

OFF TO A BAD START

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Serious students of strategic forces and deterrence know that the *credibility* of our forces for deterrence is dependent on their flexibility to provide a spectrum of deterrent options, and their resilience to adjust in a timely way to changes in the threat environment. The U.S. need for flexible and resilient strategic forces to deter enemies and assure allies credibly has been recognized for decades, and is the reason that Democratic and Republican administrations since the 1960s rejected the old “assured destruction” standard popularized by former Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara in his day.

McNamara’s horrific yet rigid and finite threat of nuclear “assured destruction” was discarded specifically because it alone was deemed to be an *incredible* deterrent threat vis-à-vis many of the severe threats we and our allies faced, including limited nuclear threats. The basic U.S. and allied concern was that a U.S. “assured destruction” deterrent would leave the United States and allies vulnerable to attack because opponents would not actually believe that the United States would employ an “assured destruction” deterrent in response to any but the most severe nuclear attack on the U.S. homeland. Thus U.S. and allied governments agreed on the need for greater flexibility through multiple more limited deterrent options to help provide credible U.S. deterrence strategies to a spectrum of possible attacks.

Virtually all major nuclear policy documents made public since the 1960s have emphasized this need for flexibility and multiple strategic force options.¹



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Strategic force flexibility is particularly important today for credible deterrence because the contemporary threat environment can shift rapidly and in surprising ways. In one crisis we may need one set of strategic capabilities to deter credibly, while in another, a different set of strategic capabilities may be necessary; assuring allies credibly may necessitate still different types of strategic forces; and when an attack cannot be deterred, an altogether different set of forces may be necessary to defend against it.

The material question is whether the treaty is compatible with the continued force flexibility and resilience essential to the credibility of U.S. deterrence strategies over the long term.

If we want a credible deterrent to a spectrum of severe attacks, including for example, nuclear and biological attacks on our allies, our deterrence forces must have the quantity and diversity necessary to be flexible and resilient. The 2009 report by the bipartisan Strategic Posture Commission, entitled *America's Strategic Posture*, emphasizes this contemporary U.S. requirement given the current, fluid threat environment.²

Understanding this requirement is the necessary starting point for any review of New START, the arms reduction agreement recently finalized by the White House and Kremlin. Indeed, at New START's lower force levels, the need for flexibility and resilience in our remaining forces becomes increasingly important. The material question is whether the treaty is compatible with the continued force flexibility and resilience essential to the credibility of U.S. deterrence strategies over

the long term. Under New START, would the combination of U.S. reductions and possible Russian force deployments (with or without Russian cheating) threaten the necessary flexibility and resilience of our forces? After all, we cannot allow our enthusiasm for quantitative nuclear reductions to undermine our ability to credibly deter war and assure American allies. As the late Herman Kahn often observed, "The objective of nuclear-weapons policy should not be solely to decrease the number of weapons in the world, but to make the world safer—which is not necessarily the same thing."³

Drawing down American capabilities

New START raises some concerns in this regard. For example, a recent Administration report on verification emphasizes that "any" Russian cheating "would have little effect on the assured second-strike capabilities of U.S. strategic forces..."⁴ This claim is ominous because it suggests that the Obama administration has resurrected "assured destruction"-type capabilities as the standard of adequacy for U.S. strategic forces, and on that limited basis has determined that "any" Russian cheating could have no serious effect on our ability to deter or assure.⁵ This flies in the face of every Republican and Democratic administration since the 1960s and their proper conclusion that U.S. "assured destruction" capabilities alone are inadequate because they require little or none of the flexibility and resilience so important for *credible* deterrence and assurance. Assured destruction is a conveniently finite, undemanding force standard; it imposes few requirements on U.S. offensive capa-

bilities and none on U.S. defenses, but it also undermines U.S. deterrence and assurance missions. The Administration's celebratory claims about New START verification that appear tied to some version of this old Cold War-type of measure are far more troubling than reassuring.

