

Maxim Starchak

# Russia and long-range missiles in Europe

*Deterrence or an arms race*

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March 2025

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# Russia and long-range missiles in Europe

## *Deterrence or an arms race*

Russia is increasing security risks in Europe by producing and deploying the latest weaponry on the borders with NATO countries, conducting exercises aimed at engaging in military operations in Europe, and designating NATO as the main enemy both in rhetoric and in strategic documents. The invasion of Ukraine demonstrated that Russia is, furthermore, capable of carrying out military aggression to achieve its goals.

In an effort to neutralize Russian threats, Germany and the United States are planning to deploy long-range missiles in Europe. This raises important questions: 1) Is a deterrence mechanism crystallizing in this way, or will it alternatively lead to a large-scale arms race? 2) Is it worth strengthening the overall missile presence in Europe, or will it increase security risks? The answers to these questions will largely depend on Russia's reaction and its possible military policy.

### Russia's strategic threat

According to the bilateral declaration of July 10, 2024, the United States will begin episodic deployments of the long-range, land-based missile capabilities of its MDTF in Germany in 2026 as part of the planning for long-term stationing of these capabilities in the future. When fully developed, these conventional long-range fire units will include SM-6, Tomahawk and developmental hypersonic weapons.<sup>1</sup>

The main reason for the deployments of new missiles in Germany is the need to close a capability gap in Europe which does not currently include its own long-range weapons. At the same time, Russia deployed missile systems such as Iskander-M and Kinzhal in the Kaliningrad region and deployed tactical nuclear weapons in Belarus.<sup>2</sup>

However, the strategic threat is that for President Vladimir Putin<sup>3</sup>, the West constitutes Russia's enemy. Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov<sup>4</sup> also says that Russia is in

a state of military and political confrontation with the collective West. According to Defense Minister Andrei Belousov<sup>5</sup>, the army should be prepared for a military conflict with NATO in Europe in the next decade. Russia's strategic alliances with Iran and North Korea confirm Russia's long-term anti-Western path. In anticipation of the invasion of Ukraine, its ultimatums of December 2021 were aimed at obtaining concessions from the United States and NATO and reshuffling the order in Europe. Russia has not obtained what it sought, and will not attain it with the end of the war in Ukraine. Because of this, Russia is sure to continue testing its weapons, deploying them in new territories, and carrying out missile and nuclear intimidation. Both Putin<sup>6</sup> and leading Russian analysts<sup>7</sup> insist on this, as a matter of fact. In other words, the Russian missile threats to Europe are serious and will remain serious for the foreseeable future.

### The INF Treaty factor

In response to the missile plans on the part of Germany and the United States, Putin<sup>8</sup> said that in the event of the deployment of these missiles, Russia would consider itself exempt from the previously assumed unilateral moratorium on the deployment of medium and shorter-range strike weapons, including increasing the capabilities of the coastal forces of the Navy. However, without waiting for American missiles, Putin announced that Russia would deploy medium-range Oreshnik missiles on its territory and in Belarus in 2025<sup>9</sup>, therein confirming the suspicion that the European missiles are just an excuse for Putin's long-standing desire to expand overall Russian military capabilities.

Russia has notably always been unhappy with the INF Treaty. In June 2000, the newly elected president of Russia made their disdain for the INF Treaty immediately ap-

<sup>1</sup> Joint Statement from United States and Germany on Long-Range Fires Deployment in Germany, 10 July 2024. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2024/07/10/joint-statement-from-united-states-and-germany-on-long-range-fires-deployment-in-germany/>

<sup>2</sup> Stationierung von US-Marschflugkörpern in Deutschland. <https://www.bundeswehr.de/de/aktuelles/meldungen/stationierung-us-marschflugkoerpern-deutschland>

<sup>3</sup> Speech by Vladimir Putin during a visit to the Vishnevsky Central Military Clinical Hospital, January 1, 2024. <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/73205>

<sup>4</sup> Speech by Sergei Lavrov at the XXXII Assembly of the Council for Foreign and Defense Policy, Moscow, May 18, 2024. [https://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign\\_policy/news/1951435/](https://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/1951435/)

