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**EUROPE IN A MULTIPOLAR  
MISSILE WORLD**

**Why the EU and NATO should not try  
to salvage the INF Treaty**

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## INTRODUCTION

On 1 February 2019, the US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced that his country had suspended its compliance with the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces Treaty, or INF Treaty, and would withdraw from it within six months. The INF Treaty, little known outside of arms control and disarmament circles, was a landmark Cold War agreement between the United States of America and the USSR – the first to ban an entire category of weapons (ground-based medium- and intermediate-range missiles). The US withdrawal, announced in dramatic terms by President Donald Trump in October 2018, followed the claim that Russia had recently developed and fielded a missile with performances forbidden by the INF Treaty.

The end of this little-known treaty is not anecdotal. Not only will it further strain the US-Russia relationship and antagonise allies, it will also contribute to the erosion of what is left of the global arms-control architecture and incentivise arms-race behaviours among great powers. In a world where security is increasingly less a question of multilateral deliberation and rules-based interactions, the end of the INF Treaty is a further signal that missile technologies are again becoming a venue for competition between great powers: only this time, at least three are playing the game (United States, China and Russia) rather than two (United States and USSR). Additionally, missile technology proliferation has turned into a major dimension of contemporary battlefield realities, and missile programmes of countries such as Iran and North Korea continue to pose important diplomatic and non-proliferation challenges. Meanwhile, Europe is, by and large, left watching as its regional security architecture erodes. Welcome to what US National Security Advisor John Bolton recently termed ‘a multipolar missile world’.

The EU should not try to salvage the INF Treaty. Its diplomatic capital might be better spent in areas where it could potentially make a difference, rather than in a treaty to which it is not even party. Existing multilateral regimes and agreements with the EU or its Member States as parties are already in dire need of reinforcement in the face of technological progress, a volatile diplomatic environment and self-centred, competitive political narratives. These include, inter alia, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) framework (including its Structured Dialogue), multilateral export control regimes (MECR) like the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR), transparency and trust-building mechanisms like the Hague Code of Conduct against missile proliferation (HCoC), and nuclear-related frameworks like the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA or ‘Iran deal’) or the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Process.

These, however, may simply fail to meet the challenge of a multipolar missile world. Renewed efforts, both conceptual and in the realm of capabilities, are needed in a NATO framework to reinforce the linkage between deterrence and diplomacy.

NATO-EU dialogue and cooperation on defence issues could be further enhanced, and European countries should work more with like-minded partners at both bilateral or multilateral levels on the challenges of non-proliferation and disarmament in the twenty-first century. The demise of the INF Treaty should therefore re-energise the debate on European strategic autonomy, help support collective capability building – not least in NATO – and prompt new discussions on stronger multilateral rules on missile development, use and proliferation.

# 1. WHAT IS THE INF TREATY?

## 1.1. Context and negotiations

Starting in 1976, the Soviet Union introduced new intermediate-range missiles to its arsenal. They were feeding into what was then referred to as ‘theatre nuclear force’ (TNF), i.e. nuclear weapons destined for a non-strategic (regional) role. The SS-20 ‘Saber’, as NATO called them, were based on a larger, yet unsuccessful, intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) programme and constituted a net improvement over the missiles they replaced: the SS-4 and SS-5. They were more accurate and more concealable. They had solid propellant engines, meaning they did not require the complex and time-consuming pre-launch fuelling operations of their liquid-fuelled predecessors. They were carried on mobile launchers and could carry several warheads (Mod 2) instead of just one (Mods 1 and 3). The SS-20, in other words, dramatically improved the Soviet nuclear posture. These missiles could strike almost any target in Europe but could not reach the continental United States. Their range and short time-to-target made them appear as both challenging to NATO unity and utterly destabilising.

NATO’s response to this challenge became known as the ‘dual track’: on the one hand, the alliance decided to modernise its own TNF by fielding new American medium-range Pershing II missiles and BGM-109G Ground-Launched Cruise missiles (GLCM). On the other hand, Washington agreed to negotiate an arms control agreement with Moscow on these types of missiles. The two tracks were seen in 1979 by the NATO Foreign and Defence ministers as ‘parallel and complementary’: TNF modernisation was, in their view, ‘necessary to meet NATO’s deterrence and defence needs, to provide a credible response to unilateral Soviet TNF deployments, and to provide the foundation for the pursuit of serious negotiations on TNF’.<sup>1</sup>

The dual-track policy was met with considerable criticism by important constituencies in several European countries. Pacifist movements protested the arms race, fearing more from a military escalation than from Soviet missiles alone. This came to be known as the Euromissile crisis.<sup>2</sup> A rift had emerged between ‘Atlanticists’ and ‘pro-Europeans’, the former emphasising the central role of credible deterrence and NATO unity in the face of Soviet threats, and the latter preferring to talk of a necessary détente with arms control and disarmament as a priority.

