

End of an era? What Putin's 'suspension' of the New START nuclear treaty means

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Russian President Vladimir Putin's move to suspend his country's involvement in the last remaining arms control treaty with the U.S. came as a disturbing surprise to multiple former officials who negotiated the pact and nonproliferation experts committed to ending the expansion of nuclear forces.

For more than 50 years, the U.S. and Russia — the world's two largest nuclear powers — have had some form of an agreement in place that capped their ability to produce or deploy nuclear weapons. Putin's announcement that he was suspending participation in the New START Treaty could end that era, with some of those experts debating whether this could launch another Cold War-style arms race. Tensions between the two nations over the war in Ukraine only increases those concerns.

"Putin's clearly trying to inject nuclear leverage into both Ukraine and his relationship with the United States," said Jon Wolfsthal, who helped negotiate the New START Treaty in 2009 as a member of the National Security Council. "And that should worry a lot of people."

While Putin maintained in his speech Tuesday that Russia would not be the first to use a nuclear weapon, Russia has rattled its nuclear saber multiple times since the start of the war, referencing its nuclear capabilities and threatening Ukraine's nuclear power plants with bombs and shells. Secretary of State Antony Blinken told reporters on Tuesday that the U.S. is keeping a watchful eye on how the situation develops and is open to further talks.

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