<sup>5</sup> Speech by Andrey Belousov at an expanded meeting of the Defense Ministry Board, December 16, 2024. [https://function.mil.ru/news\\_page/country/more.htm?id=12542363%40egNews&ysclid](https://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12542363%40egNews&ysclid)

<sup>6</sup> Speech by Vladimir Putin at an expanded meeting of the Foreign Ministry Board, November 18, 2021. <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67123>

<sup>7</sup> Dmitry Trenin. How should Moscow respond to threats from its neighbors in the Baltic region. Profil, August 13, 2024. <https://profile.ru/politics/kak-moskva-dolzha-reagirovat-na-ugrozy-sosedej-po-baltijskomu-regionu-1564142/>

<sup>8</sup> Putin's speech at the Main Naval Parade, July 28, 2024. <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/speeches/74651>

<sup>9</sup> Russia is ready to deploy Oreshnik in Belarus in 2025, December 6, 2024. <https://tass.ru/politika/22599327>

parent by remarking that Russia could withdraw from it.<sup>10</sup> According to some military experts, the lack of medium and shorter-range missiles prevented Russia from countering global missile defense and NATO expansion.<sup>11</sup> Then Russian Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov proposed to his American counterpart Donald Rumsfeld in October 2003 that the INF Treaty be terminated altogether.<sup>12</sup> Without achieving this, Russia began developing missiles that, on the one hand, could both fit into the existing international legal framework and, if necessary, perform the functions of medium and shorter-range missiles, in the way, for example, of a medium-range cruise missile ground-based 9M729 and the RS-26 Rubezh ballistic missile. Thereafter, in 2016, a further indication of Russia's intentions was revealed in the outright removal of the INF Treaty from their updated Foreign Policy Concept.<sup>13</sup> Finally, Russia has also notably embarked on the creation of new missiles.

The strike on Dnipro with the Oreshnik missile in November 2024 demonstrated that the development and production of this missile was carried out long before the decision of Germany and the United States. Even if the United States had deployed such missiles only in the Asia-Pacific region, moreover, this would have been sufficient for Russia to commence its deployment in Europe. The deployment of missiles in eastern Russia would, however, be extremely negatively received in Beijing. Given Russia's increased dependence on China, it would not have dared to do this, and Europe would still have remained the best and easiest solution to the U.S. response in the first stage.

The collapse of the INF Treaty helps Russia take an active role in shaping military threats to Europe. Russia cannot resolve the issue of hitting targets on NATO territory with air and sea-based missiles. Furthermore, Russia has a historical problem with the construction of naval missile systems, and the war in Ukraine has shown that Russia, moreover, lacks air missiles.<sup>14</sup> Given this backdrop and the enemy's sophisticated intelligence capabilities, Russian experts admit that these missiles have performed poorly. Ground-based missiles are cheaper and their strikes are more unexpected and effective. Their creation may therefore become a priority for the Russian ground army.

## Arms race?

Before and during the war, President Putin plainly stated that he would not want a costly<sup>15</sup> or full-scale<sup>16</sup> arms race. There are no funds for this in the sense that Russia is not able to organize the mass production of hundreds of missiles without harming the economy. On the other hand, Russia is able to show not a large number, but nevertheless a wide variety of types of missiles and thus pose a significant threat as such through demonstrative testing.

Russian production of medium-range missiles is unlikely to be significant. Based on my experience of observing the production of Russian missile systems, in the beginning, Russia will hardly be able to produce more than 7-8 Oreshnik missiles per year. This figure may well grow to 30 per year, depending on the ability of the Votkinsk plant, the manufacturer of this missile, not only to expand production, but also to purchase equipment and find personnel. Other possible missiles are more like a tremendous display of technological prowess with the potential for a significant propaganda effect designed to frighten the public. Its actual development depends on a variety of labile factors. For example, the development of several types of missiles may confirm the greater efficiency of one of them, quite possibly not the Oreshnik missile.

