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WORLD

Putin Suspends Nuclear-Arms Treaty Between Russia, U.S.

Russian leader vows to continue with military campaign in Ukraine

By *Ann M. Simmons* [Follow](#)

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MOSCOW—Russian President Vladimir Putin said Moscow would suspend its participation in the last remaining major nuclear-arms-control treaty between the U.S. and Russia, and vowed to continue the military campaign in Ukraine as the diplomatic gap between Moscow and the West widened.

He also said that if the U.S. were to test new types of nuclear weapons, Russia would do the same.

Mr. Putin's remarks on the New Start treaty came during a wide-ranging state-of-the-nation address to Russia's federal legislature in Moscow on Tuesday ahead of the Feb. 24 anniversary of the beginning of the invasion. He again blamed the West for provoking what he calls the "special military operation" in Ukraine.

President Biden is scheduled to give a speech later Tuesday in Poland, a day after offering continuing U.S. support to Ukraine during a visit to Kyiv.

Live Q&A

Russia's War in Ukraine: One Year Anniversary

As the one year anniversary of the war in Ukraine approaches, join us today at 1 p.m. ET, for a discussion with WSJ world coverage chief Gordon Fairclough and chief foreign-affairs correspondent Yaroslav Trofimov about what lies ahead in year two of the war.

"They want to deal us a strategic defeat and are meddling with our nuclear facilities. In this context, I have to declare today that Russia is suspending its participation in the Treaty on Strategic Offensive Arms," Mr. Putin told lawmakers from both houses of the Russian parliament gathered inside Gostiny Dvor hall near Red Square.

The U.S. State Department in a report sent to Congress last month

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concluded that Russia had already
violated the New Start treaty to cut
long-range nuclear arms by refusing
to allow on-site inspections and
rebuffing Washington's requests to
discuss its compliance concerns. It

was the first time the U.S. had accused Russia of violating the treaty, which came into force in 2011, and came amid worsening tensions between Washington and Moscow over the war in Ukraine.

The Biden administration had been eager to preserve the New Start treaty and had pressed Russia to correct the violations.

Responding to Mr. Putin's speech, Secretary of State Antony Blinken told reporters in Athens that the Russian leader's decision "is both really unfortunate and very irresponsible."

"But of course, we remain ready to talk about strategic arms limitations at any time with Russia, irrespective of anything else going on in the world or in our relationship," he said. "I think it matters that we continue to act responsibly in this area."

operation in Ukraine.

PHOTO: ALEXEY PAVLISHAK/REUTERS

Jens Stoltenberg, secretary-general of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, said he regretted Mr. Putin's move. "With today's decision on New Start, the whole arms-control architecture has been dismantled," he said. "I strongly encourage Russia to reconsider its decision and to respect existing agreements."

Sergei Markov, director of the pro-Kremlin Institute for Political Studies, said Moscow's move wouldn't likely have dramatic consequences in the short term, but it didn't bode well for the future.

"If Washington does not listen to Moscow now, this is Putin's warning that he may withdraw [altogether] from the treaty," Mr. Markov said. "In a few years, there could be a colossal change that would catastrophically reduce U.S. nuclear security. Russia will move from single warhead nuclear missiles to rockets with multiple warheads," he said.

Mr. Markov said the Russian president was sending a clear message to the U.S. that if its strategy is "based on inflicting a military defeat on Russia, remember the phrase, [write it] in bright colors and hang it in all your offices: Nuclear powers don't lose wars," he said.

While Mr. Putin's comments suggested that Russia would continue to deny on-site inspections under the treaty, he didn't indicate whether Russia would suspend compliance with other provisions of the accord by refusing to provide data on its nuclear forces or withholding notification of its missile test launches.

Current and former U.S. officials said that the Russian president appeared to be leaving open the possibility that Moscow might continue to observe the core provisions of the treaty, which sets limits on the number of warheads on each side and the missiles and bombers that carry them.

Mr. Putin also complained in his address that French and British nuclear weapons aren't covered by the New Start treaty.

Russia's federal legislature gathered inside Moscow's Gostiny Dvor hall for the speech.

