

U.S. TO PULL OUT OF INF TREATY

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We are out: U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo holding a news briefing in Washington on Friday. AFP/CHIP SOMODEVILLA

The U.S. is suspending its obligations under the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty effective February 2 and will withdraw from the treaty in six months, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said at a press briefing that lasted less for about eight minutes.

The treaty, signed during the Cold War in 1987, bans ground-launched missiles with a range of 500 km-5,500 km. It was key to ending the arms race between the (then) two superpowers and helped protect the U.S.'s NATO allies in Europe from Soviet missile attacks. The U.S. will formally give Russia and the other treaty parties a formal notice that it is withdrawing under Article XV of the Treaty, Mr. Pompeo said. Article XV mandates a six-month notice period before withdrawal.

"Russia has jeopardised the United States' security interests and we can no longer be restricted by the treaty while Russia shamelessly violates it," Mr. Pompeo said.

"We cannot be the only country in the world unilaterally bound by this treaty, or any other," President Donald Trump said in a statement issued by the White House on Friday.

However, the Secretary left open the possibility that the treaty could be rescued in the six-month withdrawal period. "If Russia does not return to full and verifiable compliance with the treaty within this six-month period by verifiably destroying its INF-violating missiles, missile launchers and associated equipment, the treaty will terminate," he added.

The Trump and Obama administrations have repeatedly alleged that Russia was violating the treaty by fielding a ground-based cruise missile, the Novator 9M729 ("SSC-8" in NATO terminology) that could strike Europe at a short notice, an allegation that Russia has repeatedly denied. The Russians have raised counter-allegations against the U.S., with regard to launchers for antiballistic missile systems in Europe.

Full support

Mr. Pompeo thanked the U.S.'s NATO allies during his remarks. The alliance has said in a statement that it "fully supports" the U.S. decision.

Yet, the decision has raised concerns, especially in Europe, of an arms race.

The U.S. has also been concerned that China has been gaining a strategic advantage over it as it is not party to the treaty and bound by its terms. Withdrawal from the treaty will increase the weapons options for the U.S. in the Pacific, where China has increased its influence.

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