellow at the Quincy Institute and a senior associate at the Arctic Institute. He teaches at the Higher School of Economics in Moscow on and he studies Arctic security cooperation and US, Russia, China relations. He's been widely published, including recently by the Quincy Institute, where he recently released a brief on renewing the New START arms control treaty between the US and Russia. Ariel Petrovich is also a non resident Fellow at the Quincy Institute, and she is a research scholar at the Center for International and Security Studies at the University of Maryland. Her research examines nuclear proliferation and the risks of counterproductive consequences and security strategies. Her new edited volume atomic backfires when nuclear policies fail is available now, and she recently released a Quincy Institute brief on prospects for reinvigorating superpower nuclear cooperation that is available on our website, Thomas Countryman, Our third panelist is the former undersecretary for arms control and International Security and Assistant Secretary for International Security and Non Proliferation. Prior to retiring in January 2017, Mr. Countryman served over 35 years as a Foreign Service officer, he received several superior Honor Awards for his work, and in 2007 received the Presidential Meritorious Service Award. Since 2017 he served as the chairman of the board of directors for the Arms Control Association.

Okay, so just to give a very brief intro myself here. If you are a an arms control nerd and you follow nuclear arms control policy, you know that today is pretty momentous day, the New START Treaty, which is the last remaining arms control treaty, nuclear arms control treaty between Russia and the United States, actually, I think nuclear arms control and arms control of any kind between Russia and the United States expires formally today. So unless it is renewed, we are entering a period of potentially uncontrolled nuclear arms racing between the United States, Russia and the rising power of China. So to discuss this issue, both the specifics of new

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start and the general question of how we could and why we should revive nuclear arms control between the superpowers.

I'm going to hand it over to our three experts. We'll have each each person give sort of a five minute summary of their thoughts and research as moderator, I'll then ask our panelists some questions, and then we can turn it over to the audience, that is you for questions that you have on nuclear arms control and new start. And you should be entering those questions in the Q and A tab that you can see at the bottom of our. Screen. So without further, ado, Ariel, why don't you start us off?

Ariel Petrovics 5:08

Thank you, Marcus, and thank you to the other panelists for coming today. I really am looking forward to the discussion. There's sort of a lot of useful information that both is on Quincy and elsewhere right now, this is obviously a changing landscape as of today, right there's new news coming out every moment on this. So I'll start by giving a little bit of background. The recent publication that I just did for Quincy, that Marcus mentioned, looks at not just New Start or arms control agreements between the US and Russia specifically. But it also looks a little bit beyond that, towards basically nuclear cooperation between the superpowers more generally as well.

And I'll explain in a moment why I think all of these forms of cooperation are interrelated. They sort of all stand on one another, and they're they're critical to one another, but the different forms of cooperation that I'm talking about are, let's call them vertical cooperation. That would be things like mutual arms control basically prevents the increasing growth of existing arsenal. So that's vertical growth. So the vertical arms control agreements is one form, and that's sort of what we're going to be focusing on, most, likely most today. But I want to frame it in context of the other forms of cooperation that are critical to nuclear security in the modern world. And so the next form that we could think of is also horizontal nuclear cooperation. So basically that's preventing horizontal spread of nuclear weapons to states that don't yet have them. So that would basically mean increasing the number of nuclear arsenals, not just the size of existing ones.

And then the third form is sort of a little bit more global. It's not about specific states gaining new weapons or what weapons are gained within each state. It's more about the system as a whole, the sort of most famous, sort of landmark element of that system would be the NPT, and that one was signed in in 1970 it was brought in force in 1970 and it's been the backbone of the nuclear and it's the nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty, and it's been the backbone of of the nuclear Non Proliferation system for decades now, the reason why these are all interrelated, in part, and why they're all related to cooperation between the superpowers, is because each one of them sort of stands on the shoulders of the other and the superpowers, and the cooperation between them on nuclear security is what basically serves As the backbone for each one of them. And it's sort of very obvious when we think about the vertical arms control because that literally is an agreement between the two superpowers. And the most famous examples of the vertical arms

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control agreements are between the US and the USSR originally, and then now, between the US and Russia.

There are, however, a lot of agreements that are not just between the two largest nuclear powers in the world, the US and Russia. They also include the US and Russia. And in fact, the US and Russia were some of the key signatories, and this key negotiators to those treaties. But for example, comprehensive Chest Ban Treaty prevents the testing of nuclear weapons because of all of the sort of environmental and radioactive fallout that occurs from testing. And that doesn't just apply to the US and Russia. There's a number of other treaties like that that have been signed, and in fact, there's over a dozen that have been signed since the NPT was brought into force. So there's a lot of these, and it's more than just one treaty that we're thinking about expiring today right now.