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<sup>1</sup> NATO press communiqué M2 (79) 22 on the ‘Double-Track’ Decision on theatre nuclear forces (Brussels, 12 December 1979).

<sup>2</sup> Arié Zaks, Bernard Adam and Anne De Muelenaere, *Le dossier des euro-missiles*. Brussels: GRIP, 1981.

The result of both public pressure and the fear of ‘decoupling’ (the idea that, in the event of a Soviet attack with conventional forces, the United States might not want to use their ICBMs in the defence of Europe) was a strong insistence on arms control talks by European allies. Partly to address European fears, American negotiators dropped the term ‘theatre nuclear force’ in favour of ‘intermediate-range nuclear force’.<sup>3</sup>

In November 1981, US President Ronald Reagan offered the ‘zero option’, which entailed the dismantlement of Soviet SS-4, SS-5 and SS-20. The United States would reciprocate by refraining to deploy its own intermediate-range missiles in Europe. Two years of talks failed to deliver a positive outcome, and in 1983, the negotiations broke down. They resumed in 1986, alongside discussions on strategic weapons (START I). By 1987, Reagan and Gorbachev had found common ground. In December, they signed the ‘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’, aka the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty or ‘INF Treaty’.

## 1.2. The significance of the INF Treaty

The INF Treaty banned all (ballistic and cruise) land-based medium- and intermediate-range missiles. Any such missile, with a range between 500 and 5,500 km, would be scrapped. Washington and Moscow further agreed never to possess, produce or flight-test more of them. The treaty did not ban ICBMs or smaller-range weapons. Sea-based and air-delivered missiles were also excluded from the treaty. The INF Treaty instituted a special verification commission (SVC) where both parties could discuss the implementation of its provisions. In effect, the treaty led to the dismantling of no less than 2,692 missiles (1,846 Soviet missiles and 846 US missiles). These features made it a remarkable achievement in the realm of nuclear disarmament. They also contributed to making it a mainstay of European security.

In terms of the INF Treaty’s success in disarmament talks, it was significant enough that the two countries with the largest nuclear stockpiles committed to ban an entire class of weapon. Trust and verification, of course, always constituted key issues in negotiations as in implementation, but they were addressed by the treaty in an innovative way. INF Treaty provisions included – and this was a breakthrough – a regime of intrusive on-site inspections; they also covered data exchange and monitoring mechanisms. It is also significant that European members of NATO pushed for the Euromissile negotiations to be conducted in relation to the strategic

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<sup>3</sup> Paul Nitze, *From Hiroshima to Glasnost: At the center of decision. A Memoir*. New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1989, p. 369.

level: the 1979 NATO declaration called for TNF discussions to be integrated in the 'SALT III process'. After the failure of SALT II, it became tied to the American START proposal.<sup>4</sup>

These connections imply that the INF Treaty is not an ad hoc agreement and never was. Rather, it was a pioneering exercise and an integral part of a wider arms control corpus. The INF Treaty thereby constitutes an important contribution to the disarmament obligation covered by Article VI of the NPT.<sup>5</sup> In 2001, when inspections ended, parties to the INF Treaty argued: 'the experience accumulated in the course of inspection activities under the INF Treaty will undoubtedly be used in future bilateral and multilateral negotiations on arms control and disarmament'.<sup>6</sup>

On European security, the INF Treaty provided more than a strong symbol. It came as the culmination of a long and complex political and diplomatic process within NATO first and between the United States and Russia second. In a Cold War context, the tensions, debates and negotiations leading to the conclusion of the INF Treaty had put on display much of what simultaneously drew together and antagonised NATO allies. Once concluded, the INF Treaty-warranted verifiable destruction of intermediate-range missiles was a strong contribution to a more peaceful European environment. Decoupling was less an issue for the alliance, and destabilising weapons were not just scrapped: they were forbidden as long as the treaty would hold. In operational terms, their elimination meant that the nuclear threshold for military operations in Europe had been heightened.

