



## Issue Brief

*(Views expressed in the brief are those of the author, and do not represent those of ISSI)*

# US Expanded Sanctions Against Russia Become Law

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**“Congress could not even negotiate a healthcare bill after seven years of talking. Since this bill was first introduced, I have expressed my concerns to Congress about the many ways it improperly encroaches on executive power, disadvantages American companies, and hurts the interests of our European allies.”<sup>1</sup>**

This was stated by President Trump on August 2, 2017 as he grudgingly put pen to paper to the new package of proposed sanctions against Russia, Iran and North Korea.<sup>2</sup> Trump believes that the bill remains “seriously flawed,” particularly because it encroaches on the executive branch’s authority to negotiate, besides hurting businesses of American companies and creates trouble for the European allies of the US, despite the fact that his administration worked with the Congress to improve it. Nevertheless, he did say that the signing of the bill was “for the sake of national unity.”<sup>3</sup> The bill was passed with overwhelming majority, with the Senate passing it 98-2 and the House passing it 419-3, which ruled out all chances of a possible veto from President Trump.<sup>4</sup>

The controversial statement from President Trump after signing the bill has been analyzed briefly by the Democrats who believe that President's signature is “an apology” to President Putin.<sup>5</sup> Lauding the joint efforts of Democrats and Republicans in making the sanctions veto-proof, Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer has warned that the “Congress is going to need to keep a sharp eye on this administration's implementation of this critical law.”<sup>6</sup> He went on to say that this mutual understanding will be in the US self-interest in the long-term. “This legislation shows it’s possible for the two parties to work together to rein in the President when he veers off track, and I hope it serves as a model for the future.” While the top Democrat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Maryland Sen. Ben Cardin exerted authority by saying, ““We make the laws, not the President of the United States.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/08/02/statement-president-donald-j-trump-signing-countering-americas>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/onpolitics/2017/08/02/five-things-know-russia-sanctions-trump-signed-and-why-you-should-care/533403001/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/politics/president-trump-signs-new-russia-sanctions-questions-whether-bill-interferes-with-foreign-policy-authority/ar-AApj7HE>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/onpolitics/2017/08/02/five-things-know-russia-sanctions-trump-signed-and-why-you-should-care/533403001/>

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> <http://edition.cnn.com/2017/08/03/politics/russia-us-trump-putin-sanctions/index.html>

On the other hand, President Trump appears to be disgruntled with the developments and believes that the sanctions will now allow China to work with Russia and North Korea, bringing the US enemies closer. "By limiting the Executive's flexibility, this bill makes it harder for the United States to strike good deals for the American people, and will drive China, Russia, and North Korea much closer together."<sup>8</sup>

The reaction from Kremlin has been nothing short of what was expected in the first place. Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev has slammed the US establishment in a Facebook post. He believes that the signing of the sanctions by President Trump highlight three things; it is a declaration of a full-fledged economic war on Russia; "total weakness" of President Trump's administration; and finally, ended all hopes of improving bilateral relations between the two countries.<sup>9</sup>

The imposed expanded sanctions have also been imposed against Iran and North Korea as well. The sanctions aim at cutting off North Korea from one-third of its total exports, totaling around \$1 billion.<sup>10</sup> These new sanctions are explicitly targeted at ending North Korea's weapons program. Since North Korea is a closed society, it becomes difficult to research the effects of these sanctions. Moreover, no statement has been released by Pyongyang regarding these sanctions. Although, the satellite data used to analyze lights at night (used to establish proxy for economic activity in North Korea) suggest that regional inequality between the capital, Pyongyang, and its rural areas has increased.<sup>11</sup> But it should be noted that the regime in North Korea remains unharmed and the people are the ones who bear all the impact. The increased number of missile tests by North Korea from the onset of 2017 suggests that the regime remains undeterred regardless of the numerous sanctions levied upon the state by the international community.<sup>12</sup> The number of missile tests under the Kim Jong Un's regime is unprecedented and is more than the number of missile tests conducted by his father and grandfather combined.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2017/08/02/president-trump-signs-new-russia-sanctions-bill/532442001/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/Dmitry.Medvedev/posts/10154587161801851>

<sup>10</sup> <http://foreignpolicy.com/2017/08/05/u-s-aims-to-expand-u-n-sanctions-on-north-korea-nuclear-kim-jong-un-asia-diplomacy/>

<sup>11</sup> [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/08/09/will-u-n-sanctions-stop-north-korean-missile-tests-dont-count-on-it/?utm\\_term=.367366454a8a](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/08/09/will-u-n-sanctions-stop-north-korean-missile-tests-dont-count-on-it/?utm_term=.367366454a8a)

