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STRATEGIC CONVENTIONAL ARMS: DEADLOCKS AND SOLUTIONS

After a heated debate that lasted for eight months, on December 22, 2010 the U.S. Senate ratified the New START treaty signed by the Russian and U.S. presidents in Prague on April 8, 2010. The next day the Russian parliament stepped up the ratification process. The New START treaty was ratified in the middle of January and entered into force on February 5, 2011.

Even before New START was signed, Washington indicated its willingness to begin talks with Russia on the next round of cuts that would include not only deployed warheads but non-deployed nuclear weapons as well, including those designed to be delivered by non-strategic carriers.¹ For now Russia has adopted a wait-and-see approach. In fact, shortly before the ratification of the treaty in the Senate, several Russian Duma committees had voted to revise the already approved document because they doubted that the Senate ratification would ever come.² But it is safe to assume that if Russia joins the next round of talks, it will try to put missile defense and strategic non-nuclear weapons on the agenda.³

This paper is devoted to the problem of strategic conventional arms. As shown below, U.S. and Russia disagree about the impact of strategic conventional arms on strategic stability. The sides do not even share a common vision on what types of conventional arms should be referred to as strategic. In further analysis the term *strategic conventional arms* is defined as arms that carry conventional payloads and might have a counterforce capability, and therefore affect the strategic balance between the U.S. and Russia.⁴

This article offers an analysis of the New START treaty limitations with respect to strategic conventional arms. The analysis shows that the new treaty contains the following measures:

- ❑ numerical limits on intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs), ICBM and SLBM launchers, deployed warheads on conventional ICBMs and SLBMs;
- ❑ transparency measures with respect to those strategic delivery systems equipped for conventional armaments, for which similar systems equipped for nuclear armaments exist (ICBMs, ballistic missile submarines, heavy bombers); and
- ❑ limited transparency measures with respect to those strategic delivery systems equipped for conventional armaments, for which similar systems equipped for nuclear armaments have been eliminated or converted to systems equipped for conventional armaments (SSGNs, heavy bombers).

Our analysis also shows that strategic conventional arms are limited by the New START treaty to a much lesser extent than by the old treaty. Moreover, the new treaty does not prohibit the development of some types of strategic arms that were banned by the previous treaty. The article also discusses possible ways of resolving the problem of strategic conventional arms.



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ATTITUDES OF THE SIDES

President Dmitry Medvedev has stressed on more than one occasion Russia's concerns with respect to strategic systems armed with conventional weapons, and suggested that this factor needs to be taken into account as nuclear arms are reduced.⁵ Russian officials also emphasized the existence of a strong link between the Pentagon's "Prompt Global Strike" (PGS) concept, which serves as a framework for the development of strategic non-nuclear arms, and ballistic missile defense programs.⁶

Over the past few years dangers of this type have been accentuated in documents reflecting the views of the Russian military-political leadership. Both "The National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation till 2020" and "The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation" adopted in 2009 and 2010 respectively list the deployment of strategic conventional precision-guided weapon systems as one of the main dangers for Russia—along with the development and deployment of strategic missile defense and militarization of space.

Nevertheless, one should admit that Moscow has not yet clearly articulated what kind of arms—along with conventional ICBMs and SLBMs—it regards as strategic conventional arms. One may not rule out that Russia also includes some other strategic conventional offensive arms like heavy bombers, and long-range air (ALCMs) and sea (SLCMs) launched cruise missiles in this category. Russian military experts consider these types of arms as a substantial destabilizing factor.⁷ New types of weapons prohibited by the "old" START treaty but developed now within the framework of the PGS program may be another concern.

