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Progressive Foreign Policy Debrief

Intel for Advocacy

SL: This Halloween, Trump wants to bring nuclear weapons back from the dead

TOPLINE TAKEAWAY

- *Just in time for Halloween and a new Congress, intermediate-range nuclear weapons are back from the dead.*

THE NEW CONGRESS WILL HAVE TO KILL ZOMBIE NUKES

Following a campaign rally last weekend, President Trump [announced](#) that the U.S. will withdraw from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty. The INF Treaty banned development and deployment of intermediate-range nuclear weapons (with a range of 500 to 5,500 km) and is credited as “[the treaty that ended the Cold War](#).”

U.S. withdrawal from the INF Treaty breathes new life into an entire class of nuclear weapons largely dead and buried. And while unceremonious, Trump’s apparent resurrection of these zombie nukes at a campaign event demonstrates how much the issue of nuclear weapons should matter after November 6.

Depending on who controls the House of Representatives after the midterms, we could see two significantly different Congressional approaches to Trump’s nuclear policies. The Trump Administration’s Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) [envisioned](#) a dangerously expanded role for nuclear weapons in the U.S. national security strategy that could make nuclear use more likely. Trump’s nuclear plan includes the development of new so-called “low-yield” nuclear weapons. (If you’re wondering what’s meant by “low-yield,” think Hiroshima and Nagasaki -- destructive impact that no one should want to emulate.) While many in Congress have sought to give Trump everything on his nuclear wishlist this year, there will be pushes to stall or defund those efforts.

In [comments](#) made last month, Rep. Adam Smith, who would become the new House Armed Services Committee chairman if Democrats gain a majority in the House, said, “I think the Republican party and the nuclear posture review contemplates a lot more nuclear weapons than I - and I think most Democrats - think we need.” In reaction to Trump’s withdrawal from the INF Treaty, Smith and House Foreign Affairs Committee Ranking Member Eliot Engel [warned](#)

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against a U.S. exit from the INF and sought congressional oversight on the administration's plans.

The American public will be paying attention to how this issue plays out. A [new poll](#) this week found that 49 percent of Americans oppose withdrawing from the INF Treaty, while just 31 percent support the move. What's more, a [poll](#) in January found that more than half of Americans are worried that Trump might launch a nuclear attack without reason, and that 60 percent do not trust him with sole authority over the nuclear arsenal. In the wake of Trump's dangerous and provocative policies on nuclear weapons, it's time to reanimate the conversation surrounding nuclear weapons and ensure that voters know that preventing a new arms race is on the agenda for the next Congress.

TRUMP TAKES A BITE OUT OF THE INF

Ironically, the INF Treaty being dismantled by Trump is the achievement of another Republican president -- Ronald Reagan. The INF Treaty was [signed](#) by President Reagan and Soviet Union leader Mikhail Gorbachev in 1987 and was designed to protect our NATO allies in Europe from a U.S.-Soviet escalation. The treaty did so by preventing the development of intermediate-range missiles that could be fired by the Soviet Union into Europe, as well as banning the U.S. deployment of reciprocal weapons within Europe. The INF Treaty also set the foundation for the first Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) for bilateral U.S.-Soviet nuclear arms reduction that put the United States and Russia on a path towards nuclear disarmament.

While the U.S. [found](#) Russia in noncompliance with the INF Treaty in 2014, Trump's decision to withdraw is both [irresponsible and premature](#). Diplomatic measures to address Russia's noncompliance are far from exhausted. Instead, **U.S. withdrawal only incentivizes a new arms race between Russia and the United States** and drives the wedge further between the U.S. and Europe, who [don't want](#) more American nuclear weapons based in their countries.

For more on Trump pulling out of the INF, you can read our full talking points memo [here](#). Here are some toplines:

- **For three decades, the INF Treaty has minimized the prospect of nuclear war** by banning an entire class of nuclear weapons from being built and deployed. Withdrawing from the treaty does not make the U.S., our allies, or the world safer.
- **Intermediate-range nuclear weapons offer the U.S. no strategic military advantage.** The U.S. has long-range missiles capable of reaching Russia and both sea and air capabilities to deter China.

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- **Withdrawal from the INF Treaty will not address Russia's noncompliance.** Instead it takes constraints off Russia and makes a nuclear arms race and nuclear weapons use more likely.
- **Congress must do everything in its power to prevent Trump from obtaining new nuclear weapons banned under the INF Treaty** by prohibiting funding for the production of such weapons. To protect traditional U.S.-Russia arms control, Congress should also express its support for the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) -- which entered into force in 2011 -- and demand its extension before it expires in 2021.

