



Avoiding a Post-INF Missile Race

CNS

DECEMBER 2019

Dr. Nikolai Sokov



Middlebury Institute of
International Studies at Monterey

James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies

**The support for this briefing paper was provided by the
MacArthur Foundation.**

The views, judgments, and conclusions in this report are the sole representations of the author and do not necessarily represent either the official position or policy or bear the endorsement of the James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies or the Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey.

James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies
nonproliferation.org

The James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies (CNS) strives to combat the spread of weapons of mass destruction by training the next generation of nonproliferation specialists and disseminating timely information and analysis. CNS at the Monterey Institute of International Studies is the largest nongovernmental organization in the United States devoted exclusively to research and training on nonproliferation issues.

Middlebury Institute for International Studies at Monterey
www.miiis.edu

The Middlebury Institute for International Studies at Monterey provides international professional education in areas of critical importance to a rapidly changing global community, including international policy and management, translation and interpretation, language teaching, sustainable development, and nonproliferation. We prepare students from all over the world to make a meaningful impact in their chosen fields through degree programs characterized by immersive and collaborative learning, and opportunities to acquire and apply practical professional skills. Our students are emerging leaders capable of bridging cultural, organizational, and language divides to produce sustainable, equitable solutions to a variety of global challenges.

James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies
Monterey Institute of International Studies
460 Pierce Street
Monterey, CA 93940, USA
Tel: +1 (831) 647-4154
Fax: +1 (831) 647-3519

© The President and Trustees of Middlebury College, November 2019

Cover image: Members from thirteen NATO nations salute before the presentation of awards during the Exercise Saber Strike 16 closing ceremony at the Adazi Military Base, Riga, Latvia. (US Marine Corps photo by Sgt. Shawn Valosin/Released)

Editing and production: Rhianna Tyson Kreger and Anne-Marie Steiger

AVOIDING A POST-INF MISSILE RACE

Brief for “US-Russia Dialogue on Nuclear Issues: Does Arms Control Have a Future?”

CNS-CENESS meeting in Moscow, November 7, 2019



Dr. Nikolai Sokov

Overview

Brief for “US-Russia Dialogue on Nuclear Issues: Does Arms Control Have a Future?”

CNS-CENESS meeting in Moscow, November 7, 2019



The end of the 1987 Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces Treaty inevitably generated concerns about a new arms race in Europe similar to the Euromissile crisis in the early 1980s. The situation is different, however, in one important respect: neither Russia nor NATO want a new arms race and both have demonstrated a degree of restraint. Russia has declared that it would not deploy intermediate-range missiles if NATO does not deploy them. NATO, while insisting it needs to respond to what it sees as Russian violation of the INF Treaty, has indicated it would limit its response to non-nuclear air- and sea-launched assets. Nevertheless, the situation is fragile, and it is difficult to predict how long mutual restraint can hold.



In September 2019, Russia proposed a mutual moratorium on the deployment of ground-launched intermediate-range missiles, a politically binding obligation that could potentially include discussions on verification, including on its 9M729 missile, which was at the center of NATO accusations of Russian noncompliance with the INF Treaty. NATO immediately rejected the proposal, and repeated its earlier position: elimination of the 9M729 missile with undefined and open-ended verification, which is and will remain unacceptable to Russia. Thus, the standoff that led to the demise of the INF Treaty continues, with no realistically feasible solution in sight.

Compounding that standoff and complicating any arms-control endeavors is the absence of an agreement on the baseline, in contrast to the Euromissile crisis of the early 1980s. Then, the numbers of missiles and other delivery vehicles on both sides were reasonably clear to everyone. Today, NATO says that Russia has already deployed INF-range missiles and needs to respond to restore balance, while Russia says it does not have such missiles and may view a NATO response as an arms race requiring a response of its own.

