

NATO Secretary-General Stoltenberg's INF Response Is Inadequate

Authored by Daryl G. Kimball on Mon, 2019-07-15 13:21

Russian pursuit of the 9M729 intermediate-range missile, which is banned under the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, is unacceptable and merits a strong response. But NATO Secretary-General Stoltenberg's formula, as expressed in a new op-ed published in the German-language [Frankfurter Allgemeine](#), is inadequate.

In his July 14 essay, the Secretary-General embraces the Trump administration's decision to terminate the treaty August 2 without a realistic plan to help resolve the long-running compliance dispute. This move, combined with the possibility of new U.S. ground-launched cruise missiles in Europe—is risky and unwise as it opens the door to a new phase of destabilizing INF missile competition with Russia.

Furthermore, Stoltenberg fails to mention that [U.S. officials have refused thus far to take up Russia's offer to discuss "any mutually beneficial proposals that take into account the interests and concerns of both parties."](#)

Options that address Russian concerns about U.S. missile defense launchers in Romania and Poland—which are capable of firing offensive missiles—and that encourage the verifiable elimination of Russian noncompliant cruise missiles might have resolved the INF Treaty dispute. Failure by both sides to take such diplomatic engagement more seriously since the 9M729 (aka the SSC-8) missile was first tested five years ago has brought us to this point.

The Secretary-General reiterates his pledge that "NATO allies have no intention of developing and deploying medium-range nuclear land-based missiles in Europe. We will not reflect the behavior of Russia. Because we do not want a new arms race and we remain committed to effective arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation."

These words may sound reassuring, but Stoltenberg fails to mention that NATO will soon entertain [an American scheme to deploy ground-launched cruise missiles and other intermediate-range missiles in Europe](#). The Trump administration is pressing Congress for \$100 million for a program to develop and test the missiles. The Department of Defense plans to begin flight testing a ground-based variant of its Tomahawk ground-launched cruise missile (GLCM) just a few weeks after it pulls out of the INF Treaty August 2.

By seeking to deploy new, intermediate-range missiles in Europe, the Trump administration wants to counter Russia's 50-75 nuclear-capable, but very likely conventionally-armed, 9M729 ground-launched cruise missiles that have been deployed so far. Given that the United States and NATO forces current can hold hundreds of key Russian military targets at risk using their existing array of sea-, land-, and air-based conventional strike weapons and missiles, new U.S. intermediate-range missiles are militarily unnecessary.

Contrary to Stoltenberg's assurances, any agreement by NATO to deploy U.S. conventionally-armed, ground-launched cruise missiles in Europe would indeed "reflect the behavior of Russia."

Russia would undoubtedly see any such missile deployment, whether with conventional or nuclear warheads, as a direct threat to its leadership and command-and-control centers — and NATO's eastward expansion allows these weapons to be placed on the Russian doorstep and where they could hit key targets within minutes.

Russia would very likely respond in kind with more intermediate-range missiles. If both sides begin to deploy intermediate-range ballistic missiles and ground-launched cruise missiles, Europe will be less secure and the risk of a military incident or miscommunication leading to a full-scale war with Russia

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will increase.

Furthermore, Stoltenberg claims that NATO remains committed to effective arms control, but he fails to endorse the preservation of the 2010 New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START), which will expire in 2021 if Presidents Trump and Putin do not agree to extend it as allowed under Article XIV of the agreement. The treaty verifiably limits the long-range nuclear weapons of the Russian Federation and the United States to no more than 1,550 warheads and 700 delivery systems each.

Although Washington acknowledges Moscow is abiding by the treaty, Trump has not decided to extend the agreement, and [his treaty-averse National Security Advisor John Bolton says an extension is "unlikely."](#) Without INF and without New START, there would be no legally-binding limits on the world's two largest nuclear arsenals for the first time since 1972.

A new and more serious NATO commitment to arms control is needed to protect Europe and the United States. NATO could declare as a bloc that no alliance members will field any INF Treaty-prohibited missiles or any equivalent new nuclear capabilities in Europe so long as Russia does not deploy treaty-prohibited systems where they could hit NATO territory.

This would require Russia to dismantle or move at least some currently deployed 9M929 missiles. As the United States and Russia dispute the range of that missile, perhaps they could agree to bar deployments west of the Ural mountains. The U.S. and Russian presidents could agree to this "no-first INF missile deployment plan" through an executive agreement that would be verified through national technical means of intelligence and monitoring mechanisms available through the Open Skies Treaty and Vienna Document.

Finally, if the NATO secretary-general is truly "committed to effective arms control," he, along with all NATO members, need to join the [European Union](#)—as well as leading [independent nuclear security experts from around the world](#)—in calling upon the United States work with Russia to extend New START by five-years and pursue new negotiations to further reduce excessive strategic, intermediate, and tactical nuclear weapons arsenals in Russia, the United States, and Europe.

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