

The Iskander's Threat to European Security: The View from Poland

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The Iskander Missile Threat to European Security

The Jamestown Foundation, Washington, March 21, 2017

I. Broader Context

1. Serious differences in the Allies and Russian approaches to Euro-Atlantic security

- asymmetry in their national security interests and their military potentials.
- destabilizing factors of non-strategic nuclear weapons and its means of delivery (including ballistic and cruise missiles).

2. US and European Allies will seek to limit threat of non-strategic nuclear forces, an area in which Russia boasts quantitative superiority

- Russia is unlikely to agree to any further reductions in nuclear weapons and sets unrealistic preconditions, as: expanding the “basket” on high-precision conventional weapons, such as Conventional Prompt Global Strike forces, and disparities between Russia and NATO in conventional armed forces.

3. Russia's Threat Assessment

- In its Military Doctrine, Russia has identified NATO as a main external military danger.
- Russia also sees US policy as a potential military threat to its security.
- At the moment only the US has the capability to neutralize Russia's nuclear forces, its early warning systems and space control assets.
- US is developing a strategic ballistic missile system and strategic systems for precision-guided conventional weapons.

4. Iskander missile threat, is a key component of above mentioned destabilizing factors to Euro-Atlantic security

5. Rules for use of Nuclear Weapons

- Russia reserves the right to use nuclear weapons in response to an attack against it or its allies.
- By providing for a first-strike use, Russia has based its security policy on the deterrent function of nuclear weapons.
- Tactical nuclear weapons may be used widely in an armed conflict to demonstrate Russia's readiness to use all available means to protect itself and its interests (de-escalation doctrine).
- Use of TNW would be exercised by missile forces, as simulated during the “Zapad” series military exercises.

6. Military activities

- Russia has increasingly based its foreign policy on military activities.

- Increased intensity of the Russian “routine” exercises since 2014, with high-precision strikes conducted by joint forces including missile components from the Western Military District, is aimed to exert pressure on neighboring states and creates divisions among NATO states.
- Russian doctrine envisions the use of non-strategic nuclear weapons in certain scenarios of a conflict with NATO forces.
- Russia feels free to increase the amount of conventional military equipment in the European part of the state (suspended implementation of CFE).

II. *Iskander missile threat*

- Very high on the security and defense policy agenda.
- The ballistic and cruise missile threats from Russia to NATO Europe are real and constantly growing. They originate from various directions (Kaliningrad Oblast, Crimea, Syria) and successively grow due to the Russia’s rearmament and modernization plans.
- Well-balanced and cost-effective military tool.
- Creates a new security situation in terms of nuclear and missiles threats to European security.
- Deployments to Kaliningrad enclave are provocative and unnecessary step, aimed at destabilizing the security environment in Europe.
- Russia is capable of striking almost entire territories of Poland and Baltic States, including high value assets such as airfields, sea ports, and C2 centers.
- Whole region put under direct threat of conventional or nuclear ballistic missile attack.
- Russia is also able to transport them to Kaliningrad Oblast very quickly by air or sea.
- Russia’s A2/AD capabilities to secure dominance in the air over large areas of the Baltic Sea, Baltic States and Poland, challenging NATO’s reinforcement of Eastern members and limiting NATO’s ability to defend the region.
- Russian offensive weaponry shall be taken into account in Alliance’s defense and operational planning.
- NATO and Allies should develop whole spectrum of capabilities to defend ourselves against this existential and difficult to tackle threats. Those capabilities should include:
 - active defense against ballistic and cruise missiles (such as a robust and effective missile defense system, jamming and electronic warfare assets)
 - and counterforce capabilities to prevent missiles from being launched (such as precision-guided weapons).

III. *Russia’s Violation of the INF Treaty*

- Unique Cold War disarmament agreement that banned an entire category of U.S. and Soviet Union arms with range of 500-5500 km.
- By reducing the risk of an out-of-the blue nuclear attack, the treaty has become one of the cornerstones of military stability and predictability in Europe.
- INF Treaty also eliminates decoupling of U.S. and European security.

