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International Security Demands U.S. Intercontinental-Range Missiles

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Since the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) entered into force in February 2011, the U.S. has borne a significant majority of the nuclear arms reductions required under the treaty. Russia, the other party to the treaty, has been increasing the number of its deployed nuclear weapons and delivery vehicles, which the treaty allows.

Now, according to a document prepared by the Office of the Secretary of Defense-Policy to the Senate Intercontinental-Range Ballistic Missile (ICBM) Coalition, the Administration is planning on eliminating an ICBM squadron to allegedly comply with New START. Not only would such a move be unwise and imprudent at this time, but the U.S. does not need to eliminate an ICBM squadron to meet New START's limits.

Hedge Against Uncertainty. The Air Force currently deploys three ICBM wings on its bases in Wyoming (Francis E. Warren), North Dakota (Minot), and Montana (Malstrom). Each operates 150 ICBMs. A squadron consists of 50 ICBMs. With long-range bombers and submarine-launched ballistic missiles, U.S. ICBMs are an essential element of the U.S. nuclear triad.

According to the State Department's October 1 factsheet,¹ the U.S. must dismantle 109 of its deployed ICBMs, deployed submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs), and deployed heavy bombers and remove another 138 warheads. The U.S. has already reduced its deployed warheads by 112. Russia has also reduced its warhead number since New START's entry into force, but unlike U.S. reductions, these appear to be almost entirely temporary cuts.

Russia can add 227 delivery systems and 150 warheads to the number present at entry into force. (From existing numbers, the announced Russian buildup is 150 deployed warheads by 2018 and 227 deployed delivery vehicles by 2028.)

Such a U.S. disadvantage is striking, especially considering that the U.S. provides nuclear security guarantees to over 30 nations around the world. Russia provides no such guarantees and has in fact threatened U.S. NATO allies with a nuclear attack.²

The Administration requested resources to conduct an environmental assessment (EA) of ICBM reductions in its fiscal year 2014 budget request. New START requires an EA only if the Administration decides to eliminate the ICBM silos; an EA is not required for an ICBM removal. New START, however, does not require elimination of ICBM silos. The U.S. can be in compliance with the treaty limits without the elimination of silos.

The Utility of ICBMs. ICBMs are the most responsive and least expensive to operate leg of the nuclear triad. They can be launched faster and reach their targets faster than any other leg of the triad. They might provide the U.S. with a decisive advantage in a conflict, since the purpose of U.S. nuclear weapons is to not only deter aggression but also end

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the conflict as fast as possible on terms favorable to the nation.

Because the 450 ICBMs the U.S. deploys are dispersed, they are essentially invulnerable to nuclear arsenals of smaller and emerging nuclear weapons states. ICBMs would force adversaries with large nuclear weapons arsenals to exhaust their own nuclear forces to disarm the U.S., thus leaving the opponent vulnerable to a U.S. retaliatory strike.

In his June 2013 Berlin speech, President Obama announced his desire to reduce deployed U.S. nuclear forces by up to one-third. This reduction—whether part of an arms control agreement (very unlikely) or made unilaterally—would reduce the U.S. deployed ICBM force to between 250 and 270 launchers under best assumptions. Such a cut would make it unlikely that the Administration would honor its commitment to maintain the nuclear triad in Section 1251 of the National Defense Authorization Act of 2010 (the “1251 Report”).

The Administration’s Broken Promises. The 1251 Report outlines the Administration’s plan to invest more than \$85 billion to U.S. nuclear weapons sustainment and infrastructure modernization. These promises did not survive a year after New START entered into force.

In fiscal year 2014, the Administration is about \$250 million short on funding for the Nuclear Weapons Activities in the National Nuclear Security Administration’s budget. This amount does not account for sequestration, which will further widen the funding gap.

During the Senate’s consideration of New START, President Obama promised that he would speed up the construction of the Chemical and Metallurgy Research Replacement Facility at Los Alamos. The Administration, however, delayed the construction of the facility by five years last year, effectively terminating it. The President’s other promise—that he would proceed with Phase IV of the European Phased Adaptive Approach—suffered a similar fate earlier this year when the Administration canceled the development and deployment of advanced interceptors to Poland and Romania in the 2020 time frame.

The U.S. is currently the only nuclear-armed nation without a substantive nuclear weapons modernization program. Delivery systems reductions under New START might cost more than a billion dollars over the treaty’s implementation period. A lack of clarity regarding the costs of New START implementation further complicates discussions about the budgetary implications of the treaty.

Congress Should Push Back. To maintain the safety and security of the U.S. and to assure allies, Congress should:

- **Prevent the Administration from reducing U.S. ICBM silos.** This can be done by defunding resources for expensive multi-year silo dismantlement and for carrying out the EA. The Administration must complete the EA before liquidating the silos. These resources should be invested in nuclear weapons programs in accordance with the 1251 Report.
- **Not authorize any further elimination of U.S. nuclear weapons.** While the President is intent on reducing U.S. nuclear weapons further below the New START limit, carrying out further reductions at the time when all other adversaries are modernizing and increasing the sizes of their nuclear weapons arsenals would be imprudent.
- **Increase funding for U.S. nuclear weapons infrastructure modernization.** Facilities responsible for keeping U.S. nuclear warheads safe, secure, and reliable have been underfunded for decades. Rather than funding expensive multi-year silo elimination programs, the nation should adequately fund science underpinning the nuclear deterrent.

Security and Credibility. Wishful thinking and misguided assumptions about the future international security environment should not drive the U.S. nuclear weapons posture. The U.S. should modernize its nuclear weapons arsenal for the sake of its security and for the sake of guaranteeing the

1. U.S. Department of State, “New START Treaty Aggregate Numbers of Strategic Offensive Arms,” October 1, 2013, <http://www.state.gov/t/avc/rls/215000.htm> (accessed November 18, 2013).

2. Harry de Quetteville and Andrew Pierce, “Russia Threatens Nuclear Attack on Poland over US Missile Shield Deal,” *The Telegraph*, August 15, 2008, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/russia/2566005/Russia-threatens-nuclear-attack-on-Poland-over-US-missile-shield-deal.html> (accessed November 18, 2013).

credibility of the U.S. nuclear weapons arsenal—on which more than 30 allies around the world rely.

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