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How to Deal with Long-Range Precision-Guided Conventional Weapons, an interview with Nikolai Sokov

Dr. Nikolai Sokov is senior fellow at the Vienna Center for Disarmament and Non-Proliferation. He is a former arms control negotiator for Soviet (later Russian) Foreign Ministry and has participated in negotiations on the INF Treaty, START I, and START II, as well as multiple ministerial and summit meetings. He holds a PhD from the University of Michigan and the Soviet equivalent of a PhD from the Institute of World Economy and International Relations. He is the author of two dozen books and monographs, as well as more than 300 articles.

Europe hosts the greatest concentration of conventional long-range precision-guided weapons in the world. They are now being used by Russia against Ukraine. What are the distinctive features of this type of weapons, what tasks can they perform and what risks do they pose?

Historically, there have been two major distinct classes of military assets – traditional conventional weapons, such as tanks, artillery, etc., and nuclear weapons. Arms control processes also developed along these two weakly interconnected lines. Long-range precision-guided conventional weapons span the gap between these two classes. (1) Like traditional conventional weapons and in contrast to nuclear weapons, they are usable; countries that possess them do not have moral, legal, or other inhibitions against using them in war. (2) Like nuclear weapons and unlike traditional conventional weapons, their use can have strategic outcomes severely degrading the fighting capacity of the adversary—not just its military capability, but also its industrial capacity, transportation networks and its command, control and communication systems. In the past 30 years they have become the central tool of war, used on a large scale and literally on the first day of war against a broad variety of targets, many of them civilian and many located in densely populated areas.

How may the modernisation efforts undertaken by Russia and NATO states enhance these features and aggravate the related risks?

Russia has developed two types of hypersonic missiles – the air-launched Kinzhal (currently deployed in limited numbers and used at least twice against Ukraine) and the sea-launched Tsirkon (testing is nearing completion). The United States does not have such missiles but is working on them and is expected to complete relevant programs for ground- and air-launched hypersonic missiles in a few years; some of them will be deployed in Europe. Hypersonic missiles have the same military missions as their existing subsonic counterparts, but can reach targets much, much faster and thus vastly compress decision times. Simply put, once the attacked party's radars detect such missiles, there will be no time to clarify the situation (this could be a false warning, for example) or contact the other side through a hotline: it will be necessary to launch a strike in response before it is too late to react. Consequently, the situation will become less stable and the risk of war due to a mistake or miscalculation will increase.

Is there a realistic prospect to subject these types of weapons to arms control?

There is an urgent need to begin addressing these weapons through arms control and confidence building measures. The Vienna Center, with the support of Konrad Adenauer Stiftung and the Foreign and Defence Ministries of Finland, has developed detailed, practice-oriented proposals for a transparency regime with respect to long-range precision-guided conventional weapons. We see that transparency regime as the first step toward a more comprehensive arms control regime down the road.

What would be the most appropriate institutional framework to promote this new arms control regime?

The best institutional framework, in our view, is the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). Such a regime should include all European countries as well as the United States and Canada. The OSCE not only can provide a platform to negotiate such a regime, but also for its implementation.

International Community Faced with the North Korea Challenge

The experimental launch of a new Hwasong-17 ICBM by North Korea on 24 March has renewed alarm about a possible escalation on the Korean peninsula. Satellites have also documented pictures of the Punggye-ri test site where workers can be seen digging a new passageway in preparation for what many believe will be Pyongyang's first nuclear test since 2017. Despite the economic difficulties facing the North Korean regime, successive international sanctions imposed for its nuclear and missile activities have had a limited effect and have not halted nuclear weapons development. A new (seventh) nuclear test by North Korea would be considered a hostile act by South Korean President, Yoon Suk Yeol, a supporter of a heavy-handed policy towards its northern neighbour, and even China would view it as a destabilising move.

Many believe that de-escalation on the Korean Peninsula should begin with a declaration of peace to definitively end the Korean War. It is doubtful that such a step would actually trigger a denuclearisation process on the Korean peninsula, however. In May 2021, the Biden administration announced its intention to pursue a "calibrated, practical opened approach to diplomacy" with North Korea, distancing itself from the global approaches of its two immediate predecessors ("our policy will not focus on achieving a grand bargain, nor will it rely on strategic patience"). Instead, the Biden administration proposes "relief for particular steps" with the "ultimate goal of denuclearization", basically a continuation of the US's commitment to the UN-mandated goal of eliminating Pyongyang's nuclear weapons in an incremental way, offering partial sanctions relief in exchange for gradual steps **towards** denuclearisation.

