Center for Strategic and International Studies

TRANSCRIPT

Should the United States Extend New START Limits?

DATE

Friday, October 10, 2025 at 1:00 p.m. EDT

CSIS EXPERTS

Heather Williams
Director, Project on Nuclear Issues and Senior Fellow, Defense and Security Department, CSIS

Tom Karako
Director, Missile Defense Project and Senior Fellow, Defense and Security Department, CSIS

Kari A. Bingen
Director, Aerospace Security Project and Senior Fellow, Defense and Security Department, CSIS

Transcript By
Superior Transcriptions LLC
www.superiortranscriptions.com

CSIS | CENTER FOR STRATEGIC & INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

Kari A. Bingen: Welcome to the HTK Series, where we discuss strategic forces issues of the day. HTK stands for Heather, Tom, and Kari, but for you defense wonks out there it also stands for "hit to kill."

On September 22nd, Russian President Vladimir Putin announced that Russia is willing to continue to abide by the limits established in the New START treaty for one year following its upcoming expiration if the United States agrees to do the same. President Trump has since said that the proposal sounds like a good idea.

(Video clip plays)

Reporter: President Putin offered to keep limits on nuclear arms for one more year to then hopefully negotiate a new treaty.

President Donald Trump: Sounds like –

Reporter: Would you like to do that?

President Trump: Sounds like a good – good idea to me.

(Video clip ends.)

Ms. Bingen: The New START treaty was signed in April 2010 and entered into force in February 2011. It sets numerical limits on U.S. and Russian strategic nuclear warheads, delivery vehicles, and launchers. After being extended for five years in 2021, the agreement is set to expire in February 2026 and its verification mechanism has been defunct since Russia suspended its cooperation with the bilateral inspection regime established in this treaty in February 2023.

So was Putin's offer genuine? Should the Trump administration accept Putin's suggestion to informally extend the limits of this treaty? What would continuing to abide by New START limits mean for U.S. deterrence and modernization plans? I'm Kari Bingen, director of the Aerospace Security Project here at CSIS. Here to unpack these questions and more I'm joined by Heather Williams, director of the Project on Nuclear Issues, and Tom Karako, director of the Missile Defense Project. We'll also take audience questions, so I would encourage you to submit those. And I'll get those right here at the table.

So, Heather, let's start with you, and give us a bit of a 101 here. What is New START? You know, this was initially signed in 2010, ratified in 2011. What were our motivations back in that timeframe? What did it – what did New START cover and not cover? And give us a better sense of

that a security environment and the policy context and debates happening at that time.

Heather Williams: Yeah, I think this is the perfect place to start, because arms control is a product of its time. It's a product of the environment in which it's negotiated, envisioned, and in which the implementation starts. And so I would ask everyone, bring your minds back to 2010. The world was really, really different. It's actually worth taking a few minutes to think about just how much the world has fundamentally changed in 15 years. So in 2008, 2009, 2010, we had these series of op-eds from the four horsemen, from, you know, really senior strategists and statesmen, who were calling for the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons. And I think it sparked a lot of optimism about nuclear reductions, a future for arms control, working towards nuclear disarmament.

And then in April 2009 you have this huge speech by Barack Obama, the Prague speech, also calling for the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons. It is worth emphasizing, in that same speech Obama did say it probably won't happen in my lifetime. One of the nuclear experts in the field likes to say the Prague speech is a Rorschach test of where you fall on nuclear issues, and everyone has a favorite half of the Prague speech.

Tom Karako: I think he got a Nobel Prize for that, didn't he?

Dr. Williams: He did get a Nobel Prize for it. The Nobel Prize speech, though, also emphasized, you know, there is evil in the world, and there is still a role for nuclear weapons. But at that time, when you had the four horsemen article, Obama's speech, you know, there was this kind of enthusiasm and optimism for nuclear reductions. This is also a time – this is pre-Ukraine 2014, obviously. Russia was, at that point, a strategic partner, I believe was the term that we were using for them. This was before China's massive nuclear buildup, which we have particularly seen in recent years.

The other pressure point at this time was that the START I treaty was expiring in 2009. And I think the U.S. got a lot of benefits from START I. We got a lot of transparency into Russia's strategic capabilities, into their strategic forces, but also more transparency and dialogue as well. And so that was all coming to an end. And there was this sense of, we can't just let this die. We want something to replace it.

