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Washington, November 22 (RHC)-- The United States has withdrawn from the Open Skies Treaty that allows unarmed surveillance flights over member countries, the Trump administration's latest move to pull the U.S. out of a global treaty.

The U.S. on Sunday formally pulled out of the Open Skies Treaty, some six months after President Donald Trump first announced the decision, according to the State Department, CNN reported. Earlier, State Department officials told Fox News the Trump administration will withdraw from the Open Skies Treaty on Sunday.

Senior U.S. officials first said in May that Trump was planning to pull out of the 35-nation treaty that allows its member to make surveillance flights over each other's countries to build trust.

The Trump administration said Russia has repeatedly violated the post-Cold War pact's terms. "While the United States, along with our Allies and partners that are States Parties to the treaty, have lived up to our commitments and obligations under the treaty, Russia has flagrantly and continuously violated the treaty in various ways for years," Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said at the time.

"This is not a story exclusive to just the treaty on Open Skies, unfortunately, for Russia has been a serial violator of many of its arms control obligations and commitments," he added.

The New York Times has reported that the move could be a prelude to Washington also withdrawing from the New START Treaty which limits the number of nuclear missiles the United States and Russia can deploy.

The Trump administration also pulled the United States out of the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) with Russia last year. The agreement banned nuclear and conventional ground-launched ballistic and cruise missiles with ranges between 500 and 5,500 kilometres that was signed in 1987.

Democrats on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in June questioned the legality of the Trump administration's plan to pull out from the Open Skies Treaty.

"The timing of your decision — less than five months before an election — is also suspect. Beginning the U.S. withdrawal from the Open Skies Treaty, without complying with U.S. domestic law or constitutional practice, is an obvious political maneuver in an attempt to bind a future administration," senators wrote in a letter to Pompeo and former Secretary of Defense Mark Esper.

"As such, we demand that you immediately discontinue your efforts to initiate the withdrawal process until Congress is provided with the requisite notification under the [National Defense Authorization Act], and the Senate has had an opportunity to weigh in on the withdrawal."

The Open Skies treaty, proposed by U.S. President Dwight Eisenhower in 1955, was signed in 1992 by President George H.W. Bush and took effect in 2002.

According to The New York Times, Trump was very unhappy about a Russian flight over his golf resort in Bedminster, New Jersey three years ago.



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