

Letters

Missile Treaty Deserves to Be Ratified Quickly

To the Editor:

Eugene V. Rostow's article opposing prompt ratification of the intermediate nuclear force treaty ("Go Slow on Ratifying the I.N.F. Pact," Op-Ed, Jan. 5) can only be based on the theory that any agreement the Soviet Union is willing to sign must ipso facto be contrary to our interests — a theory that would put an end to international treaties altogether.

According to participants in the deployment of the intermediate- and short-range missiles in Europe, we put them there to reassure our North Atlantic Treaty Organization allies. According to President Reagan, we sent them to force the Russians to remove theirs. Whichever account is correct, we have achieved both aims: Western Europe supports the new treaty, and the Russians are to remove their missiles.

When Mr. Rostow was a member of the Reagan Administration, he argued for an American position that would have permitted the two sides to retain intermediate nuclear forces in Europe at equal levels greater than zero. His erstwhile colleagues have

now gained Soviet acceptance of a proposal that accomplishes even more — a zero level of forces, to be reached by requiring the Russians to destroy many more missiles than we must. Yet Mr. Rostow argues we should not ratify the agreement until the Russians make similarly asymmetrical cuts in strategic arms and defensive systems, in which he claims they have an advantage.

Unless one is opposed on ideological grounds to the concept that, by taking realistic steps, we may incrementally achieve a safer world, this makes no sense. Why hold a good agreement in hand hostage to the uncertainties of two prospective accords that may never be reached?

If we fail to accept the "yes" answer that the Soviet Union has given to terms that we proposed, the consequences will extend far beyond the militarily insignificant missiles involved, and even beyond the damage that will be done to America's good name in one of the few foreign policy areas where we now have one. If the powerful factions in the Soviet Government that mistrust us intensely

have their fears confirmed by the sort of ploy Mr. Rostow proposes, the effect will be to weaken Mikhail S. Gorbachev's tenuous hold on power.

While this might not bother Mr. Rostow — who would doubtless prefer to rally the American people against a more threatening figure — it would be a severe blow to world peace. Mr. Gorbachev wants economic reform in the Soviet Union in his country's interest, not ours, but knows that he cannot achieve this without opening channels for free communications. As Americans, we are committed to the proposition that open debates are the most fertile seedbeds of peace. Sowing them with the salt of duplicity, as Mr. Rostow's plan would do, in the end would benefit no one.

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