

Trump's threat to tear up nuclear pact with Russia met with alarm in Europe, silence from Democrats

Bill Van Auken
23 October 2018

The threat issued over the weekend by US President Donald Trump to unilaterally rip up a key disarmament treaty with Russia has provoked vows from Russia to retaliate, expressions of sharp concern among Washington's NATO allies and near total silence from Trump's ostensible opposition in the Democratic Party.

Two weeks before the US midterm elections, not a single candidate, Democrat or Republican, is raising the growing danger of a new nuclear arms race and of direct military confrontation between the world's two largest nuclear powers as an issue. No section of the ruling political establishment has any interest in alerting the population to the real and present danger of a catastrophic nuclear war.

The Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) treaty that Trump has vowed to scuttle was negotiated in 1987 between US President Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev, whose "perestroika" and "glasnost" policies paved the way to capitalist restoration and the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

The deal banned the production and deployment by the US and Russia of land-based ballistic missiles—both conventional and nuclear—with ranges between 500 and 5,500 kilometers (310–3,420 miles). It represented a significant concession by Moscow—previously rejected by Gorbachev's predecessors and the Soviet military command—resulting in the destruction of 1,752 Soviet missiles, including SS-20s aimed at Washington's European NATO allies, as compared with 859 less powerful US missiles, most of them Pershing IIs pointed at Moscow and other Soviet targets. The deployment of the US missiles had provoked mass protests, particularly in Germany, over the fear that the arms buildup threatened to turn Europe into the main battlefield in a US-Soviet nuclear war.

That threat is now being revived between the US and Russia with charges and counter-charges, provoking new expressions of alarm in Europe.

Washington has charged Moscow with developing and deploying a new intermediate range nuclear missile, which Russia denies.

The danger that the dispute over the so-called intermediate-range nuclear missiles could turn into a direct military conflict between the world's two largest nuclear powers became all too apparent earlier this month, when the US NATO ambassador, Key Bailey Hutchison, threatened a pre-emptive military strike against Russia. Hutchison told a press conference at NATO headquarters in Brussels that if Moscow continued its development and alleged deployment of the missile that Washington claims violates the INF treaty, the Pentagon was prepared to "take out" the missile.

The Pentagon, meanwhile, has acknowledged in its 2018 Nuclear Posture Review that it has already begun research and development on new conventional, ground-launched, intermediate-range missile systems. Moscow has further charged that anti-missile installations that the US has deployed surrounding Russia in eastern Europe could easily be converted into launchpads for offensive missiles.

Moscow responded Monday to Trump's threat with a combination of offers to negotiate "mutual" grievances over the INF and threats to answer any US military escalation with one of its own.

"We need to hear the American side's explanation on this issue," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said. "Scrapping the treaty forces Russia to take steps for its own security."

Delivering this "explanation" is US national security adviser John Bolton, the chief advocate within the Trump

administration for abrogating the treaty and an anti-Russian hawk who had previously described Moscow's alleged "meddling" in the US 2016 election as an "act of war." Bolton met with his counterpart, Nikolai Patrushev, secretary of Russia's Security Council, and with Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov on Monday, and is scheduled to hold talks with President Vladimir Putin today.

Reaction in Europe to Trump's threat has been generally negative. German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas called it "regrettable." French President Emmanuel Macron called Trump on Sunday. "The president noted the importance of this treaty, in particular for European security and our strategic stability," Macron's office said of the call. The governments of Italy and Spain issued similar statements.

British Defense Minister Gavin Williamson, meanwhile, reiterated the UK government's subservience to Washington, declaring that Britain stands "absolutely resolute" with the Trump administration.

Should the Trump administration consummate the abrogation of the treaty, it would sharply escalate already rising tensions within NATO, posing the threat of a breakup and the consolidation of a new European military alliance.

China called upon Washington to "think twice" before ripping up the arms control treaty. A foreign ministry spokeswoman added, "It needs to be emphasized that it is completely wrong to bring up China when talking about withdrawal from the treaty."

Washington is being driven to abrogate the treaty in large measure as part of its buildup toward war with China. Not a party to the bilateral accord, China has developed a significant force of land-based, conventionally armed, medium-range ballistic missiles to counter the US military buildup in its "pivot to Asia." The Pentagon wants to counter this by deploying its own missiles in the region, but is barred from doing so by the INF treaty.

Meanwhile, in the US itself, the threat to tear up one of the most important arms control treaties of the 20th century, opening the door to the breakdown of all such agreements and a frenzied arms race to deploy "usable" nuclear weapons, has been met with near total silence, particularly by the Democratic Party, which is ostensibly running against Trump's policies in the midterm elections.

One exception was Senator Robert Menendez, who is the ranking member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Menendez, who has denounced the Trump

administration for not adopting a more confrontational stance against Russia, declared Monday: "There is no doubt that Russia is responsible for the degradation of the INF treaty. However, withdrawing from this treaty without a comprehensive strategy for addressing its underlying strategic implications and without consulting Congress or our allies threatens long-term United States' national security interests."

The Democratic Party supports the buildup to war against Russia and welcomes Trump's threats against Moscow; that is what they have demanded from the outset of his administration. What Menendez is demanding, however, is that the Trump White House present a "comprehensive strategy" for military confrontation with the nuclear-armed power. At the same time, he is expressing concerns within the US military and intelligence apparatus that Trump's unilateralism is undermining the NATO military alliance in Europe.

Within America's two capitalist parties and the ruling political establishment generally, there exists no antiwar faction. Divisions between the Democrats and the Trump White House are limited to tactical matters of where and how the US should concentrate its global war drive.

The US ruling class as a whole supports the escalation of the conflict with Russia, regardless of the threat of nuclear war. The aim is to eliminate the Russian Federation as an impediment to US domination of the strategic energy producing regions of the Middle East and Central Asia, and ultimately to subjugate and divide it into a collection of semi-colonies of US imperialism.

Despite the basic unanimity of the two capitalist parties in support of war and reaction, there exists a powerful constituency for the struggle against war within the American working class. The US government, the corporate media and the major parties have all sought to conceal the real danger of a global nuclear conflagration from the broad mass of the population.



To contact the WSW and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact