

## II. Russian–United States nuclear arms control

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In 2017 the prospects for advancing the Russian–US nuclear arms control and disarmament agenda continued to diminish. The role of arms control as one of the foundations of the post-cold war strategic relationship between Russia and the United States came under increasing strain as political relations between the two countries deteriorated further. The situation was complicated by the new US administration's emphasis on making future discussions about arms control and disarmament contingent on effective verification of compliance with existing agreements.

### Implementation of New START

Russia and the USA continued to implement the bilateral 2010 Treaty on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms (New START).<sup>1</sup> Under the treaty the two parties agreed to limit the number of their deployed strategic nuclear warheads to 1550 each and to limit the number of their deployed strategic missile launchers and heavy bombers equipped for nuclear armaments to 700 each.<sup>2</sup> The biannual treaty data collected in September 2017 showed that both Russian and US holdings were under most of the final treaty limits (see table 7.1).<sup>3</sup>

New START contains transparency and verification measures—such as biannual data exchanges, notifications and up to 18 on-site inspections annually—that have contributed to building mutual confidence between the parties about the size and composition of their respective strategic nuclear forces.<sup>4</sup> The 13th session of the treaty's Bilateral Consultative Commission was held in Geneva on 29 March–11 April 2017 to discuss practical issues related to its implementation.<sup>5</sup>

When fully implemented by February 2018, New START will result in modest reductions in Russian and US deployed strategic nuclear forces. However, these forces constitute only a relatively small proportion of their total nuclear weapon inventories. New START does not limit the two coun-

<sup>1</sup> For a summary and other details of New START see annex A, section III, in this volume.

<sup>2</sup> Due to New START's counting rules, these numbers do not reflect the actual deployment of strategic warheads and launchers. This is mainly because bombers are counted as carrying only 1 weapon each, even though they can carry many more air-launched cruise missiles. See below and chapter 6, sections I and II, in this volume.

<sup>3</sup> US Department of State, Bureau of Arms Control, Verification and Compliance, 'New START Treaty aggregate numbers of strategic offensive arms', Fact sheet, 18 Jan. 2018.

<sup>4</sup> For a summary of inspection activities see US Department of State, 'New START treaty inspection activities', [n.d.].

<sup>5</sup> US Department of State, Office of the Spokesperson, 'Thirteenth session of the bilateral consultative commission under the New START Treaty', Media note, 12 Apr. 2017.

**Table 7.1.** Russian and US aggregate numbers of strategic offensive arms under New START, as of 5 Feb. 2011 and 1 Sep. 2017

Category of data	Treaty limits <sup>a</sup>	Russia		United States	
		Feb. 2011	Sep. 2017	Feb. 2011	Sep. 2017
Deployed ICBMs, SLBMs and heavy bombers	700	521	501	882	660
Warheads on deployed ICBMs, SLBMs and heavy bombers <sup>b</sup>	1 550	1 537	1 561	1 800	1 393
Deployed and non-deployed launchers of ICBMs, SLBMs and heavy bombers	800	865	790	1 124	800

ICBM = intercontinental ballistic missile; SLBM = submarine-launched ballistic missile.

<sup>a</sup> To be reached by 5 Feb. 2018.

<sup>b</sup> Each heavy bomber, whether equipped with cruise missiles or gravity bombs, is counted as carrying only 1 warhead, even though the aircraft can carry larger weapon payloads.

Source: US Department of State, Bureau of Arms Control, Verification and Compliance, 'New START Treaty aggregate numbers of strategic offensive arms', Fact sheets, 1 June 2011 and 18 Jan. 2018.

tries' stocks of operational non-deployed strategic nuclear warheads or retired warheads awaiting dismantlement, which constitute a significant proportion of their overall warhead holdings. Nor does it limit their holdings of non-strategic (tactical) nuclear weapons, which in Russia's case is nearly a quarter of its total inventory of nuclear warheads. As of January 2018 Russia possessed an estimated total of approximately 6600 nuclear warheads, while the USA had approximately 6800 warheads.<sup>6</sup>

New START will expire in February 2021, 10 years after it entered into force, but the treaty stipulates that the parties may agree to extend it for a further 5 years. Against the background of growing pessimism about the future of US–Russian arms control, the year ended with no clear indication of whether the two sides would agree to an extension.<sup>7</sup> Many US officials have expressed an unwillingness to extend the treaty with Russia while the latter is alleged by the USA to be in violation of a seminal cold war-era agreement, still in force, that limits specified types of intermediate-range missile.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> For details of the size and composition of Russian and US nuclear warhead inventories see chapter 6, sections I and II, in this volume.

<sup>7</sup> Stewart, P., 'Despite tensions, US sees value in New START treaty with Russia', Reuters, 23 Sep. 2017; and Kozin, V., 'Nuclear disarmament is unthinkable until trust is restored between Russia and the US', *OrientalReview.org*, 26 Oct. 2017.

<sup>8</sup> Brooks, L., 'After the end of bilateral nuclear arms control', Center for Strategic and International Studies, CSIS Next Generation Nuclear Network, 3 Nov. 2017.

