

Eliminating Short-Range Nuclear Weapons Designed to Be Forward Deployed

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Summary of Conclusions

This analysis proceeds from the assumption that *until the United States and Russian Federation, along with NATO countries, are able to eliminate short-range nuclear weapons from Europe, efforts to eliminate them anywhere else in the world will be stymied*. For that reason, the major focus of this paper is on what it will take to get NATO and Russia talking about the weapons, understanding the problem from each other's perspective, building up confidence, and moving into controlling and eventually reducing and eliminating the weapons from Europe. While that goal is being accomplished, the other states deploying short-range nuclear weapons—India and Pakistan, China, Israel—should be brought into the discussion and into confidence-building activities. However, these countries will be very unlikely to move to control and reduce their own short-range weapons if the problem in Europe is not on its way to being resolved.

Russia's new dependence on nuclear weapons to compensate for its conventional weakness is one of the key issues that will have to be dealt with in order to begin the process of control and reduction. Working toward resolution of differences over the CFE Treaty will be one major way to do so. So Russia, in this regard, is the difficult side of the policy equation.

At the same time, it is worth emphasizing how far NATO and the United States have come in transforming themselves into the eas-

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ier side of this policy equation. As recently as 1999, NATO was not in a position to move beyond a traditional statement of the importance of nuclear weapons in its Strategic Concept. By 2005, however, politicians in Europe became ready to move the issue out of the closet and debate it openly. Also throughout this period, nuclear readiness levels in NATO Europe steadily declined and in one case—Greece in 2001—nuclear weapons were completely withdrawn from a NATO country. On the other side of the Atlantic, U.S. strategy became more and more focused on centralizing nuclear planning and operations at Strategic Command in Omaha. This move was consonant with a trend in the direction of centralized capabilities to attack targets world-wide under the “Global Strike” concept. Global Strike became synonymous with long-range, highly accurate, deep-strike conventional missions, which also supported the notion of deemphasizing nuclear weapons in U.S. and NATO policy.

Thus, the environment for ending NATO nuclear deployments in Europe is much more welcoming than it was less than a decade ago, and it is feasible that NATO could decide to recast its Strategic Concept to achieve this goal in the context of its 60th anniversary celebrations in 2009. The key question for NATO policymakers, however, is whether they wish to lead on this issue without requiring a major change in Russian policy at the same time. There are arguments that may be made about the exemplary effect that unilateral action would have in this case, as well as benefits for the NATO allies’ defense budgets (including that of the United States). But it is realistic to assume that Russia will not be willing to move so quickly to temper its dependence on nuclear weapons in its military strategy.

Therefore, NATO would probably want to maintain an insurance policy while work with the Russians moves forward. The alliance, for example, could agree to remove short-range nuclear weapons from Europe while leaving the infrastructure for deploying the weapons in place. The alliance could continue to train and certify personnel for nuclear operations, and could continue some specific exercise activities to ensure that command and control capabilities remain intact and that nuclear weapons could be quickly reintroduced into Europe if necessary. These steps could then be phased out as mutual confi-

dence builds between NATO and Russia, and particularly if Russia were willing early on to address NATO concerns about possible continuing deployment of nuclear weapons in Kaliningrad.

This issue of a disconnect between Russia and the United States/NATO on the importance of nuclear weapons is the most difficult one to grapple with in any effort to eliminate short-range nuclear weapons. The disconnect will take time and patience to address, and this paper recommends an “inch by inch, step by step” approach.

Confidence-building should be the first step, but we need not be satisfied with superficial site visits and other slow steps that characterized confidence-building during the Cold War era. Instead, confidence-building should take advantage of the intensive cooperation that the United States and Russia have pursued in the past fifteen years to have some practical effect on real problems being encountered in each side’s nuclear forces. For example, in the context of the Warhead Safety and Security Agreement (WSSX), the U.S. and Russia have been working intensively on measures to improve the safety of nuclear weapons against threats of fire and lightening. Bringing such measures to bear on nuclear weapons in Europe would help to solve real problems that both sides have encountered, and also build confidence in the nature of the deployments. Confidence-building, therefore, should be linked to intensive problem-solving for both sides, which in turn will have a rapid impact on the growth in confidence—a confidence feed-back loop, in other words.

Once mutual confidence is growing, Russia and the United States/NATO can move to the next stage, beginning arms control and reduction measures. Initially, finding a way to exchange data should be the focus of these efforts, for two reasons. First, differences over how to exchange data under the Presidential Nuclear Initiatives has been a persistent irritant between Russia and NATO practically since the PNIs were agreed in the early 1990s. The resulting damage has made it difficult for the two sides to imagine how they might sit down with each other at the negotiating table. Thus, figuring out a judicious way to do data exchanges by itself would play a vital confidence-building role.