The one other contextual point I want to flag, that I do think was important, that was the year of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference, which was in the spring and summer of 2010 and

that treaty – or, that review conference, rather, concluded with a 64-point action plan. It was one of the most ambitious NPT review conferences in history. That too was a product of the environment and a product of its time, and just captured all of this creativity, momentum, and ideas around arms control and disarmament. And so in some ways, New START was kind of this natural progression. Don't get me wrong, a lot of work went into this, but that was the mood.

The mood is obviously very, very different now. You know, since then Russia has violated almost every arms control agreement they're in. I'm sure that we'll get to that. But so what New START actually, is it limits the U.S. and Russia to 800 delivery vehicles, 700 launchers, 1,550 warheads, all operational, strategically deployed. New START also comes with really intrusive verification mechanisms, a bilateral consultative committee. And so the main bumper sticker about New START that the lead negotiator Rose Gottemoeller always says, is it brought predictability and transparency. And that has kind of been a legacy of arms control.

You know, New START isn't just a product of its time, it is also a product of an arms control tradition. The U.S. and the Soviets really started engaging in strategic arms control in the '60s, after the Cuban Missile Crisis. And then you have SALT I, ABM Treaty, INF, START. I'm sure we can talk about the importance of that legacy. But that gets us to kind of, you know, the current predicament, so to speak, which is, is arms control – if arms control is a product of its time, is it still something useful today? Do we want to lose that legacy and all of that transparency that has been built up over time in that relationship with Russia? Or do we want something different, because the world is just so different now than it was at the time of 2010, New START.

The last point I want to make on this is that New START did come with a commitment to a pretty ambitious nuclear – well, at the time – ambitious nuclear modernization package, which I know you both were involved on Capitol Hill at the time of that, and so really curious on your insights. But all to say, New START wasn't just done, yes, arms control without recognizing the importance of a strong deterrent at the same time.

Ms. Bingen: So, Tom, you and I were both up on the House Armed Services Committee staff. in that 2010-ish timeframe. What do you recall?

Dr. Karako: That was a – that was a bumpy time on this topic. And maybe it's a function of where I am on the spectrum and where I was on the spectrum then that, you know, some folks had a lot of reservations at the time about New START. And, you know, this was also the time that –

the heady days of, you know, John Kyl, for instance, holding up the treaty in order to get – there was 1251 report, but also fundamentally in order to get the nuclear modernization thing kick started. And so those things really went hand in hand.

And I'll say, you know, back to the heady days of the four horsemen and such like that, you know, those op-eds were coming when it only been a couple years when 2010 NPR came out and said that non-pros are the biggest priority for the nuclear agenda. Some folks, I think, at the time, disputed that. I think some of the headiness perhaps got away from us. You know, Russia had invaded Georgia just two years before that, in 2008. We kind of got awakened to the Russian character in 2014, but, you know, they did invade Georgia in 2008. And it was John McCain in this context, around that time, he was talking about looking into Putin's eyes and seeing, you know, KGB. So I think not everybody was quite in that same – in that same space. But it was, like you say, a very different – very different time.

Ms. Bingen: Yeah. And I go back to that time as well. And, you know, we were involved in the House on the debates. Obviously, the Senate had the treaty ratification responsibility. But what really weighed on, I think, members and senators on that time was – it was Obama's Prague speech. It was this world free of nuclear weapons. And would that mean that the United States was willing to take even unilateral reductions? Obviously, there was a desire for a treaty, but would the us go further? Was arms control – at that point in time, was it an ends, or was it a means to an end? And we weren't – we were not focused on China. You know, China had its few hundred nuclear weapons. We did not see this, this massive expansion that we've seen now. So it very much was focused on Russia.

And there was clear recognition as well, I think, on a bipartisan basis, that we do have – we have aging weapons that we had not paid attention to for a couple decades, an aging weapons complex and nuclear infrastructure. And so there was a grand bargain to be had here politically. And I credit, you know, obviously Obama administration pushed the – pushed the – and wanted the New START treaty. But you had Senator Kyl. You had Tim Morrison working for him at the time. On the House side we had Congressman Mac Thornberry, Congressman Mike Turner, who really pushed for, hey, you know, we will – we will support this treaty, but we need to make sure that the weapons posture and deterrent that we have in place is safe, secure, reliable, that we are investing in the modernization of our delivery systems, and that we're investing in the modernization of the complex. I think that was a smart – that was a smart grand bargain.

