

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 12, 2019

The Honorable Donald J. Trump
President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Trump,

We write to urge your administration to extend the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) with Russia for another five years in order to ensure that the United States can continue to enjoy the treaty's clear national security benefits over this period. Since its signing nine years ago, the treaty has provided stability, predictability, and critical intelligence insights over more than ninety percent of the world's nuclear weapons. Therefore, we are very concerned that so far, the United States has made no visible or concrete effort to extend its life. Failure to extend New START risks unraveling a broader arms control regime that has helped uphold stable deterrence and curb a costly, destabilizing arms race for nearly half a century.

Without inhibiting the ability of the United States to maintain a survivable, reliable, and effective nuclear deterrent, New START has advanced the security interests of the United States and underpinned strategic stability with a major nuclear-armed rival. By setting mutual limits on the numbers of deployed nuclear warheads and deployed and non-deployed strategic delivery vehicles, the treaty constrains the size and composition of Russia's nuclear capabilities and – through comprehensive monitoring and transparency measures – allows the United States to verify Russia's treaty compliance with confidence. New START is due to expire in February 2021 and can be extended for up to five additional years by agreement between the U.S. and Russian presidents.

In February 2018, New START's central limits on U.S. and Russian strategic nuclear arsenals went into effect. The U.S. Department of State has certified that Russia continues to be in compliance with the terms of the treaty. An extension of New START is thus in the vital national security interest of the United States.

First, agreement to extend New START by an additional five years will cap Russia's current strategic force structure until at least 2026, adding to greater predictability and transparency as the United States begins to replace its aging nuclear weapon systems. At a March 2017 hearing of the House Armed Services Committee, Commander of U.S. Strategic Command (STRATCOM) and Air Force General John Hyten testified in support of New START, stressing that "bilateral, verifiable arms control agreements are essential to our ability to provide an effective deterrent."¹

¹ Military Assessment of Nuclear Deterrence Requirements: Hearings Before the Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives, 115th Congress, 1st Session, March 8, 2017.

<https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-115hrg24683/html/CHRG-115hrg24683.htm>

Second, New START's limits are backed by an extensive and effective verification regime. As of March 2019, the United States and Russia had each conducted more than 145 on-site inspections at the other's nuclear bases and facilities and together had made more than 17,400 notifications required by the treaty. In addition to monitoring Russia's adherence to the treaty's terms, these activities provide the United States with valuable intelligence on the size, capabilities, location, and operation of Russia's strategic offensive forces.


General Hyten reinforced this point at a February 2019 Senate Armed Services Hearing, stating that New START gives "insights into the Russian's capabilities. Those are hugely beneficial to me."² Hence, allowing the treaty and its verification provisions to lapse will significantly hinder the ability of the U.S. to track the movement and determine the makeup of Russian forces.

Third, beyond enabling intelligence on and constraining the size of Russia's strategic arsenal, extension of New START will give the United States breathing room to negotiate a follow-on arms control accord. Specifically, with central limits on strategic forces remaining in effect through 2026, the United States and Russia will have the opportunity to pursue measures for the limitation and reduction of nuclear capabilities not covered under New START. Abandoning the treaty, by contrast, will lead to an unstable strategic environment and make increasingly difficult the imposition of additional constraints on Russia's nuclear forces.

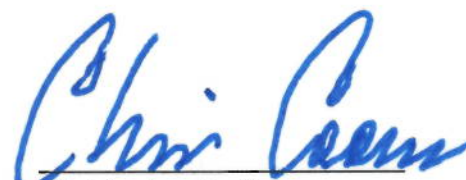
Finally, the United States has long linked bilateral arms control with its nuclear modernization efforts. Cordoning off Russia's current and future nuclear capabilities within legally-binding, verifiable limits allows the United States to make strategically and fiscally prudent investments in its nuclear weapons arsenal while also freeing up funding for conventional defense priorities. Thus, the twin processes of arms control and modernization have moved and must continue to move in tandem.

Arms control is not an end in itself; it is a tool for containing the military capabilities of our adversaries and safeguarding the national security interests of the United States and its allies. Since 1972, Republican and Democratic administrations alike have pursued such measures as a complement to maintaining a robust nuclear deterrent. We urge you to sustain this bipartisan policy and advance U.S. security by extending New START for an additional five years.

Sincerely,



Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



Christopher A. Coons
United States Senator

² "U.S. Strategic Command and U.S. Northern Command and SASC Testimony." U.S. Strategic Command, March 1, 2019. <https://www.stratcom.mil/Media/Speeches/Article/1771903/us-strategic-command-and-us-northern-command-sasc-testimony/>

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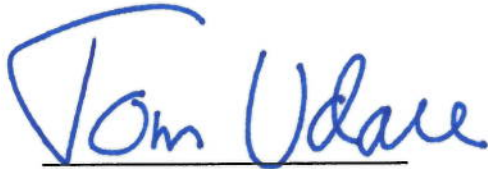
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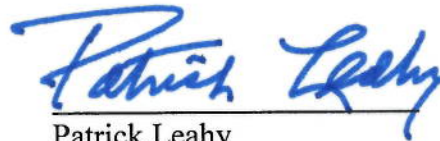
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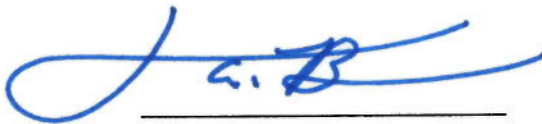
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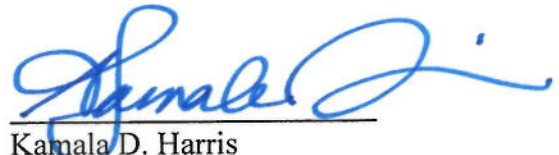
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