

Yury Fedorov

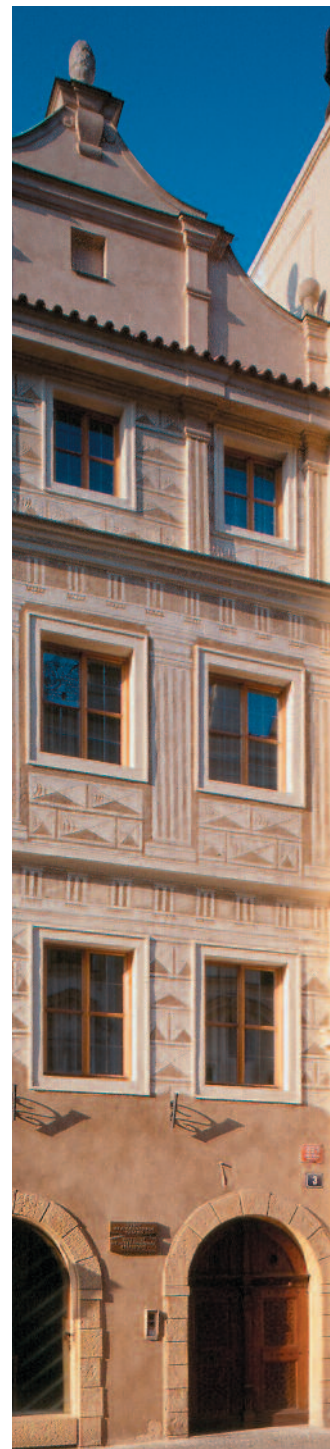
A looming crisis of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Force Treaty: Sources and consequences

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Russia's violation of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Force Treaty (INF) confirms that Moscow sees nuclear weapons as a robust tool preventing NATO from militarily opposing the Russian military expansion in the strategic rim stretching from the Baltic to the Black Sea.

If Russia adds intermediate-range missiles to its armory the INF Treaty will collapse, thus challenging the USA and NATO with a dilemma: they could either to be reconciled with Russia's growing military threat to Europe, or neutralize this threat by stationing American nuclear missiles near Russian borders.

The countries of Central-Eastern Europe have to support deployment of new US nuclear weapons in Europe since it could be the only way to prevent a dangerous deterioration of the security landscape in the region.



Introduction

2

By the end of 2011 the US intelligence and military agencies determined that Russia violated the INF Treaty by testing a new ground-launched cruise missile (GLCM) with a flying range of more than 500 kilometers, as such missiles are definitely forbidden by this treaty.¹ In 2013–2014 the USA informed its NATO allies of the issue in question and discussed its concerns with Russia many times, including at a meeting at senior level in Moscow in September 2014.² Just after this meeting the State Department noted that “although the U.S. concerns were not assuaged in this meeting, the parties had a useful exchange of views. They agreed to continue the dialogue”.³ This meant that the discussions came to nothing. On April 27, 2015, when addressing the 2015 NPT Review Conference, the US Secretary of State John Kerry emphasized “deep concerns regarding Russia’s clear violation of its obligations” under the INF Treaty.⁴ In addition, albeit the development and testing of the new Russian ballistic missile RS-26 (aka the “Rubezh” or Yars-M) are not included in the list of Russian violations of the INF Treaty this missile is meant for attacking targets in Europe and hence its development and deployment is *de facto* a violation of the INF Treaty. The Russians, on their part, simply deny discussing American concerns on their merits and accused the US of violating the INF Treaty. This poses a few questions: Who is violating the INF Treaty? Is it Russia, the USA or both of the countries? What could be the strategic consequences of the deployment of new Russian intermediate-range missiles aimed at European targets? Can NATO neutralize a looming Russian threat, and if so, by what means?

The new Russian ground-launched cruise missile

The GLCM at issue, identified as an R-500, or an Iskander-K, is designed for the Iskander missile system. American official non-classified sources do not go into details on

¹ Woolf, Amy F. (2014), “Russian Compliance with the Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty: Background and Issues for Congress”, *Congressional Research Service. Report R43832*. December 16, p. 12.

