

Analysis of the Reasons Why US and Russia Withdrew from the INF Treaty Successively – Based on the Levels of Analysis

Xinyi He*

*School of Economics and Management, East China Jiaotong University, Shuanggang East Street,
Nanchang, China*

2954316155@qq.com

**corresponding author*

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Abstract: The Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF Treaty) is a milestone in the history of arms control negotiations between the United States and the Soviet Union, but there are continuous disputes during its existence. From February 2, 2019, the United States announced the suspension of its obligations under the INF Treaty and officially started the withdrawal process. On the same day, the Russian president also announced the suspension of implementation. The factors behind the successive withdrawal are complicated and are related to the development of the international arms control system in the future. This paper mainly focuses on the analysis of the reasons for the withdrawal by comparing the two sides under the same perspective through the levels of analysis.

1. Research Background

After the end of World War II, the United States became the overlord of the capitalist world. The Soviet Union, only second to the US, has always been its hostile on the way to dominate the world. Then, a bipolar confrontation situation is formed in the 1950s. In the game between the United States and the Soviet Union, the nuclear arms race was constantly escalating. In 1977, the Soviet Union deployed a new type of SS-20 land-based medium-range ballistic missile that could hit any corner of Western Europe, occupying the advantage of conventional weapons. And the United States began to attach importance to the issue of intermediate missile. In 1981, President Reagan came to power and carried out the "dual track" approach. On the one hand, he deployed the Pershing II missiles with better performance in Western European countries, carried out the Star Wars Program, and held high the "banner of peace". On the other hand, he held a series of negotiations with the Soviet Union on the "Zero Option", but no substantial progress was made. On the contrary, both sides fell into a strange deadlock. In 1985, a turning point appeared. Mikhail Gorbachev, then general secretary of the Soviet Communist Party, adopted a "new thinking" and resumed nuclear disarmament negotiations. On December 8, 1987, the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF Treaty) was officially implemented, according to which, the United States and the Soviet Union would no longer retain, produce or test land-based cruise missiles and ballistic missiles with a range of 500 km to 5500 km [1], and those deployed or to be deployed would be

destroyed. The United States needed to destroy 846 pieces, and the Soviet Union needed to destroy 1846 pieces. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the treaty was inherited by Russia.

As a significant achievement of the nuclear disarmament negotiations between the United States and the Soviet Union during the cold war, the INF Treaty is known as "the most successful arms control document in the cold war period", which is of milestone significance. However, during the over 30 years of the treaty's existence, the United States and Russia had many disputes over the treaty and they were facing the risk of termination, and this dispute was further intensified in 2013. They aimed to seek the best time to "escape unscathed". In 2014, the U.S. formally accused Russia of breaking the contract with the SSC-8 missile - the "Iskander-K" missile, which was used as the fuse to cause the storm of withdrawal from the treaty. The Russian side denied this and pointed out US's breach of contract. This situation of mutual "accusation" continued until February 2, 2019, when the United States officially announced the suspension of its obligations under the INF Treaty and started the withdrawal process. Subsequently, the Russian president also announced the suspension of implementation. On August 2, 2019, the INF Treaty was completely invalid.

2. Current Research

After the United States and Russia withdrew from the INF Treaty one after another, the motivation of the withdrawal has become one of the focuses of international arms control system research. Domestic and foreign researchers explore the reasons behind this incident from different levels, which can be mainly divided into the following three views:

The first view is that there are some problems in the treaty itself. In the early stage, through reviewing the implementation process, Zhao Yuming [2] said, "With the development of the times, the treaty raises some applicability problems", which is also recognized by most scholars. Yang Weili and Zhang Wenming [3] pointed out that the United States was threatened by the "Anti-Access/Area Denial" actions in the Western Pacific region, and that it needed to clear the obstacles for the deployment of new weapons, while Feng Yujun [4] pointed out that Russia needed to make up for its weaknesses on military forces as soon as possible to meet the requirement of "post-Soviet space".

The second view is that changes in the world situation will affect the treaty. From the perspective of national strategy, some scholars focused on the rise of China, which they believed was the key point for the United States to change their decision. The two guiding documents issued successively by the Trump administration from 2017 to 2018, namely, the National Security Strategy of the United States of America [5] and the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America [6] respectively, regarded China and Russia as "revisionist countries" and claimed that the security and prosperity of the United States are facing challenges. Mark Stokes and Dan Blumenthal suggested in their article "Can a Treatment Contain China's Missions?" [7] that the United States should either ask China to join or they could just withdraw from the treaty. Feng Yujun [8] put forward that the United States might promote a new round of arms control and disarmament negotiations, and China was bound to become the focus, which also confirmed this view from another side.

