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Nuclear-Armed Cruise Missiles: Towards a Global Ban?
Russia's Perspective

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Summary

This analysis addresses Russia's perspective regarding an eventual agreement on eliminating nuclear cruise missiles from strategic equations—in particular, as a means of maintaining the integrity of the INF Treaty.

The major argument in favor of a total ban on nuclear cruise missiles is their strategic ambiguity and an inability to identify whether they are nuclear or conventionally armed[2]. In principle, this differentiation is possible through intrusive verification means—analogous to those that are used by the US and Russia for controlling heavy bombers. But such a framework can only be achieved through a negotiated agreement, which would require positive political context and probably take considerable time. In the absence of such an agreement, there are no reliable ways of assessing whether an approaching cruise missile is nuclear-armed or carries a conventional explosive charge. This ambiguity may result in a dangerous destabilization of relations between the opponents, especially in a crisis situation.

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[1] The author is grateful to Vladimir Dvorkin for submitting data and arguments that were used when preparing this article.

[2] Parthemore, Christine. (2017). The ambiguity challenge: Why the world needs a multilateral nuclear cruise missile agreement. *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, vol.73, no.3, p.154-158; Weber, Andrew. (2018). Nuclear armed cruise missiles should be banned. *APLN and Toda Peace Institute*, Policy Brief no.12, May 2018.

Theoretically, uncertainty could also be interpreted as promoting more stable deterrence (for instance, if there are doubts on the expected results of a first strike against the opponent). But in practice, worst case scenarios tend to prevail in calculations and assessments related to vital security issues. Because nuclear-armed cruise missiles could play a role in delivering a decapitating first strike against the nuclear command and control infrastructure, the cost of uncertainty in a crisis could be enormously high.

Setting certain rules with respect to nuclear-armed cruise missiles could address such concerns. Alternatively, rather than building a complicated system of control with respect to the deployed cruise missiles in order to assess their mode, a ban on nuclear-armed cruise missiles could be an easier way of addressing the above-mentioned uncertainty. However, since 2015, when this idea was addressed to a broader political and professional audience, hardly any traces of official reaction to, or professional debate on, the matter could be found in Russia. In trying to understand its eventual position, various facets of the problem have to be kept in mind.

1) Political Background

In Russia, the last decade has witnessed a growth in military spending and allocation. Considerable investment into military buildup has taken place. The military potential has been increased rather than reduced—such was the marker of changes to be promoted in the country. The very idea of eliminating certain categories of weapons would go against this formal course and informal spirit. At the same time, the situation with arms control does not give any ground for optimism. Many agreements have unraveled, and others are under severe pressure.[3] No serious progress has been made for many years.

Russia's official attitude towards arms control has always been and remains quite supportive. But the current absence of progress is attributed only to the opposite side; the latter is also blamed for taking the initiative in the arms race. As a result, the 'wait and see' approach is Russia's de facto course. Moscow's tacit assumption seems to be the following: to wait until the country 'stands up' militarily, which would allow engagement in arms control from the position of strength.

Most importantly, the political relationship between Russia and the US has worsened since 2013-2014 so considerably that any constructive developments look highly improbable. Joint efforts in sensitive security-related areas require some mutual trust even under normal circumstances. The last five years could be seen as 'abnormal' and no change is expected in the foreseeable future. The current atmosphere is characterized by politically motivated sanctions, official accusations against Moscow (varying from electoral interference to assassinations)

[3] *Russia: Arms Control, Disarmament and International Security*. (2017). IMEMO supplement to the Russian edition of the SIPRI Yearbook 2016 / Ed. by Alexey Arbatov and Sergey Oznobishchev. – Moscow, IMEMO.

and dramatically eroded narratives tilting towards open hostility. Against this background, trying to promote a positive agenda may amount to naivety rather than optimism.

In the eyes of Russia, the arguments that could counterbalance this negative environment are not extremely convincing. Still, they do exist.

