PS1 for 3/31/88#LOOPHOLES IN THE INF TREATY

President Ronald Reagan has called for the ratification of a U.S.-U.S.S.R. treaty that eliminates a whole class of nuclear weapons, destroys thousands of warheads, and is verifiable. Unfortunately, that worthy goal is not met by the Intermediate Nuclear Force (INF) Treaty that he signed with Gorbachev last Pearl Harbor Day (a day of inappropriate imagery) and which is now awaiting ratification by the U.S. Senate.

The INF Treaty does not eliminate nuclear weapons at all, despite the apparent belief to the contrary by practically everybody from presidential candidates to plain people. INF destroys only the missiles, while allowing both the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. to take their ""nuclear warhead devices'' and ""guidance systems'' off of old missiles and put them onto new ones.

The part that kills people and destroys property is not banned under the terms of the treaty. Senator John Glenn said that he has found an appalling number of people ""who were not aware that this treaty does not destroy one single nuclear explosive device.''

Does the INF Treaty eliminate a whole class of nuclear missiles? The answer is yes for the United States but no for the Soviets. INF only requires the Soviets to eliminate the SS-20 missiles they admitted in the treaty that they have.

The National Intelligence Estimate (based on our four military service intelligence departments plus the National Security Agency) figures that the Soviets have at least 300 more SS-20s than they declared in the treaty, and could have up to 1,600 more. Even 50 to 100 hidden SS-20s would be militarily significant, as each has three warheads, each of which is seven times more powerful than the Hiroshima bomb.

We are told that the INF Treaty provides for on-site verification.

The joker in this statement is that verification is permitted only on those sites pre-selected by the Soviets but not on other sites where the Soviets may be hiding hundreds of missiles, including those sites where they formerly deployed INF-type missiles.

Furthermore, there are no procedures for doing anything about it if verification shows that the Soviets have cheated. After all, we never did anything about their cheating on previous treaties.

The INF Treaty involves scrapping only three percent of the missiles held by each superpower, leaving us with 4,000 nuclear warheads remaining in Europe. Unfortunately, the 3 percent to be scrapped are the only ground-based missiles in Europe that are capable of striking the Soviet Union, while the 4,000 others are short-range battlefield weapons that cannot reach the U.S.S.R.

Of course it is good to limit the number and destructiveness of nuclear weapons. But that process has been proceeding steadily for the last 20 years and has nothing to do with treaties, agreements, or the mythology of ""arms control.''

Technological improvements, primarily in making weapons more accurate, have made it more cost-efficient to have fewer nuclear weapons of improved accuracy but less destructive power. Accordingly, the total explosive power of the U.S. nuclear arsenal is now only one-fourth of our peak in 1960.

It is hard to maintain with a straight face that the INF Treaty would be a step toward peace. INF requires the United States to give up our most effective deterrent in Europe, the Pershing II missiles, while the Soviets are permitted to keep their new SS-25s that are capable of hitting the same Western European targets as their SS-20s and also have ICBM capabilities.

The INF Treaty does not reduce by a single one the number of missiles aimed at the United States. It makes Western Europe more

vulnerable to the massive superiority in conventional weapons possessed by the Warsaw Pact nations.

The INF Treaty retargets, but does not scrap, any nuclear weapons, and we can't verify it well enough to know whether the Soviets reduced their SS-20 missiles to zero or concealed additional hundreds they are not admitting. Under the INF Treaty, Gorbachev can take all his SS-20 warheads now targeted on Europe, put ten of them on each of his new missiles, and retarget them on the United States.

All this certainly does not fit the definition of ""promoting peace,'' ""arms control,'' or ""reducing tensions.'' It's no wonder that Senators are asking questions, and it's no wonder that the State Department finds them too embarrassing to answer.