The third view is that Trump's coming to power has also catalyzed the withdrawal process. Influenced by the popularity of populism, Trump held high the banner of "America first" in the election, and his subsequent ruling measures also proved that it was not simple lip-service. Wang Hui [9] said that the role of this political declaration might be crucial, and that the Trump government being so keen on withdrawing from the group and abolishing the treaty was the most powerful evidence. Sun Bo [10] put forward that the mid-term election was imminent, so Trump might be trying to gain the support of voters and consolidate his ruling position.

We know that for complex international events, the explanation is not convincing if it is not discussed comprehensively at multiple levels. On the whole, although the domestic and foreign scholars' research on the disintegration of the INF Treaty is rich, most of them are fragmentary, ignoring that there is close relationship between different factors in essence. Moreover, the United States and Russia are rarely studied under the same analysis, lacking clear and systematic comparison. The starting point of this paper is to use the levels of analysis to make a comprehensive comparative analysis of the reasons for the withdrawal of the United States and Russia.

3. Research Design

The levels of analysis originated from Professor Kenneth Waltz's book *Man, the State and War: A Theoretical Analysis*. [11] He attributed the root of war to three images of individuals, states and international system, and discussed the relationship between them: The role of any image should not be ignored, and different images should be given different levels of attention in different situations. Later, David Singer further raised the AHP to a methodology, and attributed the reasons behind international relations to two aspects - the macro international system and the micro nation and state [12]. After the 1990s, this method has been highly concerned by the academic community. James Rosenau put forward five levels: individual, role, government, society and international system [13]. Bruce Russett and Harvey Starr further refined and developed them into six levels from macro to micro - the global system, relations between states, the societal level, the governmental level, roles and the individual actor [14].

As for the United States and Russia's withdrawal from the INF Treaty one after another, the influencing factors behind it are complex and huge. Therefore, in the discussion, the level of analysis should be as comprehensive as possible, otherwise it may lead to "the fallacy of single interpretation" [15]. However, a multi-angle analysis will inevitably lead to "fragmentation" and lack of logic. The reason for choosing the levels of analysis is that, first of all, it is applicable to most interactive scenes of international relations, including the withdrawal from the treaty. Secondly, the United States and Russia can be placed under the same discussion system, which is more comparative. Thirdly, it can decompose the complex international relations into several relatively easy-to-define variables, and make them logical and reasonable. In this way, we can get a relatively complete and clear understanding [16].

For the choice of levels, as this paper will discuss the influence factors of the United States and Russia, if the division of levels is too detailed, it will easily lead to no distinction between the primary and secondary, as well as the confusion of levels. Therefore, this paper intends to discuss from the micro to macro levels of decision makers, states and the international society. The micro level emphasizes the influence of the decision-maker, that is, the political role of the decision-maker in the state and the decision-maker's tendency to make choices as an independent individual. The middle level mainly discusses the importance of superstructure, social environment, national history, cultural tradition, economic situation and other factors in the nation. The macro level is the most comprehensive among all levels, including all the interactions in the environment. It discusses the international factors "above" or "outside" of the nation, such as the interaction between related countries, the current world pattern and the change of power contrast between countries.

4. Three levels of analysis of the successive withdrawal of the US and Russia

4.1. The Decision-Maker Level

The leaders of a country often play a significant role in influencing the decision-making directions, and will influence the event to a certain extent.

Due to the stable political situation in Russia and having a solid ruling foundation because of the four-term president, Putin's political thinking is relatively stable and his policy towards the United States has a certain continuity. Russian President Vladimir Putin grew up in the 1970s, the most powerful period of the Soviet Union, with a strong national consciousness. In the Top one: The Putin Interviews, he even said that he was "a successful model of patriotic education in the Soviet Union". After Putin came to power, he took a series of tough measures to restore Russia's former glory. As he said at the Valdai club meeting, Putin believes that "external pressure, as in the past, will only consolidate our society" [17]. In 2002, Putin carried out the policy of "never compromise with terrorists" and resolutely cracked down on the rebels in the Moscow theatre hostage crisis. In 2008 South Ossetia Conflict, Putin left the Olympic venue and flew directly to the war zone to defeat Georgia. In 2012, when he ran for president again, Putin said in his campaign platform that "Russia will not retreat in the face of challenges". All of these show Putin's not humble nor arrogant attitude in promoting the dream of a powerful country, which lays the groundwork for the subsequent withdrawal from the treaty and the restoration of the military forces of great powers. Moreover, when faced with the challenge of withdrawing from the treaty, a political strongman like Putin will probably continue their tough and uncompromising attitude, give up mediation and give strong response.

