

## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE INF TREATY

On December 8th 1987, President Reagan and Secretary Gorbachev signed a treaty between the USA and the USSR which promised to dismantle all their land-based nuclear missiles deployed in Europe and the Soviet Union, with ranges between 500 km and 5000 km, and not to deploy any more. About 2000 missiles are covered, of which about three quarters are deployed in the Warsaw Pact countries and one quarter in NATO countries. The provisions are to be carried out over a three year period with agreement for very considerable and wide ranging inspection at short notice by each side to verify that there is no cheating. There is a separate agreement to destroy the few old Pershing 1A ballistic missiles owned by West Germany with American nuclear warheads under "dual key" control.

Since there are about 50,000 nuclear missiles in the world, roughly equally divided between West and East, this means that something like 4% of them will be dismantled. Numbers between 2% and 8% have been given for the real diminution of the world's deployed nuclear arsenal, depending on how the counting is done in terms of warheads, explosive power and degree of actual deployment. The precise figure is not very important. It is small, but it is finite; so for the first time the two Super-powers have agreed actually to reduce their nuclear arsenals.

This fact, with the implied hope that a watershed has been reached and that a general de-escalation of the arms race will now follow, starting with an agreement during 1988 to a drastic reduction of long-range nuclear arsenals, is one of the cheerful things about the treaty. Another is that, for whatever reason, the heads of the most powerful states on earth are now on speaking terms once more, and appear eager not only to forget phrases like "evil empire" but actually to promote co-operative action. A third is that the agreed verification procedures have already produced an opening up of secrecy because the numbers and sitings of weapons have had to be disclosed, and the agreed inspections will, as Mr Shevardnadze has said, make for "jolly times ahead for the security services on both sides". Still this is not yet a time for euphoria for several reasons. Here are some of them.

### 1) RATIFICATION:

The Politburo of the USSR has acclaimed the treaty, so we may take it as ratified so far as the Soviet Union is concerned, but it still has to be ratified by the USA Congress before it is binding. Until that happens, there will be no dismantling, and indeed we are to expect that exercises of Cruise missile convoys from Greenham and Molesworth will continue (at our expense and inconvenience); why else should the first missiles have been taken to Molesworth only a few days before the treaty was signed? The fate of the SALT 2 treaty is a painful reminder that the ratification is by no means certain. There will be plenty of self-interested pressure groups working on Congressmen not to ratify. This is no time for complacency in the peace movement. It is the only interest group that can organise political action to lobby for ratification.

### 2) PERCEIVED DANGERS:

Few military men really think that nuclear weapons could be used in Europe without precipitating a world-wide nuclear exchange. All the same, the INF missiles have given a feeling of vulnerability in Russia and the whole of Western Europe, including the UK, over and above the fear of an all-out war. That feeling is now transferred, on the one hand, to the two Germanies and those other states, East and West which lie within the range of, so called, battlefield nuclear weapons (ie. 200 - 300 km from the border), and on the other hand to the USA whose citizens may now feel themselves to be first targets of any nuclear exchange.

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In West Germany this is already having the beneficial effect of promoting discussion about the desirability of NATO's "first strike" nuclear policy. That policy would undoubtedly leave Germany decimated during the first few days of a war. Not surprisingly, the Government of the FRG has shown itself recently to be the most keen of all the major partners of the EC and NATO to go on from the INF treaty to one removing all nuclear weapons from Europe, without waiting for agreements about conventional forces. They are under great pressure in this direction from their electorate. British and French governments immersed in cold war thinking may well fear German "neutralisation" and seek to offset it by uniting, strengthening and making more independent their own nuclear armaments.

But the boggy of Eastern superiority in non-nuclear forces is also being brought out again in western military thinking. The artificial nature of this boggy has been shown many times by NATO commanders who have, when pushed, always admitted that they would rather command their own forces than those of the other side; yet when the counting can be done in so many ways to suit any particular argument, it is a dangerously frightening boggy. It could produce a call for other non-nuclear weapons to be deployed, and in particular for chemical weapons. TASS is already reporting that the Americans have begun manufacturing binary chemical weapons since the treaty was signed. Any scares or actions in this direction would be a serious step backward, especially in view of the agreement already reached between the East German government and the West German SDP for a corridor between them free of chemical weapons.