There are also, in fact, many other treaties that have kind of all worked up towards this, and a lot of examples of nuclear cooperation between the superpowers. And I should mention that those are not only during times of sort of sanguine relations between the US and USSR or the US and Russia. There's many of those examples actually came at the height of tensions, for example, during the Cold War, when these two superpowers saw each other as a very real current threat, and they they worked towards forms of cooperation that would help mitigate those threats. So I definitely don't come at the possibilities for renewed cooperation with sort of rose colored glasses. I don't think that this necessarily means that the two countries will suddenly become best buddies. It doesn't necessarily mean that they have to already be on in really good relations to be able to get something across the finish line today. It is definitely possible as of right now, because they both have an interest in gaining great, greater nuclear security. And so the way that this works is vertical arms control agreements, which sort of help limit the size and structure of the arsenals in the largest superpowers to date, China has not come on to any of these bilateral agreements. That's important to note, because China is currently building up their own arsenal.

So future agreements may need to also consider China, however, they it isn't necessary for China to be part of these agreements for them still to be important today. That's in part because they limit, sort of the the uncertainty and the threat posed between bilaterally, the US and Russia, which leaves more space for each of them to help balance against China as well, and sort of consider the the China question, each of these then sort of help support the global Non Proliferation system. It's a system of a sort of an agreement between the nuclear haves and the nuclear have nots, and the US and Russia are sort of the most obvious nuclear haves. They have the largest arsenals in the world. And part of the agreement for the other countries who don't have nuclear weapons was that the US and Russia would also eventually work towards limiting their own weapons and maybe even eventually towards nuclear zero, but certainly increasing, or dramatically increasing, the size and number of their arsenals is going to be a big blow to that sort of system, more broadly, the countries that don't have it, but are capable of it, and there are many states today that are capable of developing nuclear weapons, but haven't yet done so, sort of rely on seeing the superpowers also being responsible stewards of the new their own nuclear capabilities.

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And then each of these sort of then helps lead towards greater horizontal Non Proliferation efforts, which in other words, means preventing states that don't yet have it from gaining it. And sort of the most obvious example that many of us think of today would be Iran. But there are many other examples as well, including allies at the US South Korea is is one that comes up a lot because it's had a lot of public interest in developing its own arsenal and plenty of capabilities to do so very quickly. So for a state like that to not develop one, they would probably need to see that the the nuclear the nuclear system, the nuclear Non Proliferation system specifically, is alive and well. So all of these elements that we're going to talk about today, which I'm going to turn it over to Pavel in a moment to give you more details on on the specifics of the arms control agreements, but all of these arms control agreements, and especially New Start that we're going to talk about today, also relate to the health of nuclear security more broadly. And we're not only talking the US and Russia. So I'm going to go ahead and pause there. There's sort of a lot to get into, happy to get into more on horizontal or the global Non Proliferation systems, but I want to leave plenty of space talk about New START, since that's what's got developments going on today.

Marcus Stanley 12:52

Thanks, Pavel?

Pavel Devyatkin 12:53

Pavel, thank you. Thank you, Marcus, Ariel Tom and everyone for joining us. It's great to be with you on this particular day. This moment matters for American security in a very direct way, the end of new start. It doesn't make an arms race inevitable, but for the first time in many, many decades, there's no binding agreement that limits us and Russian nuclear forces. So whatever restraint existed before is a choice now, not an obligation. And so that, you know, the choices are contingent on whether our policymakers will opt for expanding arms, or, you know, will opt for pragmatic diplomacy. You know, the question we should ask is, Does this arrangement a security landscape which lacks any legal limits on nuclear arsenals. Does that serve American security interests at an acceptable cost? We're faced with the question of keeping those limits without a formal treaty. There are strong reasons for both Washington and Moscow to show restraint, even without a treaty. So a numeral, so a numerical, arms race in strategic arms will not just be destabilizing, but also incredibly expensive. Maintaining and modernizing a nuclear arsenal will cost nearly a trillion dollars over the next decade.

And there's something that we don't talk about enough, and that is that Russia actually has advantages in in a production competition. Now, Russia has a state run defense industry which can ramp up production very quickly. Now, Russia is already out producing the US and NATO in conventional weapons for the war in Ukraine, and meanwhile, the US defense industry is captured by contractors who prioritize shareholder returns over a strategic capacity. So in the US, we have lobbyists and donors pushing Congress to throw more taxpayer dollars at the Pentagon, often using profits to. Buy back stocks rather than investing in the industrial base that

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we need. You know, President Trump himself has recognized this problem, and last month issued an executive order to prevent excessive stock buybacks in the arms industry, you know. But this all says that a nuclear arms race would be very expensive and would play to Russian strengths, not ours. You know, that's, you know, something that we should really consider when we think about whether we should go back to a qualitative, a quantitative arms race. But so, you know, effective deterrence isn't about who has the most warheads and bombs. It's about having a survivable and effective force that can make any any attack, pay a very high price.

