

## The INF Treaty Compliance Disputes and Its Future Implications

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**Abstract:** *The Treaty on Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces (simplified as the INF Treaty) was signed by the United States and the former Soviet Union on December 8, 1987 and formally entered into force as of June 1, 1988 in the wake of exchanging the instruments of ratification. By comprehensively banning the ground-launched missiles range from 500-5500km possessed by both countries, the INF Treaty for the first time in history achieved the substantial reduction of both countries' nuclear arsenals and introduced the on-site inspection, on which the verification regime in future nuclear disarmament treaties like START I, START II as well as New START are built. Those features of the treaty provide historic implications for its contribution to both strategic stability and international security.*

In July 2014, the U.S. State Department released the 2014 edition of its report, i.e. *Adherence to and Compliance with Arms Control, Nonproliferation, and Disarmament Agreement and Commitments*, stating that the Russian Federation under the INF Treaty is in violation of its obligations of not possessing, producing, or flight-testing a ground-launched cruise missile with a range capability of 500km to 5,500km, or possessing or producing launchers for such missiles. The report does not provide any details on the said information that the United States uses to make this accusation.

Russia, while having repudiated the charges from the United States promptly, also outlined several issues that are believed to constitute the U.S. violations of the INF Treaty, which triggered a new round of confrontations between the two countries in the wake of Ukraine Crisis and invited world-wide concerns on the treaty's future as well.

### Compliance Disputes on the INF Treaty

Both the United States and Russia now show concerns on certain military programs of each other, and believe the terms of the INF Treaty is violated.

As far as the United States is concerned, although the official report released by the U.S. State Department provides no specific details

on Russia's violation, several possible offensive weapons are mentioned by the U.S. media as well as academic communities, i.e. (1) having ground-launched cruise missiles with a range capability over 500 km and (2) having tested ballistic missiles in an intermediate-range. However, beyond those speculations, some more assured assessments are given recently. According to an U.S. State Department senior official, what indeed constitutes the violations of the Treaty is an unnamed ground launched cruise missile with a range over 500km, which is supported by the U.S. intelligence community with high confidence in the assessments. Further disclosures of the U.S. officials indicate that Russia has developed and tested the cruise missiles since 2008 with firm support from the Russian military-industry complex and the Putin Administration.

As far as Russia is concerned, there have been three American military programs identified by Russian officials as the violations of the INF Treaty, which include (1) the use of intermediate-range missiles as targets for tests of the U.S. ballistic missiles defense system; (2) the use of drones as weapon delivery vehicles; (3) the planned deployment of missile defense interceptors on the ground in the Navy's MK-41 missile launchers.

While accusing the other side of treaty

violations, both countries have offered justifications to defend themselves on the treaty compliance issue. Since Washington has not officially provided details of Russia's possible violations, Moscow has offered no specific response accordingly but claimed that the U.S. allegations are groundless and therefore only serve as another attempt to compromise Russia's reputation. And for the United States, the Obama Administration has sought justifications in response to Russia's accusations by contending that, (1) armed drone is reusable but without launchers, thus is different from cruise missiles prohibited by the INF Treaty; (2) target missiles used for the BMD research purpose is permitted under the INF Treaty; (3) MK-41 missile launchers deployed on ground will be deprived of cruise missile launching capabilities through technical modifications.

### **The U.S. and Russian Interests and Concerns on the INF Issue**

The INF Treaty marks a milestone in nuclear disarmament between the United States and Russia, which greatly reduced the confrontations between the two countries and the risks of global nuclear war during the Cold War. Currently, the U.S. principal purpose is to ensure that Russia would come back to the compliance track, which would guarantee NATO European countries' security by preventing Russia from developing intermediate range missiles. And furthermore, the United States also has concerns on the intermediate range ground launched missiles. Over the previous decades, American strategists have offered several options for the Administrations to take, seeking to impose limitations on the ground-launched intermediate range missiles possessed by the third country. One proposal, named "21st century two tracks plan", calls for the pursuit of globalizing the INF Treaty as one track to

terminate the treaty by withdrawal, which is evidently drawn from the strategy that the NATO used during the Cold War to promote the arms control negotiation with the former Soviet Union by deploying new intermediate range missiles.

For Russia, the scenario could be more complex. Russia for decades has been uncomfortable with the limitations under the INF Treaty. And the world-wide security dynamics Russia has to face further contribute to Russia's discontent with the INF Treaty thus fueling its intentions to seek modifications of the Treaty.

First, Russia in the post-Cold War has to confront an increasingly deteriorating security environment featured by the U.S.'s continuously improving its BMD and NATO's conventional superiority as well as the NATO's expansion eastward into nations close to Russia. The Intermediate range missiles, in this regard, are considered desirable countermeasures for their precision and mobility among many Russian analysts as well as officials, who push the country to pursue such military programs. According to the disclosures of the Obama Administration, Russia's military industries, driven by both economic interests and security concerns, have made enduring efforts to persuade Russian Government to withdraw from the INF Treaty. If the proposal of withdrawal is elevated to Russia's Governmental policy, the green light for them to develop intermediate-range missile would be turned on. The Russian cruise missile violating the INF Treaty was believed to be first developed as early as 2008 and has concluded the major part of test tasks so far.

