



# Americans and Russians Agree: We're Heading towards a New Arms Race

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The United States and Russia are on track to withdraw from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty in August. This leaves the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) as the only remaining arms control agreement between the United States and Russia. However, New START is due to expire in 2021 and it appears unlikely that it will be extended. For the first time in decades, it is possible there will be no constraint on the quantity or quality of US and Russian nuclear forces.<sup>1</sup>

Findings from a new binational survey, conducted by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs and the Levada Analytical Center, show that Americans and Russians would like to see the two countries negotiate an agreement to reduce their nuclear arsenals.<sup>2</sup> However, support or opposition to withdrawing from the INF Treaty is split amongst both the Russian and US publics.

## Americans and Russians Want Arms Control

Despite the reticence of the US and Russian presidents to negotiate an extension or follow-on to New START, Americans and Russians would likely favor such an agreement. Nearly 9 in 10 Americans (87%) and 74 percent of Russians favor their two countries coming to an agreement to limit nuclear weapons. Historically, public support in the United States has been consistently high for arms control agreements between the two nuclear powers, which together at the height of the last arms race possessed an estimated 60,000 nuclear warheads out of a total estimated 64,000

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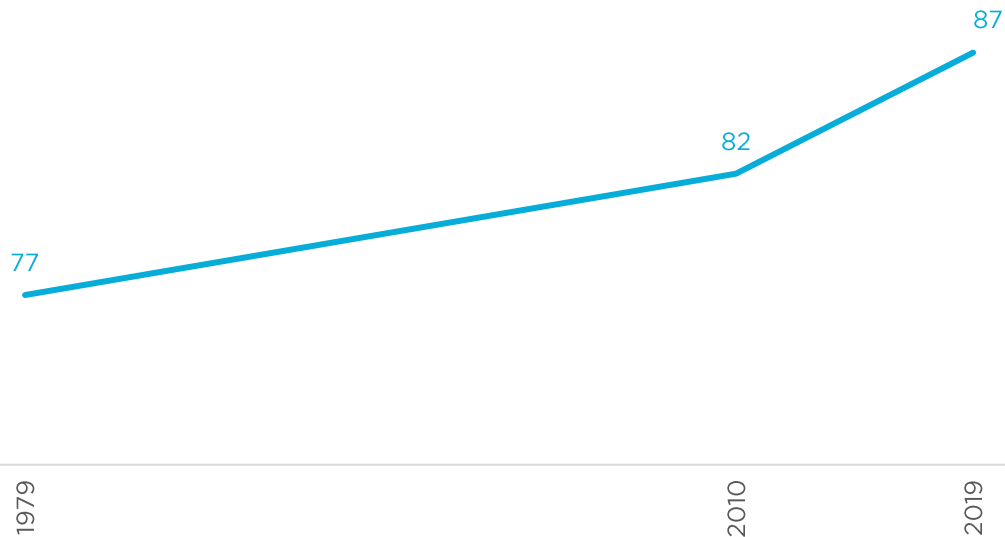
<sup>1</sup> Kingston Reif, "As INF Treaty Falls, New START Teeters," *Arms Control Today*, March 2019, <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2019-03/news/inf-treaty-falls-new-start-teeters>.

<sup>2</sup> This brief is based on coordinated surveys conducted by Dina Smeltz and Lily Wojtowicz of the Chicago Council on Global Affairs and Denis Volkov and Stepan Goncharov of the Levada Analytical Center in Moscow. The joint project on US-Russian public opinion about foreign policy issues was generously funded by the Carnegie Corporation.

nuclear warheads worldwide.<sup>3</sup> In fact, even in a period of relative calm in 2007, majorities of both Russians and Americans favored cutting nuclear arsenals down to fewer than 400 active nuclear weapons each.<sup>4</sup>

## US Support for Arms Control

*Do you favor or oppose the United States and Russia coming to an agreement to limit nuclear weapons?\** (% favor)



\* Sources: CBS News Poll (1979), 60 Minutes/Vanity Fair (2010)