Dr. Karako: I think so. It's taken for granted now that the program of record for nuclear modernization, well, of course, this is what we're doing. And the dispute is whether we should be doing more. But it was by no means to be taken for granted in that time. It had to be created, as it were.

Ms. Bingen: Mmm hmm. And the threats changed significantly, which I know we'll talk about.

But, Heather, let's go back to you. OK, what is Putin's proposal? And what do you think is motivating him to make this offer?

Dr. Williams: Right. So, as you said in the opening, Putin has put this offer on the table. It's also come from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and some other senior officials. It's worth noting, I've gone and looked at the different wording of all the different comments and sometimes worded a bit differently. I'm going to – I'm going to say Vladimir Putin's word is it going to be the deciding one on this. And so what Putin's offer was that Russia would continue to abide by the central limit, so that those numbers that I threw out – 1550 warheads being a key one – that Russia would continue to observe those limits for an additional year past February 5th, 2026.

There are a few caveats to what he said, however, that I thought were pretty important. He said, we believe that this measure will become viable only if the United States acts in a similar way and does not take steps that undermine or violate the existing ratio of deterrence potential. So it is very much teeing this up and saying, OK, ball's in your court now. And, you know, we've talked about this, and I think it's worth unpacking, this is a traditional Russian play. They've done this historically with other agreements. But what were some of Putin's potential motivations? The timing of this, I think, is really important. It was around the time of when the U.N. General Assembly was opening up. And so I think there was very much an international audience that Putin was trying to speak to.

And, again, this is also part of the Russian playbook, trying to portray Russia as this champion of arms control and strategic stability. You know, they're the one trying to uphold the NPT. China also has that playbook. I think China's a little bit better at it than the Russians are. But that timing, I think, was really – was a really crucial factor about why did Putin make this offer now? That was a part that seemed a little bit unique to me. The other reason why they might be doing it now, according to the Russians themselves, they are about 90 percent done with their nuclear modernization of their nuclear forces. The U.S. isn't at 90 percent. You know, we're still struggling with a lot of the different replacement programs. Sentinel, obviously, we've talked about on other

parts – on other episodes of this. And so I think that for Russia there is a benefit to continuing to hold these limits, because they've already done – made a lot of these investments and come up with their new systems, whereas we're really just getting into it.

Trump's response – as we said, Trump said, "it sounds like a good idea." I've heard a few people around the community say, oh, great, Trump has agreed to it. I didn't quite interpret it that way. I heard the president saying, this is something we should think about, not say, yes, absolutely, let's go forth with it. But obviously I have no idea what's in the president's mind. I don't think anybody does on this issue, necessarily. I actually think that the president's response should be taken as an offer to open up a dialogue on this. And so I think there's some pros and cons to taking up the Russian offer.

The upside is that Russia has rejected any sort of arms control dialogue for years. The Biden administration made at least four offers for a strategic stability dialogue. The Russians said no. They have been violating, withdrawing from agreements. We haven't had bilateral consultative committee conversations with them in years. And so on the one hand, if the door is open, we've been asking for the door to be open, we've been knocking on the door for a while, you know, maybe it is a good opportunity to take up. The other potential benefits would be this return to predictability and transparency, if it came with some sort of verification measures or a return to those BCC meetings. And so that would have to be part of a conversation. Again, why I just don't think the U.S. should blindly agree to this thing. Yeah, that sounds great. Let's go forth and do it. The details really will matter in this.

The last reason that I'll say I think it could be a good idea is because it could be a starting point for some sort of future arms control agreements. And keeping that door open could have benefits for us in terms of having a bit more insights into what are Russia's strategic intentions and what is their arsenal. The downsides and why, you know, I actually did – my Ph.D. dissertation was on the benefits of arms control and trust building. I'm still really skeptical about this. (Laughter.)

