

## I. Bilateral and multilateral nuclear arms control involving China, Russia and the United States

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Bilateral and multilateral engagement on nuclear arms control suffered significant setbacks in 2022. The beginning of the year was auspicious, with a joint statement by the leaders of the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council (the P5)—China, France, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom and the United States—on ‘Preventing nuclear war and avoiding arms races’ (see section II). This underlined the importance of arms control agreements and commitments and expressed the intention to seek ‘bilateral and multilateral diplomatic approaches’ including to prevent arms racing.<sup>1</sup> January was also marked by the continuation of the bilateral strategic stability dialogue between Russia and the USA. During these talks, which were intended as a precursor to arms control negotiations, the two sides exchanged security concerns, but they found differences between their positions on several key issues to be intractable.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 upended bilateral relations. The war stopped most communication between Russia and the USA and also affected the implementation of the 2010 Treaty on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms (New START) and negotiations of a potential follow-on framework. Meanwhile, there was no movement between China and the USA on strategic stability dialogue. China remained unwilling to engage in arms control talks without preconditions, a position it largely shares with France and the UK.

This section covers these developments, looking in turn at Russian–US strategic stability dialogue, implementation of New START and talks on a follow-on, and engagement with China. It concludes by analysing prospects for progress on any of these fronts.

### **The Russian–United States strategic stability dialogue**

In January 2022 Russia and the USA convened their bilateral strategic stability dialogue, the third session since it was initiated at the June 2021 meeting between US President Joe Biden and Russian President Vladimir Putin. This was termed an ‘extraordinary session’ because of the lack of preliminary meetings of the two inter-agency expert working groups (on ‘principles and objectives for future arms control’ and on ‘capabilities and actions with

<sup>1</sup> Joint statement of the leaders of the five nuclear-weapon states on preventing nuclear war and avoiding arms races’, 3 Jan. 2022.

strategic effects') that the two sides had agreed to create in September 2021.<sup>2</sup> The dialogue took place against the backdrop of Russia's military build-up near the Ukrainian border.<sup>3</sup>

In advance of the third session, in December 2021 Russia had transmitted to the USA two draft agreements—one between Russia and the USA and one between Russia and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)—that relayed its desired security guarantees and were intended as a 'starting point' for talks.<sup>4</sup> The session, held in Geneva and led by Russian and US deputy foreign ministers, Sergey Ryabkov and Wendy Sherman, included the exchange of security concerns on both sides and the discussion of preliminary ideas for reciprocal action.<sup>5</sup> Sherman noted US interest in discussing arms control that would include both strategic and non-strategic nuclear weapons. The USA also indicated its openness to discussion of limits on the size and scope of military exercises and of the placement of missiles, including the future of certain missile systems in Europe formerly covered by the 1987 Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty.<sup>6</sup> These reflected some overlap with the Russian draft treaties. For his part, Ryabkov called for quick action on arms control negotiations, noting that any such arrangements would be linked to the joint development of a 'strategic equation' encompassing nuclear and non-nuclear weapons.<sup>7</sup> Both sides cited irreconcilable differences on other key security issues, in particular a Russian proposal for NATO to refrain from further enlargement of its membership, including the accession of Ukraine and other states in Eastern Europe.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 prompted the USA to suspend the bilateral strategic stability dialogue.<sup>8</sup> In April, an official of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) confirmed that the process was

<sup>2</sup> Joint statement on the outcomes of the US–Russia Strategic Stability Dialogue, Geneva, 30 Sep. 2021. See also Saalman, L., 'Bilateral and multilateral nuclear arms control involving China, Russia and the United States', *SIPRI Yearbook 2022*, pp. 440–41.

<sup>3</sup> On Russia's build-up of forces and subsequent invasion see chapter 1, section V, and chapter 2, section I, in this volume. On the effect on nuclear facilities in Ukraine see section V of this chapter.

<sup>4</sup> Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'Press release on Russian draft documents on legal security guarantees from the United States and NATO', 17 Dec. 2021.

<sup>5</sup> US Mission to International Organizations in Geneva, 'Deputy Secretary Sherman's participation in an extraordinary session of the strategic stability dialogue with Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov', 10 Jan. 2022.