In particular, according to Putin<sup>17</sup>, Russia is also developing a ground-based complex of shorter-range hypersonic ballistic missiles, and a land-based version of the Kalibr sea-based cruise missile. Such Kalibr missiles deployed in the western regions of Russia will multiply the salvo weight of cruise missiles and feature the highest level of efficiency. If we assume that the ground-based Kalibr missile brigade is similar to the Iskander-M, then it will include 12 launchers with six missiles each. Consequently, the missile salvo of the conditional brigade of advanced ground-based Kalibr missiles would thus reach 144 missiles. For comparison, the entire Russian Navy is now capable of firing no more than 200 missiles "from all barrels".<sup>18</sup>

Some sources have already reported that Russia is creating a new derivative of the Iskander-M ballistic missile system with a range of about 1,000 km.<sup>19</sup> Russia may also bring back serial production of the Zmeevik medium-range ballistic missile for the coastal forces of the Navy. The Bastion coastal missile system, which can be armed with Zircon hypersonic missiles, could well become the basis for this system.

<sup>10</sup> Interview to the „Welt am Sonntag“ newspaper. <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/interviews/24202>

<sup>11</sup> Kovalev V., Matvienko Y., The Center for Strategic Nuclear Forces Problems of the Academy of Military Sciences. On the issue of denunciation of the INF Treaty. <https://csef.ru/media/articles/6473/3a30c3dc0fb626c751d51a721e729a70.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> Lieutenant General Evgeny Buzhinsky. Is there a future for the treaty on the elimination of intermediate-range and shorter-range missiles? Security Index, Volume: 20, number: 3 (110), 2014, PP. 147-152.

<sup>13</sup> The Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation, November 30, 2016. <http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/41451>

<sup>14</sup> Joe Goodwin, Wing Commander, UK AF. Allied Air Command Lessons from Ukraine Implications from NATO Air & Space Power Conference. The Journal of the JAPCC, May 2024, Edition 37. P.50-59. <https://www.japcc.org/articles/allied-air-command-lessons-from-ukraine/>

<sup>15</sup> Meeting with Sergey Lavrov and Sergey Shoigu, February 2, 2019. <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/59763>

<sup>16</sup> Extended meeting of the Board of the Ministry of Defense, December 16, 2024. <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/75887>

<sup>17</sup> See: Meeting with Sergey Lavrov and Sergey Shoigu, February 2, 2019.

<sup>18</sup> Alexander Ermakov. A new arms race? How Russia will respond to the U.S. withdrawal from the INF Treaty, December 19, 2018. <https://eurasia.expert/chem-rossiya-otvetit-na-vykhod-ssha-iz-drsm/>

<sup>19</sup> Russia's New 'Iskander-1000' Ballistic Missile Boasts Doubled Range and Greater Accuracy, January, 30, 2025. <https://militarywatchmagazine.com/article/russia-new-iskander1000-missile-doubled-range-greater-accuracy>

As for other extraneous factors at play, it is typical for the Russian military strategy to aim for parity with the armed adversary at hand. That is, by deploying medium-range missiles, Russia will take a look at the development of such weapons in Europe, and if NATO's medium-range missile forces remain in small numbers in a limited area, then Russia will not over-deploy missiles or otherwise emit another asymmetric response. There will not be a large arms race in Europe due to the small number of American missiles, nor will there be a change in the Russian defense strategy.

## The political function of missiles

By demonstrating the development of new missiles and deploying them in Europe, Russia will use this as a political mechanism. Back in 2005, Defense Ministry experts openly admitted that one of the goals of Russia's non-nuclear precision weapons was to create conditions for negotiating a balanced limitation of strategic offensive and defensive capabilities.<sup>20</sup> In other words, the new missiles were supposed to pose a threat to NATO by eliminating Russia's imbalance in conventional means and creating opportunities to defeat missile defense systems.

The decision to deploy American missiles in Germany was unexpected for Russia. By threatening to abandon the moratorium on the deployment of intermediate-range missiles, Russia may have aimed to prevent the appearance of missiles in Europe, but the opposite resulted. Now, in order to sow threats and eliminate the imbalance, Russia has no choice but to discuss creating new types of missiles and deploying them along the entire perimeter of its borders with Europe. In doing so, Russia seeks to destroy the existing architecture of European security in order to compel negotiations toward a new order on its own terms.

