

Russia's arms-control violations U.S. silence could jeopardize national security

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In 1982, President Reagan noted the importance of arms-control treaty compliance stating, "Simply collecting agreements will not bring peace. Agreements genuinely reinforce peace only when they are kept. Otherwise, we are building a paper castle that will be blown away by the winds of war."

Significantly, in a December 1985 report, Reagan stated, " the Soviet Union has violated its legal commitments to the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty-1 Anti-Ballistic Missile (SALT I ABM) Treaty and Interim Agreement, the Limited Test Ban Treaty of 1963, the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention, the Geneva Protocol on Chemical Weapons, and the Helsinki Final Act. In addition, the USSR has likely violated provisions of the Threshold Test Ban Treaty." Reagan personally raised compliance with President Mikhail Gorbachev, punishing Russian violations by ending U.S. observance of two arms-control agreements (SALT I and II).

President Obama in his 2009 Prague speech declared, "Rules must be binding. Violations must be punished. Words must mean something." Unfortunately, his actual policy is less demanding. The Obama administration has provided the public little information on Russian arms-control violations and appears not to press Russia on compliance. The State Department's 2010 compliance report only named START agreement issues that had been resolved, not outstanding compliance issues. It revealed, "The United States raised new compliance issues since the 2005 Report," but did not identify them. It said that some of the new issues "were closed" but gave no further explanation of what those issues were, how they were closed or what issues remain. Subsequent reports merely assert complete Russian compliance with New START, which seems unlikely given the State Department's own 2011 report saying, "As expected, there have been differences and concerns with implementation." The report fails to elaborate on those "differences" and "concerns."

The sad reality is the Russians, repeating past Soviet practice, consistently disregard obligations that hinder them in achieving their nuclear weapons goals. Russia knows from experience that penalties imposed by the United States for noncompliance are rare. Even President Boris Yeltsin's Russia violated

key START verification provisions, as is detailed in the 2005 State Department report on "Adherence to and Compliance with Arms Control, Nonproliferation, and Disarmament Agreements and Commitments." It also violated the 1991-92 Presidential Nuclear Initiatives, which involved political commitments to nuclear weapons reductions.

The George W. Bush administration raised the issue of the nuclear initiatives noncompliance, but to no avail. In November 2012, the State Department's International Security Advisory Board noted, "Russia is not believed to have fulfilled all of their unilateral pledges." No treatment of this issue appears in the Obama administration's unclassified compliance reports.

Yeltsin's Russia reportedly initiated very low-yield nuclear testing in contravention of its announced moratorium and legal obligation not to defeat the "object and purpose" of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. This reportedly continued under President Vladimir Putin. If true, it may explain how Russia, as its leaders have announced, developed new nuclear weapons in the post-Cold War period. Again, the United States appears to have ignored this issue.

Russian START compliance actually appears to have worsened under Mr. Putin. In 2007, Russia tested a multiple-warhead version of the SS-27 ICBM, despite a START prohibition against multiple warheads on this missile. The issue is not mentioned in the Obama administration's unclassified compliance reports. Rather, the administration legitimized this otherwise noncompliant multiple-warhead SS-27 in New START. What about demanding compliance?

Even more significant are the reported Russian violations of the 1987 Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces treaty. Russian journalists and publications, including an official Russian news agency, have said that the Russian R-500 ground-launched cruise missile has a range of 600 to 1,800 miles, which would make it a violation of the INF Treaty; and two reports say that the missile is a modification of a missile specifically prohibited in the treaty. A second prohibited ground-launched cruise missile also is reported. In 2009, Britain's House of Commons Defense Committee noted reports that the R-500 has a 1,200-mile range. The R-500, now operational, is not treated in the Obama administration's unclassified compliance reports.

Similarly and most recently, Russia last month launched its new Rubezh "ICBM" to 1,800 miles — an act that is at least a willful circumvention of the INF treaty, and possibly a material violation. There is no indication that these issues have been raised with Russia — even while the Obama administration has unilaterally eliminated U.S. nuclear sea-launched cruise missiles.

Noncompliance with arms-control obligations takes on particular significance in the context of the 85 percent reduction in deployed U.S. nuclear capabilities since 1992. At the much-higher force levels of the Cold War, minor variations in force levels would be unlikely to upset the nuclear balance. At today's much-lower U.S. force levels, even modest instances of Russian cheating could upset that balance, increasing Russia's margin of nuclear superiority and threatening U.S. and allied security. Most recently, the Obama administration has proposed further deep nuclear reductions that could make Russian cheating even more significant — and even more attractive to Russian leaders, given their expressed belief that Russia's greatness is tied directly to its nuclear prowess.

With the Obama administration's continuing drive to reduce U.S. nuclear capabilities, verification has never been more important. However, even if verification measures are sound, the absence of a firm U.S. compliance policy will encourage cheating by countries inclined to do so, such as Russia. Despite its words, the administration appears to be doing nothing about Russian arms-control violations, possibly because it sees pressing Russia to comply with existing agreements as an obstacle to its arms-control agenda. In truth, in the absence of effective verification and strict enforcement of compliance, a prudent arms-control agenda is not possible. A serious White House plan to pressure arms-control violators to resume compliance is long overdue.

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