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## Hypersonic Missile Arm Race: US Walking a Tightrope in East Asian Region

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Washington is walking a tightrope in the East Asian region: the Sino-American hypersonic missile arm race may prompt a rapid escalation of tensions between the two sides with certain destabilizing effects, military expert Eleni G. Ekmektsioglou notes.

The hypersonic missile arm race between the United States and China may prompt a rapid military escalation in the East Asian region, dragging it into the abyss of instability, PhD Researcher and Research Assistant at the American University School of International Service Eleni G. Ekmektsioglou noted.

According to the scholar "military thinking so far has been dominated by the use of brute force... instead of coercive force that leaves the final choice to the opponent."

"The latter [coercive force] would be more expedient in a regional conflict scenario where the United States faces a nuclear force while at the same time the objective at stake does not justify an all-out war effort," she elaborated.

The United States has been pursuing its conventional prompt global strike (CPGS) high precision technology, aimed at "striking a target anywhere in the world within one hour's time," since late 1970s. The idea has caught its second wind after 9/11, during the Bush administration.

Although CPGS had been initially meant for counterterrorism operations, very soon the concept

has taken on a new meaning of a prompt "counternuclear" strike. "Counternuclear is broader and more comprehensive than counterforce since it targets nuclear warheads, C4ISR systems as well as production and storage facilities," the scholar elaborated.

The Obama administration praises the development of the CPGS program. However, Washington's course has triggered growing concerns among Chinese policy-makers. Beijing fears that the program is aimed at containing China.

"Specifically, Chinese experts talk about the scenario of China being subject to American coercion, a concern that is mainly due to US nuclear superiority, which — married to BMD [Ballistic Missile Defense] and a conventional pre-emptive strike enabled by CPGS — puts at risk the Chinese retaliatory capability," Ms. Ekmektsioglou emphasized.

In order to equalize opportunities, China kicked off its own hypersonic missile projects. The Chinese tests carried out in January and August 2014 had demonstrated clearly that Beijing entered the competition.

"Over the last several years, talk has heated up over Beijing's DF-21D anti-ship ballistic missile (ASBM), with a maneuverable warhead and range at around 1,500 km, taking many U.S. experts and high echelon officers by surprise," the scholar stressed.

The CPGS technology is considered a game changer in the traditional warfare. Indeed, its accuracy and speed that allows to penetrate an adversary's BMD systems may significantly bolster both US' and China's military capabilities. But on the other hand, it leads to "two-sided escalation situations."

A surprise attack and a tough response to it leave "no room for signaling and diplomacy," and, unfortunately, the "escalation control" is just a "wishful thinking" in the troublesome East Asian regional environment.

"Hypersonic weapons add to the complexity and elusiveness of the escalatory dynamics and this is something both sides will need to plan for," the scholar emphasized.