## The INF Treaty dispute

In 2017 Russian–US tensions continued to rise over US allegations that Russia was violating the 1987 Soviet–US Treaty on the Elimination of Intermediate-Range and Shorter-Range Missiles (INF Treaty).<sup>9</sup> Under the INF Treaty, the Soviet Union and the USA agreed not to possess, produce or flight test a ballistic missile or ground-launched cruise missile (GLCM) with a range capability of 500 to 5500 kilometres, or to possess or produce launchers for such missiles. In 2014 the USA alleged that Russia was conducting flight tests of a new GLCM with a range proscribed by the treaty. Russia rejected the US allegation as baseless and complained that the USA had failed to provide any evidence or specific facts about the alleged Russian violation.<sup>10</sup>

Russia countered with its own allegations of US non-compliance with the INF Treaty. These included charges that the USA was deploying a missile defence interceptor system in Europe that could also be used to launch prohibited GLCMs; using targets for missile defence tests with similar characteristics to proscribed intermediate-range missiles; and manufacturing armed unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs, drones) that fall under the treaty's definition of GLCM.<sup>11</sup> The USA dismissed Russia's allegations as an attempt to draw attention away from its own violation of the treaty. According to the US State Department, since 2014 the USA had repeatedly engaged with Russian officials in multiple venues to explain why the US systems and activities of concern are in compliance with the INF Treaty.<sup>12</sup>

### *New public information about alleged Russian treaty violation*

The INF Treaty dispute moved increasingly into the public domain in 2017 after a US decision to provide more information, based on intelligence sources, about the Russian missile system in question. During a hearing in the US Congress in March 2017, the vice chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Paul Selva, confirmed media reports that the USA believed that Russia had begun to deploy the new missile, in violation of 'the spirit and intent' of the INF Treaty.<sup>13</sup> Selva testified that Russia has 'deliberately deployed' the missile to military units 'in order to pose a threat to NATO [the

<sup>9</sup> The current parties to the INF Treaty are the USA and the 4 relevant successor states of the Soviet Union—Belarus, Kazakhstan, Russia and Ukraine. For a summary and other details of the INF Treaty see annex A, section III, in this volume.

<sup>10</sup> Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'Comments by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the report of the US Department of State on Adherence to and Compliance with Arms Control, Nonproliferation, and Disarmament Agreements and Commitments', 1 Aug. 2014.

<sup>11</sup> Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (note 10).

<sup>12</sup> US State Department, Bureau of Arms Control, Verification and Compliance, 'Refuting Russian allegations of US noncompliance with the INF Treaty', Fact sheet, 8 Dec. 2017.

<sup>13</sup> US House of Representatives, Armed Services Committee, 'Transcript of hearing on military assessment of nuclear deterrence requirements', 8 Mar. 2017, p. 10; and Gordon, M. R., 'Russia deploys missile, violating treaty and challenging Trump', *New York Times*, 14 Feb. 2017.

North Atlantic Treaty Organization] and to facilities within the NATO area of responsibility’.

In November 2017 a senior official of the US National Security Council, Christopher Ford, publicly identified the Russian missile system under US scrutiny as the Novator 9M729, which has the NATO designation SSC-8.<sup>14</sup> The existence of the missile had been known for some time, but its technical characteristics and relationship to existing Russian missile systems remained the subject of speculation. It is widely believed to be a ground-based version of the Novator 3M14 Kalibr sea-launched cruise missile.<sup>15</sup> It is unclear, however, whether the new missile can be fitted on the same launcher used by the INF Treaty-compliant 9M728 Iskander-M missile, which would make it difficult for US satellite surveillance to distinguish between the two.<sup>16</sup>

The USA has not made public the evidence that it used in determining that the Novator 9M729 violates the INF Treaty. The US State Department’s latest annual report on arms control compliance, released in April 2017, explains the types of information the USA has shared with Russia to support its claim of Russian non-compliance but does not reveal the substance of that information.<sup>17</sup> Some analysts have speculated that the missile may not have been tested to a treaty-proscribed range from a mobile ground-based launcher and that evidence of a violation was indirect, based on a US technical assessment of its range capability.<sup>18</sup> According to the 2017 State Department report, the USA provided Russia with information to show that: ‘The violating GLCM has a range capability between 500 and 5500 kilometers’.<sup>19</sup>

#### *Continued deadlock over INF Treaty compliance*

On 8 December 2017, the 30th anniversary of the signing of the INF Treaty, the US State Department announced a new US strategy for resolving the INF Treaty dispute. This involved the use of economic and military measures in order ‘to induce the Russian Federation to return to compliance’, which included a review of the options for new US ‘conventional, ground-launched, intermediate-range missile systems’. The announcement noted that the USA

<sup>14</sup> Majumdar, D., ‘Novator 9M729: The Russian missile that broke INF Treaty’s back?’, *National Interest*, 7 Dec. 2017.

<sup>15</sup> Podvig, P., ‘The INF Treaty culprit identified: Now what?’, *Russian Strategic Nuclear Forces*, 5 Dec. 2017.