February 22-25, 2019 | n=1016

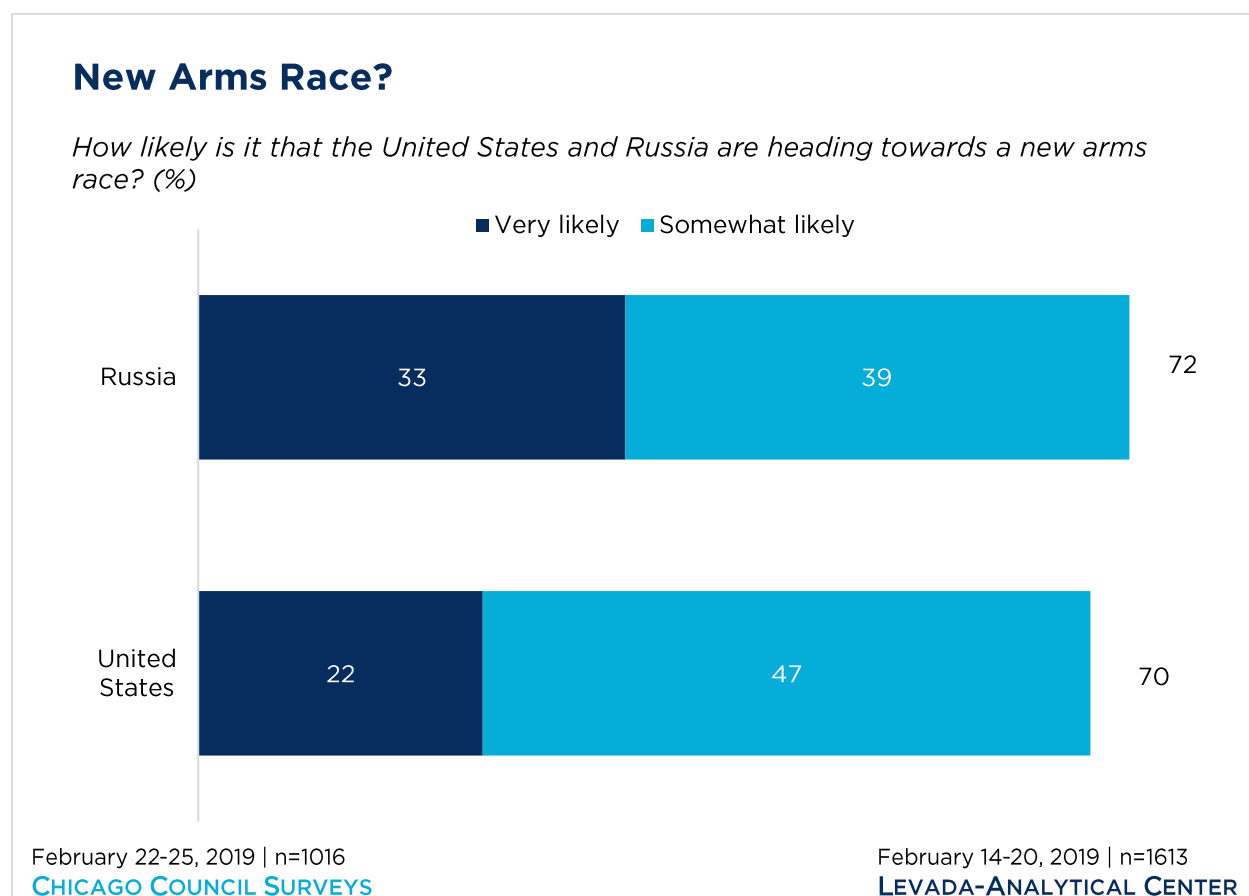
CHICAGO COUNCIL SURVEYS

Among Americans, support for negotiating arms control agreements is bipartisan (90% Republicans, 89% Democrats, 84% independents). This is notable along two lines, first that Republicans are not following President Trump's cues on arms control in general—however, they are on the INF Treaty, see below. Second, while Democrats largely favor negotiating a new arms control agreement with Russia, they are far less likely to favor undertaking friendly cooperation and engagement with Russia in general (49% Republicans, 31% Democrats, 57% independents).

<sup>3</sup> Hans M. Kristensen and Robert S. Norris, "Global Nuclear Weapons Inventories, 1945-2013," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 69:5, 75-81, DOI: 10.1177/0096340213501363.

<sup>4</sup> After decades of cuts to both nuclear arsenals, a 2007 World Public Opinion survey found that majorities of Americans and Russians not only supported deeper cuts than those mandated by the recently negotiated Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty (71% Americans, 58% Russians) but also favored cutting their nuclear arsenals to fewer than 400 active nuclear weapons each (59% Americans, 53% Russians). See: <https://www.cissm.umd.edu/publications/americans-and-russians-nuclear-weapons-and-future-disarmament-0>.

Such high levels of support for arms control currently are due, in part, to fears that the two countries are headed towards a new arms race—respondents who said a new arms race was likely were more likely to favor negotiating a new arms control agreement. American and Russian publics appear to agree with the many journalists speculating that the two countries are on that very path.<sup>5</sup> Seven in 10 Americans and Russians think it is very (22% Americans, 33% Russians) or somewhat likely (47% Americans, 39% Russians) that the two countries are headed towards a new arms race.



