

BROADENING THE SCOPE OF ARMS CONTROL: NEW STRATEGIC SYSTEMS, "NON STRATEGIC" ARSENALS, CONVENTIONAL LONG-RANGE PRECISION STRIKE, HYPERSONIC MISSILES, MISSILE DEFENSE AND SPACE CAPABILITIES

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How would you prioritize the incorporation of new elements into a future arms control negotiating framework?

First, there are several approaches to defining which "elements" are actually new: some new types of weapons or new warfighting (or deterrence) domains in general, or "new" as opposed to the elements that have been a part of other arms control negotiating frameworks. As currently, we have both the development of new weapons and shift of international "competition" into new domains, and the fact that quite a limited number of "working" negotiating frameworks exist, I suggest we can take the best of "both worlds".

Second, the biggest priority should be to limit the chance of any real armed conflict between great powers, as the path to nuclear escalation will hardly be manageable. But, simultaneously, the arms control provides for "manageability" in itself, so any negotiating framework should include tangible deliverables and working mechanisms, including those focused on compliance disputes resolution.

Third, based on the previous idea the most important new elements that should be considered will have to be:

- a) Usable, so the risks of escalation are high and need to be decreased.
- b) Devastating, so the escalation itself might lead to unintended consequences, including because of (mis)perceptions by those on the "receiving" end.
- c) Perceived by different actors in a similar manner, so those actors find it useful to address these elements.
- d) Exist in physical form, so there will be something substantial to monitor and verify.

What is the most highly destabilizing weapon system that requires immediate attention?

Going down to actual destabilizing weapon systems it is appropriate to focus on long-range (starting from several hundred kilometers) high-speed (including but not limited to hypersonic weapons of different sub-types) high-precision weapons of different basing modes (including but not limited to space domain), without an actual focus on payloads.

This might sound like a repetition of traditional official Russian "bogeyman" claims, but in this very domain we are approaching an extremely dangerous situation due to the following reasons:

1. This is the major trend in global military development; more and more countries are acquiring similar capabilities through domestic development, foreign military sales, or a mix of both.
2. Such weapons are natural progress of "classic" subsonic land attack cruise missiles and medium-range ballistic missiles, with a flavour of reconnaissance-strike systems.
3. Regional military conflicts of last several decades and especially last ~10 years demonstrate the ever-growing number of actors that are ready to use conventionally-armed missiles to strike different types of targets, including with "signaling" intentions, but such cases also demonstrate that modern missiles are good tools with rather impressive precision and destructive power.
4. So, when those "tools" are flying your way, there is serious pressure to react, especially if you assess their targets to be your "family jewels" (e.g., nuclear weapons or command, control, and communications nodes)[1].
5. There are more and more platforms capable of firing long-range missiles, and there will be even more. When such platforms (including Russian corvettes and frigates or US destroyers and submarines) will be on patrol near adversary borders, or land-based mobile launchers will be deployed in a pattern that will be considered capable of hitting those "family jewels", the pressure to shift towards first pre-emptive strike doctrine and posture will grow enormously.

What will be the impact of further proliferation of these new elements?

Further proliferation of long-range precision weapons is a reality, and it can hardly be reversed. The main impact will be the increased feeling of threat in most countries in the world. When one feels threatened, naturally, this entity starts to look for solutions. Such solutions can take the form of missile defense, which is expensive and penetrable in any case, and (or) of similar capabilities acquisition (which are also expensive). Another option – going nuclear or shifting focus on nuclear capabilities.

The “sub-total” in this case will be a growing number of offensive and defensive “bubbles” which intersect with each other. Given that the world is in quite a disarray, most countries will find themselves quite uncomfortable, as their neighbours, for different reasons, will obtain the capability to hit them or limit their strike capability, or both – security dilemma at its finest.

And that is why we need arms control solutions, first and foremost because arms control in itself is a tool to enhance national security, not something you engage in for the good of humankind.

What would a negotiating framework look like to address these new elements bilaterally and multilaterally?

For bilateral formats, which, presumably, mean Russia-US negotiations (or consultations, at the very least), the negotiating framework should include several layers.

First, both countries should agree that:

- a) A main strategic stability principle – the absence of drivers for a first strike – remains relevant and must be reaffirmed.
- b) There is a direct path from minor military incident to a major nuclear war through high-intensity conventional warfighting, and while in any case the sides would try to limit the scope of such conflict, avoiding it in the first place should be a priority.
- c) The countries will continue the discussions on destabilizing effects of certain military capabilities.
- d) Common security through arms control remains a cornerstone of international peace.

