

National Security

U.S. to withdraw from nuclear arms control treaty with Russia, raising fears of a new arms race

The Trump administration announced Friday that the United States will pull out of a nuclear arms control treaty with Russia, ending a cornerstone Cold War agreement and raising fears of a new nuclear arms race in Europe and Asia.

President Trump said Russia is violating the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, a charge Moscow denies, leaving the United States at a disadvantage because of its own compliance at a time when global threats have changed considerably in the more than 30 years since the pact was signed.

“We cannot be the only country in the world unilaterally bound by this treaty, or any other,” Trump said in a statement. “We will move forward with developing our own military response options and will work with NATO and our other allies and partners to deny Russia any military advantage from its unlawful conduct.”

The treaty has been a central element of Europe’s security strategy for more than three decades and its signing was considered a crucial moment in Cold War arms control, eliminating more than 2,600 missiles and ending a years-long standoff with nuclear missiles in Europe.

But the Trump administration has argued that Russia has not been complying with the pact since 2014 and that it puts the United States at a military disadvantage against China, which is not bound by the treaty.

President Trump said Feb. 1 he wants a "new treaty" to replace the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces treaty with Russia, from which the U.S. plans to withdraw. (Photo: Oliver Contreras/The Washington Post)

The collapse of the pact highlights the cost of poor relations between Washington and Moscow, which even during the Cold War managed to hammer out mutually agreeable arms control pacts.

The withdrawal also signals the increasing peril treaties face in a Trump administration that emphasizes national sovereignty over international cooperation. In addition to withdrawing from the INF Treaty, Trump has also left the Iran nuclear deal and Paris climate accord and threatened to pull out of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and World Trade Organization. His withdrawal from the INF Treaty has fueled concerns that he will decline to extend the main nuclear arms treaty with Russia and risk a return to the early days of the nuclear arms race.

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