² House of Representatives, 113th Congress. Second session (2014), Russian Arms Control Cheating and the Administration Responses. Joint hearing before the Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation and Trade of the Committee on Foreign Affairs (Serial No 113-238) and the Subcommittee on Strategic Forces of the Committee on Armed Forces (Serial No 113–132). December 10, p. 18; Gordon, Michael (2014), “U.S. Says Russia Tested Missile, Despite Treaty”, *The New York Times*, January 30; Gordon, Michael (2014), “U.S. Says Russia Tested Cruise Missile, Violating Treaty”, *The New York Times*, July 28.

³ U.S. Department of State (2014): “U.S.-Russia INF Treaty Compliance Meeting in Moscow”. Media Note. Office of the Spokesperson. Washington, DC. September 11. Online: <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2014/09/231490.htm>.

⁴ Kerry, John, Secretary of State (2015), Remarks at the 2015 Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty Review Conference. New York City, NY. April 27. Online: <http://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2015/04/241175.htm>.

this weapon, yet the Russian media uphold that the US concerns are well-grounded. The first flight-test of the R-500 had taken place in 2007 while the state testing started most probably in 2008. This missile was a modernized version of the GLCM RK-55 “Relief” (aka the CSSX-4 Slingshot) that was developed in the former USSR in 1983–1985 and eliminated in accordance with the INF Treaty in 1988–1991, which range was of up to 3000 kilometers.⁵ Some sources suppose that the R-500 is a modification of the Soviet sea-launched cruise missile (SLCM) Granat (aka the SS-N-21 Sampson) with a range of 2600 kilometers.⁶ However, the question of what particular Soviet cruise missile, ground- or sea-launched, was a forebear of the R-500 is not really important. The mentioned cruise missiles, which were Soviet analogues of the American GLCM BGM-109G and the SLCM Tomahawk, were technically very much alike.

Press reports confirmed that when tested, the cruise missile under consideration was fired from ground-based launchers. An article published in October 2014 by a source close to the Kremlin gave the following information: “After its launch the rocket (the R-500 – YF) flew to cover 2,600 kilometers; and one has to admit that missiles of this range are in fact banned by the INF Treaty. Moscow did not give any explanation of the subject. A source in the Defense Ministry stated that it was a sea-launched cruise missile that had been launched not from a ship, but from a ‘ground platform’ with a view to save money and simplify the obtaining of telemetry parameters”.⁷

The last point is important. Actually, the INF Treaty allows the testing of SLCMs from ground-based platforms, but only if these platforms are fixed. Article VII (para 11) states,

“A cruise missile which is not a missile to be used in a ground-based mode shall not be considered to be a GLCM if it is test-launched at a test site from a fixed land-based launcher which is used solely for test purposes and which is distinguishable from GLCM launchers”. As for the flying range

If Russia does not violate the INF Treaty it can easily prove it by demonstrating the GLCM to American experts to assure them that it cannot be used in the INF mode.

of the new GLCM, Article VII (para 4) of the Treaty postulates that “the range capability of a GLCM ... shall be considered to be the maximum distance which can be covered by the missile in its standard design mode [when] flying until fuel exhaustion ...”. This means that the range capability of a GLCM depends on the volume of its fuel tanks and hence roughly on the length and diameter of the missile.

⁵ Novosti kosmonavtiki (2010), “Krylataya raketa R-500”, *Novosti kosmonavtiki*. October 14. Online: <http://novosti-kosmonavtiki.ru/forum/forum13/topic11238/>.

⁶ Newsru.Com (2007): “Rossiya provela pervie ispitanija novoi krilatoi raketi P-500 sposobnoi preodolet ‘vse sistemi PRO’”. *Newsru.com*, May 29. Online: <http://www.newsru.com/russia/29may2007/iskander500.html>.

⁷ Vzglyad (2014), Kuda chotim tuda i stavim, *Vzglyad*. October 21. Online: <http://vz.ru/society/2014/10/21/711642.html>.

So, if Russia really does not violate the INF Treaty it can easily prove it by demonstrating the GLCM to American experts to assure them that its size is too small to contain a sufficient amount of fuel to cover a distance longer than 500 kilometers and that the launcher is fixed. However, Moscow simply “has not acknowledged the missile”, gives no explanation for the tests being considered, denies that it is breaching the INF Treaty and says that the US concerns are “baseless”.⁸ This means that any discussion of this problem on its merits shows that Russia is really developing and testing a missile that violates the INF Treaty. Instead Moscow declares that the USA does not “provide a positive answer” to its counterclaims.

