

New START Survives

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The Biden administration is pressing ahead with [extending](#) New START for the full five years allowed in the treaty:

President Biden proposed Thursday that a centerpiece U.S.-Russia nuclear arms treaty be extended for five years, a decision that marks the first major foreign policy action of his administration as he seeks to confront national security challenges while grappling with the coronavirus pandemic and economic distress at home.

Full extension of New START is the right decision, and it was really the only one that made any sense under the circumstances. The alternatives were either to let the treaty lapse or extend it for a shorter period of time, and neither of those was desirable or in the interests of the U.S. There was no time to negotiate anything beyond the extension. Russia has repeatedly said that it would commit to a five-year extension without preconditions. Keeping New START alive is a win-win for the U.S. and Russia, and it helps to stave off a new nuclear arms race for at least a few more years. The next step will be to engage Russia in further arms control negotiations to lay the groundwork for a successor treaty to take New START's place. The full five-year extension gives the Biden administration time and breathing space to do this in a responsible way instead of the last-minute shenanigans that we saw from outgoing arms control envoy Marshall Billingslea.

For the last four years, the previous administration dragged its feet and tried running out the clock on the treaty in a vain attempt to use the treaty's expiration as leverage. U.S. officials wrongly believed that they could compel Russia into making additional concessions in return for extending the treaty, but the Russians were not as desperate as these hard-liners imagined. Even now, former Trump administration officials keep boasting about the supposed leverage they had over Moscow, but this is just excuse-making for their failure to achieve anything on arms control for four years. Had the election gone the other way, New START would have ended this year and arms control as we have known it for half a century would have collapsed. The U.S., our allies, and Russia are all more secure because the treaty is going to survive.

The Russian government has [responded](#) to the U.S. offer favorably, and it appears that Moscow is just waiting on the formal proposal to arrive. Extending New START is an early, easy win for the Biden administration and the United States, and it is another reminder that elections can have very important foreign policy consequences.

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