

# **Fact sheet: Comparison of US–Russia nuclear reduction treaties**

Matt Rivers

BASIC Notes, 8 July 2002



British American Security  
Information Council

The Strategic Offensive Reduction Treaty (SORT) signed by Washington and Moscow on May 24, 2002 appears to be a move in the right direction at first glance, but when compared with previous US–Russia nuclear reduction treaties it is a missed opportunity for international security and nuclear disarmament. SORT contains nominal reductions at best. The treaty limits deployed strategic warheads to 1,700-2,200, but it has no timeline for implementation and allows each side to take its weapons out of storage on the first day of 2013. SORT does not call for the elimination of any warheads or delivery vehicles and does not include short-range tactical weapons.

President Bush was correct when he stated that this treaty would “liquidate the legacy of the Cold War.” SORT single-handedly diminishes the value of past US–Russian arms control agreements by failing to build on the foundation of its predecessors. Fundamental differences separate SORT from previous US–Russia nuclear reduction treaties on what is being reduced, the form reductions take, the timetable for implementation, and the lifespan of the reductions.

## **General Limits & Restrictions (Timetable for Implementation)**

SORT (signed May 24, 2002)

- Limits deployed strategic warheads to 1,700-2,200 over 10 years

The treaty contains no provisions for limiting delivery vehicles and provides no timetable for carrying out the reductions other than the implementation deadline, which is also the expiration date of the treaty. The treaty does not call for the destruction of any nuclear warheads, allowing them to be retained in storage as a responsive or ‘hedge’ force. SORT falls significantly short of the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaties (START) by failing to even limit the number of delivery vehicles.

Setting no limitations on the number of delivery vehicles allowed and the storage of warheads removed from deployed status will make the reductions under SORT easily reversible in the future.

START I (signed July 31, 1991, entered into force December 5, 1994)

- Limited deployed delivery vehicles to 1,600 over 7 years
- Limited deployed strategic warheads to 6,000 over 7 years

In addition to setting limitations on the number of deployed warheads and their delivery vehicles, START I destroyed all ground-launched intermediate range ballistic missiles and prohibited the modernization and replacement of heavy Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs) and Sea-Launched Ballistic Missiles (SLBMs). The reductions took place in three phases over a seven year period concluding on December 5, 2001, but the treaty extends until December 5, 2009 to keep each side from immediately reversing the reductions.

START II (signed January 3, 1993, never entered into force)

- Would have limited deployed strategic warheads to 3,000-3,500 over 7 years

The number of delivery vehicles were not limited, but all heavy ICBMs and their respective launchers were taken off alert in the treaty. START II also banned the practice of arming land-based missiles with Multiple Independently targeted Re-entry Vehicles (MIRVs). The reductions were set to take place in two phases over a seven year period after the treaty entered into force. Unfortunately, the treaty was never ratified by both countries, and Russia withdrew from its START II commitment following the US withdrawal from the ABM treaty on June 13, 2002.

START III (negotiations were supposed to begin after the entry into force of START II)

- Would have limited deployed strategic warheads to 2,000-2,500

The treaty framework, set by Presidents Bill Clinton and Boris Yeltsin in 1997, called for the destruction of delivery vehicles and even considered the destruction of strategic nuclear warheads.

## Counting Rules

SORT – Contains no specific counting provisions within the text of the treaty. Only operationally deployed warheads are counted; therefore, warheads removed from active service and put into storage and warheads on delivery vehicles undergoing repair will not count towards the ceiling. The weak counting rules in SORT compared to the regulations in the START treaties will allow many more weapons to remain at each country's disposal by placing them on de-alerted status.

START I – Contains specific counting provisions for counting both delivery devices and warheads (see Article III of the treaty text).

START II – Contains specific counting provisions based on START I.

## Verification/Transparency Measures

SORT – The only verification measure included in the brief treaty is an agreement to hold meetings at least twice a year of a Bilateral Implementation Commission to deal with issues of compliance. Other verification/transparency measures may emerge during the ratification process currently underway in the Senate and Duma.

START I – Employs national technical means of verification. Each party agreed not to use concealment measures, and to ensure compliance each has the right to conduct on-site inspections and continuous monitoring activities. The treaty also created a Joint Compliance and Inspection Committee to deal with the issues of verification and oversee the implementation of the treaty.

START II – Presented the same verifications provisions as START I with the addition of a Bilateral Implementation Commission to deal with issues of compliance.

## Withdrawal Clause

SORT – Each party, in exercising its national sovereignty, may withdraw from the treaty with just three months, written notice to the other party. The withdrawal clause in SORT greatly differs from the clause in START on the grounds for removal; “exercising national sovereignty” allows a party to withdraw merely if they want to, whereas “extraordinary events having jeopardized supreme interests” displays a need for withdrawal.

START I – Each party may withdraw from the treaty six months after submitting a notice to the other party. The notice should include “a statement of the extraordinary events the notifying party regards as having jeopardized its supreme interests.”

START II – Contained the same withdrawal clause as START I.

## Concessions Made in the SORT Treaty

Both the United States and Russia were forced to compromise on several issues in the negotiation process, but the treaty text heavily favors American interests. President Putin conceded to the Bush administration on his two issues of major concern.

- Russia was forced to abandon the START counting rules they hoped to retain and concede to the US counting system. However, the US system is to have no system at all, allowing downloaded weapons to count as reductions.
- President Putin wanted an irreversible treaty resulting in the destruction of delivery vehicles and warheads, but he was persuaded to sign an easily reversible treaty that opted for storage, allowing the US to maintain a hedge force that could be re-deployed quickly should any future threat arise.

The Russians received little in return from the United States, making it a rather one-sided agreement.

- The ban imposed on MIRVs was lifted due to the collapse of the START II treaty.

This is dangerous because MIRVs can cause leaders to act hastily when faced with the decision to “use or lose” missiles armed with multiple warheads.

- President Bush agreed to a “legally binding” treaty rather than the “handshake” agreement he desired. It was important for President Putin to get the Bush administration to agree to a treaty both to appease Russian hardliners and to acquire the ensuing economic benefits.

## **SORT Ratification Process (Estimated Timeline)**

### **Senate**

- Resolution of Ratification must pass by a 2/3 vote in the Senate; individual provisions require a simple majority

July - Six hearings will take place throughout the month. Hearings in front of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee will include the Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and reports from the Senate Armed Services and Intelligence Committees.

August – Senate Foreign Relations Committee staff will draw up a Resolution of Ratification based on the July testimony.

September – Senate Foreign Relations Committee mark-up.

October – the Resolution of Ratification should reach the Senate floor for debate.

### **Duma**

- Law of ratification must be passed by the State Duma, approved by the Federation Council, and signed by the President.

President Putin is set to submit the treaty for ratification by late June or early July and the lower house of parliament will then consider a draft of a document outlining members’ general position on the treaty. The treaty is expected to win approval in the State Duma and could be ratified before the completion of the calendar year.

SORT will enter into force the day both countries instruments of ratification are exchanged.

## **What’s Missing?**

- Tactical nuclear weapons have not been addressed in any of the US–Russian treaties to date

Russian tactical nuclear weapons are of great concern in the new age of terrorism because they are inadequately secured and could fall into the wrong hands. Tactical weapons pose a major security threat and should be considered in any future negotiations. For further information see article in the Boston Globe.