In the immediate post-Cold War context, the INF Treaty remained a pillar of US-Russia disarmament talks. However, the erosion of the arms control and disarmament practices of the bipolar world was difficult to avoid, given the development of new missile threats from 'rogue states' (including Iran and North Korea), the deteriorating relationship between Moscow and Washington, and the ambitious missile programmes of rising powers (most importantly, China). An important milestone was reached in 2002, when the Bush administration withdrew from the treaty on the limitation of anti-ballistic missile systems or 'ABM Treaty', a critical Cold War agreement focused on strategic equilibrium between the two great powers. To motivate

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<sup>4</sup> The SALT, or 'Strategic Arms Limitation Talks', process covered two rounds of negotiations between the United States and the USSR over their respective strategic arsenals, taking place between 1969 and 1979. SALT I produced the ABM Treaty, while SALT II produced an agreement that the US Congress refused to ratify in reaction to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Prospects for a SALT III agreement then evaporated. In the 1990s, bilateral talks resumed and produced two treaties: START, or 'Strategic Arms Reduction Treaties', I and II. START II never entered into effect.

<sup>5</sup> Article VI of the NPT states: 'Each of the Parties to the Treaty undertakes to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament, and on a treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control'.

<sup>6</sup> 'Officials Mark End of INF Treaty Inspections', *Arms Control Association*, 1 June 2001: [www.armscontrol.org/node/2873](http://www.armscontrol.org/node/2873).



its decision, the administration cited the treaty's obsolescence and the need to defend against new missile threats, notably from Iran,<sup>7</sup> but also from Russia.

Other agreements have similarly been discredited over time. For instance, the Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty, signed in 1990, put equal limits on deployed military troops and equipment from Warsaw Pact countries and NATO allies: both sides agreed to not have more than 20,000 tanks, 20,000 artillery pieces, 30,000 armoured combat vehicles (ACVs), 6,800 combat aircraft and 2,000 attack helicopters each in the zone covered by the treaty (Europe, from the Atlantic to the Urals). A regime of inspections was instituted, based on a system of quotas. Naval assets were kept out of the treaty's scope. But the end of the Cold War meant in practice that there was an almost immediate discrepancy with the CFE Treaty's text and rationale on the one hand, and current issues on the other. Worsening relations between NATO countries and Russia, with Russian troop deployments in Moldova and Georgia and NATO's enlargement as focal points, led Moscow to suspend its compliance with the treaty in 2007 and pull out completely in 2015.

As another example, the Open Skies Treaty signed in 1992 provided its parties with the right to conduct reconnaissance flights in one another's airspace. This important confidence-building measure is 'at an impasse'<sup>8</sup> because of Russian restrictions over Kaliningrad and Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and because of corresponding measures by the United States. Discussions are ongoing, but in the United States, funding for treaty-related equipment remains an issue – demonstrating how difficult the political conversation over such a treaty may be.<sup>9</sup>

### 1.3. The INF today: claims and counter-claims

Like most Cold War arms control agreements, the INF Treaty lost its lustre over its three decades of existence. Firstly, the INF suffered from the ups and downs of the US-Russia post-Cold War relationship. Russian officials have repeatedly cited the deployment of US missile defence systems in Central Europe as a motive for possible withdrawal. Not just missile defence, but also NATO's enlargement and the War on Terror contributed to antagonise the two countries during the Bush administration, with arms control agreements suffering a first important blow. The US-Russia 'reset' attempted in 2009-2012 delivered the New START treaty, imposing limits on the

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<sup>7</sup> The ABM Treaty signed in 1972 put limits on the deployment and development of missile defence systems. Its rationale was that missile defence systems could provide the country which developed it with a first strike capability, i.e. the possibility to launch a nuclear attack on the enemy's nuclear sites and intercept the remaining retaliatory missiles, and as such were fuelling escalation.

<sup>8</sup> Aaron Mehta, 'US, Russia remain at "impasse" over Open Skies treaty flights', *Defense News*, 14 September 2018: <https://www.defensenews.com/air/2018/09/14/us-russia-remain-at-impasse-over-nuclear-treaty-flights/>.

<sup>9</sup> Kingston Reif, 'US Reverses Course on Open Skies Treaty', *Arms Control Association*, October 2018: <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2018-10/news/us-reverses-course-open-skies-treaty>.

number of deployed nuclear warheads and on deployed and non-deployed launchers. But the reset was short-lived, and its failure left both governments frustrated at the actual state of affairs between them.<sup>10</sup> The wars in Iraq and Libya also took their toll, and Russia's annexation of the Crimea and military operations in Ukraine, as well as its intervention in Syria, pushed the relationship to a new low in more recent years.