Russia’s counterclaims

Russia claims that the US violates the INF Treaty by

- its use of target missiles with characteristics similar to those of intermediate and shorter-range ballistic missiles during missile defense tests;
- its planned deployment in Romania and Poland of a land-based modification of the MK-41 shipboard launcher, which is capable of firing GLCMs;
- its possession of armed drones that necessarily fall under the INF Treaty definition of ground-launched cruise missiles.⁹

These claims are intended to divert attention from the Russian R-500 GLCM, to rank it with a number of other problems and to drag out the discussions. But the most important

Russia intended to divert attention from the Russian R-500, to rank it with a number of other problems and to drag out the discussions.

point is that the Russian counterclaims are baseless.

Article II (para 1) of the INF Treaty explicitly says that a “ground-launched ballistic missile (GLBM) means a ground-launched ballistic missile that is a weapon-delivery

vehicle”. Yet American Hera target-missiles, which the Russians have in mind, are not “weapon-delivery vehicles” because they were never tested in this mode; and they are modified booster stages, and the usage of modified booster stages is allowed by the INF Treaty.

⁸ *Russian Arms Control Cheating and the Administration Responses*, op. cit., p. 30.

⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation (2014), Comments by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the Report of the U.S. Department of State on Adherence to and Compliance with Arms Control, Nonproliferation, and Disarmament Agreements and Commitments. MFA. Moscow, August 1. Online: http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/0/D2D396AE143B098144257D2A0054C7FD.

As for the ground-based version of the MK-41 interceptor launcher, the official American position on it was exposed by Brian P. McKeon, the Principal Deputy Undersecretary of Defense:

The Aegis Ashore vertical launching system is not the same launcher as the sea-based Mk-41 Vertical Launching System, although it utilizes some of the same structural components as the sea-based system. Equally important, the Aegis Ashore system is only capable of launching defensive interceptor missiles, such as the SM-3. It is incapable of launching cruise missiles.¹⁰

Finally, at first glance the American armed drones meet the INF Treaty definition of a cruise missile, since an American armed drone is “an unmanned, self-propelled vehicle that sustains flight through the use of aerodynamic lift over most of its flight path” and that is intended for delivering weapons. However, drones, unlike cruise missiles, are in actual fact two-way reusable systems that are not banned by the Treaty. Also, drones do not fully meet the definition of “unmanned” as they are piloted by men, although the men are based on the ground.

The “Rubezh” missile

Albeit the Obama administration does not include the new Russian ballistic missile known as the RS-26, the “Rubezh”, or the Yars-M, which was developed and tested in Russia in 2011–2015, in the list of Moscow’s failures to comply with the INF Treaty, there are solid grounds for considering it as a violation of the spirit of this Treaty and, more importantly, an essential threat to the European security. In March 2015, just after the last test, it was announced that the “Rubezh” would soon be added to Russia’s missile armoury and that its deployment would begin in 2016.¹¹

On May 23, 2012, this missile was successfully tested for the first time: it was launched from the Plesetsk Space Center to the Russian Kura Range on the Kamchatka Peninsula, covering a distance of 5800 kilometers.¹² Yet during three other successful flight-tests the “Rubezh” was fired from the Kapustin Yar Range in Astrakhan Oblast to the Sary Shagan site in Kazakhstan at a distance of about 2000 kilometers.¹³

¹⁰ Honorable McKeon, Brian P. (2014), Statement, *Russian Arms Control Cheating and the Administration Responses*, op. cit., p. 10.

¹¹ Safronov, Ivan (2015), “‘Rubezh’ zarubezhnogo primeneniya”, *Kommersant*. March 26. Online: <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2694449>.

¹² Kristensen, Hans M. (2013), “Russian Missile Test Creates Confusion and Opposition in Washington”, *Federation of American Scientists*, July 03. Online: <http://fas.org/blogs/security/2013/07/yars-m/>.

¹³ Global Security (2015), “RS-26. Rubezh/Avangard – Road Mobile ICBM”, *Global Security*. Online: <http://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/world/russia/ss-31.htm>.

Russian experts usually portray the “Rubezh” as a modernized version of the Yars ICBM. However, in March 2015 an anonymous source from the Russian Defense Ministry revealed that it has fewer stages and a shorter range than the Yars.¹⁴ The Russian expert Pavel Podvig believes that “if true, this appears to confirm that [the] RS-26 is a two-stage missile based on [the] RS-24 (a three-stage missile – YF) very much in the way [that the]

The development of the “Rubezh” missile is an effective circumventing of the INF Treaty.

