



US WITHDRAWAL FROM THE INF TREATY: IMPLICATIONS FOR GLOBAL STRATEGIC STABILITY

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December 20, 2018

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



In his speech at the NATO headquarters in Brussels on December 4, 2018, the US Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo stated that at least on 30 occasions since 2013, US has raised the issue of Russia's non-compliance with the Intermediate-range Nuclear Force (INF) treaty.¹ Pompeo, highlighted Russia's recent actions in Georgia, Ukraine, Syria and the meddling of Russia in the US elections, as an act of "Russia's lawlessness on the world stage." He said that the US declares that it has found Russia in the material breach of the INF treaty and will suspend its obligations as a remedy, effective in 60 days unless Russia returns to a "full and verifiable compliance."² At the same day, the arrival of two Russian Tu-160 strategic bombers in Venezuela, as a part of strengthening bilateral military cooperation,³ has severely aggravated the already growing Russia-US tensions.

The INF treaty was negotiated and concluded in 1987 with an aim to reduce the chances of a nuclear war between the then two superpowers - the US and Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) - and to strength the objectives of strategic stability by "eliminating intermediate-range and

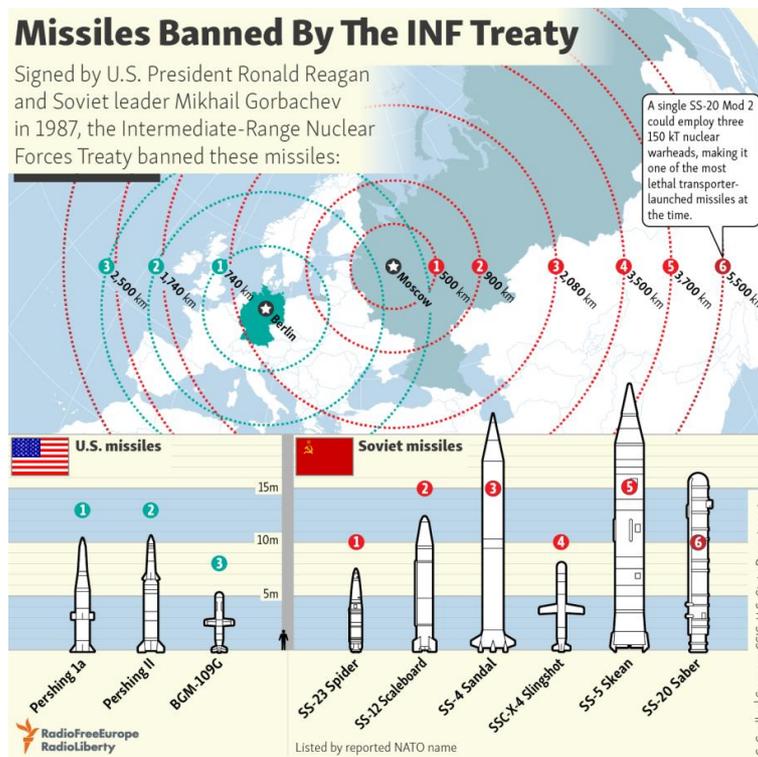
¹ Katelyn Caralle, "Mike Pompeo says Threat of Withdrawal from INF Treaty 'Sets Down the Marker' for Vladimir Putin," *Washington Examiner*, December 10, 2018, <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/policy/defense-national-security/mike-pompeo-says-threat-of-withdrawal-from-inf-treaty-sets-down-the-marker-for-vladimir-putin>

² Ibid.

