

Responding Wisely to a New START to Putin's Aggression

The Headline

Late last month, Russian President Vladimir Putin [announced](#) during his annual address that Moscow “is halting its participation in the New START deal.” New START, a treaty signed back in 2010 by President Obama and then-Russian President Medvedev, limits the number of deployed nuclear weapons and ICBMs fielded by Russia and the United States and allows short-notice inspections and other transparency measures to ensure compliance. This comes as Russia continues its nuclear saber rattling in the midst of its imperialist invasion of Ukraine, which recently reached its one-year mark as we [discussed](#) here at The Debrief.

President Biden has taken steps to ensure that Putin's move does not kick off an escalation spiral. Calling the decision a “big mistake,” Biden has smartly kept the door open for Russia to return to compliance with the treaty. This is a must for U.S. policy moving forward, as a tit-for-tat in the nuclear realm will have no winner. The US and Russia have the two largest nuclear stockpiles in the world by far, and mutual cooperation to reduce those stockpiles has long been a source of hope that humanity might find a way out of the nuclear bind it has created. There is nothing fundamental preventing a return to that cooperation.

Still, the dangers of Putin's move cannot be downplayed. As our friends at Global Zero [explained](#), “this way lies madness” and the only word that can describe Putin's move is “reckless.” Every time Putin casually dismantles a piece of US-Russia nuclear arms control cooperation, the future of international arms control and nuclear risk reduction becomes more bleak. The fact that Russia is losing on the battlefield in eastern Ukraine makes the unpredictability of Putin's next step an even scarier prospect than this withdrawal would have been on its own.

What's next: Congress, and progressives in particular, must continue to be vocal in support of arms control diplomacy. Hawks have already begun to call on Biden to escalate by withdrawing from New START entirely. Indeed, John Bolton, the diplomacy Grinch himself, actually [praised](#) Putin's move, because dismantling vital arms control agreements is one of Bolton's lifelong passions. But when John Bolton is against something, you can feel good about being for it. The benefits of New START are mutual and global, and the path to a diplomatic return must remain open, even for a cruel authoritarian like Putin.

The Happenings

March 12th, 5:00 PM ET (in-person, DC): “Book Talk: Six Stops on the National Security Tour with Miriam Pemberton,” [Institute for Policy Studies \(IPS\)](#)

March 13th, 7:00 PM ET: “Myanmar's civil war: Military, political, and crime dynamics,” [Brookings Institution](#)

March 14th, 3:00 PM ET: “The IAEA Mission in Ukraine: A Conversation with Director General Rafael Mariano Grossi,” [Center for Strategic and International Studies \(CSIS\)](#)

The Spotlight

In today’s spotlight, we interview Julia Gledhill, [Defense Analyst](#) at Project On Government Oversight (POGO). You can follow her on Twitter [here](#).

1): What was the first moment you realized you were interested in U.S. foreign policy? Do you have any lessons learned for students or those just starting in a similar career path?

It’s hard to say if there was a specific moment, but my love for language learning sparked my interest in the world, and my country’s place in it. Before I fully understood the scope of the Global War On Terror or the boundlessness of the Pentagon budget, I loved Spanish class. It exposed me to different cultures and global perspectives in a way that growing up in the 9/11 generation did not. By the time I graduated high school, I had a few years of Mandarin Chinese under my belt, too – which had me questioning U.S. narratives on China – among other things – including U.S. involvement in what was then the beginning of a long civil war in Yemen.

Regardless of what sparks your interest in foreign policy, my advice to students and young professionals alike is to stoke a fire in your belly. Write a thesis if you have the opportunity. Ask your boss to lead on an advocacy issue you care about. Whatever it is that excites you, angers you, or confounds you about U.S. foreign policy – hang onto that, and don’t let the incrementalism of policy work dampen your vision for a better future.

2): What is one thing you wish was better or more widely understood about the Pentagon budget?

I wish people understood how much corporations shape the Pentagon budget. Everyone knows it’s huge, but I’m not sure it’s clear that corporations successfully convince Congress to routinely and arbitrarily increase the Pentagon budget by tens of billions of dollars beyond what even the Pentagon requests. In other words, I wish there was broader understanding of the extent to which Congress prioritizes corporate profitability in the Pentagon budget.