### Split Views on INF Treaty

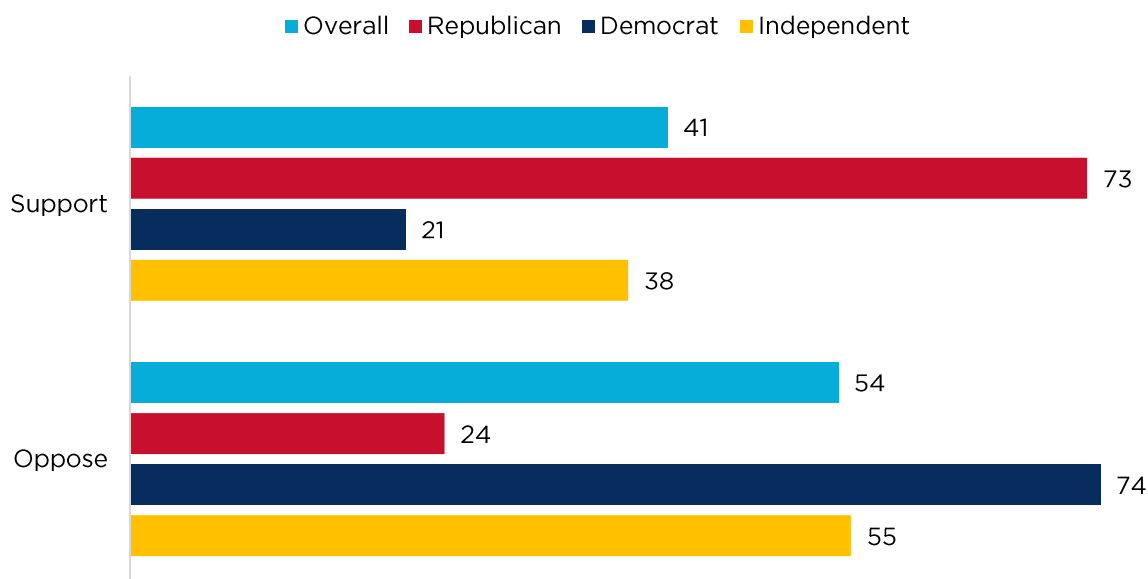
However, when it comes to withdrawing from the INF Treaty, the Council and Levada surveys find both Russians and Americans are split. A slim majority of Americans oppose the US decision to withdraw from the agreement (41% support, 54% oppose).

<sup>5</sup> For example, see: Ann M. Simmons and James Marson, “As US-Russia Treaty Breaks Down, Risk of Arms Race Rises,” *The Wall Street Journal*, February 3 2019, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/russia-follows-u-s-in-suspending-involvement-in-nuclear-treaty-11549109035>; “Is the US entering a new arms race with Russia,” *PBS Newshour*, February 7 2019, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/is-the-u-s-entering-a-new-arms-race-with-russia>; Julian Borger, “Russian ambassador to the US warns arms control is ‘in crisis,’” *The Guardian*, March 4 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/mar/04/russia-us-nuclear-arms-weapons-control-crisis>.

Like many foreign policy issues today, Americans are split along partisan lines, suggesting that support for the decision is linked to support for the US president.

## INF Treaty Withdrawal

*As you may know, last week the presidents of the United States and Russia announced that they will withdraw from the intermediate range nuclear forces (INF) treaty that both countries signed in 1987. Do you support or oppose the US decision to withdraw?*



February 22-25, 2019 n=1016  
CHICAGO COUNCIL SURVEYS

Another survey—recently conducted by the Program for Public Consultation—found that after presenting Americans with arguments for and against withdrawing from the INF, a majority preferred to stay within the treaty and work with Russia to address both countries’ concerns (66%).<sup>6</sup> What’s more, when given these arguments, majorities across all political parties favored remaining in the agreement (55% Republicans, 77% Democrats, 63% independents). This could indicate that Republicans’ gut feeling is to support the president’s decision, but when given additional information more are convinced by the arguments for remaining in the treaty.

Among Russians, a slim plurality support the Russian decision to withdraw from the INF Treaty (44% support, 40% oppose). Like the US findings, though to a lesser degree, Russians who support President Putin are more likely to favor withdrawal from the INF Treaty. A plurality of Russians (47%) who approve of the job Vladimir Putin is doing as president support Russia’s decision to withdraw from the

<sup>6</sup> These arguments can be found in the survey questionnaire:  
[http://www.publicconsultation.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Nuclear\\_Weapons\\_INF\\_Quaire\\_0119.pdf](http://www.publicconsultation.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Nuclear_Weapons_INF_Quaire_0119.pdf).

agreement, while only 39 percent of Russians who do not approve of the job Putin is doing support the decision to withdraw.

## Methodology

The analysis in this report is based on data from a joint Chicago Council-Levada Analytical Center survey on Russian and American Attitudes conducted in February 2019.

