

Intermediate-Range Nuclear force (INF) treaty

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Manifest pedagogy: This is a topic which has cross cutting linkages with two subjects – World History and International Relations. It should be studied as part of the Cold war and nuke race and also link it with present nuke race and denuclearization efforts. INF treaty in itself could be a prelims question

In news: The US has formally withdrawn from INF treaty.

Static dimensions:

- What is INF treaty

Current dimensions:

- Reasons for US withdrawal
- Impact on global politics

Content:

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has announced the US withdrawal from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty

What is the INF Treaty?

- The INF Treaty was signed in December 1987 by President Ronald Reagan and Soviet General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev.
- It prohibited the United States and the Soviet Union from possessing, testing and deploying ground-launched cruise and ballistic missiles with ranges between 300 and 3,400 miles (488km and 5,472km).

- Under the treaty, Washington and Moscow destroyed 846 and 1,846 missiles, respectively.
- Short flight times and unpredictable flight patterns made these missiles hard to detect, so strategists argued that these systems exacerbated crisis instability and increased the chances of accidental nuclear war.
- Given their relatively limited range, these systems were designed chiefly to fight a theatre nuclear war in Europe.
- European countries, therefore, considered the destruction of these missiles highly beneficial to regional security.
- INF Treaty covered all types of ground-launched cruise and ballistic missiles – whether their payload is conventional or nuclear.
- Moscow and Washington are prohibited from deploying these missiles anywhere in the world, not just in Europe.
- However, the treaty only applies to ground-launched systems. Both sides are free to deploy air- and sea-launched missiles within the 300- to 3,400-mile range

Reasons for US withdrawal:

President Barack Obama's administration first voiced concerns about Russian violations in 2013, and a year later, Obama sent Russian President Vladimir Putin a letter urging discussions. Both the Obama and Trump administrations communicated with Russia more than thirty times over the issue, but to no avail.

The US officials have identified the 9M729 cruise missile as their main concern. Earlier this year, President Donald J. Trump said the United States would terminate the treaty because of Russian noncompliance. U.S. officials claimed that Russia breached the treaty by deploying systems for an intermediate-range missiles known as the SSC-8.

Trump also raised concerns about China's missiles, which are

not constrained by the agreement even though an estimated 95 percent are in the INF range. But the majority of these Chinese missiles are fitted with conventional, not nuclear, warheads, and the United States and Russia possess more than 90 percent of global nuclear stockpiles, far exceeding China's capabilities.

Moscow denied the treaty violation, demanded to see the evidence and responded with its own list of alleged US infractions, as well as the exhibition of a launch tube that it claimed was that of the 9M729 of US. Putin said his country would suspend its INF obligations as well. Russian officials charged that the United States had also violated the treaty, though Washington and its allies called those charges spurious

Some observers have argued that the INF Treaty is "Eurocentric," failing to take into account the US-Chinese military balance – which is becoming increasingly central to Washington's strategic calculations

Impact on global politics:

The INF withdrawal issue has been controversial with US allies, further straining the Nato alliance at a difficult time for transatlantic relations. Nato had favoured a policy designed to push Moscow back into compliance. It is unlikely that Nato allies will agree to host US intermediate-range systems on their territory, a move some fear would lead to a new arms race in Europe

The abandonment of the pact leaves Europe exposed to Russian land-based missiles capable of hitting their targets within minutes. Russia's new missiles are land-based, mobile, difficult to identify, rapidly employable and armed with conventional or nuclear warheads, and can strike almost any target in most European countries with little to no warning time. According to the experts, with the loss of the treaty, "Europe loses a central pillar of its security"

Withdrawal will probably not lead to a new INF deal binding the United States, Russia and China. China has rejected the US offer of trilateral arms control talks. Moscow and Washington engaged in strategic stability discussions this year, but as yet nothing substantive has emerged

The collapse of the INF Treaty leaves **New START**, (is a nuclear arms reduction treaty between the United States and the Russian Federation. It entered into force on 5 February 2011 and is expected to last at least until 2021)

governing strategic weapons, as the only US-Russia nuclear arms control deal still standing. But the USA's recent comments criticising New START as "flawed from the beginning" suggest that the Trump administration is unlikely to extend it past its expiration date of 2021. In the absence of new accords, the five-decade-old US-Russian nuclear arms control regime will meet its demise

Implications for Asia

China, India, North Korea, and Pakistan – these four nuclear weapons states in Asia also have missiles in this class. The U.S. decision to abrogate the INF Treaty is a signal to the leadership of all four nations that arms control and disarmament is no longer an important global norm. If Russia and the United States continue to undermine that norm, all four of these nations may feel less constrained in the development of their nuclear weapons and ballistic missile programs.

Without the INF's constraints, the U.S. may begin to pressure Japan, Taiwan, and other Asian allies to deploy U.S. ground-based intermediate-range missiles on their territory. Those missiles need not be armed with nuclear weapons. Most of China's missiles in this class are armed with conventional high explosives. The United States will try to persuade its Asian allies by arguing new missiles are needed to counter

China's. Increased numbers of conventionally-armed missiles kept on high alert will create new uncertainties that increase the risk of rapid escalation in a future military conflict.

Lessons learnt during the Cold War will need to be learned all over again. There is still strong support among the non-nuclear weapons states to uphold the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and to pressure the nuclear weapons states to honor their NPT obligation to return to the negotiating table. The passage of the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) is an important step forward