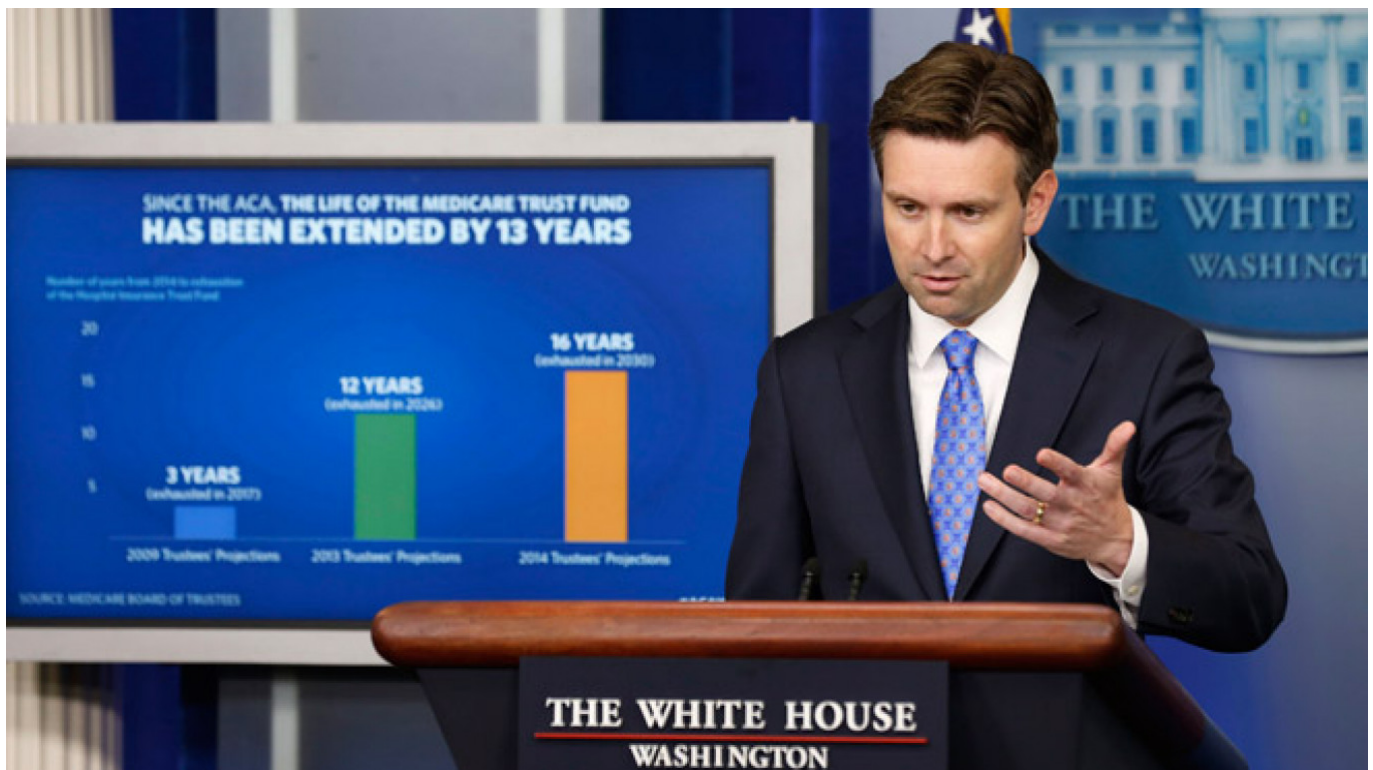


Experts I.D. Russian Missile That U.S. Claims Breached Treaty

By [Alexey Eremenko](#)

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White House Press Secretary Josh Earnest

Russian analysts have tentatively identified the mysterious missile at the center of Washington's recent claims that Moscow had violated a perestroika-era arms treaty, but have noted that the missile in question had never been used to target Ukraine.

The Likely Culprit

The deployment of Russia's state-of-the-art R-500, a powerful missile that boasts a range of more than 2,000 kilometers, may be seen as a violation of the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, or INF Treaty, which the State Department nebulously accused Russia of having breached Tuesday.

This is likely to be the missile that provoked the State Department's ire, said Ruslan Pukhov, the director of the for-profit think tank Center for Analysis of Strategies and Technologies.

Russia announced plans to arm some Iskander missile systems with R-500s last year, and is apparently making progress toward doing so now, Pukhov told The Moscow Times.

Notably, Pukhov explained late Tuesday, the U.S. itself cannot boast have a flawless track record in terms of abiding by the treaty.

He cited by way of an example the use of dummy intermediate range missiles for tests of the American missile shield in Europe, and of unmanned combat aerial vehicles, which also technically qualify as cruise missiles, as defined by the treaty.

No Ukraine Connection

Minor treaty violations are a routine matter, usually solved without any media attention, but tensions hiked over Ukraine have caused the matter to spill into the open and get blown out of proportion, said Pavel Zolotarev, a retired Russian army general who now serves as deputy director of the Institute for U.S. and Canadian Studies at the Russian Academy of Sciences.

Experts polled for this story, however, unanimously said the R-500 was not likely to have been aimed at Ukraine, where Russia is accused of backing the separatists.

The incident is not related to the ongoing conflict in eastern Ukraine, even though missiles figure increasingly in frontline communiqués, Zolotarev said.

On July 17, a Malaysian passenger jet was destroyed over rebel-controlled eastern Ukraine, apparently by a surface-to-air missile fired from a Buk missile system whose origins are currently the subject of heated debate.

Citing U.S. intelligence sources, CNN reported Tuesday that the Ukrainian military had launched short-range surface-to-surface ballistic missiles at the rebels, who claimed on Wednesday to have found an unexploded warhead. Official Kiev denied it, saying such missiles were "too powerful" for the ongoing urban warfare.

The Violation

The INF treaty prohibits both signatories, Russia and the U.S., from possessing, producing or flight-testing ground-launched cruise missiles with a range of between 500 and 5,500 kilometers.

The U.S. report accusing Russia of having breached the treaty refrained from providing details of the nature of the alleged violation, as did department spokeswoman Jen Psaki, who mentioned the accusations at a news briefing on Tuesday.

"This is a very serious matter, which we have attempted to address with Russia for some time now," Psaki said at a news briefing, by way of an explanation.

President Vladimir Putin received a letter from U.S. President Barack Obama on the matter Monday, The News York Times reported.

The Kremlin and the Russian Defense Ministry have both remained silent on the issue. Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov discussed the issue with U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry

on Tuesday, but the Foreign Ministry provided no information on the diplomats' talking points.

See also:

[U.S. Claims Russia Has Fired Rockets into Ukraine](#)

Contact the author at a.eremenko@imedia.ru

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