So we already have that, you know, we have more weapons. Do we have lots of weapons already? You know? And more weapons don't make us meaningfully safer. They just create a bigger target list and take money away from other things we actually need. I would prefer if that money was spent towards health care or education or other priorities. But when it comes to defense, you know, even conventional military priorities like drones, like ship building and other emerging technologies, you know, that's where money could be invested. And you know, the American people get this. A poll taken last month shows that the vast majority of Americans support negotiating numerical limits with Russia. Even 85% of Trump voters say that President Trump should accept Russia's offer to keep the existing caps from new start for another year.

So this isn't a partisan issue, and so walking away from New Start isn't just destabilizing. It's not just expensive, but also it's, it's, it's, it's potentially politically dangerous for the President's own base. So at this point, you know, what should we do? I think you know, President Trump should affirm the offer to extend new start. We've seen reports in Axios today that US and Russian officials have agreed to potentially extend new start, but this will require the president's approval both Putin and Trump a mutual commitment to maintain New Start limits, even informally, will buy us time, and it will signal to both sides that an arms race is not anyone's interest. This shouldn't be considered a gift to Russia. It's actually about national security. It's about our interests. We should bring back basic transparency measures, notifications before big exercises, data sharing, open hotlines between our militaries, which also we learned today that European Command is also restarting, reportedly restarting, military to military dialog with with Russia.

You know, this doesn't require trust. It's just common sense to keep these hotlines open to avoid any accidents, and the US and Russia should consider starting talks on a new agreement, one that covers new weapons that both sides are building and worried about, so hypersonic weapons like Russia's Bureav, Vesnic and Poseidon, advanced missile defense systems like golden dome, the technology has changed, and the the agreements need to catch up with these emerging technologies. So previously, you know, President Trump has said that there have been tremendous amounts of money, you know, spent on nuclear and that the destructive power is something we don't even want to talk about. And he's absolutely right. So the question is now whether his administration will turn that sentiment into policy. It seems that the window is open, but it's not clear if that window will stay open forever.

Marcus Stanley 18:50

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Thanks Pavel, Thomas?

Thomas Countryman 18:55

Thanks very much. With the expiration of New START, I can see a positive scenario, and then pessimistic scenario. Positive scenario, you can glean from the very few words that Donald Trump and Marco Rubio have uttered on the situation, and that is, there could be a new era of arms control in which China is brought into the equation, and there are new mechanisms, new formats for reducing nuclear competition. I'm all in favor of that, but the pessimistic scenario is there as well, and that is that we could rapidly find ourselves in a trilateral arms race, among the three major powers that would exceed in cost and in risk the arms race that we lived through during the Cold War. And that's, of course, what I would like to avoid. It's easier to believe that pessimistic scenario, because so far, we haven't seen the United States do anything, and I underline anything in the last 10 years in the field of arms control.

Now I want to believe with all my heart that Donald Trump is sincere in the few statements he has made when he says that we have to move to denuclearization, to reducing arsenals and reducing the amount of money, now, more than \$100 billion a year that the US spends on nuclear weapons. I want to believe that, but I haven't seen any action taken by his administration yet. There has been every opportunity to do so. What needs to be done now is for the US and Russia to authorize experienced negotiators, both military and civilian, to talk to each other for the first time in five years, in order to at least set out a roadmap for future negotiations. It also should be the job of the United States to make a proposal to China, not for a negotiation, but for a consultation, for the beginning of a dialog. And in fact, the Trump administration, although it continues to say that China refuses our requests for dialog, has not made a request for dialog, except in public statements and tweets, but has not actually approached China to say, let's begin a process of talking. And I have equal criticism for the Chinese government, which also has failed to take any initiative to say, we're ready to talk.

So the pessimistic scenario, unfortunately, is more likely at this moment, I would hope that this is a good moment for the Trump administration to take a deep breath and say we do not have an immediate need to upload additional weapons. We can take the time to be ready to respond to any significant new threat of Russia uploading weapons, but we can also take the time to start talking to each other. I hope the president knows that a nuclear treaty is not an a real estate deal that you can do in an afternoon over a cup of coffee with another strong leader. It requires long preparation, long negotiations by experts, and it's complex.