All its assertive behavior notwithstanding, Moscow does not feel satisfied with the current deterioration of relations with the West. The damaging effect is obvious and increasingly burdensome, both economically and politically. The challenging task for Russia's leadership is to get back into the club of respectable international actors without paying too much for it. Whether it is able to square the circle and at what price may remain unclear for a long time, but one approach may be restarting arms control. A nuclear cruise missile deal would fit into this category and could bring valuable political results.

Although cruise missiles represent an insignificant part of the nuclear arsenals of Russia and the US, eliminating a whole category of weapons would be a significant achievement. Making such a deal might turn out to be a more challenging task in comparison to other existing arms control options. However, it is not as if the participants would enter an absolutely unexplored area as was the case in the 1980s at the beginning of negotiations on conventional forces in Europe. Indeed, the existing negotiations and the verification experience on strategic offensive weapons and intermediate nuclear forces would be extremely helpful in successfully addressing the cruise missiles issue.

2) Arms Control

The idea of a nuclear cruise missile ban corresponds to the general orientation towards reducing and finally eliminating nuclear weapons. The goal of de-nuclearization is officially supported by all eventual participants of the proposed deal. However, some of them are not always consistent in pursuing this course, either conceptually or in their military programme. If the goal of a nuclear weapons free world is relegated to an uncertain future, while the focus on nuclear weapons remains significant and their role in military development and planning becomes more prominent—this all would turn into flagrant opposition to the proposed idea of denuclearized cruise missiles.

This could become a problem for those major nuclear countries that are openly blamed for not being serious about the elimination of nuclear weapons. In Russia, some wording in the official documents and statements, as well as certain details in operational deployment, tend to allow allegations that nuclear weapons do play an increasing role in military thinking and planning. The overall reliance upon nuclear weapons continues, whereas in media and even within the professional community it is sometimes presented almost apologetically. Alternatively, both nuclear superpowers could gain political dividends if they endorse the idea of a ban—which will hopefully reduce criticism on the part of non-nuclear states.

It seems important to note that Russia's official policy navigates rather delicately and cautiously in these troublesome waters. This could be seen, for instance, when analyzing President Putin's major address to the Federal Assembly, delivered on 1 March 2018. It contained a significant emphasis on the importance of the nuclear factor for security—just as the recent US Nuclear Posture Review did when it was released in February 2018. But the Russian approach, all its assertiveness notwithstanding, also described an option of nuclear arms control, similar to the cautious arms control references in the US document. An eventual nuclear cruise missile deal would fit into such pattern.

At the same time, Russia seems to have overcome concerns about 'denuclearization' that became more pronounced during the Obama period. Moscow worried that reducing the role of the nuclear factor would undermine Russia's nuclear status, both politically and security-wise. The problem was assessed as extremely serious in the light of Russia's considerable weakness in conventional forces, as well as the US efforts in developing non-nuclear deterrence and war-fighting capabilities. To promote counterbalance by focusing upon nuclear assets seemed only logical and financially reasonable. But the situation is changing; the involvement in Syria has made Russia's military more confident about the country's conventional potential. In light of this, Russia could decrease its reliance on nuclear weapons and become more receptive to the ideas of denuclearization.

And finally, with respect to any arms control deal, Moscow has to assess the prospects of competition with the opponent, the associated financial and technological burden, and the risk of failure. This is especially important, for instance, when considering the US program of LRSO (long-range stand-off weapons), which will replace the air-launched cruise-missile when its service life is over in 2030. This is expected to be a qualitatively new factor in the area of air-launched cruise missiles—providing the US with stealth capabilities, longer range and greater accuracy. Another possible concern could be the plan to develop a new sea-launched cruise missile with low-yield nuclear charges—in other words, to abandon the decommissioning of this type of weapon brought about by decisions of previous US administrations. Against this background, a total ban on nuclear cruise missiles may appear attractive indeed.

