

ISSUE BRIEF

No. 4105 | DECEMBER 11, 2013

Russia's Arms Control Violations: What the U.S. Should Do

Michaela Dodge and Ariel Cohen, PhD

This past June, President Obama called for another round of nuclear weapons reductions by stating that he intends to “seek negotiated cuts with Russia to move beyond Cold War nuclear postures.”¹ The United States has already moved beyond its Cold War nuclear posture. Since the end of the Cold War, the U.S. has cut the number of its deployed strategic nuclear weapons by over 80 percent.

But just as during the Cold War, Moscow is not complying with its arms control obligations and is in fact in violation of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty. The U.S. should take steps to protect its interests in light of Russia's strategic nuclear weapons buildup and treaty compliance issues.

Russia Rising Again. Twenty-two years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia is once again rising in regional influence and is rebuilding its strength. In the military, economic, and political spheres, it prepares to project power across Eastern Europe, Central Asia, and the North Pacific. Its leaders want to boost strategic rocket forces and bring back intermediate nuclear missiles.

In future decades, U.S. national and military leadership should take into account this return of

Russia as an important actor in international relations. Russia will increasingly affect its neighbors in Eastern and Central Europe, the South Caucasus, and Central Asia and will do its best to project power into the Mediterranean and the Middle East. This policy is backed by a massive nuclear arsenal that Moscow is modernizing at a great cost.

Nuclear weapons remain a mainstay of Russia's military power.² The total Russian nuclear stockpile is at least 6,500 nuclear weapons.³ Russia sees its nuclear arsenal as one of the principal guarantors of its security and global power.⁴

The INF Treaty and Beyond. Moscow has a poor track record when it comes to upholding its arms control obligations. With the exception of the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, which is still in its implementation phase, Russia has violated every arms control agreement the United States has ever concluded with it. Violations include the INF, the 1972 Biological Weapons Convention, the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, the 1990 Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty, and the 1993 Chemical Weapons Convention.

The Presidential Nuclear Initiatives, a set of political declarations in the early 1990s, committed the U.S. and Russia to dismantle parts of their tactical nuclear weapons. The U.S. fulfilled its commitments, while Russia's unwillingness to fulfill its part of the bargain resulted in a 10-to-1 disadvantage in this class of weapons for the U.S., which has significant negative implications for U.S. and NATO forces in Europe.

Today, Russia is reportedly violating the 1987 INF treaty,⁵ which acting Undersecretary of State for Arms Control and International Security Rose

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at
<http://report.heritage.org/ib4105>

Produced by the Douglas and Sarah Allison
Center for Foreign Policy Studies

The Heritage Foundation
214 Massachusetts Avenue, NE
Washington, DC 20002
(202) 546-4400 | heritage.org

Nothing written here is to be construed as necessarily reflecting the views of The Heritage Foundation or as an attempt to aid or hinder the passage of any bill before Congress.

Gottemoeller and Assistant Secretary of Defense for Global Strategic Affairs Madelyn Creedon confirmed last year. However, the State Department's own compliance report fails to address any issues related to Russia's violation of this treaty.⁶ House Armed Services Committee chairman Howard "Buck" McKeon (R-CA) has pointed out that the Obama Administration has failed to address Russia's arms control violations.⁷

U.S. Options. The U.S. has several options to address Russia's arms control violations, including advancing missile defense systems to protect the U.S. and its allies from Russian ballistic missiles, compelling Moscow to follow through on its political and legal arms control obligations, and strengthening U.S. overall capability to detect and address arms control cheating.

