

Briefing Paper: New START and the TPNW

January 2021

Introduction

In the first few weeks of 2021, there have been two new and significant developments in bilateral and multilateral nuclear policy.

The first global treaty to ban nuclear weapons, the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), took effect on 22 January 2021. And on 26 January, the United States and the Russian Federation agreed to extend the bilateral cap on U.S. and Russian nuclear arsenals, the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) for five additional years.

Key Points:

- The extension of New START is welcomed as it prevents backsliding on nuclear disarmament. It's a welcome start to the new US administration, but additional steps will now be needed to make progress on disarmament.
- Since the United States and Russia first agreed to this current cap on nuclear arsenals in 2010, the international community has negotiated, adopted and brought into force a treaty banning nuclear weapons: nuclear weapons are illegal under international law.
- Throughout the time the New START agreement has been in place, Russia and the United States have spent billions each year to build new nuclear weapons systems. This is now banned under international law.
- With the New START quickly extended and the TPNW in force, the groundwork has been paved for significant disarmament advances in the coming four years, the nine nuclear armed states have no excuses not to walk that path.
- Simply staying at the current nuclear weapon levels will not be enough to protect the world from this catastrophic threat. With the TPNW in force, there is a new international standard. Russia, the United States and all nuclear-armed nations must take active steps to move towards compliance with this international treaty and join it.

Background Information:

New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START)

- In 2010, the United States and Russia signed [New START](#), which limits both countries to 1,550 deployed strategic nuclear warheads, 700 deployed nuclear missiles and bombers, and a total of 800 deployed and non-deployed launchers for nuclear missiles and bombers.
- The United States is estimated to have [5,800 nuclear weapons](#) and Russia to have [6,375 nuclear weapons](#) in total, which includes non-deployed warheads not counted under New START.
- The treaty expires on 5 February, but will now be extended for five years with the agreement of both countries' presidents.

- Under the Trump administration, the United States made little progress to extend the treaty, instead unsuccessfully seeking a new trilateral arms control agreement with China.
- [President Biden announced](#) early in his presidency that he would pursue an extension of New START, which was welcomed by Moscow, which had made repeated overtures to do so under the Trump administration.
- Extending New START importantly prevents Russia and the United States from increasing their deployed nuclear warheads and delivery systems, maintaining one bilateral arms control agreement.

Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW)

- The [Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons](#) (TPNW) is the first comprehensive global nuclear weapons ban, adopted in 2017 by 122 countries.
- It entered into force and took full effect on 22 January 2021. Currently, there are 86 signatories and 52 states-parties, and those numbers continue to grow.
- [The treaty prohibits](#) nations from developing, testing, producing, manufacturing, transferring, possessing, stockpiling, using or threatening to use nuclear weapons, or allowing nuclear weapons to be stationed on their territory. It also prohibits them from assisting, encouraging or inducing anyone to engage in any of these activities.
- It also includes landmark obligations for states-parties to assist victims of nuclear weapons use and testing and start to remediate environments contaminated from nuclear weapons use and testing.
- The treaty's entry into force in January created a [new international standard](#) for nuclear weapons: they are now illegal under international law.
- Previous weapons prohibition treaties have shown that even weapons possessors that have not joined the treaty cannot escape its influence.
- With the entry into force of the TPNW, nuclear weapons are illegal under international law.