There seems to be an expectation in the West that a resolute response coupled with patience may produce the same outcome as in the 1980s, when the Soviet Union, after several years of stalemate, accepted the “zero option” proposal to eliminate all its ground-launched intermediate-range missiles. While such an outcome is, in principle, not impossible, its likelihood appears low. It is worth recalling that it took five years for such a change in policy, and that, initially, the Soviet response included not only a buildup of intermediate-range missile in Europe, but also preparations for their deployment in Chukotka targeting US Pacific states. The reversal was part of a wholesale change in all aspects of policy, both foreign and domestic. Further, Russian population and elite today largely regard Gorbachev’s foreign and defense policy to have failed, making a repetition of such a turnaround questionable. These elites and policy makers have been particularly skeptical of the INF Treaty; during the last decade, Moscow apparently was on the verge of abrogating it, mirroring the 2002 US abrogation of the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty. Consequently, the current standoff could last longer and be more confrontational than it was during the 1980s.



Prospects for “classic” arms control do not look promising. The military balance in Europe is far more complex than it was during the 1980s. Then, the balance was defined by traditional armed forces—in which the Soviet Union had modest superiority—Soviet preponderance in ground-launched intermediate and tactical weapons, and NATO superiority in sea- and air-launched intermediate and tactical weapons. The Soviet Union also counted British and French nuclear forces on the side of NATO. These imbalances were addressed through a series of arms-control measures: the INF Treaty eliminated intermediate-range ground-launched missiles, the 1991 Presidential Nuclear Initiatives (PNIs) resulted in the radical reduction of short (tactical)-range nuclear weapons, and conventional forces were reduced in accordance with the 1990 Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty.

Not only are none of these regimes in force today, but the military balance today includes additional features:



- The role of nuclear weapons has radically diminished, not just in numerical terms, but primarily in terms of missions. They have been largely replaced with high-precision long-range conventional weapons (first and foremost sea- and air-launched cruise missiles; these are being complemented by armed unmanned aerial vehicles). Unlike nuclear weapons, these are usable and have been used in multiple conflicts since the end of the Cold War. For a long time, the United States had a near-monopoly on these assets, but now Russia is deploying them as well.
- Enlargement of NATO and the collapse of the CFE regime has moved NATO eastward. Although both Russian and NATO forces represent only a fraction of Cold War levels, the new configuration is far less stable. Of greatest concern is the security dilemma that has emerged around the Baltic states and Poland, which makes any calculation of military balance much more challenging, and that complexity will unfavorably affect the prospects of possible negotiations.
- Although nuclear balance has lost its centrality, these weapons still play the role of ultimate deterrence, making escalation to the nuclear level a risk in any conflict. Moreover, many intermediate- and shorter-

range delivery systems are dual-capable (currently mostly Russian, but the United States plans to transition to dual-capable systems as well), increasing the risk of escalation in case of any, even very limited, conventional conflict.

- In contrast to the 1980s Euromissile crisis, Asia will play a vastly more important role. It is commonly believed—with good reason—that the Asian theater (US *vis-à-vis* China) will likely become the focus of an arms race in intermediate-range forces, conventional and perhaps nuclear. Anticipated deployments of US INF-range missiles in Asia will likely trigger symmetric Chinese and Russian responses, further complicating any arms-control arrangements in Europe (in particular by making global scope less feasible).

The situation is further aggravated by a highly unfavorable political situation: not only East-West relations can be best characterized as hostile, domestic politics in the United States as well as internal NATO politics make it very difficult to expect serious arms-control dialogue.

The ability to draw a line between arms control and political conflict and to engage in the former in the midst of the latter, which was typical during the Cold War since at least the early 1960s, has been nearly lost. The unresolved controversy over the implementation of the INF Treaty further complicates matters: it is taken as evidence that “normal” arms-control talks with Russia are next to impossible or, at least, that they must result in a fundamental change of Russian military posture. Moscow tries to resurrect the Cold War pattern of separating arms control from other issue-areas, but success of these efforts is questionable. It is not unreasonable to expect that serious arms control will have to wait until a major crisis, similar in severity to the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, can resurrect cooperation on security issues.



