

U.S. TO PULL OUT OF RUSSIA MISSILE PACT

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: Effect of policies and politics of developed countries on India's interests

U.S. President Donald Trump with National Security Advisor John Bolton in April. AFP/NICHOLAS KAMM

U.S. President Donald Trump confirmed that the U.S. would pull out of the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty with Russia, a crucial Cold War-era treaty banning the development, testing and possession of short and medium range ground-launched nuclear missiles with a range of 500-5,000 km. The treaty, signed in 1987, was central to ending the arms race between the two superpowers, and protected America's NATO allies in Europe from Soviet missile attacks.

John Bolton, Mr Trump's National Security Advisor, is in Moscow on a visit and is expected to convey the decision to the Russians. At issue is Russia's alleged development and deployment of the Novator 9M729 missile, also known as the SSC-8, that could strike Europe at short notice, an allegation that Russia has repeatedly denied. "Russia has violated the agreement. They've been violating it for many years... so we're going to terminate the agreement. We're going to pull out," Mr. Trump told reporters.

'Obama didn't negotiate'

Accusations of Russia violating the treaty pre-date the Trump presidency, and go back to 2008. "I don't know why President Obama didn't negotiate or pull out. And we're not going to let them violate a nuclear agreement and go out and do weapons and we're not allowed to," said Mr. Trump.

The U.S. administration, under former President Barack Obama, raised the issue of Russia testing a ground-launched cruise missile with Russian President Vladimir Putin in 2014. The Russians denied the allegations and raised counter-allegations of the U.S. installing missile defence systems in Europe.

While the two countries failed to find a resolution using the dispute resolution mechanism in the treaty, the U.S. continued to remain party to the treaty under pressure from its European allies. Mr. Bolton, known to be a hawk, has been the driving force behind the U.S.'s decision to withdraw from the INF, *The New York Times* had reported on Friday, prior to Mr. Trump announcing the withdrawal. U.S. Defense Secretary James Mattis had told NATO Ministers earlier in October that the U.S. would withdraw from the INF if Russia did not roll-back its Novator missiles.

A withdrawal will allow the U.S. new weapon options in the Pacific in its efforts to counter China's growing influence. There are also concerns that the treaty's end could mark the beginning of a new arms race between the U.S. and Russia.

Russia's warning

The Russian government on Sunday warned the U.S. against such a withdrawal. "If the Americans continue to act as crudely and bluntly... and unilaterally withdraw from all sorts of agreement and mechanisms from the Iran deal to the International Postal treaty, then we'll be reduced to taking action in response, including of a military nature. But we don't want to go that

far,” said Russia’s Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov.

Reactions across Europe were varied. The German Foreign Minister, Heiko Maas, called Mr Trump’s decision “regrettable” and the U.K. Defence Secretary, Gavin Williamson, said Britain would remain “absolutely resolute” in standing by the U.S. in its position against Russia.

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