The last point I'd like to make about this is that if the Trump administration insists that the only negotiation worth doing is trilateral, to include China, that is a reason, that is an excuse for not doing anything with the US and Russia possessing 90% of the nuclear warheads in the world. It's up to the two of them, as every president until this one recognized to take the lead in nuclear arms reduction. One more comment that builds on what Ariel said about vertical and horizontal proliferation. All the five recognized nuclear powers insist that their weapons are defensive and stabilizing. Your weapons are offensive and destabilizing. This they reflect each other perfectly.

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The one thing that the five all agree on is we do not want more nations to get nuclear weapons. We want to prevent horizontal proliferation to new countries.

And I think none of them appreciate the fact that their competition in vertical proliferation makes horizontal proliferation by other countries more likely. When you see a state that is practicing territorial expansion or a state that is threatening territorial expansion, both under the cover of nuclear weapons. It's natural to be concerned that other countries are going to make a logical conclusion about their own need for nuclear weapons. So I am going to try to focus on the optimistic scenario. On some of the paths that Ariel and Pavel have outlined for cooperation, and I'm going to look for any positive sign that the Trump administration is ready to be realistic rather than simply rhetorical on restraining Nuclear Risk.

Marcus Stanley 25:22

Thank you. Tom so I'm going to take moderator privilege here and ask several questions to our panel, and then we will open up. I see we we have quite a number of questions in the Q and A already, but please do enter your questions the Q and we will try to get to those in the last 20 minutes or so of the discussion. So speaking of the optimistic path, we do have reports this morning that the US and Russia are discussing are starting to at least informally discuss an informal extension of the New START treaty that is a an informal agreement to abide by New Start limits on nuclear weapons for the next six months, potentially to prepare for a formal negotiation of a new treaty. So I just wanted to ask, uh, you about your thoughts on the prospects for that. Tom, maybe we could start with you as a former US government official who has been involved in those kind of negotiations. And then also Pavel, you. You are an American, but you're based in Moscow, so you probably have a sense of the Russian perspective as well, but Tom?

Thomas Countryman 26:48

So let me use a morbid metaphor, the New START treaty is dead, technically and legally. However, it is being kept on life support in hope that some of the valuable organs can be transplanted elsewhere. There is no possibility to revive the full treaty at this point, but the potential for both sides to shake hands and say, We will not upload more weapons as long as you do, whether that is for a six month or a 12 month period, is a positive sign, and I look forward to seeing some confirmation of this early report about Mr. Witkoffs diplomatic efforts. That would be good. It's also good if they're the report that the military demilitarized military conversations between the US will resume. If that's true, that is also positive. I strongly believe right now, it is the US and Russia who need to do the heavy lifting with each other. And if this report about a handshake deal is accurate, that's a small but positive step.

Marcus Stanley 28:09

Thanks, Pavel. What about the Russian interest in perspective here?

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Pavel Devyatkin 28:15

Yeah, it's definitely encouraging news. And you know, President Putin has made his offer to extend new start for another year. Back in September, Russia has been waiting for a response. You know, this week we've read, we've read different officials like Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey krebkov repeatedly saying, you know, Russia is waiting, and that the US silence on on Russia's offer is taken as, I quote, egoism. So, you know, definitely there seems to be an opportunity that, you know, six months is the offer as I understand, it's modest enough, you know, it could be achievable, an informal arrangement. You know, it doesn't require the ratification of Parliament, of Senate. You know, the key question is if verification measures are going to be included. You know, this has been something that's been of concern from the US side.

But you know, for you know, when it comes to Russian experts, you know, lots of people been saying that New Start was a product of its time. It fulfilled its purpose, and that, you know, Russia is likely to maintain its strategic arms at quantitative levels that adhere to new start. So I think it's a very positive development. It's something that we should definitely support and and see how it goes.

Marcus Stanley 29:41

Thank you. So I was reminded of something that I think there's not enough public attention to, by something that you said actually Pavel in your presentation, which is that the US is already embarking on a nuclear modernization. Program, and in fact, I would argue a nuclear buildup. And I just want to get your views on this, and also to make this clear, because I think it's not really so clear to the public, even though we already have a tremendous number of nuclear weapons, we are looking at Bill modernizing and building more. Pavel, you cited the figure that we are scheduled to spend almost a trillion dollars, according to CBO estimates, over the next decade, on nuclear modernization. And there's a lot of pressure on DC to go even further.

