Russia's Views on Cruise Missiles in the Context of START III

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> *The START III Treaty is the only method of synchronizing the inevitable unilateral reductions of our Strategic Nuclear Forces with parallel reductions in the US nuclear potential and of ensuring reliability of Russian nuclear deterrence in the foreseeable future.*
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> *--Sergei Rogov, Director of USA-Canada Institute, August 2000*

The abysmal state of Russia's conventional forces has caused Moscow to rely on nuclear weapons to ensure its security. This reliance was formalized in Russia's military doctrine, which states that nuclear weapons can be used "in situations critical to the national security of the Russian Federation and its allies." In fact, most Russian security analysts believe that this dependence on nuclear weapons will continue for the foreseeable future because the economy will have to improve significantly before a conventional force buildup can be contemplated. Yet despite Russia's need to rely on nuclear weapons, even this may be problematic because its economic plight may create difficulties in maintaining its current level of nuclear forces.

Thus, Russia has a keen interest in negotiating a treaty to reduce Strategic Nuclear Forces below Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) II levels, and would prefer to go even beyond the 2,000-2,500 limits agreed to by Presidents Yeltsin and Clinton in Helsinki in 1997. Sergei Rogov, an influential defense analyst, believes that Russia's strategic nuclear forces will fall below 1,000 warheads by 2010 irrespective of arms control agreements. Accordingly, Russia is keen to ensure rough parity with the US.

To retain a credible deterrent posture at these lower levels, Russia believes that it is important to restrain US sea-launched cruise missiles (SLCMs)--forces that heretofore have not been addressed as strategic weapons in the START treaties. Russian officials reason that once strategic nuclear forces go to very low levels, SLCM capabilities become strategically significant. In fact, Russia's current START III negotiating position reportedly calls for the complete elimination of all SLCMs, both nuclear and conventional.

Prior to assessing Russia's position regarding cruise missiles and START III, I will examine Moscow's overall view of its security position vis-à-vis the US in order to provide background for Russia's negotiating stance. I will also suggest how the US and Russia might approach START III in a manner that is equitable and focuses on creating a more stable environment.

The US Seeks Sole Superpower Status

Since the demise of the Soviet Union, Russia feels that its important, albeit diminished, role in the world is unappreciated. Russia repeatedly reminds us--most recently in its 2000 National Security Concept--that "Russia is one of the world's major countries with centuries of history and rich cultural traditions." Despite the undeniable decline in Russia's military capability, even military leaders are baffled by the lack of respect bestowed upon their country. Ivan Kapitanets, Admiral of the Fleet, recently noted that the world has failed to undertake:

> a proper assessment of [Russia's] place in the world. The Russian Federation is a great land, sea, and nuclear power situated on two continents, its shores are washed by three oceans, it has 35% of the world's mineral reserves, it has world cultural values and a rich history, and it has a significant science and technology potential. Moreover, Russia made the main contribution to preserving world civilization in the 20th century.

Russia's belief that it is marginalized on the world stage should not be underestimated. This belief is reinforced by what it sees as a US desire to remain the world's sole superpower. Russia contends that the combination of: a US-led NATO expansion; US unilateral military actions in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Sudan; NATO airstrikes against Yugoslavia; and the prospect of a US national missile defense (NMD) all point to the behavior of a hegemon, rather than that of a nation seeking cooperative solutions by consulting international organizations such as the UN and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). Russia naturally views these developments with alarm.

Benefits of Cruise Missiles

Until the 1970s, cruise missiles for land attack were not seen as possessing a significant military capability. Advances in computers in the 1970s, however, led to a new generation of small terrain-mapping radars that could fit into the nose of missiles and sense the terrain over which the missile was flying. With more accurate guidance, cruise missiles could fly low and evade radar. Today's cruise missiles have many advantages: 1) they are highly accurate even at long distances, and thereby minimize the risk of collateral damage against civilians; 2) they are fast, can fly at low altitudes, and have a very small radar cross-section, making them difficult to intercept; and 3) they are small,

enabling them to be launched from relatively small ships and trucks; an aircraft carrier is not necessarily needed.

Russia's View of Long-Range Cruise Missiles

One reason SLCMs were not covered by previous START treaties is that verification measures would have been highly intrusive and were unacceptable to the US. The Russians argue that long-range SLCMs are strategic weapons because they can attack Russian national territory. In Krasnaya Zvezda, Valentin Kuznetsov has argued that since it is difficult to distinguish between nuclear and non-nuclear SLCMs, "only the total elimination of both nuclear as well as non-nuclear long-range SLCMs will help diminish the danger of war breaking out and will help strengthen international peace and security."

A large but unstated part of Russia's desire to ban long-range SLCMs is the poor state of the Russian Navy. Russia's Navy lacks sufficient ships and submarines to deploy a credible long-range SLCM force. Yet Russia fully appreciates the military importance of air and sea-launched cruise missiles and began directing funds to expand its bomber fleet almost immediately after its recent ratification of START II. In April 2000, the 37th Air Army began a large-scale tactical exercise in southern Russia wherein a number of Raduga Kh-101 conventionally-armed long-range cruise missiles were deployed. The exercise was intended to cover missions previously assigned to the Russian Navy's air assets. Moreover, Russia has recently launched production of a supersonic anti-ship cruise missile, the Moskit-Ye, which it intends to export. According to *Military Parade*, a glossy magazine published for arms buyers, no navy in the world currently has the means to combat this fast missile, which has a "penetrating warhead." Thus, while Russia wants the US to eliminate its long-range SLCMs because it cannot match the US capability in this category of armaments, it recognizes the overall importance of cruise missiles--albeit mostly of shorter range--to its war-fighting capability and has chosen to enhance its cruise-missile capability (and through exports, the capabilities of other countries).

A Better Approach to START III

It is possible to address Russian concerns about SLCMs and at the same time address US concerns about Russian nuclear forces if US and Russian arms control negotiators take a more encompassing approach to arms control. In particular, they should:

- Consider both strategic and tactical nuclear weapons in fashioning an arms control agreement. Previously, heavy bombers, intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) and submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs) were the only entities that were subject to control under the START treaties. If nuclear SLCMs are to be considered as part of an arms reduction treaty, they should be constrained regardless of their range.

- Employ technologies capable of distinguishing between nuclear and conventional weapons. Since significant differences exist between the two types of armament,

it would be productive to develop procedures to distinguish them in a treaty context rather than taking an unproductive path of limiting one side's conventional capability in an asymmetric manner.

- Enhance transparency of the infrastructure and production capability of the two nations to ensure the predictability necessary for a successful arms control regime.

By undertaking a combination of the above measures, US and Russian arms control negotiators will pursue a path that can lead to meaningful constraints.

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