3) Nuclear Deterrence

The overall support for moving, even cautiously, along the path of arms control and denuclearization could facilitate Russia's engagement in an eventual deal on cruise missiles, albeit with no guaranteed outcome. Much more important is the concrete assessment of the weapons under discussion. What role do they play in preventing and/or neutralizing the hostile actions of a possible enemy? How might their elimination affect deterrent and warfighting potential? Would the expected balance of gains and losses be acceptable, in comparison to those of other involved parties?

In practical terms, answers to these questions are the key determinants in a country's attitude towards any existing or proposed arms control agreement. However, the initial position is likely to be based on security-focused considerations, and even more narrowly on military

aspects of security. The stronger the arguments in support of the deal under consideration, the better are its prospects. And *vice versa*.

In a broader sense, there is a need to develop new approaches towards nuclear deterrence[4]. But when considering practical issues, it is important to avoid the erosion of the existing situation. A cruise missile ban would not undermine in a significant way the systems of nuclear deterrence—neither in Russia nor in the US. The cruise missile component therein is considerably less important than those of the ICBMs and SLBMs. In various models of massive nuclear exchange, these two categories of missiles always play a central role since they can be launched immediately on command and within a short time deliver a devastating strike against the territory of the enemy. Strategic nuclear cruise missiles are unable to perform this task.

Their modest role in nuclear deterrence is in a sense confirmed by the New START Treaty signed in Prague in 2010. The treaty does not count the number of nuclear cruise missiles on strategic (heavy) bombers within the total number of nuclear charges on deployed vehicles. Only the number of strategic bombers is counted. Both in Russia and in the US, the formally agreed ceiling of 1550 nuclear charges includes about 70 strategic bombers, each counted as one unit. However, one Tu-160 could carry up to twelve nuclear cruise missiles, and one B-52H up to twenty. Their total number deployed on strategic bombers in Russia and in the US is estimated at approximately 200-300 units. It is noteworthy that this is considerably lower than what is theoretically possible.

Thus, the deterrence potential in its current configuration would not be dramatically affected by an eventual nuclear cruise missile ban. The latter would indirectly echo one serious problem with cruise missiles as a component of nuclear deterrence—they are too slow in comparison to ballistic missiles. It is true that reducing the time for retaliation is not the major problem of the nuclear deterrence, whereas cruise missiles make the deterrence more flexible—however, at the price of efficiency. But if the priority is given to the latter, the opposite proposition within the same logic leads to the conclusion that the radical way of resolving this dilemma would consist in eliminating the aircraft leg of the triad.

However, both for Russia and the US this does not look like a realistic prospect in the foreseeable future. They assume that air-borne nuclear deterrence is necessary as a guarantee against eventual unexpected technological breakthroughs that could occur within any of the two other legs of the triad, undermining its sustainability.

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[4] Arbatov, Alexei. (2018). Transformatsia yadernogo sderzhivania (The transformation of nuclear deterrence) (in Russian). *Mirovaya ekonomika i mezhdunarodniye otnosh*enia, no.7, pp.5-16.

Even if we put radical approaches aside, other traditional arguments in support of air-borne cruise missiles could become an obstacle. For instance, a rationale for keeping and developing cruise missiles with nuclear charges could relate to the insufficient (or relatively lower) penetration capacity of strategic bombers operating as platforms for cruise missiles. To compensate, cruise missiles would need a longer range. With an inverse relationship in the payload–distance ratio, they would have a considerably lower destruction capacity if used conventionally. Delivering at the distance of 5500 km the explosive charge equivalent to a few hundred kilograms of TNT will hardly be a convincing retaliation (in comparison to 200 kilotons of a nuclear charge). It would not come as a surprise if this was grounds for major opposition to the proposed nuclear cruise missile ban.