³ "Russia Sends two Nuclear-capable Bombers to Venezuela," *NBC News*, December 11, 2018, https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/russia-sends-2-nuclear-capable-bombers-venezuela-n946246?cid=public-rss_20181210

shorter-range missiles,” with a commitment not to develop such “systems thereafter.”⁴ The treaty defines the ranges of missiles from 500-5500 kilometres as the intermediate and short-range missiles (for list of banned missiles by the treaty see graph below). It is estimated that as a result of the INF treaty, both the superpowers had destroyed around 2,600 (approximately 800 by US and 1800 by USSR) declared intermediate and short-range missiles and launchers by 1991.⁵

However, since 2014, the US has been raising strong objections against the INF treaty violation by Russia. The US believes that Russian SSC-8 or Novator 9M729 is a “missile of concern,” whereas Russia claims that the missile is fully compliant with the INF treaty.⁶ The US also believes that the missile was tested several times and gives its estimated range of 2500 kilometres, and there are other claims that the missile has a range of 500-5500 kilometres.⁷ However, when Russia conducted test of the SSC-8, it was within 500 kilometres, reflecting that it is not in violation of the INF treaty.



Source: “Missiles Banned by the INF Treaty,” *RFE/RL*, October 22, 2018, <https://www.rferl.org/a/missiles-banned-by-the-inf-treaty-/29557616.html>

⁴ For full text of the treaty see, *Treaty on Elimination of Intermediate-range and Shorter-range Missiles between USA and USSR (INF Treaty)*, Nuclear Threat Initiative (NTI), https://www.nti.org/media/documents/inf_treaty.pdf

⁵ “The Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty at a Glance,” Arms Control Association, <https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/INFtreaty>

⁶ Missile Defense Project, “SSC-8 (Novator 9M729),” *Missile Threat*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, published October 23, 2018, last modified December 10, 2018, <https://missilethreat.csis.org/missile/ssc-8-novator-9m729/>

⁷ *Ibid.*

The Russia-US tension on the INF treaty sparked in July 2014, when the US Department of State released its unclassified report on “Adherence to and Compliance with Arms Control, Non-proliferation, and Disarmament Agreements and Commitments.”⁸ The compliance report stated that “the US has determined that the Russian Federation is in violation of its obligations under the INF Treaty not to possess, produce, or flight-test a ground-launched cruise missile (GLCM) with a range capability of 500 km to 5,500 km, or to possess or produce launchers of such missiles.”⁹ It also noted that US has raised its concerns with Russia and will continue to raise it. The US also raised this issue in its 2018 Nuclear Posture Review (NPR), which clearly stated that if Russia complies with its arms control obligations and reduce its non-strategic nuclear arsenal, US may reconsider its pursuit of low-yield Sea-launched Cruise Missile (SLCM).¹⁰ As a result, in October 2018, the US President, Donald Trump, announced to withdraw from the INF treaty.¹¹ The US’s considers its recent 60 days ultimatum to Russia as a part its effort to give the treaty a chance to stay.

While on the other side, the Russian President, Vladimir Putin, views the US withdrawal from the INF treaty as “ill consideration” and warned that Russia will follow suit if the US arms itself with the weapons banned by the treaty.¹² He claimed that US is seeking to use Russia as a scapegoat for the demise of the INF treaty by accusing it of a violation.¹³ Russia claims that it has not received any document or evidence from the US as a proof that Moscow is violating or in material breach of the INF treaty. On December 7, 2018, the Russian Foreign Minister, Sergey Lavrov, stated that Russia has been requesting for proof from US for quite a long time and Moscow is ready for a “serious and professional talk.”¹⁴ Russia has also accused the US of not complying with the INF treaty obligations by placing the US’s Aegis Ashore missile defence systems in Romania and Poland, which are “dual use” weapons. The Russian experts believe that the appearance of the American ballistic missiles in Europe means that NATO would have the capacity to sweep Russian territory almost as far as the

⁸ *US Department of State*, “Adherence to and Compliance with Arms Control, Non-proliferation, and Disarmament Agreements and Commitments,” July 2014, <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/230108.pdf>

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ *US Department of Defence* “Nuclear Posture Review: 2018,” February 2018, <https://media.defense.gov/2018/Feb/02/2001872886/-1/-1/1/2018-NUCLEAR-POSTURE-REVIEW-FINAL-REPORT.PDF>

