

July 17, 2014

**STATEMENT BEFORE THE HOUSE ARMED SERVICES SUBCOMMITTEE
ON STRATEGIC FORCES ON THE FUTURE OF THE INF TREATY**

**By Jim Thomas
Vice President and Director of Studies
Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments**

Chairman Rogers, Ranking Member Cooper, and distinguished Members of the Strategic Forces Sub-Committee, thank you for inviting me to testify on the status and outlook for the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty. I appreciate the Subcommittee's concerns about suspected treaty violations by the Russian Federation, as well as its concerns about the constraints the treaty imposes on the United States. As is well known to Subcommittee Members, the INF Treaty prohibits the United States and Russia from testing or fielding ground-launched ballistic and cruise missiles with ranges between 500-5,500 kilometers (km). At the same time, a number of other countries are building up sizable arsenals of these types of missiles. After more than 25 years, it is an appropriate time to take stock of the INF Treaty and assess its continuing relevance in a world where Russian compliance is in question, Iran and North Korea continue to pursue nuclear weapons and long-range missile delivery means, and China is actively exploiting an intermediate-range missile gap. As the era of Euro-centric, bilateral arms control draws to a close it will need to be replaced by increasingly multi-lateral and Asia-centric security approaches consistent with the broader strategic aim of rebalancing to the Asia-Pacific region. The Administration and the Congress should work together to craft a new agenda that reflects these imperatives. In my testimony, I will assess the current situation and its implications for the United States. I will then recommend a new "dual-track" approach the United States might undertake to extend the viability of the INF regime while hedging against its demise.

Current Situation

Over the past several years there have been indications that Russia is circumventing and/or violating the INF Treaty.¹ Russia has an intercontinental-range ballistic missile (ICBM) that has been tested at ranges that would fall into the category of an Intermediate-Range Ballistic Missile (IRBM). While the fact that it has also been tested at greater than 5,500 km ensures that it is not captured by the INF Treaty, tests at sub-5,500 km ranges suggest that it might be intended to fill the role of an IRBM. There are

¹ Michael R. Gordon, "U.S. Says Russia Tested Missile, Despite Treaty," *The New York Times*, January 29, 2014, p. 1; and Mark Schneider, "Reports of Russian Violations of the INF Treaty," National Institute for Public Policy, National Institute Information Series, No. 340, June 2012.

also reports that Russia has tested a ground-launched cruise missile (GLCM) with a range of more than 500 km. If true, it would be a clear violation of the treaty.

These reports indicate that 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. If successful, this strategy could allow it to field prohibited weapons while avoiding blame for revoking the treaty. Moreover, Moscow may not fear the consequences of a “soft exit.” It may assess that the Obama administration has little appetite for confrontation given its broader arms reduction objectives and little military incentive to leave the treaty itself (because it has not engaged in any serious research and development with respect to ground-based missile forces).

If Russia pursues a soft exit strategy, what might be the politico-military benefits of new ground-launched missile capabilities? In the past, Russian military commanders have publicly stated the need for missiles with sufficient range to attack U.S. forward-based ballistic missile defense systems, which are currently being deployed to Poland and Romania as part of the European Phased Adaptive Approach. Suppressing these defenses could also undermine the confidence of NATO frontline states in U.S. security guarantees, weakening ties between Washington and the Alliance’s newest members. In that sense, it would represent a continuation of Russian wedge-driving between the United States and frontline Central European allies that has been apparent since the first announcement of missile defense deployments in January 2007.

Although Russian violations of the INF Treaty would have far-reaching implications for U.S. allies in Europe, they would also affect the strategic calculations of rivals such as China.² Indeed, China should figure far more prominently in discussions about the future of the treaty. Without the large-scale missile buildup by the People’s Liberation Army (PLA), dealing with any Russian violation would be a more straightforward, bilateral affair. But China’s continued augmentation of its ballistic and cruise missile arsenals is the backdrop to a U.S.-Russian bilateral arms control agenda that is increasingly outdated.