A ban on nuclear cruise missiles could be also challenged from the position of the so-called 'escalate to de-escalate' strategy attributed to Russia[5]. Nuclear cruise missiles do have a role within such a strategy. It is true that the latter has never been proclaimed by Russia officially as an overarching principle, but references to it appear in lower level documents such as the updated version of the Naval doctrine (2017).

The logic of this strategy proceeds from two very simple assumptions. First, its function is to make clear to the opponent that stakes are high, intentions are serious, and the struggle will be pursued with all possible determination. The use of nuclear weapons is considered to be the most efficient way to send such a signal. Secondly, the adversary is expected to react by decreasing the intensity of the conflict until it is terminated with conditions imposed on the enemy. Similar patterns of strategic thought existed in the West at the time of Soviet conventional superiority in Europe. NATO's flexible response strategy, in place for almost thirty years from the 1960s, also used what nowadays is defined as 'escalation to de-escalate'.

On a ladder of escalation, there certainly could be a place for nuclear cruise missiles. But the problem here has a more general character – it is about eventual use of nuclear weapons at the sub-strategic level. Debates on this matter were inconclusive in the past. The current focus of the discussion is the lower yield of nuclear weapons. The above-mentioned Nuclear Posture Review seems to endorse this approach.

Russia's traditional declaratory approach has always tended to the opposite thesis, accentuating that any nuclear use will inevitably escalate to global nuclear conflict. This actually promotes a very strong argument for maintaining robust reciprocal deterrence. But by the same token this undermines – both for Russia and for the US – arguments for sub-strategic nuclear potentials, early nuclear use and so on. The idea of a nuclear cruise missile ban fits well into this logic. In particular, among the strong arguments in favor of such a ban is the expectation that it will operate against lowering nuclear threshold. If, however, the latter is not considered

[5] Zysk, Katarzyna. (2018). Escalation and Nuclear Weapons in Russia's Nuclear Strategy. *The RUSI Journal*, 163(2):1-12, May 2018.

as an important qualitative mark in the development of eventual hostilities, this argument becomes irrelevant.

4) Multilateral Pattern

The nuclear arms race and nuclear arms control are becoming more multilateral. This complicates assessments, comparisons, and interactions, and makes designing and constructing cooperative deals more difficult and more controversial than in the past. A possible agreement on nuclear-armed cruise missiles is a case in point.[6].

The US and Russia continue to be the major actors and, were they the only participants in any agreement under discussion, they could develop a relatively consistent approach. Their nuclear potentials, although by no means identical, have considerable similarities in quantitative, qualitative, functional and structural characteristics.

By and large, in the US and Russia nuclear cruise missiles are the constituent parts of strategic nuclear forces, ensuring mutual deterrence and strategic stability as a whole.

In other nuclear states, the role and function of cruise missiles is different and therefore cannot be assessed in the same way. Therefore, the involvement of these states in a possible cruise missile ban has to proceed differently.

The United Kingdom, according to the official data, does not possess nuclear-armed cruise missiles. But the Royal Navy operates conventional cruise missiles, specifically the US-made *Tomahawk* which is nuclear-capable. The cruise missile *Storm Shadow* (developed as a joint project with France where it is known as *SCALP-EG*) has the potential to carry a nuclear charge.

France has developed independently sea-launched and air-launched cruise missiles (*ASMP*) that could be used both in conventional mode and with nuclear charges; approximately 60 units are reported to be in service. France is reported to have upgraded its nuclear air-launched cruise missile during the current decade.

For the United Kingdom and France, the previous record and the interpretation of nuclear deterrence are not identical, which is important when assessing the role of nuclear-equipped cruise missiles. For the United Kingdom, the question is not relevant currently but has the potential to become an issue. In the case of France, nuclear-capable cruise missiles, besides their military significance, have arguably even more importance symbolically and politically.

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[6] SIPRI Yearbook: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security. (2018). Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp.235-279.

