

“Beyond U.S. – Russia Arms Control”

By Hans M. Kristensen
Director, Nuclear Information Project
Federation of American Scientists

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First let me begin by thanking the organizers for inviting me to speak today, and especially on the opening panel. I’ve been asked to speak arms control beyond US/Russia (and a whole lot of other things too), but I actually believe continued US/Russian arms control is the basis for nuclear arms control with others. There is much work to be done and with the Trump administration expected cut to the State Department budget significantly, nuclear arms control may be facing a tough time. So today I’ll focus on the current crisis, the INF treaty issue, the New START treaty, and nuclear modernization plans.

It is difficult to deny that arms control appears to be in a tough spot right now. The arms control optimism that flared up with the Obama administration nearly a decade ago only partially took off. The New START treaty was an important first step that placed lower caps on strategic nuclear forces and updated an intrusive verification system. And there were also important non-proliferation initiatives. But the U.S-Russian deals that were envisioned to follow have so far eluded us. Here are many reasons for that, international and domestic.

Instead of arms control, both Russia and the United States have since turned their attention to reinvigorating their nuclear forces through extensive modernization programs and increased operations and exercises. The backdrop for this has been a steady deterioration of relations, increased bickering, a cut-off of most contacts and imposing of sanctions against Russia after its invasion of Ukraine. The two sides are now back in an official adversarial relationship and are behaving and talking accordingly. Trust has been lost that will take a long time to rebuild. With the crisis comes the risk of falling back on familiar Cold War solutions that may be poorly suited for today’s realities.

Explicit nuclear threats issued by various Russian officials against individual countries have made the situation worse. Poland and Denmark have been threatened that their missile defense facilities could be attacked, and a simulated nuclear strike allegedly was carried out against Sweden in 2013. Whatever else Vladimir Putin intended to achieve with these acts and his invasion of Ukraine in 2014, he has awoken NATO to its former core mission: defending its territory. So if he worried NATO was a threat before, he will have helped to make it a lot worse now.

Just how new or serious the Russian threats are is somewhat unclear, but they have helped fuel speculations that Russia has adopted a new nuclear strategy that relies more on early use of nuclear weapons than before. One senior former defense official said in 2015 that “Moscow is using *an entirely different definition* of ‘escalating to deescalate’”

than NATO used when threatening nuclear escalation if its conventional defenses were failing, by “employing the threat of selective and limited use of nuclear weapons to *forestall* opposition to *potential* aggression.”

The implication would be that Russia would not wait but pop a few nukes even before significant fighting had broken out to discourage NATO from even responding. Other officials say privately that the “escalate-to-deescalate” fear is overblown and being exaggerated by defense hawks, but it is true that Russia relies more on limited nuclear weapons use than NATO to compensate for inferior conventional forces.

The United States doesn’t issue explicit nuclear threats and is more timid about rattling the nuclear sword. Instead, it talks about deterrence and reassurance. But the bottom line is the same: if an adversary does A, then the United States will do B. Likewise, while Russia is criticized for having an “escalate-to-deescalate” strategy, the United States appears to have something similar. As former STARTCOM command Admiral Cecil Haney told Air Force Global Strike Command last year: “At the end of the day, our adversaries and potential adversaries must understand that they cannot escalate their way out of a failed conventional conflict, that they will not reap the benefits they seek and that restraint is always the better option. Our nation is prepared to manage escalation using all its instruments of national power...If deterrence fails, you take the lead to bring America’s nuclear force to bear, providing ‘deterrence through strength and global strike on demand.’”

The condemnation of Russia’s alleged first use strategy is also interesting because the Obama administration as one of its last acts in office rejected adopting a no-first-use policy. In some situations, the United States apparently also is prepared to use nuclear weapons first – before an adversary has attacked the United States or its allies with nuclear weapons or other weapons of mass destruction.

In 2014, the State Department first publicly accused Russia of violating the INF treaty by developing and testing a GLCM. The US government has yet to identify the missile but it has become more explicit about what the missile *is not* by denouncing various rumors and emphasizing that it is a “state-of-the-art missile.” So apparently not a copy of something else. Recently there have been reports that the weapon has been deployed, with one battalion fielded, a second fitting out, and more coming. It appears to be a dual-capable system, possibly with focus on the conventional mission.