SS-20 was a two-stage version of [the] Temp-2S”.¹⁵ Thus, since the maximum flight range of the “Rubezh” is 200–300 kilometers longer than 5500 kilometers it is

not covered by the INF Treaty. However, as it is a two-stage version of the Yars ICBM and was tested mainly at distances of about 2000 kilometres, this missile is designed to be used mainly in the INF mode, including against targets in Europe. Or to put it differently, the development and deployment of the “Rubezh” missile is nothing but an effective circumventing of the INF Treaty.

Possible American countermeasures to Russia’s violations of the INF Treaty

Because of Moscow’s refusal to discuss the American concerns in any practical way the US administration is looking for measures capable of inducing Russia to be in compliance with the INF Treaty and, if the Kremlin continues to be obstinate, measures to neutralize the emerging threat. In December 2014 Rose Gottemoeller, the American Under Secretary of State, accentuated that the US is interested in the continuing viability of the INF Treaty: “if we withdrew from the INF Treaty, it would legalize the illegal actions they (the Russians – YF) are taking now, and I don’t think that is in our interest to do so”.¹⁶ Yet at the same time she said that “... the United States is assessing options in the military sphere to ensure that Russia would not gain a significant military advantage from its violation of the INF Treaty”.¹⁷ Also, Brian P. McKeon made it quite clear that “[t]he Joint Staff assessment has led us to review a broad range of military response options and consider the effect each option could have on convincing [the] Russian leadership to return to compliance with the INF Treaty, as well as countering the capability of a

¹⁴ Interfax (2015): “Pazrabotka strategicheskoi raketi RS-26 – odin iz otvetnich shagov na pazvertivanie PRO SShA – istichnik v Minoberoni”, *Interfax-ABH*, March 26. Online: <http://www.militarynews.ru/story.asp?rid=1&nid=370944>.

¹⁵ Russian Strategic Nuclear Forces (2015), “RS-26 Is Tested and Ready for Deployment”, *Russian Strategic Nuclear Forces Blog*, March 26. Online: http://russianforces.org/blog/2015/03/rs-26_is_tested_and_ready_for.shtml.

¹⁶ Gottemoeller, Rose E., Under Secretary of Arms Control and International Security (2014), “Testimony”, *Russian Arms Control Cheating and the Administration Responses*, op. cit., p. 38.

¹⁷ Gottemoeller, Rose E. (2014), op. cit, p. 5.

Russian INF Treaty-prohibited system”.¹⁸ The military responses, as he mentioned, fall into three categories:

- active defenses to counter intermediate-range ground-launched cruise missiles;
- counterforce capabilities to prevent intermediate-range ground-launched cruise missile attacks;
- countervailing strike capabilities to enhance U.S. or allied forces.¹⁹

McKeon also said, “We don’t have ground-launched cruise missiles in Europe now obviously because they’re prohibited by the treaty. But that would obviously be one option to explore”.²⁰ In early June 2015 the Associated Press mentioned an unclassified portion of a report written by the office of the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff that identified various weapons that the US could deploy in Europe or Asia if it were freed from the INF Treaty constraints, including GLCMs and ground-launched ballistic missiles (GLBM) of intermediate range equipped with technology adjusting the trajectory of the warhead after it re-enters the atmosphere and heads for its target.²¹ In addition, Philip Hammond, the British Foreign Minister, recently said that Britain could once again host US nuclear missiles amid growing tensions with Russia.²²

The US is looking for measures capable of inducing Russia to be in compliance with the INF Treaty and, if the Kremlin continues to be obstinate, measures to neutralize the emerging threat.

The crisis of the INF Treaty and security interests of the Central-Eastern European states

Albeit at the moment of writing it would be too early to make any definite forecasts about Russia’s behaviour there are grounds to believe that Moscow will deploy its new

¹⁸ Honorable McKeon, Brian P (2014), op. cit., p. 8.

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 28.

²⁰ Ibid, p. 34.

²¹ Associated Press (2015): “The Obama administration is weighing a range of aggressive responses to Russia’s alleged violation of a Cold War-era nuclear treaty, including deploying land-based missiles in Europe that could pre-emptively destroy the Russian weapons”, *The Associated Press*. June 4. Online: http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/stories/U/US_UNITED_STATES_RUSSIA_NUCLEAR_TREATY?SITE=AP&SECTION=HOME&TEMPLATE=DEFAULT&CTIME=2015-06-04-14-50-26.

