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By Ernie Regehr and Douglas Roche

The world is about to lose one of the most important nuclear disarmament agreements ever made — and Canada is silent.

The 1987 Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, signed by U.S. President Ronald Reagan and Soviet Union President Mikhail Gorbachev, eliminated a whole class of intermediate-range nuclear missiles and marked the beginning of the end of the Cold War. Now U.S. President Donald Trump has said the U.S. intends to suspend its participation in early February, leading to its “termination” six months later.

Why? The U.S. says the Russians are cheating. Russia says the U.S. is stretching the Treaty’s boundaries. Who’s right? That’s what verification procedures and diplomatic talks are all about. Canada must demand a diplomatic review of INF compliance procedures because we have a big stake in whether the world will lapse into a new nuclear arms race.

And that is where the world is headed. Gorbachev, now in retirement, and George Shultz, who was Reagan’s Secretary of State, have issued a dire warning that “abandoning the INF” would undermine strategic stability and be a step towards an immensely destructive war.

The importance and success of this Treaty cannot be in doubt. It bans the possession, production, and flight-testing of ground-launched missiles within the 500 to 5,500 kilometres range and bans launchers for such missiles. Also, it produced the elimination of 2,692 Soviet and U.S. missiles based in Europe, and it was key to building an innovative system of verification, data exchanges, and mutual consultations.

Two giants of American arms control who now run the Nuclear Threat Initiative, Senator (Ret’d) Sam Nunn and Ernest J. Moniz, Secretary of Energy in the Obama Administration, have also warned of a “cascade of negative consequences” if the INF Treaty is abandoned – including the unfettered deployment by Russia of intermediate missiles

sparking a new arms race, serious division within NATO, and the undermining of efforts to rally the world to prevent the further spread of nuclear weapons and missiles.

The end of the INF also portends the collapse of the U.S.-Russia New Start Treaty, due to expire in 2021 unless it is renewed. The U.S. has signalled it's not interested in renewing the one nuclear disarmament pillar left to hold in check a new outbreak of long-range missiles. The nuclear-armed states are already modernizing their nuclear stocks.

The Nobel Peace Prize-winning International Pugwash warns against "a world ungoverned by treaties constraining actions of states with nuclear weapons," and concludes that "decades of effort to build an architecture of restraint are unravelling because key lessons from the early years of the Cold War seem to have been forgotten."

We appreciate that in 2018 both the G-7 and NATO summits, with Canada's participation, declared that the preservation of the INF Treaty is a key to Euro-Atlantic and international security, but we are disappointed that the government of Canada has itself remained inexplicably silent in the face of the Trump Administration's threat to abandon the Treaty.

The INF Treaty is not simply a European or U.S.-Russia matter. Canada definitely has a stake in averting the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of the use of any nuclear weapon. As the great Canadian diplomat George Ignatieff once said, "No incineration without representation."

This is not a time for quiet diplomacy. Canada has a voice and stature in the world. We must be heard by those who control our fate of whether we will live or die in a nuclear war. What the world should be witnessing is not the collapse of nuclear arms control treaties but new agreements to provide for further reductions in deployed and stockpiled nuclear weapons.

Silence is an abrogation of responsibility. We urge Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and his government to provide bold, public, and insistent leadership.

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