Unfortunately, it is unlikely that the INF Treaty will survive this attack. Trump's National Security Advisor John Bolton [reportedly](#) rejected Russian appeals to remain in the treaty after a meeting this week with Putin and other Russian officials. But we will not know for sure until after the [next Trump-Putin meeting](#), which may take place next month.

THE INF TREATY IS NOT THE ONLY VICTIM

Trump's withdrawal from the INF Treaty comes in the wake of a series of similar policy decisions to dismantle nuclear nonproliferation efforts and increase the risk of nuclear war:

- **Unilaterally violating the Iran nuclear deal and reimposing harsh sanctions on Iran to try to blow up the deal, despite Iran's continued compliance.** Without the economic incentives offered by the agreement, Iran has less incentive to remain compliant. Trump's actions thereby create the conditions for Iran to decide to ramp up elements of its nuclear program that were frozen under the deal, bringing it closer to being able to quickly build a nuclear weapon, and risking the spread of nuclear weapons in the Middle East.
- **Building new nukes and a belief in "nuclear warfighting" increase the risk of nuclear use and a global nuclear arms race.** Trump's nuclear strategy encourages the development of new [nuclear bombs](#) that are [deceptively called "low-yield" warheads](#), to justify potentially using nuclear weapons in a wider array of warfighting scenarios.

While Trump has been the decision maker on these issues, we should also be clear that John Bolton has been one of the key architects of the U.S. turning its back on nuclear nonproliferation. Bolton has built his career on upending international law and norms, as well as ending U.S. participation in international arms control and nonproliferation agreements. When Bolton worked in the George W. Bush administration, he similarly blew up the Agreed Framework with North Korea and masterminded U.S. withdrawal from the Anti-Ballistic Missile

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Treaty. And if his “[serial killing spree of arms control agreements](#)” continues, New START might be the [next victim](#).

GRAVE DANGER AHEAD

The Trump administration’s policies make the use of nuclear weapons and nuclear war more likely. Whether it’s encouraging the development so-called “low yield” nuclear weapons or lifting restrictions on range, Trump and Bolton are expanding the arsenal of nuclear options available to a president with sole authority to hit the button.

But the reality is that there’s no such thing as a small or “low yield” nuclear weapon. All nuclear weapons are unacceptably destructive and dangerous. The [decision we are actually facing](#) is between nuclear war or no nuclear war. It’s that simple. And in dismantling vital nuclear nonproliferation agreements, the Trump administration incentivizes a new global nuclear arms race that pushes us closer to the brink.

Like zombies back from the dead, the Trump administration’s resurrection of an offensive nuclear weapons policy should terrify us all.

BURIED LEDES

The fallout of the murder of Washington Post journalist Jamal Khashoggi at the hands of the Saudi government [continues](#) as a bipartisan measure was introduced in the House this week **under the leadership of Rep. Jim McGovern aimed at prohibiting military aid and sales to Saudi Arabia.**

Germany has taken [the lead](#) as Chancellor **Angela Merkel announced this week that her government will not approve new arms sales** to Saudi Arabia until further notice.

Meanwhile, Sens. Feinstein, Durbin, Leahy, and Sanders [wrote to Trump](#) telling him that his “crude abandonment” of American values at home and abroad and his “embrace of global autocrats **has weakened our great nation and undermined its moral standing in the world.**”

Khashoggi’s murder has not only drawn more attention to the U.S.-aided Saudi-led airstrikes in Yemen (see op-eds from [Sen. Sanders](#) and [Rep. Ro Khanna](#) this week on this) but also to [an economic war](#) in Yemen “that is exacting a far greater toll on civilians and **now risks tipping the country into a famine of catastrophic proportions.**”

Iran hawks [aren’t interested](#) in holding Saudi Arabia accountable for murdering Khashoggi because **they want their war with Iran.**

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Team Trump was talking regime change in Iran with the Saudis [before](#) Trump even took office.

There are [signs](#) that **peace talks with the Taliban are yielding tangible results.**

Immigrant recruits are having their loyalty questioned for the high crime of merely [following lawsuits](#) about the fate of their future in the U.S. military.

Support for Israel among American liberals, millennials, and women has plummeted, as “the perception of [close ties between Trump and Israel](#) and between Netanyahu and Trump are definitely pushing Democrats and liberals to distance themselves from the Jewish state.”

Marshall Island residents [continue](#) to seek healthcare, and justice, for having **unwittingly been made human test subjects to American nuclear weapons tests.**

And finally, we're almost desensitized to the madness of the Trump era, but **it's worth repeating that there was an assassination attempt this week on two former U.S. presidents** and a handful of others publicly reviled by Trump. And there are prominent figures on the right who [floated the conspiracy theory](#) that it was a false flag operation organized by the left.