

An understanding of Russia's concerns about missile defense "requires an understanding of Russia's new security, military, and foreign policy doctrines; the complex role nuclear weapons play in defense policy; the relationship between Russian conventional and nuclear capabilities; and the priorities for economic reform articulated by President Vladimir Putin's administration."

Russia's New Security Policy and the Ballistic Missile Defense Debate

CELESTE A. WALLANDER

Little mystery surrounds Russian policy toward American proposals to revise the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty to develop a national missile defense system. Moscow views the ABM Treaty as the basis for strategic stability and a necessary condition for maintaining the broad array of agreements on controlling weapons of mass destruction and the means for their delivery. Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov recently referred to these agreements as the "modern architecture of international security," with the ABM Treaty serving as the foundation. "If the foundation is destroyed, this interconnected system will collapse, nullifying 30 years of efforts by the world community."¹

Russia views the American premise for national missile defense (NMD)—that the United States is threatened by the acquisition of weapons of mass destruction and missile technology by certain "states of concern" (formerly called "rogue states")—as implausible. Russian analysts consider only North Korea a credible threat in technological terms for a time frame of 10 years or less and relegate potential Middle East threats (Iran and Iraq) to a 20- to 25-year window. Furthermore, they argue that the United States can rely on existing theater missile defense (TMD) systems and developing technologies such as Theater High Altitude Area

Defense to deal with any missile launches by these countries. American reluctance to rely upon boost-phase TMD to cope with these potential regional threats is seen as evidence that the real target of NMD is undermining and possibly neutralizing Russia's nuclear retaliatory capability.

The key to understanding Russian policies, the potential for agreement on ABM modification, and likely Russian responses in the event of nonagreement is more complicated than this familiar public posture. It requires an understanding of Russia's new security, military, and foreign policy doctrines; the complex role nuclear weapons play in defense policy; the relationship between Russian conventional and nuclear capabilities; and the priorities for economic reform articulated by President Vladimir Putin's administration.

RESHAPING SECURITY POLICY

Since the beginning of this year, Putin has approved three documents that comprise the government's official policy on national security, military doctrine, and foreign policy. The statements explain Russia's national interests, objectives, and problems, and establish the military, political, and economic means by which Russia will pursue its interests and cope with threats and problems.

The clear message of all three documents is that the greatest threats to Russia's national interests lie within the country itself, and that Russia's most urgent task is to achieve economic reform and stability. However, in contrast to earlier assessments that ruled out external threats, the documents approved this year also conclude that unnamed countries might pose a threat to the territorial integrity or sovereignty of Russia and its neighbors. At the root

CELESTE A. WALLANDER is a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations.

¹Igor Ivanov, "The Missile-Defense Mistake: Undermining Strategic Stability and the ABM Treaty," *Foreign Affairs*, September–October 2000, p. 15. The other agreements to which Ivanov was referring included existing and potential strategic arms reduction treaties, the 1991 agreements on tactical nuclear weapons, the nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, and the Missile Technology Control Regime.

of this shift is an assessment that: NATO's conventional capability has increased because of enlargement while Russia's conventional military capabilities have continued their post-Soviet slide; after the 1999 air campaign in Kosovo, NATO is more inclined to use military force for nondefense missions in the European region; and the United States will continue to pursue a unilateral, assertive global policy.

As a result of this assessment, the new Russian military doctrine lowered the threshold for nuclear use. Nuclear options were always part of the mix of military responses to threats; throughout the 1990s, Russian military policy allowed for the first use of nuclear weapons in the event of non-nuclear attacks on Russian territory and sovereignty. More important than the precise language in the 2000 doctrine was the analysis behind the careful wording. In June 1999, the defense ministry reported that during military exercises simulating a conventional military action on Kaliningrad from Poland, the attack was successfully defeated and de-escalated only with resort to nuclear weapons.

Russian analysts have concluded that Russia's conventional military forces are insufficient to defeat external aggression and internal conflicts, exemplified by the quagmire of Chechnya. Consequently, the Russian leadership has decided that in the short-to-medium term the country must rely on nuclear weapons to deter and de-escalate potential conventional regional conflicts. This means that the range of missions assigned to Russian nuclear forces have expanded beyond deterring global war. The task for Russia's foreign, defense, and security policies is to see Russia through a transitional period of 10 to 15 years until its conventional military forces can be reformed and rebuilt to more effectively serve as the primary instrument to defend Russian national interests.