The arms-control landscape in Europe is defined by a difference between the “narrow” approach of NATO and the “integrative” approach of Russia.

The former concentrates on INF-range ground-launched missiles with an implicit emphasis on nuclear-capable missiles or, even more narrowly focused, only those equipped with nuclear warheads. Adjacent to this is the NATO position on tactical nuclear weapons, which has remained unchanged since 2010 and boils down to asymmetric reductions of Russian and US capabilities. Other NATO concerns, such as Russia’s ability to quickly amass conventional forces and move them across its territory, the “fortress” in Kaliningrad Oblast, growing Russian capability in the Black Sea, etc., have not been operationalized in arms-control positions. Conceptually, this orientation is similar to the Barack Obama administration’s approach to strategic arms control, which sought to address only nuclear weapons (including some innovative ideas, such as his proposal to address the nuclear stockpile instead of delivery vehicles).

Today, however, NATO arms-control policy is in disarray since the Donald J. Trump administration has demonstrated a discernible concept of arms control. So far, the development of a European vision has been slow to emerge. It seems that Europe, whether European NATO or the EU, is not particularly well fit for producing a cohesive, reasonably comprehensive arms-control agenda.

The Russian “integrative” approach with respect to strategic arms control was outlined in the statement of Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov to the Duma during ratification of the 2010 Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START). It treats nuclear weapons as just one element of strategic balance alongside missile defense, conventional weapons, and space weapons. *Vis-à-vis* Europe, this includes, at a minimum, long-range air- and sea-launched strike assets—both nuclear-capable and conventional—and missile defense. Moscow also voices concerns about NATO’s improving reinforcement capability, the growing American military presence in Poland, and rotational deployment of forces in the Baltic states, but these concerns are not part of arms-control agenda.. Tactical nuclear weapons remain on the sidelines and Russia’s position is the same as it was two decades ago: namely, that any dialogue on them can only begin after the

withdrawal of American B-61 bombs from Europe.

The incompatibility of these approaches minimizes, if not eliminates, prospects for successful arms-control engagement. In addition, each approach has major drawbacks, further worsening the chance for success. If the two sides attempt to launch a dialogue based on their existing concepts, this could aggravate political conflict and increase the risk of an arms race.

The approach that is limited to INF-accountable assets misses several major Russian concerns, in particular:

- Russia has been more concerned about US and NATO ability to wage conventional war without direct contact (similar to the 1999 war over Kosovo) than about their nuclear weapons. Seen from this perspective, there is precious little difference between ground-, air-, or sea-based long-range conventional weapons: all of them are seen as usable means of war.
- Forward-deployed traditional conventional forces in the Baltic states and Poland, which Moscow sees as a “foot in the door” to be reinforced whenever necessary (the Russian military views NATO’s rotational deployment as a way to familiarize its forces with the future theater).
- US and NATO missile-defense capability will remain high on the list of Russian concerns, although its real impact on continental stability is probably lower than what Moscow portrays it to be.

Paradoxically, the limited approach to avoiding a missile race in Europe contradicts the long-term security interests of the EU and NATO. Russia has acquired a conventional capability similar to that of the United States and NATO and has already employed it in Syria since 2015. That capability will only grow, and it is mostly concentrated on air and sea platforms; hence leaving these categories outside any future arms-control regime, whether formal or informal, leaves a big hole in NATO defenses. The dual capability of Russian and, in the future, US cruise missiles, as well as the introduction of hypersonic missiles, is bound to further worsen the security situation.

The proposal recently voiced by NATO Deputy Secretary General Rose Gottemoeller to employ available verification methods to differentiate between nuclear and conventional land-based INF missiles, which

ostensibly would legalize the latter, could only enhance that risk.¹ It could further stimulate an arms race in conventional intermediate-range weapons, which is de facto already underway, by adding a third, ground-launched component.