More specifically, the U.S. should:

- **Advance U.S. ballistic missile defense.** The U.S. ballistic missile defense program currently lags behind the ballistic missile threats. Russia has repeatedly threatened the U.S. and its NATO allies with a nuclear attack, further underscoring the need for the program. Iran and North Korea have advanced ballistic missile technology and their missiles can reach parts of the U.S.
- **Condition U.S. implementation of arms control agreements.** The U.S. should not continue to implement nuclear weapons reductions until Russia is in compliance with its legal and political arms control obligations. Nuclear weapons dismantlement is costly. While Russia keeps increasing the size of its nuclear weapons arsenal and is not in compliance with its arms control obligations, China remains opaque about its nuclear weapons capabilities, which threaten the U.S. The U.S. should not unilaterally reduce its nuclear weapons and should gain more insight into other nations' nuclear weapons programs before assessing its own forces.
- **Advance U.S. intelligence capabilities with respect to other nations' new weapons designs.** The U.S. National Nuclear Laboratories should initiate and expand their research efforts in areas of foreign national nuclear weapons programs. Such knowledge takes time to build and can be essential if conflicts break out and escalate. It is also essential to inform policymakers on what military capabilities the U.S. should develop in the future.
- **Modernize the U.S. nuclear weapons arsenal.** U.S. nuclear weapons are based on a 1970s design, when yield-to-weight ratio was the primary concern. U.S. nuclear weapons do not incorporate the most modern safety features, and the nation has not conducted a yield-producing experiment in over 20 years. The Administration is not providing the necessary resources to revitalize the U.S. nuclear weapons infrastructure. Meanwhile, Russia, China, and others are modernizing their arsenals. These trends should be addressed to strengthen the U.S. deterrence posture vis-à-vis adversaries and assure allies.

1. The White House, remarks by President Obama at the Brandenburg Gate, Berlin, Germany, June 19, 2013, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/06/19/remarks-president-obama-brandenburg-gate-berlin-germany> (accessed December 2, 2013).

2. Mikhail Barabanov, Konstantin Makienko, and Ruslan Pukhov, *Military Reform: Toward the New Look of the Russian Army*, Valdai Discussion Club, July 2012, p. 14, http://vid1.rian.ru/ig/valdai/Military_reform_eng.pdf (accessed July 6, 2013).

3. *Ibid.*, p. 36.

4. Center for Strategic Budgetary Analysis, *Nuclear Conventional Firebreaks and the Nuclear Taboo*, 2013, p. 42.

5. Mark Schneider, "Additional Information on Reports of Russian Violations of the INF Treaty," National Institute for Public Policy, 2012, <http://www.nipp.org/Publication/Downloads/Downloads%202012/Info%20Series%20350.pdf> (accessed December 2, 2013).

6. Josh Rogin, "U.S. Knew Russia Violated Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty," *The Daily Beast*, November 26, 2013, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2013/11/26/u-s-knew-russia-violated-intermediate-range-nuclear-forces-treaty.html> (accessed December 2, 2013).

7. Press release, "Chairman McKeon on the President's Berlin Remarks," House Armed Services Committee, June 19, 2013, http://armedservices.house.gov/index.cfm/press-releases?ContentRecord_id=36e9b3e7-b881-4d9e-af00-7f515cc5dba0 (accessed July 2, 2013).

- **Revive and strengthen the bipartisan Senate Arms Control Observer Group.** The Senate should establish a bipartisan panel modeled after the panel that played a key role during the INF (and later Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty) negotiations with the Soviet Union. The panel would have access to U.S. negotiators and key documents pertaining to U.S. arms control negotiations. It would be the key channel between the Administration and Members of Congress. It would also contribute to educating Congress on key issues of U.S. national security.
- **Pause high-level arms control and missile defense negotiations with the Russian Federation until Russia is in compliance with its arms control obligations.** By continuing to engage with Russian representatives and ignor-

ing Moscow's arms control violations, the U.S. legitimizes and perhaps encourages Moscow's activities. The U.S. should not send a message that it accepts Russia's arms control violations.

Tools in the Toolbox. Leaving Moscow's arms control violations unaddressed damages U.S. credibility and its national security interests. However, the U.S. has ample tools to address Russia's noncompliance. These tools should be employed until Moscow complies with its arms control commitments.

—*Michaela Dodge is Policy Analyst for Defense and Strategic Policy and Ariel Cohen, PhD, is Senior Research Fellow in Russian and Eurasian Studies and International Energy Policy in the Douglas and Sarah Allison Center for Foreign Policy Studies, a division of the Kathryn and Shelby Cullom Davis Institute for International Studies, at The Heritage Foundation.*