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NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE COUNCIL

MEMORANDUM

12 August 2022 | NICM 2022-17481

[redacted] Nuclear Arms Control Takes Back Seat to the War in Ukraine for Russia

(U) Key Takeaway

[redacted] ***Scope Note:*** *This memo responds to a request* [redacted] *for an updated assessment of the value that Russia attaches to nuclear arms control, especially in the light of the ongoing war in Ukraine.*

[redacted] We assess Russia probably still values strategic nuclear arms control as a means to constrain the United States. Moscow's suspension in August of New START Treaty (NST)-authorized US inspections in Russia probably was because of its frustrations with US efforts to provide military and intelligence support to Ukraine.

[redacted] We assess that Russia probably is not preparing to abandon the treaty, which it still values because of its role in constraining US strategic forces and helping Moscow retain strategic parity with Washington. Rather, it most likely is trying to retain decision space in the future based on the trajectory of the conflict in Ukraine. As such, the outcome of the fighting in Ukraine—and the continued role of the United States in helping Ukraine—probably will color Russian officials' views of the utility of the NST and the broader arms control relationship.

[redacted] At the same time, we assess that Russian officials probably still see value in preserving the last remaining platform for strategic arms control between the two premier nuclear powers and could resume inspections when they believe conditions have improved.

[redacted] Russia probably still sees value in strategic nuclear arms control as a means to constrain the United States and probably is not considering withdrawing from the NST. At the same time, it is setting itself up for a range of response options as the war in Ukraine continues. The ongoing conflict has almost certainly hardened Russia's stance on strategic stability issues writ large [redacted]

- [redacted] The Kremlin probably believes that citing logistical challenges such as concerns over COVID-19 and overflight restrictions will allow it to continue stalling US inspections in Russia allowed under NST until it accomplishes its objectives in Ukraine and enables it to paint the United States as at fault for not addressing its concerns related to the treaty, [redacted]
- [redacted]

[redacted] We assess that Moscow's decision to suspend NST inspections indicates that they are not

(U) *This memorandum was prepared under the auspices of the National Intelligence Officer (NIO) for WMD & Proliferation.* [redacted]

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[redacted]

interested in negotiating with the United States on strategic stability issues in the near term, [redacted]. We assess that Moscow could return to inspections and talks when conditions change.

- [redacted] Russian officials have accused the United States of being a party to the conflict in Ukraine and believe that the United States wants to cripple Russia militarily, [redacted].

- [redacted] We assess that Russia's growing frustration over US support to Ukraine, skepticism about the value of diplomacy with the United States, cynicism that Washington is trying to use issues on NST resumption to show Moscow as uncooperative, and uncertainty about its ability to logistically support inspections amid sanctions and restrictions on Russian aircraft probably were factors in Russia's decision to delay NST inspections, [redacted].

- [redacted] Moscow may believe that denying NST inspections is a useful way to convey its frustrations with the US role in the war.

[redacted] Looking ahead, the status of the conflict in Ukraine—particularly the role of the United States in helping Ukraine—probably will color Russian officials' views of the utility of the NST and the broader arms control relationship. If Moscow continues to blame the United States for its own failings on the battlefield, then its willingness to work through NST implementation issues or negotiate future agreements may erode.

- [redacted] Russia's invasion, the unity and strong reaction of NATO, and the probable accession of Finland and Sweden to the Alliance have intensified Russia's security concerns, judging from [redacted] Russian officials' public statements. As a result, Moscow may reevaluate aspects of its arms control relationship with the United States against what it perceives to be increasing NATO and US military aggression.

- [redacted] If and when Strategic Stability Dialogue engagements resume, [redacted]

- [redacted] Nonetheless, Russian officials probably still see value in preserving the last remaining platform for strategic arms control between the two premier nuclear powers and could resume inspections when they believe that conditions have improved. Historically, Russia has valued arms control as improving predictability and reducing the risk of an arms race, and have recognized that the economic drain of the Cold War arms race contributed to the Soviet Union's collapse, based on their past public statements.

- [redacted] We have long assessed that Russian officials hailed the NST as "the gold standard" of arms control treaties because it established nuclear parity with the United States and demonstrated Russia as an indispensable partner on international security. Russia has raised concerns about US implementation of the NST over the years, but we assess that none of those issues rise to the level of concern that would lead Moscow to try to use the inspection suspension as leverage to gain US concessions.

[redacted]