²² Doyle, Jack (2015), “US Nuclear Missiles May Return to Britain over Russian Threat: Foreign Secretary Says Government Will Consider Hosting Weapons for First Time since Cold War”, *The Daily Mail*. June 8. Online: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3114774/US-nuclear-missiles-return-Britain-Russian-threat-Foreign-Secretary-says-Government-consider-hosting-weapons-time-Cold-War.html#ixzz3cSDqTE3a>.

GLCMs and “Rubezh” missiles and aim them at targets in Europe. This will essentially strengthen Moscow’s ability to blackmail and threaten European states with a view to

- undermine the unity of the Atlantic alliance;
- deter NATO’s potential intervention in a possible war in the Southern Baltics that would be caused by Russian aggression against the three Baltic States, or in the war in Ukraine, if the Ukrainian crisis is not resolved in a reasonably short period of time;
- defeat NATO troops by a limited use of nuclear weapons if an armed conflict between Russia and NATO in the Baltic region breaks out.

In actual fact, Moscow wants to put NATO member-states in a grim position: they could either defend the three Baltic States, thus facing the risk of being the victims of a nu-

If the USA and the European states refuse to deter the threat caused by the new Russian nuclear missiles Russia’s potential aggression against the three Baltic States may become real.

clear attack by Russia, or refrain from any involvement in such a conflict, thus undermining the very *raison d’être* of the North Atlantic alliance.

This, in many ways, replicates the strategic situation in Europe that emerged in the late 1970s, when the USSR deployed its highly effective SS-20 missiles with a view

of decoupling the USA and the European NATO members in the security sphere. Then the NATO members were forced to make the “double-track decision” – to deploy American intermediate-range missiles in Europe to restore the nuclear balance on the continent and to offer negotiations aimed at banning the INF weapons from Europe. In the late 1980s, however, the Kremlin signed the INF Treaty, which banned the intermediate-range nuclear missiles, since Soviet leaders and military commanders had realized the threat of a very short-warning attack on several critical strategic targets, including several national command and control centers that were started by the American INF forces.

Thus if Russia deploys its intermediate-range missiles and aims them at Europe the prospect of American INF forces appearing in Europe becomes real. This may challenge the states of Central-Eastern Europe (CEE) with a dilemma: they could either support the deployment of US nuclear missiles in Europe, possibly on their soil, or face the risks caused by Russia’s aggression against the Baltic States. Public opinion and political establishments in CEE may then be deeply split into two camps – those of supporters and opponents of the new American missiles – just as a similar situation had sprung up in the 1980s, when mass anti-missile movements had arisen in Western Europe; and the Kremlin will no doubt capitalize on it. Yet if the USA and the Eu-

European states refuse to deter the threat caused by the new Russian nuclear missiles. Russia's potential aggression against the three Baltic States may become real. Russia's invasion of Georgia, its annexation of Crimea, its "hybrid" war in Donbas, its explicit threats to use nuclear weapons in case of the West's involvement in the war in Ukraine and its regular war games and military drills near the borders of the three Baltic States prove that the Kremlin, if not deterred, is prone to realize the worst case scenarios.

Conclusions and recommendations

Development and testing of the new Russian intermediate range missiles GLCM P-500 and GLBM "Rubezh" is an element of Moscow's strategy aimed at threatening European states with a nuclear attack or actual use of nuclear weapons with a view to disable NATO and deter it from supporting the three Baltic States and/or the countries of the north-western segment of the Black Sea region against probable Russian aggression.

If Russia starts to deploy the missiles just mentioned, a deployment of new American intermediate range nuclear forces may become necessary, just as such a deployment was necessary in the 1980s. At the same time we may expect that this will engender hot political debates in the CEE countries.

In view of this the CEE countries are to:

- Develop, preferably within the NATO framework, a coherent strategy that would presume to send a clear and strong signal to Moscow saying that if it deploys its new intermediate-range missiles the USA and the European states will deploy the American intermediate-range systems;
- Reproduce the "double-track" policy, which led to the banning of intermediate-range nuclear missiles in the 1980s, if Moscow ignores this signal.

Yury Fedorov is an independent expert on international security. Among his other occupations, he is a freelancer for the Russian Service at RFE/RL and a member of the editorial board of Security Index. E-mail: fedorovyury@googlemail.com.