The apparent “blindness” of the United States and NATO to these developments is surprising. After all, long-range precision-guided conventional strike weapons are usable and have been used in multiple conflicts after the end of the Cold War. One can easily imagine a scenario wherein one or the other side may be tempted to use them on a very limited scale hoping to keep conflict below the nuclear threshold. One can even say that they have not been used only because the risk of escalation to the nuclear level has been too high, but this fragile guarantee against a limited conventional conflict is not sufficiently reliable in the long term. The current US and NATO position could be seen as a legacy of the West’s past near-monopoly on these weapons, which has since evaporated. The United States is also legally bound by the Senate “advice and consent” resolution on New START, which explicitly prohibits negotiations on long-range conventional strike assets. The US Senate resolution, however, does not limit European countries, whose silence on the matter is puzzling.

The limited scope of the INF Treaty, which addressed only land-based missiles and assumed all of them nuclear, was appropriate in the late 1980s or even well into the 1990s, but not indefinitely so. The 1991 Presidential Nuclear Initiatives (PNIs), whose status is now unclear, partially—but only partially—addressed the sea-launched component of military balance in Europe by banning deployment of US and Soviet/Russian nuclear sea-launched cruise missiles (SLCMs), leaving conventional ones untouched. The 1991 START I Treaty indirectly limited the number of US and Soviet/Russian nuclear air-launched cruise missiles (ALCMs), but, again, not conventional ones. The United States eventually took all nuclear cruise missiles out of service (Russia did not, although their number was not large). As the role of conventional SLCMs and ALCMs continued to grow, the INF Treaty became increasingly irrelevant. Obviously, this was not a reason to end it; rather, a much better option would have been to negotiate a parallel or complementary regime for ALCMs and SLCMs, including the conventional variety.

Thus, Moscow will likely reject the “narrow” approach to arms control in Europe because it ignores a number of its concerns. More importantly, it ignores trends in the military balance, which have been developing over the last three decades, and an agreement that does not account for long-range conventional weapons would have been dangerous for the future of Europe.

The comprehensive (integrative) approach to European security favored by Russia is also suboptimal, although for different reasons.

This approach requires successful negotiations on multiple issues, most of which have never been addressed in past arms-control agreements. In the absence of precedent or a shared understanding on how these should be approached, negotiations may take an unacceptably long time and could generate serious conflicts and protracted deadlocks.

Among others, the following issues must be addressed:

- How elements of NATO and Russian military capabilities relate to and offset each other, including but not limited to nuclear weapons, precision-guided conventional strike weapons (ground, - air, and sea-launched), traditional armed forces, missile defense, etc., given asymmetries in postures and geography. The relative input of missile-defense systems will likely present a particularly serious challenge given the difficulty of assessing their effectiveness.
- The methods for factoring in non-NATO countries into the military balance in Europe (in particular Ukraine and Georgia, which are not members of NATO, but aspire to join the alliance).
- Accounting rules for nuclear and conventional weapons. Admittedly, the former should be subject to stricter limitation (and, accordingly, verification) while limits on the latter can be more relaxed. Particularly challenging will be accounting for and verification of dual-capable weapons.
- Regional limitations and limits on concentration of forces. Although it is possible to utilize the approach used in the CFE-2 (national limits coupled with limitations on reinforcements), they will need to be modified and augmented. Essentially, this is a security-dilemma problem: whereas Russia is obviously stronger than any of its neighbors, NATO as a whole is stronger than Russia. Limits on concentration appear the only way to address this situation. Similarly, limits will be needed on movement of forces between regions.
- Accounting for and limitation of air and sea platforms, which can be moved in a short time from other parts of the world and create significant concentration of both strike and defense assets in or near

IV

As noted above, the window of opportunity is relatively narrow. If action is not taken soon, it may close. It is worth recalling, as an example, the 1991 PNIs: in response to the American statement about reducing tactical nuclear weapons (TNW), the Soviet Union not only announced similar measures, but also proposed negotiations on a legally binding and verifiable treaty on these weapons. Although the US had begun to favor arms control on TNW (an approach that, during the Cold War, the Soviet Union had supported but the US had rejected), the United States did not accept Gorbachev's proposal. A few years later, Russia changed its position and opposed any such measures, and the window closed. The last twenty-five years have demonstrated how difficult it is—perhaps impossible—to resurrect an opportunity once it is missed. We should be careful not to repeat that mistake.

