

Possible scope and Conditions for Information-Sharing and Confidence-Building Measures regarding Non-Strategic Nuclear Weapons in Europe

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A Range of Possible Measures

Over the past few years, NATO officials, along with Western and Russian non-governmental experts, have suggested information-sharing (transparency) measures and other confidence-building measures (CBMs) for dealing with non-strategic nuclear weapons (NSNWs).¹

U.S. National Security Advisor Donilon in March 2011 proposed reciprocal transparency “on the numbers, locations and types of non-strategic forces in Europe.”² An April 2011 paper endorsed by ten NATO permanent representatives called additionally for reciprocal transparency on “command arrangements, operational status and level of operational security.”³ A February 2012 paper released by the Euro-Atlantic Security Initiative set out other possible measures: “demating” NSNWs from delivery systems; relocating NSNWs away from NATO-Russia borders; consolidation of NSNWs at fewer storage sites; and restricting NSNWs to declared storage sites.⁴ NATO’s May 2012 “Deterrence and Defense Posture Review” endorsed the concept of CBMs in general but did not specify particular proposals.

The Russian government has not put forward specific ideas for transparency or CBMs. Non-official Russian experts have suggested possible CBMs, including: confining NSNWs to “centralized” storage facilities (away from air and naval bases) on national territory; challenge inspections to confirm the absence of NSNWs at air and naval bases; transparency regarding NSNWs retired since 1991; and data exchanges, with visits to NSNW storage sites to confirm that the number of weapons at a site is consistent with the number declared.⁵

¹ The term “non-strategic nuclear weapons” is used in this paper to refer to nuclear warheads, not delivery systems.

² The White House, Remarks as Prepared for Delivery by Tom Donilon, National Security Advisor to the President, “The Prague Agenda: The Road Ahead,” Carnegie International Nuclear Policy Conference, March 29, 2011.

³ Letter of the ambassadors of Poland, Norway, Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Iceland and Luxembourg and charge d’ affairs of Slovenia to Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen, April 15, 2011.

⁴ Euro-Atlantic Security Initiative, “Addressing Nonstrategic Nuclear Forces,” February 2012.

⁵ Alexei Arbatov, “Gambit or Endgame: The New State of Arms Control,” The Carnegie Papers, Carnegie Moscow Center, March 2011 and Anatoliy Diakov, “Verified Reductions of Non-Strategic Nuclear Weapons,” Center for Arms Control, Energy and Environmental Studies, Moscow Institute for Physics and Technology, February 18, 2011.

Benefits and Costs

Two issues would need to be addressed at the outset regarding transparency measures or CBMs regarding NSNWs. First, geographic scope, i.e., would the measures apply to U.S. and Russian NSNWs worldwide or in Europe only? Second, would the measures apply to the non-strategic warhead itself or to the delivery system? For purposes of this paper, it is assumed that the initial focus will be on warheads, not delivery systems, which have primarily conventional missions.

Transparency. The chief benefit of transparency regarding NSNWs would be to provide greater confidence by reducing mutual suspicions and worst-case assumptions about the other side's capabilities and/or intentions. Periodic or recurring transparency could improve stability by confirming the existence or absence of weapon trend lines. Transparency would work best if done on a reciprocal basis.

NATO has released some information on its NSNWs, including on types (now gravity bombs only), relative numbers of weapons, relative numbers of storage sites, and readiness levels. The United States has disclosed the total number of nuclear weapons in its stockpile for each year through 2009. The Russian government has yet to release comparable information, though it has indicated percentage reductions made in various categories of Russian NSNWs since 1991. Neither the United States nor Russia has formally disclosed the number of non-strategic weapons it currently maintains or their locations.

Information-sharing on numbers, types and locations of U.S. and Russian NSNWs, which would need to be conducted in a manner consistent with U.S. and Russian law, would be useful in and of itself and could facilitate monitoring the implementation of other CBMs, such as relocation of weapons. The inability to monitor implementation of the 1991-92 presidential nuclear initiatives gave rise to concern that Russia did not fulfill all the measures announced by President Yeltsin, e.g., whether nuclear-armed sea-launched cruise missiles (SLCMs) had been removed from Russian submarines.

Transparency would also be useful in the context of a future negotiation covering NSNWs. It would allow Washington and Moscow to develop better-informed proposals for NSNW limits and could provide the basis for a data exchange as part of an eventual agreement. Washington and Moscow could compare data on NSNW numbers, types and locations against their all-source information holdings; if the numbers tracked, that would build U.S. and Russian confidence in their intelligence and in their ability to monitor an eventual agreement.

