

RUSSIA SUSPENDS PARTICIPATION IN N-PACT

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: International Treaties & Agreements, and other important organizations

Framing a response: Russian President Vladimir Putin, centre, at a meeting with Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, left, and Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu in Moscow. AP/Alexei Nikolsky

President Vladimir Putin on Saturday said Russia was suspending its participation in a key Cold War-era missile treaty in a mirror response to a U.S. move the day before. Moscow and Washington have long accused the other of violating the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) agreement, which was signed in 1987.

President Donald Trump last year announced plans to withdraw unless Russia fulfilled its obligations.

Televised meeting

“Our American partners have announced they are suspending their participation in the deal, and we are also suspending our participation,” Mr. Putin said of the agreement, following a U.S. deadline for cooperation.

Mr. Putin said during a televised meeting with Foreign and Defence Ministers Sergei Lavrov and Sergei Shoigu that Russia would no longer initiate talks with the U.S. on disarmament. “We will wait until our partners have matured enough to conduct an equal, meaningful dialogue with us on this important topic,” the President said.

Brokered by U.S. President Ronald Reagan with last Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, the treaty ended a superpower build-up of warheads that had frightened Europeans. It banned ground-launched missiles with a range of 500 km to 5,500 km.

The deal addressed Soviet nuclear-tipped ballistic missiles targeting Western capitals, but put no restrictions on other major military actors such as China. President Donald Trump said on Friday that Washington was starting a process to withdraw from the agreement in six months.

60-day deadline

The U.S. in December gave Moscow a 60-day deadline to dismantle missiles it said breached the agreement. But Moscow has insisted that the disputed 9M729 missile is allowed under the treaty.

Mr. Lavrov on Saturday repeated Russian accusations that Washington itself has been in violation of the deal for many years. The Foreign Minister said Russia had “tried everything to save the treaty” in several rounds of diplomatic talks.

Mr. Putin also said Russia would “not be drawn into a costly new arms race”. Russia would only deploy intermediate- and short-range missiles in Europe or elsewhere in answer to similar moves from the U.S., he added. European leaders have voiced fears over the consequences of the treaty’s demise and called on Russia to address concerns before the U.S. formally leaves in August. Beijing on Saturday also expressed concern over the mutual suspension, calling for the U.S. and Russia to engage in “constructive dialogue”.

Mr. Lavrov at Saturday's meeting voiced concerns that Washington's decision to withdraw from the INF could jeopardise the extension of the New START treaty. That agreement, which caps the number of nuclear warheads held by Washington and Moscow, expires in 2021.

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