



THE INF TREATY AND THE PROBLEMS OF COMPLIANCE

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In the recent past, both the United States and Russia have accused each other of violating the Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (the INF Treaty). This Treaty was signed in December 1987 between the two superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union and it eliminates ballistic and cruise missiles between the ranges of 500-5500kms.

Russia has been accused by the United States of developing the RS-26 ballistic missile and R-500 cruise missiles. The United States claims that these missiles are banned under the INF treaty. Russia is also accused of having launched the RS-26 missile at range below the upper limit of the treaty that is 5500kms. As with the R-500, though it is reported that the missile ranges below 500kms, the US apprehends that the range of the missile can be increased to an INF category missile.

Though most could believe that the United States is raising these allegations only after the worsening of the Ukrainian crisis however, such concerns of Russia violating the Treaty is not new. In April 2013 also, two US Congressmen wrote a letter to President Obama raising concerns about Russia's violation of the INF Treaty which could be "of great significance" to the United States and also to its NATO allies.ⁱ In May 2013, the United States Undersecretary of State for Arms Control and International Security, Rose Gettemoller also raised concerns regarding the violations confronting Russia, but met with no satisfactory response from Russia.ⁱⁱ

However, this accusation is not one-sided. The Russians have also accused the United States of violating the Treaty. Moscow believes that the US is testing target missile which can be converted to INF category missiles easily. Russians have already raised concerns back in 2001 and also again in 2010 regarding the Long Range Air Launched Target (LRALT) with 2000kms range. Concerns were also raised on the Medium Range Target 1100kms range (MRT) and the HERA with 1200kms range.ⁱⁱⁱ As late as in 2014, Moscow has accused the United States of violating the Treaty when the United States planned to deploy the MK 41 Vertical Launch System (VLS) in Poland and Romania reported to be capable of launching sea launched missiles namely the Tomahawk cruise missiles. The Russians fear that the VLS could be used by the United States to launch ground-launched intermediate range cruise missiles too.

The Centre for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments in the United States has warned in July 2014, “Russia may be engaged in arms control “salami-slicing” slowly undermining the INF treaty through ambiguous infractions rather than exiting the treaty through overt abrogation.”^{iv} The Centre also suggested for the development of IRBMs with trajectory shaping vehicles (TSVs) which can manoeuvre upon re-entry back into the atmosphere for evading missile defence systems.^v The INF Treaty under Article XV.2 provides both the parties the right to withdraw from the Treaty.^{vi} This can happen if the party feels that “extraordinary events related to the subject matter of this Treaty have jeopardised its supreme interests by giving a notice of its withdrawal “six months prior to withdrawal” from the Treaty.^{vii}

However, despite both the parties to the treaty accusing each other of violating the treaty, both the states must strive hard to abide by the norms of the treaty rather than withdraw from it. The treaty was a historic success since it managed to eliminate an entire class of nuclear

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arms, destroying about 2692 intermediate range nuclear armed missiles which also included the sophisticated Soviet SS-20 missiles with multiple warheads.^{viii} It must be remembered that slightest modification in a missile by either of the two parties could affect the range of the missile and lead the other party to believe that the Treaty has been violated. These issues must be discussed openly between Russia and the United States.

Russia is also raising the issue of the problem of the treaty being bilateral in nature since according to Sergei Ivanov, the Kremlin chief of staff, other states are able to “do what they want.”^{ix} He obviously referred to states like China developing INF category missiles which he believes is a “destabilising factor.”^x

Amidst these issues, it remains to be seen if the INF Treaty is successfully multi-lateralised which indeed would be a herculean task. In the near future such a possibility is far-fetched. However, given the intermediate range missile threats from various states, it remains to be seen if both the US and Russia can successfully abide by the treaty. For both the United States and Russia, withdrawal from the treaty would result in serious political and strategic implications and could also hinder future nuclear arms control measures.

(Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Centre for Air Power Studies CAPS)

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ⁱ “US Officials Say Russia Violating Missile Treaty-Report,” *Ria Novosti*, July 1, 2013, <http://en.ria.ru/military_news/20130701/181992481/US-Officials-Say-Russia-Violating-Missile-Treaty--Report.html>

ⁱⁱ Jeffrey Lewis, “The problem with Russia’s Missiles,” *Foreign Policy*, July 29, 2014, <http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2014/07/29/the_problem_with_russia_s_missiles_r500_rs26_inf_treaty>

ⁱⁱⁱ Viktor Litovkin, “Russian ICBM missile tests: What lies behind U.S. allegations,”? *Russia Beyond the Headlines*, February 5, 2014, <http://rbth.com/defence/2014/02/05/russian_icbm_missile_tests_what_lies_behind_us_allegations_33893.html>

^{iv} Jim Thomas, “Statement Before The House Armed Services Subcommittee On Strategic Forces On the Future Of The INF Treaty,” *Centre for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments*, July 17, 2014, <<file:///C:/Documents%20and%20Settings/caps/My%20Documents/Downloads/Thomas-INF-testimony1.pdf>>

^v Ibid.

^{vi} “Treaty Between the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics On The Elimination Of Their Intermediate-Range and Shorter-Range Missiles (INF Treaty),” *U.S. Department of State*, <<http://www.state.gov/t/avc/trty/102360.htm>>

^{vii} Ibid.

^{viii} Thomas Karako, “Putin’s Treaty Problem: The Lessons of Russia’s INF Treaty Violations,” *Centre for Strategic and International Studies*, July 29, 2014, <<http://csis.org/publication/putins-treaty-problem-lessons-russias-inf-treaty-violations>>

^{ix} Russia won’t quit nuclear forces treaty unless it faces ‘serious threat’- Kremlin,” *RT.com*, September 23, 2014, <<http://rt.com/politics/189904-russia-inf-treaty-ivanov/>>

^x Ibid