The views of the U.S. side on strategic conventional arms fundamentally differ from the Russian views. Although at the signing of the new START treaty the U.S. side admitted the impact of conventional ICBMs and SLBMs on strategic stability and agreed to set up limits on such systems, nevertheless it gives a high priority to the development of strategic conventional systems and, at the very least, does not envisage making such systems a subject of future negotiations. When the U.S. administration submitted the new Treaty to Congress, it made clear that the treaty does not contain any constraints on the testing, development, or deployment of the current or planned PGS systems. Besides that, it is a view of the U.S. side that not all new kinds of weapon systems of strategic range would be *new kinds of strategic offensive arms* subject to the New START treaty. Specifically, it stated that it would not consider future strategic-range non-nuclear systems that do not otherwise meet the definitions of the Treaty to be new kinds of strategic offensive arms for the purposes of the Treaty.⁸ Similar understanding was expressed in the Foreign Relations Committee's Resolution of Advice and Consent to Ratification.⁹

EXISTING TYPES OF STRATEGIC CONVENTIONAL ARMS

Transparency measures of the New START treaty cover the Ohio class strategic nuclear submarines that have been converted to long range SLCM carriers (SSGNs), and those heavy bombers which are no longer used for nuclear missions. Besides SSGNs, sea-launched cruise missiles can also be carried by attack submarines and surface ships. However, neither attack submarines nor surface ships are covered by the New START treaty.¹⁰

SSGNs Armed with Long Range Cruise Missiles

The conversion of four Ohio class strategic submarines to SSGNs was finished in 2008. Each converted SSGN is capable of carrying 154 long-range Tomahawk SLCMs. The "old" START treaty counted each SSGN as a platform with 24 SLBM launchers, because the conversion was conducted by procedures other than those specified in the previous treaty.

In accordance with the New START treaty, four SSGNs are now also counted as 96 Trident-1 SLBM launchers. However, the new Treaty specifies simplified procedures aimed at excluding these launchers from the tally:¹¹

- No later than three years after the Treaty entered into force, the United States of America shall conduct an initial one-time exhibition of each of these four SSGNs. The purpose of

such exhibition shall be to confirm that the launchers on such submarines are incapable of launching SLBMs.

- After the completion of the initial exhibition, the United States of America shall periodically provide an opportunity for the Russian Federation to confirm that none of the launchers on the four SSGNs has been reconverted and each of them remain incapable of launching an SLBM. The Russian Federation shall have the right, while conducting a Type One inspection at a submarine base, to inspect designated launchers on an SSGN if such a submarine is located at the submarine base. Throughout the life of the Treaty, the number of such inspections shall not exceed a total of six inspections for all four SSGNs existing at the time of the Treaty's entry into force, and the number of such inspections shall not exceed two inspections for each SSGN.

If either Party decides to convert other ballistic missile submarines to SSGNs, such submarines will be subject to similar measures, and an additional number of inspections will be agreed within the framework of the Bilateral Consultation Commission (BCC).

Heavy Bombers Equipped for Non-nuclear Armaments

In accordance with the New START treaty, the U.S. counts now less than 206 deployed and non-deployed heavy bombers (47 B-1B, 18 B-2 and 141 B-52), including those bombers that have been decommissioned and put into storage.

After implementing the New START the United States plans to retain no more than 60 heavy bombers equipped for nuclear armaments, including all 18 B-2s and no more than 42 B-52s.¹² The rest of the bombers will be excluded from the tally mostly by means of converting them to carrying non-nuclear armaments. Heavy bombers equipped for non-nuclear armaments are not limited by the Treaty, but they are also subject to Type Two inspections if they are located at the air bases, i.e. at the facilities at which the deployed heavy bombers are based.

