No More 'New START'

Nuclear Weapons Numbers Treaty May Have Been Worse than Useless

By Ray Acheson

On Feb. 5, 2026, New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START), the last remaining nuclear arms control agreement between Russia and the United States, officially expired. In September 2025, the Russian government offered to continue implementing the Treaty for another year if the U.S. government agreed, but the Trump regime did not formally respond to that offer. Instead, his administration has insisted on nuclear arms control talks with China, which has a much smaller arsenal than either Russia or the United States and has so far refused to engage in such negotiations.

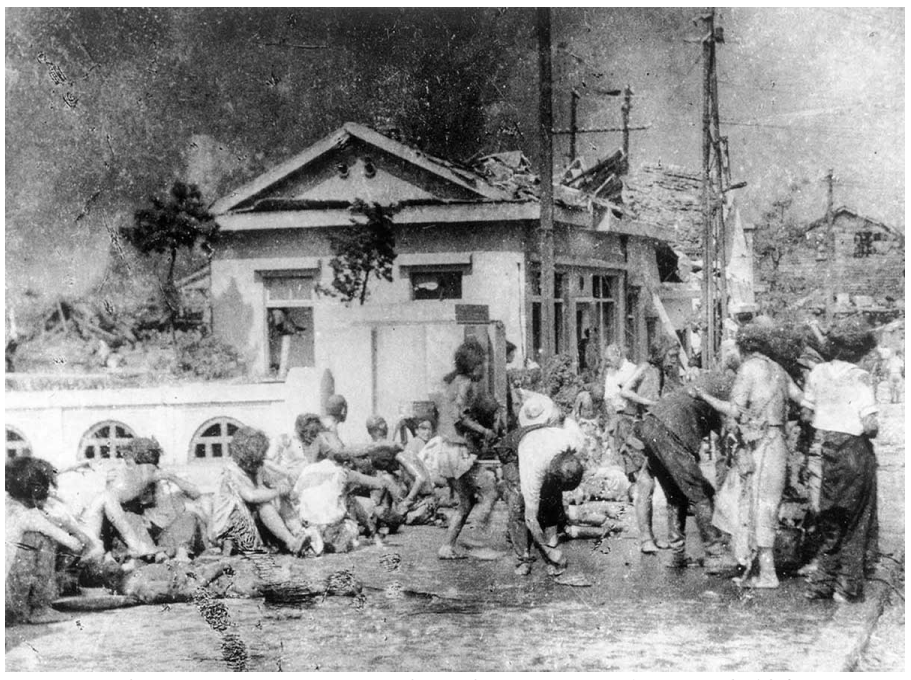
The expiration of New START means that Russia and the United States could increase their deployed warheads substantially within a matter of months. New START, agreed to in 2010, obligated Russia and the United States to reduce their operationally deployed, "strategic" nuclear warheads to:

- 700 deployed intercontinental and submarine-launched ballistic missiles and heavy bombers assigned to nuclear missions;
- 1,550 nuclear warheads deployed on those platforms; and
- 800 launchers (both deployed and non-deployed).

The Treaty also included mechanisms for compliance and verification, twice-yearly exchanges of data, ongoing mutual notification about the movement of strategic nuclear forces, short-notice, on-site inspections of missiles, warheads, and launchers covered by the Treaty, and a bilateral consultative commission and clear procedures to resolve questions or disputes.

The cost of New START, however, was very high

The Obama administration agreed to a massive [$1.7 trillion] nuclear weapon modernization program in exchange for ratification by the U.S. Senate. This modernization program continues today, with the U.S. government spending billions every year to "upgrade" its nuclear arsenal, delivery systems, and related facilities. Thus, as ICAN Australia [Int'l Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons] notes, U.S. ratification of New START "has arguably done more harm by entrenching the United States' possession of nuclear weapons and thwarting prospects for disarmament." Fifteen years later, we still have the modernization program, but not the treaty for which it was bargained.



The atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima, Japan, August 6, 1945 by the United States destroyed 140,000 civilians. It had only a fraction of the explosive and incendiary force of "tactical" warheads being built by the United States as a part of the Obama Administration's trade-off for Senate ratification of the 2010 New START treaty. Photo by newspaper photographer Yoshito Matsushige.

Russia has also been modernizing its nuclear arsenal over the past years, and has threatened to use nuclear weapons in the context of its war in Ukraine. In 2024, Russia spent about $8.1 billion on its nuclear weapon program, while the U.S. spent about $56.8 billion. The Trump regime has suggested it might restart explosive nuclear testing, and has engaged in several unlawful military actions over the past year, including in Iran and Venezuela. Both Russia and the U.S. are in violation of many international laws and have shown disdain for any attempt to restrain their violence. In this context, prospects for nuclear arms control, let alone disarmament, look grim.

However, it's important to recognize that the failure of Russia and the United States to extend New START or negotiate a new arms control agreement does not mark the beginning of a new nuclear arms race. The arms race has been underway for many years already. While the expiration of New START marks another development along this path, it is a path both countries were already on. Furthermore, New START itself, while limiting certain deployments, did not lead to denuclearization. Instead, it led to further expansion of nuclear arsenals. Whatever comes next must be substantially different — it must advance disarmament, not arms control; it must lead to abolition, not retrenchment of the weapons and systems that have led us further to destruction.

