

January 13, 2016

President Barack Obama
The White House

Mr. President:

The undersigned write to seek your attention to a developing major obstacle to the nuclear arms control agenda and the realization of the Prague vision, in the form of Conventional Global Prompt Strike (CGPS) and other programs for the development of hypersonic precision weapons (HPW). **In particular, we urge initiation of a moratorium on testing HPW.**

Many questions have been raised as to the cost of HPW projects, the lack of a clear mission statement, and unresolved issues as to operational feasibility.¹ We believe, however, that the most serious dangers of HPW programs lie in their potential for strategic destabilization, an accelerated arms race, and the blocking of opportunities for further reductions in nuclear arms.

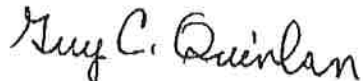
Although the United States has not identified preemptive attack on an adversary's nuclear and conventional war fighting systems as a mission of HPW, the reduced visibility of HPW to radar deployed to detect ballistic missiles could make such a use plausible. The pursuit of such capabilities creates threat perceptions that erode stability and complicate the initiation and conduct of negotiations for nuclear arms reductions. Moreover, if the non-nuclear status of U.S. weapons leads to their use, that may in turn lead to nuclear use. Among other factors, the potential for a CGPS attack to be mistaken for a nuclear attack has been widely recognized.

U.S. plans for CPGS have involved only conventional warheads, but there is no technical barrier to application of technologies developed for CGPS to nuclear weapons delivery. Indeed, Chinese and Russian HPW program goals appear to include new nuclear weapons delivery systems. The potential for intensified qualitative arms racing, including to defeat missile defenses as they continue to be refined, is increasing.

Although no country yet has a fully operational non-ballistic missile capable of speeds greater than Mach 5, HPW programs are advancing rapidly, and the window for a possible test ban could close in the relatively near future. Since HPW missiles would not be anyone's preferred option for use over a prolonged period, because of their high cost and relatively small payload, discontinuing HPW development would not sacrifice any strategic advantage. It could, however, remove a major obstacle to the advancement of your Prague vision.

A test ban – which could initially take the form of a non-legally binding moratorium, with an invitation to open negotiations – would be relatively easy to verify, and it would be effective as well, because no one could rely on HPW for a preemptive surprise attack without repeated flight testing. We believe that initiation, formal or informal, of such a moratorium would be a significant legacy of your presidency. We of course would be happy to discuss this proposal in more detail.

Sincerely,



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¹ Recent literature and testimony include:

M. Gubrud, R. Nagappa and T. Zhao, "Going Too Fast: Time to Ban Hypersonic Missile Tests?", *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, September 2015, <http://thebulletin.org/2015/september/going-too-fast-time-ban-hypersonic-missile-tests-us-response8718>

M. Gubrud, "The Argument for a Hypersonic Missile Testing Ban," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, September 2, 2015, <http://thebulletin.org/argument-hypersonic-missile-testing-ban7412>

J. Acton, "Prompt Global Strike: American and Foreign Developments," Testimony, House Armed Services Subcommittee on Strategic Forces, December 8, 2015, <http://carnegieendowment.org/2015/12/08/prompt-global-strike-american-and-foreign-developments/ioccc>

J. Acton, "Why Do We Need Hypersonic Strike Weapons, Exactly?", *Defense One*, September 17, 2014, http://www.defenseone.com/ideas/2014/09/why-do-we-need-hypersonic-strike-weapons-exactly/94379/?oref=d-river&mkt_tok=3RkMMJWWfF9wsRonva%2FIZKXonjHpfsX66ugqXqCg38431UFwdcjKpmjr1YIERep0aPyQA gobGp5I5FEIQ7XYTLB2t60MWA%3D%3D

J. Acton, *Silver Bullet? Asking the Right Questions About Conventional Prompt Global Strike*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 2013, <http://carnegieendowment.org/files/cpgs.pdf>

"DOD Needs to Strengthen Implementation of Its Global Strike Concept and Provide a Comprehensive Investment Approach for Acquiring Needed Capabilities," GAO-08-325, April 30, 2008, <http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-08-325>