

Press Releases: Press Availability at NATO Headquarters

Press Availability
Michael R. Pompeo

Secretary of State

Brussels, Belgium
December 4, 2018

SECRETARY POMPEO: Good evening, everyone. I want to begin this evening by expressing my condolences to the Bush family on the passing of a great man, President George H. W. Bush. He embodied literally the best of America in his devotion to public service and his ardent patriotism. My wife Susan and I mourn with President Trump and all of our fellow Americans as we celebrate his incredible life. Tomorrow I will join the President and my fellow cabinet members in honoring him during America's national day of mourning.

President Bush, during his entire lifetime, was a relentless defender of transatlantic security. Today, we strive to emulate his example by asserting powerful American leadership on behalf of our people and our allies. When the INF Treaty was inked in 1987, it represented a good-faith effort between two

rivals to de-escalate the threat of nuclear war. President Reagan described it as the realization of “an impossible vision,” and Mikhail Gorbachev said it had “universal significance for mankind.”

But whatever successes this treaty helped produce, today we must confront Russian cheating on its arms control obligations. As I told my fellow ministers earlier today, our nations have a choice. We either bury our head in the sand or we take common-sense action in response to Russia’s flagrant disregard for the express terms of the INF Treaty.

It’s worth noting that Russia’s violations didn’t happen overnight. Russia’s been flight-testing the SSC-8 cruise missile since the mid-2000s. They’ve been testing it in excess of ranges that the treaty permits. All the tests of the SSC-8 have originated from a Kapustin Yar site from both a fixed and mobile launcher. Its range makes it a direct menace to Europe.

In 2017, General Selva of the Joint Chiefs of Staff told Congress that Russia had deployed its missile, and I quote, “in order to pose a threat to NATO and to facilities within the NATO area of responsibility,” end of quote. Russia continues to press forward, and as of late 2018 has filled multiple battalions of the SSC-8 missiles.

Throughout all of this, the United States has remained in scrupulous compliance with the treaty. In spite of Russia’s violations, we have exercised the utmost patience and effort in working to convince Russia to adhere to its terms. On at least 30 occasions since 2013, extending to the highest levels of leadership, we have raised Russia’s noncompliance and stressed that a failure to return to compliance would have consequences.

Russia’s reply has been consistent: deny any wrongdoing, demand more information, and issue baseless counter-accusations. For more than four years, Moscow has pretended that it didn’t know what missile or test the United States was even talking about, even when we provided extensive information about the missile’s characteristics and testing history. It was not until we chose to publicize the Russian name of the missile in November of 2017 that Russia finally acknowledged its existence. Then Russia changed its cover story from the missile that does not exist to the missile that exists but is treaty-compliant.

These violations of the INF Treaty cannot be viewed in isolation from the larger pattern of Russian lawlessness on the world stage. The list of Russia’s infamous acts is long: Georgia, Ukraine, Syria, election meddling, Skripal, and now the Kerch Strait, to name just a few.

In light of these facts, the United States today declares it has found Russia in material breach of the treaty and will suspend our obligations as a remedy effective in 60 days unless Russia returns to full and verifiable compliance.

We’re taking these steps for several reasons. First, Russia’s actions gravely undermine American national security and that of our allies and partners. It makes no sense for the United States to remain in a treaty that constrains our ability to respond to Russia’s violations. Russia has reversed the

trajectory of diminishing nuclear risk in Europe, where America has tens of thousands of troops and where millions more American civilians are living and working. These Americans live and work alongside many more millions of Europeans who are put in danger by Russian missile systems.

Second, while Russia is responsible for the demise of the treaty, many other states – including China, North Korea, and Iran – are not parties to the INF Treaty. This leaves them free to build all the intermediate range missiles that they would like. There is no reason the United States should continue to cede this crucial military advantage to revisionist powers like China, in particular when these weapons are being used to threaten and coerce the United States and its allies in Asia.

If you ask the question why the treaty wasn't enlarged to include more nations, including China, keep in mind that it has been tried three times without any success already, and it has failed each time.

Third, inertia will not drive policy in the Trump administration. As President Trump has made clear and as I spoke about this morning, the United States will not support international agreements that undermine our security, our interests, or our values.

Finally, and I want to be clear about this, America is upholding the rule of law. When we set forth our commitments, we agree to be bound by them. We expect the same of our treaty counterparts everywhere, and we will hold them accountable when their words prove untrustworthy. If we do not, we'll get cheated by other nations, expose Americans to greater risk, and squander our credibility.

Earlier today, I spoke on America's enduring leadership role in the international order and I reiterate that powerful American leadership means never abandoning our responsibility to protect our security and our nation's sovereignty. I've stated our position in no uncertain terms. The United States remains hopeful that our relationship with Russia can get better, can get on better footing.

With that being said, the burden falls on Russia to make the necessary changes. Only they can save this treaty. If Russia admits its violations and fully and verifiably comes back into compliance we will, of course, welcome that course of action. But Russia and Russia only can take this step.

