

Russia

APC-12M Topol missile launches from the Plesetsk cosmodrome in 2011.

By Mark B. Schneider

Since the 1970s, Russia has cheated on its arms control agreements, clearly seeing this tactic as a tool to gain military advantages over the US and leverage over Russia's neighbors. Many Administrations, either in hopes of keeping the arms control process alive or simply not wanting to inflame relations, have looked the other way while this was happening, but past precedent bodes ill for future strategic dealings with Russia.

In violation of its various arms control agreements, Russia has developed new strategic nuclear weapons; is building new strategic bombers; has developed new nuclear-capable sea-launched cruise missiles; and has moved to make its air defense systems dual-capable, doubling as treaty-prohibited ground-launched nuclear weapons.

Russia shows no inclination to give up this tactic and has in fact stepped up its rhetoric that it will resort to nuclear weapons first if it feels threatened.

The first serious government effort to examine the problem didn't occur until the Reagan Administration. In 1985, President Ronald Reagan informed Congress of "a pattern of Soviet noncompliance" and said the Soviet Union had violated "its legal obligation under, or political

There is no reason to expect Russia to break a habit of ignoring its arms control and treaty obligations. By doing this, it has gained military advantages for decades.

commitment to, the [Strategic Arms Limitation Talks I Anti-Ballistic Missile] Treaty and Interim Agreement, the SALT II 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."

Things didn't improve when the Soviet Union went out of business. A 2015 House Armed Services subcommittee report noted, "The Russian Federation is not

AIR FORCE Magazine / July 2016

Russian Defense Ministry photo by V. Savickiy

Cheats

complying with numerous treaties and agreements, including the [Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces] Treaty, the Open Skies Treaty, the Biological Weapons Convention, the Chemical Weapons Convention, the Vienna Document, the Budapest Memorandum, the Istanbul Commitments, the Presidential Nuclear Initiatives, [and] the Missile Technology Control Regime.” It also stated that Russia had withdrawn from the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE).

The evidence indicates that such violations aren’t accidents, one time incidents, misunderstandings, or legitimate disputes over treaty interpretation, and they are often quite militarily significant. If a legal or political commitment hinders an important Russian objective, it tends to be ignored. Cheating can result in numerical advantages, more effective weapons, and in some cases, lower costs.

Unlike Russia, the US has long and optimistically viewed arms control as a way to reduce the probability and destructiveness of conflict. In November 1975, British strategist Colin S. Gray wrote in *Air Force Magazine* that the Soviets conducted arms control negotiations in

“a fairly crudely combative way.” Russia, he said, saw arms control as a “political struggle.” Absent a response, cheating gives Russia military advantages.

NUCLEAR THREATS

Soviet/Russian military doctrine allowed for the first use of nuclear weapons in conventional war, and today Russia threatens nuclear attacks. In June 2015, Deputy Defense Secretary Robert O. Work and then-Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Adm. James A. Winnefeld Jr. told Congress, “Russian military doctrine includes what some have called an ‘escalate to de-escalate’ strategy—[one] that purportedly seeks to de-escalate a conventional conflict through coercive threats, including limited nuclear use,” a policy they described as “playing with fire.”

Russia’s nuclear doctrine affects its policy on nuclear reductions, arms control, and compliance. Willingness to use nuclear weapons provides the motive for resisting nuclear arms cuts and for cheating. Indeed, during Russia’s New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty ratification process, its defense minister said

Russia intended to increase its strategic nuclear forces. Since New START entered into force in 2011, Russia increased its deployed warheads, deployed delivery vehicles, and deployed and nondeployed delivery vehicles, reaching 1,735 deployed warheads by March 2016, an increase of 198.

Since the signing of New START in 2010, Russia has refused to negotiate deeper cuts in strategic nuclear weapons or limits on tactical nuclear weapons. In a Russian newspaper interview in 2013, Sergei B. Ivanov, Kremlin chief of staff, explained why: “When I hear our American partners say, ‘Let’s reduce something else,’ I would like to say to them, ‘Excuse me, but what we have is relatively new.’” The Americans, he said, “have not conducted any upgrades for a long time. They still use Trident [missiles].”

