**Don’t trash the INF Treaty**

By Carol Turner

At a Mid-Term rally in Nevada on 20 October, President Trump announced his intention to withdraw from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty. Think I’m exaggerating to say it’s a threat to world peace? Please read on…

Signed by Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev in December 1987, the INF Treaty marked the beginning of the end of the cold war confrontation between the US and Soviet Union. American cruise and Pershing missiles and Soviet SS20s were removed from Europe – and with them the threat of a nuclear war on our doorstep.

Under the terms of the Treaty, the US and USSR (and later Russia), agreed:

* not to possess, produce or flight test ballistic missiles or ground launched cruise missiles (GLCMs) with a range of between 500-5,000 kilometres,
* not to possess or produce launchers for these missiles, and
* to an on-site verification process.

The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) records that 2,692 short- and medium-range missiles had been destroyed by 1991. The very same year, US cruise missiles were removed from Greenham Common airbase in Berkshire. The INF helped clear the way for subsequent US-Russia arms agreements – including the New START Treaty, a bilateral arms reduction agreement coming up for renewal in 2021.

In 1972, the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty of 1972 had reduced the threat of a global nuclear confrontation between the two nuclear powers, by limiting the number of ABM sites and missiles each could deploy. Each agreed to scale down their defences against a nuclear attack by the other, thus reducing the risk of the US or Soviet Union launching a first strike in the belief that they would be protected from retaliation.

Just as the AMB Treaty cut down the threat of a global nuclear confrontation between the two nuclear powers, so the INF Treaty removed the threat of a ‘limited’ confrontation fought out in Europe. Both were landmark arms control agreement of their time.

In 2002 then-President George Bush unilaterally withdrew from the AMB Treaty, to enable the US to press ahead with national missile defences – that is, improvements in ballistic missile interception systems. Now his successor is following suit, with the intention of upgrading America’s ability to fight a nuclear war in a limited ‘theatre’. (See previous editions of *Briefing* in which this author has written about the US drive to develop so-called lower yield and more precisely targeted nuclear weapons.)

At the Nevada rally Trump reiterated US claims that Russia has failed to abide by the terms of the agreement. The Pentagon asserts that development of a Russian GLCM it calls the SSC-8 (Russian designation 9M729) breaks the terms of the Treaty.

But what he told the press afterwards is, perhaps, just as important to note:

* ‘Russia has violated the agreement; they have been violating it for many years. And we’re not going to let them violate a nuclear agreement and go out and do weapons and we’re not allowed to’;
* ‘if Russia’s doing it and if China’s doing it and we’re adhering to the agreement, that’s unacceptable’;
* ‘We’ll have to develop those weapons, unless Russia comes to us and China comes to us and they all come to us and say, let’s really get smart, and let’s none of us develop those weapons.’

Trump has not only put the possibility of nuclear confrontation in Europe back on the table, he has hinted at a wider threat – that of a world-scale military confrontation between the US and China.

France, Germany and the EU have defended the INF Treaty – calling for greater Russian transparency but making clear they oppose American withdrawal. Britain’s response however has been at best ambiguous. Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson was quick to support Trump, saying Russia had made a ‘mockery’ of the INF and must ‘get its house in order’.

The threat to the INF needs urgent action:

* Ask your MP to sign Labour MP Lloyd Russell-Moyle’s Early Day Motion, EDM 1744 on US withdrawal from INF treaty.
* Contact Shadow Defence Secretary Nia Griffiths and let her know how strongly you feel, and ask your CLP to do likewise.
* Invite a Labour CND speaker to your branch or constituency meeting to discuss what’s at stake, contact labourcnd@gmail.com
* Visit Labour CND website at www.labourcnd.org.uk and sign up to our e-newsletter.

*This article first appeared in Original Labour Briefing, Dec 2018 issue*