

## Commentary: A Nuclear Bait-and-Switch With LRSO

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Desperate times call for desperate measures, and right now opponents of US nuclear modernization plans are more desperate than ever. The year 2015 was not kind to them as President Obama, whom they hoped would usher in a new era of nuclear disarmament, has proposed and supported plans to modernize the nuclear triad of bombers, submarines and missiles.

Russian nuclear threats against US allies in NATO, newly aggressive nuclear build-up operations and a major treaty violation further demonstrate that nuclear issues are not going away.

In a last-ditch effort to make some sort of progress on nuclear disarmament before Obama leaves office, anti-nuclear activists are calling for cancellation of the Long-Range Stand Off (LRSO) weapon, a planned program for a nuclear-armed cruise missile that would begin replacing the current system around 2030. Their main arguments against the LRSO are that it will be redundant and unnecessarily expensive.

Leaving aside the fact that in peak funding years the LRSO will make up about three-tenths of 1 percent of the defense budget annually, the claim that the LRSO will be redundant deserves more scrutiny.

The new cruise missile will be designed to penetrate enemy air defense systems after being launched by the B-52 bomber or the planned Long Range Strike Bomber (LRS-B). Yet, as critics Daryl Kimball, executive director of the Arms Control Association, and Tom Collina, policy director at Ploughshares Fund, both point out, the new bomber will also be designed to penetrate enemy air defenses, and if needed, drop the B-61 nuclear gravity bomb. Consequently, they say the US can eliminate the planned procurement of the LRSO.

This argument might carry more weight except that the same people making this claim now are in many cases the same people who supported reducing or retiring the B-61 gravity bombs only a few years ago. So which is it? Do they support cutting the B-61 in favor of the LRSO, or cutting the LRSO in favor of the B-61? The answer: both.

This is simply an example of the old bait-and-switch maneuver. Once one program is cut, they will call for the other to be cut as well, effectively reducing the US nuclear triad to a dyad of only missiles and submarines.

In either case, they are wrong to argue that redundancy, per se, is a bad thing. In fact, redundancy is a necessary component of any important system, be it extra GPS satellites for navigation or backup generators for hospitals.

Critics of the LRSO can have no confidence that a nuclear stand-off capability will be unnecessary to deter future threats. In fact, Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Mark Welsh said recently, "Today, there are roughly 10 integrated air defense systems in the world that you would have a difficult time operating in or around in aircraft. ... By 10 years from now, there will probably be 25 or so."

For deterrence, current and future adversaries should not feel safe against US bombers behind their air defense systems. The LRSO would introduce great uncertainty in their planning.

If the United States cuts LRSO plans now, a future president would be left without a potentially important option during an international crisis. The US nuclear infrastructure is unable to respond at the same pace that international security events change; this is why some redundancy has been built into the nuclear triad for decades, with each leg able to substitute for another in the case of technical failure or advanced adversary defenses.

Nuclear disarmament advocates may dare to dream that unilateral US cuts to the LRSO program will enlighten foreign leaders as to the error of their ways and lead to a global ban on nuclear-armed cruise missiles; but reality dares to intrude. Vladimir Putin recently helpfully reminded the world that the cruise missiles successfully launched from a Russian submarine against ISIS targets in Syria were, "new, modern and highly effective high-precision weapons that can be equipped either with conventional or special nuclear warheads."

Russian officials seem to subscribe to a "nuclear first use" strategy and Putin's firm *nyet* to further arms control negotiations with the United States shows he is in no mood for Western "enlightenment."

Congress should fully fund the LRSO program and send Mr. Putin a useful message that the US is investing in the capabilities that will disabuse him of the notion he can escalate his way out of a crisis or intimidate NATO allies without consequence.

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