

## After Putin's address, Russia suspends participation in New START Treaty



Russian President Vladimir Putin speaking to the Federal Assembly yesterday.

Yesterday, President Vladimir Putin delivered his annual Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly, the national legislature of the Russian Federation which consists of the State Duma, the lower chamber, and the Federation Council, the upper chamber. The address came exactly one year after Russia's 30-member Security Council approved recognition of the independence and sovereignty of the Russian-supported "people's republics" in portions of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions in eastern Ukraine, after which Putin signed treaties of friendship, cooperation and mutual assistance with both "republics" and deployed additional troops to those areas, setting the stage for Russia's invasion three days later.

The address, which lasted for nearly two hours, dealt briefly with the current situation in Ukraine and focused for the most part on economic and social policy in the Federation. But at the end of the address, Putin turned briefly to another issue and, with one sentence, grabbed the front-page headlines of media around the world. The issue was implementation of the treaty between the U.S. and Russia on measures to reduce and limit strategic offensive arms, known as the New START Treaty. The Treaty, which was agreed in 2010 and entered into force in February 2011, gave the U.S. and Russia seven years to meet its key limits on strategic offensive arms, after which they would maintain those limits for as long as the treaty remained in force. The U.S. and Russia subsequently extended the treaty, scheduled to expire in 2021, for five more years until February 2026. The treaty limits both sides to 700 deployed intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), deployed submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs), and deployed heavy bombers equipped for nuclear armaments; 1,550 nuclear warheads on deployed ICBMs,

deployed SLBMs, and deployed heavy bombers equipped for nuclear armaments; and 800 deployed and non-deployed ICBM launchers, SLBM launchers, and heavy bombers equipped for nuclear armaments. The treaty gives both sides the right to inspect in order to verify the count of the other, but inspections have been cancelled since 2020 because of Covid and then the war.

Putin said that in early February NATO had demanded that Russia return to implementing the Treaty, including allowing inspections of its nuclear defense facilities, despite the fact, he said, that “the West is directly involved in the Kiev regime’s attempts to strike at our strategic aviation bases. The drones used for this purpose were equipped and updated with the assistance of NATO specialists. And now they want to inspect our defence facilities? In the current conditions of confrontation, it simply sounds insane. I would like to draw your attention specifically to the fact that they are not letting us conduct full-scale inspections under this treaty. Our repeated applications to inspect different facilities remain unanswered or are rejected under formal pretexts, and we cannot verify anything on the other side.”

As a result, Putin said, “I am compelled to announce today that Russia is suspending its membership in the New START Treaty. To reiterate, we are not withdrawing from the Treaty, but rather suspending our participation. Before we come back to discussing this issue, we must have a clear idea of what NATO countries such as France or Great Britain have at stake, and how we will account for their strategic arsenals, that is, the Alliance’s combined offensive capabilities.” Last night he submitted a bill suspending Russia’s participation in the Treaty and today the Duma’s Committee on International Affairs recommended its adoption, after which the Duma unanimously approved the bill. The Federation Council also approved the legislation. The legislation stipulates that resumption of Russia’s participation in the Treaty will be decided by Putin. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs subsequently said Russia will continue to abide by the quantitative limits on weapons specified in the Treaty and will continue to participate in the exchange of notifications in regard to the launch of ICBMs and SLBMs.

In regard to Ukraine, Putin reiterated the arguments he made exactly one year earlier in a televised address after the Security Council had approved recognition of the independence and sovereignty of the “people’s republics” in eastern Ukraine and he had signed treaties of friendship, cooperation and mutual assistance with both “republics.” Claiming the need to “protect the people in our historical lands, to ensure the security of our country and to eliminate the threat coming from the neo-Nazi regime that had taken hold in Ukraine after the 2014 coup, it was decided to begin the special military operation [Putin’s term for the invasion]... Since 2014, Donbass [Russian spelling] has been fighting for the right to live in their land and to speak their native tongue. It fought and never gave up amid the blockade, constant shelling and the Kiev [Russian spelling] regime’s overt hatred. It hoped and waited that Russia would come to help. In the meantime, as you know well, we were doing everything in our power to solve this problem by peaceful means, and patiently conducted talks on a peaceful solution to this devastating conflict... We were open and sincerely ready for a constructive dialogue with the West... But in response, we received either an indistinct or hypocritical reaction, as far as words were concerned. But there were also actions: NATO’s expansion to our borders, the creation of new deployment areas for missile defence in Europe and Asia... deployment of military

contingents....Finally, in December 2021, we officially submitted draft agreements on security guarantees to the USA and NATO. In essence, all key, fundamental points were rejected. After that it finally became clear that the go-ahead for the implementation of aggressive plans had been given and they were not going to stop. The threat was growing by the day. Judging by the information we received, there was no doubt that everything would be in place by February 2022 for launching yet another bloody punitive operation in Donbass. Let me remind you that back in 2014, the Kiev regime sent its artillery, tanks, and warplanes to fight in Donbass....Those who plotted a new attack against Donetsk in the Donbass region, and against Lugansk [Russian spelling] understood that Crimea and Sevastopol would be the next target. We realized this as well. Even today, Kiev is openly discussing far-reaching plans of this kind....We are defending human lives and our common home, while the West seeks unlimited power. It has already spent over \$150 billion on helping and arming the Kiev regime. ...The West is using Ukraine as a battering ram against Russia and as a testing range.... The Western elite make no secret of their goal, which is, I quote, "Russia's strategic defeat."

In the meantime, the war goes on – and Russians and Ukrainians are dying every day because of Putin's hallucinations about Ukraine.

David R. Cameron  
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