Like, I think that there's a lot of red flags here. Russia has rejected arms control, violated arms control, withdrawn from arms control. On the one hand, that's why this offer could be a great opportunity. On the other hand, why should we trust anything that the Russians want to do in arms control right now? You know, when someone shows you who they are you should believe them. The Russians have shown us who they are on arms control, and we really should believe them.

The other reason I'm skeptical about this is because I think this will make our allies really nervous. I was at a conference in Europe last month. And I asked someone, you know, what would make you nervous coming out of the Trump administration on nuclear policy? And quite a few Europeans said arms control would make me really nervous right now. They're worried about being cut out. As long as there is a Russian troop on the ground in Ukraine, they think it's too premature to engage in this sort of agreement with the Russians going forward.

Ms. Bingen: Can I keep you just going on this? Because I think sometimes we assume, you know, arms control might be a good idea, but can you go back to, like, why do we have it in the first place? What are the – I mean, there's a military operational piece of this, why you might want arms control, or even agree to controlling, but then there's also a policy and a political aspect of this. So why even – what is it good for? What are the benefits of it?

Dr. Williams: Yeah. I think there's a –

Ms. Bingen: And then are those conditions, you know, in place, I guess?

Dr. Williams: Yeah. And I think – I'm really glad you asked that, because it is worth going back to, like, what's the point? Arms control is not something that we are obligated to do. It is not something that should take precedent over deterrence, in my mind. Deterrence comes first, and arms control opportunities might flow from arms control. But in my mind, arms control is a management tool. If you are – if you have a one or multiple peer adversaries who are also building up their strategic arsenals, arms control is a tool that can give you some sense of at what rate are they producing, what do they have? It gives you that bit of predictability that can be a benefit in force posturing, and that transparency that otherwise you really might not have.

Arms control is not disarmament. A lot of arms control agreements do include reductions, but not necessarily. I think that's a really important point to drive home. There have historically been arms control agreements that have allowed states to actually build up within them. And so I think that that relationship between arms control and deterrence is a really important one, that deterrence has to take a priority. And, for example, in the 1980s, you know, folks in DOD were doing – redid some of the targeting plans and identified opportunities for cuts in U.S. strategic forces. That contributed to INF. That contributed to START I, the Presidential Nuclear Initiatives. But it really has to flow from the broader national strategy and defense posture, which I'm sure we'll get into since an NDS is coming up sometime soon.

But also say, arms control is not an automatic. It is not a given that you have to do.

The one additional point of context I will add, though, which might contradict some of what I just said, we are part of the NPT which includes an obligation to – I'm trying to remember the exact language – negotiate a cessation of the arms race at an early date and make progress towards general and complete disarmament. Something like that. The world is not moving in that direction. I haven't seen the Russians showing any interest in negotiating a cessation of the arms race. I don't see the Chinese working towards general and complete disarmament. But if we want to uphold the NPT, we have to find some way to meet that obligation, and sometimes arms control can help with that.

Dr. Karako: Well, you know, I think Heather's right on one key thing here. And I did my dissertation on treaty law as well, so we can nerd out.

Dr. Williams: Look at us, relevant Ph.D.s.!

Dr. Karako: Look, pacta sunt servanda, treaties must be observed, is kind of the bedrock principle here. But, you know, I'm not too worried about the NPT things because of it being the product of its time, for instance. You know, the other thing – nerding out here – is, you know, the word "treaty," from Latin, was the word for faith, "fidere." It's the same group for, like, federal government, for our union. There's not just a whole lot of faith. It's bad faith all the way down in terms of Putin, right? There's a third technical term in treaty law that I think Putin is playing here, and that's called bamboozling, right? (Laughter.) He's trying to bamboozle for U.S. domestic politics and international politics. He's playing on the, oh, the sky would fall if we don't have this kind of thing, and looking for the marginal advantage – marginal political and military advantage, for instance.

There's another word from diplomacy here that I want to invoke, and that's détente. And détente is from the French, the loosening of the tension. We treat détente from the '70s as always and obviously a good thing. Sometimes politically it's bad to loosen the tension, to let your guard down. You know, it literally comes from loosening the catch on the crossbow or the trigger, actually. And I think right now we need to stay focused. We need to keep the tension up. And the – we remain seized of the, you know, KGB nature of Putin's eyes right now, as opposed to looking for off ramps.

