

Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty

Introduction

- The [Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces Treaty](#) (INF, or The Treaty Between the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on the Elimination of Intermediate-Range and Shorter-Range Missiles) was signed on December 8, 1987, and entered into force on June 1, 1988.
- The treaty requires parties to eliminate nuclear and conventional ground-launched ballistic and cruise missiles that are used at distances ranging from 500 to 5,500 kilometers.
- The two countries eliminated intermediate-range nuclear weapons by 1991, destroying a total of 2,692 missiles.
- After the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991 the treaty was “multilateralized” to include 12 Soviet successor states.

Why it Matters

The treaty prevents the production, testing, and deployment of a destabilizing class of weapons and inhibits an arms race of intermediate-range missile systems.

The INF Treaty was in part a response to the Soviet Union’s deployment of SS-20 missiles in the mid-1970s. Anxiety about this decision led to NATO’s [“dual-track”](#) decision to engage the USSR in arms control negotiations and deploy American intermediate-range weapons in Western Europe to counter Soviet INF missiles. The INF Treaty set an important precedent for arms control negotiations by eliminating an entire class of weapons that were deployed by both parties and considered to be key to both nations’ security strategies. The INF Treaty was also the first arms control agreement between the United States and Soviet Union that reduced each country’s nuclear delivery systems.

What the Treaty Does

The treaty lists the specific types of ground-launched missiles and associated equipment that the United States and the USSR were required to destroy. The United States had to dismantle all Pershing II, Pershing IA, and Pershing IB ballistic missiles and BGM-109G cruise missiles, and the USSR had to dismantle its SS-20, SS-4, SS-5, SS-12, and SS-23 ballistic missiles and SSC-X-4 cruise missiles. Equipment associated with these missiles (i.e. training missiles and launchers) also had to be destroyed, but warheads could be reconfigured for use on other systems not controlled by the treaty. And finally, neither party may produce missiles that match the treaty’s definition of “intermediate-range.”

Verification

In addition to national technical means of verification (NTM) via satellites and remote sensing capabilities, the INF was the first arms control treaty between both countries to incorporate “intrusive” methods of [verification](#), including extensive exchanges of data and inspections. Baseline inspections were performed in 1988 to establish each country’s size and location of intermediate-range nuclear forces. The INF provided for up to 20 short notice inspections per year at specific sites designated in the treaty agreement for the first three years after the treaty entered into force, 15 such inspections per year for the next five years, and ten such inspections per year for the following five years. These inspections ended in May 2001. The INF treaty also created the Special Verification Commission, which operates as a forum through which the two parties can theoretically resolve questions about compliance.

Potential Violations

Alleged Russian Violations

Instance 1: Cruise Missile Testing and Deployment

The United States has accused the Russian Federation of testing and deploying a [cruise missile](#), the SSC-8, in violation of the INF Treaty. The U.S. first brought this issue before Congress in 2011, and raised the issue with Russia in 2013 after it became clear that the missile being developed was ground-launched. (The INF does not restrict air- or sea-launched cruise missiles). The issue was also raised in a November 2016 Special Verification Commission meeting. Despite the U.S.'s objections, Russia has since [deployed](#) one battalion of the missile, with another battalion located at a training site. Russia denies violating the treaty.

Instance 2: Ballistic Missile Testing

The [RS-26 Rubezh](#) missile is claimed by Russia as a strategic intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) - with a long range exempting it from the treaty - but some analysts allege that it has been tested at distances violating the INF treaty. Though Russia has confirmed that multiple RS-26 Rubezh tests have been within the distance threshold of the INF Treaty, other tests landing further than the maximum threshold put the missile outside of banned items under the treaty. As of August 2016, the U.S. government has not alleged that any Russian ballistic missile tests violate the INF treaty.

Alleged U.S. Violations

In response to allegations from the United States, Russia has issued counter-claims that the United States is in violation of the treaty.

Instance 1: Missile Defense Targets

The United States has developed target missiles in order to test missile defense systems. Russia alleges that one of these target missiles, the Hera, may violate the INF treaty due to its 1,000 kilometer range and its composition of old ballistic missile motors that share properties to intermediate-range missiles. The United States argues that as a booster missile, Hera is permitted under treaty rules. Additionally, according to the U.S. government, target missiles have never been tested or deployed for weapons delivery.

Instance 2: Arming Drones

Russia has suggested that American unmanned aerial vehicles - colloquially referred to as drones - that fly within INF treaty ranges break the terms of the agreement. The United States argues that because drones are not missiles they are not regulated by the treaty.

Instance 3: Missile Defense

Russia has expressed dissatisfaction with the [American European Phased Adaptive Approach](#) (EPAA) missile defense system, which involves the installation of MK-41 launchers on land in Romania and Poland. MK-41 launchers are typically used on Aegis ships to launch SM-2s and Tomahawk cruise missiles. Russia argues that these launchers can be used at ranges that violate the INF treaty, but the United States claims that the launchers used in the Aegis Ashore EPAA program will not be capable of launching cruise missiles, and therefore the U.S. is in full compliance with the treaty.

Sources: U.S. Department of State, Congressional Research Service, Pavel Podvig - European Leadership Network