This level of corporate power is, of course, nothing new in the United States. But it’s a lot more tangible when – for example – pharmaceutical companies price gouge people and then turn around and lobby Congress to do nothing about it. I think it’s harder to wrap our heads around how weapon makers do this because they don’t produce anything the average person actually needs or wants. So, all the corporate debauchery in the “defense” world is conveniently veiled under “national security,” which is completely amorphous compared to unaffordable prescriptions.

3): In a [recent piece](#) in the LA Progressive, you and Quincy Institute’s Bill Hartung explain “requiring crucial information about a program before proceeding to its development stage should be a no-brainer. Yet the Pentagon has wasted untold billions of dollars on ill-functioning weaponry.” You go on to explain reforms that would help - have you seen progress in Congress? What kind of arguments have worked in convincing members?

Unfortunately, we haven't seen Congress give Pentagon waste the level of attention it deserves. Crappy weapons do nothing but further enrich their manufacturers – corporations that pocket even more taxpayer dollars trying to fix them. But preventing wasteful spending on ill-functioning weaponry requires the Pentagon to be a smarter buyer, which threatens corporate profitability. Congress is therefore generally unwilling to make the bold reforms necessary to eliminate and prevent Pentagon waste – Congress is simply too captured by private industry, for several reasons.

But there is still a growing number of lawmakers interested in cutting Pentagon waste. Progressives dominate, but there are more conservative lawmakers purportedly committed to tightening Congress' purse strings in favor of a leaner and more effective Pentagon budget. Ultimately, everyone agrees that taxpayers deserve more accountable Pentagon spending. We're footing the bill and getting little in return, after all.

Buried Ledes

[After seven years without formal diplomatic relations, Iran and Saudi Arabia agreed to reopen embassies in one another's countries.](#) The agreement comes after multiple rounds of negotiations between the two Persian Gulf states in Iraq and Oman. However, the agreement came to fruition in Beijing, with China helping to push the negotiations past the finish line.

[The Biden administration has released Guantanamo Bay detainee Ghassan Abdullah al-Sharbi.](#) . He had been held at the infamous military detention center for more than two decades. 31 detainees remain at Guantanamo, 17 of them having never been charged with a crime. The 17 are approved for release, but need the Biden administration to negotiate agreements with other countries to take them in.

[Indonesia is moving its capital from Jakarta to a new city on Borneo Island.](#) The new city will be called "Nusantara" and it will be announced officially in the first half of 2024. The capital is envisioned as a green city covering over 642,000 acres. Nusantara comes with a \$32 billion price tag, so the government has released an incentives package to increase investment with major tax relief for investing corporations.

[Seoul is adding a spokeless Ferris wheel to its skyline, set to be open in 2027.](#) The wheel's location, in Haneul Park in northeastern Seoul, was chosen for its proximity to the border with North Korea, as the wheel will symbolize the pursuit of a unified Korea in the form of a national unity ring. Currently, the largest spokeless Ferris wheel is in Shandong, China measuring 475 feet high. Seoul's will reach 591 feet.

The 95th annual Oscars will be held this upcoming Sunday. If you've ever wondered why it's called the Oscars - [no one exactly knows!](#) The International category will feature films from Germany (All Quiet on the Western Front), Argentina (Argentina, 1985), Belgium (Close), Poland (EO), and Ireland (The Quiet Girl). Unfortunately, it appears that no film from Asia or Africa is represented in the category. I guess the [Academy's new "crisis team"](#) won't cover the lack of representation.

Mike Check!

A new GOP-led House means a Congress in which Congressmen named Michael [outnumber](#) women as committee chairs. Here's Mike Check, an occasional series dedicated to keeping track of what the Mikes are doing with all that power.

Today, we have Wisconsin Republican congressman **Mike** Gallagher, who started off the first hearing as chair of the elegantly named Select Committee on Strategic Competition between the United States and the Chinese Communist Party by declaring the U.S. relationship with China to be “an existential struggle over what life will look like in the 21st century.” It’s unsurprising rhetoric from a guy who is on record yearning for a “new Cold War” between the U.S. and China, but hardly inspiring stuff, given the terrible consequences of the previous shadow conflict among global powers on people across the world. We’ll struggle if, when faced with the global challenges of the 21st century, our leaders can’t think of a response more creative than repeating the horrors of the 20th.

New START was signed between the U.S. and Russia in 2010. When was the original START signed?

- A. 1979
- B. 1984
- C. 1991 (CORRECT)
- D. 1994