

Hypersonic Missiles and European Security: Interview with Danny Pronk



Danny Pronk joined the Netherlands Institute of International Relations 'Clingendael' as a Senior Research Fellow in July 2018. His research focuses on security and defence issues, particularly in relation to China and Russia. He has over twenty years of experience as a practitioner in intelligence and during that time held several senior analytical and operational leadership positions at both the Netherlands General Intelligence and Security Service (AIVD) and the Defence Intelligence and Security Service (MIVD). He is currently also employed as a guest researcher (Dual PhD candidate) within the Institute of Security and Global Affairs (ISGA) at Leiden University.

The Netherlands Institute of International Relations (Clingendael) is a leading European think tank on international affairs. What aspects and issues of non-proliferation, arms control and disarmament does the institute cover?

We work on all aspects of non-proliferation, arms control and disarmament, looking at both conventional weapons and weapons of mass destruction (chemical, biological and nuclear). In this vein we cover the relevant treaties and export control regimes, such as the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR). Our work includes looking at the legal, political, technical and historical aspects of both conventional weapons and weapons of mass destruction. Through our research, publications, seminars and other awareness-raising and training activities, we aim to promote non-proliferation norms and rules. We also monitor the development of dual-use items, i.e. goods, software and technologies that have both civilian and military applications, and the progress in military technology, as this is crucial to understand the future of warfare and global security.

In a recent [article](#), you emphasize the proliferation risks of hypersonic vehicles and missiles. In your view, why is their development (and operational deployment) problematic? What impact does this technological advancement have on international and European security?

The military appeal for these kinds of weapons is easy to grasp. Their very high speed, well above Mach 5, increases the survivability of the weapon and decrease the target's ability to react. Engaging such a weapon, which is also manoeuvring at these speeds in the atmosphere, is particularly demanding. Moreover, there is a strategic ambiguity concerning their warheads, as such weapons may carry nuclear warheads. Hypersonic vehicles

and missiles have a clear impact on international security. Due to the combination of high speed, manoeuvrability and unpredictable flight paths, they challenge even the best missile defences now deployed and projected. Because of the difficulty in defending against them, even relatively small forces can pose threats against forward-projected military forces, thereby acting as a deterrent against interventions. Furthermore, any hypersonic attack will occur with very little warning. This, combined with their unpredictable flight paths and the strategic ambiguity surrounding their warheads, compresses the time for effective response.

What approaches can be adopted to contain the proliferation of hypersonic missiles and the related technology? What measures and diplomatic actions should the EU take in this regard?

There are two approaches to containing the proliferation of hypersonic missiles and related technology within the context of arms control. First, a multilateral policy of export denial covering complete delivery vehicles and their major subsystems. Second, a policy of case-by-case export reviews for technological items such as scramjets and other hypersonic engines, fuel for hypersonic use, sensors, navigation and communication equipment for hypersonic flight, hypersonic flight controls etc. These are all specific technologies that could be made subject to export controls under the existing model of the 35-nation MTCR. This requires redesigning the MTCR in order to direct its restraints against such weapons, however. At the moment, the MTCR only aims to inhibit the proliferation of missiles capable of delivering nuclear, chemical or biological payloads. Yet, hypersonic weapons need not deliver a mass destruction warhead in order to be operationally and strategically effective.

CHINA, ARMS CONTROL AND THE EU

China has made it abundantly clear that the trilateral arms control approach sought by the Trump administration is not in its strategic interest. Fu Cong, head of the arms control department at the Chinese Foreign Ministry, has declared that China would be "happy to participate the next day" in the negotiations to extend the New START Treaty if the US reduced its deployed warheads "down to the Chinese level". Regarding the suspension of the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) by the US, a senior Chinese diplomat even declared that "the premise and basis for trilateral arms control negotiations do not exist at all, and China will never participate in them."

The Chinese strategic calculus is based on two fundamental elements.

First, INF Treaty-range missiles play an irreplaceable role in China's strategy in East Asia. They are a "pocket of excellence" of China's arms industry, to paraphrase Deng Xiaoping. US estimates that China deploys 2200 INF ballistic and cruise missiles. Their mission is to provide a conventional deterrence force against Taiwan. The Chinese military is currently working on the DF-17 (range 1700 km). Deployed in Northeast China with a hypersonic glide vehicle, it aims to deter US forces in Okinawa.

Second, China perceives strategic stability as gravely undermined by other countries' missile defence systems and surveillance operations of Hainan-based ballistic submarines in the South China Sea. Therefore, China's priority is the modernization of its missile and underwater force and the development of a ballistic missile early warning system through accessing Russian expertise.

