

Confidential

RUSSIA

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Aleksandr Kolbin reports from London:

HOW OPEN SOURCE INTELLIGENCE NARROWS DOWN THE OPPORTUNITIES FOR DIALOGUE ON THE INF TREATY

SUMMARY

A New York Times article published on February 14, 2017 and citing unnamed US administration officials has caused another round of accusations against Russia for allegedly violating the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty. In the absence of specific details from the official Washington, the so-called open source information has in fact produced an all-sufficient basis for accusing Russia of violating the INF Treaty.

Using the methods and tools of open source intelligence (OSINT) for verification of Russia's compliance with the INF Treaty may have quite negative consequences, according to PIR Center's Consultant Aleksandr Kolbin. Even if the violations are taking place, research community and decision-makers should not be guided by the open source analysis only in formulating responses. OSINT tools are still flawed and the results can be double-edged. The official information and the need for mutual inspections should not be neglected.

Otherwise, using officially unconfirmed results of the open source analysis in real politics can lead - and is already leading - to the uprise of another round of military-political tension in Europe, up to the possibility of a new arms race on the continent.

On February 14, 2017, the *New York Times* published an article which asserted, with reference to unnamed U.S. Administration officials, that Russia, in violation of the INF Treaty, has secretly deployed "a ground-launched cruise missile" on its territory. The article particularly named the 9M729 *Iskander* long-range cruise missile (the U.S. reporting name is SSC-8).

This was not the first time when the U.S. side accused Russia of breaching the INF Treaty. Every edition of the *Adherence to and Compliance with Arms Control, Nonproliferation, and Disarmament Agreements and Commitments Report* by the U.S. State Department since 2014 officially accused Russia of violating the 1987 agreement. In particular, the 2015 Report stated that "the United States determined the cruise missile developed by the Russian Federation meets the INF Treaty definition of a ground-launched cruise missile with a range capability of 500 km to 5,500 km, and as such, all missiles of that type, and all launchers of the type used to launch such a missile, are prohibited under the provisions of the INF Treaty." But the reports did not provide any further details on the type of the GLCM or a launcher under consideration.

In an effort to fill this gap, some independent researchers proposed their analysis of what Russia's actions could have caused the U.S. accusations. Their findings were published in the media resulting in two main explanations related to the testing of the already mentioned 9M729 cruise missile and the RS-26 ground-based ballistic missile (as long as Russia tested it for a range not exceeding 5500 km).

These researchers, after analysing the open source data and pictures from Russian testing sites, agreed that 9M729 could be a variant of the 9M728 missile, namely increased in length from about 6.7 to 8.1 meters. Because of the increased length, Russia had to create a new transporter-erector-launcher vehicle (TEL) in 2016 on the basis of the MZKT-7930 chassis. Some analysts also provided the links to the 2016 procurement plan of the *Titan Central Design Bureau* in Volgograd mentioning the acquisition of the MZKT-7930 chassis for manufacturing a new TEL for the *Iskander-M* system.

Even though this logic of research (rough estimates of the new missile length building on analysis of publicly available photos and videos; procurement plans as a proof; etc.) may seem convincing, it still cannot serve as the basis for real-world political and military decisions. The assessment of the compliance with any international arms control treaty must be confirmed by univocal official information and be verified through official channels, including inspections.

It should never be forgotten that open source data interpretation may result in double-edged conclusions. Indeed, using the same OSINT tools and methods allows making an opposite conclusion - that the new cruise missile would not necessarily require a production of a new TEL in 2016. The new missile could easily fit onto the old one. Hereafter we'll try to confirm it by our own estimates.

In order to estimate the maximum length of a cruise missile that can be launched from the older (deployed before 2016) version of the *Iskander*

TEL, one can use images/videos of the *Iskander-M* TEL available in open access and the *Google SketchUp* software (methodology first introduced by the James Martin Center for Non-Proliferation Studies in Monterey). In particular, the *Russia 1* State TV Channel broadcast of March 14, 2016 contained scenes of loading a launch tube into the *Iskander-M* TEL truck body (see Image 1).



Image 1. Loading a launch tube into the *Iskander-M* TEL. Source: Youtube

It is known that the *Iskander* TEL is based on the MZKT-7930 series chassis (also known as *Astrolog*) manufactured by the *Minsk Wheel Trucks Plant*, or *VOLAT* (Minsk, Belorussia). The chassis' length is 12,669 meters; and its length together with the TEL is 13,070 meters (Image 2).

