

# **US and Russian Withdrawal from the INF Treaty: Implications for the Future of Arms Control and Strategic Stability**

Statement by  
Ambassador Alexander Vershbow  
Distinguished Fellow at the Atlantic Council's  
Scowcroft Center for Strategy and Security  
before the  
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Mr. Chairman, Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the invitation to offer my views on the implications of the imminent demise of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty for the future of arms control and strategic stability with Russia. It's an honor to be here with former Senator Richard Lugar, who has played such a prominent role in efforts to prevent nuclear proliferation following the end of the Cold War and the break-up of the Soviet Union, and with my former State Department colleague, Paula DeSutter.

The 1987 INF Treaty is the most significant arms control agreement negotiated between the United States and the Soviet Union. It had a transformational impact in ending the Cold War and stabilizing the relationship between the West and Moscow for more than three decades. I worked on the INF issue during my first assignment at the State Department in the late 1970s, and this led to a career-long involvement in efforts to transform NATO-Russia relations from conflict to cooperation. The loss of this landmark treaty as a result of Russia's violation worries me deeply on both the personal and professional level as it creates an uncertain future for the United States and its Allies.

The INF issue began as a transatlantic crisis, a crisis of confidence in the US commitment to the defense of Europe. Our NATO Allies, led by German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt, argued that the Soviet deployment of the SS-20 intermediate-range ballistic missile in the mid-1970s had destabilized the strategic balance which had been steadied by the SALT I agreements of 1972. The Allies' concern was that Russia's ability to strike Europe with the SS-20 could "decouple" the United States from its Allies by forcing the United States either to escalate to the use of strategic forces in response to an SS-20 strike – triggering World War III – or to capitulate.

To avoid this dilemma and bolster deterrence, Allies agreed in 1979 to counter the SS-20 with the deployment of US Pershing II and ground-launched cruise missiles in Europe, to begin in 1982. The Pershing and cruise missile systems would enable the United States and NATO to target Soviet territory with non-strategic INF systems, restoring a semblance of balance and depriving the Soviets of "escalation dominance."

But the short warning times inherent in both sides' INF deployments increased fears of a preemptive attack and heightened the risk of miscalculation and uncontrolled escalation in the event of a crisis. While the United States and NATO offered to restore the *status quo ante* with the "zero option," the Soviet reaction was to walk out of the negotiations when the first INF systems were deployed in 1983. They hoped to foment public opposition in NATO countries to derail the US deployments while retaining their SS-20s.

Fortunately, NATO solidarity held, and President Ronald Reagan and Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev had the vision four years later not just to limit INF systems, but to eliminate this entire class of systems, both nuclear- and conventionally-armed. The INF Treaty increased stability in Europe and gave a strong impetus to reductions in strategic nuclear weapons. Although it was a bilateral agreement between Washington and Moscow, the INF Treaty became a cornerstone of European security and stability. NATO's dual-track decision – the offer to reduce US deployments if the Soviets agreed to reduce their SS-20s – proved to be a powerful demonstration of how to negotiate from a position of strength. It opened the way to progress in multilateral negotiations to reduce conventional armed forces in Europe in the 1990s.

All that progress is now at risk with the US Administration's decision to suspend its implementation of the INF Treaty and withdraw from the Treaty, together with Russia's decision to follow suit. The risk is only magnified by the significant deterioration in the wider relationship between the West and Russia in recent years. Over the past decade, we and our Allies have faced an increasingly aggressive, revisionist Russia that has up-ended the international order established at the end of the Cold War – invading and occupying parts of Ukraine and Georgia, changing borders by force, and undermining Western democracies using cyber attacks and information warfare. Today's Russian leaders may be more prepared to use their nuclear weapons coercively than were Soviet leaders in the 1970s and 1980s as part of their strategy to weaken NATO and reestablish domination over Russia's neighbors.

The Administration's decision to withdraw from the INF Treaty is legally justified, but politically questionable. From a legal standpoint, Russia is clearly in material breach of its obligations under the Treaty. US intelligence agencies all agree that Russia has for several years been developing and testing a ground-launched cruise missile with a demonstrated range that far exceeds the Treaty limit of 500 kilometers. Last year, it began to deploy the illegal system, called the 9M729 (or SS-C-8 in NATO terminology), with around 100 missiles now in the field.

The Administration has a point in arguing that it is difficult to justify the United States continuing to comply with a Treaty that the other side is clearly violating. Our NATO Allies, having seen the evidence of Russia's non-compliance, have supported the US decision to withdraw as a legal matter, and have not bought into Russia's dubious counter-charges that it is the United States, not Russia, that has violated the Treaty.

