



Missiles for Asia?

The Need for Operational Analysis of U.S. Theater Ballistic Missiles in the Pacific

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The finding that Russia is in violation of its obligations under the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty has raised doubts about its durability. If the treaty cannot be revived, the United States could choose to add conventional land-based theater ballistic missiles to its arsenal. The U.S. Army should start a rigorous assessment of the potential military value and potential strategic risks of deploying such missiles in Asia.



RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What is the status of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty and the U.S. response to current challenges to it?
- In the context of the East Asian military balance, what are the benefits and risks of adding conventional land-based theater ballistic missiles to the U.S. portfolio of strike capabilities?



KEY FINDINGS

- The Durability of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty is in Doubt
- The U.S. Department of State has concluded that Russia is in violation of its obligations under the treaty.
 - The United States remains committed to the treaty and seeks to encourage Russia to return to compliance by eliminating prohibited systems. The prospects are unclear; attempts to revive the treaty could take several years.
 - It is too soon for the U.S. to decide to withdraw from the treaty, but it is still worth examining the benefits and risks of adding conventional land-based theater ballistic missiles (TBM)s to the U.S. force structure.

China's Rapid Military Modernization Could Threaten U.S. Forces

- Land-based, conventionally armed precision ballistic and cruise missile systems have been a focus area for modernization.
- Chinese TBMs could play a key enabling role in counterintervention campaigns.

TBMs Offer Some Potential Benefits

- TBMs might provide negotiating leverage in new arms-control negotiations.
- TBMs can be survivable, can strike quickly, and can penetrate many defenses.
- Development risks are likely lower for TBMs than for other candidate technologies.

But the Benefits Must Be Weighed Against the Potential Risks

- Land-based TBMs would require regional access agreements, which may be difficult to obtain.
- TBMs are more expensive than some alternatives, such as cruise missiles, and could be slow to deploy into rapidly evolving crises.
- The characteristics of TBMs make it difficult to reassure adversaries that they will not be used in surprise attacks on leadership or other sensitive targets, potentially undermining structural stability and crisis management.



RECOMMENDATIONS

- The U.S. Army can start a rigorous operational analysis of the potential military value that conventional land-based theater ballistic missiles (TBMs) could add to the U.S. portfolio of strike capabilities.
- In particular, the U.S. Army should analyze the potential military value of TBMs in the Pacific and whether they might plausibly help the U.S. offset China's military modernization.
- The potential operational benefits of TBMs should be weighed against the crisis stability risks that they could create.