These reports have deepened perceptions in the West that Russia cannot be trusted on arms control and that arms control agreements with Russia no longer serve US interests. Some have not surprisingly called for a tit-for-tat response. Recently, five US senators proposed the INF “Preservation Act.” A contradiction in terms because the act would require the United States to begin development of its own GLCM and “transfer INF range systems to allied countries,” which would violate the treaty and remove pressure on Russia to return to compliance.

It is also curious why Russia would want to violate the INF treaty and potentially open the door for US redeployment of INF weapons in Europe – especially given Russia’s accusations that US missile defense launchers installed in Romania could be used to fire INF weapons against Russia. Russia seems to be saying that INF weapons are bad.

Fortunately, the US military has so far shown little appetite for a tit-for-tat response and instead focused on adjusting existing and emerging capabilities to deprive Russia of any potential military advantages. And there seems to be little appetite in NATO to redeploy INF missiles in Europe; indeed, attempts to push such a deployment through NATO bureaucracy could split the alliance further.

Militarily the United States does not have to develop a new GLCM. The US military has considerable capabilities to counter Russian or Chinese INF weapons. The United States knows that; the allies know that; and Russia knows it. Long-range sea-based Tomahawk land-attack cruise missiles are continuously deployed in coastal waters in world hotspots and now frequently also entering the Black Sea and Baltic Sea areas. The Air Force has recently added the long-range Joint Air-to-Surface Standoff Missile (JASSM) to its B-1 and B-52 strategic bombers operating in Europe and Asia, deployed the JASSM to Ramstein Air Base in Germany and is selling it to Australia, Poland and Finland to equip their fighter-bombers as well. The sale to Poland and Finland will for the first time bring strategic nuclear forces in western Russia within range of long-range precision conventional weapons based in Eastern Europe.

The solution to the INF issue is not to ditch the treaty and sink back into a Cold War-like redeployment of INF weapons. Deterrence today is different than during the Cold War, primarily because of the advent of advanced conventional strike weapons, cyber and missile defense. Even though it is difficult, the solution is to work the issue through the Special Verification Commission and make new arrangements to regulate the INF issue and try to broaden the treaty to cover more countries. Indeed, INF proliferation is a global menace that requires new initiatives and Russia and the United States need to jointly pursue limitations on nuclear cruise missiles (possibly even conventional) to curtail and dial back long-range cruise missiles around the world.

There has also been much constipation among some about Russia’s increase of deployed warheads counted under the New START treaty. The number has grown since 2013 and at the last count stood at 1,796 warheads – 246 warheads above the treaty limit, and 429 warheads more than the United States at the time. But the number does not reflect an increase of the Russia arsenal but a fluctuation of the warhead level during the transition from Soviet-era weapons to newer types.

I don’t see that the numbers indicate that Russia intends to break away from the New START treaty. The fact that Putin in his first phone call with Trump reportedly brought up the possibility of extending the treaty suggests that he is not interested in violating it but continuing it. The United States should welcome that.

Nor do I think the disparity in deployed strategic warheads matters strategically at this point. There is another New START number that is much more important in that context: the number of strategic launchers. And there the United States is counted with a significant advantage of 173 launchers more than Russia. It is the structure of the posture that is important. Russia knows that the United States has an additional 2,000 warheads in storage it could upload onto launchers if it needed to. Russia does not have nearly that upload capacity.

It is on this basis that DOD and DNI in 2012 informed Congress that Russia “would not be able to achieve a militarily significant advantage by any plausible expansion of its strategic nuclear forces, even in a cheating or breakout scenario under the New START Treaty.”

Even so, shortly after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in 2014, some former US defense officials began to question whether “the weapons limits imposed by New START [are] still consistent with our own and our allies’ national security requirements” and “whether our security can afford a strategic arsenal capped at limits which were based on an alternate reality.”

The US should always assess whether its military forces are adequate and appropriate. But as far as I can see, there is no basis for questioning the New START treaty, which has equal limits for Russia and the United States and keeps a cap on what Russia could otherwise do.