<sup>6</sup> Sherman, W. R., US Deputy Secretary of State, Briefing on the US–Russia strategic stability dialogue, US Department of State, 10 Jan. 2022. For a summary and other details of the Treaty on the Elimination of Intermediate-Range and Shorter-Range Missiles (INF Treaty) see annex A, section III, in this volume. On the demise of the INF Treaty see Topychkanov, P. and Davis, L., 'Russian–United States nuclear arms control and disarmament', *SIPRI Yearbook 2020*, 399–409.

<sup>7</sup> 'Future Russia–US strategic equation should include nuclear and non-nuclear weapons—Russian deputy FM', Interfax, 30 Nov. 2020.

<sup>8</sup> US Mission to International Organizations in Geneva, US statement to the Conference on Disarmament, Subsidiary Body One on the Cessation of the Nuclear Arms Race and Nuclear Disarmament, 15 Mar. 2022; and Detsch, J. and Gramer, R., 'Biden halts Russian arms control talks amid Ukraine invasion', 25 Feb. 2022.

formally ‘frozen’ and speculated that the process could be resumed with the completion of what Russia termed its ‘special military operation’ in Ukraine.<sup>9</sup> Over ensuing months, both sides spoke of their willingness in abstract terms to engage on topics of strategic stability and nuclear arms control, including through separate presidential statements from Biden and Putin delivered at the 10th review conference of the 1968 Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in August 2022 (see section II).<sup>10</sup>

However, there was limited bilateral engagement between Russia and the USA after February. This included the establishment in March 2022 of a military-to-military deconfliction line to reduce the risks of miscalculation amid the war in Ukraine, and telephone calls between the Russian and US defence ministers, Sergey Shoigu and Lloyd Austin, in May and October.<sup>11</sup>

The USA at times demonstrated a willingness to delink the war in Ukraine from other topics, with President Biden stating that ‘even as we rally the world to hold Russia accountable [for the war], we must continue to engage Russia on issues of strategic stability’.<sup>12</sup> Several members of the Russian government, including President Putin and Ryabkov, similarly suggested that they were ready to restart the process and awaited a response from the USA.<sup>13</sup> Yet the Russian foreign minister, Sergey Lavrov, also said that it is ‘impossible to discuss strategic stability’ while ignoring Western involvement in the war.<sup>14</sup> As the year ended, there remained no tangible plans for resumption of the strategic stability dialogue.<sup>15</sup>

## New START

The suspension of the Russia–USA strategic stability dialogue meant the disruption of a process that aimed to lay the groundwork for a follow-on treaty to New START.<sup>16</sup> This is the only remaining treaty that sets limits on the size and composition of the Russian and US nuclear arsenals (see table 8.1), but it is set to expire in February 2026.

Russia and the USA continued to implement most elements of New START in 2022 despite the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the accompanying nuclear

<sup>9</sup> ‘Russia says strategic stability dialogue with US “frozen”, TASS reports’, Reuters, 30 Apr. 2022.

<sup>10</sup> Biden, J., US president, Statement ahead of the 10th NPT review conference, White House Briefing, 1 Aug. 2022; and Putin, V., Russian president, Greetings on the opening of the 10th NPT review conference, 1 Aug. 2022.

<sup>11</sup> Youssef, N. A., ‘US, Russia establish hotline to avoid accident conflict’, *Wall Street Journal*, 3 Mar. 2022; and ‘Russia’s Shoigu holds second call with US defense secretary in three days’, Reuters, 23 Oct. 2022.

<sup>12</sup> Biden, J., US president, Message to the Arms Control Association, 2 June 2022.

<sup>13</sup> Kremlin, ‘Valdai International Discussion Club meeting’, 27 Oct. 2022.

<sup>14</sup> ‘Lavrov says Ukraine war affects prospects for nuclear talks’, Reuters, 1 Dec. 2022.

<sup>15</sup> Bugos, S., ‘Russian–US arms dialogue remains uncertain’, *Arms Control Today*, vol. 52, no. 6 (July/Aug. 2022).

<sup>16</sup> For a summary and other details of New START, see annex A, section III, in this volume.