## Non-nuclear deterrence

U.S. long-range missiles are positioned as strictly non-nuclear.<sup>21</sup> In addition, the role of non-nuclear forces in the U.S. strategy is increasing.<sup>22</sup> The same thing is happening with the Russian strategy. In that vein, Russia's future long-range missile potential in Europe is also likely to be non-nuclear.

Since 2012, Russia has officially begun mass-producing high-precision cruise missiles and their carriers, and since 2014, a clause has appeared in Russia's Military Doctrine stating that the use of high-precision weapons is envisaged

as part of the implementation of strategic deterrence measures of a military nature.<sup>23</sup> In other words, since 2014, Russia has officially adopted the concept of non-nuclear strategic deterrence.

According to Valery Gerasimov, Chief of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces, "in the future, increasing the capabilities of high-precision weapons, including hypersonic ones, will allow shifting the bulk of strategic deterrence from the nuclear to the non-nuclear sphere."<sup>24</sup> In other words, Russia really is paying great attention to non-nuclear deterrence by creating long-range, high-precision weapons. The only drawback, the experts of the Defense Ministry noted, is the insufficient volume of such means to cause unacceptable damage to NATO forces.<sup>25</sup> In this way, the development and creation of the Oreshnik missile was designed militarily to offset the imbalance in non-nuclear forces rather than create a new nuclear threat. The nuclear potential of the Oreshnik amounts to the deliberate rousing of uncertainty so that the threat level of such missiles is higher.

In Russian military thought, non-nuclear deterrence can accomplish three important tasks. At the global level – non-nuclear strategic forces should counter U.S. missile defense for the effectiveness of Russian strategic nuclear forces.<sup>26</sup> At the regional level, the use of non-nuclear strategic weapons or the threat of irreparable damage as a result of them sets the task of ceasing military operations in the non-nuclear phase and preventing the conflict from reaching the nuclear level.<sup>27</sup> At the local level, the intended use of high-precision weapons with non-nuclear warheads is for pinpointing strikes on enemy positions in order to gain strategic initiative in a local conflict.<sup>28</sup> The latter strategy could be particularly dangerous for Europe.

## Military function of missiles

Russia has regional military superiority in areas close to its borders with NATO territory, is able to quickly mobilize and mobilize huge conventional forces, and has the ability to deny or complicate NATO reinforcements, including with medium-range weapons.<sup>29</sup> In addition, many Russian experts point out that NATO has a shortage of existing or

<sup>20</sup> Korobushin V. Prospects for the development of the nature of strategic deterrence and its role in ensuring Russia's security. *Military Thought* No. 6. 2005. PP. 9-15.

<sup>21</sup> See: Joint Statement from United States and Germany on Long-Range Fires Deployment in Germany

<sup>22</sup> America's Strategic Posture. House Armed Services Committee. October 2023. P. 8. <https://americanfaith.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Strategic-Posture-Commission-Report.pdf>

<sup>23</sup> Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation, December 25, 2014. <http://www.scrf.gov.ru/security/military/document129/>

<sup>24</sup> Valery Gerasimov's speech at an open meeting of the Board of the Russian Ministry of Defense on November 7, 2017. [https://function.mil.ru/news\\_page/world/more.htm?id=12149743%40egNews](https://function.mil.ru/news_page/world/more.htm?id=12149743%40egNews)

<sup>25</sup> Ponomarev S., Poddubny V., Polegaev V. Criteria and indicators of non-nuclear deterrence: the military aspect. *Military Thought*, No 11, 2019, PP. 97-100.

<sup>26</sup> Bychkov V., Slepukhin A. A deterrence strategy based on the development of new types of non-nuclear strategic weapons until 2035. *Marine Collection*. No 12 (2109), 2022 PP. 52-58.

<sup>27</sup> Andrey Kokoshin. On the system of non-nuclear (pre-nuclear) deterrence in Russia's defense policy. Moscow State University. 2012. 32 p.