The US survey was conducted by Ipsos Public Affairs using their national online omnibus service, KnowledgePanel™, between February 22-24, 2019 among a weighted national sample of approximately 1,016 American adults, 18 years of age or older, living in all 50 US states and the District of Columbia. The margin of error is  $\pm 3$  percentage points.

The Russia survey was conducted between February 14-20, 2019 by the Levada-Center (Levada Analytical Center) with face-to-face interviews conducted among a representative sample of 1,613 persons aged 18 years and older, living in eight federal districts of the Russian Federation. Inside each district, the sample is distributed among five strata of settlements proportionally to the number of population living in them, 18 years of age or older. The margin of error is  $\pm 3.4$  percentage points.

The 2019 and 2017 Chicago Council-Levada Analytical Center Joint Surveys on Russian and American Attitudes are made possible by the generous support of the Carnegie Corporation of New York.

## About the Chicago Council on Global Affairs

The Chicago Council on Global Affairs is an independent, nonpartisan organization that provides insight – and influences the public discourse – on critical global issues. We convene leading global voices and conduct independent research to bring clarity and offer solutions to challenges and opportunities across the globe. Ranked [No. 1 Think Tank to Watch](#) worldwide, the Council on Global Affairs is committed to engaging the public and raising global awareness of issues that transcend borders and transform how people, business and governments engage the world. Learn more at [thechicagocouncil.org](http://thechicagocouncil.org) and follow [@ChicagoCouncil](#).

## About the Levada-Center

The Levada-Center is one of the leading research organizations in Russia that conducts public opinion surveys, expert and elite surveys, in-depth interviews, focus groups, and other survey methods. The Center brings together experts in the fields of sociology, political science, economics, psychology, market research, and public opinion polls. The Center's research and experts have been cited in national and international media such as *Kommersant*, *Vedomosti*, *RBC*, *The Economist*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, *Reuters*, *BBC Radio*, *Radio Liberty*, and others. Learn more at [levada.ru](http://levada.ru) and follow [@levada\\_ru](#) or on [Facebook](#).

## Appendix 1: US Topline\*

**Q. Do you favor or oppose the United States and Russia coming to an agreement to limit nuclear weapons?**

	Favor (%)	Oppose (%)	NR (%)
<b>Overall</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>4</b>
Republican	90	8	2
Democrat	89	6	5
Independent	84	13	3

**Q. In dealing with Russia, do you think the United States should:**

	Undertake friendly cooperation and engagement with Russia (%)	Actively work to limit Russia's power (%)	NR (%)
<b>Overall</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>4</b>
Republican	49	46	5
Democrat	31	66	3
Independent	47	50	4

**Q. How likely is it that the United States and Russia are heading towards a new arms race?**

	NET likely (%)	Very likely (%)	Somewhat likely (%)	NET unlikely (%)	Somewhat unlikely (%)	Very unlikely (%)	NR (%)
<b>Overall</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
Republican	60	14	46	35	31	4	5
Democrat	79	29	50	15	12	3	6
Independent	66	21	46	29	23	5	5

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\* Due to rounding, totals may not add up to 100%; for Republicans n=237, Democrats n=338, and independents n=372.

**Q. As you may know, last week the presidents of the United States and Russia announced that they will withdraw from the intermediate range nuclear forces (INF) treaty that both countries signed in 1987. Do you support or oppose the US decision to withdraw?**

	Support (%)	Oppose (%)	NR (%)
<b>Overall</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>6</b>
Republican	73	24	3
Democrat	21	74	5
Independent	38	55	6



## Appendix 2: Russian Topline\*

**Q. Do you favor or oppose the United States and Russia coming to an agreement to limit nuclear weapons?**

	Favor (%)	Oppose (%)	NR (%)
Overall	74	17	9
Approve of Putin	74	16	10
Do not approve of Putin	73	19	8

**Q. How likely is it that the United States and Russia are heading towards a new arms race?**

	NET likely (%)	Very likely (%)	Somewhat likely (%)	NET unlikely (%)	Somewhat unlikely (%)	Very unlikely (%)	NR (%)
Overall	72	33	39	21	18	3	7
Approve of Putin	70	29	41	22	20	3	8
Do not approve of Putin	76	41	35	19	16	3	5

**Q. As you may know, last week the presidents of the United States and Russia announced that they will withdraw from the intermediate range nuclear forces (INF) treaty that both countries signed in 1987. Do you support or oppose the Russian decision to withdraw?**

	Support (%)	Oppose (%)	NR (%)
Overall	44	40	16
Approve of Putin	47	36	17
Do not approve of Putin	39	47	14

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\* Due to rounding, totals may not add up to 100%; Russians were asked “All-in-all, do you approve of the job Vladimir Putin is doing as President of Russia?” for those who approve of Putin n=1037, for those who do not approve n=564.