We appreciate NATO's strong support for the United States decision as expressed in this statement released today. The United States and our NATO allies stand vigilant that Russia's lawless conduct will not be tolerated in the realm of arms control or anywhere else.

Thank you.

MS NAUERT: We have time for several questions. The first one goes to Teri Schultz from Deutsche Welle. Teri.

QUESTION: Hi. Thank you. Secretary Pompeo, I'm here.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Got you.

QUESTION: What does this mean concretely? What will the next steps be? Are you just waiting the 60 days and hoping that Europe can help pull Russia back into compliance? What exactly – how exactly will this play out now? And then does the six months start in 60 days? Just a few more details on that. Thank you.

SECRETARY POMPEO: You bet. So as I said in my remarks, we would welcome a Russian change of heart, a change in direction, the destruction of their program and their follow-on continuance of the terms of the treaty. And so over the next 60 days they have every chance to do so. And we would welcome that.

I will tell you, our European partners appreciate that extra time. We work closely with them. They asked for an extended period, and we, in our efforts to make sure that we had complete unity – and I will tell you, as you speak to the other 28 ministers who are here today, there is complete unity around this – we believe this is the right outcome. The six-month period will begin to run 60 days from now. During the 60 days, we will still not test or produce or deploy any systems, and we'll see what happens during this 60-day period.

We've talked to the Russians a great deal. We're hopeful they'll change course, but there's been no indication to date that they have any intention of doing so.

MS NAUERT: Jessica Donati from *Wall Street Journal*.

QUESTION: Yeah. Thank you. Beyond withdrawing from the – or suspending your membership of the INF Treaty, what other steps can you do to help Ukraine in what it's suffering at the hands of Russia?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So there was lots of discussion about that today. I'll leave to a couple of others to talk about the conversations. But two things were very clear from the time that we spent with the Ukrainian foreign minister as a group, is that there is complete unanimity that the Russian action was lawless and unacceptable and deterrents must be restored, and that that is a collective commitment of Europe and the world to deny Russia the capacity to continue to violate basic international law norms. We hope that the Russians will return the sailors that they're holding today, just immediately. And we will collectively develop a set of responses that demonstrate to Russia that this behavior is simply unacceptable.

MS NAUERT: Emerald Robinson from One America News.

QUESTION: Thank you, Mr. Secretary. You talked about, yes, the commitments with treaties in regards to the United States and its allies. But you also talked about international institutions and gave America's viewpoint on that. You called out specifically the IMF and the World Bank and the UN. How do you think so many large international institutions can be reformed today? Is it a question of new leadership?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Every institution needs to be evaluated consistently, right. That doesn't – multilateral, international organizations are no different. These organizations have now been around for an extended period of time, and each of them is worthy of full review. Do they still – are they still fit for purpose? Do they still serve their intended means? That's what I spoke about this morning.

President Trump believes that if we exert American leadership and American national sovereignty and we evaluate these institutions against the objective of creating prosperity and peace around the world, that each of them is ripe for some piece of reform. And we'll look at the parts that are working as I – and I described several institutions' functions that are working. We'll keep those. We'll enhance those. We'll want to be part of those.

But if it's broken and it's not delivering for America and for the world then we ought not rest on our laurels and think, "boy, that's good," just because it's multilateral. That notion that the mere nature of something being multilateral is not in and of itself a good. The things that are good are the things that flow, the things that follow from the work that nation-states do as part of those multilateral organizations, and the United States is intent on being a leader to make sure each of those institutions that you mentioned is delivering.

MS NAUERT: Last question, Guy Taylor from *Washington Times*.

QUESTION: Thank you, Mr. Secretary. Back to the INF Treaty just for a second. You mentioned the prospect of the U.S. developing and deploying systems that would otherwise be in violation of the treaty. From a strategic perspective, is that kind of deployment something that the administration, the Trump administration, is really now preparing to do? And can you speak perhaps to European concerns about the prospect of the deployment of midrange nuclear weapons across Western Europe, for instance, that have been banned by this treaty for so long?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So I can say two things about that today. European nations can rest assured that as we prepare how we will all protect and create stability in Europe and around the world from the threat of intermediate nuclear range missiles, and those in particular from Russia, that we will be working closely with our European allies and other allies throughout the world who are also threatened by these missile systems. And so it won't come to a surprise anyone what the United States is thinking, how we're approaching it, and we will look for their assistance, their help, their inputs in how to develop a security architecture – an architecture that actually delivers.

I mean, we – just to be clear, we had a party – a treaty that had two parties, only one of which was compliant. That's not an agreement. That's just self-restraint, and it strategically no longer made sense to remain in that position and we'll develop our course forward. I don't want to say much about what the United States policy is going to be because there are lots of folks still to talk to. And I will also leave to the Department of Defense the nature and work that they're doing on systems that will ultimately

potentially be noncompliant.

MS NAUERT: Okay, thank you very much everyone. Thank you.

The Office of Website Management, Bureau of Public Affairs, manages this site as a portal for information from the U.S. State Department. External links to other Internet sites should not be construed as an endorsement of the views or privacy policies contained therein.