**Table 8.1.** Russian and United States aggregate numbers of strategic offensive arms under New START, as of 5 February 2011 and 1 September 2022

Category	Treaty limit <sup>a</sup>	Russia			United States		
		Feb. 2011	Sep. 2022	Change	Feb. 2011	Sep. 2022	Change
Deployed ICBMs, SLBMs and heavy bombers	700	521	540	+19	882	659	-223
Warheads on deployed ICBMs, SLBMs and heavy bombers	1550	1537	1549	+12	1800	1420	-380
ICBM and SLBM launchers and heavy bombers	800	865	759	-106	1124	800	-324

ICBM = intercontinental ballistic missile; SLBM = submarine-launched ballistic missile.

<sup>a</sup> The treaty entered into force on 5 Feb. 2011. The treaty limits had to be reached by 5 Feb. 2018.

<sup>b</sup> Each heavy bomber, whether equipped with cruise missiles or gravity bombs, is counted as carrying only one warhead, even though the aircraft can carry larger weapon payloads.

Source: US Department of State, Bureau of Arms Control, Verification and Compliance, 'New START Treaty aggregate numbers of strategic offensive arms', Fact sheet, 1 Sep. 2022.

sabre-rattling—including President Putin's threat that any external interference would have 'such consequences that you have never encountered' and his decision in February 2022 to introduce a 'special combat duty regime' in Russia's deterrence forces.<sup>17</sup> Implementation of the treaty included data exchanges on the status of the two sides' strategic nuclear forces in March and September. In accordance with their obligations, both sides provided notification in advance of launches of treaty-accountable ballistic missiles—including in April as Russia tested its new RS-28 Sarmat (SS-X-29) system, a heavy intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) equipped with multiple independently targetable re-entry vehicles (MIRVs).<sup>18</sup>

In August 2022 Russia notified the USA that it was not ready to resume on-site inspections of its nuclear weapon-related sites. The system of verifying compliance with New START had been challenged by the Covid-19 pandemic, with on-site inspections on pause since March 2020 and an imbalanced reliance on notification exchanges and the meetings of the Bilateral Consultative Commission (BCC), the body established to address treaty compliance or implementation concerns.<sup>19</sup> In August 2022 the USA had sent notification of its intention to resume on-site inspections, leading Russia to stop the process. It cited limitations to its rights to conduct inspections on US territory linked to travel restrictions imposed by the USA in response

<sup>17</sup> 'Putin orders "special service regime" in Russia's deterrence force', TASS, 27 Feb. 2022.

<sup>18</sup> Vergun, D., 'Russia notified US of ICBM test launch', US Department of Defense, 20 Apr. 2022.

<sup>19</sup> Saalman (note 2), pp. 438–39. For a brief description of the BCC see annex B, section I, in this volume.

to Russia's actions in Ukraine, as well as Covid-19 related circumstances.<sup>20</sup> Russia observed that only with the resolution of these issues would it be 'possible to return to the full application of the verification mechanisms' under New START.<sup>21</sup> In response, the USA declared that it would not consider holding talks on a follow-up treaty until inspections resumed.<sup>22</sup> Despite this, the two sides agreed to insert text in the draft final outcome document of the 10th NPT review conference committing themselves to 'full implementation' of New START and 'to pursue negotiations in good faith on a successor framework . . . in order to achieve deeper, irreversible and verifiable reductions in their nuclear arsenals'.<sup>23</sup> However, Russia objected to the document on other grounds, preventing a consensus outcome with any such substantive content (see section II).

A session of the BCC in Cairo scheduled to begin in late November 2022 would have presented an opportunity for Russia and the USA to discuss the resumption of inspections and other implementation concerns. But Russia decided at the 'political level' and at the last minute to postpone the session, with Ryabkov later citing the situation in Ukraine while also expressing concerns about US implementation of New START.<sup>24</sup> A Russian MFA spokeswoman stressed New START's importance and expressed an expectation that the USA would create the conditions for a session in 2023 with a 'return to the full-format implementation' of treaty provisions.<sup>25</sup>

### **Engagement with China**

In recent years China has played an active role in the dialogue process among the P5, which are also the five states recognized as nuclear weapon states under the NPT.<sup>26</sup> In a press briefing on the P5 leaders' joint statement of January 2022, China expressed the need to strengthen communication

<sup>20</sup> 'Russia suspends START arms inspections over US travel curbs', Reuters, 8 Aug. 2022.

