

Russia Increases Nuclear Warheads While U.S. Decreases Its Arsenal

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April 04, 2016



Russia has continued to increase its arsenal of strategic warheads, although their number will have to be reduced to meet a 5-year-old arms reduction treaty with the United States that comes into effect in 2018, according to figures released by the U.S. State Department.

Under the New START Treaty, the number of strategic warheads deployed by Russia and the United States must be reduced to 1,550 apiece when the treaty's restrictions take effect in February 2018.

The United States has reduced its stockpile to 1,481 strategic warheads, according to the latest data released Friday by the U.S. State Department on Friday. This compares to 1,790 warheads deployed by the United States when New START was introduced in 2011.

Meanwhile, Russia has increased the number of strategic warheads it deploys on its ballistic missiles to 1,735 under the latest count — up from 1,566 in 2011.

Most warheads were added over the last year: According to a count on March 1, 2015, Russia was in possession of 1,582 strategic warheads.

An assistant secretary for arms control at the U.S. State Department, Frank Rose, accused Russia last week of dismantling a number of post-Cold War agreements — although not New START, which he said Moscow appreciated for the verification procedures it provided, the Financial Times reported.

"My personal view is that Russia no longer sees value in that [security] architecture put in place at the end of the Cold War," Rose was quoted as saying. He cited Russia's withdrawal from the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe, and Moscow's alleged testing of medium-range ballistic missiles, a move that would be a breach of the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty.

"They are slowly but surely taking out the key building blocks of the Euro-Atlantic architecture put in place in the late 80s and 90s," Rose was quoted by the Financial Times as saying.

He spoke ahead of a nuclear security summit in Washington — a gathering Russian officials chose not to attend.

Hans Kristensen, an arms control analyst in Washington, said the nearly 200-strong increase in Moscow's strategic warheads since 2011 was partly due to a third Borei-class ballistic missile submarine that joined Russia's fleet last year.

"Russia is nonetheless expected to reach the treaty limit by 2018," Kristensen wrote in a blog posted Friday on the Federation of American Scientists website.

"The temporary increase in counted warheads is caused by fluctuations in the force level caused by Russia's modernization program that is retiring Soviet-era weapons and replacing some of them with new types," he wrote.

Russia's arsenal of strategic launchers — another type of weapon to be reduced under New START — counts about 220 fewer than that of the United States, according to aggregate data cited by Kristensen. The United States needs to dismantle 41 launchers to meet the treaty's limit, according to the data.

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