

Russia vows to respond in kind if U.S. deploys INF-covered missiles in Europe



Rome, December 8 (RHC)--Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov says his country will not hesitate to respond to any new deployment of medium-range missiles by the United States in Europe.

“If practical steps are taken to create and deploy [such missiles in Europe], we will have a mirror reaction, but we will not be the first”, Russia’s top diplomat said during a press conference in the Italian capital Rome, adding: “Every step will have a Russian reaction.”

The joint press conference with his Italian counterpart, Luigi Di Maio, was held on the sidelines of the fifth edition of the annual Rome Med – Mediterranean Dialogues, an international conference that aims to draft a “positive agenda” for the Mediterranean region.

Earlier this year, Washington withdrew from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, which had banned all land-based missiles with ranges of 500 to 5,500 kilometers, including those carrying both nuclear and conventional warheads.

The INF was signed toward the end of the Cold War in 1987 by the then-US President Ronald Reagan and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev. The treaty, seen as a milestone in ending the Cold War arms race between the two superpowers, led to the elimination of 2,692 missiles from both sides, ridding Europe of land-based nuclear missiles.

Washington claimed that Moscow's failure to comply with the treaty was the main reason behind its pullout decision. Russia followed suit and said that it had not breached the accord and believed the U.S. planned to abandon the deal as part of its plan to develop its own sophisticated missiles.

"If the Americans leave the treaty and thus they will design, create and deploy this type of missiles previously banned by the INF, we will do the same," Lavrov vowed. "Americans said they were not going to create a missile of this class but they have already tested one," he added.

Back in September, Russian President Vladimir Putin proposed a moratorium on the deployment of short and medium-range missiles to Europe. The U.S.-led NATO, however, refused to endorse the proposal.

In October, Russian Ambassador to the United States, Anatoly Antonov, said that if INF-covered missiles were deployed in Europe, Moscow would be forced to retaliate. The world can "return to the situation before the conclusion of this well-known treaty of the late 80s and then it will be a completely new regional and strategic situation that will require additional action from us," he warned at the time.

Washington has been deploying its missiles in Eastern Europe and near Russia's western borders, a provocative move denounced by the Kremlin. Moscow has repeatedly warned Washington not to deploy such missiles in the vicinity of Russia's borders, vowing to deploy its own missiles, capable of reaching all parts of Europe in response.

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