Despite that, in his first telephone conversation with Vladimir Putin, Donald Trump reportedly brushed aside New START as a one-sided deal when Putin raised the issue of extending the treaty for another five years. If the report is accurate, then that was an extraordinary bad decision. If we do not safeguard and continue arms control we’ll be removing the constraints that do exist for Russia’s modernization. In fact, it is precisely because of Russia’s modernization that we need to retain the New START treaty.

Indeed, we can take advantage of Russia’s financial problems to negotiate additional reductions. And we need to make use of additional bilateral reductions to gradually broaden arms control to cover other nuclear-armed states as well. Recently we have seen China, Pakistan and possibly India moving in the direction of MIRVed ballistic missiles. It is in the clear interest of Russia and the United States to try together to limit that development.

Overall, we need a balanced combination of arms control and defense. For the deterrence side that means increased reliance on conventional capabilities, which are much more useable and credible than nuclear weapons. The 2013 Nuclear Employment Strategy calls on DOD to increase the role of conventional weapons in contingency planning. We have had very capable Tomahawk land-attack cruise missiles deployed out there for years, and the current version is much more capable than earlier ones, and it’s deployment on the force is being boosted. Development of the next-generation land-attack weapon is underway.

In recent years we have also seen the JASSM being deployed on the B-1 and B-52 and the denuclearized bombers being sent on strategic deterrence missions to Europe and Asia. On Guam, the B-1 has even replaced the B-52 and recent Korea overflights have been with denuclearized bombers equipped with JASSM. Nearly 5,000 JASSMs are planned and it is going on pretty much everything that can fly, including tactical aircraft. It is being sold to allies and partners and will soon be permanently deployed in Eastern Europe within range of Russian deterrence targets. Conventional deterrence is more credible and more relevant for the security situations that our allies in Europe and Asia are facing.

Now, conventional deterrence has its own challenges that demand careful thinking about crisis stability and action-reaction dynamics. It's all very well if we think conventional deterrence in some scenarios is more credible than nuclear deterrence, but if that fuels advanced conventional weapons buildups among adversaries, or if advanced conventional weapons mixed with missile defenses cause them to rely even more on nuclear weapons to compensate, then it can also make deterrence more brittle. At lower nuclear levels that challenge will grow. So we have to look for a careful balance.

This is not just an issue for the United States but also Russia, who is significantly widening the deployment of long-range conventional cruise missiles in its force. And China, who is increasing its land-attack and sea-based cruise missiles and mixing nuclear and conventional ballistic missiles.

Nuclear deterrence is not going to become irrelevant or go away, but it too must be balanced and affordable. As it stands now, the modernization plan is not; it is bloated and too expensive. In January 2015, CBO estimated it would cost \$350 billion over the next decade to modernize and maintain the nuclear forces; two years later the estimate has increased by 15% to \$400 billion.

The modernization program is part of a defense procurement bubble in the 2020s that exceeds funding projections. Frank Kendall, the Pentagon's former top acquisitions official, acknowledged that a couple of years ago: "We do have a problem in the budget, and that problem is called the recapitalization of the triad ... There is no way I can see that we can sustain the force structure and have a reasonable modernization program unless we get more money in the defense budget."

The issue here is not whether the United States should modernize or not, whether it can afford to modernize or not, or whether nukes cost 5% or 7% of the defense budget. The issue is how to plan a modernization program that is affordable given everything else we also have to pay for. This is about defense prioritization; if you have to choose, what is most important: a nuclear air-launched cruise missile or a conventional air-launched cruise missile.

Part of the problem is that instead of designing a modernization program based on balanced needs and means, we have ended up with an "all of the above" modernization plan that is essentially reconstructing what was already there. This is happening even

though the Pentagon has concluded that even after the New START treaty is implemented, the United States will still have up to one-third more nuclear weapons deployed than it needs to meet current and projected national and international defense needs. Even so, the 2013 Nuclear Employment Guidance does not direct any reductions below the New START force level.

The problem with a bloated modernization plan is that it will force us to make rash fixes later rather than building them into the plan from the outset. That tends to be more expensive, create a less flexible force, and create instability in long-term posture planning.