The Heritage Foundation, which was very influential organization in DC, that came up with a project 2025, sort of playbook for the Trump administration that you may have heard of. They came out with a report calling for a large scale expansion of the US nuclear arsenal to 40 604,600 nuclear weapons by 2050 and I'm not sure how that compares to our Cold War levels, or if that's an all time record, perhaps Tom could fill us in on that. But in that report, it says, by, and I'm quoting from this heritage report, by 2024 the nuclear community had reached a general bipartisan consensus that the United States needs more nuclear weapons and fast. So I don't know this, this nuclear community. I've never met them. They're not the general American community, but perhaps you guys are part of the nuclear community. Do you guys agree that there is a general bipartisan consensus that the US needs 4600 nuclear weapons by 2050 No, Tom, you want to expand a little. And where you think this pressure is coming from in DC?

Thomas Countryman 32:10

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Well, there's a lot there. I mean, you mentioned project 2025, the blueprint for American authoritarianism. It is well funded, the corporations that would build weapons are in the ascendancy. They have a good practice of funding both executive branch and legislative branch candidates. And while I am not saying that they are all venal, it is an important part of the ecosystem in Washington to that drives ever higher defense spending.

In particular, the largest boondoggle in American history is coming up the golden dome project, which any physicist will tell you cannot succeed in the way that Trump has described it. But neither members of Congress nor defense industry executives are interested in the opinions of physicists on this particular issue. So it is that initial expenditure, if you combine it with what we are already spending on the modernization program and on the weapons complex that is already spending well over \$100 billion a year on the nuclear industry, and any industry with that much money will fight for self preservation and expansion.

Marcus Stanley 33:53

And how does that for 4600 nuclear weapons in 2050 compare to our past arsenals and our current arsenals?

Thomas Countryman 34:02

Well, we currently have more than 4000 nuclear warheads. The majority of them are in a reserve, a so called hedge. Do we need to deploy all of them? I'm certain there are people in Washington who believe that we do the I don't see the logic myself. At the peak the US possessed nearly 30,000 nuclear warheads dispersed at hundreds of sites, including all across Europe. And there was a realization at that time that the sheer number and diversity and dispersal of nuclear weapons created an instability that was not in our interest, I don't think we need to move back in that direction.

Marcus Stanley 34:56

Thank you. Okay, so I want to turn to a few to. Issues that came up at a really interesting hearing held by the Senate Armed Services Committee on Tuesday about a potential Post New Start world, and some, some a number of senators and witnesses seem to welcome that kind of world. Honestly, a couple of concerns were raised by opponents of reviving new start. One was that Putin has previously violated nuclear arms control treaties, and they were concerned about what our options and recourse would be if Russia violated any new nuclear arms control treaty. Do any of you have views on this issue of compliance with nuclear arms control treaties, and whether those treaties are are useful even despite that possibility, Ariel?

Ariel Petrovics 35:54

Yeah, thank you for bringing this one up, because I think that one of the main reasons we hear both people in DC, but but even sort of experts and non experts outside DC arguing against

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new start, is not that theoretically, arms control is bad. There are many believers that arms control is good, but still think that that it isn't working. One of the big arguments is that while we can't trust our other side, Russia has repeatedly violated agreements. And in fact, in 2023 Russia, you know, kicked out the inspectors and basically said we're not going to abide by the verification measures anymore, although they did continue to respect limits.

So the my, my strongest argument in favor of New Start is, and at any of the arms control agreements is not that it's perfect. There is no perfect arms control agreement. It's that it's better than the alternative of no constraints whatsoever. So even having the constraints in place with imperfect verification measures, is certainly better than an entirely unconstrained and opaque adversary. One of the the big reasons why continuing new start, or maybe repurposing the the organs from the old new start, is is a very strong argument is, because it's actually really difficult to reinvent the wheel here, especially things like the bodies and organizations that actually need to do the verification processes and and and basically implement transparency measures between adversaries are difficult to set up. They're difficult to empower, and it's a lot easier to continue or revitalize existing ones than to build them all up from scratch.

So yes, absolutely. Russia has not been a perfect player here. Russia would obviously argue the US hasn't either, but I think Russia's track record is is pretty poor in terms of transparency and compliance. However, they haven't outright violated it or blown any of these agreements out of the water. They do actually tend to abide by them in spirit, even if they do try to sort of cheat around the margins. Cheating around the margins is much better than just exploding the Arsenal size, and much better than absolutely no insight whatsoever as to where those those weapons are, what types of capabilities they have, and where they're where they're going.

And I did want to just to finger a point that Pavel made in his report that I'm sure he's probably going to get to but there are lots of weapon systems that are not covered in the New START Treaty. There's no sort of transparency measures on those, and they would probably require different systems and different organizations in order to implement transparency on things like low yield weapons. They're very different than this, than the strategic weapons controlled by New Start so we're not talking about sort of we put in new start, and it's all going to work out great. It's a starting point. But it definitely is better to re Empower ones that exist than have to start from scratch.

