

The cancellation of the CFE treaty by Russia and the tit-for-tat expulsion of Russian and British diplomats -- seemingly unrelated -- have strong parallels in Cold War mythology, according to Eric Walberg

26/7/7 -- The decision in July 2007 by the Russian government to withdraw from the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty negotiated in the dying days of the SU comes as no surprise. Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev gave the US the shop, being more concerned about domestic reform and Western aid, convinced that Reagan's US was really a peace-loving sort.

And despite the bargain- basement price, the US Senate never bothered to ratify it, so it was a sitting duck. The Russian announcement noted that the US plan to set up missile bases in Poland and the Czech Republic is an egregious violation of a treaty on European disarmament and that alone makes the treaty meaningless, with or without the precious Senate approval. Gorbachev himself supported Putin's decision: "It would be absolutely illogical for Russia to be the only state to abide by the treaty and for the others not to even ratify it."

Of course, the US insists its missile plans have nothing to do with the CFE Treaty. Apples and oranges. On the contrary, in typical US casuistry, it is Putin who is the spoiler, refusing to pull troops out of Trans-Dniester and Georgia, a completely extraneous rider to the treaty blithely agreed to by former president, Boris Yeltsin in 1999 to sweeten it for the US Senate. It's not the US that is violating every conceivable notion of peace and disarmament by tearing up the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty, absorbing eastern Europe and the Baltics into NATO, pressuring some of these countries to allow US missile bases, not to mention its massive arms build-up and invasions of sundry countries since the treaty was signed 19 years ago. No, it's Russia's unpredictable, bellicose behaviour. And of course the Western media dutifully chimes in. *Newsweek*'s cover blares "The Tyrant's Turn", a sequel to its cover "Putin's Dark Descent". If it was not so perverse, it would be worth a laugh. In fact, Russia is withdrawing its remaining troops from Georgia, despite very provocative flirting by Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili with NATO and the US. It insists that the few troops remaining in Trans-Dniester are peacekeepers, which any Transnistrian will readily confirm.

Trans-Dniester is a breakaway province of Moldova with a half million ethnic Russian and Ukrainians surrounded by very unsympathetic ethnic Moldovans, like in Kaliningrad, one of dozens of incongruous remnants of Soviet days. It suffered a bloody war with Moldova in 1992 and the Russian army intervention on the side of the secessionists. A peace accord with the Moldovan government giving the region greater autonomy was signed in 1997. In 2003 Russia signed a memorandum with Moldova to federalise this republic and legalise the stationing of the Russian troops until 2020, but nationalist demonstrations in Moldova forced the government to renege. A referendum in September 2006 approved independence and eventual union with

Russia. The vote, however, was rejected by Moldova and the EU. Oh, it just happens to have one of the largest stockpiles of arms (Soviet) in Europe and those pesky 1,300 Russian troops. A sort of Kosovo in reverse.

In any case, these rider clauses are not what the treaty is about, and really don't belong there anyway. US criticisms based on them are (a) part of its continuing campaign to tighten its hold on Europe and (b) a cover for the real violations to the spirit of disarmament that the US is indulging in.

The main focus of the treaty, the massive disengagement that took place in Europe following the collapse of the SU, was successfully implemented, bringing to an end one of the greatest military stand-offs in history. It helped usher in a united peaceful Europe, again for the first time in history, though the withdrawal of all Soviet/Russian troops was not reciprocated -- there are 120,000 US troops still mysteriously "protecting" Europe. Instead of complaining about 1,300 Russian troops genuinely protecting a Russian-speaking enclave in Moldova, Europe and Russia should be demanding that the US withdraw its troops from Europe.

So is it any wonder that Russia pulled the plug? The treaty has long been a joke. The New York Times even coyly admits that, "the Bush administration has put less stock in official treaty relations than many predecessors." It's a wonder that Putin was as slow to react as he in fact was. And most fortunate for him that oil prices have allowed him to stabilise the economy and chart a courageous international political agenda.

Instead of sober analysis, Western pundits poked fun at Putin, arguing that there is no provision in the treaty for a moratorium, only withdrawal. "This is basically non-compliance, an illegal move," huffs Pavel Felgenhauer, a Moscow-based analyst who writes for the right-wing US Jamestown Foundation. Yes, more casuistry. How many angels on the head of that pin, Pavel? OK, Putin really meant "withdrawing", abiding by the 150-day grace period specified in the treaty. The linguistic slight-of-hand on his part is most likely a diplomatic manoeuvre, intended to give the US a chance to reconsider its grossly foolhardy Euro-missile bases and Star Wars plans, and call for some serious negotiations on the real dangers to world peace.

And lo and behold, US officials immediately scrambled to express optimism that Putin's decision "might serve to energise negotiations in the 150 days offered by the Kremlin." But this is really just smoke and mirrors. As the officials were obfuscating, Polish President Lech Kaczynski was on his way to the US, first to Washington to finalise the missile base plans (Poland has "held

## CFE Treaty, Trans-Dniester, Polish missiles: Tit for tat

Written by Eric Walberg

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out", hoping to negotiate military contracts and other concessions) before calling in on Nancy Reagan in California to present her with the White Eagle, Poland's highest award, in recognition of ex-President Ronald Reagan for helping destroy Communism. Ahh, Poland.

<http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2007/855/in3.htm>