Full-scope arms-control negotiations aiming at legally binding and verifiable treaties are hardly feasible in the current and projected political and security environment; they are perhaps even counterproductive to the extent that the failure of such negotiations could further worsen the already highly charged atmosphere. First-order actions should be more modest and entail the bare minimum of a formal agreement, following the example of PNIs, notwithstanding the limitations and the drawbacks of that format.

The first step forward could be expanding restraint to other classes of intermediate-range weapons, first and foremost, sea- and air-launched cruise missiles.

The main purpose should be to preserve the practices and scale of deployment that preceded the demise of the INF Treaty; reducing their scale is desirable, but not necessary at this stage.

Specifically:

- Parties could promise to refrain from deploying a significant number of ground-launched ballistic and cruise missiles in Europe; the brunt of this measure would fall on Russia, of course (it has already promised to do so, but should refrain from reacting to limited-scale NATO actions) while NATO (the United States, in effect) would also refrain from deploying ground-launched systems in Europe, especially

after their new generation becomes available, bearing in mind that the US Army plans to go ahead with “long-range fires” with ranges above 500 km.²

- Parties could refrain from permanent or temporary deployment in Europe and seas around it (including the Arctic) of platforms equipped for long-range cruise missiles, so that a significant concentration of these assets does not emerge even temporarily. The same applies to aircraft (strategic bombers) that can be temporarily deployed to Europe (this has been limited in any event, so a change in existing practices is unlikely). The brunt of these measures will fall primarily on the United States.

To reemphasize, the effect of such measures will be limited. Obviously, the United States will continue to deploy ships and submarines with SLCMs to European waters and its heavy bombers will continue the practice of “visits” to European bases, just as Russia will continue to augment its limited number of ALCMs and SLCMs, including platforms for the latter, in the Baltic, Black, and Caspian Seas. The issue of the 9M729 will be left unresolved, at least for the time being. Yet, more institutionalized restraint will already be a gain in the current environment.

These measures could be undertaken in the form of non-binding unilateral political statements by relevant leaders (US, NATO, Russia, and preferably others). Language will have to remain vague: in particular, such statements can hardly contain any numbers, but they could help improve the political and security atmosphere in Europe and hopefully buy more time to develop a more specific and long-lasting solution.

An accompanying measure could be similar restraint with regard to missile-defense assets in Europe.

Obviously, it is hardly possible to reverse ongoing activities, but it would be desirable to refrain from planning and implementing new ones or at least to limit them to a minimum. As in the previous measure, this one is intended to avoid the growth of missile-defense capabilities to the level that could prompt Russia to begin deploying a significant number of intermediate-range missiles. Clearly, Russia will also continue to deploy missile defense (and perhaps NATO may even start rethinking its current view of the relationship between offensive and defensive weapons).

The initial set of unilateral, parallel confidence-building-style measures could help ensure stability in Europe that is both more solid and likely to last longer than the current conditional restraint. If these measures are adopted, it could pave way for *more far-reaching initiatives*. The next stage could include the following two elements:

Greater transparency with regard to nuclear weapons in Europe

It is advisable to exchange—at least confidentially, but preferably publicly—data on the stocks of nuclear warheads available for short-notice deployment with intermediate-range delivery vehicles, both missiles and aircraft. The proposed measure would only affect warheads stored at bases, but not the total stockpiles in Europe, whether intended for strategic or nonstrategic weapons. The main purpose of this measure is to keep in check fears about a *nuclear arms race* in Europe and fears of an early escalation to the nuclear level in case of any military conflict.