Compared with Putin, who has ruled for nearly 20 years, US President Trump is an "political neophyte". Trump has repeatedly destroyed Obama's political legacy. According to Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS), before Trump was officially elected president, he had criticized his predecessor at a campaign rally in Nevada that, "I don't know why Obama didn't decide to withdraw from the treaty" [18] and claimed that he would "repeal the Obama act in a short time" after taking office. Then, Trump spared no effort to "de-Obamanization". On the day of taking office, Trump withdrew from the TPP and then from the Paris Agreement, ending the Obamacare reform and canceling the "unilateral agreement" between the Obama administration and Cuba. This also seemed to suggest some of the reasons behind the withdrawal. In 2016, Trump followed the trend of populism in the United States, holding high the banner of "America first" and was elected president. Before becoming the president, Trump's long-term business experience made him pay more attention to immediate interests than previous presidents. After elected as president, Trump formed a government composed of conservative forces and tycoons, loyal to the national interests of the United States and questioned international treaties. He spared no effort to reduce the budget of international organizations, implemented limited strategic contraction in the Middle East, and carried out "unilateralism" in global governance, falling backwards. Trump's direct, bold and unexpected measures showed his radical and self-made personal style, while his withdrawal from the INF Treaty continued the thought of continuing the US hegemony at the lowest cost.

In 2018, the mid-term congressional election would be held during Trump's term of office. However, according to the opinion poll as of October 19 of that year, the election situation between the Republican Party and the Democratic Party was still very tight [19]. At the election rally the next day, Trump announced that he was ready to withdraw from the INF Treaty, which was likely to gain the support of voters and stabilize the Republican majority.

4.2. The State Level

The United States and Russia have always been in a competitive relationship in terms of armaments, which is the reason why Russia opposed the United States at the first time.

In the United States:

The Hawk came to power and the popularity of populism affected the attitude of the people to the INF Treaty. The Trump administration is composed of Hawks represented by Pompeo, the US Secretary of State. They are based on the "neo-realism" and call for absolute advantage and absolute

security. They regard regional powers that may challenge the United States as their real enemies. Bolton, who is jokingly known as the "arms control serial killer", is also involved. He once urged the United States to withdraw from the Treaty on the Limitation of Anti-Ballistic Missile Systems, and also wrote an article criticizing the INF Treaty in 2011 [20]. As the national security affairs assistant of the Trump administration, Bolton may have played a certain role in the relevant withdrawal matters. Due to the growing discontent in the society after the financial crisis, populism has gradually developed in the United States. When Trump was elected president in 2016, populism has been intensified. In the eyes of populists, the positive attitude of U.S. governments towards globalization has not been beneficial and has also damaged the rights and interests of many American people. With this populist force, Trump's Republican Party held high the banner of "America first" and responded positively, striving to get rid of the shackles of the outside world and give priority to and solve the American problems. From the Paris Agreement to UNESCO, from the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration to the Human Rights Council of the United Nations, the Trump administration is trying to cater to the demands of domestic populist voters. In the eyes of populists, the INF Treaty is also the representative of the "waste of resources" initiative, which should not be continued.

After the Republican Party became the ruling party, the change of American foreign policy promoted the disintegration of the INF to a certain extent. Different from the Democratic Party, which emphasizes the interests of both parties and strongly opposes the withdrawal of the treaty, the Republican Party is more likely to "seek peace with strength" and implements the "dual track" approach again, intending to reduce the strategic space of Russia, China and other countries regarded as competitors. The so-called dual track approach, on the one hand, re-applies the "imposed cost" strategy to induce Russia to participate in the arms race and fall into the quagmire of high-cost arms race again. On the other hand, it uses public opinion pressure to coerce more countries, especially China, into joining the bilateral negotiations that was originally between the United States and Russia. After the United States had unilaterally announced its withdrawal from the treaty, it frequently dispatched B-52 bombers to the Russian border area and carried out simulated attacks. It also investigated the combat readiness of Southern Crimea, Kaliningrad and the Baltic Sea coastal areas. The frequency was close to that during the cold war, which undoubtedly further threatened Russia's geopolitical security. The United States tries to drag Russia into an arms race through these measures, thereby bringing down Russia's economy and intensifying social contradictions, thus hindering Russia's re-emergence. After the termination process began, the US side has been committed to shifting its focus, avoiding the important and dwelling on the trivial, and directing the "fire of public opinion" to unrelated countries. Taking China as an example, the United States has strongly invited China, whose nuclear power is quite different from the superpowers', to join the arms control negotiations. Pompeo, the US Secretary of State has repeatedly publicly stated that "China's accession" is the prerequisite for the renewal of the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) [21]. In fact, although China has nuclear weapons represented by "DF-26" and "DF-21D", there is a huge gap in the total number of nuclear weapons between China and the United States, and China has always said that China's military deployment is only to achieve the minimum nuclear deterrence.

