



## Open Skies Treaty

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### Why in News

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Recently, the United States of America (USA) has announced that it will exit the **Open Skies Treaty (OST)** due to continuous violation of the treaty by Russia and changes in the security environment.

### Key Points

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- It is expected to formally pull out of Open Skies in six months.
- **USA's Stand:** The USA has blamed Russia for restricting US flyovers in neighbour Georgia and its military enclave in Kaliningrad (Russia).
  - Russia misused its flights over the US and Europe to identify critical infrastructure for potential attack in a time of war.
  - Russia intends to annex the Crimean peninsula and has designated an Open Skies refueling airfield in the region.
  - Yet, the USA has expressed willingness to make a new agreement.
- **Russia's Stand:** Russia has denied the allegations and warned that the withdrawal will affect the interests of all of 35 participating countries.

However, Russia intended to fully follow all the rights and obligations under the treaty as long as the treaty is in force.
- It can be noted that the USA has used the treaty more intensively than Russia.

Between 2002 and 2016, the U.S. flew 196 flights over Russia compared to the 71 flights flown by Russia.
- This move by the USA has further deepened doubts on extension of the **New START treaty**, which expires in February, 2021.
- Throughout its term, the Trump administration has been skeptical of arms control agreements. In 2019, the U.S. and Russia walked away from the **1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty**.

### Open Skies Treaty

- It was signed in 1992 and came into effect in 2002.
- It is an agreement that allows its 34 signatory countries to monitor arm development by conducting **surveillance flights (unarmed)** over each other's territories.
- Therefore, the **treaty established an aerial surveillance system** for its participants.
- Both US and Russia are signatories of the treaty.
- India is not a member of this treaty.

### **Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty**

- It was a nuclear arms-control accord reached by the United States and the Soviet Union **in 1987** in which the two nations agreed to eliminate **their stocks of intermediate-range and shorter-range (or "medium-range")** land-based missiles (which could carry nuclear warheads).
- It also covered all land-based missiles, including those carrying nuclear warheads but **did not cover sea-launched missiles.**
- The United States withdrew from the Treaty on 2<sup>nd</sup> August 2019.

### **New START Treaty**

- The new **Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START)** is a treaty between the United States of America and the Russian Federation on measures for the further reduction and limitation of strategic offensive arms.
- It entered into force on 5<sup>th</sup> February, 2011.
- It is a successor to the START framework of 1991 (at the end of the Cold War) that limited both sides to 1,600 strategic delivery vehicles and 6,000 warheads.
- The USA has been worried that extending New Start would negatively impact an arms deal with China and Russia.
- It is concerned that China's nuclear stockpile could be doubled if the New Start Treaty continued as is, without including China.
- The New Start Treaty also suffered from verification inadequacies and that the U.S. intended to **establish a new arms control regime which would include China.**

**Source: TH**