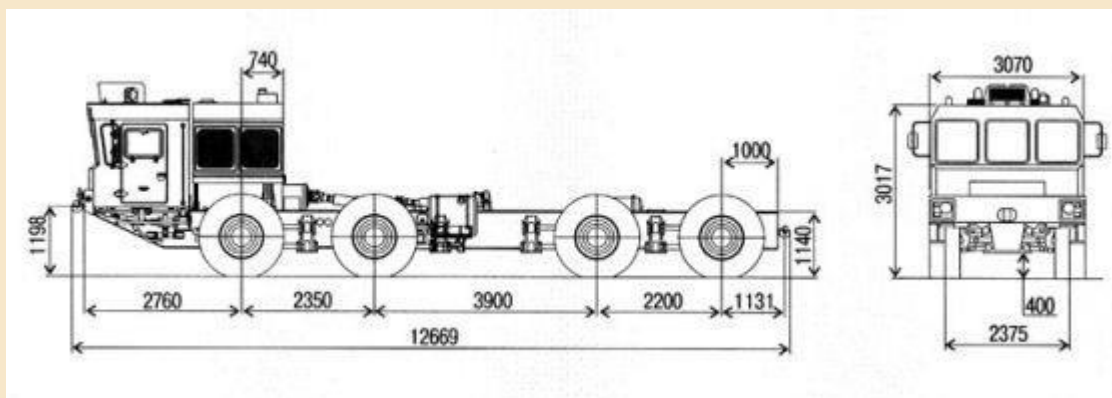


Image 2. MZKT-7930 series chassis layout. Source: Volatdefence.com

Combining what is known about the chassis specification with the abovementioned video and using *SketchUp* software, one can build a model of the *Iskander* TEL together with a launch tube. Herewith, it is possible to scale the model to the correct size, where the whole *Iskander* TEL's length is 13,07 meters, the launch tube's length is 7,56 meters, and the truck body's length is 8,58 meters (Image 3).

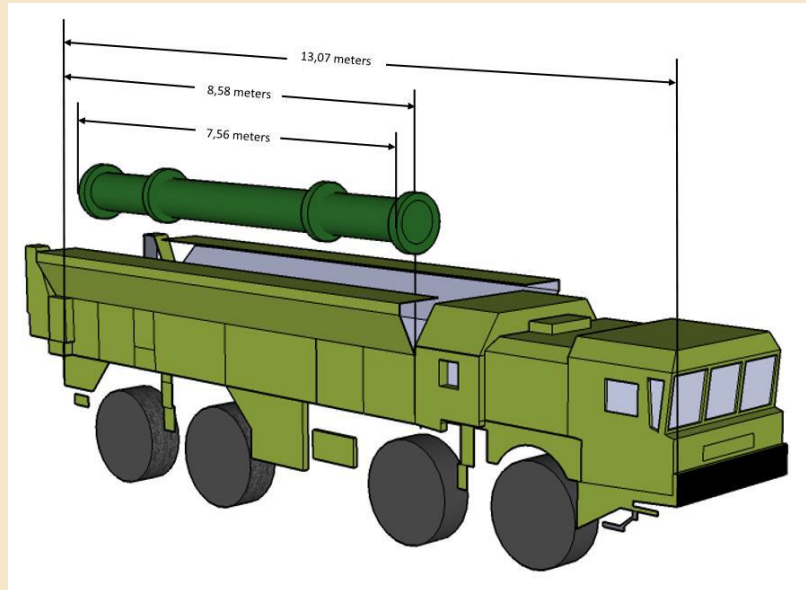


Image 3. Author's Google SketchUp model

Finally, there are images in open access confirming that a missile or a launch tube can be placed throughout the whole length of the *Iskander-M* TEL truck body (Image 4).



Image 4. The *Iskander-M* TEL, 2015. Source: Bastion-karpenko.ru

Consequently, the maximum length of a cruise missile that can be placed onto the *Iskander* launcher deployed before 2016 is 8,5 meters.

Thus, using unverified open source information only, a researcher could make a conclusion that Russia began to deploy the prohibited missile on *Iskander* TELs, and that the TELs deployed before 2016 could be used for this purpose as well. And again, according to open source information, the Moscow State Research Institute of Instrument Engineering responsible for creating the data management systems for these missiles reported in 2014 that the management

system for 9M728 / 9M729 missiles and for its improved version had passed state tests in 2014.

In addition to this, in December 2016 two independent researchers - namely Lewis from the U.S and Kivimaki from Finland - basing on open source information, stated that "Russia was now deploying the *Iskander* missile system to Kaliningrad." Also, the authors warned that from Kaliningrad the new missile could hit targets "throughout Western Europe including London, Paris and Madrid".

All these publications have caused a real stir, despite the fact that no official confirmation took place, let alone verification.

As a result, in the absence of any specific details on Russia's violations from the U.S. officials, the open source information produced by the research community and published by the media have formed a basis of its own for accusations against Russia. Moreover, that open source information has been actively commented by politicians, military and diplomats on both sides.

In particular, **Mikhail Ulyanov**, the Russian Foreign Ministry's head of Non-Proliferation and Arms Control Department, while commenting on the above-mentioned *NYT* article, said that Russia rejects the claims, "which are completely unfounded and totally unsubstantiated." He also mentioned poorness of the "references to some anonymous representatives of the U.S. administration" which only "instil fears" around the topic.

The reaction of the U.S. officials was diametrically opposite.

- Quite indicatively, just two days after the *New York Times* article was published, Senators **Tom Cotton** (R-Arkansas), **Ron Johnson** (R-Wisconsin) and **Marco Rubio** (R-Florida) introduced the Intermediate-Range Forces Treaty (INF) Preservation Act, legislation that "would allow the United States to take steps to bring Russia back into compliance with the INF Treaty and begin developing similar missile systems."

The proposed steps include "establishment of a program of record for a dual-capable road-mobile ground-launched missile system with INF ranges; aggressively seeking additional missile defense assets; facilitating transfer of INF range systems to allied countries; limiting funds for New START extension or OST activities until Russia returns to compliance; and a policy review on determination of RS-26 as countable under New START." Thus, the Senators, again not directly, but implicitly, named a type of missile which could be under consideration by the U.S. side when it talks about Russia's non-compliance with the INF Treaty.

In any case, adoption of this legislation would mean the termination of the implementation of the U.S. obligations under the INF Treaty. Notably enough, the only background for the press release of this legislation proposal was the above-mentioned article in the *New York Times* of February 14, 2017.

- Finally, the U.S. allies in Europe also commented on this article. For instance, the French Defense Minister **Jean-Yves Le Drian**, four days after the article was published, said on the Munich Security Conference that NATO should respond to Russian violation of the INF Treaty "as quickly as possible," for it may involve "deployment and testing of cruise missiles that may be capable of carrying nuclear weapons."

To conclude, the current situation around the alleged violations of the INF Treaty by Russia could be an example of the first serious intervention of non-verified open source information in real decision-making in the military-political realm. Such intervention produces several consequences.

- *First, relying on unverified open source information undermines the plausibility and reliability of accusations against Russia. Russian authorities can always make reference to unofficial nature of allegations.*
- *Second, using unverified open source data in validation of its own rearmament programs undermines the credibility and impartiality of the U.S. allegations against Russia.*
- *Third, relying on unverified open source information in military and political decision making can produce uncontrolled and undesirable impact on European security, provoking new arms races and interstate tensions.*

In these circumstances, restoring strategic dialogue between Russia and the United States becomes an increasingly important task. Such a dialogue, inter alia, should be designed to eliminate all possible speculations on the extent of the INF Treaty violations, both by Russia and the United States. Even if such violations are taking place, in formulating responses to them both the research community and decision-makers should be guided not by the OSINT tools and methods alone, but by the official information and the results of mutual inspections, if such become possible.

Editor: Julia Fetisova

(c) Trialogue Club International: trialogue@pircenter.org;
(c) Centre russe d'études politiques: crep@pircenter.org
Moscow - Geneva, February 2017

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Dear members of Trialogue Club International,

The 2017 Club season has started, and we kindly **invite you to extend your membership of the Club for 2017 or for the 2017-2018 period.**

In 2017 Club members will continue to receive exclusive analytics on Russian foreign policy priorities and key challenges and threats to international security. We have scheduled **5 meetings of Trialogue Club International** in 2017, including 4 in Moscow and 1 abroad. Club Members will receive a series of articles from the Security Index journal in electronic form, **12 issues** of the Russia Confidential analytical bulletin (in Russian or English), as well as other information and analytical bulletins.

As always, specialists of *Triologue Club International* and its partner organization PIR Center are open for exchange of opinions on key international issues.

In **2017**, membership fees are as follows:

Period	Individual	Corporate
01.01.17 – 31.12.17 (1 year)	50 000 roubles	80 000 roubles
01.01.17 – 31.12.18 (2 years)	90 000 roubles	140 000 roubles

We operate a **1+1 arrangement** for **corporate members**, whereby each corporate member is entitled to have **2 representatives** participating in Club events.

For all membership issues, please email us at secretary@trialogue-club.ru or call +7 (985) 764-98-96.

Sincerely,

**Chairman,
Triologue Club
International**

Dmitry Polikanov