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Back to the Future? The New Missile Crisis

1. Introduction

The 1987 INF Treaty¹ between the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on the Elimination of their Intermediate-Range and Shorter-Range Missiles—more commonly referred to as the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty²—can easily be considered a landmark arms control and disarmament treaty.³ It was the first bilateral agreement between the Soviet Union and the United States to effectively eliminate a whole class of missiles and missile launchers. It lifted the most imminent nuclear threat to Western Europe, served as a significant turning point in U.S.–Soviet relations, and introduced the most intrusive verification measures up to that point. Its background history was the first period of détente, NATO's Dual-Track Decision to counter the Soviet SS-20 threat, and a negotiation record which finally achieved what almost no one would have expected when negotiators first sat down in Geneva.

31 years after the INF Treaty entered into force (in 1988), the Administration of U.S. President Donald Trump decided to quit the agreement in the summer of 2019. Since 2014 the United States had been publicly accusing Moscow of violating the Treaty by flight-testing a ground-launched Cruise Missile (GLCM) in the ranges banned by the INF Treaty (500–5,500 km).⁴ Subsequently, U.S. officials expressed concerns that Russia might have started to produce more missiles

- 1 Parts of this article are taken from an earlier article on the INF crisis. See Ulrich Kühn and Anna Péczeli, Russia, NATO, and the INF Treaty, in: *Strategic Studies Quarterly* 11/1 (2017), pp. 66–99.
- 2 Treaty Between The United States Of America And The Union Of Soviet Socialist Republics On The Elimination Of Their Intermediate-Range And Shorter-Range Missiles (INF Treaty), <http://www.state.gov/t/avc/trty/102360.htm>.
- 3 Cf. Avis Bohlen, William Burns, Steven Pifer, and John Woodworth (eds.), *The Treaty on Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces: History and Lessons Learned*, in: *The Brookings Institution* (December 2012), <http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/papers/2012/12/arms-control-inf-treaty-pifer/30-arms-control-pifer-paper.pdf>; Amy F. Woolf, *Russian Compliance with the Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty: Background and Issues for Congress*, Congressional Research Service (April 25, 2018), <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/nuke/R43832.pdf>.
- 4 U.S. Department of State, *Adherence to and Compliance with Arms Control, Nonproliferation, and Disarmament Agreements and Commitments*, Report, (April, 2017), <https://www.state.gov/2017-report-on-adherence-to-and-compliance-with-arms-control-nonproliferation-and-disarmament-agreements-and-commitments/> (accessed March 30, 2020).

than needed to sustain a flight-test program.⁵ Russia rejected the accusations and tabled a number of counter-allegations against the United States.⁶ The diplomatic back-and-forth finally culminated in the U.S. decision to withdraw from the Treaty—a decision with potentially wide-ranging repercussions for the security of Europe and East Asia.

The end of the INF Treaty comes at a critical time. Ever since the Russian annexation of Crimea in March 2014, Moscow's relations with the West have plummeted to an all-time post-Cold War low. Against a background of mutual accusations of violating the norms and principles of the European security order, covert Russian involvement in the war in Eastern Ukraine, Moscow's alleged meddling in the 2016 U.S. Presidential elections, the unresolved case of the poisoning of former operative Sergei Skripal, the continued rhetorical Russian nuclear saber-rattling and intimidation of European NATO allies, the European Union's economic sanctions against Russia, and the Russian military intervention in Syria, the West and Russia find themselves trapped in a dangerous downward spiral, which some have already labeled a "New Cold War."⁷

The renewed confrontation has also left its mark on the instruments of arms control. Through its actions in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine, Russia violated the Budapest Memorandum of 1994 in which it, along with the United States and Britain, had agreed to respect the sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity of Ukraine (a key element in securing Kiev's agreement to transfer all Soviet-era nuclear warheads to Russia for elimination).⁸ In so doing, Moscow further damaged the integrity of so-called negative security guarantees in general. In March 2015, Russia completed its "suspension" of the most important conventional arms control treaty—the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe—and walked out of that treaty's decision-making body.⁹ On nuclear safety and security, Russia ended almost all cooperation with the United States on bilateral efforts to secure nuclear materials and facilities under the auspices of the Cooperative Threat Reduction program and cancelled the US–Russian Plutonium Management and Disposition Agreement.

5 Michael R. Gordon, *Russia Is Moving Ahead with Missile Program That Violates Treaty*, U.S. Officials Say, in: *The New York Times*, October 19, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/20/world/europe/russia-missiles-inf-treaty.html?_r=0.

6 The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, *Comments on the report of the U. S. Department of State on Adherence to and Compliance with Arms Control, Nonproliferation, and Disarmament Agreements and Commitments*, (August 1, 2014) http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/0/D2D396AE143B098144257D2A0054C7FD.