Second, if and when the sides will be ready to discuss future arms control arrangements, the path forward can be two-fold:

- a) Search for a joint understanding of the “factors affecting strategic stability”.
- b) Search for ways to address some of those factors (especially the aforementioned element of the highest priority), as a general treaty covering all “concerns” is improbable, if not impossible.

Third, destruction even of some of the military capabilities is next to impossible to agree on (at least as long as those capabilities are considered military and (or) politically useful), so the focus should be on limits. Such limits can be quantitative and geography-based but cannot be qualitative. Probably a good way to start would be to codify at least some of the existing deployment practices. There is also a traditional challenge of geographical limits with regard to mobile systems, but given the current capabilities of intelligence-gathering technologies, including but not limited to national technical means, a substantial and untraceable change of deployment pattern leading to regional destabilization seems unlikely.

After both sides agree on limits and live with those for some time, they will, hopefully, realize, that the sky still does not fall, so we can move towards gradual reductions.

One of the major challenges would be to find appropriate verification techniques, both for “extended” nuclear and non-nuclear domains. Relevant research might be politically problematic, so the relevant efforts should be extremely cautious. But this work will have to be done.

Russia and the US remain and will remain the trend-setters for global arms control, so success on the bilateral track is, probably, the major prerequisite for any multilateral efforts. But, simultaneously, in the current multipolar, polycentric world, it is impossible for Moscow and Washington to totally disregard other countries and their interests.

There is no "one size fits all" solution, but if we take the "multi-layer" approach explained for the bilateral format to the multilateral one, bringing other countries on board for the "joint understanding" might be something achievable, as well as multilateral discussions on strategic stability factors[2].

Multilateral limits are much more challenging, as hardly any country would agree to codify its inferiority. However, (yet again based on the priority of long-range precision strike weapons) there is a chance to find some trilateral regional solutions if, for example, Russia, China, and the US agree on the number of launch platforms or missiles in a given sector of the Earth surface without specifying the payloads.

Finally, as there is some room for asymmetric arms control even between Russia and the US, should our countries find a way to codify "disparity" that does not affect strategic stability, it might become a blueprint for further multilateral efforts. One field where this might be possible is to try to address the deployment patterns of SSBNs: within the P5, and even between Russia and the US, the practices and capabilities are very different, but still provide deterrent effect (or at least considered as such).

Are there other instruments or mechanisms -- short of a legally binding treaty -- that could improve bilateral transparency and confidence?

The domestic political climate in the US forces everyone to search for such instruments, and there is a menu of those.

We all remember Presidential Nuclear Initiatives, which were imperfect, but led to a substantial decrease in nuclear stockpiles (although for different reasons, which can be boiled down to the lack of missions or lack of funds to make those stockpiles sustainable). So, unilateral measures, even unverifiable[3], might work, but, of course, provide room for accusations and counteraccusations.

An important tool is a self-restraint. In the Russian case, despite the US skepticism, the self-restraint regarding post-INF developments is an important example; there are no deployments, there are no tests.

The self-restraint mentioned above is a part of a moratorium initiative, which also provides for a non-legally binding solution. It is very unfortunate that the interest in looking deeper into this initiative is very limited, to say the least, as such arrangement ("we do not do something somewhere as long as you refrain from such actions") can be a draft for many areas. Of course, there is a huge challenge of verification, transparency, definitions, etc., but those can be sorted out if there is a political will.

Restraint and moratoria codification might be in the form of joint declarations or agreed statements, which will make those politically-binding. Such tools are imperfect, but they can serve as crutches until "proper" arms control is back on the table.

Another useful mechanism to improve bilateral transparency and confidence is engagement in doctrine discussions and debates on the perceived capabilities and intentions. The best way to do this is to hold regular military-to-military and "2+2" consultations, but if this is impossible due to political reasons, even Track 1.5 will be good enough. Through such consultations threat perceptions between the adversaries can become clearer to each other, so a chance of inadvertent escalation will be somewhat lower.

Finally, any chance of practical contacts between militaries should be used, including regional deconfliction mechanisms, to achieve a greater level of general trust between servicemen. This might not look as fancy as talks between Presidential Representatives, but, again, the effect of better mutual understanding is hard to overestimate. Such practical contacts should be multilateralized, so the people involved will obtain real-world experience of looking for joint solutions.

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[1] The terminal stage of such threat perception was manifested in the latest version of the Basic Principles of the State Policy of the Russian Federation on Nuclear Deterrence, where detection of

ballistic missile launch (without specifying neither range nor payload) against Russian territory is considered a condition that can lead to nuclear use.

[2] To a limited extent, such discussions already take place within the P5 process.

[3] In fact, even the resolution of the Cuban Missile Crisis can be defined as unilateral non-verified measures.