

Russia suspends participation in New START nuclear arms control treaty as US prepares expansion of Ukraine war

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In an address to the Federal Assembly on February 21, Russian President Vladimir Putin announced that Russia would suspend its participation in the 2011 New START nuclear arms controls treaty. The treaty, which provided for a 50 percent reduction of the number of strategic nuclear missile launchers and a bilateral inspections regime, was the last remaining arms control treaty that was active between Russia and the US, the world's two largest nuclear powers.

Defending his decision, Putin pointed out that NATO had de facto posed an ultimatum to Moscow earlier in February, demanding that Russia allow the US to resume nuclear arms inspections as part of the Treaty. Putin said, "We know that the West is directly implicated in attempts by the Kiev regime to strike our strategic aviation bases. The drones that are used for these attacks were equipped and upgraded with the help of NATO experts. And now they want to also inspect our defense objects? Under the current conditions of today's conflict, this simply sounds like nonsense."

Putin also stated that the Russian Ministry of Defense and Rosatom "should ensure their readiness for the testing of Russia's nuclear weapons. We will of course not be the first ones to do so, but if the US will conduct tests, then we will conduct them too. No one should have the dangerous illusion that the global strategic parity [in nuclear arsenal] can be destroyed."

Putin's speech, while scheduled weeks in advance, came just hours after President Joe Biden completed a highly provocative tour of Kiev, where he met with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and pledged that the US, which has spent tens of billions of dollars on the Ukrainian army over the past year alone, was committed to the war "as long as it takes."

Coming just a few days before the first-year anniversary

of the beginning of the war, Biden's visit left no doubt about the character of this war: it is a war waged by NATO against Russia, in which the NATO-directed and armed Ukrainian armed forces are but a proxy. With widespread concerns about the crisis-ridden state of the Ukrainian army, one year into the war, Washington signaled with Biden's visit that it is prepared to fund and continue the war against Russia, come what may.

Given the extraordinarily provocative character of Biden's visit, Putin's speech underscored, above all, the utterly bankrupt basis upon which the Russian oligarchy has conducted this war. Putin spent much of the speech lamenting the fact that NATO and the US, which he again called "our partners", had continued to expand to Russia's borders and prepared for war despite the constant efforts by the Russian oligarchs to find a compromise and basis for collaboration.

Having emerged out of the Soviet bureaucracy's nationalist betrayal of the October revolution, which culminated in the 1991 destruction of the Soviet Union, the Putin regime invaded Ukraine last year, basing itself on the bankrupt conception that the war would force the imperialist powers to negotiate with the Russian oligarchs. But instead, the invasion was seen as a gift by the imperialist powers, which have long sought to provoke this war, and have since used every opportunity to escalate and expand it, determined to bring about the complete defeat of Russia and thus facilitate a regime change operation in Moscow and the break-up of the country.

The Kremlin, which was not prepared for a protracted war, has since scrambled to hold on even to the territories occupied in the first weeks of the war. With a new offensive now underway, involving tens of thousands of newly mobilized soldiers, territorial gains by Russia have

remained minimal. Meanwhile, casualties on both sides are horrifyingly high, with estimates putting the number of dead and wounded among both the Russian and Ukrainian army in the hundreds of thousands.

In an indication that the years-long economic war by the imperialist powers against Russia, which was dramatically escalated over the past year, is taking a severe toll on the population, for about half of his speech Putin engaged in social and nationalist demagogy. As a result of the sanctions war, entire branches of industry that were closely integrated into the world economy, most notably auto, have been left in shambles, and Russia has been cut off almost entirely from the semiconductor industry, which is critical to the functioning of any modern economy (and army). Yet Putin painted a picture of an economy that had successfully weathered a supposedly only minor crisis and was now preparing to come back stronger than ever. He also tried, yet again, to present himself as an enemy of the oligarchs, despite the fact that his entire regime is dedicated to the defense of this criminal ruling class.

However, Putin's main strategy, to diffuse and disorient popular discontent, consists in the promotion of the worst traditions of Great Russian chauvinism. As in previous speeches, he quoted the Tsarist official Pyotr Stolypin, who said, "In the defense of Russia, we must all join together, coordinate our efforts, our duties, and our rights to uphold one supreme historical right — the right of Russia to be strong."

Whatever the reactionary combination of complaints about and appeals to the imperialist powers, and efforts to whip up nationalism on the part of the oligarchic Putin regime, NATO and the US continue to work to rapidly escalate and expand the war.

In a 20-minute speech also on Tuesday in Poland's capital Warsaw, Biden largely repeated the same war propaganda that has been coming out of the White House and its affiliated news media for the past year: he denounced "Putin's war," praised the "patriots" and "heroes" that are "defending Ukraine" — a substantial layer of which are outright neo-Nazis — and insisted that "democracies" would stand united in the fight against "autocracy".

The nauseating hypocrisy of Biden's speech was underscored by the very setting in which it was given: Biden spoke at the invitation of Poland's ruling far-right Law and Justice party (PiS), which has played a central role in the NATO offensive against Russia, and is infested with fascist and anti-Semitic elements. In its almost eight

years of rule, PiS has banned free speech on and research about the role of Polish anti-Semitism in the Nazi-led Holocaust, effectively abolished the right to abortion and an independent judiciary, and has clamped down on the rights of LGBTQ+ people.

Perhaps the most significant aspect of Biden's speech was his open appeal to the Polish nationalist and anti-Communist right, the pro-NATO opposition in Belarus, and the pro-NATO government in Moldova. Biden praised the "brave leaders of the opposition and the people of Belarus", meaning the NATO-backed opposition around Svetlana Tikhonovskaya. As in Russia and other former Soviet countries, the US has been working to bring about a regime change in Belarus. Ruled by the authoritarian dictator Alexander Lukashenko, Belarus is now the only remaining ally of Russia in Eastern Europe and on the verge of being fully dragged into the war in Ukraine.

Biden also stressed the role of Moldova, a tiny country of 3.6 million, sandwiched between NATO-member Romania and Ukraine. A portion of Moldova that borders Ukraine, Transnistria, is ruled by Russian-backed separatists and hosts 1,500 Russian troops. The country has long claimed a constitutionally enshrined neutral status. However, under its current President Maia Sandu, Moldova has sided with NATO in the war against Russia. The Sandu government is now openly discussing membership in NATO, despite warnings by the Kremlin that Russia would respond militarily to such an alignment. Sandu was present during Biden's speech in Warsaw and the US President praised her, "I'm proud to stand with you and the freedom-loving people of Moldova. Give her a round of applause."

Behind the smokescreen of rhetoric about "democracy" and "liberty", the imperialist powers, basing themselves largely on fascist and ultra-nationalist forces, are preparing an escalation and geographic expansion of the war in Ukraine, which threatens to soon engulf all of Eastern Europe and could result in a nuclear catastrophe.



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