7 Robert Legvold, *Managing the New Cold War*, in: *Foreign Affairs*, 93/4 (2014), pp. 74–84.

8 For the Budapest Memorandum between Russia, the USA, the UK and Ukraine from December 5, 1994 see https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atfcl/%7BF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s19941399_.pdf (last accessed March 30, 2020).

9 Kingston Reif, *Russia Completes CFE Treaty Suspension*, in: *Arms Control Today*, April 2015, <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2015-04/news-briefs/russia-completes-cfe-treaty-suspension> (last accessed March 30, 2020).

Taken together, these developments have led some to caution that the world is experiencing “the end of the history of nuclear arms control.”¹⁰ Others have argued that Russia has effectively broken with the rules and constraints of the European and global security order and that the West (that is, NATO) is, therefore, no longer bound by agreements like the INF Treaty.¹¹ After the end of the INF Treaty, the United States and its Allies in Europe and East Asia face a choice of what to do to enhance security: give arms control another chance or provide the ground for another missile buildup.

This essay recounts the history of the INF Treaty from the latter days of *détente* to the current developments after the end of INF. It explains why the current post-INF environment is highly problematic for European security, and what the way forward—reviving arms control or re-entering an arms race—might look like. Even though the new missile crisis might create additional negative ripple effects for East Asia, the essay focuses primarily on Europe.

2. The Cold War Missile Crisis

It is crucial to note that, from the very beginning, the history of the INF Treaty was mainly a history of European security concerns. The precarious military balance in conventional forces between NATO and the Warsaw Pact came under increasing pressure when the Soviet Union decided to replace its aging SS-4 and SS-5 ballistic missiles (all single-warhead missiles) with the three-warhead SS-20 ballistic missile. Deployed deep inside Soviet territory and having a maximum range of 5,000 kilometers, the SS-20 was potentially able to strike any target in Western Europe as well as targets in Southeast Asia and Alaska.

The European NATO allies, first and foremost West German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt, identified those weapons as destabilizing the security system, creating a gap in NATO’s nuclear deterrence posture. They had no similar capabilities to match the threat. When, in 1979, the NATO Allies decided effectively to mount a response to the growing SS-20 threat, they opted for a dyadic concept.¹² The Dual-Track Decision had two components. On the deployment track, NATO

10 Alexei Arbatov, *An Unnoticed Crisis: The End of History for Nuclear Arms Control?*, in: Carnegie Endowment, June 2015, http://carnegieendowment.org/files/CP_Arbatov2015_n_web_Eng.pdf (last accessed March 30, 2020).

11 Matthew Kroenig, *Facing Reality: Getting NATO Ready for a New Cold War*, in: *Survival* 57/1 (2015), pp. 49–70.

12 The Harmel Doctrine of 1967, named after Belgian Foreign Minister Pierre Harmel, outlined a two-pronged strategy based on deterrence and engagement for NATO. The doctrine’s core concern was the maintenance of an adequate defense of all Allies. That concern was coupled with a political agenda of engagement with the Soviet Union aimed at stopping the nuclear arms race and reducing the dangerous tensions between the two blocs. See NATO, *The Future Tasks of the Alliance*, Report of the Council Ministerial Communiqué, Brussels, December 1967, pp.13 f., http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_67927.htm.

threatened to introduce 108 newly built Pershing II ballistic missiles and 464 GLCMs into Europe. On the arms control track, NATO reached out to the Soviets and offered negotiations aimed at achieving limits that could affect the scale of the deployment it proposed.

The first round of negotiations (1981–1983) was completely fruitless, due to both sides sticking to their maximum positions. Washington wanted to include all INF-systems—those in the 1,000 to 5,500 km range—wherever they were deployed and proposed the so-called “double zero” option (put forward by President Ronald Reagan), by which all SS-4, SS-5, and SS-20 missiles should be dismantled and the Pershing II and GLCM not be deployed. Meanwhile, the Soviets insisted on including British and French systems, limiting the geographical scope to cover only the European part of the Soviet Union (thus allowing for Soviet INF-range deployments in the Asian part of the USSR), and including all American nuclear-capable missiles and aircraft in Europe. In November 1983, as a result of this diplomatic deadlock, the first weapons were deployed in West Germany. As a direct reaction, the Soviet delegation to the INF talks in Geneva walked out.¹³

3. An Arms Control Solution

When Mikhail Gorbachev took office as General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in March 1985, a resumption of the INF talks had already been agreed upon (two months earlier). However, it was only in 1986 that the Soviet position changed markedly, and in a surprising way. By the time of the Reagan-Gorbachev summit in Reykjavik in October 1986, the Soviets had already come close to the original U. S. double zero proposal, even though Gorbachev wanted to retain a small number of INF missiles in Asia. To the surprise of Western analysts, Moscow subsequently went even further than the original U. S. proposal had, by suggesting the inclusion of missiles of shorter ranges (between 500 and 1,000 km)—which meant including the West German Pershing IA and the Soviet SS-23 and SS-12.¹⁴ On 8 December 1987, Reagan and Gorbachev signed the INF Treaty in the East Room of the White House.