Marcus Stanley 39:10

Thank you, Pavel?

Pavel Devyatkin 39:14

Yeah, thank you. I agree with what Ariel said. So I echo all that. I just want to add another thing that came up in that hearing you mentioned Marcus Rose Gottemoeller, who negotiated new start, said that the treaties are important because it gives tools for recourse beyond just national technical intelligence and satellite monitoring. You know, the other treaties include data

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exchanges, notifications, on site inspections, and when those on site inspections were halted during the covid pandemic, you know, they came up with with virtual technologies and procedures for doing that. So, yeah, definitely. You know. Without a treaty, you have less understanding of what the other side is doing. And so now we're going to see what Trump and Putin come up with if they listen to their officials when it comes to extending new start for six months. But definitely, these agreements are meant to be reciprocal, and you know, verification is a key part of all this. Thank you.

Marcus Stanley 40:25

Well, a little meditation on the word Trust. I find it darkly comic that anyone in this administration can look at the business record and the historic and the political record of Donald Trump, and then say with a straight face you can't trust Vladimir Putin's word. I don't trust either of these gentlemen. Fortunately, nobody. Fortunately. Arms control treaties are not about trust. They are about verification, and that's why the loss of the verification methods for New Start are important. It does not mean there is no verification possible. We both have satellites. We both have national technical means.

As Ariel noted, the Russians will always try to cheat at the margins, but they can't cheat big without it being detected. And when you have a hedge of a few 1000 additional nuclear warheads lying around, you always have an option to reciprocate with a buildup of nuclear weapons you cannot solve every problem in a treaty. And it is very frustrating to me to see the tendency of people to say this treaty is inadequate because it did not solve every problem in the world. It didn't solve the Palestinian America, Israeli issue, and it didn't cure cancer, therefore it's a poor treaty. This is the argument that Mr. Trump made in 2018 when he violated the JCPOA agreement with Iran. It didn't solve every problem with Iran, and as a result, the nuclear problem became worse. You have to address issues one step at a time, and you do it with people you don't trust. That is the essence of not just diplomacy, but of national security.

Marcus Stanley 42:37

I would note with the Iran example, that the JCPOA nuclear arms control treaty with Iran didn't exactly fail. The US pulled out of it, after which the nuclear problem got worse. So it's not something that you you blame on arms control in that case, but more about the unwillingness to do arms control. So this I'm going to kind of get into actually a question that I wanted to ask about, something that came up at the hearing.

But also one of our viewers asked the same question, which is this issue about proliferation? Nuclear proliferation among us, allies, Senator Reid, who was the ranking Democratic member of that committee, pointed to Trump administration actions against American allies as undermining confidence in American what they call extended deterrence, like the willingness American willingness to protect our allies from nuclear attack. And he raised the issue of potential proliferation spiral as allies in Europe and Asia, US allies in Europe and Asia, like

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South Korea and so on, considered their own nuclear deterrent. And Rose Gottmuller also raised that concern. So what is your perspective on that risk and danger? Pavel and then Ariel?

Pavel Devyatkin 44:12

Yeah, these, these issues are definitely connected. You know that, you know, but, but obviously, extended deterrence and arms control aren't mutually exclusive. I think, you know, Tom said it really well that when an administration has territorial expansion in its in its foreign policy, that raises a lot of risks for allies. You know, Sweden is now in talks with with France and the UK to develop nuclear weapons. And you know, other Nordic states are really worried about Trump's threats against Greenland. So, you know, arms control can actually support extended deterrence because it reduces it reduces threats. You know, there are fewer incentives for. A nuclear brinkmanship. You know, it signals that the US is a responsible leader. You know that allies won't need more. Or, you know, new nuclear weapons, if, if they think that the US can, can still provide that nuclear umbrella or shadow.

Marcus Stanley 45:22

Ariel, I know you've done research on this specific question, so did you have thoughts?

Ariel Petrovics 45:28

Yes, thank you. And I have a few. I'm actually going to double down on what Pavel said he's 100% accurate that arms control and proliferation risks and allies are not mutually exclusive or even orthogonal issues. The proponents of basically doing away with arms control limits would say that, well, if we're going to protect our allies, we need more weapons, because we need to GO Station them in new places. We need to do more forward deployments, kind of like what we did during the Cold War.

