



Written by [Steve Byas](#) on May 22, 2020

## Trump Exits Open Skies Treaty Over Russian Violations

“Russia didn’t adhere to the treaty, so until they adhere, we will pull out,” President Donald Trump announced this week, confirming that the United States will be leaving the 35-nation Treaty on Open Skies because of Russian violations.

Under the terms of the 1992 treaty, which has been in force since 2002, members are allowed to have short-notice, unarmed reconnaissance flights over the land of the other members, so as to observe military forces and activities, by using specific, pre-approved observation aircraft. The official certified U.S. Open Skies aircraft is the [OC-135B Open Skies](#) (shown). The stated purpose of the treaty is to reduce the chances that military miscalculations could cause a war.



The United States has objected to Russia’s imposition of restrictions on flights near Kaliningrad, an area between Poland and Lithuania, which has a significant Russian military presence. Jonathan Hoffman, a Defense Department spokesman, said that Russia had denied U.S. flights “within 10 kilometers of the Georgia-Russia border, and denying a flight over major military exercises the past year which completely prevented imaging of military exercise activity that was scheduled and approved previously. Russia flagrantly and continuously violates its obligations under Open Skies and implements the treaty in ways that contribute to military threats against the United States and our allies and partners.” Hoffman also noted that the United States is “committed to our treaty obligations, but in this era of great power competition we are looking to advocate for agreements that benefit all sides and that includes partners who comply responsibly with their obligations.”

Not surprisingly, Trump’s unilateral action was opposed by his enemies in the intelligence and security community. For example, retired four-star General Michael Hayden, a former director of the National Security Agency, tweeted, “This is insane.” Other important posts held by Hayden include being the former deputy director of national intelligence and director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) under President George W. Bush.

Daryl Kimball, executive director of the Arms Control Association, said the treaty was too important to abandon over the overflights near Kaliningrad. “Concerns about Russian compliance with the accord, though serious, are resolvable [although he does not explain *how* they are resolvable], pertain to political disputes between Russia and some of its neighbors, and do not rise to the level of a material breach that would merit U.S. withdrawal from the treaty.” Other opponents of Trump’s action include former Secretary of State George Schultz and former National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger.

Trump, however, argued that the withdrawal would not hurt relations with Russia: “No, I think that we’re going to have [a] very good relationship with Russia.” He expressed optimism that his action



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could force the Russians to take the actions necessary to cause the U.S. to reinstate the treaty, or for the two nations to write a new treaty. "There's a chance we may make a new agreement or do something to put that agreement back together. I think what's going to happen is we're going to pull out and they're going to come back and want to make a deal."

President Trump was supported in his decision by Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. Pompeo noted the concern expressed by nations in Europe at the withdrawal, and said, "If not for the value they place on the OST, we would likely have exited long ago. We are not willing, however, to perpetuate the Treaty's current problems of Russian-engendered threat and distrust simply in order to maintain an empty façade of cooperation with Moscow." He added that the United States is prepared to reconsider the exit from the treaty "should Russia return to full compliance with the Treaty."

The opposition to Trump's actions recalls the almost religious devotion to arms-control agreements with the Russians from the Reagan Era, despite the Soviet Union's chronic cheating on those very same treaties.

It also illustrates the hypocrisy of Trump's critics. For his entire presidency, and even before, the Democratic Party leadership, the bipartisan "Deep State" of the intelligence community, and their allies in the mainstream media have said that Trump is somehow under the thumb of Russian President Vladimir Putin, and have criticized every attempt Trump has made to have good relations with him.

A review of headlines from 2019 demonstrates vividly this mantra. The *Chicago Tribune* wrote, "Trump can't seem to resist the urge to do failures for Putin," while *Politico* argued, "Trump can't help himself when it comes to Putin." CNN's David Andelman wrote, in a piece entitled, "Trump keeps doing favors for Putin," that "There seems to be no end to the 'solids' or favors that Donald Trump has managed to do for Vladimir Putin."

Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi has even said, "All roads lead to Putin."

Yet, when Trump exits a treaty because of violations by a government led by that same Vladimir Putin, he is castigated for it.

What seems more likely is that Trump is doing what he thinks is in the national interest of America. That would include cultivating a good relationship with the man who runs a very powerful country — Russia — while at the same time refusing to allow that same country and its leader — Putin — to develop a military advantage over the United States.

In other words, it could be that Trump is simply putting "America First" — perhaps the most-hated phrase among his globalist critics.

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