I mean, again, Russia has violated every treaty, just about. And they're toying with violating the Outer Space Treaty. But, look, reports of them

using chemical weapons in Ukraine, what, last month? So there's not the basis of faith. It's violations all the way down. And I'm reminded of John Kerry in 2014, when the reports of INF violations were percolating up – this was only a couple years after New START entered into force. And John Kerry said, look, if this is right, the U.S. Senate is never going to ratify another arms control treaty ever again. And I think it's important to also emphasize – you remember Kerry in 201. It was like, oh my goodness, START expired. The sky is going to fall if we don't get another treaty in place immediately.

But SALT I expired. We didn't have a SALT II because of Afghanistan. And we went from 1977 to, what, 1991 without a big, comprehensive treaty. You know, a lot went on in the '80s, of course. And then, likewise, there was a gap between START I and New START. So I don't think – I think everybody needs to just, you know, keep calm and carry on. The sky is not going to fall just because we don't have a piece of paper with ribbons on it governing these kinds of things.

Ms. Bingen: OK, Tom, I'm going to keep this on you. I mean, I imagine the Russians would love nothing more than to put missile defense and now space-based interceptors, announced as part of Golden Dome, in some sort of treaty package. So we've got that bucket here to talk about and tackle. But then also, nowhere in this conversation that we're having right now are we talking China, and what China is doing on the nuclear front. So talk about both of those.

Dr. Karako: I mean, Trump 1.0 China showed exactly zero interest in talks over time – zero interest in nuclear talks. They're building up to get to their marginal advantage. And, I think to Heather's point, we have to first build up to get to a position of strength before we even think about that sort of thing. So I think that's just foolish right now.

Dr. Williams: And just – sorry, very quickly – Trump – you know, I gave the recent Trump quote about this might be a good idea, but Trump has made numerous – has made statements earlier about how he's interested in denuclearization. And I think a lot of folks have been getting excited about that. But an important caveat to those offers is he want – is he has always said he wants it with Russia and China. I haven't heard the president make any major, definitive statements about arms control just with Russia. It seems like China will have to be part of any future arms control equation going forward for the administration.

Ms. Bingen: Well, if we agreed with the Russians on continuing the caps, who benefits from this? It's China that is continuing to expand their numbers, diversity of different types of platforms. And, oh, by the way, we haven't even talked Russia's, what, 2,000-or-so non-strategic or

tactical nuclear weapons that aren't covered under any of this. But, Tom, I did want to go back to you on missile defense. There was a certain article in the New START treaty that explicitly addresses missile defense. So I don't want to get you off the hook yet. What did that say?

Dr. Karako: Yeah. So there's two things. And we have, I think, a section five we can pull up here, which prohibits the conversion of ICBM or SLBM launchers – canisters, silos – for the use of missile defense interceptors. And this was, again, 2010 timeframe. Keep in mind, just a few years earlier during the Bush administration we put a small number of ground-based interceptors, GBIs, into Vandenberg Air Force Base, Peacekeeper silos, I think it was, now Vandenberg Space Force Base. There's just, like, four there, for instance. And that's where we do our testing from, but they are operational. And so it prohibits the conversion of any more of them. I think there's a couple reasons why that might be. The first is, it is generally a good idea to have your ICBMs coming from one place, and your interceptor things coming from another place, so that you don't misconstrue one for the other on a bad day.

But there's also something else in the treaty. And that is the preamble, which is not binding but nevertheless has all this language about recognizing the relationship between offensive and defensive strategic arms. And that, you know, we don't want basically the build-up of lots of missile defense interceptors to undermine the essentially assured vulnerability from the offensive side. I'll just say, I didn't like language at the time. I still don't like it. It's very much smacks of kind of the – frankly, the preamble of the 1972 ABM Treaty. And I think where we've come on the missile defense side just kind of makes that a little bit obsolete.

But there's another thing on the missile defense front. And that is that that Putin also, again, I think trying to bamboozle folks and play a political card, was grousing about U.S. plans to expand strategic components of missile defense, including preparations for interceptors in outer space. And he said that this is destabilizing and it could nullify our efforts to maintain the status quo in the field of strategic offense of arms. I guess my reaction is, you know, really, Jan? (Laughs.) You know, first of all, yes, the executive order for Golden Dome did talk about developing these things. I think that's a long way off. There's a lot of technical problems. And I guess I just have a whole lot more faith in the capability of ours and their offensive capability to not make nuclear weapons impotent and obsolete anytime soon.