In addition, the treaty would limit U.S. strategic force flexibility and resilience because it requires sizeable reductions in the number of U.S. strategic nuclear launchers, and would limit some types of strategic *conventional* forces for prompt global strike (PGS). Administration officials have said, "The treaty does not constrain our ability to develop and deploy non-nuclear prompt global strike capabilities."⁶ But in fact, New START *would* restrict deployment of any U.S. conventional PGS options based on existing ICBMs or sea-launched ballistic missiles. These would be limited under New START's ceiling of 700 deployed launchers.⁷ And, we would have to reduce our strategic nuclear force launchers further below 700 on a 1:1 basis for each of these conventional PGS systems deployed. Such a substitution in general, it should be noted, has understandably been rejected for deterrence purposes by senior U.S. military leaders.⁸

Administration officials, though, have said that limiting these conventional PGS options in this fashion is acceptable based on the assumption that only *a small number of such systems will be needed*.⁹ Unfortunately, there can be no certainty behind that assumption given the many different and now-unknown threats that will arise in New START's 10-15 year time frame. Perhaps the option of deploying *many* such conventional PGS systems will be critical for deterrence, assurance or defense. Yet, under

New START, we would be mightily constrained from doing so because of the treaty's limits and its required 1:1 trade-off with our nuclear forces.

Stretched to the limit

In addition, New START's force limits do not allow "more [capability] than is needed" for deterrence under current planning.¹⁰ Leaving little or no such margin may be risky when force flexibility and diversity is necessary to deter and assure credibly across a range of threats.

Senior U.S. military leaders have noted in open testimony that New START *would indeed allow sufficient U.S. strategic force flexibility*.¹¹ However, the analysis behind this important conclusion reportedly was predicated on three key assumptions: 1) U.S. planning guidance for strategic forces would remain the same; 2) there would be no requests for an increase in forces; and 3) Russia would be compliant with New START.¹²

But would the treaty allow sufficient U.S. flexibility and resilience *if one or all of those optimistic starting assumptions do not hold, as is plausible*? For example, what if Russia again decides to violate its treaty commitments? What if relations with China and Russia return to a crisis pitch, and they express more severe nuclear threats to our allies or to us? What if Iranian deployment of nuclear weapons and missiles throws the entire Middle East into an unprecedented security crisis? What if the apparent nuclear nexus of Burma, Iran, North Korea and Syria poses unprecedented threats to our allies or our forces abroad?¹³ U.S. planning and force requirements might have to change with any and all of these unwanted developments that could arise during New START's tenure. What new

quantitative or qualitative strategic force requirements might arise as a result for credible deterrence, assurance or defense, and would New START preserve the necessary U.S. force flexibility and resilience to meet those requirements? These are fundamental questions regarding the treaty and international security.

New START neither requires real Russian reductions nor does it provide hard limits on a renewed buildup of Russian strategic nuclear forces.

More simply, will the U.S., at least, develop and deploy the diverse strategic force structure that remains possible *under the treaty* and could help preserve U.S. force flexibility and resilience at lower levels? The traditional U.S. triad of bombers, ICBMs, and sea-based missiles—now buttressed by missile defenses and the potential for new non-nuclear PGS capabilities—can be extremely valuable in this regard because the diversity of offensive and defensive options helps provide the necessary basis for adjusting to a multitude of different threats and circumstances.

The Obama administration has expressed its intention to support the triad, missile defense deployment, and conventional PGS, but at this point it has made no apparent commitment to advanced conventional PGS deployment or to modernizing the aging ICBM and bomber legs of the triad, including the air-launched cruise missile. This fosters concern that the Administration's enthusiasm for force reductions may now come at the expense of the long-standing requirements for force diversity, flexibility, and resilience, and take

refuge in a return to old "assured destruction"-type thinking. If our strategic forces are to be reduced further, we also must take care to ensure that they also are modernized with the specific goal of maximizing their flexibility and resilience at lower numbers—whether through traditional means or as a result of innovations. Past administrations have so balanced reductions with necessary modernization programs, but this is a tall order to which the Obama administration has not yet committed.

For example, bombers have great inherent flexibility and resilience, and the weapons counting rules for bombers under New START are extremely permissive. Yet, while Russia has decided to build a new strategic bomber and apparently has a new long-range air-launched nuclear cruise missile near deployment,¹⁴ the Obama administration plans to cut U.S. nuclear-capable bombers by more than one-third under New START and has made no commitment to replace the venerable B-52 or to build a new air-launched cruise missile.¹⁵ Similarly, the Administration has announced that it will deMIRV U.S. ICBMs and reduce the number of U.S. ICBM launchers by at least 30 under New START,¹⁶ while Russia is deploying new MIRVed mobile ICBMs, and has decided to move ahead with a new heavy MIRVed ICBM as is now permitted under New START.