Highly precise, conventionally armed ground-launched ballistic and cruise missiles have become a major pillar of China’s counter-intervention strategy to deny rival naval forces freedom of maneuver within the first two island chains, and to prevent opposing air forces from basing in the Western Pacific. China has also demonstrated its ability to use missiles against satellites on orbit, which are critical for both military and commercial surveillance, communications, and navigation. The PLA Second Artillery Corps began work on its first intermediate ballistic missile program around the same time that the United States and Soviet Union signed the INF Treaty, and its DF-21 medium-range ballistic missile (MRBM) bears remarkable similarities to the U.S. Pershing II, which was banned under the INF Treaty.³ Unlike Russian missiles that appear to violate or circumvent the INF Treaty and would be consistent with an offensive concept of suppressing enemy missile defenses, Chinese conventional theater missile forces would likely play a role early in a war, conducting offensive counter-air (airfield attack) and

² Steven Pifer, “The Moscow Missile Mystery: Is Russia Actually Violating the INF Treaty?” at www.brookings.edu/research/opinions/2014/01/31-moscow-missile-mystery-russia-violating-inf-pifer.

³ Mark Stokes, *China’s Evolving Conventional Strategic Strike Option*, Project 2049 Institute, September 14, 2009, p. 9.

suppression of enemy air defenses, opening the door to subsequent larger volume strikes conducted by strike aircraft.

Beyond China, a number of other countries have amassed small but growing inventories of ballistic and cruise missiles that would be proscribed if these nations were signatories to the INF Treaty. North Korea and Iran, for instance, both have missile programs that could provide them with the ability to hold enemy population centers at risk—especially if their missiles are mated with nuclear warheads or other weapons of mass destruction.

Implications for the United States

For a variety of reasons, the United States is operating at a major disadvantage by not fielding its own ground-launched intermediate-range missile forces. First, ground-launched missiles have the potential to hold at risk a wide range of targets, including fixed targets located inside heavily defended airspace, as well as time-sensitive targets like missile launchers that can quickly alter their position. Today, however, the United States relies on a small number of stealthy B-2 bombers and cruise missile-armed nuclear-powered submarines to conduct conventional strike operations against such targets in highly contested environments.⁴ Second, theater missiles represent an attractive tool for imposing costs on rivals, as the United States has learned the hard way. While missiles themselves are relatively cheap, the capabilities needed to counter them on the ground, intercept them in the air, or enable targets to withstand attacks are all far more expensive. Moreover, because they can hold at risk surface naval forces and large facilities like air bases, missile forces can devalue major investments in otherwise valuable assets.

Looking ahead, it clearly does not serve U.S. interests for Moscow to engage in a unilateral “soft exit” from the INF Treaty while Washington remains a party to the treaty in good standing. Therefore, the United States must ensure robust monitoring, verification, and compliance with the treaty as long as it remains in force. It should demand that Russia fully disclose information in a timely fashion about missile programs suspected of violating or circumventing the treaty. Evidence of Russian non-compliance should be reported to Congress promptly, and should also be taken into account when considering any future bilateral arms control initiatives. Finally, the United States should make clear that unless Russia quickly and verifiably demonstrates full compliance, it is Moscow that will assume responsibility for the treaty’s demise.

A 21st Century Dual-Track Approach

Beyond the bilateral issue of Russian compliance, the United States should consider undertaking a new “dual-track” approach to extend the viability of the treaty over time, expand its coverage to a wider range of countries, and/or adjust some of its restrictions to address contemporary and anticipated security challenges.

⁴ Evan Braden Montgomery, “China’s Missile Forces Are Growing: Is It Time to Scrap the INF Treaty?” *The National Interest*, July 2, 2014 available at <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/chinas-missile-forces-are-growing-it-time-modify-the-inf-10791?page=show>.