Failure to call Russia out on cheating increases its incentive to do it, and American officials have long been reticent to challenge Russia on its violations or respond to them. With the exception of the Reagan Administration’s 1986 termination of US observance of the SALT I and II agreements in response to multiple Soviet violations, there’s been no substantive US response to Russian violations.

Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea violate a number of arms control and international security agreements. Secretary of State John F.

An SS-27 Sickle B mobile ballistic intercontinental missile is prepared at the Alabino training ground near Moscow for the 2012 Victory Day parade.



Photo by Vitaly V. Kuzmin

Kerry said, “The United States condemns the Russian Federation’s invasion and occupation of Ukrainian territory and its violation of Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity in full contravention of Russia’s obligations under the UN Charter, the Helsinki Final Act, its 1997 military basing agreement with Ukraine, and the 1994 Budapest Memorandum.” The Budapest Memorandum was a condition for the START entry-into-force and the denuclearization of Ukraine.

The Obama Administration also says Russia is violating the CFE Treaty, which was intended to limit the amount of conventional military forces in Europe. This is particularly significant in light of Russia’s aggression against Ukraine and the ensuing European crisis. But even before Moscow suspended its obligations under the CFE Treaty in 2007, it had been in violation of its terms. Russia actually admitted this in 1999, according to the Arms Control Association. In March 2015, TASS news agency reported that Anatoly I. Antonov, deputy defense minister, said the CFE Treaty “is dead and there are no prospects for reviving it.” A month later, TASS quoted Anton Mazur, the head of the Russian delegation at the Vienna talks on military security and arms control, as saying that while Russia “formally remains [a] party of the CFE Treaty ... there will be no return to the treaty.” There’s no legal basis for Russia’s long-term refusal to comply with CFE while remaining a party to it.

By increasing the level of forces arrayed against parts of Europe, Russia’s violation of the CFE Treaty has enhanced its military capability against some NATO states. Russia’s suspension of CFE inspections reportedly blocked information about its preparations to attack Georgia in 2008.

The most common Soviet/Russian arms control violations have involved the nuclear treaties that were the focus of bilateral arms control. The full scope of Russian noncompliance is not in the public domain because there’s only been one comprehensive and unclassified compliance report since 1993. US law, however, requires an annual report with “a specific identification, to the maximum extent practicable in unclassified form,” of each potential violation of an arms treaty.

VERIFICATION ISSUES

The 2005 State Department compliance report documented Russian violations of important verification provisions of the START agreement, but its discussion was limited to issues active that year. The next compliance report wasn’t issued until 2010 and revealed that the US had raised some compliance issues since the previous report, but didn’t disclose what those were, except that some involved verification.

The Obama Administration has said the most common Russian violations of START involved warhead counting inspections and telemetry provisions.

There were substantive Russian START violations. One of the most significant was

the Russian failure to eliminate 22 SS-18 heavy ICBM silo launchers, as required, annually for over three years in the 1990s. According to Russia’s own unclassified START data declarations, it had 28 more deployed 10-warhead SS-18s than allowed under START.

Another apparent START violation will shape Russian strategic nuclear forces for decades to come. Russia tested the SS-27 Mod 1/Topol M Variant II ICBM—which was supposed to have a single warhead—with multiple independently targetable (MIRV) warheads from 2007 through the expiration of the START agreement in 2009. Through these tests, Russia developed and deployed the MIRVed SS-27 Mod 2.

Russia gave this missile a new designator and name (RS-24/Yars)—apparently to conceal the START violation under the rubric of a “new type” of ICBM.

Prior to START, Russia violated a number of SALT II provisions, including the limit of one “new type” of ICBM. The Reagan Administration concluded that the Soviet SS-25 mobile ICBM (still deployed) was a prohibited second new type of ICBM. The Soviet SS-18 Mod 5 heavy ICBM (still deployed) was a prohibited third.

Russia has gained advantages from ignoring its legal and political commitments regarding testing of nuclear weapons. Likely Soviet testing well above the 150-kiloton yield limit of the Threshold Test Ban Treaty apparently aided development and deployment of more powerful and reliable MIRVed Russian nuclear warheads. The 2009 US Strategic Commission report stated, “Apparently Russia and possibly China are conducting low-yield tests.” Reports of low-yield hydronuclear tests have appeared in the Russian press since the 1990s. President Boris Yeltsin’s April 29, 1999, decree on nuclear weapons development reportedly approved “hydronuclear field experiments.”