But our Allies are concerned that, politically, we have given a gift to President Putin, who has long sought to escape the INF Treaty's limitations. Since at least 2005, Putin has advocated withdrawing from the INF Treaty so that Russia could counter the INF missiles of countries like China and Pakistan not subject to the INF Treaty's constraints. Using Russia's allegations of US violations of the Treaty as justification, Putin now appears bent on deploying INF systems and other new nuclear capabilities as part of his strategy of intimidating NATO and recapturing the "escalation dominance" Russia lost when it scrapped the SS-20. Our withdrawal from the Treaty will give Russia free rein to rapidly deploy ground-launched versions of its newest cruise missiles and hypersonic weapons, in addition to the 9M729.

The United States and its Allies have kept the door open to a diplomatic solution to preserve the INF Treaty in the remaining months while it remains in force, albeit suspended. They have made clear that, if Russia agrees to dismantle its illegal ground-launched cruise missile, the United States could reverse its decision to suspend implementation and withdraw from the Treaty. But last-ditch negotiations have gone nowhere. Russia has dug in on its claims that the 9M729 is compliant with the INF Treaty and that the United States is to blame, making it unlikely that a diplomatic solution will be found. It seems inevitable that the Treaty will become a dead letter at the beginning of August, six months after the United States gave notice of withdrawal.

In my view, however, we should not give up on other possible arms control solutions that could, at least, mitigate the effects of the demise of the INF Treaty. President Trump mentioned the possibility of a "different treaty" in his State of the Union address, and President Putin said last week that Russia would not be the first to introduce new INF systems. So far, it appears that Russia's illegal cruise missile, the 9M729, while capable of carrying a nuclear warhead, has only been deployed as a conventional system. The United States and NATO, for their part, have thus far downplayed any intention to deploy new nuclear-armed missiles in Europe in response to Russia's violation of the Treaty.

One possible solution, therefore, would be to challenge Russia to agree to a mutual renunciation of all nuclear-armed, land-based INF-range missiles (including the 9M729) and to agree to mutual inspections to verify that no nuclear-armed versions are deployed by either side. As part of this arrangement – which could be based on informal, reciprocal declarations rather than formal negotiations – the United States and its allies could agree to Russian inspections of the US missile defense site in Romania and the similar site under construction in Poland to confirm that they have no offensive capability as Moscow has alleged. In addition, the sides could agree to numerical limits on the number of conventionally-armed systems that would be permitted.

Another solution would be for the United States and Russia to agree to refrain from deploying any land-based INF systems in or within range of Europe, while permitting some agreed number of such systems in Asia. This would address the Russian and US interest in offsetting the INF capabilities of China and other Indo-Pacific countries while avoiding further destabilization of the situation in Europe.

A successor agreement along the above lines could help maintain stability and avert an unconstrained competition in intermediate-range systems. It could also improve the climate for negotiations on an extension of the New Strategic Arms Reductions Treaty (New START) prior to its expiration in 2021. That Treaty is still being observed by both sides and will soon be the only remaining, legally binding agreement that limits the nuclear weapons of the United States and Russia. New START remains in both sides' interest in terms of reducing strategic nuclear weapons in a balanced, verifiable way and in ensuring transparency and predictability regarding each side's capabilities.

Until we have exhausted the possibilities for a successor to the INF Treaty, we should proceed cautiously on the question of military measures to counter the Russian violation of the Treaty. We should review the options in close consultation with our NATO Allies, who literally could be caught in the crossfire of any new US-Russian missile competition in Europe. NATO has a lot of work still to be done to strengthen its overall defense and deterrence posture in Europe – including steps to increase readiness and reinforcement capacity and to counter Russian cyber and hybrid threats. Deploying new intermediate-range, land-based missiles in Europe is not essential to these efforts and could be politically divisive within the Alliance.

In fact, there are many existing US programs that could be adapted to negate the military advantage the Russians' hope to gain with the 9M729 and other INF-range systems, without developing a new intermediate-range ground-launched cruise missile of our own. These include deploying additional air-to-surface missiles like the JASSM-ER (Joint Air-to-Surface Standoff Missile - Extended Range) on US and Allied aircraft, developing a conventional version of the new LRSO (Long-Range Stand-Off system), the successor to existing air-launched cruise missiles, and deploying a new-generation sea-launched cruise missile to replace the Tomahawk. We could also deploy additional missile defense systems to protect key military sites against Russian cruise missile threats.

NATO's assessment of the options should focus on conventional solutions. But we and our Allies should make clear to Moscow that if Russia proceeds with the deployment of nuclear-armed INF missiles along NATO's borders, we do not rule out new nuclear-armed systems of our own. We should keep the onus on Moscow for any new arms competition in Europe.

One last point: There may be a stronger case for deploying conventionally-armed, intermediate-range ground-launched missile systems (cruise and ballistic) in the Asia-Pacific region than in Europe. They could serve as a counter to China's significant INF capabilities and its capacity to threaten US bases in Japan and Korea. Such systems could enhance our ability to suppress Chinese air defenses and engage their naval vessels from longer distances. It remains to be seen, however, whether our Japanese and Korean allies would agree to host these systems, once developed, or whether it would be more realistic to continue to rely on air- and sea-launched systems for these missions.