

# HAWKISH MOVE: ON U.S. PULLOUT FROM NUCLEAR TREATY



The US, which has long accused Russia of violating the INF treaty, formally announced it was suspending its obligations under the agreement.

The Donald Trump administration's decision to withdraw from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) treaty with Russia is a retrograde step.

It was Signed in 1987 by the US and USSR, it banned the use of short and medium-range missiles by both countries.

## What is the I.N.F. Treaty and how did it come about?

The treaty resolved a crisis of the 1980s when the Soviet Union deployed a missile in Europe called the SS-20, capable of carrying three nuclear warheads.

The United States responded with cruise and Pershing II missiles based in Europe.

By the time, the then President Ronald Reagan of US and Mikhail S. Gorbachev of USSR, negotiated **the deal to ban the weapons in 1987.**

It **barred both countries** from deploying **land-launched cruise missiles** in the **500- to 5,500-km range.**

However, Russia appears to have been covertly violating it in letter and spirit.

The U.S. in 2008 expressed concern over the **Russian Novator 9M729 missile tests** and in 2014 alleged that Russia was testing a **ground-based cruise missile.**

### **On what reasons US is backing its decision:**

Mr. Trump, who scuppered the **nuclear agreement with Iran**, has hinted he would refuse to **abide by a treaty** that other parties were **disregarding.**

There is now a sense of alarm that **the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START)**, which limits both countries arsenal of **intercontinental ballistic missiles**, and will **lapse in 2021**, might be scrapped next.

Yet, the U.S. response cannot be regarded as purely retaliatory.

### **Was Russia actually in breach of the treaty terms?**

According to information dating to the **Obama administration**, it seems so. During the **2014 crisis in Ukraine**, the United States accused **Russia of violating the treaty** by deploying **prohibited tactical nuclear weapons** designed to intimidate Europe and the former Soviet states that have aligned with the West.

President Obama personally informed President Putin of Russia in a letter that the United States believed the Russians were **violating the treaty**, but that he wanted to **resolve the issue through dialogue and preserve the accord.**

The Russians have said there is no violation.

But American officials say Moscow is all but openly deploying a prohibited missile that the West calls the **SSC-8, a land-based cruise missile** that could be threatening to European nations.

Russian officials put a **newly modified version of that missile** on display for a foreign audience for the first time in an attempt to rebut the accusations that the weapon violates the treaty.

Trump administration officials, who first signalled last year that they would **withdraw the United States from the treaty**, said the display was meaningless in allaying their concerns.

### **Is China obliged to honour the I.N.F. Treaty?**

No, and it may be a greater concern to the Trump administration than Russia.

While the Chinese military is carving out a **greater sphere of influence** in the **Western Pacific**, the **I.N.F. Treaty constrains** the United States from placing short- and intermediate-range missiles **on land near China** as a deterrent.

For this and other reasons, Mr. Trump and his national security adviser, John R. Bolton, have called **the I.N.F. Treaty outdated.**

At the heart of this worrisome **echo of the Cold War years** is the changing balance of power in **global nuclear politics** heralded by **China's rise as a regional hegemon** its growing arsenal poses a threat in the eyes of strategists in Washington.

In 2018, the **U.S. Nuclear Posture Review** noted that Beijing was steaming forward with the **expansion of its cruise-missile arsenal, potentially neutralising** the capability of American warships that could seek to approach the Chinese coastline during a standoff.

### **Conclusion:**

The United States and Russia suspended a **crucial nuclear weapons treaty**, a move that has sparked concerns of a budding arms race between the world's two biggest nuclear powers.

Mr. Trump's thinking may rest on the fact that he could **now develop ground-launched missiles**, and perhaps keep **Moscow's aggression in check** through a **military-posture superiority**, and also save the exchequer some cash, for this option is cheaper than cruise missiles that can be **fired from aircraft, ships, or submarines**.

Withdrawing **without exhausting** all available **diplomatic options** to resolve the compliance dispute makes it **more difficult for Washington** to control the narrative around the collapse of the treaty, and allows Russia to pursue the development and deployment of **intermediate-range systems without restriction**. Nevertheless, in **pulling out of the INF**, Washington is effectively throwing away leverage it may have had with Russia **on an issue of global concern**.