



RUSSIA REFORM MONITOR

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AFTER THE INF, INTIMIDATION

On the heels of news that the Trump administration plans to withdraw the United States from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, Vladimir Putin has issued a shot across the bow to Washington's European allies. At a news conference on October 24th, the Russian president claimed that Russia does not want to "put Europe in such serious danger," but that Washington's decision may leave them no choice. He warned that any European nation that agrees to host future U.S. intermediate-range missiles would be inviting a potential retaliatory Russian strike in the event of a conflict. The threat, moreover, appears to have real teeth; the Alliance's Secretary General, Jens Stoltenberg, has confirmed that most European allies would likely be unwilling to host additional nuclear weapons on their soil, given the potential for Russia's deployment of its own intermediate-range missiles capable of holding the continent at risk. (*Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, October 24, 2018)

ANOTHER TRUMP-PUTIN SUMMIT ON THE HORIZON...

When U.S. National Security Advisor John Bolton traveled to Moscow last month to meet with senior Kremlin officials, he raised the idea of a second encounter between President Donald Trump and his Russian counterpart, Vladimir Putin. The idea reportedly came up when Putin voiced a desire for continued U.S.-Russian dialogue. Bolton responded by suggesting a meeting of the two presidents on the sidelines of this month's World War I Armistice 100th Anniversary commemoration in Paris.

The rest of Bolton's diplomatic discussions in Moscow centered on the recent U.S. decision to withdraw from the INF Treaty. His official agenda included meetings with Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu, Secretary of the Security Council Nikolai Patrushev, and Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov - all of which reportedly focused on the INF and steps to build dialogue since Trump and Putin's first meeting in Helsinki last July. In press conferences and interviews between meetings, Bolton emphasized Washington's motivations for withdrawing from the INF Treaty: not only is Russia already violating the treaty by deploying non-treaty-compliant missiles in Europe, but since China and other nuclear weapons states are not party to the treaty, it has outlived its usefulness as a tool in today's changed geopolitical environment. He noted that formal American withdrawal from the treaty would likely take months to complete. (*Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, October 23, 2018)

...AS BOLTON PUTS RUSSIA ON NOTICE

Bolton then traveled on to Georgia, where he wasted no time calling out the Kremlin's destabilizing behavior. In an interview with the Reuters news agency in Tbilisi, the U.S. National Security Advisor said it would be "helpful" for Moscow to cease its election meddling, its military operations in the Ukrainian conflict and the Middle East, and its use of chemical weapons in assassinations abroad. He noted that the Trump administration is weighing these kinds of behavior in its current assessment of whether to impose additional sanctions on Russian actors (*The Moscow Times*, October 26, 2018)

U.S.-RUSSIAN MILITARY TENSIONS RISE IN SYRIA

Russia is accusing the United States of using advanced electronic warfare tactics against its assets in Syria. In late October, Russian defense officials claimed that a U.S. *Poseidon* P-8 intelligence aircraft seized control of thirteen Syrian drones in the airspace over Latakia province, at which point the P-8's crew allegedly piloted the drones in the direction of Russia's Hmeimim Air Base and its naval base at Tartus. Although the drones were destroyed before any attack occurred, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov described the incident as "very alarming." The Russian military made similar accusations of drone capture earlier this year, although the Department of Defense has consistently denied these allegations as unfounded and "utterly irresponsible." (*Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, October 25, 2018)

RUSSIA'S CYBER PROVING GROUND

Before Russia interfered in the 2016 U.S. presidential election, it was testing its cyber- and disinformation capabilities closer to home, in neighboring Ukraine. As early as the Spring of 2015, the government of Ukrainian president Petro Poroshenko was reportedly lobbying social media giant Facebook to devote greater attention - and resources - to the issue of Russian information warfare. The pleas went largely unanswered, with Facebook failing to respond to Ukrainian requests to investigate purported fake accounts and false news on its platform. That situation, moreover, remains more or less the same today. Ukrainian officials say that over the past three years Facebook has failed to address "most" of their concerns about Russian political meddling - despite the fact that the tactics being used by Russian operatives, "such as coordinated activity to overwhelm Facebook's system and the use of impostor accounts," remain consistent.

The social media firm is now belatedly moving to correct the problem, including through dedicating more staff to identifying and removing malicious accounts, in Ukraine and elsewhere. "It's possible that we could have done more sooner, and we haven't been as fast as we needed to be, but we're really focused on it now," says one company executive. (*Washington Post*, October 28, 2018)