The US side's withdrawal from the INF Treaty is based on the strategic consideration of returning to the battlefield with the advantages of land-based intermediate-range missiles. The advantages of land-based midcourse are very obvious - low-cost, high-precision and large firepower. It can be deployed deep into the hinterland, which can limit the opponent's maneuver to the greatest extent. It is also difficult to warn and intercept. It is a serious attack on the opponent's nuclear counterattack force. However, the US believes that the "Anti-Access/Area Denial" capability of some countries based on land-based intermediate-range missiles threatens the freedom

of the United States. And due to the limitation of the treaty, the military strength comparison between America and other regional powers in this field is "unbalanced" [22]. If the return of land-based midcourse missile and forward deployment can be realized, combined with sea-based and air-based mobile strike forces, they can strengthen the strike force, offset this "Anti-Access/Area Denial" capability, enhance military containment, and regain the so-called "absolute superiority in nuclear power".

In Russia:

The Russian people have a strong passion over the imperialism. In the face of national interests, they are tough, stubborn and never compromise. Due to the particularity of geography and history, Russia, which is located at the border of Asia and Europe, has differences and opposites with western countries in culture, religion, ideology, social system and national interests. The development of national history is inseparable from the influence of national character. The core of a nation is rooted in the land that gave birth to it. The Russian people are warlike and aggressive. It is the crazy aggressive expansion that leads to the empire across Eurasia. The power and prosperity of Peter the Great and Ekaterina II became the pride and glory of Russian, which made even powerful invaders like Napoleon and Hitler fail in this land. During World War II, as a superpower comparable to the United States, it was a well-deserved leader in the Communist camp. Despite the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia inherited the idea of the Soviet Union that regarded itself as a "global power", and still hoped to solve international problems on an equal footing with the United States. It was not only the unilateral withdrawal of the treaty by the United States, but also the continuous provocation that made the border security of Russia in jeopardy. As a nation with feelings of the great power and fighting spirit, Russia was bound to make countermeasures against what the United States had done.

Restricted by the economy, Russia also hopes to find a most economical and effective countermeasure. Russia inherits the strategic thinking of the Soviet Union. The Military Doctrine issued in 2014 clearly states that, "Nuclear weapons can be used when Russia or its allies are attacked by nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction, or when Russia or its allies are attacked by conventional weapons, but the country is in a state of life and death" [23]. This shows that Russia attaches great importance to nuclear weapons. In the 2018-2025 National Weapons and Equipment Plan, Russia has made it clear that it will put the development of strategic nuclear forces in the first place in the future [24]. Before the withdrawal from the treaty, Russia had mass produced the Yars intercontinental missile and tested the silo-based Sarmat intercontinental missile and Rubezh, the road-mobile strategic missile. However, this does not bring Russia a sense of security when the gap between the US and Russia in the naval and air forces was widening day by day, and the conventional strength comparison between Russia and NATO was in an all-round inferior position. In fact, the existence of the INF Treaty has greatly restricted Russia's actual fighting ability. Taking the Syrian war as an example, because it was far away from the mainland, it could only be attacked by launching sea-based missiles from the Caspian Sea or air-based Kalibr missiles launched by strategic bombers. On the premise of steep rise in cost and inflexibility, the effect was not so good. It may be an opportunity for Russia to take advantage of Eurasia's advantages in depth to develop a land-based midcourse missile to supplement its military strength as a low-cost way to hedge risks and re-establish an asymmetric strategic balance with the United States. Therefore, Russia is not entirely forced to withdraw after the United States.