The North Korean regime has no interest in disarming. The hope is that sanctions continue to have an effect on its economy, changing the strategic calculus in Pyongyang. China could potentially play a key role in mediating a viable solution (if it actually exists), as Beijing remains an important actor on the Korean Peninsula, and not factoring China into the equation would be a big mistake. In this regard, extra effort should be directed at reviving a negotiating framework in which other key actors are included. This would also be in the interest of Europe, which has repeatedly declared its willingness to support a peaceful solution to the Korean dispute.

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Latest Publications

Deterrence, Disruptive Technology and Disrmament in the Third Nuclear Age, Andrew Futter, Hiroshima Organization for Global Peace (HOPe) & University of Leicester, 04/2022

Hypersonic Boost-glide Systems and Hypersonic Cruise Missiles: Challenges for the Missile Technology Control Regime, Kolja Brockmann and Dmitry Stefanovich, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), 04/2022

Arctic: Toward the End of the Exception? Strategic, Nuclear and Maritime Issues in the Region, Jean-Louis Lozier, French Institute of International Relations (IFRI), 26/04/2022

Update: Developments at the DPRK's Punggye-Ri Nuclear Test Site between 24 March and 6 April 2022, Katsuhisa Furukawa & Jaewoo Shin, Open Nuclear Network (ONN), 06/04/2022

Network Calls

Senior analyst: Common Security and Defence Policy (Csdp)

The European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS) seeks to hire an experienced CSDP expert who will report to the Director and join a highly qualified and motivated team engaged in providing relevant expertise to both EU/national officials through publications, seminars, and other activities. Closing date: **30th May 2022**. More information: here.

Research assistant internship at GRIP

The Group for Research and Information on Peace and Security (GRIP) is looking for an intern to join the team for the period July-December 2022. The objective of the research assistant is to support the staff of the various units to which they are attached in their research tasks, but also in administration and management. The position is based in Brussels but may occasionally require traveling. Closing Date: **31st May 2022**. More information: here.

EU NEWS

An EU Approach for Space Traffic Management

Space is increasingly important for geopolitics and for Europe's security and defence. In view of that, the EU is committed to assess civilian and military requirements and impacts, develop the capability to identify and track space spacecraft and debris, and promote this approach with like-minded partners. In a Joint Communication (15.2.2022) the Commission and the EU High Representative/Vice President, Josep Borrell, proposed an EU approach on Space Traffic Management to address global multifaceted challenges to the safety, security and sustainability of space operations. Its goal is to develop concrete initiatives, including operations and regulation to promote a multilateral Space Traffic Management (STM) framework while preserving the EU's strategic autonomy and industrial competitiveness.

The Space Traffic Management proposal focuses on three elements:

1) Strengthening the EU's capability to identify and track space objects and avoid collisions. The operational pillar for the EU STM approach is the EU Space Surveillance and Tracking (SST). The goal is to accelerate the development of automatic collision-avoidance services and the use of artificial intelligence and quantum technology;

2) Setting out the appropriate normative and legislative framework;

3) Establishing international partnerships on STM and engaging at a multilateral level. In particular, the EU will favor a multilateral STM approach in the framework of the UN Committee on the Peaceful Use of Outer Space (COPUOS)

For more details: Factsheet

NETWORK NEWS

Preventing the Misuse of Emerging Technologies: What Can Be Done and Which Governance System to Put in Place?

Rapid evolutions in the development of disruptive emerging technologies (synthetic biology, AI, and neuroscience among others) are rising concerns over their potential misuses and malicious uses. The impact of these technologies on international security, privacy, democracy, and society at large are a major source of concern. On **May 18, 2022** the Geneva Centre for Security Policy will hold a hybrid meeting to discuss these issues.

More information: here.

New EUNPDC e-Learning Course on Arms Control History

This learning unit published by the EUNPDC aims to provide a brief history of arms control in a classical chronological order, focusing primarily on the West, from antiquity to the present.

More information: here.

IISS Shangri-La Dialogue 2022

The International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) will host Asia's premier security summit, the IISS Shangri-La Dialogue. The summit, which will take place in Singapore on **10-12 June 2022,** is a unique meeting where ministers debate the region's most pressing security challenges, engage in important bilateral talks, and come up with fresh approaches together.

More information: here.

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