Being of unlimited duration, the Treaty eliminated all Soviet SS-20, SS-4, SS-5, SS-12, and SS-23 ballistic missiles as well as SSC-X-4 Cruise Missiles and launchers on the one side; on the other, all U. S. Pershing II and Pershing IB ballistic missiles; and the relevant U. S. ground-launched Cruise Missiles and launchers. In fact, the Treaty banned all U. S. and Soviet ground-launched nuclear and conventional missiles and launchers with a range between 500 and 5,500 km worldwide. By June 1, 1991, a total of 2,692 intermediate-range missiles had been

13 U. S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, *Understanding the INF Treaty*, Washington, D. C., 1989, p. 9.

14 Bohlen et al. (eds.), *The Treaty on Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces*, p. 6.

entirely eliminated. In addition, the Treaty prohibited producing or flight-testing any new INF systems or separate stages of INF missiles or launchers. It did not, however, ban sea-launched Cruise Missiles (SLCMs) or air-launched Cruise Missiles (ALCMs). A further novelty was the asymmetric character of the reductions. While the Soviet Union destroyed 1,846 missiles, the United States destroyed 846 missiles. To address possible compliance concerns and to oversee implementation, the Treaty established the Special Verification Commission (SVC).¹⁵

For Europe, INF meant the beginning of a process which resulted in a densely institutionalized network of various multilateral arms control and confidence- and security-building measures, including, among others, the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe, the various formal stipulations on military transparency and predictability of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (the later OSCE), as well as the bilateral Strategic Arms Reductions treaties (START I and II) and the U.S.–Soviet Presidential Nuclear Initiatives, reducing the number of tactical nuclear weapons with shorter ranges.

4. Growing Russian Discomfort and the U. S. Allegations

The subsequent years saw little reason to worry about the bargain. On-site inspections continued until mid-2001 when, according to the Treaty's provisions, the extensive inspection regime was finally terminated and replaced by national technical means of verification—ten years after the last INF systems had been destroyed. However, below the level of public attention, Russian dissatisfaction with the Treaty did surface now and then. Russian officials and President Vladimir Putin himself questioned the continued viability of the INF Treaty. Several times, they went so far as formulating arguments in favor of abandoning the agreement.¹⁶

In 2007, the then Russian Defense Minister Sergey Ivanov publicly questioned the Treaty: “The gravest mistake was the decision to scrap a whole class of missile weapons—medium-range ballistic missiles. Only Russia and the United States do not have the right to have such weapons, although they would be quite useful for us.”¹⁷ What Ivanov hinted at was concern amongst the Russian military over China's intermediate- and shorter-range missiles, a capability Russia could not match with land-based systems.¹⁸

15 See Article XIII of the INF Treaty, <https://2009-2017.state.gov/t/avc/trty/102360.htm> (accessed March 30, 2020).

16 Evgeny Buzhinsky, Does the INF Treaty Have a Future?, in: Security Index: A Russian Journal on International Security, 20/2 (2014), pp. 89–93; Bohlen et al. (eds.), *The Treaty on Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces*, p. 22.

17 RIA Novosti, Scrapping Medium-Range Ballistic Missiles a Mistake—Ivanov, in: Sputnik, February 7, 2007, <http://sputniknews.com/russia/20070207/60350944.html>.

18 Victor Yesin, Nuclear Disarmament: Problems and Prospects, in: *Russia in Global Affairs*, March 2, 2008, http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/number/n_10357.

Then, in 2010, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs repeated its earlier claim that the continued U.S. use of “a whole family of target missiles” for its missile defense programs represented “direct violations” of the Treaty.¹⁹ As we know today, the U.S. government at that time already suspected that Russia was developing a new GLCM of intermediate-range. Finally, in 2014, the INF crisis reached the level of full public attention, when the U.S. State Department declared “the Russian Federation is in violation of its obligations under the INF Treaty not to possess, produce, or flight-test a GLCM with a range capability of 500 km to 5,500 km, or to possess or produce launchers of such missiles.”²⁰

Moscow’s reaction came immediately. In an official statement, Russia rejected the U.S. allegations and presented its own list of counter-accusations, most prominently U.S. missile defense installations in Romania and Poland, allegedly in violation of the INF Treaty.²¹ According to the Russian accusations, those missile defense installations could easily be converted—just by changing the necessary software—into launching sea-launched Tomahawk Cruise Missiles as ground-launched ones. In the words of Russian President Vladimir Putin, if America were to withdraw from the treaty, “our response would be immediate [...] and reciprocal.”²² What followed was a fruitless diplomatic back-and-forth which reached a first peak in November 2016 with the U.S. request to re-convene the SVC in Geneva (the commission which had been dormant for over 13 years) after information had surfaced that Russia was allegedly producing more missiles than needed for a flight-test program.²³ Neither the U.S. nor the Russian concerns could be resolved at that meeting.

