The Brookings Institution
5 on 45: What the demise of the INF treaty means
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PITA: You're listening to 5 on 45 from the Brookings Podcast Network, analysis and commentary from Brookings experts on today's news regarding the Trump administration.

ROSE: My name is Frank Rose and I'm a senior fellow for security and strategy in the Foreign Policy Program at the Brookings Institution. Today I'd like to discuss the demise of the Intermediate Nuclear Forces or IMF treaty and its implications for strategic stability.

The IMF treaty prohibits parties to the agreement from producing possessing or flight-testing ground launch intermediate range cruise or ballistic missiles with a range of between 500 and 1500 kilometers. The treaty was originally signed by the United States in the Soviet Union in 1987. On February 1st, 2019, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced that the United States was suspending its obligations under the Einav treaty and providing Russia and the other treaty parties with formal notice that the United States is withdrawing from the IMF treaty effective in six months pursuant to Article 15 of the treaty. According to Secretary Pompeo this action was being taken in direct response to Russia's violation of the IMF treaty by flight test day, A 9M729 cruise missile beyond 500 kilometers. The following day Russian President Vladimir Putin announced that Russia in response to the US announcement was also suspending its obligations under the treaty. How did we get to this point? And what steps should the United States take to ensure that the demise of the IMF treaty doesn't lead to the total collapse of the strategic stability framework between the United States and Russia?

Russia has expressed concerns about the relevance of the IMF treaty for many years. Indeed, in a 2004 timeframe the Russians proposed the United States and Russia jointly withdraw from the treaty, arguing that it no longer reflected the security situation in Eurasia especially the proliferation of medium and intermediate range missiles by states like China, North Korea, India, Pakistan, and Iran. While the Bush administration declined

to take Russia up on its offer for a joint withdrawal from the treaty. Based on the timelines associated with developing major weapons systems, it is probably around this time that Russia embarked on the development of this treaty prohibited ground launch cruise missile. In July 2014, the Obama administration declared that Russia was in non-compliance of its obligations not to flight test a ground launched cruise missile with a range of between 500 and 1500 kilometers. Prior to the public designation of Russian noncompliance, the United States had been engaging Russia diplomatically on the IMF issues since 2013. In an attempt to induce Russia to return to compliance with the treaty none of those efforts over five years and under both the Obama and the Trump administrations made any progress. Therefore, I fully understand the Trump administration's decision to exit the treaty. From my perspective the key question was not whether we could have saved the IMF treaty. I think that's highly doubtful. But whether the Trump administration handled the diplomacy surrounding the exit from the treaty. In a way that effectively manages strategic stability. The Trump administration's initial announcement that it was seriously considering withdrawing from the IMF treaty was poorly handled. If the administration believed it was necessary for the United States to exit the treaty, they needed to do it in a way that one. Place the blame for killing the treaty squarely on Russia and to the NATO allies united. Unfortunately, the administration's initial announcement of the decision failed on both counts. President Trump's announcement of the decision on the sidelines of a campaign rally without any prior consultation with U.S. allies. Amounted to sheer diplomatic malpractice by making the announcement in the way they did. The Trump administration made the issue about the United States instead of Russia's violation. Where blame for the treaty's death clearly belonged. That said the Trump administration seems to have recognized the mistakes it made by failing to consult adequately with allies in late 2018. And work to ensure alliance unity in advance of last week's announcement.

Indeed, on February 1st, 2019 NATO allies noted. In response to the Russian violation, they fully support the United States decision to provide six month written notice to the treaty parties of its withdrawal. Under Article 15 of the iron AF treaty. With the IMF treaty's demise imminent. The key question now is what steps the United States should take next.

First, we need to acknowledge that the U.S.-Russia strategic stability framework established in the early 1990s in collapsing, in part because it has failed to address the changing security environment. For example, I think the Russians and other critics of the treaty have a valid point when they argue. That the IMF treaty only constrains Russian in U.S. missile capabilities. And does absolutely nothing to limit Chinese, North Korean, or Iranian systems. Therefore, the Trump administration would be wise to begin an internal process to examine what a framework for strategic stability might look like for the future. To be effective any new framework would need to incorporate new actors like China. And new technologies like cyber in outer space. It also needs to be flexible enough to address changes in the security environment. Outside groups can assist with this process as well. Indeed, later this year the Brookings Institution plans to launch a major project examining. What a new framework for strategic arms control might look like.

Second, before making any significant steps towards developing U.S. ground launch cruise missiles. The Trump administration should consult closely with allies about the political and strategic implications of deploying such systems. Given the political challenges of deploying missiles in democratic countries. There are serious questions as to whether any U.S. ally would agree to host offensive cruise missiles on their respective territories. Furthermore, the U.S. probably doesn't need ground launch cruise missiles to hold Russian and Chinese targets at risk. We can probably effectively perform that mission with sea and air launch systems.

Third with strategic relations between the United States and Russia at their lowest point since the end of the Cold War, it will be critical to maintain a dialogue between the two countries on strategic issues. Therefore, both sides should agree to convene senior level talks to address the full spectrum of strategic stability issues.

And finally, the United States and Russia should extend the new START treaty. The last remaining element of the existing U.S.-Russia strategic stability framework. Extending New START would provide both sides with vital time to work through the difficult political and technical issues associated with making a successful transition to a new framework for strategic stability.

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