



CND
BRIEFING

Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty

US President Donald Trump has announced that the US is suspending its obligations and giving the requisite six months' notice for formal withdrawal from the landmark Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty. Russia has responded by announcing it too will withdraw. This treaty has been a cornerstone of nuclear arms control since the Cold War, having eliminated thousands of deadly nuclear missiles in Europe. This is a very dangerous moment for the whole world. A new nuclear arms race is beginning and the threat of nuclear war grows by the day.

What is the INF Treaty?

The INF Treaty between the United States and Russia bans ground-launch nuclear missiles with ranges from 500km to 5,500km. Signed by US President Ronald Reagan and leader of the Soviet Union Mikhail Gorbachev in 1987, the treaty came into effect in 1988.

It led to 2,700 short- and medium-range cruise and Pershing missiles being eliminated as well as Soviet SS-20s, significantly reducing the likelihood of Europe being caught in a US-Soviet nuclear war. Crucially for the UK, it meant that US cruise missiles were removed from US bases in Britain at Greenham Common and Molesworth. With the overturning of the treaty, we may now see the return of US nuclear missiles to British soil.

Arms race

During the 1970s, the Soviet Union replaced some of its older missiles (SS-4 and SS-5 models) with the newer, more accurate SS-20s which had a range of 5000km. Although this distance was not enough to hit the US, NATO retaliated by planning to base 572 new missiles in western Europe.

108 Pershing IIs would replace the existing 108 Pershing IAs stationed in West Germany, and 464 cruise missiles would be sited across western Europe. The deployment of cruise and Pershing would mark a massive escalation of the arms race because they would greatly reduce the time it took to hit Soviet cities.

Protest

During the first years of the 1980s, hundreds of thousands of people mobilised across Europe to

try to prevent the siting of the missiles. The driving force for this popular support was straightforward. Since the Cuban Missile Crisis, it had generally been assumed that the ability of the US and Soviet Union to annihilate each other many times over meant that no government would be mad enough to actually start a nuclear war. But the possibility of a 'limited nuclear war' in Europe produced genuine alarm.

Peace organisations flourished in this period, with massive anti-nuclear demonstrations taking place in Britain and elsewhere. CND played a vital role in this movement, as did the iconic Greenham Women's Peace Camp. Pressure mounted on the US from governments in western Europe and slowly, the possibility of a thaw in nuclear relations emerged. The election of Mikhail Gorbachev as general secretary of the Soviet Communist Party represented a policy change from the Soviet side as well.

Throughout the early 1980s, arms-limitation negotiations had repeatedly stalled and nuclear escalation continued. But now there was an opportunity for real progress.

INF Treaty signed

Following difficult negotiations, the INF treaty was eventually signed in 1987 and all the missiles were withdrawn from Europe by 1991. This was a historic moment – the first nuclear disarmament treaty, and one which was fully implemented. All shorter-range missile systems were eradicated by the end of 1989, and all long-range INF systems by the middle of 1991.

Violations

There have been several issues with the INF since

its adoption, with both the US and Russia accusing the other of violating the treaty. The US first raised Russian non-compliance concerns in 2013, accusing Russia of testing a prohibited ground-launched cruise missile. US concerns over non-compliance led to two special meetings of the Special Verification Commission (SVC), used to determine treaty compliance, in 2016 and 2017. Russia has continued to deny violating the treaty.

Russia has also made its own claims that the US is non-compliant with the INF. These have centred on the US' deployment of MK-41 launchers at the Aegis ground-based ballistic missile defence (BMD) site in Romania and the planned deployment of these launchers in Poland in 2020. Russia states that these launchers are essentially intermediate-range missile launchers, as they are capable of launching intermediate-range Tomahawk cruise missiles, prohibited under the INF. The US has rebutted these arguments.

In 2017, the US Department of Commerce imposed sanctions on two Russian companies involved in the missile system and the Trump administration's 2018 Nuclear Posture Review authorised the reintroduction of a nuclear-armed sea-launched cruise missile in response to Russian violations.

