

Statement of the Deep Cuts Commission on the INF-Treaty Crisis and the Way forward

(16 November 2018)

For more than 25 years, the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty has verifiably prohibited U.S. and Russian ground-based INF systems and successfully reduced the risk of nuclear escalation and an arms race in Europe.

Although NATO has repeatedly declared it remains “fully committed to the preservation of this landmark arms control treaty,” U.S. President Donald Trump has announced that he intends to terminate the 1987 INF Treaty in response to U.S. allegations that Russia is not in compliance with the accord.

The repercussions of a collapse of the INF Treaty would be tremendous: it could trigger a new arms race, significantly increase the risk of nuclear escalation, further undermine political relations between the United States, Russia and Europe, and complicate a decision by Moscow and Washington to extend the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) before its scheduled expiration date in 2021. Without INF or New START, there would be no legally binding, verifiable limits on the world’s two largest nuclear arsenals, or indeed anywhere else in the world.

Since 2013 the Deep Cuts Commission, an independent trilateral U.S., Russian and German expert project, has published numerous articles and suggestions to resolve the INF Treaty dispute, to preserve the remaining arms control agenda, including the extension of New START, and called for structured and regular talks to enhance strategic stability between the United States, Russia and China.¹ The U.S. allegations about a non-compliant Russian ground-launched cruise missile (the 9M729) are serious, as are Russian concerns that

¹ Over 40 experts signed the statement “Urgent Steps to Avoid a New Nuclear Arms Race and Dangerous Miscalculation” on 18 April 2018 See: https://www.armscontrol.org/sites/default/files/files/documents/DCC_1804018_FINAL.pdf

launchers (the Mk-41) for the NATO missile interceptors in Romania (and soon in Poland) could be used to field offensive missiles prohibited by the INF Treaty.

U.S. and Russian officials have not yet exhausted available options to preserve the INF Treaty. To break the impasse, we have proposed that both sides need to acknowledge the concerns of the other side and that Washington and Moscow should agree to reciprocal visits by experts to examine the missiles and the deployment sites in dispute. If the 9M729 missile is determined to have a range that exceeds 500 km, Russia could modify the missile to ensure it no longer violates the treaty or, ideally, halt production and eliminate any such missiles as well as associated launchers in its possession.

For its part, the United States could modify its missile defense launchers to clearly distinguish them from the launchers used to fire offensive missiles from U.S. warships, or agree to transparency measures that give Russia confidence the launchers cannot fire offensive missiles. Such an arrangement would address the concerns of both sides and offer a face-saving approach to restore compliance with the treaty.

In a meeting this past spring, Trump administration officials apparently proposed to Russia that it eliminate the 9M729 missile, but there have been no follow-on discussions on the option and no offer for reciprocal measures to address Russia's concerns.

We believe the United States and Russia should exhaust all cooperative options to solve the INF Treaty crisis instead of scrapping the treaty. When presidents Trump and Putin meet in Argentina at the upcoming G-20 Summit, they should acknowledge the other side's INF concerns and direct their experts to find a solution that resolves compliance concerns. They should agree to relaunch immediately a genuine and regular dialogue on strategic stability and commit to begin talks on the extension of New START by a period of five years, as provided for in Article XIV of the treaty.

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