

## The US intends to quit the INF treaty

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On 20 October, US President Donald Trump announced the US's intention to withdraw from the 1987 Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty on the elimination of ground-launch ballistic and cruise missiles with a range of from 500 km to 5500 km. The reason given was that Russia had repeatedly violated the Treaty. Trump announced that the US would develop intermediate-range strike capabilities unless Russia and China are ready to negotiate and conclude a new agreement restricting the development of this type of capabilities.

Trump's intent to withdraw from the INF Treaty was supported by the UK defence secretary Gavin Williamson, who also criticised Russia's actions. Germany's foreign minister Heiko Maas said the US intention to withdraw from the INF Treaty was regrettable, and stated that it poses difficult question for Germany and Europe. The French President Emmanuel Macron, in a telephone conversation with Trump, emphasised the INF Treaty's importance for European security. In turn Dmitri Peskov, a spokesman for the Russian President, said that Russia was and remains faithful to the provisions of the INF treaty, and accused the US of violating it. He also stated that after the US withdraws from the INF treaty, Russia will be forced to rebuild the balance of power. In turn, the deputy foreign minister Sergei Ryabkov assessed the US's actions as an attempt at blackmail aimed at obtaining concessions from Russia. A spokeswoman for the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs described Washington's possible withdrawal from the INF treaty as a mistake that could cause negative impacts in various areas.

### Commentary

- From the strictly technical perspective, despite the elimination of the missile categories specified in the INF Treaty, both the US and Russia possess the technology enabling the development of such missiles within a relatively short time by using already existing types of weapons. Russia has openly violated the INF treaty by having adapted sea-based Kalibr-class cruise missiles for ground launchers since 2007. It has conducted field trials since 2008, in which the 500-km range was exceeded. However, the Obama administration officially raised the issue of Russia's violations of the INF treaty only in 2014, in connection with tests of a new ballistic missile for the Iskander system, code-named 9M729, with a nominal range of 2500 km, and with the first modified Iskander-K launchers being put into service. The US also has the potential to develop intermediate ground-launched missiles. The US adapted sea-launched RIM-161 (SM-3) missiles for

ground launch (tests of the universal launcher have been carried out since 2011), having tested RGM-165 LASM (SM-4) as a surface-to-surface missile in the early 2000s. However, the US (unlike Russia) has not made any tests of the surface-to-surface missiles with a range beyond 500 km, and the entire SM-4 programme was officially closed in 2002.

- From the US's perspective, it is not only the Russian violations of the INF Treaty that are a problem, but also the development of such capabilities by China, and the impact this could have on the balance of power in the Asia-Pacific region. China's remaining outside the INF control regime, and the *de facto* unilateral limitation of the development of such capabilities by the US, which is currently the only party complying with the regime, is perceived by Washington as increasingly problematic. It seems that the ultimate goal of Trump's administration is to try to make not only Russia but also China to enter into negotiations on a new arms control treaty in this field.
- For at least a year, the USA has been approaching the issue of the INF treaty within NATO, presenting a non-paper in summer 2017 which contained proposals for possible actions. These were aimed on one hand at increasing the Western European allies' capabilities to defend themselves against Russian systems (including by strengthening missile defence and early-warning systems), and to deter Russia (including through the increased rotation of US B-2 and B-52 bombers in Europe). On the other hand the non-paper included proposals to include China and India in the INF treaty. These discussions have so far not yielded any results. At the same time, as part of increasing the pressure on Russia to return to compliance with the INF treaty, the *Nuclear Posture Review* prepared by the Department of Defence in February this year recommended commencing INF treaty-compliant research and development by reviewing military concepts and options for conventional, ground-launched, intermediate-range missile systems. The halt to multilateral consultations in NATO and the US's decision to withdraw from the INF treaty is strongly supported by Trump's current national security advisor John Bolton, who confirmed the US's intent to withdraw during his visit in Moscow on 22 October. The final decision, if taken, may be officially announced in January 2019. According to the Fiscal Year 2018 Defense Authorization Bill for the fiscal year 2018, the US President is obliged to inform the Senate whether Russia has violated the INF treaty, and whether that treaty is thus still binding upon the US.
- The US's withdrawal from the INF Treaty will primarily be disadvantageous for Europe. Although the Treaty has been infringed by Russia, it remains a tool for Western European allies to put (rhetorical) pressure on Moscow to return to compliance with the regime. In this way, it contributes to the postponement of any Western political and military response to Russian armaments, although at least since the deployment of the Kalibr cruise missiles on the Baltic and Black Sea fleets' vessels, all of Europe is now within range of Russian intermediate-range missile strikes. Moreover, Russia has possessed air-launched intermediate-range strike capabilities since the end of the Cold War. Upholding the INF regime is in the interest of Western European allies, first of all Germany, which wants to avoid an 'arms race' between the US and Russia. This would possibly imply a controversial discussion on the increase of the US military presence in Europe, and high pressure being put on Germany to station US missile systems on its

territory. On the other hand, the negotiations on a new arms control treaty may also be potentially unfavourable for Poland, because Russia will certainly set conditions including the removal of the elements of the US missile defence system from Poland and Romania.

- The US's formal withdrawal from the INF treaty is not favourable for Russia. Moscow had wanted to include the issues regulated by the treaty in a package deal which would also have included the issue of the US's missile defence system in Europe and the extension of the New START treaty on measures to further reduce and limit strategic offensive arms. On the other hand, however, Russia will try to take advantage of the US's decision in order to transfer political responsibility for the collapse of the INF regime onto the US, and will try to deepen the crisis in trans-Atlantic relations. Moscow will try to maximally discredit Washington's decision, politically and in propaganda, in order to bring the US into conflict with its European allies (mainly Germany and France). Russia is also counting on the emergence of conflicts around the possible deployment of US intermediate-range missile systems in Europe. At the same time, the Kremlin is unlikely to be interested in a serious escalation of the conflict, because that would increase the risk of further US actions (including sanctions, which Moscow most fears), and start an arms race that Russia would not be able to win in the long run. It is possible, however, that Russia will decide, for example, to respond to the US by the demonstrative deployment of tactical nuclear warheads on the Kalibr and Iskander missiles in Kaliningrad, and perhaps also in Belarus.
- The US's final decision to withdraw from the INF Treaty will contribute to increasing tensions in trans-Atlantic relations. From the point of view of the Western European allies, it will be another action by the US which fails to take European interests into account. It is the US, not Russia, who will be blamed for the failure of the INF treaty, which is still formally treated as the foundation of European security, although in fact it has long since ceased to play this role. This could be another argument supporting French calls for the need to develop the EU's 'strategic autonomy' in the face of the US's withdrawal from Europe. It cannot be ruled out that in the coming months France will attempt to start a strategic discussion on European security between the EU and Russia, without US involvement. Proposals of this nature were presented in August this year by the French President, promising not only "that more substance will be given" to the mutual defence clause in the EU (Article 42(7) of the Treaty on European Union), but also to start a review of Europe's defence and security architecture, especially with Russia.

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