

The Dangers of Nuclear War: “Global Stability” Requires the Reintroduction of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF), with Inclusion of China

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Even two years after the United States withdrew from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty in 2019, some consequences are still being felt today. Washington’s unilateral exit has endangered global strategic stability in nuclear security. The INF was a cornerstone in Washington-Moscow relations as it was an effective arms control treaty that helped reduce tensions between the two superpowers, especially since the Americans installed weapons in Europe that could reach Moscow in less than eight minutes.

Former U.S. President Donald Trump attempted to justify withdrawing from the INF because of Moscow’s supposed violations of the treaty. However, as this was quickly disproven, especially since Washington failed to provide any evidence for their allegations, the narrative shifted and the truth came out – the U.S. withdrawal was to counter China’s military strengthening in the Pacific, including in the South China Sea. Beijing is not a signatory to the INF, and now the U.S. is risking a new arms race as it is no longer bound by the treaty and is attempting to dominate the geographical space that traditionally falls into China’s area of influence.

Most Chinese missiles are short- and medium-range, and if Washington wants to assert its military dominance it must be able to counter these missiles, even when far away from home. This will naturally lead to China taking further measures to secure its sovereignty and territory, and thus can lead to a new arms race, especially as the U.S. is taking a greater interest in Taiwan, an island that Beijing considers a rebel province.

Under the New START treaty, Russia and the U.S. can have up to 1,550 nuclear warheads. China is believed to have around 300. Therefore, the likelihood of the U.S. placing nuclear warhead missiles in Asia is low as there is great risk of retaliation. According to American calculations, up to 90-95% of China’s missiles are intermediate-range and short-range missiles.

However, just like the INF Treaty, China is not a signatory of New START. Although Washington and Moscow extended New START earlier this year to February 2026, there was no discussion of China joining the treaty. Moscow said it did not have the capacity to link Beijing to negotiations on nuclear disarmament agreements, but Washington continues to insist that the Asian country must comply to New START.

The U.S. withdrawal from the INF and China's non-involvement in New START has influenced Chinese military planning. This is evidenced by the fact that China has started active construction of two intercontinental ballistic missile launcher installation sites. In theory, this could allow the Asian country to increase its arsenal of intercontinental ballistic missiles by up to nearly 800 units. China fears that the U.S. will place potential first strike missiles near its border and is taking corresponding preventive measures.

Russia did not violate the terms of the INF Treaty, as seen by Washington's failure to produce evidence that it had. None-the-less, Russia was still condemned by NATO for unfounded accusations about the installation of 9M729 missiles, supposedly prohibited by the agreement. The problem though is that the 9M729 missiles were never tested.

President Joe Biden likely has a different opinion on Trump's policy in relation to New START, but certainly not on the INF Treaty. Those close to Democrat circles and the Biden administration remain convinced that Russia violated the INF, claiming that the country had placed missiles in Europe first. But even if the Biden administration shows less immediate interest in missile deployment in the Asia-Pacific region, there is still potential that this could occur in the near future, especially as the pressure campaign against Beijing continues to intensify despite Trump having already left the White House.

Russia could suggest to the U.S. to think of a new strategic equation to achieve global stability. However, it is difficult to talk about any new treaty because the process of new negotiations with the U.S. is only beginning. The first round of discussions was held on July 28 in Geneva. Many NATO countries, particularly former Warsaw Pact countries, oppose this though and insistently claim that Moscow has already installed such missiles and that negotiations should end.

If Washington truly wants to de-escalate global tensions, then it must revise its position on the INF, renew serious discussions with Moscow, and consider having China as a signatory. The original INF was signed in the context of the Cold War, where the U.S. and the Soviet Union competed for supremacy within a bipolar context. However, we now live in a multipolar age where China cannot be sidelined from discussions and treaties related to global security and stability.

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