¹¹ “Trump says US will Withdraw from Nuclear Arms Treaty with Russia,” *Guardia*, October 21, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/oct/20/trump-us-nuclear-arms-treaty-russia>

¹² “Putin: US Withdrawal from INF Is ‘Ill-Considered,’ Russia will Arm itself,” *Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty (RFE/RL)*, December 5, 2018, <https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-officially-notified-of-u-s-intent-to-withdraw-from-inf-treaty/29638750.html>

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ “Russia Still Ready for Talks with US on INF Treaty — top Diplomat,” *TASS*, December 5, 2018, <http://tass.com/politics/1034918>

Ural Mountains.¹⁵ They also consider that the US withdrawal from the INF treaty is mainly aimed at containing China, militarily.

Such developments could further complicate the already fragile international peace and security environment as major international powers are trying to shift away from their nuclear postures and policies. They are increasing their reliance on nuclear weapons and modifying the measures which are meant to avoid possibilities of a nuclear war. The US's NPR 2018 clearly highlights these dangerous trends and the US apprehensions that Russia and China are trying to revise the post-Cold War international order and norms of behaviour and Russia wants to change the map of Europe through the use of force.¹⁶ On the other side, China and Russia have their own concerns vis-à-vis the US, and against this revised US nuclear posture they might also go for low-yield or useable nuclear weapons. Such perceptions are going to increase chances of miscalculations among adversaries and as a result, major powers will embark upon developing new technologically advanced and lethal weapon systems undermining the global deterrence stability. This, in turn, will severely impact the global strategic stability with increased chances of actual use of nuclear weapons if a global crisis erupts between global and major powers.

Furthermore, any violation or withdrawal from the INF treaty by Russia and the US will bring severe implications for the decades-old global arms control and disarmament efforts, as Michael Krepon argues "Without this treaty, America's friends and allies will feel less comfortable and vital controls over nuclear arms would be loosened."¹⁷ David E. Sanger and William J. Broad termed such withdrawal as a rewind of the "Cold War."¹⁸ This reflects that withdrawing from the INF treaty would result in initiating a new nuclear arms race between Russia and the US, as both states have already expressed their desires to modernising their nuclear weapons systems and wanted to develop new advanced low-yield nuclear weapons and their ultimate delivery systems.

One could argue that the US and other global powers have lost their monopoly over missiles technology as several medium and smaller states have already acquired ballistic missile technology and some of them even have the nuclear weapons capability. Therefore, it is likely that US and Russia might withdraw from the INF treaty to counter these emerging threats. However, it should

¹⁵ Dmitry Belyaev, "Is the US withdrawal from the INF Treaty an Attempt to Contain China," *Fair Observer*, December 11, 2018, https://www.fairobserver.com/more/international_security/us-inf-treaty-withdrawal-russia-china-nuclear-security-news-43210/

¹⁶ *US Department of Defence "Nuclear Posture Review: 2018."*

¹⁷ Michael Krepon, "Rescuing the INF Treaty," *Arms Control Work*, December 9, 2018, <https://www.armscontrolwonk.com/archive/1206404/rescuing-the-inf-treaty/>

¹⁸ David E. Sanger and William J. Broad, "A Cold War Arms Treaty is Unravelling but the Problem is Much Bigger," *New York Times*, December 9, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/09/us/politics/trump-nuclear-arms-treaty-russia.html>

not be ignored that if existing international instruments of arms control are undermined, then it would become impossible to control the proliferation of missile and nuclear technology. Citing their security concerns, more and more states would try to acquire nuclear weapons and ballistic missile technology and would completely undermine global strategic stability. As a nuclear war would bring devastating consequences for all the humankind, therefore, in order to maintain international peace and security, the key international players should make efforts to strengthen arms control instrument which are meant to avoid a nuclear war. Respect for such instruments will enhance confidence among major power. At this point in time, initiation of dialogue is necessary between Russia and US to help solve the standoff on INF treaty and other emerging bilateral challenges.