5. INF and the Trump Administration

With Donald Trump’s unexpected ascent to the White House, U.S.–Russian relations took center stage due to U.S. accusations that Russia had influenced the outcome of the U.S. Presidential elections and had actively aided the Trump campaign. Questions were also raised about the new President’s business ties to Moscow, his somewhat ambiguous stance towards U.S. security guarantees for European NATO Allies, and his embrace of Russia’s authoritarian model. Against this background of largely poisoned relations, all decisions with regard

19 Quoted from Kühn, Péczeli, Russia, NATO, and the INF Treaty, p. 9.

20 U.S. Department of State, Adherence to and Compliance with Arms Control, Nonproliferation, and Disarmament Agreements and Commitments, Report.

21 The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Director of the Foreign Ministry Department for Non-Proliferation and Arms Control Mikhail Ulyanov’s interview with the Interfax news agency, December 19, 2017, https://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/2998923.

22 Meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club, October 19, 2017, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/55882>.

23 Gordon, Russia Is Moving, in: The New York Times, October 19, 2016.

to Russia became a bone of contention in domestic U.S. politics, sometimes with far-reaching repercussions for European security. The INF Treaty was just one policy topic amongst many where U.S. policy-makers were raising their anti-Russian profile.

What has spurred the end of INF is also the fact that U.S. policy towards Russia under Donald Trump is not coherent or homogenous but breaks down into varying lines taken by different, sometimes competing, groups of actors. There are some in the U.S. government who favor a tough stance towards Russia, and in particular want to contain and push back against Russian influence in Eastern Europe. Perhaps the most prominent voice for this course was that of John Bolton, Trump's National Security Advisor from April 2018 to September 2019. During his time in office, Bolton emerged as the main critic of the INF Treaty. Bolton had a proven track record of deep-seated skepticism towards treaties constraining U.S. power, particularly arms control agreements.²⁴ In 2014, he publicly lobbied for the United States to end the INF Treaty, arguing that "with Russia's violations of the Treaty, America remains the only country bound by and honoring a prohibition on deploying intermediate-range forces."²⁵ He inferred that "maintaining international security requires that the U.S. have access to the full spectrum of conventional and nuclear options."²⁶ In addition, Bolton saw the United States as ill-prepared in the looming power struggle with China, which was never a party to the INF Treaty.²⁷

This group got significant support from defense hawks in the U.S. Congress. In a hearing before Congress in early 2017, U.S. General Paul Selva, Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, declared that Russia had already deployed a significant number of prohibited missiles in the ranges banned by the Treaty.²⁸ In late 2017, in order to increase pressure on Russia to return to compliance, the U.S. Congress mandated the Secretary of Defense to develop a conventional ground-launched cruise missile within INF ranges.²⁹ The original bill by the Senate went even further, authorizing research and development for a nuclear-

24 Joseph Cirincione, John Bolton is a serial arms control killer, in: *The Washington Post*, February 1, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldpost/wp/2019/02/01/inf/>.

25 John R. Bolton and John Yoo, An obsolete nuclear treaty even before Russia cheated, in: *The Wall Street Journal*, September 9, 2014, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/john-bolton-and-john-yoo-an-obsolete-nuclear-treaty-even-before-russia-cheated-1410304847>.

26 *Ibid.*

27 Franz-Stefan Gady, INF Withdrawal: Bolton's Tool to Shatter China-Russia Military Ties?, in: *The Diplomat*, October 24, 2018, <https://thediplomat.com/2018/10/inf-withdrawal-boltons-tool-to-shatter-china-russia-military-ties/>.

28 General Paul Selva, Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Transcript of Hearing on Military Assessment of Nuclear Deterrence Requirements, March 8, 2017, https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/features/2017/0917_nuclear-deterrence/docs/Transcript-HASC-Hearing-on-Nuclear-Deterrence-8-March-2017.pdf.

