

LEARN ABOUT NUCLEAR WEAPONS

ABM – Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty

The ABM treaty was concluded in 1972 between US President Nixon and Soviet leader Brezhnev. Anti-ballistic missiles are systems to counter nuclear ballistic missile attacks. Under the treaty both states agreed to have only one ABM system on their territories. The treaty prohibits test launches, development and deployment of sea-, space- and mobile land-based ABM systems.

In 2001 the US President George W. Bush announced that the US would withdraw from the ABM treaty. In 2002 the US left the treaty, despite massive international and national protests. It was the first time the US withdrew from an international disarmament treaty. The proponents of US withdrawal argued that testing and development of a national missile shield would be necessary to protect the US from nuclear blackmailing by rogue states. Critics said withdrawal would be a significant blow to international disarmament and nonproliferation work, and would increase international tensions. SORT is partly a result from the negotiations between Russia and the US following the US withdrawal.

INF – Intermediate Nuclear Forces

The INF treaty was concluded in 1987 to eliminate US and Russian land-based intermediate- and shorter-ranges missiles. A total of up to 3,000 missile systems were destroyed and Europe was freed from the most immediate nuclear threat, even if the INF treaty did not include tactical nuclear weapons. The treaty further included only elimination of the missiles and not the nuclear warheads, which meant warheads could be kept for use in other permitted systems.¹ In 1991, under the leadership of President George H. W. Bush, the US withdrew all its nuclear weapons from South Korea as a means of implementing the INF treaty.

SALT I and II – Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty I and II

SALT I (1972) and SALT II (1979) were two rounds of negotiations between the Soviet Union and the US in order to create limitations in both states' strategic nuclear arsenals. SALT I resulted among other things, in regulating submarine-launched ballistic missiles. Negotiations on SALT II resulted in an agreement on increased limits on intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs), and heavy bombers. Other limits were placed on multiple re-entry vehicles and bombers with intermediate-range missiles. SALT II was to remain in effect through 1985, but the US Senate, due to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, never ratified it. Both states still kept to the agreements under the treaty.²

START I – Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty I

Following ten years of tortuous negotiations, START I was signed by the US and the Soviet Union

in July 1991. Only five months later the Soviet union fell apart, resulting in four independent states with Soviet nuclear weapons at their territories: Russia, Kazakhstan, Ukraine, and Belarus. In May 1992 the new states signed an Additional Protocol to START I. The treaty was not ratified until December 1994, when all nuclear weapons had been removed from Kazakhstan, Ukraine and Belarus and all three states had signed the NPT as non-nuclear weapon states.

START I demands reductions in the strategic nuclear arsenals of the US and Russia in silos, bombers, and submarines. SALT I prohibits both states from deploying more than 6,000 nuclear warheads on a total of 1,600 delivery systems, and the ballistic missile throw-weight (lifting power) is limited to 3,600 metric tons. START I has been implemented: in 2001 the former Soviet and US arsenals were reduced by 30-40 %.³

Presidential Nuclear Initiative

In September and October 1991, US President George H.W. Bush and Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev announced a series of policy initiatives declaring that the United States and the Soviet Union—and later Russia—would reduce their arsenals of tactical nuclear weapons (TNW) and delivery vehicles. Russian President Boris Yeltsin reaffirmed and somewhat expanded Gorbachev's statement in the name of the newly independent Russia in January 1992. These initiatives have become known as the Presidential Nuclear Initiatives (PNI). The PNIs were “reciprocal unilateral commitments,” meaning that they are politically, not legally, binding, and are non-verifiable. The PNIs led to perhaps 17,000 TNWs being withdrawn from service, the deepest reductions in nuclear arsenals to date.

START II – Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty II

US President George Bush and Russian President Boris Yeltsin signed the second Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty in 1993. The treaty limits their strategic arsenals to 3,000-3,500 warheads on delivery systems (tactical weapons and spares are not included in the counts). It also prohibits multiple re-entry vehicles (MIRVs) on intercontinental ballistic missiles, and limits the number of warheads deployable on submarine-launched ballistic missiles to 1,700-1,750.⁴

START II has not entered into force: when the US withdrew from the ABM Treaty in 2002, Russia declared START null and void the following day. It was replaced by the much weaker SORT in 2002.⁵

START III – Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty III

Discussions began between the US and Russia in 2007 to further reduce nuclear arsenals to 2,000-2,500 each, though it is unlikely negotiations will begin, as Russia withdrew from START II in 2002 and SORT was signed in May 2002. SORT does not, however, address strategic nuclear warhead destruction or tactical nuclear weapons limits, both groundbreaking arms control measures that were suggested for inclusion in START III.⁶

SORT – Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty

The May 2002 Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty (SORT), also known as the Moscow Treaty, commits the United States and Russia to reduce their deployed strategic nuclear forces to 1,700-2,200 warheads apiece. This warhead limit takes effect and expires on the same day, December 31, 2012. After this date, both sides are free to decrease or increase the size of their deployed strategic forces. Unlike past strategic arms control agreements between Moscow and Washington, SORT

does not specify which warheads are to be reduced or how reductions should be made. No warheads or delivery vehicle must be destroyed under the accord. Past strategic treaties spelled out precise destruction obligations and processes for eliminating delivery vehicles to ensure that “reduced” warheads could not be quickly redeployed. Basically, this means the US and Russia could just remove the warheads from the missiles, keep all missiles, and store the warheads in a reserve – ready to be re-assembled at any time.

The treaty also does not regulate or constrain how deployed warheads are fielded. “Each party shall determine for itself the composition and structure of its strategic offensive arms,” the treaty declares. In effect, this means the United States and Russia can continue deploying multiple warheads on a single ICBM—a configuration banned by the 1993 START II accord that never entered into force.

SORT has no provisions for assessing compliance. The Bush administration argued against such provisions, citing improved U.S.-Russian relations. Instead, the two sides said they would rely on the 1991 START verification regime for verifying implementation. However, START I expires December 5, 2009, three years before the SORT limit takes effect. Both states can withdraw from the treaty with one month's notice. Unlike most arms control treaties, the withdrawing party does not have to justify its action.⁷

SORT has jokingly been called the “SORT of treaty” due to its vague language and lack of verification provisions: “We're sort of gonna try to disarm and sort of find some kind of way of keeping track of how...” The fact that a treaty this vague and weak was all the world's two major nuclear players could negotiate does not exactly increase the impression that their commitment to total elimination of all nuclear weapons, as stated in Article 6 of the NPT, is a serious undertaking.

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- 1 <http://www.fas.org/nuke/control/inf/text/inf.htm>
 - 2 <http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1B1-377584.html>
 - 3 <http://www.fas.org/nuke/control/start1/index.html>
 - 4 <http://www.fas.org/nuke/control/start2/index.html>
 - 5 <http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/legal/treaties.html>
 - 6 <http://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/start3.asp>
 - 7 <http://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/sort-glance.asp>