The argument against that is twofold. One, the US doesn't look like an incredible partner because we don't have capabilities. The US has more than sufficient capabilities to force project all over the world without more weapons. We have enough weapons and capabilities to destroy the world several times over. We don't need more to be able to destroy it more times over, the argument is actually especially about actually the increasing capabilities in the adversaries. So in East Asia, we see increasing capabilities in not only North Korea, who isn't constrained by any arms control agreements, and China, who is also not constrained by any arms control agreements, but could be if they continue to look like a superpower and could be rolled in. It's kind of the direction in which China is heading. The demand in Poland and Germany is not because the US doesn't have capabilities. And in fact, it's not because there aren't nuclear weapons already stationed in Europe. There are. It's because Russia is looking more threatening. There are their capabilities are growing. Their constraints on their arsenal are falling away. And so it's not just about what the US can do to force project. It's whether or not the US looks like they're willing to use their capabilities, right? Will they trade Washington for

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Paris? Is the sort of the common argument. I mean, we see a lot more of that, will we trade Washington for Seoul? Will we trade Washington for Berlin?

And the argument has always been that the US didn't need to make that trade. In part, the US was more than capable of defending, but also that the US is more than capable of of making a trade off that they think that basically demonstrating that they are willing and committed partners is actually more more securing to US interests than retrenching and basically bringing home all of our forces. If the US looks like they are a willing partner, they're not going to need to look like they have the capability to destroy the world so many times over. And also there's obviously this added benefit of, if they go in with the arms control, then there's less fear coming in from the other adversaries. Right? We can control the buildup of Russian arms capabilities, and maybe then turn our attention to China and control that buildup as well. So definitely not two orthogonal issues. They're highly, highly related.

Marcus Stanley 48:25

Thank you, Tom?

Thomas Countryman 48:26

Well, to expand on one of Ariel's central points, the discussion about developing indigenous nuclear weapons capacity in several countries is not driven by the loss of the New START Treaty. It is not driven by a lack of us capabilities. It's driven first by a nuclear armed Russia willing to brandish its nuclear weapons in pursuit of imperialist territorial expansion. And the second thing that drives it is a clear attitude of disdain and unconcern on the part of the US administration towards European allies. It is not reassuring to European and Asian allies to know that the US has this many weapons, or that US generals still say the same things they used to say they understand the words of the US president, and that drives the apprehension that causes them to discuss nuclear weapons. Options to be clear, developing nuclear weapons would be a bad idea for any country, whether it's South Korea, Japan, Turkey, Germany, Poland, Sweden, that may be thinking about it. It is not without costs. It makes a risk, not only to this. Civilian population, it makes that country more of a target, and it causes great reputational cost. If South Korea wants to be as much of a pariah as North Korea, I think they should not choose to go for nuclear weapons. I do hope that every country that feels threatened by Russia or China and uncertain about the reliability of us support would invest smart in conventional defense of their territory.

Marcus Stanley 50:33

Thank you. Okay, so moving into more of the audience questions here and this. This is a question relevant to proliferation in some parts of the world. I think we have a very open ended question here, is Israel somewhere in the background here, Israel is one of the world's largest nuclear states, but in terms of its number of weapons by all accounts, but it doesn't admit to that. Does anyone want to speak to that issue?

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Thomas Countryman 51:08

Well, for 35 years, I was forbidden to admit the fact that Israel had nuclear weapons. I wouldn't call it one of the largest nuclear weapon states. It is far behind, where US, Russia and China are it? There should be more open discussion about not only the responsibility of the five to negotiate with each other, but how do you also begin a process that would include India, Pakistan, Israel and even North Korea in talking about responsible management of nuclear weapons? How to get to a state where none of the nine nuclear powers are making the situation worse by building up their arsenals. That's a discussion that I thought was realistic six or seven years ago to initiate. I don't think it's realistic at this moment, but it is on our to do list after the US and Russia, get back to meaningful discussion.

Marcus Stanley 52:26

Yeah, you mentioned Turkey as a possible proliferator. And you one has to imagine, obviously, Turkey is on Russia's border as well, but one has to imagine that that has something to do with Israel's nuclear capacity too. So this issue was mentioned a couple of times, but we have a couple of questions about it and maybe to go which is about how golden dome affects calculus on arms control and Tom you mentioned the physics problem with saying that golden dome is going to completely eliminate, you know, missile risk the United States. But is it possible that even if it does not completely eliminate that risk, that it might be destabilizing, even to to build it, even if it's imperfect?