The New START treaty does not require irreversibility of conversion. In fact, procedures for the conversion of nuclear bombers to non-nuclear ones can be chosen by the side that conducts the conversion. It is well known that during the implementation of the previous START Treaty the U.S. side failed to demonstrate the irreversibility of the conversion of the B1-B heavy bombers to heavy bombers equipped for armaments other than long-range nuclear ALCMs.¹³ It is therefore likely that a similar situation may occur in the future with respect to the conversion of nuclear heavy bombers to non-nuclear uses. Moreover, the new treaty stipulates a simplified procedure for excluding from the accounting procedures the B1-B heavy bombers, whose nuclear missions were abandoned by the Nuclear Posture Review of 2001.¹⁴

- No later than one year after the Treaty entered into force, the United States of America shall conduct a one-time exhibition of a B-1B heavy bomber equipped for non-nuclear armaments to demonstrate that the B-1B heavy bomber is incapable of employing nuclear armaments. The features that distinguish a heavy bomber equipped for nuclear armaments from a heavy bomber equipped for non-nuclear armaments are recorded.
- All B-1B heavy bombers that have been converted prior to the completion of such an exhibition and that have the recorded distinguishing features shall be included in the category of heavy bombers equipped for non-nuclear armaments.

Upon completion of the conversion of the last B-1B heavy bomber to a heavy bomber equipped for non-nuclear armaments, all B-1B bombers will cease to be subject to the Treaty.¹⁵ From that moment, they can be based or temporarily located outside the national territory with no prior notification.¹⁶ Nevertheless, the Russian side will have the right to inspect conventional B-1B heavy bombers that are located at Dyess or Ellsworth Air Force Bases. Such inspections can be conducted with the purpose of verifying that the designated B-1B heavy bombers remain incapable of employing nuclear armaments. No more than three B-1B bombers are allowed to be inspected during one inspection. No more than one such inspection may be conducted each year at either Ellsworth Air Force Base or Dyess Air Force Base. Such inspections shall count towards the annual quota for Type Two inspections.



FUTURE TYPES OF STRATEGIC CONVENTIONAL ARMS

Conventional ICBMs and SLBMs

The New START treaty sets the following limits with respect to conventional ICBMs and SLBMs, their launchers, and warheads:

- ❑ Deployed conventional ICBMs and SLBMs are included in the limit of 700 for deployed ICBMs, deployed SLBMs, and deployed heavy bombers.
- ❑ The aggregate number of warheads on ICBMs and SLBMs deployed for non-nuclear armaments is included in the limit of 1,550 for warheads on deployed ICBMs, deployed SLBMs, and nuclear warheads counted for deployed heavy bombers.
- ❑ Deployed and non-deployed conventional ICBM and conventional SLBM launchers are included in the limit of 800 for deployed and non-deployed ICBM launchers, deployed and non-deployed SLBM launchers, and deployed and non-deployed heavy bombers.

Conventional ICBMs and SLBMs are subject to Type One inspections. The Treaty does not have any restrictions on the number of warheads used during tests of ICBMs or SLBMs of any types.

Analysis of the Treaty shows that it has a loophole allowing unlimited deployment of conventional ICBMs. In particular, the definition of a “non-deployed launcher of ICBMs” excludes soft-site launchers. The Treaty defines a “soft-site launcher” as any land-based fixed launcher of ICBMs or SLBMs other than a silo launcher.¹⁷ At the same time, soft-site launchers of ICBMs are not considered as deployed launchers of ICBMs, and thus they are not subject to the limits stipulated by the Treaty. The old START Treaty explicitly prohibited ICBM deployment in soft-site launchers, and this provision eventually became an obstacle for the implementation of the U.S. Air Force plans for conventional ICBM deployment. The New START treaty opens such a possibility. If the United States chooses to deploy ICBMs based at soft-site launchers (such options as Vandenberg or Cape Canaveral were considered previously), such launchers would not count towards the Treaty limit for deployed and non-deployed launchers.

If a soft-site launcher accommodates an ICBM, the U.S. side could consider such a missile as non-deployed.¹⁸ The U.S. could therefore argue that the Treaty limits neither the quantity of ICBMs at soft sites, nor the number of warheads deployed on such ICBMs. If the United States proceeds with these deployment plans, the base at which soft-site ICBM launchers are deployed will likely be declared a test range, so that it will not be subject to inspections.