Thus, for the immediate future Russia will not rely on a genuine second-strike military policy. In a second-strike strategy nuclear weapons are used to threaten retaliation, thereby deterring any initial attack. In addition to the simple deterrence-through-retaliation mission that relies on some 200 deliverable warheads to threaten unacceptable damage to the United States, Russian policy includes de-escalation and war-fighting missions, potentially increasing the required number of nuclear weapons. Russian analysts argue that credibility requires convincing the adversary that Russia has a war-fighting capability, even if Russians themselves do not believe it to be so. Use of nuclear weapons to deal with regional war contingencies is quintessential war fighting.

THEATER AND STRATEGIC MISSILE DEFENSE

THEATER REFERS to the immediate location of military operations, usually in contrast to "strategic," which refers to the overall effort to defend a country or conduct a full-scale war. Theater defense is located and targets missiles in a specific location, such as North Korea. Strategic or national defense is primarily located in a nation's homeland (although components may be based abroad or in space) and meant to defend against multiple sources. Because of their location, theater defenses meant to prevent nuclear missiles from reaching the United States would target missiles in their "boost phase"—that is, shortly after launch and before they left and re-entered the atmosphere. In principle a boost-phase TMD located in Northeast Asia could provide the United States with the same protection of its national territory against North Korean missiles that a strategic NMD would. C. W. ■

Because nuclear weapons now play a role in Russia's stop-gap policy for defeating, controlling, and de-escalating regional conventional conflicts, the number of deliverable warheads available at the strategic level matter. And even an imperfect missile defense can be effective because it erodes the credibility and effectiveness of Russia's multiple nuclear missions; hence assurances that an American NMD system could not stop 100 percent of Russia's missiles do not address Russia's security concerns.

THE POTENTIAL RATIONALE FOR ABM REVISION

The baseline consensus that emerged in Russian security discussions in the first half of 2000 had two premises. First, Russian security will for at least the next decade rely primarily on nuclear weapons, with a form of launch-on-warning with 200 deliverable warheads, escalation control and de-escalation potential through a form of flexible response—and the need to deal simultaneously with the United States (along with its NATO allies) and China in any potential armed conflict. Second, agreement with the United States on the third strategic arms reduction treaty (START III) is better than unilateral measures to ensure sufficient retaliatory capability. Current projections for modernization of Topol-M (SS-27) missiles—Russia's newest intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM), first deployed in 1997—are based on a defense budget in the range of 2.6 to 2.9 percent of GDP (207 billion rubles, or about \$7 billion for fiscal year 2001), which is a small sum given the size of

Russia's economy but a huge burden on a weak economy about to embark on a new direction in market reform.

A moderately successful Russian economy can be expected to support production and deployment of 20 to 30 Topol-M missiles per year through the decade, providing a force of as many as 300 of the single-warhead missiles by 2010. Combined with reliance on Delta-class submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SSBNs) with modernized SS-N-23 missiles (carrying 4 warheads each in current plans), a small force of aging but reliable bombers, and retiring other nuclear forces as their service life ends, one arrives at a force of 1,000 to 1,500 nuclear warheads. This provides an acceptable retaliatory capability if the ABM Treaty is maintained. It also provides sufficient capacity for deliverable warheads against the United States/NATO and can deal with existing and projected Chinese nuclear missile capability against Russia.

With even a limited United States NMD, these calculations change in two respects. First, to counter limited United States defense systems, Russia has said it might make the Topol-M capable of carrying multiple warheads. In part, this is simply to increase the number of warheads against United States defenses, but it is also to achieve the advantage of launching, for example, only 100 3-warhead missiles rather than trying to coordinate the launching of 300 separate missiles to penetrate defenses. The Topol-M has already been tested with side-maneuver technology, which complicates the ability of United States defenses to track multiple warheads from single missiles.

Second, Russian analysts assume that the Chinese response to a United States NMD system will be to increase deployment of missiles from fewer than the 30 it currently has to the hundreds. As a result, if Russia takes seriously the need for a nuclear force that can deter and de-escalate in conflicts with the United States/NATO and with China, the required number of deliverable warheads increases. To achieve a larger force while still engaging in the kind of force modernization now in its earliest stages, Russia would need to place 3 warheads on its Topol-M and might seek to deploy more warheads on SS-N-23s above the current level of 4 per missile.

