

# Minimal chance for new 'START'

Russia rejects US terms for extending nuclear arms pact

Reuters | Moscow



Russia sees minimal chances of extending the New START treaty with the United States - their last major nuclear arms pact - as it does not accept conditions set out by Washington, Deputy Foreign Min-

ister Sergei Ryabkov was quoted as saying on Monday.

He spoke after Marshall Billingslea, the U.S. Special Presidential Envoy for Arms Control, told a Russian newspaper that Moscow must accept a joint agreement with Washington on extending the treaty before the U.S. presidential election in November.

"I suspect that after President Trump wins re-election, if Russia has not taken up our offer, that the price of admission, as we would say in the US, goes up," Billingslea told Kommersant newspaper in an interview.

Ryabkov said that position constituted an ultimatum and lowered the chances of reaching

any kind of agreement to extend the deal, which expires in February next year.

"We cannot talk in this manner," TASS news agency quoted Ryabkov as saying. Another news agency, RIA, quoted him as saying the chances of a treaty extension were "minimal".

The New START accord, signed in 2010, limits the number of strategic nuclear warheads that Russia and the United States can deploy.

Failure to extend it would remove the main pillar maintaining the balance of nuclear arms between the two countries, adding yet another element of tension to their already fraught relationship.

## 1991

New START is a successor to the original Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START I) signed in 1991 between the then-Soviet Union and the United States.

### Disagreement on China

Billingslea said the US side was looking for a framework political accord on extending New START. This framework, which would not have to be ratified by the U.S. Senate, would stipulate that a successor to New START must be

multilateral and include China, he told Kommersant.

Ryabkov called that a "deliberate distortion of our position." He said China's decision on whether to take part in the talks was exclusively Beijing's to make.

"We have not taken and do not intend to take any steps to bring China into these talks, something we have told our American colleagues on multiple occasions," TASS quoted Ryabkov as saying.

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Arms deals between Presi-

dent Ronald Reagan and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev in the 1980s, and their successors George H.W. Bush and Russian President Boris Yeltsin in the 1990s, underscored growing trust between the superpowers at that time and proved a contributor towards ending the Cold War.



## Hollywood action clips spotted in China airforce video

AFP News

A high-octane PR video for China's airforce crashlanded on social media after users questioned why the world's second-largest military power spliced clips from Hollywood blockbusters "Transformers" and "The Rock" into its own propaganda material.

The video, with 4.72 million views on Weibo and crafted by the Propaganda and Culture Centre of the PLA's Air Force, parades its medium- and long-range H-6 bomber.

With a soaring score and high-altitude action shots, the chest-thumping video shows Chinese airmen launching an attack on an island base -- strongly resembling US facilities in Diego Garcia and Guam -- then returning from the successful sortie.

But eagle-eyed social media users in China were quick to spot some glaring plot holes.

The explosive central missile sequences were plucked from three Hollywood movies,



An image posted online comparing Chinese PR video with original movie footages by Apple Daily HK

"Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen", "The Rock" and "Hurt Locker", and Weibo was withering in its scorn for the lack of originality.

"It turned out that our dream of great power was pieced together by editing American film clips," said one user.

"We promote the domestic military aircraft using US Hollywood movie clips, why bother?" added another, while a third said: "It's our nation's promotional video, why don't we use our own images?"

China is locked with the US in a power struggle over defence,

technology, trade, disputed seas and the status of Hong Kong and Taiwan.

The Pentagon says China already outstrips the US in several areas of defence -- claims Beijing furiously denies -- and wants to double its stockpile of nuclear warheads

## Chinese drug dealer on death row in Indonesia escapes via sewers

Reuters | Singapore

According to a cell mate, he had planned the Sept. 14 escape for five to six months using tools from a construction project in the prison kitchen

A Chinese drug trafficker under death sentence escaped from jail on the outskirts of Indonesia's capital Jakarta by tunnelling through the sewage system, police said yesterday.

Cai Changpan, 37, who was convicted of methamphetamine smuggling, dug a hole from his cell at the prison in the Tangerang area into waste pipes and on to a road outside, Jakarta police spokesman Yuri Yunus told reporters.

According to a cell mate, he had planned the Sept. 14 escape for five to six months using tools from a construction project in the prison kitchen, Yunus said. Indonesia Direc-

torate General of Prisons spokeswoman Rika Aprianti told media the trafficker, who also uses the name Cai Ji Fan, had timed

his escape to the changing of the guards. According to Indonesian news website detik.com, he was sentenced to death in 2017 for trafficking 135 kg of crystal meth. A police investigation found 70 kg of meth hidden in chicken coop cleaner equipment. Cai, police said, had previously broken out of a Jakarta police detention centre in 2017 by breaking a hole in a bathroom wall. No lawyer or representative for Cai was immediately reachable for comment.

Police put him on their most wanted list.

## Briton, Australian killed clearing WWII bomb in Solomons

AFP News

Two bomb disposal experts from Britain and Australia died in the Solomon Islands when World War II ordnance they were helping to clear exploded, officials said Monday.

Police said the pair -- who worked for the charity Norwegian People's Aid -- were storing munitions without permission in a residential area of the capital Honiara when the blast occurred on Sunday afternoon.

Norwegian People's Aid named the pair as Briton Stephen "Luke" Atkinson and Australian Trent Lee, who were helping collate a database of unexploded ordnance in the Solomons, which was a major Pacific battleground in WWII.

Police inspector Clifford Tunuki said the explosion took place at the charity's office and it appeared unauthorised work was being carried out on unexploded ordnance (UXO) in a residential area.

"We do not know what exactly happened that led to the bomb blast but preliminary investigations indicate they had



WWII munitions and equipment, like these shown in a village near Honiara in 2005, are regularly found in the Solomon Islands, which were the site of fierce fighting between Allied and Japanese forces

several items of UXO at the residence and they may have been conducting some UXO work," he said.

Tunuki said police were unaware the munitions were being stored in the area and, had they known, would have insisted they be taken to a proper bomb disposal facility.

He said they had now been removed and assured residents the surrounding suburb was now safe.

Norwegian People's Aid said its activities in the Solomons had been temporarily suspended while the cause of the "devastating" blast was examined.

"The investigation needs to be

completed before there can be a con-

clusion on the cause of events," it said in a statement.

The Solomons saw fierce fighting between Allied and Japanese forces in WWII and when the conflict ended, they abandoned vast quantities of shells, landmines and other munitions.

Norwegian People's Aid was working with Solomons police to survey the scale of the problem and develop a nationwide collection programme.

The charity said on its website that the Solomons remained heavily contaminated by unexploded munitions, which not only posed an explosion risk but had also often degraded after 75 years, leaching harmful chemicals into the environment.

"Munitions from the conflict continue to kill or seriously injure local people and are used for destructive fishing practices," it said.

"Explosive weapons are often found within city construction sites, coral reefs, farms, forests and suburban gardens where children sometimes find and play with them."



The Solomon Islands police have said the two bomb disposal experts appear to have been working on unexploded ordnance in a residential area