It is worth recalling that the INF Treaty was itself the result of a strategy adopted by the United States and NATO in the late 1970s that called for negotiated reductions in intermediate-range nuclear forces and the deployment of such forces at the same time. Both elements were necessary to the strategy. The disarmament goal was crucial for persuading European allies to allow new missiles on their territory, while the deployment of these weapons helped convince the Soviet Union to negotiate a total ban on them. A latter-day “dual-track” approach—one that would update the treaty framework while hedging against the possibility that negotiations may fail—might include the following elements:

1. Multi-Lateralization. The United States should seek to multi-lateralize the restrictions of the treaty to eliminate or place substantial limits on other states’ intermediate-range missiles.⁵ Some might argue that non-signatory states—especially those that already possess intermediate-range missiles—will never join the treaty, as they would lose the military advantages they have accrued outside its framework. Indeed, the United States and Russia attempted to “globalize” the treaty in 2007-2008 with no takers.⁶ But missile-armed states might have greater incentives in the years ahead to accept some limits on their own forces, especially if they assess a credible possibility that the United States and Russia might amend or quit INF themselves. This threat might be particularly salient for China. With the treaty no longer in force, the United States would be able to deploy forward-based, ground-launched systems capable of ranging its territory—as would Russia.

Efforts to multi-lateralize the treaty should entail publicizing how existing intermediate-range missile capabilities undermine crisis stability, especially in the absence of any symmetrical countermeasures.⁷ Allied consultations will also be critical. Because U.S. allies and partners are most at risk from the missile forces China, North Korea and Iran, they have the greatest interest in seeing the treaty universalized. The United States should enlist its allies and partners to apply greater pressure on states possessing missile forces proscribed by the INF treaty, to include signaling their willingness to host forward-based U.S. missile forces if no progress can be made toward multi-lateralization. Pursuing such a strategy would exploit one of the greatest asymmetric forms of leverage the United States possesses: the strength of its alliances. While multi-lateralization efforts may ultimately fail, they would still be important in terms of setting the narrative and building allied support for any future military measures that the United States might explore.

2. Amendment. If multi-lateralization is not achievable, then the United States might choose to negotiate with Russia to amend the treaty in order to redress the theater missile threats posed to U.S. forces and allies in key regions around the world.⁸ A potential step the United States and Russia might explore would be to relax limitations on missile forces outside an area roughly defined as 30° West to 60° East longitude and 30° North to 0° North latitude. An amendment would permit deployment of forward-based, ground-

⁵ Mark Stokes and Dan Blumenthal, “Can a Treaty Contain China’s Missiles?” *Washington Post*, January 2, 2011, p. A15.

⁶ Stephen J. Blank, “Russia and Arms Control: Are There Opportunities for the Obama Administration?” Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, March 2009, p. 53 available at www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil.

⁷ Steven Pifer, “Don’t Scrap the INF Treaty,” Brookings Institution, available at www.brookings.edu/research/opinions/2014/06/09-dont-scrap-inf-nuclear-weapons-treaty-pifer.

⁸ This proposal builds on one by Evan Braden Montgomery, “China’s Missile Forces Are Growing: Is It Time to Scrap the INF Treaty?” *The National Interest*.

launched systems (conventional weapons delivery only) outside that geographic area with ranges between 500-2,000 km, which would confer sufficient targeting range to address the most pressing threats, while maintaining prohibitions on ground-launched intermediate-range systems between 2000-5,500 km.

Such an amendment would allay concerns of European allies by extending prohibitions against Russian missile forces west of the Urals, while reassuring Russia by limiting any future American conventional missile deployments in Asia or the Middle East to ranges that would not threaten Moscow. If the treaty ceased to be in force and Russia began deploying treaty-proscribed missile forces west of the Urals, Central European states would likely request in-kind deployments by the United States to enhance the credibility of American extended deterrence.

There would likely be fewer qualms about such an amendment on the part of Middle Eastern partners, some of which might welcome forward-based missile deployments to offset Iran's growing inventory of missiles capable of reaching its neighbors. For instance, some of the Gulf Cooperation Council states might be open to hosting U.S. deep strike ground-based missile forces, especially if Iran continues to pursue a nuclear weapons capability and expand its own missile forces.

