

## **INF TREATY DEMISE NOT 'ALL RUSSIA'S FAULT'**

Written by John Hallam  
Saturday, 03 August 2019 17:30 -

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SUN AUG 4TH 2019

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**INF TREATY DEMISE NOT 'ALL RUSSIA'S  
FAULT',**

## **BRINGS ARMAGEDDON JUST THAT BIT CLOSER**

## **AN OUTBREAK OF COMMONSENSE WON'T BE THE END OF THE WORLD**

The Demise of the INF treaty, announced yesterday by NATO's Jen Stoltenberg and in the US by the Trump administration, is not, in spite of the rhetoric condemning Russia, 'all Russia's fault'.

## Is/was Russia 'Egregiously' in violation of the INF?

The 9M729 missile, that supposedly violates the INF treaty range of 500Km, had, according to the Russians, a range of 480Km. It was based on an almost identical previous missile with a similar range. The 9M729 has not (yet) been tested on land to a greater range. The US says a variant has been tested at sea to a significantly greater range, but Russia insists this is not the same missile. The closer one looks, the more murky, and the less certain, does the case that the 9M729 'egregiously' violated INF treaty range constraints. While the 9M729 MAY, possibly, have a greater range than Russia admits, this has yet to be proven, nor are there any real 'flags' that would lead one to think that this is so. Yet the US and NATO proceed as if this were a 'proven' fact, that would withstand the examination of a court of law or an arbitration tribunal. **It is anything but proven.**

And the US claim has never been tested in any such tribunal though the INF treaty did provide for just that. We do NOT know for certain that the range of the 9M729 is greater than the 480Km Russia says it is. It may or may not be.

### So What?

Be that as it may.....the fact is that by eliminating the INF Treaty, Russia is now relieved of any legal restraints whatsoever on its missile systems, and has made it perfectly clear that if it wasn't building systems with ranges in excess of 500Km-5,500Km before Friday 2 Aug it will certainly do so now.

And the US is soon to test missiles in the same range category (500-5,500Km).

Jens Stoltenberg said repeatedly (and quite without factual foundation) that Russia had 'already' introduced missiles of the forbidden ranges into Europe, and thus was wholly and solely to blame for the demise of the INF.

This is not provably the case. The 9M729 might or might not be of the forbidden range. We really (to repeat) don't know one way or the other.

But it is now highly likely that missiles of the forbidden range are very likely to be introduced into Europe in the very near future – unless someone has a blinding flash of commonsense and takes up Putins offer of a 'moratorium' on such missiles, a proposal that Stoltenberg in his news conference dismissed as 'not credible'.

What will the introduction of missiles of ranges between 500 and 5,500Km do to strategic stability in Europe?

They will compress decision-making times, particularly (and asymmetrically) in Moscow, while making European cities into ultra-quick targets for Russian missiles of the 500-5500Km range category.

This means that the tripwire for a potentially civilization-ending apocalypse has been made just a bit more (quite a bit more) sensitive. The risk of armageddon has been increased.

For what? For a missile (the 9M729) that might or might not have technically violated the treaty, and that Russia claims did not in fact violate the treaty, and about whose real range we in fact know nothing.

In addition (and its a pretty big 'in addition), the only operational arms-control treaty now left between the US and Russia is New START, which unless extended, expires in 2021.

US National Security adviser John Bolton says its unlikely to be extended, leaving us with no formal arms control arrangements at all.

An uncontrolled arms race may or may not be 'inevitable'. After all, that depends on what other decisions will be made down the track by the US and Russia. But the indications thus far look as if one may be possible.

Nuclear posturing and provocative military exercises such as those that took place one or two years back in the Baltic States and Poland and were mirrored on the Russian side, involving nuclear-capable forces in that context, will be all the more dangerous.

Its easy to say what should happen instead.

If every Government would sign, ratify, and implement the Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), the nuclear threat would of course disappear entirely. No nuclear weapons, no threat. We can worry about global warming instead. But for some Alas! The very simplicity of the idea seems to make it hard.

In the meantime, the US and Russia in particular should implement measures to make an 'accidental apocalypse' (or a not-so-accidental one) more difficult.

These include, on a now familiar list:

'No First Use' – both countries should agree, or should decide unilaterally, not to initiate nuclear war.

Presidential Candidate Elizabeth Warren has said she would do this – every candidate should do it.

'De-Alerting' – Nuclear weapons should be placed in a status in which it is no longer possible to fire them essentially at will within a timeframe of less than two minutes.

Improved Mil-to-Mil communications – procedures and physical hotlines from one military to the other that existed and were in use up to a few years ago, dating from the cold war, should be revived. They were and are still, essential safety measures.

Exercises close to the Russian border (eg in the Baltic's, Poland, Slovakia, or Romania), by either NATO forces or by Russia, and in particular by nuclear-capable forces should absolutely be avoided.

The New START agreement should be extended, and a successor agreement preferably incorporating some of these risk reduction measures, should be negotiated.

Finally governments, and organizations such as NATO, should cease and desist from blaming each other for developments such as the demise of the INF. Nobody is totally pure and blame-free, and acknowledgement that the 'other side' of an argument may have a point or three never hurt anyone.

And such an outbreak of commonsense and adulthood is what we need if we are not to risk destroying the world over disputes that are just not worth the ultimate stakes for which they are played.

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