Over time, this New START-inspired combination of U.S. ICBM reductions and permitted Russian MIRVed heavy ICBMs could again challenge the survivability of U.S. ICBMs, bombers, and missile-carrying submarines not on patrol—a situation long recognized as highly "destabilizing." And if the survivability of these U.S. forces is at risk, so

too will be much of the triad's flexibility and the corresponding credibility of U.S. forces to deter and assure.

The Administration will need to make some hard commitments to U.S. force modernization if we are to move forward with flexible and resilient offensive and defensive capabilities at lower force levels. How much confidence can we have that the Administration will take the necessary strategic modernization steps given its highest nuclear priority of nonproliferation and movement toward a nuclear-free world, its commitment to further negotiations with Moscow, and its presumption against any new nuclear warheads?¹⁷ A solid U.S. commitment to bomber and cruise missile modernization, Minuteman ICBM life extension and ultimate replacement, and missile defenses of all ranges likewise could help provide this confidence. Indeed, credible assurances and the necessary strategic modernization budgets should be the corresponding *sine qua non* of any acceptance of New START.

Disproportionate burden

Concern about New START's impact on U.S. force flexibility and resilience—however modest or significant—might be eased if the treaty's ceilings on Russian forces actually would reduce the threats we might face. But, according to numerous Russian open source accounts, New START's ceilings are of little real consequence for Russia because Russia's aged Cold War strategic launchers already have been reduced below New START's ceilings, and will decline further with or without the treaty—while Russia's comprehensive post-Cold War nuclear modernization programs are moving forward

slowly. Alexei Arbatov, the former Deputy Chairman of the Duma Defense Committee, notes that “[t]he new treaty is an agreement on reducing the American and not the Russian [strategic nuclear forces]. In fact, the latter will be reduced in any case because of the mass removal from the order of battle of obsolete arms and the one-at-a-time introduction of new systems.”¹⁸ Prior to the New START negotiations, Russian open sources already projected that by 2012 Russian strategic nuclear forces could have as few as 406 launchers and fewer than 1,500 accountable warheads—well below New START ceilings using its counting rules.¹⁹ The point was made most succinctly by Dr. Sergei Rogov, Director of the USA and Canada Institute in Moscow: “We will not have to reduce anything prematurely. In effect, the ceilings established by the new START Treaty do not force us to reduce currently available strategic offensive forces... Only the United States will have to conduct reductions...”²⁰ Russian defense expert Mikhail Barabanov again makes the same point: “The truth is, Russia's nuclear arsenal is already at or even below the new ceilings. At the time of the signing of the treaty, Russia had a total of just 640 strategic delivery vehicles—only 571 of them deployed... It therefore becomes evident that Russia needs no actual reductions to comply. If anything, it may need to bring some of its numbers up to the new limits, not down.”²¹

In other words, New START's common ceilings essentially appear to require *unilateral* reductions by the United States. Russian officials and analysts have long celebrated this situation, while some U.S. officials and treaty proponents have acknowledged it only recently.²² In this context, it is difficult to take seri-

ously the notion that the treaty's supposed reductions for Russia justify its prospective limitations on U.S. flexibility and resilience.

Nor does the treaty provide solid barriers against the re-emergence of Russian strategic forces. New START neither requires real Russian reductions nor does it provide hard limits on a renewed buildup of Russian strategic nuclear forces. That is because New START contains sufficient loopholes and permissive counting rules to allow Russia to deploy far beyond the treaty's 1,550 strategic nuclear warheads ceiling *within the terms of the treaty* if Russia finds the financial resources to do so. In fact, according to a report by RIA Novosti, the official news agency of the Russian Federation, Russia could deploy 2,100 strategic actual nuclear weapons under the treaty—well above the putative 1,550 warhead ceiling.²³ There are avenues that would allow Russia to deploy many more than even that number and remain within the confines of the treaty.