29 115th Congress, 1st Session, House of Representatives, Report 115-404, <https://www.congress.gov/congressional-report/115th-congress/house-report/404/1>.

capable version—an endeavor ultimately blocked by the White House.³⁰ In the words of an anonymous U.S. official, the idea behind this proposal was “to send a message to the Russians that they will pay a military price” for violating INF by “posturing ourselves to live in a post-INF world [...] if that is the world the Russians want.”³¹

Last but not least, the U.S. Department of Defense, in consultation with the White House and the Department of Energy, developed its own approach towards the INF crisis. This approach can be subsumed under the headline of “staying within the regime while being tough on Russia.” In essence, that meant formulating INF Treaty-compliant military responses, including responses in the nuclear realm. In early 2018, the Pentagon released an updated version of the U.S. Nuclear Posture Review (NPR),³² a document outlining U.S. policy on nuclear deterrence, arms control, and nonproliferation for the years to come. The NPR suggested the United States should “modify a small number of existing sea-launched ballistic missile warheads to provide a low-yield option, and in the longer term, pursue a modern nuclear-armed sea-launched cruise missile (SLCM).”³³ The new SLCM, the NPR argued, would “provide an arms control compliant response to Russia’s non-compliance with the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces Treaty.” Further on, it said: “If Russia returns to compliance with its arms control obligations, reduces its non-strategic nuclear arsenal, and corrects its other destabilizing behaviors, the United States may reconsider the pursuit of a SLCM.” Finally, on October 20, 2018, Donald Trump announced the United States’ intention to withdraw from the Treaty.³⁴

6. Europe and the New Missile Crisis

For Europe, the end of INF has the potential to plunge the continent deeper into a security dilemma with the Russian Federation. Back in July 2018, NATO heads of state and governments had reaffirmed their intention to “remain fully committed to the preservation of this landmark arms control treaty.”³⁵ So Trump’s

30 Kingston Reif, Hill Wants Development of Banned Missile, *Arms Control Today*, December 2017, <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2017-12/news/hill-wants-development-banned-missile>.

31 *Ibid.*

32 Office of the Secretary of Defense, February 2018, <https://media.defense.gov/2018/Feb/02/2001872886/-1/-1/1/2018-NUCLEAR-POSTURE-REVIEW-FINAL-REPORT.PDF>.

33 Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Nuclear Posture Review 2018*, p. 54.

34 Julian Borger, “Trump says US will withdraw from nuclear arms treaty with Russia,” in: *The Guardian*, October 21, 2018, www.theguardian.com/world/2018/oct/20/trump-us-nuclear-arms-treaty-russia.

35 NATO Brussels Summit Declaration Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Brussels, July 11–12, 2018, www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_156624.htm.

withdrawal announcement came somewhat as a surprise to most U.S. Allies. In the weeks following Trump's announcement, U.S. officials began to provide more details about the Russian violation. According to these public statements, Russia had tested a GLCM, the Novator 9M729 (NATO designation SSC-8, "Screwdriver") from both fixed and mobile launchers, far surpassing a range beyond the INF compliance threshold.³⁶ Even the German government, which had previously been hesitant to call out Russia publicly, shifted course. On November 20, 2018, German Chancellor Angela Merkel stated that "we know" that Russia has not been complying with INF "for some time."³⁷ In December 2018, the NATO Allies announced that they "strongly support the finding of the United States that Russia is in material breach of its obligations under the INF Treaty."³⁸ A last-ditch effort to find a diplomatic solution to the crisis, suggested by Chancellor Merkel, would only delay U.S. withdrawal from the INF Treaty. On February 1, 2019, Donald Trump declared that the United States would exit the INF Treaty six months later. On August 2, 2019, INF became history.

The implications are clear. Europeans could be the first to see the negative effects of the end of INF. Because of the extremely short flight times they take (around five minutes only), intermediate-range weapons, if directed at Europe, would give the targeted states almost no warning time. In the words of Mikhail Gorbachev, the 1980s' threat of INF weapons "was like holding a gun to our head."³⁹ This effect would immediately come back, and it would pertain to almost all of Europe, should Russia deploy the alleged new systems in its western military district (perhaps including deployment in its westernmost exclave of Kaliningrad).

Such deployments, if they were to occur in the years ahead, would also lend additional arguments to those warning of Russia's assumed nuclear doctrine of "escalate to de-escalate." According to the drafters of the new American NPR, Moscow "mistakenly assesses that the threat of nuclear escalation or actual first use of nuclear weapons would serve to 'de-escalate' a conflict on terms favorable to Russia."⁴⁰ What they refer to is the fear of extended deterrence failure in

36 Office of the Director of National Intelligence, Director of National Intelligence Daniel Coats on Russia's INF Treaty Violation, November 30, 2018, www.dni.gov/index.php/newsroom/speeches-interviews/item/1923-director-of-national-intelligence-daniel-coats-on-russia-s-inf-treaty-violation.

