The Promises and Pitfalls of American INF-Range Missile Deployments in Asia

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Research Questions and Motivations

- Under what circumstances can intermediate-range missiles contribute positively to both conventional deterrence and strategic stability in the US-China relationship?

- How do US intermediate-range missiles fit into broader goals and strategy in East Asia?

- Motivations:
  - Deterioration of US-China relationship.
  - Dissatisfaction with existing arguments.
  - Window of opportunity for shaping policy.
Definitions and Scope of Analysis

“INF-Range or Intermediate Range Missiles”
- INF Treaty banned *all* ground-based missiles with ranges between 500 and 5,500 kilometers, regardless of armament.
- I focus on *conventional* ground-based missiles. US has stated it will not deploy nuclear warheads on future land-based missiles.

“Strategic Stability”
- States frequently label actions of rivals as destabilizing even if accuser is taking similar actions.
- My definition: Stable form of mutual deterrence where neither US nor China faces incentives or pressures for using nuclear weapons first, either intentionally or inadvertently.

“Inadvertent Escalation”
- My definition: Nuclear use that results from conventional military operations that unintentionally infringe on ability of a targeted state to effectively use its secure second-strike nuclear forces

Scope of analysis
- Focused on US-China, but intermediate-range missiles will come into play in other regions too.
- Little USG info about what our capabilities or strategy will be, so a lot of this is speculative.
Strategic Rationale for US Deployments

- Improved US operational flexibility.
  - Reduce reliance on few, large bases that support air and naval power.
- Survivability of mobile land-based systems.
  - Easier to conceal, more difficult targeting problem for China.
  - Reduce incentives for Chinese preemptive action.
- Air and naval platform knock on effects.
  - Reduce forward-deployments of more exquisite platforms.
  - Free up payload space on other platforms.

Source: RAND *US-China Military Scorecard, 2015*
Complicating Factors

Alliance Dynamics

- US will have to secure permission from allies for forward deployments of intermediate-range missiles.
- Not much public enthusiasm among allies since US withdrew from the INF Treaty.
- Basing Catch-22s.
- Dual-track decision vs. modern conditions.
  - NATO allies pushed US to deploy.
  - Different threat picture with China.

Target Set Debate

- What US missiles will target matters a great deal for questions of inadvertent escalation and strategic stability.
- Where analysts fall on this debate is largely a function of what they want US strategy to be in Asia.
  - Maximizers vs. reformers (next slide).
  - No consensus viewpoint yet.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Maximizer</th>
<th>Reformer</th>
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<tr>
<td>◇ Intermediate-range missiles as missing piece in an otherwise sound US conventional posture and approach.</td>
<td>◇ Open to different models for deterrence and conventional posture. Intermediate-range missiles as an option to reform US approach.</td>
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<td>◇ Overmatch as desired strategic end state.</td>
<td>◇ Narrowly-defined operational role for missile capabilities, and narrower target set.</td>
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<td>◇ Target Set: deep targets and enabling capabilities.</td>
<td>◇ Target Set: Chinese power projection forces (especially naval) and coastal support infrastructure.</td>
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<td>◦ Air defense, command and control, space situational awareness, bases.</td>
<td>◦ Ships, tactical aircraft, repair and refit facilities.</td>
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<td>◇ Demands longer-range missiles w/ variety of delivery options to hold target set at risk.</td>
<td>◇ Competitive strategy logic is present but different.</td>
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<td>◇ Competitive strategy as a feature.</td>
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The Case for the Reformer Approach

- Easier to sell to US allies as many are already thinking about missiles in this way (Japan and Australia in particular).
- Easier for US military to implement the reformer approach.
  - USMC already going this direction.
- Better implications for strategic stability.
  - Maximizer approach targets the systems that help protect China’s second-strike nuclear forces.
  - Reformer approach reduces preemption incentives while maximizer approach increases them.
- A reformer deployment would sacrifice operational flexibility but gain in other areas.
Conclusion

- US intermediate-range missiles can contribute positively to both conventional deterrence and strategic stability vis-à-vis China, but the effects of the missiles are dependent on the target set and their role in US military strategy.

- Pursuing maximum US flexibility and overmatch is tempting but going down this path would likely create new problems for US-China strategic stability and face greater resistance from US allies.

- More modest operational deployment model focused on a narrower target set would improve conventional deterrence against Chinese aggression with relatively little increase of inadvertent escalation risks.