- Russia's violation or circumvention the INF Treaty in a clandestine manner rise our serious concerns.
- It is estimated that Russian SSC-X-8 ground-launched cruise missile may have a range between 500 km and 5.500 km and can carry both conventional and nuclear payloads.
- The Russians now have two battalions of the prohibited cruise missile. One is still located at Russia's missile test site at Kapustin Yar in the country's southeast. The other was shifted in December from that test site to an operational base elsewhere in the country.
- There is also speculation that it could be a possible successor missile ground-launched version of the sea-launched Kalibr-NK/SSN-30-A.
- The other missile that creates concern is the currently deployed Iskander-M. Its technical parameters indicate that it can reach targets at greater distances than 500 km.
- U.S. diplomatic efforts to convince Russia to return to full and verifiable compliance under the treaty have not brought up to now the desired effects. Russia consistently denies the U.S. charges and accuses the U.S. of breaching the treaty.
- Violation or circumvention of the INF Treaty has crucial impact on European and transatlantic security. It clearly demonstrates that Russia strives to acquire diverse and tested options for a missile strike against Europe and U.S. forces in Europe.
- The direct missile threat to different European states would depend on the number, range and deployment location of missiles.
- A diversified missile arsenal broadens Russia's options for intimidating Europe. Russia may create a fait accompli in Central Europe and tries to deter other Allies from sending reinforcements.
- Preservation of the INF Treaty is crucial to avoid decoupling of U.S. and Allied security as well as keeping the same security level between NATO Europe and U.S. The INF Treaty is also very important, because it enhances credibility of U.S. security guarantees for European Allies.
- Russia's missiles can be seen as a countermeasure to U.S. / NATO BMD installations in Europe.
- Allies should continue efforts to develop effective NATO Integrated Air and Missile Defense System (NATINAMDS), providing a significant level of defense against full spectrum of ballistic and cruise missiles and at the same time adding to collective defense and deterrence capabilities.

IV. *Strategic consequences and challenges for NATO*

- INF Treaty violation is the next stage in Russia's dismantling military predictability in Europe. It would highly increase threats to security and stability, in particular the threat of short-notice attack on targets of strategic importance.
- Need for a firm U.S. response, in close consultation with NATO allies to preserve the viability of the INF Treaty through ensuring full and verifiable compliance.
- U.S. should focus on resolving all concerns through dialogue with Russia including the Special Verification Commission established by the INF Treaty.

- NATO should consult on a specific set of different military measures to tailor its deterrence and defense posture in case Russia gradually deploys missiles incompatible with the INF Treaty.
- Modalities of NATO / US response would depend on the scale of Russia's actions and NATO's readiness to make and implement relevant decisions.
- Growing Iskander missile threat and violation of INF Treaty shows the important role of NATO nuclear deterrence policy and significance of greater military presence in our territory of allied forces.
- The unpredictable future of the INF Treaty and growing missile threat from Russia confirms that modernization of Polish Armed Forces should include reliable defensive and dissuasive capabilities. The US (including US Congress) have important role in this effort (i.e. JASSM-ER).

V. New approaches needed

- The arms control mechanism created during the Cold War based on legally binding agreements (setting quantitative ceilings, and verification and control measures) is far from applicable.
- Need to develop new instruments to ensure that situation remains predictable and to prevent any escalation of political-military crises. These instruments could include confidence-building measures and enhanced transparency regarding particularly sensitive components of military tools.
- In coming years, strategic stability and European security in particular, will depend directly on whether Russia and the United States together with other NATO member states are able to ensure predictability on the offensive missiles issue.

VI. Conclusions

- Poland is a strong advocate of developing robust and effective response to Russian missile threat to Europe, as a part of wider build-up of A2/AD zones and offensive military strategy and doctrine.
- Given the existential nature of this threat and decoupling risk in NATO, the Euro-Atlantic community cannot just live with it, we need to take actions to fight this challenge.
- Solving the Russian missile threat will require new and novel approaches to the challenges we face.