37 "Pressestatements von Bundeskanzlerin Merkel und dem dänischen Ministerpräsidenten Rasmussen," November 20, 2018, www.bundeskanzlerin.de/bkin-de/aktuelles/presse-statements-von-bundeskanzlerin-merkel-und-dem-daenischen-ministerpraesidenten-rasmussen-1552136.

38 Statement on the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty Issued by the NATO Foreign Ministers, Brussels, December 4, 2018, www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_161122.htm.

39 Quoted from Q&A: 25 Years On, Gorbachev Recalls Nuclear Milestone, in: The Moscow Times, December 6, 2012, <https://themoscowtimes.com/news/qa-25-years-on-gorbachev-recalls-nuclear-milestone-19978>.

40 Office of the Secretary of Defense, Nuclear Posture Review 2018, p. 8.

the context of Russia attacking one of NATO's militarily weak member states in Eastern Europe, perhaps in the Baltic area. In that scenario—so the argument by Western analysts goes⁴¹—Russia could resort to the early and limited use of non-strategic nuclear weapons to coerce NATO into accepting a military *fait accompli*. Without the capabilities for an immediate, measured nuclear response, NATO would then have little choice but to accept defeat.⁴² Seen from this angle, additional Russian intermediate-weapons would give the Russian military additional assets to hold at risk NATO targets deep in Western Europe and critical for reinforcement in the event of a military crisis, say (again) in the Baltic region. Against a pre-existent background of NATO grappling with the worst-case scenario of not being able to defend the Baltic States in a conflict with Russia, intermediate-range missiles would further tip the already precarious regional military balance in favor of Russia, most notably by threatening to disrupt NATO's supply and reinforcement chains.

Even though most of such military considerations currently take place in expert circles behind closed doors and stay largely unnoticed by the wider public, the coming years might well see a renaissance of intermediate-range missiles in Europe, together with a political debate akin to that of the late 1970s and early 1980s.

7. Back to the Future: Arms Racing or Arms Control?

With the end of the INF Treaty, Europe's security is once more very much up in the air. Two scenarios are possible in the years ahead. Both of them would, to different degrees, mirror past developments surrounding the emergence of the INF Treaty in the 1980s.

The first scenario—arms racing—sees Russia and the United States developing and deploying more and more intermediate-range missiles. This course would be in line with other developments on the strategic nuclear level. In his State of the Union speech in March 2018,⁴³ Vladimir Putin revealed a number of new or planned strategic nuclear systems aimed at offsetting America's advantage in

41 Matthew Kroenig, Facing Reality: Getting NATO Ready for a New Cold War, in: *Survival* 57 (2015), pp. 49–70.

42 Proponents of that logic refer to the readiness levels of NATO's dual-capable aircraft in Europe which are currently measured in weeks and the assumption that the Allies' aircraft might not be able to penetrate Russian airspace. According to NATO, its dual-capable aircraft "are available for nuclear roles at various levels of readiness"—the highest level of readiness is measured in weeks. NATO, NATO's Nuclear Deterrence Policy and Forces, December 3, 2015, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_50068.htm#. See also Alexander Lanoszka and Michael A. Hunzeker, Confronting the Anti-Access/Area Denial and Precision Strike Challenge in the Baltic Region, in: *RUSI Journal* 161/5 (2016), pp. 12–18.

43 Russia's Putin unveils 'invincible' nuclear weapons, March 1, 2018, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-43239331>.

strategic missile defense installations, and made it abundantly clear that Moscow views its missile inventory as the ultimate security and great power guarantee. While a stance like this does not rule out the possibility of U.S.–Russian nuclear arms reductions in the future, it makes it less likely against the background of the current political tensions.

Even though the Trump Administration says otherwise, a reintroduction of U.S. ground-launched intermediate-range missiles becomes quite likely now that the INF Treaty is ended. The Pentagon has been researching a new conventional GLCM and a modern medium-range ballistic missile since 2018, and the first tests of these weapons systems were made in 2019.⁴⁴ The latest reports from Washington indicate that the GLCM could be ready for deployment in early 2021.⁴⁵ Defense hawks in Washington would probably welcome a decision to fund these systems to the full in the years ahead, even more so since leaving the INF Treaty has finally untied America's hands in East Asia, where China can field as many missiles in INF-ranges as it wants while the U.S. military has up to now been barred from reciprocating.⁴⁶

In this scenario, America's European Allies would face the daunting challenge of consulting with Washington over what to do with the new missiles—where to deploy them. Complicating all this, NATO's European members share no common position on how to respond to Russia's new missile challenge. While French President Emmanuel Macron is pushing ever harder for European “strategic autonomy” in the realm of defense and perhaps even in nuclear matters,⁴⁷ some members of the German Social Democrats have been discussing requesting the removal of some twenty U.S. nuclear gravity bombs from German soil, which would result in Berlin opting out of NATO's operational nuclear sharing arrangement.⁴⁸ Fueled by the growing transatlantic rift, strong public opposition to a new arms race on the continent could easily resurface in a number of countries, and not just in Germany.

