



Hawkish move

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The U.S.'s unilateral withdrawal from a nuclear treaty threatens to kick-start a new arms race

- The Donald Trump administration's decision to withdraw from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) treaty with Russia is a retrograde step.
- Signed in 1987 by Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev, it barred both countries from deploying land-launched cruise missiles in the 500- to 5,500-km range.
- However, Russia appears to have been covertly violating it in letter and spirit.
- The U.S. in 2008 expressed concern over the Russian Novator 9M729 missile tests and in 2014 alleged that Moscow was testing a ground-based cruise missile.
- Yet, the U.S. response cannot be regarded as purely retaliatory.
- There is now a sense of alarm that the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START), which limits both countries' arsenal of intercontinental ballistic missiles, and will lapse in 2021, might be scrapped next.
- At the heart of this worrisome echo of the Cold War years is the changing balance of power in global nuclear politics heralded by China's rise as a regional hegemon; its growing arsenal poses a threat in the eyes of strategists in Washington.
- Shifting geo-politics also requires that European concerns be factored into strategic discussions on the INF, particularly because it is Europe that is most immediately threatened by the Russian stockpile.
- Nevertheless, in pulling out of the INF, Washington is effectively throwing away leverage it may have had with Russia on an issue of global concern.

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