<sup>28</sup> See: Ponomarev S., Poddubny V., Polegaev V. Criteria and indicators of non-nuclear deterrence: the military aspect.

<sup>29</sup> Jacek Durkalec. European security without the INF Treaty, NATO Review, September 30, 2019. <https://www.nato.int/docu/review/articles/2019/09/30/european-security-without-the-inf-treaty/index.html>

planned arsenals of high-precision weapons for carrying out a strike aimed at disabling Russia's strategic weapons.<sup>30</sup> Other Russian analysts<sup>31</sup> and military<sup>32</sup> however believe that expanded deterrence constitutes a bluff. This means that Russia may consider the strategy of using long-range precision weapons effective at the local level, and thus a possible war with NATO countries.

We can thus conclude that the potential is there for Russia to be able to rapidly deploy land forces and occupy some of the border territories of NATO (or even countries) and, under threat of using nuclear weapons, force NATO to cease retaliatory actions and therein retain these gains. Despite the fact that NATO's air and naval forces are significantly superior to Russia's in both quality and quantity, they would simply not have time to react.

## Strategies for improving the effectiveness of long-range missiles and possible threats

Given these events, long-range missiles in Europe are needed primarily to address the above problem. The deployment of current and future missiles should be aimed not only at closing the gap in capabilities with Russia, as the Bundeswehr stated, but also at providing Germany and NATO with the military tools for defeating specific military targets in the event of a conflict.

It remains unknown how many MDTF fire units will be in place in Germany in 2026. Colonel Wolfgang Richter suggests that the long-range fires battalion may feature four batteries and up to 16 launchers capable of firing up to 48 missiles without reloading.<sup>33</sup> In this configuration, the new long-range missiles in Europe will not become a mechanism for countering the above scenario for NATO, but will simply serve as a response to the deployment of Russian complexes. Deployed only in Germany as such, this small number of missiles will have a political rather than a military effect. They will not, however, have a significant impact on deterring Russia.

To provide an effective military response, NATO strategists can consider the following options.

→ **Increase the number.** The Russian military<sup>34</sup> and experts<sup>35</sup> are not concerned about the appearance of ground-ba-

sed missiles in Europe as such, but about their massive deployment, that is, when it comes to at least several hundred missiles. A small number of missiles non-hardened by substantial air/missile defense forces, however, featuring a stationary, constantly monitored platform, is perceived in Russia as an easy target as such.<sup>36</sup>

Only a substantial number of missiles can be used to respond rapidly and effectively to Russia's military aggression. In addition, the dispersed ground forces of long-range fires will become additional threats that Russia will have to take into account when implementing its strategy, which may ultimately interfere with its actual implementation. In general, only a large group of long-range fires can become an effective deterrent mechanism for Russia.

→ **Reduce missile delivery time.** Russia's defense capability would be more affected by the deployment of missiles in Eastern Europe<sup>37</sup> or the deployment of hypersonic missiles, which could completely cover the European territory of Russia up to the Urals and possibly far beyond it in a matter of minutes, and hit several objects of state and military control and strategic nuclear deterrence of Russia. It would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, for Russia to counteract such rapid threats.<sup>38</sup>

Since the United States is, however, only developing hypersonic missiles, such a threat is seen only in the long term.

→ **Permanent deployment.** Statements on long-range firing indicate episodic or temporary deployments and suggest their transitioning into permanent ones in the future. The delayed decision on the deployment of missiles was supposed to allocate space for a variable response to Russia's potential actions aimed at diminishing security in Europe.

However, Russia itself does not have a policy of temporarily deploying missiles. It will interpret any deployment of long-range missiles in Germany as guaranteed and will respond with a permanent deployment of its missiles. Mentioning the temporary deployment of insignificant American long-range fire capabilities will not do anything for European security, but it nevertheless affects global security.

Only the constant deployment of several hundred American missiles, with their hypersonic or nuclear capabilities, or, at very least, the appearance of such missiles in Eastern Europe, can make a significant shift in Russian strategy.