Second, an agreed baseline of weapons systems has always been

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a necessary and significant precursor to success in arms reduction negotiations. Only once the parties have agreed to the number and nature of deployments can they agree on how much and in what way to reduce them. Either side might begin by trying unilaterally to spur movement, for example through declassification of deployment numbers. The United States has established procedures to do so, and could agree on such steps with its NATO allies. However, there should be no expectation of a quick response from the Russian side, as procedures for declassification are not routinely established and the political environment in Moscow is difficult. Nevertheless, the Russians might be willing to share some data on a confidential government-to-government basis if the United States comes forward with an initiative.

Several larger policy steps will be required before the two sides will be willing to sit down to significant arms reduction negotiations—NATO will have to decide what it wants to do about short-range nuclear weapons deployed in allied countries, and Russia and NATO will have to be on the road to resolving their differences over the CFE Treaty. As these solutions are in train, arms reduction negotiations can begin. Even before that point, however, the two sides could pursue further unilateral measures to convince each other that nuclear-capable bases have been or are being closed down—and here, Russian willingness to shed more light on the situation in Kaliningrad would be very important. Another interim measure with some risks attached to it would be to recommit to the PNIs. Uncertainties over implementation of the PNIs have added up to some serious mistrust between Moscow and Washington and for that reason an initiative to recommit could stir up old frustrations. Bringing high-level authority to bear—and particularly President George H.W. Bush and President Gorbachev, who launched the PNIs originally—could be an important way to overcome such irritation.

The unquestionable goal should be a ban on short-range nuclear weapons in operational deployment, linked to a continuing campaign to eliminate nuclear warheads and dispose of their nuclear materials—with accompanying transparency measures. Efforts to negotiate this ban, which should first engage Russia and the NATO countries,

should come to engage the other nuclear weapon states. This could be done through development of a step-by-step confidence-building process that would lead to more comprehensive control and reduction measures, and eventually in the long term future to a broader ban. The configuration of this group is complicated: it should certainly involve the nuclear weapons states under the Non-Proliferation Treaty—the United States, France, and the United Kingdom (which are NATO countries) plus Russia, China—and also the other states in possession of nuclear weapons—India, Pakistan and Israel.

In theory, because China, India and Pakistan do not maintain their nuclear weapons at a high level of operational readiness, negotiating with them a ban on operational deployments would be straightforward. Ironically, the accompanying transparency into their programs, which would be necessary for a negotiated ban, is likely to be much more difficult. The United States and Russia, after thirty years of negotiated nuclear arms reductions, are accustomed to mutual monitoring and verification—but these countries are not. Moreover, Israel does not publicly admit to a nuclear weapon program. Therefore, no area of short-range nuclear arms control will be simple. However, confidence-building measures with all the relevant countries could start early, and should be the focus of immediate policy efforts.

Strategic arms will also be a target for further arms reductions, and as David Holloway argues in his paper for this project, these should be considered in four stages, beginning in the near term with reductions between Russia and the United States but proceeding toward the eventual elimination of nuclear weapons. *As these stages advance, short-range weapons should be placed in the same basket with strategic arms for negotiating actual elimination of the weapons.* This approach would acknowledge the reality that nuclear weapons are impossible to differentiate when they are divorced from their launch vehicles, and would also anticipate deep reductions, when the difference between short- and long-range systems becomes steadily less relevant.

Short-range nuclear weapons designed to be forward deployed have the potential, in fact, to serve as a special harbinger for later stages of the strategic arms reduction process. In the early 1990s, the Presiden-

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tial Nuclear Initiatives were early expressions of the concept that warheads should be moved out of operational deployment and into secure status, not ready for immediate launch. The PNIs may be revived and lead to a ban on short-range weapons in operational deployment, or a ban may be negotiated on its own. In either case, implementation of the ban would be a type of “pilot project” for zero deployed warheads in the strategic forces. The transparency, verification and monitoring measures applied to short-range weapons would serve well in the strategic case, and certainly as strategic and short-range weapons begin to fall into the same basket for elimination.

The agenda for eliminating short-range nuclear weapons is potentially an exciting one, taking full advantage of the lessons learned over the past 15 years, and particularly the practical ways in which Russia and the United States have learned to work together to enhance the safety and security of nuclear weapons. This mutual interest should help to overcome the frustration, anger and disconnects that have hampered Russian cooperation with the United States and NATO. But patience and attention to multiple problems—including the CFE Treaty—will have to be the watchwords of the effort. Efforts to engage Russia on the nuclear front cannot be divorced from attempts to solve these other problems.