<sup>21</sup> Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'Foreign Ministry statement on the Treaty on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms', 8 Aug. 2022.

<sup>22</sup> Lindsay, J. and Lewis, S., 'US–Russia nuclear weapons inspections must resume before new arms talks, says US', Reuters, 2 Sep. 2022.

<sup>23</sup> 10th NPT review conference, 'Draft final document', NPT/CONF.2020/CRP.1/Rev.2, 25 Aug. 2022, para. 17.

<sup>24</sup> 'Russia had no choice but to nix New START treaty talks, says senior diplomat', TASS, 29 Nov. 2022; and Bugos, S., 'Russia delays meeting on New START', *Arms Control Today*, vol. 52, no. 10 (Dec. 2022).

<sup>25</sup> 'Russia expects US to attempt to organize New START commission's session in 2023', TASS, 29 Nov. 2022.

<sup>26</sup> For a summary and other details of the NPT, including the definition of nuclear weapon state, see annex A, section I, in this volume.

among the P5 on strategic stability issues.<sup>27</sup> Fu Cong, director-general of the Chinese MFA's Department of Arms Control, again rejected the idea of China becoming involved in arms control negotiations before Russia and the USA reduced their stockpiles to a level comparable to China's arsenal.<sup>28</sup> Fu also denied US claims of a significant Chinese nuclear build-up, although he acknowledged that China was taking measures to 'modernize' its arsenal as a means to achieve national security.<sup>29</sup>

In the days following the joint P5 statement, Bonnie Jenkins, the US under secretary of state for arms control and international security, indicated that the USA would continue to pursue engagement with China in both the P5 process and bilaterally, highlighting a desire to increase transparency and reduce risk and miscalculation.<sup>30</sup> She observed that the two sides were exploring pathways to start strategic stability discussions, following on from the November 2021 virtual meeting between US President Joe Biden and Chinese President Xi Jinping. At that time, the two agreed—in the words of the US national security advisor, Jake Sullivan—that they 'would look to begin to carry forward discussions on strategic stability'.<sup>31</sup> (Official statements from China were more oblique.)

In February 2022, Russian President Putin visited Beijing to take part in the opening ceremony of the Olympic Winter Games and to hold talks with President Xi. This built on two virtual meetings between the leaders in 2021.<sup>32</sup> In a joint statement dated 4 February 2022, they welcomed the P5 statement and expressed their belief that all nuclear weapon states should, among other things, 'withdraw nuclear weapons deployed abroad, eliminate the unrestricted development of global anti-ballistic missile defense (ABM) system[s], and take effective steps to reduce the risks of nuclear wars and any armed conflicts between countries with military nuclear capabilities'.<sup>33</sup> They chastised the USA for undermining strategic stability and weakening the arms control framework, citing its withdrawal from the INF Treaty and development of intermediate- and shorter-range ground-based missiles in both the Asia-Pacific and Europe. They also called for the USA to 'respond

<sup>27</sup> Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'Director-general of the Department of Arms Control of the Foreign Ministry Fu Cong holds a briefing for Chinese and foreign media on the joint statement of the leaders of the five nuclear-weapon states on preventing nuclear war', 4 Jan. 2022; and Joint statement (note 1).

<sup>28</sup> On the relative sizes of the Chinese, Russia and US nuclear forces see chapter 7, World Nuclear Forces, table 7.1 and sections I, II and V, in this volume.

<sup>29</sup> Zhao, J., 'Ministry dismisses claims of nuclear capabilities', *China Daily*, 5 Jan. 2022.

<sup>30</sup> 'US looking for ways to reduce nuclear risk with China', *Kyodo News*, 16 Jan. 2022.

<sup>31</sup> Brookings Institution, 'Readout from the Biden–Xi virtual meeting: Discussion with National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan', Webinar transcript, 16 Nov. 2021, p. 11. See also Saalman (note 2), p. 442.

<sup>32</sup> Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'President Xi Jinping had a virtual meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin', 15 Dec. 2021.

