

U.S. Accuses Russia of Violating Nuclear Arms Treaty, Calls for Talks

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U.S. President Barack Obama listens to a question as he speaks about the situation in Ukraine from the White House in Washington, July 18.

The U.S. government has accused Russia of violating the Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces treaty and has urged immediate bilateral talks on the issue, in another sign of deteriorating relations between the two countries.

The Cold War treaty, ratified in 1988, was designed to eliminate ground-launched cruise missiles with ranges of 500 to 5,500 km (310 to 3,400 miles).

"This is a very serious matter, which we have attempted to address with Russia for some time now," an administration official said Monday in a statement.

"We encourage Russia to return to compliance with its obligations under the treaty and to eliminate any prohibited items in a verifiable manner," the official said.

The official did not describe how Russia violated the treaty, but The New York Times reported

in January that Washington had informed its NATO partners that Russia had tested a ground-launched cruise missile.

State Department officials had hinted that a formal determination that Russia had violated the treaty could be forthcoming, said Daryl Kimball, executive director of the Arms Control Association, a Washington-based research and advocacy group.

He said the violation would not represent a new military threat to the U.S. and its European allies, given Russia's existing missile arsenal.

But in an interview, Kimball called the infraction "disturbing."

"It suggests that Russia is moving away from a long U.S.-Russia tradition of restraining the most dangerous weapons even as they have serious disagreements on all sorts of issues," he said.

The U.S. notified Russia of its determination and called for senior-level talks "with the aim of assuring the U.S. that Russia will come back into compliance" with the treaty.

"The U.S. will, of course, consult with allies on this matter to take into account the impact of this Russian violation on our collective security if Russia does not return to compliance," the official said.

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