

# The Nuclear Treaty Russia Won't Stop Violating

Why has Washington looked the other way as Moscow revived Cold War weaponry?

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The Reagan administration's 1987 Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces Treaty is celebrated as the "cornerstone" of nuclear arms control. But Moscow has openly flouted the spirit and apparently the letter of the INF Treaty at least since 2008, signaling that it is determined to regain some of its Cold War nuclear-strike capacity.

The INF agreement went where no other nuclear-arms treaty had gone before. Instead of simply limiting weapons numbers, it eliminated the entire class of U.S. and Soviet intermediate range—500 to 5,500 kilometers (or 310 to 3,400 miles)—ground-launched ballistic and cruise missiles.

The agreement also prohibited their testing, production, possession or deployment. The treaty bans missiles with even the potential for use as intermediate-range weapons, such as the ones with which Russia might target countries in Europe and Asia. In 1992, the Russian Federation formally recommitted to the treaty after the demise of the Soviet Union.

Although Russia has been ignoring the INF Treaty for years—if Russian news reports are any guide—the Obama administration only recently felt compelled to openly take note of what's going on. The New York Times NYT-0.21% reported on Jan. 29 that, "The United States informed its NATO allies this month that Russia had tested a new ground-launched cruise missile, raising concerns about Moscow's compliance with" the INF Treaty. The report said the administration began raising questions with Russian officials last May but was rebuffed.

Why is this news? The U.S. has sophisticated technical means by which to monitor and verify arms agreements. But in this case the administration could have pursued Moscow's compliance issue years ago by simply reading the multiple Russian press accounts of a ground-launched cruise missile called the R-500. This stream of commentary, including reporting by the official Russian news agency RIA Novosti, indicates a clear INF Treaty violation: Russia has tested and produced a ground-launched cruise missile with a prohibited range potential of between 310 and 3,400 miles.

Russia announced the first test launch of the R-500 in mid-2007 without referring to its precise range. But in November 2008 RIA Novosti revealed that the potential range of the R-500 "can exceed 2,000 kilometers," or 1,243 miles—a range squarely within the 310 to 3,400 mile range the treaty forbids. From 2008 through December 2013, major Russian publications reported that the R-500's range is between 620 and 1,864 miles, and that the missile is in serial production.

Another compliance problem is a missile called the RS-26. In 2011, Russian officials declared the RS-26 to be an intercontinental ballistic missile, which by definition has a range beyond 3,418 miles and so wouldn't be subject to the INF Treaty. According to reports posted on the Russian defense ministry's own website, however, the RS-26 has been tested twice to a range of approximately 1,245 miles. That would make it, at best, a circumvention of the treaty. There is also Russia's nuclear-capable Iskander M ground-launched semi-ballistic missile. According to a Sept. 26, 2011, Izvestia report, it has a range of up to 372 miles.

Violating or skirting arms treaties is not new for Moscow. In the years before the Obama administration, official U.S. treaty-compliance reports documented frequent Russian misbehavior, including violations of the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, the Biological Weapons Convention, the Chemical Weapons Convention, the Limited Test Ban Treaty, SALT I, SALT II and START I.

Since 2009, the current administration's unclassified arms-control compliance reports to Congress have been mum on Russian INF Treaty noncompliance. The most recent report in July 2013 stated that the U.S. had raised no INF compliance issues with Russia in the past year. The unclassified compliance reports in 2011 and 2012 said the same.

These Russian actions demonstrate the importance the Kremlin attaches to its new nuclear-strike capabilities. They also show how little importance the Putin regime attaches to complying with agreements that interfere with those capabilities. Russia not only seems intent on creating new nuclear- and conventional-strike capabilities against U.S. allies and friends. It has made explicit threats against some of them in recent years. For example, Russia's Interfax news agency reported in 2008 that while discussing the targeting of Russian nuclear weapons, Russian Defense Ministry spokesman Gen. Anatoly Nogovitsyn, stated, "Poland is making itself a target. This is 100 percent [certain]. It becomes a target for attack. Such targets are destroyed as a first priority."

Some allies and friends, such as South Korea and Japan, are already deeply concerned about the credibility of the U.S. nuclear deterrent in the context of these growing nuclear threats and the U.S. push for further deep reductions in its own nuclear arsenal. A recent report by the Japanese defense ministry's policy-research arm observes that with "further progress in nuclear disarmament by the United States . . . U.S. allies will inevitably feel less confident in the U.S. nuclear umbrella. Much less confident in the case of Japan." The growth of Russian nuclear capabilities in violation of the INF Treaty will add pressure on these countries to accommodate Russia at U.S. expense or to seek alternative capabilities, including rethinking their nonnuclear status.

It is questionable whether the Senate would have approved the 2010 New START treaty had Russian noncompliance with the INF Treaty been aired at the time. Soft-peddling Russian misbehavior avoids immediate friction, but further nuclear accords will be meaningless, even dangerous, if the U.S. doesn't enforce compliance.

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