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NATO Rejects Putin's Missile Moratorium Offer

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Sergei Malgavko / TASS

NATO has rejected Russian President Vladimir Putin's calls to suspend deployment of missiles in Europe that were banned under a recently abandoned U.S.-Russian nuclear pact.

The Kommersant business daily reported and the Kremlin confirmed Putin's offer, which came amid concerns that Russia and the U.S. are headed toward an arms race after Washington exited the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) pact last month. The INF pact's demise means both Washington and Moscow are legally free to develop and deploy ground-launched nuclear and conventional ballistic and cruise missiles.

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"Unless and until Russia verifiably destroys the SSC-8 system, this moratorium on deployments is not a real offer," NATO spokeswoman Oana Lungesu was quoted as saying by the Financial Times newspaper.

SSC-8 is NATO's name for the Novator 9M729, which the Western alliance says violates the INF Treaty's range limits. Russia has said the Novator 9M729's range puts it outside the treaty and rejected a U.S. demand to destroy the new missile.

NATO has "heard this proposal before" and saw it as "not a credible offer," FT quoted Lungescu as saying of Putin's letter.

France's foreign ministry spokesperson, meanwhile, has said it is "studying" Putin's proposal.

Russia has previously announced its decision not to deploy medium- and short-range missiles in Europe or other regions on the condition that the U.S. does the same.

The Pentagon said last month it had tested a conventionally configured cruise missile that hit its target after more than 500 kilometers of flight, its first such test since the Soviet-era treaty's demise. Russia is close to completing preparations for a like-for-like response to the U.S. test, Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Grushko said this month.

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