<sup>30</sup> Konstantin Sivkov. Disarmed and very dangerous. Military-Industrial Courier. March 20, 2017. <https://vpk-news.ru/articles/35718>.

<sup>31</sup> Sergey Karaganov. The functions of nuclear deterrence. International life. No 6, 2024. <https://interaffairs.ru/jauthor/material/3005>

<sup>32</sup> Interview Andrey Kartapolov, Colonel-General, Chairman of the Defense Committee of the State Duma, November 26, 2021. <https://globalaffairs.ru/articles/demonstratsiya-sily-otrezvlyaet/>

<sup>33</sup> Wolfgang Richter, Stationierung von U.S. Mittelstreckenraketen in Deutschland, Juli 2024. <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/wien/21371.pdf>

<sup>34</sup> Poletaev V. Non-nuclear strategic deterrence: Myths and reality, Strategic Stability, No. 1 (42), 2008. PP. 64-67

<sup>35</sup> Interview by Fedor Voitlovsky, Director of the Institute of World Economy and International Relations, Parliamentary Newspaper, July 13, 2024. <https://www.pnp.ru/politics/fedor-voytolovskiy-nato-pytaetsya-povtorit-ostreyskiy-krisis-kholodnoy-voyny.html>

<sup>36</sup> Comment by Alexander Ermakov, Defense Researcher at the Institute of World Economy and International Relations. <https://russiancouncil.ru/analytics-and-comments/analytics/voenno-tekhnicheskii-otvet-na-proklyaty-russkii-vopros/>

<sup>37</sup> Alexey Arbatov, Prospects for nuclear arms control. Security Index, Occasional Paper Series, #1 (5), 2020. <https://pircenter.org/editions/index-bezopasnosti-1-5-2020/>

<sup>38</sup> Viktor Mizin, New contours of strategic stability and prospects for strategic arms control. Paths to Peace and Security, No 1 (56), 2019 PP. 96-121.



One concern is that this could trigger a limited arms race. To increase the effectiveness of the use of non-nuclear forces, the Russian Defense Ministry may create a separate group of operational non-nuclear responses designed to deliver single or group non-nuclear strikes, that is, therein significantly increasing the number of ground-based missile systems. In addition, in this case, the military suggests abandoning the bet on a retaliatory nuclear strike and shifting the focus to a preemptive strike.<sup>39</sup> Russia will look for ways to create threats to U.S. territory by increasing ICBMs, deploying missile launchers in Chukotka, or militarizing outer space, while strengthening early detection and combat control systems, as well as developing the capabilities of its air/missile defense systems.<sup>40</sup> However, this is a response to the United States and its potential. Neither Germany alone nor Europe yet plays a significant role in the Russian strategy.

## The German (European) factor

When Putin was forming a response to the possible deployment of long-range missiles in Europe, he said that European countries would put their territories at risk of a possible retaliatory strike.<sup>41</sup> However, these are threats of desperation, as Russia cannot mirror response to the United States.

To make matters more complicated, Russia does not consider Germany as an independent player in the whole equation. Instead, Moscow's official rhetoric has long viewed European countries as a satellite of the United States.<sup>42</sup>

Russia considers the United States to be its main strategic adversary, and the deployment of missiles in Germany is, for Russia, a U.S. policy directed against it, which means it is necessary to respond in kind to the United States.

The deployment of long-range missiles in Germany will not make the German response unique to Russian threats or attacks, nor will it alter the security situation of all alliance partners. NATO countries, especially those with U.S. military installations, and especially bases with tactical nuclear weapons and missile defense systems, are already targets for Russia.<sup>43</sup> The fact that several dozen more targets in the

form of missiles will be added to this number does not fundamentally alter anything. The situation may nevertheless change with the expansion of European missile potential.

As a replacement for the U.S. missiles, Germany, France, Poland and Italy are going to develop their own long-range conventional weapons in five to seven years as part of the joint ELSA initiative. The permanent deployment of these assets will serve as a significant deterrent to Russia. This will cool down the hotheads in Moscow, who do not see a threat in Europe without U.S. missiles.

