

Testimony of Rose Gottemoeller before
The U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Foreign Affairs
December 4, 2019
“The Importance of the New START Treaty”

Chairman Engel, Ranking Member McCaul, distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today on “The Importance of the New START Treaty,” as well as broader arms control issues of importance to the NATO alliance. Having departed the position of NATO Deputy Secretary General only in October, I am very aware of the interests and concerns of the Allies in this strategically significant arena.

I would like to begin by stressing a message that I fear sometimes gets lost in the debate: arms control, including the New START Treaty, is not a good in and of itself. It is only valuable insofar as it enhances U.S. national security and the security of our Allies. Arms control is not worth pursuing if it does not contribute to our security and indeed facilitate our ability to defend ourselves. In that way, arms control is a part of the spectrum of deterrence and defense, just as are capable conventional forces, strong nuclear forces, and reliable missile and air defenses.

Today I would like to focus on two aspects of contemporary arms control: first, the New START Treaty and its importance in regulating parity, that is, the equivalence of U.S. and Russian strategic nuclear forces; and second, tackling the problem of dual nuclear and conventional capability in ground-launched intermediate-range missiles, an issue that has become especially acute in Eurasia with the demise of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) and thus affects U.S. allies in both Europe and Asia.

New START and Parity

First, I know that a debate has been underway as to whether to extend the New START Treaty for five years, from February 2021 to February 2026, as is permitted by the Treaty. A number of arguments have been advanced against this step, including that the Treaty does not control the new nuclear systems that Russian President Putin has announced on several occasions, but most prominently in a speech on March 1, 2018. I do not find these arguments convincing, in part because in fact New START can play a role in regulating these systems, about which I’ll say more in a moment.

More importantly, we need to take a bald look at the question of whether New START benefits U.S. national security, and what blows to our security would accrue should New START abruptly go out of force on February 5, 2021. To me, the answer is clear: during the coming

decade, the United States will be modernizing its nuclear forces. If the treaty is extended until 2026, it will continue to cap Russian deployed warheads at 1,550 and delivery systems—missiles and bombers—at 700, giving the United States a stable environment in which to modernize.

Without the treaty, things could change drastically and quickly. There is no faster way for the Russians to outrun us than to deploy more nuclear warheads on their missiles. This is not a new issue. Starting in the 1970s, the Soviets and now the Russians have built larger and heavier intercontinental ballistic missiles, or ICBMs, on which they can load more warheads at will—and they have plenty of them in storage. If released from the current 1,550 limit on deployed warheads, the Russians could readily add several hundred—by some accounts, one thousand—more warheads to their ICBMs, forcing the United States into a difficult targeting problem at best, and a strategic crisis at worst:

The Russians, with their highly capable missiles, might be tempted to try to knock out the strategic command and control systems of the United States. Stability depends on such a temptation never taking shape. As far-fetched as it seems, that very scenario drove both sides in the arms reduction negotiations in the 1980s and 1990s to acknowledge that we must ensure parity in numbers of deployed warheads and delivery vehicles.

We cannot afford to lose this parity, or to stop regulating it. But if New START lapses, that outcome could happen fast, an outcome dangerous for our national security. Therefore, I believe it is in the national security interest of the United States to extend the treaty to February 2026. Such an extension will provide a stable environment both to modernize the U.S. nuclear triad, and to negotiate a new strategic nuclear reduction treaty.

Before I leave the New START Treaty, I would like to mention that it will control several of the new nuclear missile systems that President Putin has announced. The new heavy missile, for example, which the Russians call the Sarmat, meets the definition of an ICBM under the treaty and would therefore fall under it without any additional negotiation. The new boost-glide missile system, the Avangard, might also be brought under the treaty, since it is launched on a version of an existing Russian ICBM. The Russians have all but said that this system will be accountable under the treaty, and they exhibited it to a U.S. inspection team during their visit to Russia on November 24-26, an important treaty procedure. However, if New START is not extended, Russia would be able to field both the heavy missile—on which so many more warheads can be quickly deployed—and the boost-glide system, without any constraints.

I must note that the New START Treaty has provisions to address new kinds of strategic nuclear weapons, systems that have not been seen before such as the Burevestnik nuclear-armed cruise missile. However, bringing such systems under the treaty would not be accomplished without additional negotiation.