Thomas Countryman 53:15

The answer is yes, it's destabilizing, even if it's imperfect. I do support, given the experience of Russia's war in Ukraine, figuring out ways to defend the United States better against air breathing threats, drones, hypersonic missiles, etc, I do not believe that there is a way that the US can defend itself perfectly against a salvo of ballistic missiles from either Russia or China, and it would be destabilizing to have such a system, but there is work that we need to do. I will note in my own conversations with Chinese experts that the dominant mood in Beijing is satisfaction that the United States wants to spend a couple of trillion dollars on a system that won't dramatically change the strategic equation, Rather than spending it on the kind of Conventional Munitions that could change the strategic equation in the Pacific. They're happy with it.

Marcus Stanley 54:30

Thanks. I want to, kind of, do we have a bunch of questions left, and I want to kind of do a speed round here, but Pavel and Ariel, if you quickly, very quickly, it's something to add to that on Golden Dome?

Pavel Devyatkin 54:43

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Yeah, just that. You know, Golden Dome is definitely important for this calculus, because Russia's new systems, avant garde, Poseidon, berevesnik, they were created as responses to US missile defense. And you know now that us. Officials are trying to include these exotic new systems into us. Russia. Arms Control, Russia is likely also going to come back and say, well, golden dome or other such systems should also be included. So definitely, this complicates future negotiations.

Marcus Stanley 55:18

Thank you, Ariel?

Ariel Petrovics 55:20

Just very quickly, and this is unpopular, but the premise of a lot of the arms control agreements is mutual vulnerability. If we, as the US, look like we are no longer vulnerable. And note that I said look like, there is no way that we would be able to create a system that actually makes us invulnerable, which is important, because then maybe it would change the calculation. But because these systems do not make the US invulnerable, but they make Russia and China believe that the US is more invulnerable, they generate an incentive for the adversaries to build up without actually making the US more safe. So it's something to consider, are we more interested in safety, or more interested in appearance of safety?

Marcus Stanley 56:00

Okay, so we got about five minutes left. Thank you for that. We got five minutes left. I'm going to ask a couple of questions, and anyone who wants to pick one or more to respond to, please go ahead. One is, is there a role for non nuclear middle powers in supporting a renewal of nuclear arms control, or is this just a bilateral conversation, and what role could non nuclear powers play? The another question would, do Russia and China target each other. And a third question, aren't us strategists going to insist on higher numbers in order to deter both Russia and China and might a new New Start interfere with that, which is an issue that was raised at the hearing. So go ahead, answers to one or more of those questions

Ariel Petrovics 57:07

Okay, I'll do it really briefly, because I'm sure the other two have thoughts on these as well. Very quickly, the role of non nuclear power is yes, especially in the IAEA for transparency measures, you can't rely on your opponent to do transparency. It's got to be third parties. So that is how the International Atomic Energy Agency is built. And then do we? Do we think that the US should be building up in order to be able to deter both at the same time? That's the argument for over 4000 that is where that that number comes from. Is basically being able to deter both at the same time, going back to that mutual vulnerability, or even sort of mutual caps. How do you think that we're going to be able to generate caps on China or Russia, if we have more than

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both together, then suddenly the caps move up to whatever the the largest number is. So something to consider when you think about whether or not we should be capping them.

Marcus Stanley 58:03

Yeah, yes, okay, anyone else?

Thomas Countryman 58:07

I'll take a stab at the question about middle powers, and it should apply to both allies and non allies. First, if you are in the Non Proliferation field, and you go to events such as the Non Proliferation Treaty Review Conference this spring, you can taste the anger of more than 100 non nuclear weapon states that the five are continuing to build up arsenals and that the progress of the last 50 years is now being reversed. If you talk to NATO allies, they are grateful for a nuclear umbrella, but they are also concerned that additional spending on nuclear weapons actually reduces the capabilities of the US and therefore of NATO to defend the continent from conventional attack.

The problem is nobody raises these issues to the top. There are too many other issues. In the first Trump term, I approached directly a European president who was going to meet with Trump and said, Would you raise the importance of extending new start, and that President did so and reported back to me that they had done so. But that is one of the very rare exceptions when any of our allies or non allies in a meeting with the President or even the Secretary of State get around to raising nuclear issues, and so the US government draws the obvious conclusion that this is just up to us. Nobody else cares.

Marcus Stanley 59:53

All right? Well, on that somewhat depressing note, we are coming toward a close here, but there. There is one thing more, thing I want to say, which was one of the comments left by one of our viewers here. And he said, please communicate to this to the audience, folks, we cannot leave this most consequential of all decisions, the nuclear decisions, only up to politicians on all sides, as in the 1980s we must have global citizen activism over the hubris of our leaders. We the People, are just as capable of expertise on this issue as any of those politicians. Get involved, network and collaborate. So I'm going to leave it there. Thank you very much to everybody, and thanks for our members of the to our members of the nuclear community for participating.