The new treaty allows for excluding from the tally the SLBM launchers that have been converted by rendering them incapable of employing SLBMs.¹⁹ Currently the United States plans to deploy 240 Trident-2 SLBMs on 12 submarines,²⁰ so that each submarine would carry 20 deployed launchers for SLBMs. Plans for the deployment of armaments in converted launchers for SLBMs have not been clarified yet. One cannot rule out the possibility that the converted launchers of SLBMs will accommodate long-range SLCMs or other land attack weapons.

The Russian side will have the right to inspect converted launchers of SLBMs during Type Two inspections with the purpose of verifying that SLBM launchers installed on ballistic missile submarines remain incapable of employing SLBMs.

Other Future Strategic Conventional Arms

As mentioned above, when Paragraph 2 Article V was being negotiated, the U.S. side explicitly stated that it would not consider all new kinds of strategic-range weapons systems as new kinds of strategic offensive arms subject to the New START treaty. Thereby it meant that the programs developed as part of the Prompt Global Strike concept would not be limited by the new treaty.

For the time being the PGS programs are at the research and development stage,²¹ and no decisions have yet been made on what kind of armaments will be deployed. At the same time, one may expect that the New START treaty will not pose any obstacles for the development or impose any limits for the deployment of the following types of future strategic conventional armaments:

- ❑ Offensive arms that use stages of ICBMs as delivery vehicles and maneuverable conventional warheads as payloads. If most of the flight path of such an offensive weapon is non-ballistic (e.g. depressed trajectory), it will not be covered by the definition of a ballistic missile,²² and will not be subject to the Treaty limits;
- ❑ Heavy bombers converted for non-nuclear weapons, such as conventional air-to-surface ballistic missiles or conventional long-range ALCMs. In particular, the new treaty will not prohibit the deployment of conventional long-range ALCMs on B-1B heavy bombers;
- ❑ New types of heavy bombers, equipped for non-nuclear armaments, including conventional air-to-surface ballistic missiles and conventional long-range ALCMs;
- ❑ Military airplanes, other than heavy bombers (with a range of less than 8,000km), armed with conventional long-range ALCMs;
- ❑ Conventional ground based long-range cruise missiles (GLSMs) with a range exceeding 5,500km.²³

PROSPECTS FOR THE SOLUTION OF THE PROBLEM OF STRATEGIC CONVENTIONAL ARMS

It is not difficult to notice that in the context of current U.S.–Russian relations there is a similarity between the problem of strategic conventional arms and the problem of ballistic missile defense. The United States justifies the development of strategic conventional arms and missile defense by the need to face limited threats from rogue states. Russia considers this trend, as well as the development of missile defense systems, as a tendency that threatens the survivability of its future strategic forces. Russia's concerns are growing because strategic conventional arms are frequently considered in the United States as the first line of missile defense ("pre-boost-phase defense") carrying out the task of preventively destroying threatening ballistic missiles of a rogue state or substantially lowering their attack potential, thereby increasing the effectiveness of the following layers of a missile defense system.

The problem of strategic conventional arms may lead the next round of U.S.–Russian negotiations on nuclear reductions to a dead-end. In any event, it is difficult to expect a breakthrough in finding a solution to this problem as long as both sides refuse to abandon the concept of mutual assured destruction, and mutual confidence is not yet strong enough for that to happen.

The same is true of the problem of missile defense. It is interesting that the U.S. side recognizes the need to find a mutually acceptable solution and is trying to initiate joint scientific and technical programs on missile defense cooperation with Russia.²⁴ The United States apparently hopes that the success of such programs will strengthen mutual confidence, so that Russia stops considering the future U.S. missile defense system as a threat to itself. The United States will likely propose such a dialogue on joint missile defense cooperation programs as an alternative to discussion of missile defenses in the context of nuclear weapons reductions, and try to decouple the problem of missile defenses from the dialogue on strategic offensive arms by moving it into the framework of another dialogue focused on missile defense cooperation.

