

Although it will remove only 3% of the world nuclear stockpile, this agreement is significant for 3 reasons:

(1) It will remove the hair-trigger of Pershing IIs' mere 6-minute flight time to Moscow, which is dangerous and accident-prone, encouraging a "launch-on-warning" response (possibly to a false alarm). It is thus a measure of "disengagement."

(2) It is the first-ever treaty in which nuclear weapons will actually be reduced. (Previous treaties specified "non-armament" rather than "disarmament," i.e., excluding weapons from areas where they had not previously existed, e.g., Antarctica, the seabed, outer space, Latin America, or the non-nuclear-weapons states, or "arms limitation," with limits higher than existing ones as in SALT I and II.) It is not the first treaty of actual disarmament (that honour is held by the Biological Weapons Treaty, under which some stockpiles were destroyed); but it is the first nuclear disarmament treaty.

(3) It may be the harbinger of further, even more significant steps to come, perhaps to be announced at the next summit meeting: a 50% cut in strategic nuclear weapons is being widely discussed. (Under the present conditions of gross "overkill," this would still leave nuclear stockpiles far in excess of "minimum deterrence" or even "overkill = 1", but it would certainly be significant.)

Some doubts can also be expressed about the INF agreement. For example, how will the warheads be disposed of? Will they merely be attached to other missiles? Or modified and "modernized"? Even if the warheads are dismantled, what will become of the fissionable material? Unlike chemical explosives, plutonium and uranium-235 cannot be destroyed,