There is little Europe can do to change China's strategic calculus. Beijing's goals in East Asia undermine the global arms control architecture that serves European interests so well. As Carnegie-Tsinghua expert Tong Zhao's noted, China has excellent arms control technical and policy experts, but very few believers in the strategic usefulness of arms control. In this dialogue with China the EU should therefore focus, as a preliminary step, on the promotion of arms control as a means to achieve strategic stability.

Mathieu Duchâtel

Institut Montaigne/ EU Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Network



Funded by
the European Union

Latest Publications

Disruptive Technologies and Nuclear Weapons, Elena Sokova,

Vienna Center for Disarmament and Non-Proliferation (VCDNP), 2020

Strategic Risk Reduction in the European Context, Marion Messmer, British American Security Information Council (BASIS), 2020

Revitalising The NPT: Preparing the EU for the Tenth RevCon, Clara Portela, The European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS), 2020

The Militarization of Artificial Intelligence, Paul Scharre et al., UNODA, 2020

The P5 Process: Opportunities for Success in the NPT Review Conference, Shatabhisha Shetty and Heather Williams, The Centre for Science and Security Studies (CSSS), 2020

EU INSTITUTIONAL NEWS

The European Union delivers a statement on China's Ratification of the Arms Trade Treaty

On 7 July 2020, the European Union delivered a statement recognising the importance of [China's ratification](#) of the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) and stressing the treaty's overall contribution to international peace and security.

In force since 2014, the [Arms Trade Treaty](#) is the first multilateral and legally binding instrument that establishes common standards to regulate the international trade in conventional arms and reduce and eradicate their illicit trade and diversion. The EU's spokesperson stressed that the Treaty's "full implementation and universal adherence is essential", noting that the EU is sharing its expertise with several countries in order to "improve their arms export control systems", as per the Treaty's requirements.

In early July, China became the 107th State Party to the global Arms Trade Treaty. As China remains an important arms exporter, the EU noted that the country's accession constituted an important "advancement of the Treaty's objectives". More broadly, the EU stated that this development could "contribute to peace, security and stability" as well as "promote cooperation, transparency and increased confidence".

Capitalising on the accession of China to the Treaty, the EU called upon non-state parties to join the ATT before the upcoming [Sixth Conference of States Parties](#), scheduled to take place between 17-21 August 2020.

For more information: [Arms Control: Statement by the Spokesperson on the ratification of the Arms Trade Treaty by China](#)

Network Calls

[10th ODESSA SUMMER SCHOOL "Current Challenges For Non-Proliferation And Disarmament: Regional Perspectives"](#)

Applications are now open for the 10th Odessa Summer School organized by the OdCNP with the support of the Swedish Radiation Safety Authority and the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI).

The course will be held in Odessa on August 23-28, 2020.

Application material:

- 1.CV with portrait picture;
- 2.Letter of Motivation (300-500 words)

For more information please visit the [OdCNP website](#) or contact odcnp.onu@gmail.com

NETWORK NEWS

The EUNPD Consortium hosts a virtual seminar on Non-proliferation and Disarmament Education

On 23 and 24 June 2020, SIPRI, on behalf of the EUNPD Consortium, organised a virtual event on *Strengthening Non-proliferation and Disarmament (NPD) Education in Europe*. The in-person event originally planned to be held in Brussels will take place at a later date.

The 47 participants included, for the first time, university-affiliated members of the EUNPD Network. The first session provided an overview of education activities by the Consortium, the Network and the United Nations. The second session focused on how to make NPD education relevant and engaging, with contributions from academics who drew on experiences in different disciplines. The third session discussed ways to adjust to current challenges by sharing lessons learned from online teaching as well as other platforms. In this context, [PRIF](#) presented the [EUNPDC e-Learning tool](#). Given the sudden shift to online learning following the COVID outbreak, the event provided an extremely valuable forum for sharing good practices, including feedback from students on online teaching. The concluding roundtable session explored ideas to improve NPD education for Consortium and Network members. Suggestions included a gender focus given the continuing imbalance in NPD education; interdisciplinary initiatives; shared classrooms and mutual teaching at each other's classes; joint summer schools; engagement with other regions; and stronger synergies between students and professionals, inter alia by reinforcing links between Network members involved in education activities and those who are not, as well as officials participating in the various Consortium activities. An overview of NPD education activities by Network members will be the subject of an EUNPD paper to be published after the summer.

For further information, please contact eunpdc@sipri.org
Sibylle Bauer, SIPRI/EU Non-proliferation and Disarmament Consortium