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Russia will easily design new missiles to defend itself if US pulls out of INF – Putin

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Russia may easily respond to the US withdrawal from the milestone INF Treaty by developing new types of land-based missiles, Vladimir Putin said, warning that Washington's decision to pull out "is one step towards an arms race."

The Russian president reiterated that Moscow did not violate the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF), but if Washington ditches it, Russia will be left with no choice but "*to react accordingly*" to defend itself.

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*“As you know, we do have sea and airborne [missile] systems and there will be no difficulty to carry out research-and-development and make them land-based if needed,”* Putin told a Defense Ministry conference on Tuesday.

Russia’s successes in developing sea- and air-launched missiles became a source of concern for *“our partners,”* prompting them to undermine the treaty. Putin had also praised Russia’s newest Kalibr cruise missiles which saw action against terrorists in Syria.

Over the past months, Washington has been repeatedly accusing Russia of violating the INF. Moscow, for its part, denied such accusations calling them unfounded.

But, Putin said, the US is violating the INF directly, as it’s actively building up Aegis Ashore facilities in Romania and Poland. Meanwhile, there are strike drones in the US military arsenals whose properties fall under the treaty.

***They blatantly violate it and make hypothetical, unfounded claims against us.***

The Russian president noted that the US and Russia – two signatories to the treaty – are not the only countries to possess short- and intermediate-range missiles. *“There are plenty of them ... why don’t they [the US] engage these countries?”*

Putin believes they don’t do it *“simply because it apparently hampers certain aspirations and these aspirations are unlikely to be peaceful ones,”* while the US pullout *“is one step towards an arms race.”*

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He also reminded the conference that the US military is profiting from a record \$725-billion *“militarist budget”* that dwarfs Russia’s annual defense spending worth \$46 billion.

Earlier Putin suggested the US planned their withdrawal beforehand. Notably, the

Congress authorized funding an effort to build new missile systems *“before Washington announced withdrawal from the INF. The decision had been made some time ago, but quietly – they thought we wouldn’t notice it.”*

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