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President Trump’s decision to withdraw from the Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty is gravely misguided. Withdrawing will not make us safer, it will rob us of leverage essential to our own security and power. It will foolishly play into the hands of Russian propagandists by focusing global attention on our rejection of the treaty instead of Russian violations. And it will make the world a more dangerous place.

The Russian violation of the treaty should be taken seriously. But withdrawing from the treaty will not force Moscow into compliance. Just the opposite will occur. We will open the door to a renewed Russian build-up of intermediate range nuclear weapons. That would pose a far greater strategic threat to us and our allies than this violation, which gives Russia no military advantage.

President Trump and some of his top aides seem to be driven by the false belief that all international treaties are bad for the United States and that we always end up the loser. History and the facts show clearly that this is not the case. President Reagan and Congress entered into the INF Treaty because it was to our benefit, and it remains so. This and other arms control treaties over the years have been drawn up by skilled negotiators from both Republican and Democratic administrations. They have been ratified by a super-majority in the Senate after careful vetting to assure they are in the national interest. These treaties are not based on trust—they are based on verification.

Withdrawal from the Treaty would diminish U.S. standing and options in the European theater, which has been vital to our own security for over a century. It would divide us from our NATO allies, weaken our nuclear non-proliferation efforts around the world, and invite an expensive arms race. With the 2018 budget deficit sitting at $779 billion under President Trump, launching an unnecessary arms race is the height of irresponsibility.

I urge President Trump to step back from this dangerous course and, as he pledged in Helsinki last summer, to begin a new strategic dialogue with President Putin focused on nuclear risks. The Russians have so far shown more willingness to follow through on this promise than the Trump
administration. Earlier generations of soldiers and statesmen — including President Reagan — understood the folly of unmanaged nuclear competition. The INF treaty gives us benefits, as does the other major arms control agreement, the 2010 New START treaty. Both sides are complying with New START and are benefitting from its weapons limits and verification procedures. An important step toward greater stability would be for President Trump to offer to extend New START to 2026. I urge him to do so.