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Kremlin Warns it May 'Target' U.S. Missile Launchers in Europe

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Dmitry Peskov / Kremlin.ru

The Kremlin has said it might have to place U.S. missile launchers in its crosshairs if they are placed in Europe, as the United States threatens to exit a key arms control treaty.

The United States has threatened to pull out of the 1987 Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) which bans Moscow and Washington from stationing short- and intermediate-range, land-based missiles in Europe. During his annual end-of-year press conference on Thursday, President Vladimir Putin said the U.S. "shouldn't whine later" about likely Russian retaliation if Washington deployed missiles in Europe.

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"An exit from the INF Treaty could potentially lead to the [U.S.] deployment of medium-range and short-range missiles in European countries like during the Cold War," Kremlin

spokesman Dmitry Peskov said in an interview with the state-run Channel One broadcaster following Putin's press conference.

"The deployment of these missiles there and their potential pointing toward Russia will lead Russia to target these launchers with its missile arsenal," Peskov added.

Putin has previously said that Russia would be forced to train its own missiles on any European countries that host U.S. rockets.

Another U.S.-Russia treaty, the New START pact, which limits the number of deployed strategic nuclear warheads each side can have, expires in 2021. Putin said he was worried that Washington didn't appear to be interested in discussing its future.

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The Russian leader, who said Moscow had developed nuclear weapons which he believed gave it an edge over other countries, warned the threat of a nuclear conflict was growing as a result of the U.S. moves. He also cited the dangerous tendency of lowering the threshold for using nuclear weapons and the idea of using ballistic missiles with conventional warheads.

"If, God forbid, [nuclear war] were to happen, it would lead to the end of all civilization and maybe also the planet," he said.

Reuters contributed reporting to this article.

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