Ms. Bingen: And we just did a couple of weeks ago, right, a whole discussion on China's military parade and all the different weapons that they were parading. I mean, let's remind ourselves, both China and Russia have

their own national missile defense systems that they're not putting on the table in any of these discussions either.

Dr. Karako: Well, the whole militarization of space thing is one of the – one of their favorite cards to play, both Russia and China, actually. It's one of the things they work on together is kind of the diplomatic game of putting the onus on us for just anything weapons in space, although they don't seem to have a problem with putting their own weapons in space of various kinds.

Ms. Bingen: OK. So question here. Dr. Roberto Gamarra offers: I propose we discuss Putin's one-year offer in the context of the three major nuclear powers – nuclear triads, and look at it in the context of a trilateral, multifaceted competition. Thoughts on that?

Dr. Williams: Yeah. That sounds like a great idea. Anyone who knows how to get the Chinese to the table, you know, don't hold back. Tell us what the secret sauce is here. You know, so many efforts has been made, as Tom said, to bring the Chinese into some sort of dialogue. You know, there were a couple – there were a couple talks during the Biden administration. I think there was one talk between the State Department and Chinese MFA. And not much really came out of that. Though, I do think it's interesting, the Chinese then went to unilaterally observe some of the things that we have been talking to them about, like missile launch notifications. And so all to say, I do think it's – China is probably going to do arms control very differently than how we have done arms control with the Russians. So I don't totally want – want to totally rule out the prospects for Chinese arms control right now.

But from the Chinese perspective, what are the incentives to get involved in these dialogues, when the U.S. and Russian strategic arsenals are, you know, orders of magnitude larger than China's? New START is 1,550 operational, strategically deployed warheads. That's not our total arsenals. As you said, Kari, Russia has, you know, 2,000 tactical nuclear weapons as well. And China's arsenal, by DOD estimates, is now at around 600. So there's a massive asymmetry there. So from the Chinese perspective, there might not be a huge incentive to get involved at this point. I think that would be great.

I will put out there one possible forum for having that sort of conversation is this thing called the P-5 process, which is within the NPT. And it was established in 2008. If you want arms control with Russia and China, this is the only game in town right now. And the Brits just took over the presidency of it. They're meant to deliver something in spring for the NPT. To be clear, I don't put a lot of hope in this process. Like, not a ton has been going on. It's really hard to have any progress

and dialogue when the Russians, you know, are violating sovereign borders, and China is massively expanding its arsenal. But in terms of where dialogue might happen, right now that's really the only option. And so as much as, you know, I think would be interesting if China wanted to be – wanted to join a strategic stability conversation, and trilaterally, Beijing has just shown zero interest in that thus far.

Dr. Karako: There's the ironclad rule of international politics, that wanting ain't getting. And I think it's going to be very hard to get them to the table.

There's two other things – first of all, there's an article out today from friends David Trachtenberg and James Anderson, both Trump administration officials in DOD. And their read on this is that the proposal, and Trump's apparent interest in taking Putin's proposal, they call it "misplaced and naive," to which I say, yea verily. And I hope that the folks in the White House are listening to that. But there's two other things that are, like, really nagging here that have to be flagged. Which is, you know, they will observe the central strategic limits, right? Central numbers and that kind of thing. But there's still the verification thing. And that's been suspended for a while now.

So we're supposed to trust Putin, who's, you know, invading Ukraine and violating every agreement he can – he can get his hands on, without any verification measures? And in addition to all of that, if that wasn't bad enough, you know, there's the provision of the treaty, which stood up this bilateral consultative commission, is that when you have new, exotic, strategic systems that pop up, you're supposed to be able to raise that. Well, guess what? It's kind of convenient that the suspension of the verification, the suspension of the BCC, means we can't raise the new, you know, Dr. Evil toys that they've been displaying over the past couple years.

Ms. Bingen: Well, and that's the question from Leo Michel at the Finnish Institute of International Affairs.

