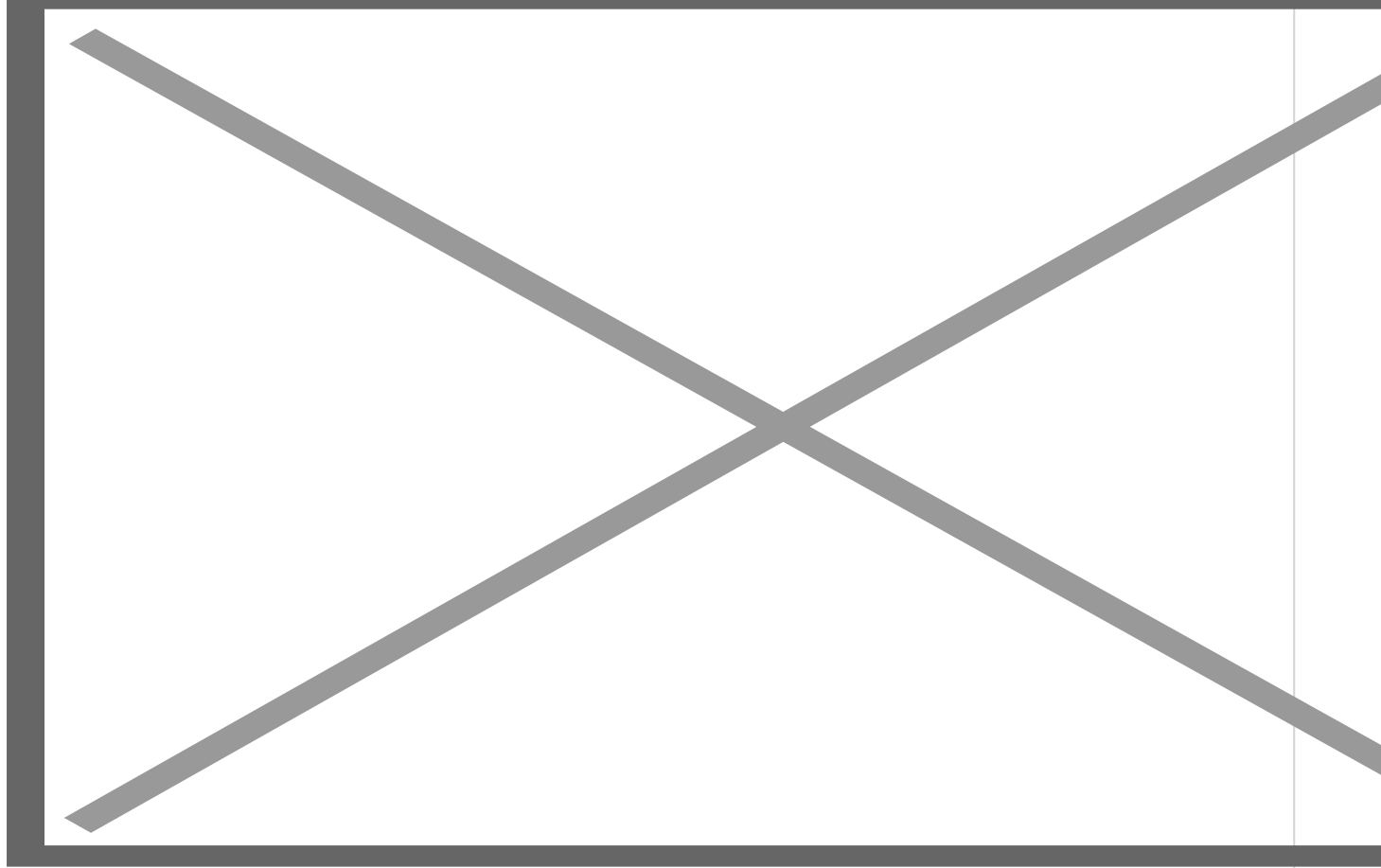


Russia says U.S. refusal to return to Open Skies pact is political mistake

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Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov

Moscow, May 29 (RHC)-- Russia says the U.S. decision not to get back to an arms control treaty, which it left under former President Donald Trump, is a "political mistake." The administration of President Joe Biden informed Russia on Thursday that it will not rejoin the Open Skies arms control pact.

The 30-year-old agreement, which had allowed unarmed surveillance flights over member countries, was withdrawn by the Trump administration last year. Trump accused Russia of violating the pact on numerous occasions, but Russia denied the allegations.

Both Russian and U.S. officials, however, had held out the possibility that the two sides could rejoin after Biden takes office. As a presidential candidate, Biden slammed the move by Trump back then, saying the president had “doubled down on his shortsighted policy of going it alone and abandoning American leadership.”

But only two weeks before a planned summit between Biden and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin in Geneva, Washington reiterated the accusations against Moscow and ruled out the possibility of rejoining the treaty.

Russia’s Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov said in a statement on Friday that Washington “has made another political mistake, inflicting a new blow on the European security system,” by refusing to rejoin the arms treaty. He added that the Kremlin was disappointed but not entirely surprised by Biden’s decision.

“We gave them a good chance, which they did not take,” he said. “They continue circulating fabrications about Russia’s violations of this agreement, which is completely absurd.” Ryabkov further said that Washington’s refusal to re-enter the pact does not create an atmosphere conducive to arms control discussions at the upcoming summit between the two leaders.

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