And the second concern that Russian officials publicly state is the emerging threats to Russian security from countries in Russia's periphery that possess their own intermediate-range missiles. In 2007, Russia sought to address these concerns by submitting

a proposal to the United Nations to convert the INF Treaty into a multilateral treaty, which could be signed by all states with intermediate-range and shorter-range missiles. However, the effort eventually failed to invite attentions of the majority players of international community despite the support by the United States and some non-nuclear weapon states.

### **Possible Future Scenarios of the INF Treaty**

Resulting from those strategic concerns, both the United States and Russia could take further steps to respond to the current compliance disputes, which now contributes to the increasing uncertainties of the INF Treaty's future. Speculations on this issue have invited heated and intense discussions in both countries and the global community as well.

Currently, Washington remains focused on solving the treaty compliance issues through diplomatic approach, meanwhile, several other options involving political as well as military countermeasures are being considered in hedging the possible steps taken by Moscow.

In the long run, assuming the current confrontations between the United States and Russia persist or even escalate, the future of the INF Treaty is extremely gloomy with either country's possibly withdrawal from the Treaty under the extreme circumstance. Although both Washington and Moscow currently remain committed to the continuity of the Treaty, there have been heated debates undergoing in both countries on the issue whether the Treaty still serves to protect their national interests. As mentioned above, Russia has constantly threatened to withdraw from the INF Treaty especially to demonstrate its strategic capability and political will when facing threats from the West, and those tactics have repeated themselves under crisis or tension background. In 2007, Russian President Putin took the threatening to withdraw from the INF Treaty as

a leverage to respond to the Bush Administration's pursuit to deploy missile defense interceptors in Poland and X-band radar in the Czech Republic.

On the U.S. side, some analysts have argued that the United States must consider the possibility of withdrawing from the Treaty and developing intermediate range missiles given that Russia's derail from the INF Treaty compliance would place the U.S. self-constraint under the Treaty in a disadvantage position.

However, despite the proposals or suggestions calling for withdrawal from the INF Treaty, more evaluations on the benefits against the possible costs are raised in both countries to determine whether the conclusion of the INF Treaty serves their respective national interests. The oppositions to the Treaty withdrawal in both countries argue that since both the United States and Russia have alternative weapons to intermediate-range missiles, the potential benefit of re-deployment of those missiles against the great loss in international prestige and the economic burden should be further weighed.

Beside the treaty withdrawal, both countries would possibly seek treaty amendment to address their concerns on INF compliance. As mentioned above, the United States has concerns about Russia's development of INF capabilities threatening its European allies, and Russia remains concerned about the INF capabilities from the NATO in its periphery undercutting its security.

The United States and Russia might explore to relax limitations on missile forces in certain geographic scope and certain missile types. The plan would allow Russia to deploy intermediate range ground launched missiles in certain regions except Europe, which would on the one hand, address the Russia's concerns on the intermediate range missiles in its periphery, and on the other hand, allay the concerns about

Russian intermediate range force of European allies.

To evaluate this scenario should start from identifying resemblance as well as difference with the withdrawal scenario. The similarities with the previous scenario lie in the fact that both lead to the redeployment of intermediate range ground launched missiles, and the biggest difference is that, under the withdrawal scenario, the treaty would cease to exist while under the amendment scenario, the treaty remains enforced, and would help both the United States and Russia to maintain their international prestige. However, while seeking the treaty amendment, what the two countries must consider is that the amendment would require both investment of large amount resources and time consuming process to fix the complicated issues, which could not be concluded overnight.

Regarding the shared concerns about the intermediate range missile of the third country, the highest possibility lies in the third scenario that both the United States and Russia jointly pursue to expand the Treaty to eliminate or place substantial limits on other states' intermediate-range missiles. Since no country with intermediate range missile accepted the proposal of globalizing the Treaty in 2007-2008, further supplementary measures might possibly be employed this time by the two countries to help achieve the Treaty multi-lateralization. The threatening treaty withdrawal or amendment might be employed once the countries with intermediate-range missiles refuse to respond. However, more pessimistic estimates remain prevail in the U.S. strategic community for the reason that the intermediate-range missiles constitute the major part of nuclear arsenals of some nuclear weapon states, which would by no means accept limitation on their intermediate range missiles. Those reasons above have in fact

deprived the globalization of the INF Treaty a chance of success.

### **Possible Implications for the Global Security**

The compliance disputes on the INF Treaty and the follow-up uncertainty have invited great attentions and concerns. Given the possible scenarios of the INF Treaty in the future, it is of necessity to evaluate their possible implications in future.

Because of the withdrawal or amendment of those weapon systems, the possible re-deployment could pose a severe threat to the strategic stability as well as international security. The re-deployment, whether in Europe or Asia, could cause serious chained countermeasures from the other side, thus duplicating the tension and panic in 1980s when the former Soviet Union for the first time deployed its devastating SS-20 intermediate-range missiles.

In the longer term, globalizing the INF Treaty might possibly become an issue in nuclear disarmament agenda, which would receive intensive international coverage by possibly receiving the support of the Great Britain and France in P5, which are free of intermediate range ground launched missiles, and some non-nuclear weapon states, which advocate elimination of all nuclear weapons regardless of types. However, given the obstacles to the road of the INF Treaty globalization, its prospect remains in question.

The INF Treaty marks a histrionic milestone of nuclear disarmament and both the United States and Russia with the largest nuclear arsenals should undertake in good faith to fulfill their commitments to and obligations of the INF Treaty. And both countries in this regard should seek to resolve the current compliance disputes through diplomatic approaches, thus contributing to the international security.