Since the approaches of the two sides towards the problem of missile defenses differ fundamentally, and the numerous earlier attempts at cooperation in this field have been far from successful, it is difficult to see how this latest attempt can succeed. Even assuming that Washington's approach will allow a solution to be found to the problem of missile defense, a similar approach to the problem of strategic conventional arms is unlikely to work. In addition to apparent similarities between these two problems there are also significant differences.


First of all, in contrast to the dialogue on missile defense, a U.S.–Russian discussion on strategic conventional arms has not even started yet. At this moment officially Washington does not see any need to discuss this particular issue with Moscow.

Second, as the dialogue between the two sides on missile defense cooperation has demonstrated, the issue of the precise nature of such cooperation is extremely sensitive. Even if one were to accept that a future joint missile defense system has a defensive nature, the sides are still unable to find a consensus as to what specific threat that system is going to be aimed against. It is



evident that any attempt to define the source of such a threat will entail substantial political costs for Russia, which does not consider any foreign country as a rogue state. Hypothetical cooperation in the area of offensive arms would entail even higher costs, primarily for Russia.

Finally, it is possible that Moscow actually has some individual missile defense technologies it could offer Washington. But the United States is far ahead of Russia in the development of precision-guided munitions. The existing imbalance looks set to continue to grow since Russia cannot afford the same kind of investment in this field.

At this time solving the problem of strategic conventional arms seems possible within the frame of dialogue on strategic offensive arms only. An approach similar to the one used during the negotiations on the New START treaty might bring the desired results. Russia's main interest was the reduction of U.S. strategic forces, and the United States was mostly interested in greater transparency of Russian strategic forces. In spite of this asymmetry of interests, the two sides have managed to achieve a compromise. Negotiations on the next round of nuclear reductions are unlikely to be limited to arms covered by the New START treaty. A potential compromise can be sought in a broader field. For example, Russia might attempt to achieve substantial benefits for itself in solving the problems of missile defense and strategic conventional arms in return for certain concessions regarding non-strategic nuclear weapons. Only time will tell to what extent both sides are prepared to discuss such an agenda. 

NOTES

¹ Nuclear Posture Review Report, April 6, 2010, <http://www.defense.gov/npr/docs/2010%20Nuclear%20Posture%20Review%20Report.pdf>, last accessed November 20, 2010.

² A. Nikolskiy and P. Khimshiashvili, "Reset of the treaty," *Vedomosti*, November 8, 2010.

³ A.S. Dyakov, T.T. Kadyshev and E.V. Miasnikov, "On further nuclear weapons cuts," Center for Disarmament, Energy and Environmental Studies at the MFTI institute, February 3, 2010, <<http://www.armscontrol.ru/pubs/post-start-reductions-ru.pdf>>, last accessed November 20, 2010.

⁴ On the impact of conventional precision guided weapons on strategic stability, see, for example: Eugene Miasnikov, "The Counterforce Potential of Precision Guided Munitions," in Alexei Arbatov and Vladimir Dvorkin, eds., *Nuclear Proliferation: New Technologies, Weapons, Treaties* (Moscow: Carnegie Moscow Center, 2009), pp. 84–103, <http://carnegieendowment.org/files/12574Blok_YadernoyeRaspr_Eng_fin1.pdf>.

⁵ See, in particular: Speech at Helsinki University and Answers to Questions from Audience, Helsinki, April 20, 2009, <http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2009/04/20/1919_type82912type82914type84779_215323.shtml>, last accessed November 20, 2010; Address to the 64th Session of the UN General Assembly, New York, September 24, 2009, <http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2009/09/24/1638_type82914_221817.shtml>, last accessed November 20, 2010.

⁶ Speaking notes, A.I. Antonov, Director, Security and Disarmament Department, Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs NATO–ssia Council Meeting, October 17, 2007, <http://www.nato-russia-council.info/htm/EN/news_33.shtml>, last accessed November 20, 2010.

