

Where Is the Arms Control Community on Russia's Intermediate-Range Cruise Missile?

By Sam J. Tangredi

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What Europe really needs is a new intermediate-range nuclear weapon-capable cruise missile to heighten its security, doesn't it? That's exactly what Russia decided when it deployed the nuclear-capable SSC-8 cruise missile last year, in violation of the Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty. Common sense defines the problem: for three decades, there were no continental-range land-based land attack cruise missiles in Europe. Now there are.

First tested in 2014, the SSC-8 (that's the NATO designation; the missile is also called the Novator 9M729) was immediately identified by the Obama administration as non-INF compliant. Because the 1987 INF Treaty has long been considered an arms-control success and critical to European security, one might think that the non-governmental arms control community—with its web of associations, study groups and foundations—would be fixated on bringing the full impact of the violation to public awareness. Instead, many are learning about the missile because of maladroit and misinterpreted remarks this week by U.S. Ambassador to NATO Kay Bailey Hutchinson. Through supercilious Russian denunciations and absurd web speculations on preemptive American attacks, Ambassador Hutchinson's poor choice of words (essentially, that the Trump administration is preparing to "take out" the SSC-8) has been identified as the problem — not those shiny new missiles themselves.

The general silence of the arms control community on the SSC-8 — minus occasional articles like this one from Steven Pifer — has been deafening. Where are the concerns, the denunciations, the appeals to President Putin, efforts to gain the support of Russian intellectuals, the painstaking analyses? Where is the passion? Who is advising activists to mobilize protests against a violation of one of the longest-lasting verifiable arms control treaties?

A perusal of recent issues of Arms Control Today, the "flagship" of the Arms Control Association, reveals near-apathy, if not quite complete disinterest, regarding the Russian intermediate-range threat. Here's a representative article from last month's edition: "If the disputed Russian missile is still believed to have a range that exceeds the 500-kilometer treaty limit, Russia could, as a confidence-building measure, modify the missile into compliance or, ideally, halt production and eliminate any such missiles." What an insight! If those mistaken Russians would only reduce the range to 499 kilometers, they would be in compliance. No treaties would be violated and arms control would have triumphed over war. The Putin threat to Europe would be solved. Time for the next grant application.

If the arms control community does not seriously examine, discuss, and make recommendations on what NATO should do, it will be confined to absolute irrelevance. Or, maybe, it just already accepts that it has been. The International Security and Arms Control Section of the American Political Science Association recently removed the "Arms Control" part of their title. For disputatious academics, that's a telling move.

Or, maybe, there is but muted reaction because it's not an apparent *American or NATO* violation. Russian violation...no juice in that.

Now my personal disclosure. I was once considered by some an arms controller since I spent considerable time researching strategic and naval arms control during the late stages of the Cold War. However, my dissertation was very

badly timed; the Berlin Wall fell the next day, the USSR shortly collapsed, and publishers were no longer interested in the topic. Moving on—like the rest of the world—to other security issues, I still kept an eye on what was being written on the future of arms control with some remaining interest. Until the post-mortem on the Krasnoyarsk radar.

For those not familiar, the Soviet Union built a phased-array radar in an internal location (Krasnoyarsk) that could be used for battle management of ballistic missile defenses in contravention of the ABM Treaty. The ABM Treaty specified that strategic warning radars could only be built on the periphery of each country and oriented outward. The Krasnoyarsk radar was neither — as Soviet officials ultimately conceded. Yet many of the leading lights of the arms control community continued to argue it was *never* a violation, or that it was merely a “technical violation,” or that it had no military significance, or (perhaps the most convoluted argument) that it was justified because our strategic ballistic missile submarines were better than theirs.

Think about that logic: the country that violated a treaty admits that it violated a treaty, but the American arms control community argues it never did. After that, could anyone take arms control seriously?

I would argue that they can and should. But only if the Arms Control Association and the like-minded *actually took arms control seriously*. Practical arms control (in contrast to disarmament fantasies) requires adherence, reciprocity, clear identification of violations, and an admission that in some cases—particularly when a treaty party lacks a commitment to the domestic rule of law—arms control might just not work. The deployed SSC-8 has the potential of being the post-Post Cold War’s Krasnoyarsk radar.

Come on, arms control community! Are you so American-centric that arms control can only be applied to American and NATO European “security sophisticates,” not Russian “strategic primitives?” President Trump tweets. President Putin authorizes the deployment of new missiles. Which should be your concern?

These views are the author’s and do not necessarily reflect the official position of the U.S. Naval War College, U.S. Navy, or Department of Defense.

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