In addition, to assist the survivability of Russian forces and enhance their credibility in the face of United States defense, Russian analysts assume that at least a portion of Russian ICBMs in 10 years will have to be mobile. Some Russian analysts also discuss the option of returning to a reliance on tacti-

cal nuclear weapons, and possibly deploying intermediate-range missiles to cope particularly with the problem of China in the Far East.

COMPLICATIONS

Important political and economic factors work against Russia's primary reliance on a substantial nuclear force for its national security over the long term. The first factor complicating the military policy is that some political leaders do not support the logic of the cold war arms control regime and the concept of United States–Russia parity that it protects. For years, Russian critics delayed ratification of START II, arguing that the agreement locked Russia into a position of permanent qualitative inferiority and required cooperation with an unreliable United States. The position of these political opponents appeared to have weakened in late 1999 after the electoral success of Putin's hastily conceived Unity party and others that supported the treaty. With opponents no longer controlling the Duma, the Putin leadership managed to achieve START II's long-delayed ratification in April.

Opposition to the strategic calculations supporting ABM and arms control emerged in a different context in July 2000, when General Anatoly Kvashnin, chief of the General Staff, went public with his proposal to reform the Russian military. These included unilaterally and immediately reducing Russia's nuclear forces to 1,500 warheads or less, slashing procurement of the Topol-M missile, and eliminating the Strategic Rocket Forces—the organization responsible for maintaining Russia's land-based nuclear missile force—as an independent service within the armed forces.

One reason for the proposal was competition within the military: if implemented, this measure would reduce the power of Defense Minister Igor Sergeev, who made his career in the Strategic Rocket Forces and who receives the bulk of his support within the military from the officers with whom he served there; it would thus improve Kvashnin's chances for replacing him as defense minister. Another reason is competition over scarce resources: during the 1990s, the Strategic Rocket Forces received funding for new strategic nuclear missiles while Russia's conventional forces were left without funds for procurement, wages, or any fundamental reform. Kvashnin explicitly argued that his proposal would allow resources to be allocated to Russia's conventional forces.

Another reason for Kvashnin's proposal is that many in Russia's security elite believe that nuclear

arms control is self-defeating. It forces Russia to accede to American criteria, such as bans on multiple warhead and mobile missiles that suit Russia's strategic context and budget constraints. Nuclear arms control also compels Russia to make concessions—potentially agreeing to ABM revisions—to gain agreement on mutual reductions to 1,500 warheads, the level where Russian forces should be within a decade anyway. And it reinforces a focus on nuclear weapons for defense that is unreasonable and irrelevant, given that Russia does not face a primary threat of global war with the United States and instead is confronted with an array of immediate threats to its territorial integrity in Central Asia and the Caucasus that require conventional forces.

At a Security Council meeting on August 14, 2000, Putin decided on a compromise that primarily favored Kvashnin's logic. Russia's strategic nuclear forces will be cut to 1,500 over the next few years through attrition, as older missiles reach the end of their service life and are decommissioned.

The Topol-M missile will continue to be deployed at a rate that will preserve a land-based leg for the Russian nuclear triad, but at a level below that

sought by Sergeyev. At the meeting Putin explicitly stated that his decision was based on the need to adjust to what Russia could really afford, and that the pursuit of nuclear arms had eroded Russia's conventional forces in the 1990s. The Strategic Rocket Forces are to remain an independent arm of the military until 2006, although the space missile defense forces will become part of the air force by 2002.

Putin's compromise on the Sergeyev-Kvashnin dispute is consistent with his reasons to pursue START III and a negotiated revision of the ABM Treaty. Given Putin's economic program and priorities, it is clearly in his interests to cap and stabilize Russian strategic nuclear spending. Although the August decision means that Russia will in principle be ready to reduce to 1,500 strategic nuclear weapons unilaterally, the Russian leadership prefers to achieve negotiated reduction and agreement with the United States on START III because only an arms control agreement provides both lower levels and a system for stability and verification. This decision of course is based on the current international, strategic, and economic context and could change in light of American decisions on NMD and their effects on the choices of other nuclear powers, especially China.

