The New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) between the United States and Russia was signed on April 8, 2010. When it enters into force, it will limit U.S. and Russian deployed long-range nuclear forces to 1,550 warheads and 700 delivery vehicles. The treaty is a follow-on to the 1991 Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START I), which expired along with its monitoring and verification regime on December 5, 2009, and the 2002 Moscow Treaty, which has no verification measures.

One of the primary accomplishments of the new treaty is that it streamlines the verification measures from START I without sacrificing any essential information, while adding the most intrusive verification system ever implemented for counting nuclear warheads. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates testified to Congress that the formal verification assessment should find that the inspections regime in New START will give the United States all the data necessary to verify treaty compliance, while significantly reducing the complexity of the inspections process and the burden on the operators of U.S strategic forces.

The treaty adds several new provisions that significantly improve confidence in U.S. knowledge about Russia’s nuclear arsenal. For example, each country must place a unique identifier tag on each of its missiles, associated launchers, and bombers, and notify the other party when delivery vehicles are moved. This helps inspectors ensure that every delivery vehicle can be counted.

More significantly, the new treaty for the first time includes verification of actual warhead numbers, rather than simply counting delivery vehicles as carrying a pre-determined number of warheads based on maximum loading. While START I’s reentry vehicle inspections only verified that a missile did not exceed the maximum number attributed to that missile type, New START requires each party to specify the number of warheads on each individual missile, which can then be verified by inspections. This major improvement greatly increases U.S. confidence in the accuracy of data provided by Russia. Simultaneously, it eliminates the over-counting of deployed warheads that resulted from earlier counting rules. For example, the last data exchange under START I in July 2009 reported the United States as deploying over 5,900 warheads, when the Pentagon said that the number was under the 2,200 limit of the Moscow Treaty.

To verify the data provided by both countries, New START uses an updated on-site inspection regime, “exhibitions” of new or converted systems, and national technical means such as satellite surveillance. START I specified nine different types of inspections (plus additional exhibitions). New START has only two types of inspections (in addition to exhibitions): Type One inspections verify declared data at ICBM bases, submarine bases and air bases as well as the number of warheads on deployed ICBMs and SLBMs and number of nuclear armaments associated with deployed heavy bombers, and Type Two inspections verify data regarding non-deployed strategic offensive arms at other locations. However, these two types collect all of the information provided by the START I inspections, except for data that is no longer necessary to verify the treaty. (See Figure 1.)

Under the verification regime, the total number of inspections has decreased, but each one is more far-reaching—in some cases gathering information that would have required two inspections under START I. In addition, the number of Russian strategic offensive arms facilities has declined greatly since START I, meaning that fewer inspections are required to get a clear picture of Russian forces.

For example, START I allowed 28 short-notice on-site inspections per year, divided into four different types. Under New START, there are only two types of inspections, Type One and Type Two, which can be conducted ten times per year and eight times per year, respectively. However, each Type One inspection includes both a data-update and a re-entry vehicle inspection. Thus, this one inspection gathers
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In sum, the United States will be able to verify Russian compliance with New START with equal confidence than under START I. All necessary data will be gathered in a more streamlined fashion, sparing time and resources. Inspectors will make fewer but more comprehensive inspections, and will be able to inspect a greater percentage of Russian facilities per year than previously.