The Dual-Capability Challenge

Now I would like to turn to my second subject, tackling the problem of dual nuclear and conventional capability in intermediate-range missiles, an issue that has become especially acute in Eurasia with the demise of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF). It thus affects U.S. allies in both Asia and Europe: NATO allies have been clear in voicing their concerns about it, and Tokyo and Seoul have also begun to do so.

It is worth noting that the problem of dual capability is not new. The Soviet Union made it routine to design ballistic as well as cruise missiles to carry either nuclear or conventional warheads, a practice which Russia continues today. The United States began deploying dual-capable Tomahawk cruise missiles in the 1980s. The unique difficulty that emerges from dual-capable intermediate-range missiles that are ground-launched is that they have either a very short flight time to target, as in the ballistic systems, or operate in a stealthy mode difficult for radar to detect, as in the cruise missiles. Warning time for those under attack is either very short, or totally lacking. The missiles thus face decision-makers with the nightmarish dilemma of a no-warning attack that could be either nuclear or conventional.

This dilemma drove U.S. and Soviet negotiators to the table to negotiate the INF Treaty, which was agreed in 1987 and sustained stability by banning *all* intermediate-range ground-launched missiles deployed by the parties—the so-called zero option. It was important to ban all such missiles, because verification regimes were dependent at that time on national technical means of verification (e.g. satellites, surveillance planes, radars deployed on national territory). On-site inspection techniques were just taking shape, and the negotiators concluded that it would be impossible to undertake the delicate, intrusive inspections needed to determine if a nuclear warhead was deployed on a particular missile.

Now, the dilemma remains, but the INF Treaty does not. The United States withdrew from the treaty in August 2019 after many years of diplomatic effort, trying to get the Russians to cease violating it through their deployment of the 9M729 intermediate-range ground-launched cruise missile, which is called the SSC-8 in NATO parlance. This hearing is not about rehearsing the U.S. withdrawal from INF. I will only say that I supported it, having personally been involved in four years of that diplomacy. I can state clearly that a treaty that one party is violating so as to undermine its object and purpose is a treaty that is hollowed out—it no longer serves U.S. national security interests. When the Russians began to operationally deploy the missiles in some numbers, they began to defeat the object and purpose of the INF Treaty.

Although I am not condoning the behavior, it has become clear why the Russians decided that they needed a new ground-launched intermediate-range missile system: over a decade ago, then Russian Minister of Defense Sergei Ivanov told Donald Rumsfeld that they were worried about the proliferation of ground-launched intermediate-range missile systems in Eurasia. In the years since, Putin has stated publicly that Russia is concerned about such missiles being deployed by

China, North Korea, India, Pakistan, Iran—states all along Russia’s Eurasian land borders. The Russians have thus far chosen not to try to fix the problem at the negotiating table, but instead deployed their own missiles in violation of the INF Treaty.

That is why I have applauded the efforts of the current Administration to highlight the development and deployment of intermediate-range ground-launched missiles by the Chinese, and to begin negotiations with both them and the Russians. However, there are several problems with the Administration’s initiative, at least from the evidence available in the media: First, it has not gone far enough to incentivize participation in a process—no one will come to the table unless they see their own interests served. Second, it has not considered how to get the other relevant actors beyond the Chinese engaged. These are tricky matters to pursue with countries who have not before engaged in negotiated arms control and limitation, who do not have the experience accumulated by the United States and Russia through over fifty years of negotiations.

In confronting these problems, I suggest pursuing a phased approach. China, for example, might be engaged early in talks aimed at high-lighting the decision-making dilemmas and stability challenges posed by such missiles deployed close to their borders. Scenario-based discussions and tabletop exercises could help to bring home the issues, as could a frank review of the history from both U.S. and Russian perspectives. Herein might be the incentive for Beijing: the proliferation of highly accurate and capable ground-launched intermediate-range missiles on Chinese borders is bad for Chinese national security.

The second phase might then develop a normative basis for further negotiations to build on—statements of restraint of various kinds. These might include declarations of missile numbers and locations; assurances that certain bases would not deploy nuclear-armed missiles; or statements of limitations on use. Such unilateral declarations, of course, are never enough in the arms control policy world, but they can begin to familiarize a country’s military and national security establishment with the value of restraint.