The ABM Treaty, therefore, is linked to more than the Russian nuclear balance, because the real object of these defense-spending decisions and priorities is not the nuclear force, but the reform and funding of Russia's conventional forces and defense-oriented economy. Both the national security and foreign policy concepts approved by Putin in 2000 overwhelmingly emphasized that Russia's primary national interest is to create a healthy and growing economy. Russia's economic failures are the most dangerous threat to its national security, and the chief mission of its foreign policy is defined as securing the country's interests through policies that the country can afford, rather than by wasting resources in pursuit of a superpower status that it cannot sustain.

This policy, combined with an emerging economic strategy for reform and growth that will focus at least partly on reviving sectors of the defense industry—primarily those with export potential—is important for modern conventional forces. To

shift resources in this manner, Putin must stop worrying about nuclear balances and focus on conventional forces and painful economic choices, especially

closing large sectors of the nuclear military industrial complex inherited from the Soviet Union.

Russian arguments that any ABM modification will intrinsically destroy the system of bilateral strategic arms control contain an inescapable contradiction: Russia has broad political, economic, and security interests in a START III treaty as long as the United States remains vulnerable to Russian nuclear weapons. Offensive and defensive nuclear systems are closely linked. This suggests that there is a price that is worth ABM modification given Russia's package of political, economic, and security concerns. The question is: What is that price?

ABM BREAKOUT?

In spring 2000, the shape of a possible deal on ABM Treaty modification became clear. The Clinton administration proposed to redesignate the site for the construction of a missile interceptor facility allowed under the ABM Treaty from North Dakota to Alaska, which is in the range of potentially acceptable treaty modifications. This possibility has been cast in terms of a limited missile-defense capability against a specific threat (North Korea) and as a result does not pose a direct challenge to Russia,

Assurances that an American NMD system could not stop 100 percent of Russia's missiles do not address Russia's security concerns.

thus showing it is not a true national missile defense. Thus it is easier to justify, and, combined with verification procedures on interceptor production and deployment, this proposed modification might be workable.

A more difficult question is whether moving the interceptor site to Alaska requires additional treaty changes that create the potential for true national missile defense and provide the basis for a capability to “break out” of the ABM Treaty. If the United States seeks treaty changes that allow sensors and improved detection, tracking, and targeting capabilities, including space-based systems, Russian analysts warn that these can be easily and quickly upgraded from a limited to a national system.

Given the need to upgrade tracking capabilities and create new technologies and sensors for discriminating between warheads and countermeasures, it is difficult to see how a verification system could guard against the United States developing a capability for quickly breaking out of an ABM Treaty revision. It is easy to count interceptors and observe where they are deployed to check that the system is limited and directed against North Korea; it is not apparent how one defines differences in ABM systems that allow for detecting, tracking, and discerning nuclear warheads. Such capabilities can be adapted quickly, and might even be useful for a broad range of contingencies even if designed and deployed for the limited North Korea scenario. With an enhanced detection and tracking system in place, it would be much easier to quickly change a limited-area defense to a national defense by increasing production and deployment of interceptors.

Even if Russia were to overcome technical obstacles and establish a regime to verify qualitative limits on these advanced technologies, the chilly state of United States–Russia relations creates problems for the prospect of verification measures that would reveal American technological capabilities. One area in which such a component of a verification regime might be built is Shared Early Warning, a program for joint monitoring and information sharing on space activities and missile launches agreed to by Putin and President Bill Clinton at their June 2000 Moscow summit.

The prospects for a verification regime would appear to hinge on the shape of the Putin leadership. Putin has shown that he thinks not merely in terms of a strong and competent state, but has non-democratic and illiberal instincts. It will be difficult to justify sharing the information necessary for stringent qualitative technological verification

regimes with a Russian government that is simultaneously using advanced technology to monitor citizens’ use of the Internet, or limiting communications and free speech.

In any case, United States participation in an ABM verification regime should be conditioned on the reliability of the Russian system. One Russian complaint against the West is that Russia has been marginalized from important security circles and not treated as a great power. Given the vital importance of advanced technologies for future security and defense systems, it should be made clear that accountability is a measure of Russia’s status as a great power.

PUTIN’S NEW COURSE

This year looked like the moment when Putin could get crucial political and military groups to agree to a verification deal. With the March presidential elections behind him and a four-year term ahead, Putin had time to invest political capital in unpopular cooperation with the West.

In early May 2000, however, it was revealed that in addition to seeking Russian agreement to revisions of the treaty that would allow the limited deployment in Alaska, the Clinton administration hoped to gain Russian agreement to further rounds of treaty renegotiation and revision to enable the United States to expand the system in the future. Whatever value this approach may have in preserving the arms control process, it eliminated both the incentive for Putin to make concessions now to achieve constraints on the United States in the future (since they are subject to renegotiation) and predictability for force planning and procurement (since the American system would change as the need arose).