<sup>33</sup> Chinese–Russian joint statement on 'The international relations entering a new era and the global sustainable development', 4 Feb. 2022.

positively to the Russian initiative' in this respect.<sup>34</sup> In December 2022, presidents Putin and Xi held another virtual meeting to discuss the broader China–Russia strategic partnership.<sup>35</sup>

During 2022 US officials raised further alarms about the pace and scale of Chinese nuclear modernization. In March the commander of US Strategic Command, Admiral Charles Richard, described it as a 'strategic breakout'.<sup>36</sup> In September his successor, Anthony Cotton, opined in his confirmation hearing that Chinese expansion of its nuclear forces did not reflect minimal deterrence, and expressed disbelief about the size and short construction time of three new nuclear missile fields in western China.<sup>37</sup> In November a report by the US Department of Defense (DOD) assessed that China had probably accelerated its nuclear expansion, and projected that its stockpile size—estimated to surpass 400 warheads—could reach about 1500 by 2035 if expansion continued at the current pace.<sup>38</sup> The DOD report noted that China was unwilling to engage in nuclear arms control negotiations.<sup>39</sup> The public version of the 2022 US Nuclear Posture Review projects that the USA will face two strategic competitors by 2030, and observes that Chinese nuclear forces would have to be accounted for in future Russian–US arms control negotiations.<sup>40</sup>

China and the USA sought to improve bilateral relation after tensions over Taiwan were inflamed by a visit there by the speaker of the US House of Representatives, Nancy Pelosi, in August 2022 and increased Chinese military activity in the region. Their foreign ministers, Wang Yi and Antony Blinken, met in September 2022 and presidents Biden and Xi met in person for the first time at the 2022 Bali summit of the Group of 20 (G20) in November. Official summaries of the latter meeting suggest that there was only an exchange of views on broader 'issues of strategic importance', with discussion of the nuclear issue confined to Russia's actions in the context of Ukraine, as Biden reaffirmed the message in the P5 joint statement.<sup>41</sup> China, Russia and the

<sup>34</sup> Chinese–Russian joint statement (note 33).

<sup>35</sup> Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'President Xi Jinping had a virtual meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin', 30 Dec. 2022.

<sup>36</sup> Richard, C., Statement to hearing on US Strategic Command and US Space Command, US Senate, Committee on Armed Services, 8 Mar. 2022, p. 8.

<sup>37</sup> Cotton, A. J., Statement to nomination hearing, US Senate, Committee on Armed Services, 15 Sep. 2022, p. 18.

<sup>38</sup> US Department of Defense, *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2022*, Annual report to Congress (DOD: Nov. 2022), p. 94. China's stockpile is estimated to be c. 400 nuclear warheads as of Jan. 2023 in chapter 7, section V, in this volume.

<sup>39</sup> US Department of Defense (note 38), p. 97.

<sup>40</sup> US Department of Defense (DOD), *2022 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America* (DOD: Washington, DC, Oct. 2022). On the US Nuclear Posture Review see also chapter 7, section I, in this volume.

<sup>41</sup> Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'President Xi Jinping meets with US President Joe Biden in Bali', 14 Nov. 2022; and White House, 'Readout of President Joe Biden's meeting with President Xi Jinping of the People's Republic of China', 14 Nov. 2022.

USA also endorsed the leaders' declaration of the G20 summit, which states that 'the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons is inadmissible'.<sup>42</sup>

## **Conclusions**

Prospects for bilateral or multilateral nuclear arms control and strategic stability dialogue appeared dim at the end of 2022. Multilateral dialogue had been put on hold, with the P5 process reportedly limited to expert-level engagement. Russia–United States talks on a successor arms control framework had been suspended. Statements by some Russian officials indicated that resolution of some kind in Ukraine may be required before Russia will consider the resumption of that dialogue. Additionally, they suggested that the full implementation of New START—in particular, the resumption of on-site inspections and the convening of the BCC—had also become contingent on addressing the deterioration in relations as a result of the war.

Beyond the immediate effects of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, worsening relations between China and Russia on one side and the USA on the other provide significant impediments to future bilateral or multilateral nuclear arms control. There is a narrowing window of opportunity in which continuity can be ensured before the expiration of New START in 2026. Unless diplomatic trends reverse, a new and more dangerous phase in Russia–USA relations is on the horizon, one with ramifications for global arms control.

<sup>42</sup> G20 Bali summit, Leaders' declaration, 15–16 Nov. 2022, para. 4.