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Progressive Foreign Policy Debrief

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SL: The proliferation administration

[TRUMP CASTS DIPLOMACY ASIDE FOR RENEWED ARMS RACE](#)

As Donald Trump's [ridiculous antics](#) continue to dominate mainstream headlines and elite media conversation, news of a, once again, Trump-induced dire threat to humanity (not hyperbole) largely flies under the radar.

This week, the United States, for the first time since the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty with the the-Soviet Union was ratified in 1988, test fired a ground-launched cruise missile off the coast of California that the INF would have banned.

Trump—with prodding from, you guessed it, [John Bolton](#)—officially withdrew from the Treaty earlier this month in a move that the Arms Control Association [said](#) “could open the door to a dangerous new era of unconstrained military competition with Russia.”

The Trump administration claims that it withdrew because Russia had been out of compliance for years. Similarly the Russians claim the U.S. violated the Treaty by placing what it claimed were offensive weapons in Poland and Romania (while the U.S. countered they were for defensive purposes only). Oddly enough, [according to Defense News](#), imagery of the U.S. missile test this week “shows the weapon was launched from a Mark 41 Vertical Launch System, the same launcher used in the Aegis Ashore missile defense system” based in Europe that the Russians claimed were offensive.

But the point is that the United States has more than enough diplomatic prowess and resources to invest in dealing with Russia's INF Treaty violation. Instead, Trump chose to weaken the State Department, devalue diplomatic options, and empower Bolton—who has a [history of blowing up arms control agreements](#)—and his preference to kill the Treaty.

"We're kind of stumbling or drifting into this arms race with the Russians," Jeffrey Lewis, a nuclear expert at the James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies, [told NBC News](#). "But there is a real human cost to an arms race. There were all kinds of disasters in the Soviet Union and the United States during the Cold War, because people felt so strongly about the need to do these dangerous things."

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And that's exactly what's happening now. Not only did newly-minted Defense Secretary Mark Esper [say](#) the U.S. would deploy the new offensive missile capabilities to the Pacific (a claim he later walked back), but also Trump trashing the INF has given Russia renewed license.

SKYFALL-OUT FROM TRUMP'S INF WITHDRAWAL

Indeed, shortly after Trump officially withdrew from the INF, Russia's test of a nuclear-powered cruise missile—of which NATO has dubbed "[Skyfall](#)"—capable of carrying nuclear weapons and, allegedly, evading sophisticated missile defense systems, went horribly awry in an explosion that [reportedly](#) killed five Russian scientists and caused radiation levels in the surrounding area to spike significantly. However, the level of damage or how widespread it is remains a mystery as the Russian government is keeping a Chernobyl-esque lid on any information about the accident. The Russians have even apparently [shut off radiation sensors](#) in the area—mandated by the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty—to prevent outside observers from gathering any data.

To get a sense of how irresponsible it is to test these kinds of weapons, the United States thought about doing it in the 1960s, "but it was too crazy, too unworkable, too cruel even for those nuclear nuts [in the] Cold War years," [said](#) Ploughshares Fund President Joe Cirincione.

"Is it dangerous? Yes!" Lewis [said](#). "I think the phrase 'flying nuclear reactor' tells you all you need to know."

THE GUARDRAILS ARE COMING OFF

Zooming out from Trump's INF Treaty exit, Russia's subsequent nuclear powered missile test failure, and the U.S. ground missile launch paints a grim picture. When you throw in Trump's withdrawal from the Iran nuclear agreement and his plans to scrap the New START Treaty—which places limits on U.S. and Russian long-range nuclear weapons—it's becoming more clear that the guardrails that have prevented the spread of nuclear weapons and their delivery systems are unraveling. In fact, India is now [floating the idea](#) of abandoning its "[no-first-use](#)" policy as tensions with fellow nuclear weapons state Pakistan have escalated into (a, once again, [Trump-induced](#)) crisis.

So as we can see, Trump's claim during the 2016 presidential campaign that nuclear proliferation was the "[greatest threat](#)" we face was just another lie. During that time, Trump [reportedly](#) wondered why we have nuclear weapons if we can't use them, and following his 2016 victory, [welcomed an arms race](#) with Russia. Perhaps we should start taking that more seriously.

WHAT WE CAN DO

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One of Win Without War's [main priorities](#) for the final FY2020 National Defense Authorization Act is to maintain the House-passed measure that would prevent deployment for Trump's so-called "low-yield" nuclear weapon (a.k.a. the gateway nuke) and we're [asking activists](#) to encourage their members of Congress to support it during the August recess. Senator Elizabeth Warren and 17 other senators also [sent a letter this week](#) to Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman James M. Inhofe and Ranking Member Jack Reed urging them to keep this and other nuclear nonproliferation related measures in the final FY2020 NDAA.

If you'd like to support our work to stop a new nuclear arms race, please consider a donation [here](#).

BURIED LEDES

NBD: [fires are burning](#) in the Amazon rainforest [at a record rate](#), **representing a huge setback in efforts to combat climate change.**

[On the other hand](#), **clean energy jobs in California outnumber fossil fuel jobs by 5 to 1** so that's something.

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo [is bummed](#) **we're all still talking about how the Saudi government murdered a journalist** who was working for a prominent American newspaper.

Thankfully the **Trump administration has decided against cutting more than \$4 billion in foreign aid**, [for now](#).

A British government report on the chaos a no-deal Brexit would cause [recently leaked](#) to the press and **its best case scenarios are ... not good.**

The claim that Afghanistan will turn into a terrorist safe-haven if the U.S. withdraws [is a myth](#).

[Another poll](#) finds that a large majority of **Americans don't want to go to war with Iran.**

Haven't gotten around to reading the Mueller report yet? Here's a [handy summary](#) of everything in it.

According to [Reuters](#), the UN warned this week that **life saving aid to Yemen will dry up** unless "countries do not pay more than \$1 billion in funding that they pledged earlier this year."

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And finally, Ted Cruz [actually might have been on to something](#). Cruz said of Trump during the 2016 presidential campaign: "We're liable to wake up one morning and Donald (Trump), if he were president, **would have nuked Denmark**. That's not the temperament of a leader to keep this country safe."