Deployments in Asia would be more controversial. On the one hand, such deployments would offset some of the ground-launched ballistic and cruise missile systems already deployed by China and North Korea. Japan might be interested in U.S. deployments of forward-based IRBMs and GLCMs, which could provide in-theater conventional response capabilities in the event of an attack on its territory. Similarly, the Republic of Korea (ROK) might welcome the deployment of an extended-range version of the MGM-164 Army Tactical Missile System (ATACMS) batteries with terminally guided "smart" sub-munitions, which could play a counter-battery role against North Korean road-mobile missiles and launchers. In both cases, forward-based missile forces would not only deepen reassurance, they would also enhance deterrence by dramatically raising the costs of aggression against key allies and reducing an aggressor's probability of success. On the other hand, allies in northeast Asia would have to weigh these potential benefits against possible drawbacks, including a decision by Moscow to deploy IRBMs to its far eastern territory. Nevertheless, while Russian missiles could certainly threaten the ROK and Japan, they would pose a far greater long-term challenge to China.

Similarly, some might argue that pursuing an amendment to the INF Treaty might prompt China to step up its own deployments of intermediate-range missiles. Yet this would only trigger a multilateral arms race. Moreover, because missile forces can be easily redeployed, an accelerated missile buildup directed against the United States and Russia would also threaten China's other neighbors—including nations that have their own missile capabilities (such as India), nations that might pursue their own missile forces (South Korea and Vietnam), and nations that might host U.S. missiles (Japan and the Philippines).⁹

3. Withdrawal. If the United States is unable to ensure Russia's compliance, or is subsequently unable to multi-lateralize or amend the treaty, it would have little choice but to scuttle INF—either with Russia or unilaterally. Paradoxically, though, American

⁹ Montgomery, "China's Missile Forces Are Growing: Is It Time to Scrap the INF Treaty?"

willingness to entertain and prepare for the possibility of withdrawal may increase U.S. bargaining leverage in negotiating multi-lateralization or amendment.

4. Military Measures. To backstop diplomatic efforts and ensure the United States can negotiate from a position of strength on Russian compliance, multi-lateralization, and/or amendment of the treaty—while hedging against the failure of these diplomatic efforts—the United States will need to create military “breakout” options. Such options should make credible the prospect of swift U.S.—and potentially allied—deployments of conventionally-armed, forward-based intermediate-range missile forces. If the political decision were taken to withdraw from or amend the treaty, it would likely take several years to deploy INF-proscribed systems. The United States should, therefore, begin taking steps now to reduce the decision-to-deployment cycle, with an eye to reinforcing its negotiating leverage to maintain the viability of the INF regime or reducing its window of vulnerability if a political decision is taken to withdraw.

The Department of Defense should undertake studies to examine how existing capabilities could be modified for new roles. It should assess the feasibility of employing a sea-launched missile for land-attack at ranges beyond 500 km, as well as the feasibility and cost to extend the range of MGM-164 ATACMS (which, if mated with sub-munitions, could execute a wide range of missions, including as a counter-battery system against enemy missile launch sites). A complementary step might be to evaluate the tradeoffs and relative costs of restarting production of Pershing II IRBMs as opposed to adapting existing missile systems or starting a completely new IRBM development program. Additionally, the Department of Defense should investigate development of a road-mobile, land-based variant of the US Navy’s Mark-41 or Mark-57 Vertical Launch System (VLS) and evaluate tradeoffs between adopting a common launch system across the Services versus modifying the Army’s existing M-270 Multiple Launch Rocket System or developing a new road-mobile transport-erector launcher (TEL) for IRBMs or GLCMs.

At the same time, the Department of Defense should provide key allies with additional information about suspected Russian treaty violations and efforts to circumvent the INF Treaty, as well as information about other countries’ 500-5,500 km missile systems. Armed with such information, allies and partners in Europe, the Middle East, and Asia should be expected to increase pressure on Russia diplomatically to ensure its full compliance with the existing INF Treaty and on other missile-armed states to either join the INF Treaty or accept binding and verifiable limitations of their missile forces. The United States should also seek to explore the willingness of allies and partners to host forward-based U.S. intermediate-range missile forces on their territory if the treaty is amended or terminated. In some cases, allies could contribute to the development and production of missile systems (thereby defraying costs), field their own missile forces, or join U.S. forces in combined deep strike ground units. Importantly, allied testing, production and fielding of IRBM and GLCM systems could occur without violating the INF Treaty.