In addition, given the August decision to proceed with nuclear force reductions, Putin needs START III less—perhaps less than the United States needs the ABM Treaty revision. Russia would prefer a mutual reduction to 1,500 nuclear weapons governed by a treaty, but if the decision is implemented, Russia will be reducing anyway. With Russian interest in preserving the ABM Treaty remaining, and United States leverage in offering START III for ABM Treaty revision reduced, the chances for agreement are probably less now than they were in the spring.

Other developments support this assessment. Through the early months of 2000, Russia complained, threatened dire consequences for bilateral relations and arms control, and quietly explored compromise revisions in response to American pro-

posals to revise the ABM Treaty and warnings that the United States might abrogate it if negotiations failed. In June and July, the Russian approach changed. While still discussing potential revisions and making the case for the treaty as it exists, Putin took the initiative on the international scene, challenging the United States in three areas.

First, Putin made several proposals for joint efforts to deploy theater missile defense in Europe and Asia. Just before his June summit with Clinton, Putin proposed joint boost-phase theater defenses in Asia, joining United States and Russian technologies and using Russia territory to deploy interceptors. During postsummit visits to Western European countries, Putin repeated the proposal in the context of joint TMDs for Europe. In subsequent comments, Russian security officials noted that Russia has experience in air defense technologies and space-based detection capabilities, has common interests with the United States and its Asian and European allies in not wanting to see the emergence of regional missile threats, and has the advantage of location to support efforts to cope with regional threats without recourse to an NMD system that would protect only the United States.

Second, Putin shifted the NMD issue from a bilateral United States–Russia matter to one that involves China, Europe, and other countries—and in a way that favors Russian views. Russia (and the Soviet Union before it) generally bolstered its status through bilateral summits and arms control talks that only the two countries with massive nuclear arsenals could conduct. Although the decision to revise the ABM Treaty remains a United States–Russia prerogative, Putin has multilateralized the issue by making it a matter of discussion in his meetings in Europe and China this summer.

Finally, Putin used his July trip to North Korea to undermine the fundamental American rationale for NMD by announcing that North Korean leader Kim Jong-Il had offered to stop his country's missile program if other countries would provide it with missile launches. Putin followed up at the July 2000 Group of Eight meetings in Japan with proposals to include an intrusive verification system to monitor North Korean compliance with any such agreement. Although the United States remains skeptical of Kim's proposal (it does not address other reasons cited for NMD, including the remain-

ing "states of concern" and the problem of accidental launch), it seriously complicates the most plausible reason for United States NMD, especially in the eyes of the European and Japanese publics, who would have to support use of their territories for deployment of sensor components to support an American NMD system.

This is not to say that Russian policy has completely abandoned quiet discussion of potential treaty revision. At the June summit, presidents Clinton and Putin agreed to a joint statement on "Principles of Strategic Stability" in which Russia agreed that the threat of weapons of mass destruction and missile proliferation was growing and that the ABM Treaty could be modified to account for changes in the international security environment. These were important concessions that committed Russia in principle to participate in continued discussion of United States NMD proposals. At the same time, Putin gained an American commitment to mutual deterrence and strategic stability with recognition that the ABM Treaty is the basis for that stability, and recognition of the interrelationship of strategic offensive and defensive arms.

However, this agreement should be viewed as a fallback position by which Russia might be able to achieve negotiated damage limitation if the United States is determined to deploy some kind of NMD. With President Clinton's decision on September 1, 2000 not to move ahead with an NMD system but to leave the decision to his successor, Russia has gained breathing room for consolidating its efforts to prevent United States deployment of NMD. Putin's diplomatic initiatives in Europe and Asia this summer and proposals on joint TMD are a more ambitious attempt to make renegotiation and revision unnecessary by offering alternative solutions, choices that for different reasons resonate with important American allies, other great powers like China, and possibly with the American public. If the new approach succeeds, it signals a more subtle and professional Russian foreign policy that is attuned to emphasizing advantages, practical results, and the realistic matching of objectives and resources required in the newly approved Russian foreign policy concept. As Putin's first major foreign policy initiative, this new approach has broader implications than merely the NMD issues for United States–Russia relations. ■