Senior Russian officials have said they are developing and introducing new and improved types of nuclear weapons. According to Russian expatriate Pavel Podvig, an expert on Russian strategic forces, the new nuclear warhead for its Bulava-30 SLBM has three times the yield-to-weight

Russian President Vladimir Putin in the cockpit of a Tu-160 bomber before military exercises at Chkalovskiy Airfield in 2005.



Photo by Presidential Press Service



ratio of the best small warheads the Soviets had during the Cold War.

Russia is also cheating egregiously with regard to the INF Treaty and the 1991-92 Presidential Nuclear Initiatives (PNIs). It is now modernizing weapons that were supposed to have been eliminated.

In 2014, the Obama Administration called this “a very serious matter” and determined “the Russian Federation was in violation of its obligations under the ... INF Treaty ... not to possess, produce, or flight-test a ground-launched cruise missile with a range capability of 500 [kilometers] to 5,500 [km] or to possess or produce launchers of such missiles.”

This violation goes to the heart of the treaty. According to a senior State Department official, “The Russian system is a state-of-the-art GLCM [ground-launched cruise missile] that Russia has tested at ranges capable of threatening the European continent.”

Rose E. Gottemoeller, State Department undersecretary for arms control and international security, said in December 2015 testimony, “This is not a technicality, a one-off event, or a case of mistaken identity, but a serious Russian violation of one of the most basic obligations under the INF Treaty.”

ENABLING EXPANSIONISM

Commenting a year ago on the State Department arms control compliance report, Congressman Mac Thornberry (R-Texas), chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, stated, “Russia’s development of intermediate-range nuclear platforms is designed to hold our interests at risk and enable [President Vladimir I.] Putin’s expansionist policies.”

Russian officials have said the Su-34 would be modified to carry long-range nuclear missiles.

Russian press reports have cited other developments that appear to be recreating the systems eliminated by the INF Treaty. These include:

- Testing and deployment of the R-500 cruise missile with a range of 1,000 km (621 miles) or more.
- Development of the RS-26, an intermediate-range missile masquerading as an ICBM (a possible violation or circumvention of both the INF Treaty and the New START agreement).
- Nondeclaration and elimination of the late Soviet-era Skorost IRBM.
- Giving surface-to-air missiles and ABM interceptor missiles a surface-to-surface nuclear attack role.
- The reported 600- to 1,000-km (373- to 621-mile) range of the Iskander-M ballistic missile and the possible range of a new version of the missile.

Russian journalist Pavel E. Felgenhauer said in 2010 that Moscow plans to covertly quit the 1987 treaty on medium- and short-range missiles because its air defense missiles could double as nuclear armed intermediate-range ballistic missiles. The Russian S-300 and the S-400 air defense missiles, the new S-500 air and missile

defense interceptor, and the Moscow ABM interceptors are nuclear armed and could function either as conventional or nuclear medium- or shorter-range ballistic missiles. He said this capability was demonstrated in the Vostok 2010 military exercise conducted in the Far East.

In April 2015, Felgenhauer wrote that the Russian S-300 system (the shortest range system he listed) has a nuclear ground attack capability and a range of “up to 400 kilometers” [249 miles]. A link attached to the article revealed one of his sources as the President of Belarus. In February 2016, Felgenhauer said the S-300PMU2, which Russia plans to sell to Iran, can attack “land and sea targets” with precision. In February 2016, TASS reported the S-400 “can also be used against ground objectives.” A 2011 *Red Star* article said Russia has 700 nuclear warheads for the Moscow ABM system and its surface-to-air missiles.

If Felgenhauer is correct about these capabilities, at least two of the systems he mentioned (the Moscow ABM and the S-500) violate the INF Treaty. The development of a dual-capable anti-air/anti-ground capability would also have

Suspected Russian gunmen on patrol at Simferopol Airport in Ukraine's Crimean peninsula in 2014. Oddly, the rifle carried by the gunman on the right does not have a magazine inserted.

important implications for US Air Force and Navy aviation. If dual-capable missiles can be launched at surface or naval targets without the use of the radar, missions to suppress or destroy enemy air defense could fundamentally change. Individual launchers may have to be targeted, and they would have substantial self-defense capability.