This may be significant over time because Russia's highest defense procurement priority is the comprehensive modernization of its strategic nuclear forces.²⁴ According to Russian open sources, Russia has a new strategic air-launched nuclear cruise missile near deployment, is MIRVing its new mobile ICBMs (the RS-24), and has committed to deploy at least one new strategic bomber, a new 5,000 km-range submarine-launched cruise missile, and a new heavy ICBM. There also has been interest expressed in the Russian press in a new rail-mobile ICBM and a new air-launched ICBM—neither of which, according to some Russian public commentary, would necessarily have to be counted under the treaty's force ceilings.

At the moment, aging forces and Russia's production and finan-

cial problems are causing reductions in Russia's force numbers precipitously—with or without New START. But, Russia has committed to the comprehensive modernization of its strategic forces; if and when it has the necessary financial and production capacity to realize this goal, New START will not prevent Russia from deploying new forces well beyond the treaty's specified ceilings within the terms of the treaty.

New START and missile defense

Senior administration officials have said about missile defense that “[t]here are no constraints of any kind in the New START Treaty,”²⁵ and that “[t]he treaty does nothing to constrain missile defenses... there is no limit or constraint on what the United States can do with its missile defense systems.”²⁶ But such statements are simply false; New START contains both explicit and implicit limitations on U.S. missile defense options. Judgments may differ regarding their significance, but there should be no further denials that New START includes them.

For example, Article 5, paragraph 3, of the treaty prohibits the United States from converting ICBM or sea-based missile launchers for missile defense purposes. The Administration has said that this is not a significant limit on U.S. defenses because the United States has no plans for such conversions.²⁷ Yet, missile agency directors examined such options in the past and have said publicly they found them technically credible and of interest. New START—a treaty that is supposed to have no restrictions on missile defense—would now preclude this option from the possible plans of future administrations.

U.S. missile defense options may need to be protected, particularly given Russia's long-standing goal to veto American missile defenses, and the Administration's apparent commitment to further negotiations with the Kremlin. Here, Congress can play a key role; the Senate could direct the President to make more clear to Russia that the United States recognizes no treaty limits on missile defense beyond those in Article 5, paragraph 3, and that the U.S. will not agree to any further negotiated limits of any kind on its missile defense options.

In addition, New START establishes the Bilateral Consultative Commission (BCC) and gives it broad authority to "agree upon such additional measures as may be necessary to improve the viability and effectiveness of the Treaty."²⁸ Missile defense is part of the subject matter of the treaty and its protocol, and the BCC is authorized specifically to discuss the unique distinguishing features of missile defense launchers and interceptors and make "viability and effectiveness" changes in the treaty. These could be done in secret and without Senate advice and consent.²⁹ Such institutions are not supposed to make substantive changes in the terms of treaties. But, START I's Joint Compliance and Inspection Commission (JCIC) served with a more limited scope, and appears to have made significant changes in START's terms without Senate consultation. This past precedent is not comforting.

The Senate might find it particularly valuable to insist on continuous and complete visibility into the ongoing workings of the BCC. This could be particularly helpful to ensure that no new limits on missile defense emerge, without Senate advice and

consent, from the BCC's potentially secret proceedings.

In sum, strategic force flexibility and resilience are key contributors to the credibility of our deterrence strategies and assurance commitments to allies. This was true in the past and is even more so today. New START warrants our concern and close scrutiny because its reductions and limitations will constrain flexibility and resilience, even to include limitations on U.S. conventional PGS and missile defense options. The most important question regarding New START is whether U.S. forces in the future will retain sufficient flexibility and resilience to be credible for deterrence and assurance in conditions that are less optimistic than those assumed by the Administration in its New START analyses. Three key considerations in this regard are: 1) the treaty's ceilings appear not to require real Russian nuclear force reductions in the near term, and its loopholes and extreme permissiveness would not prevent the resurgence of Russian strategic capabilities over time—the beginning of which already is visible; 2) enthusiasm for further reductions should not be permitted to inspire a retreat to old "assured destruction"-type planning measures that were inadequate during the Cold War and are more so today; and, 3) the Obama administration has not committed to the modernization of U.S. strategic forces necessary to ensure their continued viability, flexibility, and resilience at lower force levels. Such a commitment is critical with or without New START, but in its absence moving forward with New START could further undermine U.S. and allied security.



