Russia’s Tactical Nuclear Weapons: Posture, Politics and Arms Control

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22 February 2011
Definition

- All nuclear weapons not covered by US-Russian nuclear arms control treaties (START and INF)

- It is diverse weapons, including for platforms of intermediate range

- This is why they are often called non-strategic or sub-strategic weapons
Apart from this

- The concept of TNW does not include delivery systems
- It is nuclear munitions (warheads)
- TNW are non-deployed weapons stored separate from their platforms
- The delivery systems themselves are multi-purpose and are also designed for conventional missions
Presidential Nuclear Initiatives (PNIs)

- The comprehensive TNW definition was underlying the PNIs of 1991 and 1992

- According to PNIs, TNW were
  - moved to central storage facilities and
  - partially retired and destroyed
TNW reductions under the PNIs
(deployable weapons)

Russia vs US:
- Russia: 21,700 (early 1990s), 7,300 (now)
- US: 2,000 (early 1990s), 500 (now)

Graph notes:
- Y-axis: count of deployable weapons
- X-axis: countries
- Legend:
  - early 1990s
  - now
Russia’s TNW arsenal

- Is not only more sizeable but also more diverse
  - Air Force – frontal and intermediate aircraft
  - Navy – tactical and intermediate aircraft
    - SLCMs
      - anti-ship and anti-submarine weapons
      - naval air defence
  - Air and Missile defence
- The greater diversity of maintained TNW is an indication of more diverse military options
Two challenges to TNW arms control

- Would Russia agree to abandon associated military options?

- What measures should be elaborated to verify limitations and reductions of non-deployed warheads?
The mission of TNW

- Deterrence and/or termination of a conventional attack which exceeds Russia’s conventional capabilities

- Is seen as a temporary policy until Russia’s conventional inferiority is overcome

- It appears to remain a long-term factor determining Russia’s posture

- TNW reductions are not in Russia’s interest until other disparities are addressed in a comprehensive manner
Other disparities

- Missile defences
- Conventionally armed long-range strategic systems (Global Prompt Strike Capability)
- Weaponization of outer space
- Precision-guided munitions (PGMs) for stand-off war fighting
- Conventional disparities in Europe (CFE)
TNW arms control measures

- Shall provide for the verification of non-deployed warheads
  - in nuclear storage facilities, and
  - in transfer between nuclear sites

- This is the major challenge as it addresses the most sensible area
Recent proposals

- Russia’s TNW should be stored away from NATO and EU borders
- The follow-on negotiations to START shall address the issue of non-deployed nuclear warheads, both strategic and TNW
Effect on the US upload capability

- START
- 1,000 + 1,500 without reducing platforms
- 1,000 + 1,500 with reduced platforms

Legend:
- US upload Capability
- strategic warheads in reserve
- TNW
Gradualist approach

- Resumption of information exchange under the PNIs
  - Data exchange

- Consultations within the NRC
  - Data exchange
  - Discussion of nuclear postures
  - Confidence-building measures
  - Cooperative measures

- Consolidation of TNW in centralized storage facilities

- Resumption of Lab-to-Lab cooperation concerning warhead and fissile material verification