The third phase would then move on to designing a mutually beneficial regime for limitation of such systems. Here I am convinced that we are in a better place than we were when the INF Treaty was negotiated. My view is formed on the basis of the fact that we no longer think it impossible to determine via inspection whether a nuclear warhead is absent or present on a given missile. Already in New START Treaty implementation, we and the Russians have been working in that direction with the reentry vehicle on-site inspections, confirming that objects on the front ends of missiles are non-nuclear. Of course, such techniques can be intrusive and would require significant development and negotiation. However, I am convinced that it will be possible to ban or limit nuclear warheads on intermediate-range ground-launched missiles, an option that was not available to us in 1987.

Such an approach might also be an incentive for the Chinese: Since the majority of their modern and capable missiles are ground-launched and intermediate-range, experts have been insisting

they will never come to the negotiating table to negotiate a new “zero option.” However, if they would be able to keep some number of the missiles that they calculate to be necessary for their military requirements, the picture may be different. The Chinese need not be required to accept a zero option, nor will anyone else.

The limitation process could either ban nuclear missiles on ground-launched intermediate-range systems, sometimes called “putting the ‘N’ back in INF”, or it could place a limit on the number of nuclear missiles allowed in this range. The latter approach would require a more complicated and intrusive inspection regime, but it is feasible and worth exploring.

I do not believe that everyone has to be around the table at once, but I do believe that it is important to begin to discuss these matters with the Indians and Pakistanis, in the interest of developing long-term stability in South Asia and in Eurasia as a whole. The Iranians and North Koreans are the subject of bilateral processes that the United States has in train, and so I will not discuss them further here.

I do believe that it will be vital to engage the NATO allies in helping to scope the discussion, recall the history, and establish new control techniques. Not only do they have the experience and the knowledge to make a significant contribution, but they have their own national security interests to safeguard. Thus it is welcome that French President Macron has said in recent days that he would like France to be involved in future arms control policy-making involving such systems in Europe. Likewise, I think it will be important to involve Japan and the Republic of Korea, as their national security interests are also engaged, and they too have experience and knowledge to contribute.

An important question to confront is who would run the process, who would take the lead in designing a new regime. Clearly the United States and Russia have an enormous amount of experience in arms control negotiations and could make major contributions. However, I think that it is worth considering how to engage the so-called P-5, the nuclear weapon states under the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)—the U.S., Russia, China, France and the United Kingdom. These countries are also the permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, and as such, have a special role and responsibility in international security matters. A process has already existed for the past ten years that brings the P-5 together to discuss strategic stability matters. However, for the P-5 to play a role in developing a new arms control regime, they would have to be invested with further political authority than has thus far been the case.

In addition, India and Pakistan pose specific problems as states possessing nuclear weapons outside the NPT system. Engaging them could depend initially on long-standing bilateral contacts—for example, U.S., U.K., Russian—but in the end, the greatest progress is likely to come from engaging them in a process involving the P-5 countries, a kind of “P-5+”. I know from past experience that such an effort would not be easy, but here too, the case can be made that the national security interests of India and Pakistan would be served by greater regulation of

intermediate-range ground-launched missiles in Eurasia. The proliferation of such missiles across Eurasia is bad for the security interests of both India and Pakistan.

Concluding Remarks

As I conclude, I would like to mention that I am not at all pessimistic about the future of arms control and limitation, but we must be careful not to throw out the baby with the bathwater. Many experts are saying today that we have run out the string on traditional measures that control weapon hardware. Instead, they assert, we must confront the difficult, nay unprecedented, problems posed by cyber weapons, artificial intelligence, and other new and emerging technologies.

These are indeed important challenges to confront, but we cannot at the same time afford to drop constraints on hardware, particularly missiles and nuclear warheads. They are plenty potent threats, and will remain so. Thus, while we look for ways to control and regulate new technologies, we must continue improving how we control and regulate hardware—especially nuclear hardware. For the time being, nuclear weapons are and will remain weapons of mass destruction like no others.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the opportunity to discuss these important matters with the Committee. I look forward to our discussion and to answering your questions.