China is reported to have developed both conventional and nuclear capable cruise missiles. The latter could hardly be disregarded in the context of nuclear deterrence. However, there is a considerable deficit of reliable information on their role in the triad. The Chinese *DF-10A* and *CJ-10* have technical characteristics comparable to those of *Tomahawks.* It is also reported that hypersonic missiles for nuclear missions have been developed.

India has developed cruise missile *Nirthbay* for using various types of charges, including nuclear capability. Alongside other ground-, air- and sea-based nuclear-armed missiles, they are considered as elements of nuclear deterrence against Pakistan and China.

In Pakistan, the primary mission of nuclear-armed cruise missiles is to deter India. The country has the nuclear-capable ground-launched *Babur (Hatf-VII)* cruise missile (similar to the US *Tomahawk*). Its sea-launched version *Babur-3* is in development; once it becomes operational, Pakistan will have a triad of nuclear strike platforms from ground, air, and sea to match India's nuclear triad. The air-launched Ra'ad (Hatf-8) cruise-missile is dual-capable and its modern version is also in development.

In Israel, nuclear-armed cruise missiles are part of the triad developed as a means of ensuring the country's military security in the hostile regional environment. The cruise missiles *Gabriel* and *Garpun* represent the air- and sea-based components of the nuclear triad.

Summing up, there are eight countries in possession of nuclear-armed cruise missiles (or having a technical possibility to arm their cruise missiles with nuclear charges). But the role and function of these weapons in the deterrence strategy of each country is different. This creates problems when designing a multilateral agreement which by definition has to be based on a single logic for all participants.

For instance, in the cases of the US and Russia, nuclear-armed cruise missiles are important elements of their deterrent potentials, but relatively insignificant compared to the ground- and sea-based ballistic missiles. It is true that for both countries there could be strong arguments in favor of keeping nuclear-armed cruise missiles as a component of their deterrence. But in case they decide to eliminate the cruise missile component of nuclear deterrence, this would be neutralized by the existing broader security infrastructure.

With respect to any 'smaller' nuclear state, it would be rather difficult to suggest convincing arguments for eliminating nuclear-armed cruise missiles if they are considered to be vitally important for security. And in any case, such arguments have to be different in comparison to those addressed to nuclear 'grands'.

The United Kingdom and France occupy other geopolitical niches and face other security challenges. For them, the range of available options is affected by their overall involvement in various security arrangements within NATO, on the basis of alliance relationships with the US, and in the context of the EU-related patterns.

For India and Pakistan, the relative importance of nuclear cruise missiles could be much higher. They are essential for retaliation – which makes them important elements of deterrence. In both countries, it is not certain that the margin of security and the availability of substitutes would be sufficient to compensate for the emerging vulnerabilities and deficiencies should cruise missiles be eliminated.

In addition, there is a deficit of information on nuclear-armed cruise missiles for most of the countries involved. Assessments of China's potential are contradictory; reliable expert estimates with respect to India, Pakistan and Israel are non-existent.

Given all these considerations, it is almost impossible to design a single pattern for a future ban on nuclear cruise missiles that would be acceptable for all eight countries. A more realistic scheme might consist of three interconnected components, each having certain specific characteristics.

Group A would include the US and Russia. These two countries could have a formal treaty-type 'basic agreement' on nuclear-armed cruise missiles. The earlier US-Soviet/Russian treaties on INF, strategic offensive nuclear armaments and others could serve as a model for developing the substance of the agreement (definitions, counting rules, modernization, resolution of disputes and so on). However, if the two countries failed to agree on the details of a treaty-type document, even a general political statement containing their commitments and the clearly expressed intention to move forward, could play a role as a first contribution to the broader endeavor.

Group B would include those countries that might accept some provisions of the 'basic agreement' without making a firm commitment. These could be China, France and the United Kingdom. Each participant would decide individually what provisions it would be ready to observe. It should be possible to move from Group B to Group A.