At the same time, some European allies, such as Poland, would be extremely eager to host new U.S. intermediate-range missiles, for the simple reason that

44 Paul McLeary, U.S. Busts INF Wall With Ballistic Missile, Puts Putin & Xi On Notice, *Breaking Defense*, December 12, 2019, <https://breakingdefense.com/2019/12/pentagon-busts-though-the-inf-wall-puts-putin-and-xi-on-notice/>.

45 Shervin Taheran, U.S. to Test INF Treaty-Range Missiles, in: *Arms Control Today*, April 2019, <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2019-04/news/us-test-inf-treaty-range-missiles>.

46 Evan Braden Montgomery, Managing China's Missile Threat: Future Options to Preserve Forward Defense, in: *China's Offensive Missile Forces: Implications for the United States*, April 1, 2015, pp. 6–7, <http://csbaonline.org/publications/2015/04/managing-chinas-missile-threat-future-options-to-preserve-forward-defense/>.

47 William Drozdiak, France is prepared to extend its nuclear deterrent to Germany, *The Washington Post*, February 28, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2019/02/28/france-is-prepared-extend-its-nuclear-deterrent-germany/?utm_term=.8813e0a9ae06.

48 Bojan Pancevski, In Germany, a Cold War Deal to Host U.S. Nuclear Weapons Is Now in Question, *Wall Street Journal*, February 12, 2019, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/in-germany-anger-at-trump-throws-cold-war-nuclear-pact-into-question-11549976449>.

those missiles would mean a permanent presence of U.S. forces on the ground. Poland's offer of May 2018 to pay \$2 billion for the permanent stationing of a U.S. Army tank division on Polish soil underscores that point. In the end, under a possible second Trump term, the U.S. Administration might simply sideline hesitant Allies like Germany and decide on bilateral basing agreements with more supportive member states, Poland amongst them. The political damage to the NATO Alliance would be massive. Crafting a common political approach vis-à-vis Moscow would be almost impossible, and the Russians would in all certainty respond by producing and deploying even more missiles.⁴⁹

Perhaps the biggest difference between the current situation and the original missile crisis of the Cold War is that in today's crisis, U.S. Allies in Europe play almost no visible role. Back in the 1970s, Helmut Schmidt was adamant in ensuring that Western Europe's security concerns were properly addressed—first by publicly raising awareness of the Soviet missile buildup and then by making sure that burden-sharing and diplomatic outreach to the Soviets would inform NATO's Dual-Track Decision. Today, Germany, still a key European NATO Ally, has taken a “wait and see” approach, with Chancellor Angela Merkel keeping the issue below the level of public attention. The result is that the new missile crisis largely plays out as a bilateral game between Moscow and Washington, with the latter moving incrementally forward in formulating its own policy responses. Thereby the United States is defining European leaders' room for maneuver. This self-imposed restraint on the part of the Europeans may, one day, come to haunt Europe's leaders—if a new missiles arms race should kick in on the continent.

The good news is that there are other military means to respond to Russia than simply producing and fielding new intermediate-range missiles in Europe. Some U.S. military officials see no specific military need for new ground-launched systems.⁵⁰ Instead, the limited rotational forward deployment of conventional cruise missiles on U.S. bombers and ships in Western Europe, supported by the deployment of Cruise Missile defenses at NATO's vital logistics and transportation nodes, could well thwart the military advantage Moscow might hope to gain from allegedly violating the INF Treaty.⁵¹

These military options might open up room for maneuver for a second scenario, which would be an arms control solution to the current crisis. In concrete terms, the military countermeasures already announced by the United States in

49 In 2015, Colonel General Victor Zavarzin, a member of the Russian federal assembly's Defense Committee, warned “if the Americans indeed deploy their ground-based nuclear missiles in Europe, in this case we will face the necessity of retaliating.” Quoted from Lawmaker, Moscow can answer possible deployment of U.S. nuclear missiles in Europe, in: Tass, June 5, 2015, <http://tass.com/russia/799098>.

50 Cf. Maggie Tennis, Republicans Aim to Produce Banned Missile, in: Arms Control Today (2017), <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2017-09/news/republicans-aim-produce-banned-missile>.