The INF Treaty has restricted Russia's ability on military strikes to some extent. With the end of the cold war, the relationship between the United States and Russia eased. The United States then began to expand NATO eastward to deploy military forces nearby and the defense space in western Russia was compressed again and again. Until 2004, when Bulgaria, Romania and the three Baltic countries formally joined NATO, Russia's northwest border was completely opened, and the

southern Black Sea coast was surrounded. Moreover, because of the three Baltic countries were not restricted by the Treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe, there appeared a "grey area", in which the deployment of troops was not controlled and this increased the uneasiness of Russia. On the contrary, the US's strong sea and air base missile developed rapidly, forming an overwhelming advantage over Russia. In recent years, the United States has increased its siege of the Baltic Sea coast to the Transcaucasia, and the western border area of Russia has frequently encountered military exercises. The US side also said that it expected to complete the deployment of the European missile defense system by 2020. By then, the combat potential of Russia's strategic nuclear force would be further reduced. In addition, the separation of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) was becoming more and more obvious, which made Russia "must take this issue very seriously" [25]. This also foreshadowed the subsequent emphasis on the Kaliningrad region, which constituted the fuse for the withdrawal of the treaty. Russia must seek solutions.

4.3. The International Level

Viewing the international environment, we can find changes in three aspects:

First is the change in the international security environment. For the United States, stepping into "the era of competition among great powers", the world pattern has developed from "one super power and many great powers" to multi-polarization. Although the comprehensive strength of the United States is still unmatched, emerging countries have grown rapidly in recent years and become key regional forces, even threatening its global leadership, which undoubtedly gives the United States great competitive pressure. In 2018, the Islamic State was ended militarily, and the global anti-terrorism entered a new stage. The Trump government successively issued the National Security Strategy, US Missile Defense Review and National Defense Strategy, all of which emphasized the era of competition among great powers, calling China and Russia as "strategic competitors" challenging the security and prosperity of the United States, and even the so-called revisionist states. On the day of the invalidation of the INF Treaty, Esper, the US Defense Secretary, stated that he hoped to deploy medium range missiles in Asia in the future to deal with the "China threat" [26]. But in fact, in addition to the relatively good use of NATO allies in the Western Eurasian and Japan's positive response to missile deployment, the leaders of South Korea, Australia and the Philippines all expressed their refusal. Although the political binding forces of the regions such as Guam, Hawaii, Alaska and Diego Garcia are relatively small, their combat effectiveness is limited. Therefore, how the US side wants to realize or whether it can realize its wish to form a "comprehensive strike circle" remains to be considered.

The second is the rapid development of land-based midcourse forces of third-party countries. At a time when the United States and Russia are restricted by bilateral treaties, third-party countries such as North Korea, South Korea, Iran, India and Pakistan are rapidly developing land-based midcourse forces and striving to modernize their nuclear arsenals. As Putin said at the Munich Security Conference held in 2007, "the INF Treaty is no longer of universal significance" [27]. The successive withdrawal of the US and Russia can create conditions for the re-conclusion of the multilateral arms control system in the future.

Finally, with the fourth revolution of science and technology, a new wave of world military revolution has emerged, the invisible arms race has already begun, and the modernization of nuclear power has been re-emphasized. Under this background, the Trump administration has changed its predecessor's vision of building a "nuclear-free world" and attached great importance to the role of nuclear in revitalizing military forces. In the new Nuclear Posture Review released by the United States in 2018, it called for "promoting the modernization of nuclear weapons, nuclear infrastructure and delivery systems." [28] With an annual expenditure of more than 700 billion US dollars, the United States seek to occupy the high ground of the new military revolution. By

withdrawing from the INF Treaty, it can restructure the land-based midcourse missile system and realize the all-round intermediate range development of the sea, land and air. In contrast, Russia's development in the field of advanced technology is relatively backward. Under the situation that the US military expenditure is 10 times higher than Russia's, Russia is simply unable to launch an all-round arms race with the United States, which makes Russia feel extremely terrifying. At this time, Russia must also response actively, building land-based hypersonic weapon and reconstructing the intermediate-range missile force to meet the needs of military operation in the future.

5. Conclusion

From a comprehensive analysis, there are some accidental factors behind the successive withdrawal of the INF Treaty by the United States and Russia, but we can still draw four conclusions:

- (1) As a result of the cold war, the INF Treaty has existed for more than 30 years. But as the world situation has already changed and the conflict is no longer limited to between the United States and Russia, there has appeared an applicability problem. The withdrawal seems to be sudden, but in fact it has been premeditated for a long time.
- (2) The withdrawal of the treaty involves the layout of land-based midcourse in the future and the nuclear deterrence to the third-party countries, which is an important step in adjusting the future national strategic layout and seeking more interests.
- (3) The strategic balance formed between Russia and the United States during the cold war is rapidly disappearing. Russia also hopes to re-realize the "asymmetric balance" with the United States by means of the land-based midcourse or a new international arms control system.
- (4) The withdrawal of the treaty by the United States and Russia has increased the uncertainty of the future international security situation, and a new round of arms race may return.

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