These allegations on both sides have placed the treaty under enormous pressure in the last few years, especially in the context of deteriorating US-Russia relations generally. However, there are some doubts as to whether Trump's motivation for withdrawing from the treaty is purely down to these violations.

Bilateral treaty

Both the US and Russia have voiced concerns regarding the treaty's bilateral nature, arguing that the INF unfairly prohibits these countries from possessing missiles which neighbouring nations – particularly China - are developing. This led to a joint statement in 2007, in which the US and Russia stated that the INF 'is limiting the actions only of a few states, primarily Russia and the United States.'

It is believed that one of Trump's motivations for wanting to withdraw from the treaty is the fact that the treaty places the US at a strategic disadvantage to China. Trump and his administration have consistently attacked China during his presidency, both on economic and defence grounds. The current acting US defence secretary, Patrick Shanahan, singled the country out on his first day as a key priority in a 'great power competition'.

Trump announcement

Trump announced in 2018 that he intended to withdraw the US from the INF treaty.

A formal announcement followed on February 1st, 2019. The US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced that the United States is suspending its obligations under the INF Treaty and is providing the requisite six-month written notice

to Treaty Parties of its withdrawal. There will now be a six-month period before the withdrawal comes into effect in August.

An ultimatum: what's next?

The US has stated that it is withdrawing from the treaty as a result of Russia developing and fielding the 9M729 missile system, in breach of the agreement's restrictions. Russia denies it is violating the rules, but the US has demanded that Moscow verifiably destroy all of its 9M729 systems in the next six months, or the withdrawal will be confirmed.

The UK response

In a letter to CND, the government blamed Russia for the breakdown of the INF treaty, saying: 'It is therefore Russia's consistent failure to respect its Treaty obligations that has led to the current situation.' It is fully supportive of the US position without considering the wider context, and is not doing enough to encourage a diplomatic solution to the crisis. Standing by and allowing crucial nuclear arms control agreements to be torn up places the whole world in great danger.

The British Foreign Secretary should condemn the possibility of the end of the treaty and use the government's influence to call on both Russia and the US to fully comply with the terms of the treaty. The government could propose and facilitate urgent negotiations to resolve the outstanding issues and save the INF.

If these efforts don't work, then we need a clear statement that we will not accept American nuclear missiles in our country.

There was a dismissive response to an Urgent Question asked in Parliament in February. A government representative said he would not 'speculate on too many hypotheticals' and said the 'issue will obviously be discussed at very senior levels' when asked whether US nuclear weapons would be relocated to Britain. This is not reassuring and shows the huge challenge we have ahead of us.

Implications if INF is torn up

If this treaty is destroyed, the US and Russia would be free to once again produce and deploy intermediate-range missiles. As these missiles would not reach Russia if situated in the US, and vice-versa, it follows that the US would look to place them in Europe, possibly the UK.

This would massively increase the likelihood of a nuclear war being fought on European soil, hugely jeopardising UK and European security. Putin has already stated that if European countries host US intermediate-range missiles, these countries 'must understand that they are putting their own territory at risk of a possible counter-strike [by Russia].'

This intention to withdraw from the INF treaty is part of a wider pattern of the US disengaging from essential international nuclear treaties. Earlier this year, the US withdrew

from the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, removing its support for a treaty which would prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons.

Furthermore, the US withdrawal from the INF treaty also calls into question whether Washington will work with Moscow to renew the New START treaty in 2021, when it is due to expire. The New START treaty, signed in 2010, limits the number of deployed strategic nuclear warheads of Russia and the US to a combined total of 1,550.

Save the INF

The INF Treaty was in large part a result of massive international protest against nuclear escalation in the 1980s, including CND protests against cruise missiles which mobilised hundreds of thousands of people. CND stands resolutely against this return to the nuclear escalation of the Cold War and we call on all peoples once again to reject these moves.

The INF must be saved to prevent a disastrous descent into a new nuclear arms race based in Europe.