51 Ulrich Kühn, Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Europe in a Post-INF World, in: The Nonproliferation Review 26 (2019), pp. 155–166.

the new NPR and legislated by Congress might well lead the Kremlin to take a more transparent stance. And transparency, on a reciprocal basis, would be most urgently needed. For that to happen, Russia and the United States would have to be willing to “trade transparency for transparency.” On the one hand, Russia’s concerns about a potential dual-use applicability of U.S. missile defense systems in Romania and Poland could be addressed by offering on-site demonstrations of the system to Russian inspectors. As one Russian arms control expert suggested, “Washington should agree to modify the tubes of the interceptor launchers in Romania and Poland so that canisters containing Tomahawks or other offensive missiles cannot be installed there.”⁵² Such a solution would go beyond just mere fixes to the software, currently one of the distinguishing features between offensive and defensive capabilities. In turn, U.S. concerns could be clarified by showing U.S. inspectors the fuel tank capacity of the Russian missile that caused the end of INF.

A second option would be for NATO to make a no-first-deployment pledge in exchange for Russian geographical restraint. In essence, NATO would pledge not to deploy new land-based intermediate-range missiles in Europe first. Russia would reciprocate by relocating its SSC-8 missiles east of the Ural Mountains. The verification of Russian withdrawal could be achieved using national technical means, which have already been sufficient to detect the Russian violation in the first place.

Another, more complex option, would be the separation of nuclear warheads and launch vehicles on both sides. That would mean storing nuclear warheads verifiably several hours away from the respective launch systems. That way, both sides would increase crisis stability by reducing the potential for misunderstandings triggering an overreaction. Such an approach could apply to mobile land-based launchers and ballistic missiles as well as to NATO’s forward-deployed fighter jets. A technical study by the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research recently came to the conclusion that verifying the absence of nuclear warheads from their non-strategic delivery vehicles could be possible.⁵³

Another reason to engage in compliance, and perhaps arms control talks, lies in the risk of losing the New START agreement over the INF crisis. The New Strategic Arms Reductions Treaty (START) limits the strategic systems of the United States and Russia with ranges beyond 5,500 kilometers. New START, signed in 2010, entered into force in 2011 and expires in February 2021. On a one-time basis, the Treaty can be extended by another five years. In the United States it would only need an executive agreement by the U.S. President and no

52 Sergey Rogov, How to Prevent a Dangerous Escalation, in: *Foreign Affairs*, May 22, 2018, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russian-federation/2018-05-22/can-us-and-russia-find-path-forward-arms-control>.

53 Pavel Podvig, Ryan Snyder and Wilfred Wan, Evidence of Absence: Verifying the Removal of Nuclear Weapons, UNIDIR, 2018, <https://www.unidir.org/publication/evidence-absence-verifying-removal-nuclear-weapons>.

advice and consent by the Senate to do so. Unfortunately, the Trump Administration has, so far, not taken up the Russian initiative to extend the treaty for another five years.⁵⁴ Without INF, and, perhaps, also New START in place, the U.S.–Russian security relationship would be thrown back into a state of almost complete non-transparency and unpredictability—a highly dangerous state, last experienced in the 1960s.

8. Conclusion

Today, thirty years after stipulations under the INF Treaty entered into force, a tragic security dilemma is once more unfolding. Again, Russia seems to find value in fielding a new generation of intermediate-range missiles. Again, the United States is contemplating the option of engaging in a missile tit-for-tat, answering Russia's actions. Again, the bilateral relationship is at a significant low. And again, the ramifications for Europe are anything but positive. More worrisome these days, the renewed missile crisis has not gained center stage in public discussions yet. Even though the voices warning of a New Cold War are growing, no commonly shared sense of risk seems to be present, and the urgency of formulating a multilateral diplomatic response to the crisis is not pressed. In the vacuum of political leadership addressing the question and its absence from public debate amongst Europeans, the crisis will further fester in the years ahead, if no unexpected diplomatic breakthrough is made.

In the end, that could well mean that Europe will experience another sudden, vehement debate over hosting new U.S. intermediate-range missiles on the continent. As a result of the end of INF, the New START agreement could expire without being replaced. The negative ripple effects of this dual misfortune—INF and New START withering away—would be felt in Europe and beyond. As this essay demonstrates, there are a number of possible arms control steps that both sides could take in order to prevent a new arms race from unfolding. Unfortunately, it is not good advice or new ideas the U.S.–Russian relationship lacks; fundamentally, it is trust that is missing. And just as much as it was during the Cold War, trust is a necessary ingredient for entering into a cooperative security dialogue.

54 Kingston Reif and Shannon Bugos, Putin Invites U.S. to Extend New START, in: Arms Control Today, January/February 2020, <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2020-01/news/putin-invites-us-extend-new-start>.