

CONVENTIONAL FORCES

IN EUROPE TREATY

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The Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty was signed in Paris on November 19, 1990 - after less than two years of negotiation - by the members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the Warsaw Treaty Organization (WTO). Soviet General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev's announcement to the United Nations in December 1988 of unilateral Soviet force reductions had presented a challenge to NATO. Negotiations on conventional forces thus began in Vienna in March, 1989. The Soviet leadership sought to reduce the threat of new western weapons and operational concepts, to create a "breathing space" for internal economic and social restructuring, and to divert manpower and resources to the country's economy. Both superpowers wanted to eliminate capabilities for initiating surprise attacks and large-scale offensive actions. The treaty mandated the reduction to equal levels of NATO and WTO forces from the Atlantic to the Ural Mountains across five categories of weapons: armored combat vehicles (ACVs), artillery, combat aircraft, combat helicopters and tanks. Because the WTO nations had numerical superiority in most of these categories, they were expected to make

the largest cuts. Provisions were also made in the treaty for an advanced verification regime, which included intrusive on-site verification and data exchanges.

The collapse of the USSR and Warsaw Pact in 1990-1 presented problems, however. East European members of the WTO were unilaterally demanding the withdrawal of Soviet forces from their soil. Western critics argued that by focusing on bloc-to-bloc negotiations at a time like this, NATO was constraining itself unnecessarily. As the political situation in the East continued to shift, the USSR seemed hesitant to complete the CFE agreement, since the WTO hardly constituted a credible bloc. Meanwhile, the Soviet successor states were loath to see their future military forces constrained by a treaty signed by the former regime. Nevertheless, by January 1992, all had agreed "in principle" to ratify the CFE treaty. By November 1995, when the 40-month reduction period had ended, the parties had eliminated some 50,000 weapons and withdrawn 15,000 more.

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