

A good START

by [David Cortright](#) in the [June 28, 2011](#) issue

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The New START treaty between the U.S. and Russia, which went into effect last February, lowers the number of permitted nuclear warheads by approximately 30 percent, to about 1,550 each. That is still too many in the minds of many disarmament advocates, but it is an important step toward further reduction of nuclear stockpiles, which during the height of the cold war numbered 30,000 weapons or more on each side.

Even more important than the reduced numbers are the treaty's provisions for renewed monitoring and inspections in each country, a process that began in April. The inspections are vital to creating mutual confidence and building trust between the nuclear establishments of these two countries, which together possess more than 90 percent of the world's nuclear weapons and which must cooperate in reducing global nuclear dangers.

The New START treaty is part of a historic U.S. initiative, supported by the other recognized nuclear weapons states (Russia, the United Kingdom, France and China), to move the world closer to the goal of a nuclear-weapons-free future. In April 2009 President Obama gave a major address in Prague declaring the U.S. commitment to "take concrete steps toward a world without nuclear weapons." He vowed to "reduce the role of nuclear weapons in our national security strategy and urge others to do the same." A few months later in September 2009 Obama convened a meeting of heads of states at the UN Security Council who unanimously adopted a resolution committing the assembled presidents and prime ministers to "creating conditions for a world without nuclear weapons" and strengthening policies for preventing the smuggling, financing and theft of proliferation-related nuclear materials.

In April 2010 the president convened the first-ever Nuclear Security Summit in Washington, D.C., attended by delegations from 46 countries, 38 of which were represented by heads of state. It was an extraordinary gathering of leaders from nearly every nuclear-capable country in the world. The summit produced a joint

statement affirming the need for global action to secure nuclear facilities and prevent proliferation. The meeting also featured a number of side agreements in which various states announced steps to lower stockpiles of highly enriched uranium and contribute toward a global fuel bank that would reduce the need for national enrichment programs.