The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) was developed exactly for this purpose. Supported by the majority of countries in the world, the TPNW offers a clear path to the end of nuclear weapons and the dangerous game being played by states that are gambling with all our lives. As ICAN says, "The dire international security environment at present, rather than serving as an excuse for inaction, must spur urgent action on disarmament…. Joining the TPNW is an important step that all countries can take to press for disarmament in these dangerous times."

Reaching Critical Will urges:

- Russia and the United States to stick to the limits of New START and continue or restart the other measures of New START while they engage in good faith negotiations to end the arms race and achieve nuclear disarmament, as they and other nuclear-armed states are obligated to do under the Non-Proliferation Treaty's Article VI;

- All nuclear-armed states to join the TPNW and end their nuclear weapon programs — and in the meantime, to stop their nuclear weapon modernization programs, refrain from expanding or sharing their arsenals, and not develop and deploy "missile defense" or nuclear space systems; and

- All states to reverse course from violating and dismantling international law, to instead pursue security through disarmament and diplomacy.

*— **Ray Acheson is Director of WILPF's disarmament program Reaching Critical Will, provides intersectional feminist analysis and advocacy at international disarmament forums, and is the author of** **Abolishing State Violence: A World Beyond Bombs, Borders, and Cages** **and** **Banning the Bomb, Smashing the Patriarchy.***

Cesium Contamination of Some Imported Consumer Goods Brings Criminal Charges

Last summer and fall dozens of reports warned of radioactive cesium-137 contamination of imported shrimp, cloves, tennis shoes, and zinc powder. The shrimp contamination led to the recall of frozen shrimp — shipped from Indonesia — by Walmart, Kroger, and dozens of other grocers across 31 U.S. states. The scandal led to international investigations seeking to find the source of the cesium as well as the ways the contamination was spread, how it doused consumer goods, and how it came to be exported around the world. Kroger stores alone recalled 77.5 tons, or 155,000 pounds, of the shrimp it sold between June 12, 2025 and Sept. 17, 2025. (For background on the story, see both the Fall and Winter 2025 Nukewatch *Quarterly*.)

Reporters and investigators chased leads in search of the source of the cesium contamination, which has now been traced to airborne particles from a smelting plant at PT Peter Metal Technology, a stainless-steel processing and scrap iron smelting company in the Modern Cikande Industrial Estate (MCIE), 35 miles west of Jakarta. (Indonesia's capital Jakarta is now the world's most populous city with 41.9 million people.)

PT Peter Metal Technology (PMT) is about two miles from the shrimp processing facility, PT Bahari Makmuri Sejati which exported the tons of recalled shrimp to the U.S. last summer. The U.S. imported some 84 million pounds of shrimp from Indonesia in 2025.

Bara Hasibuan, spokesperson for the Indonesian government's "Cesium-137 Radionuclide Hazard Task Force" investigating the contamination, said Dec. 4, 2025, "The purchase of scrap materials mixed with used industrial equipment contained cesium-137, which was processed legally or illegally.…" Investigators now believe radioactive cesium dust was released into the environment after PMT inadvertently smelted scrap containing cesium-137.

At a Sep. 30, 2025 press conference Bara said, "Because it's airborne, the contamination can be carried by wind." Later, Steven Biegalski, PhD, Chair of the nuclear and radiological engineering and medical physics program at the Georgia Institute of Technology in Atlanta, told *Consumer Reports*, that the "easiest explanation" is that a medical or industrial device containing cesium-137 was inadvertently reprocessed as scrap metal. The cesium-137 could have become gaseous in the PMT smelter and then been released from the smokestack, he said. "That whole island likely had a cesium-137 plume go over it, leaving a trail of contamination," he said. (Yes, that, and the smelter itself, the smokestack, and the surroundings. Several families were evacuated from the area after cesium contamination was identified.)

If Biegalski is correct, and the plume passed over Jakarta's 41 million people and blew east across the "whole island," then the government's hazard task force was right to send inspectors to far-flung locations across Java. Two sites were a shrimp processing facility in Surabaya, 500 miles east of the smelter in MCIE; and two farms in Pati, in central Java, 310 miles east of the MCIE.

The contaminated cloves, which were intercepted before being sold in the U.S., came from a plantation in Lampung on Java's neighboring island of Sumatra, 100 miles west of the MCIE and across the Sunda Strait. This contamination indicates that part of the cesium's plume was blown west as well as east. "We can confirm that contamination has been found on plantations in Lampung," Bara said in October according to ABC News.

Nevertheless, Bara claimed last December that the source of the cesium-137 plume, the PT Peter Metal Technology smelter, had been completely cleaned up. "The decontamination in the Cikande industrial area [known as MCIE], which was the source of contamination, has been completed," he said, according to Tempo English.

Bara's claim must be considered in light of Indonesia's Minister of Environment and Forestry Hanif Faisol Nurofiq's statement to the press Dec. 3, 2025. Hanif said that his Ministry "does not possess specific duties or functions related to radiological activities or managing radioactive waste." Minister

See Cesium in Imports, p.4