

Russia to exit Open Skies treaty

January 16, 2021

In news : Recently, Russia announced that it was pulling out of the Open Skies treaty

What was the reason given by Russia?

- According to Russia, the pact, which allows unarmed surveillance flights over member countries, had been seriously compromised by the withdrawal of the United States.
- Russia also said that it had made specific proposals to other members to mitigate against the impact of the U.S. exit but that those proposals were not backed by Washington's allies.
- It has raised concerns that despite leaving the treaty Washington could potentially retain access to overflight intelligence gathered by allies who remain members in the treaty.

Why did the US leave the treaty?

The United States left the Open Skies arms control and verification treaty in November 2020, accusing Russia of violating it, something Moscow denied.

What is the Open Skies treaty?

- Open Skies treaty was entered into force in 2002
- It permits countries to fly unarmed aircraft with cameras and other sensors over the territory of the treaty's other 34 member states.
- Based on an idea advanced by Dwight Eisenhower in the 1950s, Open Skies provides for the collection of imagery of military installations and activities in order to

foster transparency.

Evolution of the treaty

- The concept of “mutual aerial observation” was initially proposed to Soviet Premier Nikolai Bulganin at the Geneva Conference of 1955 by U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower; however, the Soviets promptly rejected the concept and it lay dormant for several years.
- The treaty was eventually signed as an initiative of U.S. president (and former Central Intelligence Agency Director) George H. W. Bush in 1989.
- Negotiated by the then-members of NATO and the Warsaw Pact, the agreement was signed in Helsinki, Finland

More about the treaty

- The treaty is designed to enhance mutual understanding and confidence by giving all participants, regardless of size, a direct role in gathering information about military forces and activities of concern to them.
- The idea of allowing countries to openly surveil each other is thought to prevent misunderstandings (e.g., to assure a potential opponent that one’s country is not about to go to war) and limit the escalation of tensions.
- It also provides mutual accountability for countries to follow through on treaty promises.
- Open Skies is one of the most wide-ranging international efforts to date promoting openness and transparency of military forces and activities.
- Under the Open Skies treaty each party has two annual quotas: the number of flights it may conduct over other treaty-parties (active quota), and the number of overflights that it must accept (passive quota).
- Aircrafts are inspected before conducting an Open Skies flight, and personnel from the country to be overflown are on board during the flight.