

# *Russia says U.S. raising risk of nuclear war by threatening to leave key arms control treaty*

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Moscow, December 21 (RHC)-- Russian President Vladimir Putin says the United States is making nuclear war more likely by threatening to leave an arms control treaty with Moscow and refusing to discuss the future of another such bilateral agreement.

Putin made the remarks on Thursday during his annual news conference, throwing the ball in Washington's court to avert the warfare. "It's very hard to imagine how the situation will develop [if the U.S. quits the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF)," Putin said.

The 1987 pact, which Washington has threatened to ditch, bans the two sides from stationing short- and intermediate-range missiles in Europe. The treaty did not cover sea-launched missiles.

"If these missiles appear in Europe, what should we do? Of course, we'll have to ensure our own security," said the Russian head of state. He, then, proceeded to address the New START, another Russo-American pact which expires in 2012, that limits the number of deployed strategic nuclear warheads each side can have.

"No talks on extending this are yet being held. Are the Americans not interested, do they not need them? -- Ok, we'll survive and will ensure our own security which we know how to do," Putin said.

"We are essentially witnessing the breakdown of the international arms control order and [the start of] an arms race," he added. And the Russian leader concluded, "In general, this is very bad for humankind because it takes us closer to a dangerous threshold," referring to the prospect of a nuclear conflict.

The Russian chief executive further cautioned, "If, God forbid, something like that were to happen, it would lead to the end of all civilization and maybe also the planet." Putin asserted: "These are serious questions and it's a real shame that there's a tendency to underestimate them." He said that he hoped that "humankind has enough common sense and sense of self-preservation not to take things to such extremes."

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