<sup>16</sup> Gibbons-Neff, T., ‘This is the ground-launched cruise missile that Russia has reportedly just deployed’, *Washington Post*, 15 Feb. 2017.

<sup>17</sup> US Department of State, *Adherence to and Compliance with Arms Control, Nonproliferation, and Disarmament Agreements and Commitments* (Department of State: Washington, DC, Apr. 2017), p. 14.

<sup>18</sup> Podvig (note 15). Under the INF Treaty, a ground-launched cruise missile does not have to be flight-tested to a proscribed range to be in violation of the treaty; it is sufficient if the missile has the range capability to be so.

<sup>19</sup> US Department of State (note 17), pp. 13–14.

was prepared to halt such research and development activities if Russia returned to 'full and verifiable compliance with its INF Treaty obligations'.<sup>20</sup> In the previous month, the US Congress approved funding for development work on a new US GLCM system with a range prohibited by the INF Treaty.<sup>21</sup>

In response to the US announcement, the Russian Deputy Foreign Minister, Sergey Ryabkov, denied that the missile system in question contravened the INF Treaty, stating that it had a much shorter range than the USA alleged.<sup>22</sup> A Russian Foreign Ministry statement charged that the USA continued 'to bring forward unfounded accusations of Russia's breaching the treaty'. The statement added that 'attempts to communicate with us in the language of ultimatums or to put military and political pressure on Russia through sanctions . . . are unacceptable'.<sup>23</sup>

On 12–14 December 2017 delegations from the five parties to the INF Treaty—Belarus, Kazakhstan, Russia, Ukraine and the USA—held a meeting in Geneva of the treaty's dispute-resolution mechanism, known as the Special Verification Commission.<sup>24</sup> The delegations expressed a shared view that the INF Treaty continued to play an important role in the existing system of international security, nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, and should be preserved and strengthened. However, there were no reports of progress being made on resolving the mutual recriminations between Russia and the USA that the other party was not in compliance with the INF Treaty.

Following the meeting, the USA's allies in NATO expressed solidarity with US efforts to ensure Russian compliance with the INF Treaty. The North Atlantic Council—NATO's principal political decision-making body—said in a statement that 'Allies have identified a Russian missile system that raises serious concerns'. It urged Russia 'to address these concerns in a substantial and transparent way, and actively engage in a technical dialogue with the United States'.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>20</sup> US Department of State, 'Trump administration INF Treaty integrated strategy', Press statement, 8 Dec. 2017. Research and development work on an intermediate-range GLCM is not prohibited under the INF Treaty. However, the production and flight-testing of such a missile would violate the treaty.

<sup>21</sup> Reif, K., 'Hill wants development of banned missile', *Arms Control Today*, vol. 47, no. 10 (Dec. 2017), p. 5; and National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2018, US Public Law no. 115-91, signed into law 12 Dec. 2017.

<sup>22</sup> 'Russia hits back at US charges of INF Treaty violations', Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 10 Dec. 2017.

<sup>23</sup> Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'Comment by the Information and Press Department on the 30th anniversary of the INF Treaty', 2380-08-12-2017, 8 Dec. 2017.

<sup>24</sup> Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'Press release on the 31st session of the Special Verification Commission under the INF Treaty', 2442-15-12-2017, 15 Dec. 2017. The purpose of the commission is to serve as a forum to 'resolve questions relating to compliance' and to 'agree upon such measures as may be necessary to improve the viability and effectiveness of this Treaty'. INF Treaty (note 9), Article XIII.

<sup>25</sup> North Atlantic Council, 'Statement by the North Atlantic Council on the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty', Press Release (2017) 180, 15 Dec. 2017.

*The future of the INF Treaty*

The year ended with growing concern that the INF Treaty dispute between Russia and the USA was building up to a breakdown of the treaty at a time when neither side was showing a strong commitment to preserving it. There was particular concern that the US administration's efforts to put pressure on Russia to return to 'full and verifiable compliance' by pursuing the development of a new cruise missile delivery system that does not comply with the INF Treaty would prove counterproductive. Rather than helping to repair and preserve the INF Treaty, some experts predicted that this could accelerate the treaty's collapse and precipitate a new Russian-US missile competition.<sup>26</sup> Others warned that US allies in Europe may not be willing to accept the deployment of the new missile, and that, as was the case before the INF Treaty was concluded in the 1980s, plans to do so might split NATO.<sup>27</sup>

Moreover, the continued impasse between Russia and the USA over alleged INF Treaty violations threatened to destabilize other agreements such as New START. In doing so, it further eroded the role of arms control in Russian-US strategic relations and raised the prospect that, when New START expires in 2021, there will be no treaty regulating the nuclear balance between the two sides either in force or under negotiation for the first time since the end of the cold war.

<sup>26</sup> Pifer, S., 'The looming end of the INF Treaty', Order from Chaos, Brookings Institution, 8 Dec. 2017.

<sup>27</sup> Krepon, M., 'Responding to the INF Treaty violation', Arms Control Wonk, 5 Mar. 2017.