The idea about greater transparency with regard to intermediate-range nuclear capabilities is likely to elicit a negative reaction in Russia—which benefits from NATO’s uncertainty about the extent and the locations of Russian TNW capabilities and contingencies for its use—but in the long run, it could help stabilize the security situation in Europe, including the security of Russia, in two ways. On the one hand, it will help reduce concerns in the West about Russian intentions with regard to limited nuclear use (the “de-escalation” scenario³) while on the other, it could help reaffirm the role of nuclear weapons as a “back-up” in any serious conflict and thus help reduce the risk of conventional conflict. Given the currently prevalent perception of nuclear weapons, even a limited number of nuclear weapons can successfully play the role of ultimate deterrence. It would be very much desirable if data provided by Russia also included assets with range less than intermediate, such as *Iskander* missiles.

On the NATO side, the United States and the United Kingdom will be the least affected by such a step: the number of US gravity bombs in Europe is pretty well known (although it would be desirable to have an official confirmation of expert assessments) and the United Kingdom does not have intermediate-range nuclear assets. France might be concerned about disclosing data about its nuclear-capable aircraft, fearing that it might be counted as part of the overall European nuclear balance. Transparency is nonetheless desirable, and does not predetermine any future arms-control measures; in any event, its

intermediate-range capability is limited. Among the potential benefits of greater transparency from NATO is that it lowers the probability that NATO would move US gravity bombs eastward to the territory of newer members of the Alliance.

Finally, it would be advisable to enhance transparency with regard to large-scale exercises and permanent or rotational deployment.

This step is needed to reduce concerns about large-scale concentration of forces in the vicinity of the other side (similar to West-2017 exercises in Russia, which the West had regarded as a circumvention of the Vienna Document) and Russian concerns that rotational deployments on NATO's eastern flank are intended to familiarize its troops with the future theater and/or preposition heavy equipment in the area as well as about increased permanent US forces deployment in Poland. The current practices can hardly be reversed, but there are measures that could contribute to greater stability in Europe and reduce incentives to deploy intermediate-range missiles to counter perceived threat. These steps include (1) more detailed notifications about exercises, including a back-to-back series of exercises and perhaps expanded invitations to observers, (2) limiting rotational deployment to the same units and maybe increasing the length of each deployment, and (3) an informal obligation not to expand US presence in East/Central Europe beyond what is currently implemented.

Without doubt, restraint (especially mutual restraint) and greater transparency cannot resolve challenges to stability. Nor can they fix the challenges that have emerged with the demise of the INF Treaty: that regime was increasingly outdated anyway and contained multiple and expanding gaps. It would have been preferable, of course, to keep the INF in force and, using its presence, negotiate a complementary set of measures to address these gaps, but we have to deal now with a situation marked by the absence of Europe-wide arms control at all levels and in all issue areas. Only confidence-building measures remain in force, and most of these (the Vienna Document) have not been updated for a long time. Worse, the political situation is definitely not conducive for a major arms-control endeavor.

Agreeing on a reasonably comprehensive security regime in Europe requires time and effort; many issues have never been on the arms-control agenda and there are no precedents or shared views on how to solve them. Consequently, the central goals today should be (1) to

avoid a further worsening of the security situation in Europe and (2) by doing so, to create political conditions more conducive for a new round of arms control, addressing a broader range of issues and based on a new set of principles. Such a political environment, if not conducive for such an effort, at least does not rule them out. Confidence building and transparency cannot replace arms control, but, as the link between confidence- and security-building measures (starting with the Stockholm Document) and CFE shows, these can complement each other and, in fact, could facilitate subsequent advancement on the arms-control track.