Replacing U.S. missiles with European ones after 2035 would not involve such a high-risk effect if U.S. missiles were still in Europe. They will not have the nuclear capability, and Russia will not be able to increase global security threats by responding to the United States. Nevertheless, this may create prerequisites for an increase in Russia's long-range capability in various strategic directions from Kaliningrad and St. Petersburg to Belarus and the Crimean Peninsula. If there is a permanent deployment of European missiles, including in Eastern Europe, and their combined number exceeds the potential number of Russian missiles that Russia can deploy on its own, some Russian missiles may become demonstratively nuclear. However, ground forces in Europe are a good idea since when a favorable political situation in Moscow is achieved, they can be exchanged for Russia's abandonment of similar systems in the European part of Russia.

## The nuclear factor

Russia will rely on the fact that without verification, it will not be able to confirm the conventionality of missiles and that it will perceive any ballistic missile launched on its territory as a nuclear attack which requires nuclear retaliation.<sup>44</sup> Formally, this is consistent with Russia's nuclear doctrine. However, it would be rash for Russia itself to respond to a non-nuclear strike with a nuclear one, thereby creating a nuclear escalation. As evidenced by the overarching political-military policy of Putin's Russia, it does not want to be the formal initiator of any actions; it needs to bring the situation to such a point that its response is perceived as a response, not an initiative. In addition, Germany and the United States can adopt the words of former Deputy Foreign and Defense Minister Anatoly Antonov<sup>45</sup>, who believes that one of the potential steps in allaying Russia's concerns about non-nuclear forces may be the option of basing such missiles in places located far from nuclear bases. There are no bases with ground-based nuclear

<sup>39</sup> An interview by Colonel-General Viktor Yesin, former Chief of the Strategic Missile Forces General Staff, to the Zvezda weekly, November 8, 2018. <https://zvezda-weekly.ru/news/t/2018117102-0iaAI.html>

<sup>40</sup> Konstantin Bogdanov. Behind the INF Treaty: Military and Political Effects for Europe. *Modern Europe*, 2019, No. 4, PP. 140-150. Sergey Karaganov. Reflections on the way to victory. *Russia in Global Politics*, November 21, 2024. <https://globalaffairs.ru/articles/na-puti-k-pobede-karaganov/>

<sup>41</sup> Press conference on the results of the Russian-Italian negotiations, October 24, 2018. <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/58889>

<sup>42</sup> Message of the President of the Russian Federation to the Federal Assembly, February 20, 2019. <http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/44032/>, and Vladimir Putin's article in the Podong Sinmun newspaper „Russia and the DPRK: traditions of friendship and cooperation through the years“, June 18, 2024. <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/articles/74317>

<sup>43</sup> Comment by Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov, November 25, 2024.

<https://interaffairs.ru/news/printable/49048>

<sup>44</sup> Major General Sterling A., Colonel Khryapin A. On the fundamentals of the state policy of the Russian Federation in the field of nuclear deterrence, August 7, 2020. <http://redstar.ru/ob-osnovah-gosudarstvennoj-politiki-rossijskoj-federatsii-v-oblasti-yadernogo-sderzhivaniya/>

<sup>45</sup> Anatoly Antonov's interview to the Security Index journal, No. 2 (105), Volume 19, 2013. P. 14.

ballistic or cruise missiles in Europe, which means that it would initially be impossible to confuse the long-range missile from Germany for a nuclear missile.

If Russia equips nuclear warheads on its ground-based missiles, the United States can restore the Navy's nuclear potential by creating the SLCM-N without creating an additional nuclear factor on the ground. In this case, the Russian missile defense system will not be able to resist them.

## Arms control

Unlike with the deployment of missiles in Europe in 1979, neither Germany nor the United States offered arms control negotiations to Russia. The Russian government regularly shows a lack of competence and employs obfuscation and deception as strategic tools. Even while in arms control treaties, it was developing missiles that actually violated them.