PHOTO: MIKHAIL METZEL/SPUTNIK/KREMLIN P/SHUTTERSTOCK

“Before we return to discussing the treaty, we need to understand what are the aspirations of NATO members Britain and France and how we take it into account their strategic arsenals that are part of the alliance’s combined strike potential,” the Russian leader said.

The size and composition of the British and French nuclear arsenal hasn’t changed since the New Start treaty was concluded, said Daryl Kimball, the executive director of the Arms Control Association, a Washington-based organization that supports arms-control agreements. Russia also has thousands of short-range tactical nuclear weapons that aren’t covered by the New Start treaty to deter other threats, he noted.

The main consequence of Mr. Putin’s stance might be to add obstacles to any effort to negotiate a follow-on accord after New Start expires in February 2026.

“Putin’s announcement makes it far more likely that after New Start expires, there will be no agreement limiting U.S. and Russian strategic nuclear arsenals for the first time since 1972,” Mr. Kimball said.

Mr. Putin’s address appeared designed in part to shore up domestic support for the campaign in Ukraine. He repeated his frequent assertions that the U.S. and its European allies had initiated the conflict by drawing Ukraine’s government closer to Europe.

“... ..”

“It was they who unleashed this war. We are using force to stop the war,” he said. The West, he added, “is using Ukraine as a battering ram against Russia.”

The campaign in Ukraine is the boldest military operation ordered by the Kremlin since the Soviet Union attempted to occupy Afghanistan in the late 1970s and 1980s. As was the case then, the invading forces met fierce resistance and lost around half the territory they had gained in the early stages. The Russians’ latest attempt to gain ground, in the eastern Donbas area, around the city of Bakhmut, has again stalled.

The Russian president’s speech also came ahead of the visit to Moscow of China’s top diplomat, Wang Yi, who arrived on Tuesday afternoon, Russian state news agency TASS reported, noting that he was expected to meet with his Russian counterpart, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, on Wednesday. Presidential spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters Monday that Mr. Putin might meet with Mr. Wang, which would mark a significant gesture as the Kremlin seeks to strengthen its partnership with Beijing.

The U.S. has expressed concern that China may be considering supplying lethal weapons to Russia and has warned Beijing of the consequences of such a move.

Mr. Putin, meanwhile, warned that if the U.S. were to test new types of nuclear weapons, Russia would do the same.

“We know for a fact that certain figures in Washington are considering the possibility of actual tests of their nuclear weapons,” Mr. Putin said, without offering evidence. In this context, the Defense Ministry and Russia’s state nuclear energy company, Rosatom, “must ensure the preparedness for testing Russian nuclear weapons,” he said.

Also on Tuesday, Russia’s Foreign Ministry summoned the U.S. ambassador to Moscow, Lynne Tracy, “in connection with the expanding U.S. involvement in hostilities on the side of the Kyiv regime,” it said in a statement on messaging platform Telegram.

Mr. Putin used much of the highly anticipated address to reassure Russians that the country would be able to withstand growing international isolation, pledging to give priority to social welfare programs as the conflict moves into its second year. But he said he wouldn’t be sacrificed for guns, as he proposed a new

year. Butcher, as he put it, would not be sacrificed for guns, as he proposed a new fund to help families of fallen fighters and veterans, and instructed his government to launch a program to provide rental housing for defense-industry employees at below-market rates.

Russia's economy has faced significant challenges since the invasion began, with successive rounds of sanctions severing Russia from much of the Western economy. The latest government data published Monday said it only suffered a mild recession last year, however, with gross domestic product shrinking 2.1%. Mr. Putin attributed the better-than-expected performance to finding new markets beyond the West.

Mr. Putin also told lawmakers that everyone involved in the military campaign should be given 14 days off every six months, including the 300,000 reservists mobilized for the war last fall.

The call-up triggered the exodus of thousands of fighting-age Russian men. There is concern among the public that the Kremlin might announce another draft.

—*William Mauldin and Michael R. Gordon contributed to this article.*

Write to Ann M. Simmons at ann.simmons@wsj.com