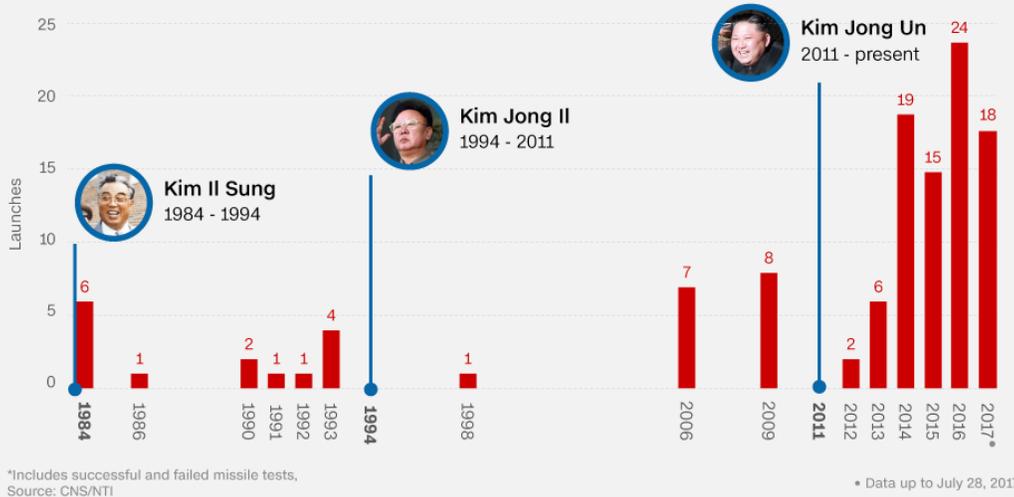
<sup>12</sup> <http://edition.cnn.com/2017/05/29/asia/north-korea-missile-tests/index.html>

### North Korea missile launches in 2017

- February 12 ● KN-15 / Pukguksong-2
- March 6 ● Hwasong-7 / Extended-range Scud missile (4 missiles fired)
- March 22 ● Unclear\*
- April 4 ● KN-17
- April 16 ● KN-17
- April 29 ● Unclear\*
- May 14 ● Hwasong-12
- May 21 ● KN-15 / Pukguksong-2
- May 29 ● KN-17\*\*
- June 8 ● 4 surface-to-ship cruise missiles
- July 4 ● KN-14
- July 28 ● KN-14

**CNN** \*Experts divided on what type of missile was fired  
 \*\*North Korea claims a new type of missile was fired, but experts doubt that

### Kim family missile tests



Iran, on the other hand, slammed the US expanded sanctions by calling the move “regressive and unlawful” and that the new sanctions are a clear hostility toward the Iranian culture and civilization, as well as an insult to all independent nations in the world.<sup>13</sup> The Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Bahram Ghasemi also referred to the recent session of Iran’s Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) - a plan adopted by P5+1, EU and Iran to ensure that Iran’s nuclear program will be exclusively peaceful - monitoring committee and the decisions made in response to the US sanctions bill, adding that “Iran will not remain silent on the violation of JCPOA by the US and a series of reciprocal measures

<sup>13</sup> <http://en.mehrnews.com/news/126873/Iran-slams-US-sanctions-bill-as-regressive-unlawful>

will be soon announced by Iranian parliament and government.”<sup>14</sup> Iranian administration also stated that Iran will keep resisting the US hostile moves.<sup>15</sup>

On the Russian side, the Russian Prime Minister Mr. Medvedev is of the view that ultimately the US establishment’s aim is to drive President Trump, “who is an incompetent player”,<sup>16</sup> out of power. “The issue of new sanctions came about, primarily, as another way to knock Trump down a peg. New steps are to come, and they will ultimately aim to remove him from power. A non-systemic player has to be removed.”<sup>17</sup>

However, he concluded that “sanctions are meaningless and Russia will cope, independently”.<sup>18</sup>

The situation between US and Russia seems to be worsening, and matters with Iran and North Korea have also taken a downward slope with North Korea ignoring all the warnings from the international community regarding its blatant and intensified missile tests and Iran threatening the US for responding to the sanctions in a befitting manner.

With every passing day, there seems to be a split between President Trump and the rest of the Congress. Other questions that arise here are, how long can the US continue to bend Russia, Iran and North Korea? Sooner or later, they will break, and if they do, what will be their reaction?

As Mr. Medvedev concluded, this is Russia, not USSR. Russia has been able to survive independently, and that has made them stronger. This might mean that the US sanctions might not mean a lot. Specially with Russia’s interest in OBOR and China willing to work along with the European Union’s continued interest in energy deals with Russia. So at the end of the day, the US might have to do a cost-benefit analysis whether the sanctions being levied on Russia, Iran and North Korea are beneficial or not, and then decide whether to persist with them, or to backtrack on their actions.

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<sup>14</sup> <http://en.mehrnews.com/news/126873/Iran-slams-US-sanctions-bill-as-regressive-unlawful>

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.emtedadnews.com/en/index.php/2017/08/03/iran-slams-us-sanctions-bill-as-regressive-unlawful/>

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.washingtonexaminer.com/russian-prime-minister-dmitry-medvedev-trump-is-an-incompetent-player-who-will-be-liquidated-by-the-us-establishment/article/2630446>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/Dmitry.Medvedev/posts/10154587161801851>

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.