The U.S. Army should seize the opportunity to leverage a small portion of its rocket artillery to demonstrate the role of land-based missile forces to hold at risk hostile air and naval forces, while also expanding the nation’s options for long-range strike.¹⁰ Toward

¹⁰ Jim Thomas, “Why the U.S. Army Needs Missiles,” *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2013 available at <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/139119/jim-thomas/why-the-us-army-needs-missiles>.

this end, it could create a deep strike battalion deployed on barges to field a small sea-launched intermediate-range missile force for experimentation and concept development that could later be adapted and brought ashore if the United States amended, or withdrew from, the INF Treaty.

The defense industry should be encouraged to conduct studies assessing the costs, technical risk, and timelines associated with various forward-based ground-launched conventional deep strike alternatives.

The United States should also increase exploratory research into future IRBMs with trajectory shaping vehicles (TSVs) capable of maneuvering upon re-entry back into the atmosphere to evade sophisticated missile defenses.¹¹ TSVs may represent the next step in the evolution of long-range precision-guided strike, and the United States may be able to leverage research undertaken to develop boost-glide systems to establish a formidable technical advantage relative to its competitors. Similarly, the United States has a substantial advantage in ballistic missile defense (BMD) research. Data from various BMD programs could be used to develop new classes of missiles and warheads to penetrate the most sophisticated defense networks.

Ultimately, if the United States rules out new forward-based, ground-launched missile capabilities, it will need to place even greater emphasis on its air- and sea-based strike capabilities. In that case, it may need to consider expanding the projected size of its land- and sea-based penetrating surveillance and strike forces (next generation bombers and carrier-based unmanned strike systems). It should also quickly investigate the viability of using current systems in the U.S. arsenal in unconventional ways to compensate for the absence of forward-based, ground-launched missile strike capabilities. The U.S. Navy might also consider acquiring undersea Towed Payload Modules to compensate for the sharp decrease in conventional land-attack missile capabilities that will result from the planned retirement of its four Ohio-Class Guided Missile Submarines (SSGNs) by the end of the next decade.¹²

Conclusion

Suspected Russian violations of the INF Treaty come at a time of great strategic uncertainty for the United States globally. While compliance issues must be swiftly addressed, the United States should also widen the aperture for evaluating the INF Treaty to ensure that it serves its broader, global interests and security commitments. A treaty that bars two countries from pursuing certain militarily desirable classes of missiles, while providing no protection against other states—some of which pose threats towards the United States and its allies—doing the same, must be constantly re-evaluated to determine the tipping point when the costs of arms control overtake the benefits. That day is quickly approaching. Now is the time to begin contemplating a world beyond the INF Treaty and taking appropriate precautionary steps. Paradoxically, doing so may offer the best course to preserving the viability of the treaty farther into the future.

¹¹ US Department of Defense, Report on Conventional Prompt Global Strike Options if Exempt from the Restrictions of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, September 2013.

¹² Elbridge Colby, "The Real Trouble with Russia," *Foreign Affairs*, April 7, 2014 available at www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/141106/elbridge-colby/the-real-trouble-with-russia.

About the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments

The Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments (CSBA) is an independent, nonpartisan policy research institute established to promote innovative thinking and debate about national security strategy and investment options. CSBA's goal is to enable policymakers to make informed decisions on matters of strategy, security policy and resource allocation. CSBA provides timely, impartial and insightful analyses to senior decision makers in the executive and legislative branches, as well as to the media and the broader national security community. CSBA encourages thoughtful participation in the development of national security strategy and policy, and in the allocation of scarce human and capital resources. CSBA's analysis and outreach focus on key questions related to existing and emerging threats to U.S. national security. Meeting these challenges will require transforming the national security establishment, and we are devoted to helping achieve this end.