The costs of such transparency stem in part from security concerns about revealing weapons numbers and the locations of sensitive military assets. Given the political changes in Europe since the Cold War, the military sensitivity of this information would seem to be reduced. It is likely, moreover, that the United States and Russia each already have a good idea of the locations of the other's nuclear weapons storage sites, even if there is less certainty about the aggregate numbers of weapons and the numbers that might be stored at specific sites.

Some have suggested that the United States and Russia apply a transparency CBM to the 1991-92 presidential nuclear initiatives. For example, they might exchange data on the numbers and types of NSNWs eliminated each year as a result of the initiatives. As this would involve an exchange of historical

instead of current data, it would presumably be less sensitive. It would nevertheless be useful; the sides could check the exchanged data against their own historical assessments, even if the lack of a baseline figure might leave some level of uncertainty.

An exchange of information regarding command arrangements, operational status and level of operational security could facilitate better understanding between NATO and Russia, though the militaries on both sides might be reluctant to share certain operational or security details. To be more useful, such an exchange could be followed by a workshop bringing together NATO and Russian military and defense officials to discuss the information exchanged. The benefits of such a workshop would depend in large measure on the candor of the participants.

Demating. It is believed that all U.S. and most, if not all, Russian NSNWs are demated—that is, separated—from their delivery systems. The United States and Russia might each state that, as a matter of national policy, it would keep its NSNWs demated. Since this may be current practice on both sides, it could be relatively easy. Such a CBM could have a positive political impact, though the practical impact would be less in cases where demated warheads were stored near to delivery systems. Exhibits, as discussed below, might increase the value of a demating CBM.

“Centralized” Storage. Moving NSNWs to centralized storage sites separate from sites where delivery systems are based would have both positive political and military impact. It would lengthen the time to prepare weapons for delivery in a crisis and increase potential warning time. The United States, however, is unlikely to agree to move weapons to centralized storage sites *on national territory* (requiring withdrawal from Europe) as a CBM or precondition for negotiating NSNW limits. Agreement to withdraw weapons to national territory likely would be possible only in the context of a treaty that significantly reduced U.S. and Russian NSNW numbers.

A second problem with the concept for NATO is that U.S. NSNWs are believed to be stored at air bases in European basing countries, in most cases where U.S. or allied dual-capable aircraft are deployed. Even without the “on national territory” requirement, centralized storage would require that NATO build new storage sites or reactivate older sites located at some distance from air bases to house U.S. NSNWs. This could be difficult politically. Relocating the dual-capable aircraft to other air bases might be another option, but it would likely be difficult for NATO to consider and would still leave weapons readily usable at their current air bases.

Relocation/Consolidation. Proposals to relocate or consolidate NSNWs away from NATO-Russia borders could have a positive political impact. NATO states in the Baltic region, for example, would welcome withdrawal of Russian NSNWs believed to be located at storage sites near Estonia and Latvia (as well as any in Kaliningrad). Relocating Russian NSNWs and other (strategic) nuclear weapons believed to be stored on the Kola Peninsula may be more problematic, given the lack of other nuclear storage facilities to support Russia’s Northern Fleet.

When relocating/consolidating weapons, it would be better to avoid moving a non-strategic warhead from a centralized storage site (not at an air or naval base) to a storage site farther away from NATO-Russia borders but at a base where delivery systems are located. That could make the warhead more readily usable. Relocation of Russian weapons to storage sites east of the Ural Mountains should be avoided, as that would provoke concern in Japan, China and other Asian states (in any event, there

appear to be a number of Russian storage sites west of the Urals but still a significant distance from NATO-Russia borders).

Given the small number of active storage sites believed to house U.S. NSNWs in Europe, relocation/consolidation would be a difficult proposition for NATO; in most cases, removing weapons from a storage site would mean removing all NSNWs from that country, which could raise pressure on other NATO states hosting nuclear weapons to transfer the weapons on their territory as well. It thus could be extremely difficult to apply this kind of CBM on a reciprocal basis, raising the question of whether Russia would be willing to apply it unilaterally, perhaps in exchange for some other NATO concession. (In any event, it appears that the closest site housing U.S. NSNWs in Europe is about 800 kilometers from Russian territory.)

When considering demating, centralized storage or relocation/consolidation CBMs, NATO and Russia should weigh the potential military impact in the event of a crisis in which one or both might take steps to increase the readiness level of its NSNWs. If, for example, weapons had been consolidated at centralized sites but one side wished to return them to air bases to increase their readiness level, what would be the impact on crisis stability between NATO and Russia? How would that compare to moves to increase readiness levels in the current situation?

Inspections/Visits. While it might be difficult to reach U.S.-Russia agreement on inspections absent a formal treaty, visits to sites associated with or formerly associated with NSNWs offer a CBM that could be used to confirm that certain other CBMs had been implemented. For example, the United States and Russia might agree to exchange visits to demonstrate how they had demated warheads from delivery systems, or to show that old NSNW storage sites were no longer being used to store nuclear weapons. Another possible CBM would be to arrange visits to U.S. and Russian warships to demonstrate that they do not carry nuclear-armed SLCMs or other nuclear weapons (this measure of course would not apply to U.S. and Russian ballistic missile submarines).