He asks: Given Russia's record of noncompliance with nuclear and nonnuclear arms control agreements, what are the risk versus benefit considerations in extending the New START limits without a verification regime in place?

Dr. Williams: I mean, I think it's – it would be a massive risk. And just to tease out a few of those points, Eric Edelman and Frank Miller wrote a piece a few months ago that tracked Russia's record of compliance and noncompliance, and found that Russia has violated or withdrawn from nine arms control agreements since Putin came to power in 2000.

That's a lot. That's really high. That does not exactly set a message of trust that we should take –

Ms. Bingen: What's the denominator of that?

Dr. Williams: Not many. (Laughs.)

Ms. Bingen: Not many left?

Dr. Williams: There's very – there's really very few left. You know, the Outer Space Treaty is clunking along. We'll see what the Russians do with that. There's the Antarctic Treaty, things like that that we still have going on. But I also want to clarify something about what "extend New START" really means. You can't – you can't legally extend New START. It's already been extended by five years. And there isn't an option for an additional extension. What Putin has proposed is to observe the New START limits for an additional year. And I think that's an important clarification, because it isn't like you're still going to have treating law necessarily dictating what you say. It's not necessarily pacta sunt servanda, so to speak.

I think the lack of verification, but also the lack of the BCC – Tom's point on this is really important – that there are new systems coming online and we don't have the usual forum for those dialogues. So, you know, the question for our show is should the U.S. extend New START limits? My answer to that would be, not yet. First we have to get the Russians to sit down to a strategic stability dialogue. In that dialogue we have to clarify, will observing the limits include getting back to verification, getting back to two onsite inspections a year, getting back to the bilateral consultative committees? And I think that that should be a minimum prerequisite just for observing the limits.

If you want to negotiate a new follow on, it's not going to – I don't think it should look like New START. The world is a very different place. But also, arms control has to flow from your DOD requirements and priorities. And so to – you know, maybe the NDS is going to make it clear what those priorities are. The U.S. is probably going to have to modernize, diversify, and/or expand its nuclear arsenal. That should be what sets the tone for what comes after New START, not the other way around.

Ms. Bingen: Well, and that's a good way to bring this segment to a closure here, which is we are anticipating a new National Defense Strategy to be released by the secretary of war at any time now. What would you like to see it say, you know, policy, posture, capabilities, on the nuclear front, and perhaps arms control and nonproliferation front?

Dr. Karako: Look, I'm going to be looking for the love –of it showing love for what are currently non-accountable systems, mostly non-strategic systems. I want to see what it says about LRSO, and SLCM-N, and that kind of thing because, of course, everybody knows Russia has an enormous advantage. And, look, this goes back to Rose Gottemoeller when the Obama administration was trying to get a New START follow on way back in the day. It was supposed to cover all the entire nuclear arsenal, as opposed to just those were allegedly strategic. So looking for that. Obviously I'm looking for, in the NDS, you know, what has to say about Golden Dome, and the relationship – that interrelationship between offensive and defensive weapons.

I'm hopeful that it will not have the kind of language I think we've seen – I think it was the Obama era on that front, in addition to being in the treaty. So I'm hopeful that it won't have that. But I think what they really need to do, and this has been a pet peeve of mine in terms of the Golden Dome stuff, is they need to begin articulating what is it that they're trying to do with the Golden Dome effort? What is the strategic logic? How does it fit together and contribute to deterrence? So that you can better answer the Putin aspersions about upsetting strategic stability and being provocative and destabilizing, that kind of stuff.

Dr. Williams: Hmm. My wish list for the NDS, with wherever a nuclear posture fits within that, I've got six. I'll go through them fast, though. First and foremost, is just identify what the priorities are for the force posture. It should be regional deterrence, strengthening extended deterrence, and coming up with a strategy to simultaneously deter two peer competitors. Second from that, it is going to probably have to signal that the U.S. nuclear arsenal has to, at a minimum, modernize. Like, we really have to execute this program of record.

But beyond that, how can we diversify the forces? We don't have a very flexible force in terms of diversity of platforms, dual-capable systems. But then also possibly expand. I would point out that actually doing those things, modernize, diversify, expand, it might also bring you some leverage for future arms control agreements. Right now we don't have a lot of leverage. There isn't much fat to trim on the U.S. strategic arsenal right now. And so you do those things not for arms control. You do them because it's the right thing for deterrence. But you might get some arms control leverage in the process.