Group C would include all other nuclear states. Their role would be limited to formal involvement and acceptance of moral responsibility. They eventually could move to Group B or Group A.

Participants in all three groups would be connected only by information exchange and membership in the same infrastructure. The US and Russia would be expected to take a lead in promoting limitations/bans on nuclear-armed cruise missiles. In time, the others would hopefully follow their example.

In alternative models of the agreement, non-nuclear states could also be invited to participate. One option is to form a group of those who possess or could develop cruise missiles and who would be willing to pledge to refrain from arming them with a nuclear charge. Because of their participation in the Non-Proliferation Treaty, such a pledge would be redundant in legal terms but politically valuable. Another option would be to form a broader circle of member-states, with mainly symbolic and information functions.

The role of the leadership in the US and Russia is vital both for initiating the process and for its successful development. The easiest (although politically quite impressive) step would be for these two countries to announce unilateral pledges to neither develop nor deploy nuclear-armed cruise missiles. However, currently this scenario is probably beyond realistic expectations.

5) Verification

Verification with respect to any arms control agreement on cruise missiles is a difficult, but not an unresolvable, task.

One of the most serious arguments against a nuclear cruise missile ban refers to verification: how to distinguish nuclear-armed cruise missiles from those that have conventional ammunition? If there are no clear visible differences between them, how can the participants be sure that other involved parties have not violated the agreement by equipping their cruise missiles with nuclear charges? Paradoxically, this very problem creates a powerful incentive for a ban on nuclear-armed cruise missiles and at the same time could become the strongest argument of its opponents.

From the history of arms control it is known that sometimes, due to the complexities of verification, it is easier to modify certain basic parameters of the agreement by negotiation. This was the case with the Prague Treaty (2010) when participants decided to consider one strategic/heavy bomber as one unit within the limits on nuclear charges, rather than to develop counting procedures in the air-based leg of the triad.

Some other past experiences could also turn out to be useful[7]. In the 1980s, in early discussions on the INF, it was proposed that quantitative limits and territorial zones for the deployment of medium range missiles be established. However, it soon became clear that total elimination is easier to achieve and more efficiently controlled than any partial limitations. Therefore, the arguments in favor of *regulation* with respect to nuclear-armed cruise missiles could appear attractive, but they should be assessed against the background of required verification efforts.

Broad verification systems established by other arms control measures could be a very useful model for a future cruise missile ban. In this respect, the most appropriate patterns are those established by the INF Treaty and New START. The latter, for instance, includes 18 inspections per year on all objects of strategic offensive forces, dozens of notifications on their current state and forthcoming changes.

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[7] *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*. Volume 74, 2018 - Issue 5: Special issue: The verification of arms control agreements.

Another possible approach could be based on the experience of the multilateral export control regimes facilitating voluntary mutual information exchange between the participating states. Of the four such regimes currently in existence, the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) is the closest model for a possible ban on nuclear cruise missiles.

This 'soft' part of the verification could be as important as its 'hard' part (intrusive inspections, data on testing and so on). At the end of this spectrum there are unilateral measures where no verification is expected or carried out as in the case of the US decision to pull nuclear sea-launched cruise missiles out of service (1991) and then to fully retire them (in early 2000s).

When moving in this direction, various approaches could be used, ranging from the voluntary exchange of information to the most intrusive inspections. They could vary depending on the status of participants in the agreement. The combination of 'soft' and 'hard' verification could be the only efficient and realistic approach to minimize uncertainties with respect to 'nuclear *versus* conventional' cruise missiles.

6) Conclusion: The INF Treaty Context

A ban on nuclear-armed cruise missiles could be helpful (although not sufficient) for saving the INF Treaty. Indeed, cruise missiles have a visible place in the list of claims that the participants to the INF Treaty have addressed to each other. Failure to remove these problems from the agenda could erode one of the few continuing arms control regimes and become an impulse for the arms race[8].