⁷ See, in particular, V.Y. Volkovitsky, "Screening Strategic Nuclear Forces is the Most Important Task for Air Forces. Part 2," *Vozdushno-Kosmicheskaya Oborona*, No. 1, January–February 2010, <<http://www.vko.ru/DesktopModules/Articles/ArticlesView.aspx?tabID=320&ItemID=350&mid=2869&wversion=Staging>>, last accessed November 20, 2010; Mikhail Volzhensky, "Missile Defense: Concealed as a Defensive, Created for Offense," *Izvestiya*, May 28, 2007, <<http://www.izvestia.ru/poliit/article3104617/>>, last accessed November 20, 2010.

⁸ Article-by-Article Analysis of New START Treaty Documents. Bureau of Verification, Compliance, and Implementation, May 5, 2010. Article V, p. 13, <<http://www.state.gov/t/vci/trty/141829.htm>>, last accessed November 20, 2010.

⁹ U.S. Congress, Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Treaty with Russia on Measures for Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms (the New START Treaty). 111th Cong., 2nd sess., October 1, 2010, Exec. Rpt. 111-6, pp. 92–93.

¹⁰ At previous START negotiations Russia always insisted on limiting nuclear long-range SLCMs and their carriers, but the United States strongly objected. Nevertheless, according to Alexei Arbatov, Director of the Center for International Security at IMEMO, both sides radically changed their attitudes at the negotiations on the New START Treaty. After making a decision in the new Nuclear Posture Review to abandon nuclear

Tomahawk SLCMs, the United States proposed limiting long-range SLCMs, but the Russian side refused to discuss the U.S. proposal. See: Alexei Arbatov's answers to questions at the seminar "Evaluating the New START Treaty. Prospects for Its Ratification," Moscow Carnegie Center, May 27, 2010, <<http://www.carnegie.ru/events/?fa=2934>>, last accessed November 20, 2010.

¹¹ Protocol to the Treaty Between the United States of America and the Russian Federation on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms, Part 9, Second Agreed Statement.

¹² Statement of Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee May 18, 2010, <<http://foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/GatesTestimony100518a.pdf>>, last accessed November 20, 2010.

¹³ Midykhat Vildanov, "Harbored Grudge," *Natsional'naya Oborona*, March 2010, <<http://www.oborona.ru/283/308/index.shtml?id=4606>>, last accessed November 20, 2010.

¹⁴ Protocol to the Treaty Between the United States of America and the Russian Federation on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms, Part 9, First Agreed Statement.

¹⁵ New START Treaty, Article III, para.7.

¹⁶ New START Treaty, Article IV, para.11.

¹⁷ Protocol to the Treaty Between the United States of America and the Russian Federation on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms, Part 1.

¹⁸ According to the New START Treaty definitions, "non-deployed ICBM" means an ICBM not contained in a deployed launcher of ICBMs or on a deployed launcher of ICBMs.

¹⁹ Protocol to the Treaty Between the United States of America and the Russian Federation on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms, Part 3, Section 1.4.

²⁰ In accordance with the U.S. Department of Defense plans, in addition to 12 submarines with deployed launchers of SLBMs, two strategic submarines would be located routinely at repair facilities. Launchers on these two submarines will be counted as non-deployed.

²¹ Current status of PGS programs, in particular, is described in: Amy F. Woolf, "Conventional Prompt Global Strike and Long-Range Ballistic Missiles: Background and Issues," *CRS Report*, October 25, 2010.

²² Protocol to the Treaty Between the United States of America and the Russian Federation on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms, Part 1.

²³ GLCMs with a range less than 5,500km are prohibited by the INF Treaty.

²⁴ Frank A. Rose, "Prospects for U.S.–Russia Missile Defense Cooperation," Remarks at the 11th Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies (RUSI) Missile Defence Conference, London, United Kingdom, May, 27 2010 <<http://www.state.gov/t/vci/rls/142329.htm>>, last accessed November 20, 2010.