Number three would be specific capabilities. I'm looking out for SLCM-N, obviously, but also possibly a new standoff capability. Number four is prioritizing nonproliferation but tying it explicitly to extended nuclear deterrence. That in recognizing that part of the reason that our allies are

not pursuing independent nuclear programs is because we have extended the nuclear umbrella to them for decades, and really making it clear the reason we do extended deterrence, yes, it is for their security, it is also for non-pro.

Number five is just some mention of the NPT. I'm worried about the health of the NPT. It would be great to just acknowledge the NPT is a thing, and we'll continue to abide by it. At the bottom of my wish list is arms control, because I think this is a moment for creativity and thinking about new ways to do arms control based on the new set of requirements. I don't know what that looks like, and I spend a lot of time thinking about this. So I don't have the answers. The administration might have some creative answers, but I think that we're not going to have a clear vision for the future of arms control right now. And, thus, I don't think Putin should be the one to force our hand.

Dr. Karako: And, just real quick, I mean, I don't think you said this explicitly but you implied it, which is, you know, in the near term we could have the upload of our ICBM. I think we have a picture of this, actually. You know, the Minuteman forces have, you know, one RV per, but they could easily go to three, for instance, if you so wanted.

But then I just want to say one final thing, which is you can't want it worse than the other guy. I think that's in "The Art of the Deal" somewhere. And so I just – this is, I think, very much a phenomenon of Washington, D.C., which is no one will ever kind of, within the political party, criticize the president on something. Which is, I think, a perfect hemming to the principle that Blackstone said in the 1780s, that the king can do no wrong. It's a fundamental principle of the English Constitution. The king can do no wrong. He can never fail. He can only be failed by his advisors. And so again, I want to go back to the Trachtenberg and Anderson comment. This is a misplaced and naive proposal. And we need – we need folks in the administration, I think, to correct the king and not fail him. (Laughs.)

Ms. Bingen: Well, these are terrific points. And I had a short list of three as well that I'll throw out here. And a good amount of this comes from the Strategic Posture Commission that was co-led in a bipartisan manner by former Senator Jon Kyl and Madelyn Creedon. And they reiterate the threat. And so I'd like to see the NDS talk – just reconfirm, or revalidate, that we are now at a point where we are dealing with two nuclear arsenals, two nuclear peers, that are on par with the United States. Which we've never had to deal with before. And that changes the game, I think, significantly as we think about our own nuclear posture and capabilities. The Strategic Posture Commission went on to say that American defense strategy and strategic posture must change, and it must change urgently.

Second, the posture commission also highlighted that if we don't field sufficient conventional capabilities and conventional forces to deter and defeat Russian and Chinese aggression in Europe and in Asia, we will actually have to rely more on our nuclear forces. And so there is also – we talked about the relationship between missile defense and nuclear forces, but there's a relationship between nuclear and conventional forces. And it's so important for us to also continue to modernize and expand and strengthen our conventional force capabilities.

And then last, lastly, Tom, you did an alliteration at one of our last discussions, so I'm going to do an alliteration here. Deliver, digits, diversity. So deliver on that program of record. You have Sentinel, B-21, Columbia-class. But I'm going to say digits, because I needed a D, but it's numbers. You know, let's revisit B-21. A hundred, is that really sufficient? A hundred? I know others have said 150, 200. Is Columbia-class at, what, 12, is that sufficient? And then some of the systems that you talked about. And then diversity. I absolutely agree with you. I mean, we just – again, China touted, we have ICBMs in silos, we have road-mobile ICBMs. We don't have that diversity in our delivery systems in force. And therefore, nor do we have any leverage – or, nor do we have sufficient leverage of things to put on the table. And back to "Art of the Deal," you negotiate from a position of strength. You don't give up what you actually need to do the mission.

So, OK. I think with that – we could keep going on, but we'll stop there. I want to thank everyone for joining us. And thank our teams – our Missile Defense team, our PONI team, our Aerospace team, our streaming and broadcasting colleagues who do a terrific job for us each time. Stay tuned for more discussions on HTK.

(END.)