The US accuses Russia of developing, testing and deploying the ground-launched cruise missile *Kalibr* with the range over 500 km. Russia accuses the US of deploying—in Romania and later in Poland—the BMD complex with Mk-41 launchers similar to the equipment used by the US Navy that could be used for launching not only anti-missiles like *Standard-3M*, but also cruise-missiles (*Tomahawk* with 2500 km range).

Both claims have a technical character[9]. They could be settled within the bilateral structures envisaged by the Treaty for discussing and clarifying issues that are subject to different interpretations. In particular, it is possible to present and analyze real parameters of testing, to determine additional permitted changes in the construction of launchers, to agree upon their visible characteristics (according to article VII of the INF Treaty) and so on. Some disputes may require decisions based on special inspections (such as the deployment or non-

[8] Arbatov, Alexei. (2017). Intermediate-range nuclear forces treaty: thirty years later. – In: *Russia: arms control, disarmament and international security.* IMEMO supplement to the Russian edition of the SIPRI Yearbook 2016 / Ed. by Alexey Arbatov and Sergey Oznobishchev. Moscow, IMEMO, pp.15-29.

[9] Viktor Mazin. (2018). Kak sokhranit' Dogovor o RSMD mezhdu Rossiei i SShA (How to keep the INF Treaty between Russia and the USA) (in Russian). Moscow Carnegie Center.

deployment of the Russian ground-based *Kalibr* missiles launchers, or the US *Tomahawks* in Mk-41 launchers in Romania and Poland).

All such means are both necessary and realistically possible for saving the INF Treaty. At the same time, they could support the eventual ban on all nuclear-armed cruise missiles. Similarly, a ban on nuclear-capable cruise missiles would *ipso facto* resolve almost all the INF Treaty compliance issues.

Russia also blames the US for developing the unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) *Predator*/*Reaper* with a range of over 500 km. This problem did not exist when the INF Treaty was in preparation. Formally, the latter does not prohibit such weapons, although the definitions developed for cruise-missiles could be applied to them. To encourage quick progress along this line in the US, Russia and many other countries, a special agreement is needed for such a regulation—either in connection with or independently of the INF Treaty. Here again, moving towards a nuclear cruise missile ban may be instrumental in addressing this INF-related problem.

One more link between the two patterns concerns the challenge of multilateralism *versus* bilateralism. On one hand, the incorporation in the INF Treaty of other countries that possess shorter- and medium-range missiles does not seem like a realistic scenario in the foreseeable future. On the other hand, there are serious obstacles to a multilateral agreement on nuclear-armed cruise missiles. The problems are in both cases very similar; indeed, critics of the ban stress its poor prospects by pointing to Russia's failure in making the INF Treaty 'more multilateral'. But this logic could be turned upside down: if the eventual ban is designed and developed in a more 'soft' way (as suggested earlier), this could contribute to promoting a multilateral approach towards the INF-related area. If this happens, a ban on nuclear-armed cruise missiles could in a sense compensate for certain deficiencies of the INF Treaty.

Some contentious issues with respect to the INF Treaty do not concern cruise missiles. But the way of addressing them should be similar—by focusing upon technical clarification, developing mutual compromises, agreeing upon more openness and efficient verification.

Still, the prevailing view seems to be sceptical about using a nuclear missile ban as a driver. According to this view, the sequence of steps should be the following: saving the INF Treaty and agreeing upon further progress in the area of strategic offensive forces, and only after that addressing the cruise-missile issue. This approach proceeds from a linear logic: the tasks of the first echelon (INF and strategic offence) could be solved relatively quickly (within months) –which would have a positive effect for resolving second echelon problems (cruise missiles). The latter would arguably open a long and hard negotiation process, where pending INF and strategic weapons issues persist as a complicating factor.

Regrettably, the overall negative dynamics in Russia's relations with the US seem to overtake all these rational considerations. But in the future, their relevance could hopefully reappear within a new phase of international developments.

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