

'One possible conclusion': US banned-missile test apparently in works long before leaving INF

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It took the US just 17 days after it was no longer officially bound by the INF Treaty to conduct a missile test that would have breached its rules. And it probably was breaching the treaty, given how long preparation takes.

On Sunday, the Pentagon fired a Tomahawk cruise missile from a truck-mounted Mark 41 Vertical Launching System to a distance of over 500km. The test was hardly unexpected. Both the missile and the launcher are time-tested, and their capabilities are publicly known. The only novelty was that the Mk41 was placed on a ground vehicle as opposed to a warship.

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If anything, the test was a demonstration of intent and attitude. It would have been legally impossible just a month ago, when the Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty still forbade not only deploying but even developing weapon systems like the ground-based Tomahawk.

The INF kicked the bucket this year after years of bickering between the US and Russia over who was the worst at sticking to the spirit of the deal. Washington said the Russians had secretly developed a missile that was in violation. There was even secret intelligence to support the accusations – or at least to convince NATO allies not to question the US' justification for withdrawal.

At the same time, the US developed and fired missiles banned by the treaty, saying it was OK

since they were just target missiles and not actual missiles meant to kill and destroy. A similar explanation somehow didn't work for North Korea with its satellite launch, which was instantly branded a clandestine ballistic missile test by the US. But when the US used one, Russia was expected to just go along.

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Washington also deployed the Mk41 VLS in Europe, claiming that they could only fire interceptor missiles to stop Iran from obliterating the Europeans, rather than directing Tomahawks at Russia. What a big surprise this new test must have been for every expert and defense official who said Moscow was overreacting to those missile defenses in Romania and Poland!

There is a notable pattern in Washington's attitude to international relations, whereby it spots every speck on the record of others, while finding sensible-sounding solutions for any blemishes on its own. How is that work on destroying your chemical weapons going, by the way? For this test to come on such short notice is the latest example.

"In two weeks, one can prepare and get a green light for a test program, and even that would take extra effort," RT's defense expert Mikhail Khodarenok remarked. "The rest of it, including bringing the tested weapon system to the range, training the crew in its use, preparing the target, putting sensors in place – that cannot be done in two weeks."

There is only one possible conclusion – the test was designed, organized, prepared and financed long before the US officially withdrew from the INF.

Now it turns out that all the while Washington was telling the world how the treaty could still be salvaged – if only Russia pled guilty and destroyed its stockpiles of missiles that supposedly violated the INF – it was also developing a weapon system that breached the very same treaty.

The work has been ongoing since at least February this year, according to a Department of Defense spokesperson quoted by RIA Novosti. This is right after the US announced its formal withdrawal and long before the expiration of the six-month grace period stipulated in the treaty. Who could have seen this one coming?