In 2004, then-Assistant Secretary of State for International Security and Nonproliferation Stephen G. Rademaker voiced Washington's concern that "Russian commitments have not been entirely fulfilled" under the Presidential Nuclear Initiatives of 1991-92 to reduce tactical nuclear weapons in Europe. Among the reported PNI violations is the retention and modernization of battlefield nuclear weapons (nuclear artillery, short-range nuclear missiles, and nuclear land mines) that Russia had pledged to eliminate by 2000.

These weapons can support Russian coercive threats of nuclear escalation and threaten NATO's capability to defend itself against Russian attack. There's also open-source evidence that Russia is violating its PNI commitment not to deploy nuclear weapons on naval ships routinely, other than on ballistic missile submarines, and not to develop new types of nuclear sea-launched cruise missiles (SLCMs). The new Kalibr SLCM, which Putin has just said *is* nuclear-capable, is prohibited under a Russian PNI commitment not to develop new nuclear SLCMs.

Russia also announced in 2015 it had built a few new Tu-160 Blackjack bombers and would build at least 50 more—a move prohibited under PNI.

Despite Russian violations, the US remains in full compliance with its PNI commitments. This has created an asymmetric situation that eliminates in-kind deterrence, rather ominously in the context of current Russian aggression and explicit nuclear threats.

Russian compliance under New START is also suspect. Unclassified State Department New START reports say the US has "raised implementation-related questions with the Russian Federation" but the reports have not revealed what these issues are.



Photo by Elizabeth Arrott, Voice of America

In 2014, Brian P. McKeon (then a senior National Security Council official, at his nomination hearing for principal deputy undersecretary of defense for policy) stated that, in September 2010, the Senate had been informed of a compliance issue that "implicated possibly New START, possibly INF."

CHEATING AS DOCTRINE

In December 2014, Colonel General Sergey Karakayev, commander of Russian ICBM forces, said, "There are currently around 400 missiles [ICBMs] with warheads on combat duty." Legally, Russia is only allowed about 300 ICBMs on alert. Of note, in 2011, the Russian space agency published a request for proposals for eliminating ICBMs including the Kuryer, a late Soviet-era small mobile ICBM.

This missile should have been declared under START and the New START, but wasn't.

In 2012, the Russian air force's commander stated the Su-34 strike fighter would be given "long-range missiles. ... Such work is underway, and I think that it is the platform that can solve the problem of increasing nuclear deterrence forces within the air force strategic aviation."

Legally, though, this can't be done without declaring the Su-34 a heavy bomber, which has not been done. There are reports of long-range nuclear cruise

missiles on the Tu-22M Backfire bomber, raising the same compliance issues.

Russian arms control violations are now a normal and predictable Russian behavior. Cheating is linked to its military doctrine and force posture that in turn is linked to Russian foreign policy goals. Russian noncompliance is quite simply for the purpose of achieving military advantages.

British Army Gen. Adrian J. Bradshaw, deputy NATO Supreme Allied Commander, Europe, has voiced concern that Russia might launch a conventional attack on a weak NATO state, threatening nuclear escalation to deter a response.

Cheating on arms control agreements is certainly not the only reason why Russian strategic rocket forces are seeing increases in numbers and capability, but it has contributed substantially to that growth.

Meanwhile, the military and political significance of Russian arms control violations both nuclear and conventional has been all but ignored in the West. Russia's habit of ignoring its treaty obligations has provided it with military advantages, backstopping its aggressive assaults on Ukraine and Syria.

"Simply collecting agreements will not bring peace," Reagan observed in 1982. "Agreements genuinely reinforce peace only when they are kept. Otherwise, we're building a paper castle that will be blown away by the winds of war." ✪

Mark Schneider is a retired member of the DOD Senior Executive Service. He is now a senior analyst at the National Institute for Public Policy. His most recent article for Air Force Magazine, "Zero Deterrent?," appeared in the August 2012 issue.