The current Russia seeks to outright defeat NATO, which means it will not compromise. Highlighting only missile issues from the entire spectrum of problematic issues has long been irrelevant for Russia. The development of its weapons is a strategic task of putting pressure on NATO and the United States. Russia is not interested in arms control; instead, it is interested in the overall redistribution of spheres of influence. Investing millions of dollars in the creation of Oreshnik missiles and others, it will not abandon them, as it did in the 1980s, especially considering that Moscow now considers the INF Treaty a mistake. In addition, the minor deployment of long-range conventional missiles in Germany is not a significant threat to Russia. Hence, neither the missiles in Germany, nor the proposals for a mutual reduction in long-range missiles will be able to change Moscow's policy.

The golden era of arms control was from the second half of the 1980s to the end of the 1990s, that is, when the USSR and Russia were as close as possible to democratic order. The real agreement to reduce arms in the 1980s was given by Mikhail Gorbachev, a man seeking cooperation, and not by his predecessors. According to Lieutenant General Evgeny Buzhinsky, back before Gorbachev and in response to European missiles, Moscow considered building up a group of MRBMs on the territory of Eastern European states and deploying Pioneer missiles in Chukotka.<sup>46</sup> The revival of nuclear arms control with Russia on equal terms is possible only with a change of political power in Moscow. Today's Russia is approaching dictatorship status, where force and weapons are the basis of politics. It is possible to come to an agreement with such a state thus only if its ultimatums are fulfilled.

## Conclusions and recommendations

Germany is doing the right thing by deploying long-range missiles. The absence of U.S. missiles in Europe has already failed to stop Russia's missile threats. Missiles are produced, placed and launched. Russia considers its long-range missiles to be an effective way to pose threats to Europe in order to achieve its geopolitical goals. The deployment of a small number of U.S. missiles such as the Tomahawk or SM-6 in conventional equipment will not trigger an arms race, but it is also not capable of having a significant impact on deterring Russia. The bottom line is that Europe needs to expand its long-range missile systems. Only the permanent deployment of a significant number of missiles in Europe, along with harnessing its hypersonic potential can have a deterrent effect on Russia accordingly. Russia will not have sufficient means of neutralizing the NATO missile threat, which can hit important targets on its territory in a matter of minutes. By gradually increasing the number and locations of missiles, Europe or NATO could increase their security, depending on Russia's actions.

An increase in missile capabilities in Europe can only trigger a limited arms race due to the simple fact that Russia does not have the financial or industrial resources necessary for quantitative growth. Russia can nevertheless respond asymmetrically by undermining strategic security by placing additional warheads on their strategic nuclear carriers, by deploying weapons in space, and by deploying missile systems in new territories, primarily threatening the United States. However, the United States, as Russia's main strategic adversary, poses several other challenges, in turn, to Russia. Russia is already preparing to withdraw from the New START Treaty due to the Iron Dome project. Under these circumstances, missile threats in Europe are becoming just one of a number of factors of Russian policy that does not however determine its overarching global strategy.

<sup>46</sup> See: Lieutenant General Evgeny Buzhinsky. Is there a future for the treaty on the elimination of intermediate-range and shorter-range missiles?

### About the author

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## Russia and long-range missiles in Europe:

*deterrence or an arms race*



Russia is sure to continue testing its weapons, deploying them in new territories, and carrying out missile and nuclear intimidation. Both Putin and leading Russian analysts insist on this, as a matter of fact. In other words, the Russian missile threats to Europe are serious and will remain serious for the foreseeable future.



The Russian military and experts are not concerned about the appearance of ground-based missiles in Europe as such, but about their massive deployment, that is, when it comes to at least several hundred missiles. A small number of missiles non-hardened by substantial air/missile defense forces, however, featuring a stationary, constantly monitored platform, is perceived in Russia as an easy target as such.



The deployment of a small number of U.S. missiles such as the Tomahawk or SM-6 in conventional equipment will not trigger an arms race, but it is also not capable of having a significant impact on deterring Russia. The bottom line is that Europe needs to expand its long-range missile systems. Only the permanent deployment of a significant number of missiles in Europe, along with harnessing its hypersonic potential can have a deterrent effect on Russia accordingly.

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