An important and rarely discussed condition for any, even limited progress, whether on confidence building or on arms control, is the mechanism. One more major difference between the present day and the Euromissile crisis of 1980s is the absence of a shared understanding of how and among whom any such measures may be discussed. During the Cold War, such a mechanism was well established. Central was the bilateral interaction between the United States and Russia; even when negotiations were in a deadlock, like in the early 1980s, the question was about changing positions of one or both sides, but alternative tracks were never considered. It was the responsibility of the superpowers to keep their allies engaged and on board with agreements. The same two countries played a fundamental role in multilateral tracks, although the “game” was more complicated and other members could play a leading role on certain issues.

Today, things look different:

- The United States clearly does have not much appetite for a leading role; not only just under the current administration (both because its leading figures are deeply skeptical about arms control and because the administration will instantly be criticized by its political opponents for being “soft on Russia”), but, even if Donald Trump is not re-elected, this negative attitude will likely persist under the next administration as well.
- This, by default, takes NATO out of the picture as well, since it is too dependent on US involvement to make relevant decisions or play a leading role in CBM or arms-control interactions with Russia.
- The EU could, in theory, take matters into its own hands, but it is not designed for effective negotiations. Negotiations presume flexibility, readiness for concessions and package deals, and confidentiality (of both negotiations and during the process of position development). Within the EU, the rule of consensus determines the lowest-common-denominator approach to any issue. Not only do internal deliberations on possible measures take a long time, but, having spent all that effort, the EU will be unlikely to change its initial position (which is a usual practice in any interaction) and will instead continue sticking to it for indefinite time.

To the extent that unilateral parallel restraint measures may require preliminary consultations, they should probably be conducted in a more limited and non-public format, consider non-standard and controversial approaches, as well as facilitate an active give-and-take.

To ensure these conditions, it will be desirable to designate a limited-composition group of two to three EU countries, which will act as representatives of the entire Union and have liberty to discuss any issues and options. These countries will keep the rest of the EU engaged throughout consultations with Russia. Obviously, no deal, no matter how informal, can be made without the consent of all EU members.

Such a mechanism would be somewhat similar to the functioning of the Eighteen-Nation Committee that negotiated the NPT in the 1960s in which much—although far from all—of the drafting was done by the United States and the Soviet Union (including joint draft texts). After the results of their work was submitted to the entire group to be revised and finally approved, the final text was sent to the UN General Assembly. One can also see similarities to the way arms-control talks were conducted during the Cold War, when NATO allies were engaged and informed and could provide input into the negotiations the United States conducted with the Soviet Union.

Given the nature of early discussions, these contacts will not need to be formal negotiations. Rather the main venue should be a series of Track 1.5 meetings, which allow informal contacts among officials and a discussion of options outside the public agenda, as well as necessary confidentiality.

Another big question is who these countries representing the EU may be. Obviously, they need to be authoritative and have confidence of EU members. Equally important—though obscure—criterion is whether Russia will be prepared to seriously engage with them. Given the tense nature of relations with many EU countries, the list of candidates is quite short. Obvious candidates are Germany and France, with perhaps one or two more countries.

Success of any consultations is far from guaranteed in the present environment. It is even impossible to guarantee that any kind of serious engagement will take place at all. Yet, the situation is tense and may even likely become worse. It is worth exploring every possible avenue and every possible option, no matter how modest, to begin to turn the tide.

Sources

¹ Speech by NATO Deputy Secretary General Rose Gottemoeller at the Swedish Institute for International Affairs, September 10, 2019, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_168662.htm?selectedLocale=en.

² Jen Judson, “First flight tests for Army’s Precision Strike Missile pushed to end of year,” *Defense News*, July 18, 2019, <https://www.defensenews.com/land/2019/07/18/first-flight-tests-for-armys-precision-strike-missile-pushed-to-end-of-year/>.

³ The notion of using nuclear weapons to “de-escalate” conflict was introduced into the English-language discourse by the author who used Russian professional publications. See Nikolai Sokov, “Russia’s 2000 Military Doctrine,” Nuclear Threat Initiative, October 1, 1999, <https://www.nti.org/analysis/articles/russias-2000-military-doctrine/>.