In the USA the changed balance of fear might easily renew the life of the fantasy of Star Wars, which had been gently fading away with the presidential term of its author. No Soviet government could agree to any drastic limitation of long-range ballistic missile arsenals until SDI is abandoned. They would rightly see SDI as potentially aggressive, and could well see an arbitrary increase in the numbers of missiles as the only valid deterrent against it.

### 3) REAL DANGERS:

So-called tactical or battlefield weapons will still be in place and in the hands of local commanders. Although their warheads are smaller than those of most longer range missiles, they are typically more powerful than the bomb which destroyed Hiroshima. As well as Lance and Scud missiles, they include artillery with nuclear shells. Technically they are controlled by the supreme commanders, but command and communication would certainly be among the first casualties in a sudden military emergency. A local commander, out of touch and being over-run by locally superior forces would be under immense pressure to use his nuclear weapons to relieve his local position. His decisions under stress and in haste might well trigger escalation to a global nuclear war. He may feel even more isolated at the time he makes them in the absence of nuclear weapons outside the immediate battlefield, but perceived as usable without the obliteration of the USA and the USSR. Similar considerations apply to submarine-launched missiles which far outnumber the ground-based Cruise and Pershing missiles.

#### 4) REPLACEMENT WEAPONS:

Apparently the warheads will not be dismantled with the missiles. This means the first appearance of a problem which will be increasingly urgent if we go on to more extensive nuclear disarmament; what to do with the Plutonium. It is a very complex problem whose discussion would be a digression here, because, unfortunately, at the moment its easy solution will be to use warheads in other, remaining, weapons. One can already foresee arguments about what exactly constitutes a warhead. In the case of a Cruise missile, does it include the guidance system? If so the transfer to sea- and air-launched missiles would be all too easy. In face of popular opinion, governments may well not wish overtly to be a party to such a negation of the presumed spirit of the treaty, but under what military pressures would they be to act covertly?

Both sea- and air-launched missiles will still be available to both sides. The UK will be vulnerable to them. American F-111's and UK Tornados will use airfields in Britain, and with stand-off missiles of more than 300 km range, could be seen as fearsome first-strike facilities, in spite of the fact that they could be detected much more easily than the present INF missiles.

The position of the Thatcher government is becoming increasingly isolated. The Trident fleet to which it is committed will have more fire power than all the weapons that will be dismantled in western Europe, and it, and the French armaments are formally outside agreements made between the two super-powers. But if the USA and USSR do go on to agree larger reductions the whole future of the Trident system, dependant as it is for both manufacture and maintenance on the USA, will be seriously in doubt. The way in which the west German government has been persuaded to forego its claim to sovereignty over the Pershing 1A missiles is a serious precedent. There will be a strong temptation to go into closer partnership with France, and if that happens one can foresee a resurgence of the idea of a Western European military union in place of NATO. Conflict between such an idea and popular feeling, especially in the FRG for detente and closer relations with the DDR, and hence with the rest of eastern Europe could change the whole aspect of Europe since the EEC

Our conclusion has to be that the INF treaty is not so much a watershed in world affairs as an opportunity to make one. The great majority of people all over the world, if they think about it at all, think that the survival of civilisation is more important than the triumph of any one political dogma over another, the urge to power of any politician, the profits of any arms manufacturer or the career of any general. But most of them do not think about it, while those in sectional interest groups do. Politics is practised as the art of focussing on one single thing; getting your own way, and persuading both yourself and others that you are right, even when you do it by any dirty tricks or contradiction of logic that may seem necessary. To people of such mind, the INF treaty will be an invitation to look for ways in which it can be used as an argument to enhance the power game and the arms race. If it is to be otherwise, it will be because the majority make their voice heard.

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