Most recently the new ICBM estimate has increased about 60% to around \$100 billion. That is in addition to the B61-12 bomb, the B-21 bomber, the LRSO cruise missile, tankers, the nuclear F-35A, and command and control...and all the other things the Air Force wants to buy.

The ICBM force is too big. Current plans call for a force of 400 missiles in silos with another 50 “warm” silos. The number can probably be reduced by a third; STRATCOM recommended 300 when the New START force level was set. Some, including former defense secretary William Perry and former STRATCOM commander and JCS vice chairman General James Cartwright, have even recommended scrapping the ICBM force altogether.

The LRSO also requires new thinking. The Air Force argues it (and NNSA) needs to spend around \$20 billion to replace the ALCM for pretty much the same reasons the ALCM was justified back in the late-1970s. But back then we did not have long-range conventional strike weapons or stealth-bombers. But now we do, so the assessment of the need for the LRSO must be different.

The Navy is also feeling the crunch because the Columbia-class SSBN fleet will eat up a third of the shipbuilding budget in the 2020s. At the same time the new administration wants to increase the size of the fleet. So the budget pressure is likely to grow.

Despite these realities we’re hearing calls for new and improved nuclear weapons capabilities tailored for limited scenarios. This would be counterproductive, a distraction, and steal scarce resources from more important defense needs. Yet these calls appear to be coming from defense hawks, industry, and defense advisory groups rather than from the military itself. So for now I see them more as opportunistic nuclear Christmas shopping rather than a reflection of actual defense needs.

If someone asks for new military capabilities, they need to answer at least five questions: 1) what is the mission; 2) who is the adversary; 3) what is the scenario; 4) why are existing capabilities unable to do the job; and 5) what other defense program would they cancel to pay for it. If they can’t answer that, then the new military capability is not important.

All the other nuclear-armed states are also modernizing. Russia is in the final phase of an overhaul of the remains of the Soviet-era nuclear arsenal, China is in the final phase of its generational transition from liquid-fuel ICBMs to a posture based on solid-fuel ICBMs and

a small SSBN fleet, France is in the middle of its upgrade, Britain is working on its SSBN replacement, Pakistan is building a “full-spectrum” deterrent with tactical nuclear weapons, India is focusing more on China, Israel has possibly added sea-based cruise missiles, and North Korea is doing everything it can to build a functioning nuclear strike capability. All of this calls for balanced and affordable defense planning and for reinvigorating arms control, not discarding it.

It is important to point out that these modernization programs did not begin during the Obama administration but many years before. The Russian modernization began in the late-1990s to replace Soviet-era weapons. It is not increasing the arsenal but will probably decrease it slightly in the years ahead. China’s modernization got underway more than two decades ago.

Contrary to what you might hear in the debate, the United States has not neglected to maintain its nuclear deterrent but continued to upgrade it. Now those forces are coming to the end of their lifespan and will have to be replaced if they are still needed.

In conclusion I think it is important to remind everyone that arms control and defense are two sides of the same coin and we should not treat them as if one is incompatible with the other. Arms control is not a means to an end but an important component of US long-term national security planning. It needs to be strengthened and broadened, not decreased. Nor can deterrence stand alone. Without its national security partners arms control and nonproliferation, deterrence becomes a single-minded and dangerous endeavor. You know the saying: If you only have a hammer, every problem begins to look like a nail. Or as now defense secretary Jim Mattis said a couple of years ago: “If you don’t fund the State Department fully, then I need to buy more ammunition.”

Instead, the Trump administration is planning a significant increase in defense spending while cutting back on State Department funding. That is a dangerous and counterproductive strategy. Obama’s defense budget for FY18 was \$584 billion, Trump wants \$603 billion. The defense budget cap is \$549 billion. Reality check, please!

Brian McKeon, the former principal deputy under secretary of defense for policy, said two years ago: “We’re looking at that big bow wave and wondering how the heck we’re going to pay for it, and probably thanking our stars we won’t be here to have to answer the question.”

Well, you are all here. So rather than simply defending individual turf or pet projects, I hope you’ll spend the next couple of days trying to find some answers to these questions.

Thank you.