1. See Richard Nixon, *National Security Decision Memorandum-242: Policy for Planning the Employment of Nuclear Weapons*, January 17, 1974 (Top Secret, declassified February 20, 1998). See also, Jimmy Carter, *Presidential Directive/NSC-59*, July 25, 1980 (Top Secret, partially declassified August 20, 1996); *Department of Defense Annual Report Fiscal Year 1982* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1981), 40.
2. *America's Strategic Posture: Final Report of the Congressional Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 2009), 23, 24-26.
3. "Herman Kahn Quotes," BrainyQuote.com, n.d., <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/h/hermankahn224157.html>.
4. Unclassified portions of the report quoted by Chairman Carl Levin, Senate Armed Services Committee, *Hearing on the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) Implementation*, July 20, 2010, CQ Congressional Transcript.
5. "Assured devastating second strike capability" is the descriptor used by Dr. James Miller in his testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee on July 20, 2010.
6. *Ibid.*; see also Department of State, Bureau of Verification, Compliance, and Implementation, *Fact Sheet*, April 8, 2010, <http://www.state.gov/t/vci/rls/139899.htm>.
7. Under New START, the number of deployed U.S. strategic launchers will have to be reduced from today's reported level of 880 launchers to a ceiling of 700 deployed launchers. Amy Woolf, *The New START Treaty: Central Limits and Key Provisions* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, June 18, 2010), 19.
8. Gen. Kevin Chilton, Testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee, April 22, 2010.
9. Woolf, *The New START Treaty*, 17-18; James Miller, Testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee, April 22, 2010.
10. Gen. Kevin Chilton, Testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, June 16, 2010.
11. Chilton, Senate testimony, April 22, 2010.
12. *Ibid.*
13. For more, see the discussion in "Article Sees Serious Implications for India from Burma's Purported Nuclear Plans," *The Tribune Online* (Chandigarh), July 17, 2010.
14. See "Moscow Upgrades Strategic Bomber Fleet," *Air & Cosmos* (Paris), January 8, 2010, 34-35; "Russian Military Pundits Consider Recent Missile Launches, Prospects," *Mayak Radio* (Moscow), August 8, 2001.
15. White House, "Fact Sheet on the 1251 Report," May 13, 2010, www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/New%20START%20section%201251%20fact%20sheet.pdf.
16. *Ibid.*
17. Department of Defense, *Nuclear Posture Review Report*, April 2010, vi; Miller, House Armed Services Committee testimony, April 15, 2010.
18. "Russia: Arbatov Critique of Khrushchikhin Article on Poor State of RF Air Defense," *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye*, March 5, 2010.
19. See "Russia: Strategic Missile Troops Chief, Aide Cited on 25 December RS-24 Test Launch," *NEWSru.com*, December 25, 2007.
20. Sergei Rogov, "Attempt Number 6: the Balance of Achievements and Concessions. Only the United States Will Have to Reduce Its Strategic Forces," *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye*, April 9, 2010, http://nvo.ng.ru/concepts/2010-04-09/1_snv.html.
21. Mikhail Barabanov, "The Arms Non-Reduction Treaty," *Moscow Defense Briefing* no. 2 (2010), 2-3.
22. See for example, Woolf, *The New START Treaty*, 20.
23. Ilya Kramnuk, "New START Treaty Based on Mutual Russian-U.S. Concessions," *RIA Novosti*, April 22, 2010, <http://en.rian.ru/analysis/20100409/158499862.html>.
24. First Deputy Defense Minister Vladimir Popovkin, as cited in Pavel Felgenhauer, "Russia Seeks to Impose New ABM Treaty on the US by Developing BMD," *RIA Novosti*, July 16, 2010.
25. Secretary Ellen Tauscher, Testimony before the House Armed Services Committee, April 15, 2010, 19.
26. Secretary Ellen Tauscher, Press Briefing, "New START Treaty and the Obama Administration's Nonproliferation Agenda," March 29, 2010, www.state.gov/t/us/139205.htm.
27. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, Testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee, June 17, 2010.
28. New START Treaty, Protocol, Part 6, Sec. 1, paragraph b.
29. New START Treaty, Article XV, paragraph 2; New START Treaty, Protocol, Part 6, Sec. 5.