Visits to active storage sites could be contemplated to confirm the accuracy of data exchanged as part of a transparency CBM, if that CBM disaggregated data by location. However, it would be a very sensitive question for both sides.

Lessons from Past Agreements

If the United States and Russia were to consider these kinds of transparency and confidence-building measures, they could draw upon numerous antecedents in previous bilateral and multilateral agreements. For example, the U.S.-Soviet Treaty on the Elimination of Their Intermediate-Range and Shorter-Range Missiles (INF Treaty), Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START I) and New START Treaty—as well as the Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty—all provided for detailed data exchanges, including data on the numbers and types of treaty-limited systems as well as on the locations of specific systems. By public accounts, the data exchanges under the bilateral nuclear treaties have proceeded smoothly.⁶ Those agreements provide ready models for data exchanges regarding numbers, types and locations of NSNWs.

⁶ Following Russia's suspension of its observance of the CFE Treaty in 2008, Russia and NATO members have ceased exchanging data and notifications required by that treaty.

One issue to bear in mind is that most locational information exchanged under these treaties dealt or deals with launchers, missiles and bombers, as opposed to warheads, which would be the focus of NSNW transparency measures. That said, New START's "Type One" inspections at ICBM and ballistic missile submarine bases require that the number of reentry vehicles emplaced on each deployed ICBM or SLBM at that base must be given to the inspecting party, so there is something of an antecedent for including warhead information in such data exchanges.

The detailed data in the INF and START I treaties was made public. Although the United States has unilaterally released detailed data on its strategic forces from New START, Russia has not publicly released its detailed data. The sides would have to discuss how to handle data exchanged under an NSNW CBM. Were it exchanged in U.S.-Russian channels, there should be a provision for sharing the data within NATO. Whether or not the data would be made public is another question. There may be security and other reasons not to make such information public.

If the sides consider CBMs involving consolidation or relocation, they might consider a parallel notifications CBM, under which they would provide advance or after-the-fact notification regarding those movements. Washington and Moscow already have significant experience with this due to the INF, START I and New START requirements regarding transit notifications.

Were the sides to agree on an exchange of visits, they presumably would want to have ground rules agreed in advance for conducting the visits. They could again draw on the experience from the INF, START I and New START treaties, which describe in detail how inspections and exhibits should be conducted, including the privileges and immunities of inspectors. Such inspections have become very regularized and routine between the U.S. and Russian militaries.

Visits to current or former nuclear storage sites for U.S. NSNWs in Europe would involve visits to third countries; procedures would thus require consent of those host countries. The INF Treaty provides a model here, as arrangements were worked out to facilitate Soviet, and later Russian, inspection of U.S. INF facilities on the territory of NATO member-states.

Which Measures Should be the Focus of First Steps

In order for transparency measures or other CBMs to have a positive impact, it would be important that NATO and Russia came to some shared assessment of the value of the measures (as well as of their potential costs). Of the measures described in this paper, an exchange of data regarding numbers and types of U.S. and Russian NSNWs, and possibly locations, would be a desirable first step. It could enhance confidence that other CBMs were being implemented and provide a basis for a treaty data base. As noted, it might be easier to agree initially to a data exchange regarding the implementation of the 1991-92 presidential nuclear initiatives, as that would involve historical rather than current data, though it would be a less valuable measure.

A CBM under which the United States and Russia each declare that, as a matter of national policy, it will maintain its NSNWs demated from delivery systems could be a good, and relatively simple, early step—if it is the case that all Russian NSNWs are demated from delivery systems. A provision for visits to

demonstrate that non-strategic nuclear warheads were no longer mated to delivery systems would greatly enhance the value of such a CBM.

A third CBM that might be relatively easy to agree would be an exchange of visits to sites that formerly housed U.S. and Russian NSNWs. Particularly if it included visits to sites close to NATO-Russia borders, it could have a positive political impact. The sides might also consider whether visits to warships could usefully demonstrate the absence of nuclear-armed SLCMs or other nuclear weapons. Visits to active NSNW storage sites to confirm exchanged data on numbers at particular locations would be desirable but would involve more sensitive issues.

Other measures—withdrawal to centralized storage, relocation and consolidation—would appear to be considerably more difficult to agree upon. NATO certainly would welcome such CBMs, if adopted by Russia, as having significant positive political and military impact, particularly if it were possible to confirm that the measures had been implemented. For its part, however, NATO likely could not reciprocate, at least not in the near-term.

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