Secondly, the (mostly<sup>11</sup>) bilateral scope of the INF Treaty had been pointed out by both Russian<sup>12</sup> and American<sup>13</sup> policymakers as skewed and problematic. China, India, Pakistan, Iran and North Korea all developed their own ballistic and cruise missile forces unconstrained by INF provisions. In February 2007, Russian President Vladimir Putin seized the argument to hint at his country's dissatisfaction with INF.<sup>14</sup> In the United States, comparable concerns have led to a similar frustration. In October 2007, Moscow and Washington even made a joint declaration at the United Nations calling on 'all interested countries to discuss the possibility of imparting a global character to this important regime'.<sup>15</sup> However, the prospects of INF 'universalisation' have never really been gauged to be very good, neither by Russia nor the United States.

These reservations have only grown more salient in recent years, with both lines of argument being picked up to justify a possible withdrawal from the treaty. A further event triggered the current standoff: the United States accused Russia of being in breach of the INF Treaty by having developed an intermediate-range cruise missile. Starting in 2014, this claim appeared in annual compliance reports by the State Department. By 2017, it was clarified that the missile the United States considered to be non-compliant with the INF Treaty was the Novator 9M729, or SSC-8: a ground-launched cruise missile similar to its naval version, the SS-N-30A (3M-14 Kalibr<sup>16</sup>).

<sup>10</sup> See, e.g. Mikhail Zygar, *All the Kremlin's Men: Inside the Court of Vladimir Putin*. New York: Public Affairs, 2016.

<sup>11</sup> After the fall of the Soviet Union, the United States sought to secure the participation of no fewer than 12 former Soviet republics it considered as successor states (to the exclusion of the Baltic states). See: '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)', US Department of State: <https://www.state.gov/t/avc/trty/102360.htm> [last accessed 29 January 2019]

<sup>12</sup> Stephen Blank, 'Russian Military Policy in Asia: A Study in Paradox', *RUFBS Briefing No. 20*, September 2013: [https://www.foi.se/download/18.7fd35d7f166c56ebe0bacfa/1542369055969/RUFBS-20\\_Russian-military-policy-in-Asia\\_FOI-Memo-4580.pdf](https://www.foi.se/download/18.7fd35d7f166c56ebe0bacfa/1542369055969/RUFBS-20_Russian-military-policy-in-Asia_FOI-Memo-4580.pdf).

<sup>13</sup> John Bolton and John Yoo, 'An Obsolete Nuclear Treaty Even Before Russia Cheated', *Wall Street Journal*, 9 September 2014: <https://www.wsj.com/articles/john-bolton-and-john-yoo-an-obsolete-nuclear-treaty-even-before-russia-cheated-1410304847>.

<sup>14</sup> Luke Harding, 'Putin threatens withdrawal from cold war nuclear treaty', *The Guardian*, 12 October 2007: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2007/oct/12/russia.usa1>.

<sup>15</sup> 'Joint US-Russian Statement on the Treaty on the Elimination of Intermediate-Range and Shorter-Range Missiles at the 62nd Session of the UN General Assembly', *US Department of State Archive*, 25 October 2007: <https://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2007/oct/94141.htm>.

<sup>16</sup> The 'Kalibr' is a family of a dozen types of missiles launched by surface combatants as well as from submarines, which includes, besides the SS-N-30A, the SS-N-27 Sizzler and 'Klub' export versions.

The 9M729, according to NATO sources, bears a total resemblance to the sea-launched Kalibr,<sup>17</sup> a missile that became an instant ‘celebrity’ in 2015 when Russian ships fired salvos of them at targets in Syria from ships and submarines in the Black Sea and the Mediterranean.<sup>18</sup> The Kalibr has a range of between 1,000 and 2,500 km<sup>19</sup> – Russia may even seek to double that range<sup>20</sup> – but it is compliant with the INF Treaty because it is launched from the sea.<sup>21</sup> In fact, Russian naval forces have made the integration of the Kalibr in small and large vessels, as well as in submarines, a priority. Putting such a missile on small surface combatants such as the 950 tons Buyan-M class corvette (Project 21631), means that Russia is, in effect, capable of conducting long-range strike missions from inland waterways. In Gressel’s words, ‘this means that during, for example, an escalating crisis in the Baltic region, Russia could threaten Berlin, Paris, and London using vessels in the port of Kronstadt or the rivers around St Petersburg’.<sup>22</sup> The importance of the Kalibr to the Russian Navy is such that experts mention this as the ‘Kalibr-isation’ of the fleet.<sup>23</sup>

A possible scenario would be that Russia converted the Kalibr into a road-mobile version and integrated it to its Iskander system (the system carries the missiles as well as various support and combat management systems on wheeled vehicles). The Iskander system includes ballistic and cruise missiles: the Iskander-M and Iskander-K respectively. On the one hand, the Iskander-M (NATO reporting name SS-26 ‘Stone’) ballistic missiles are most famous for replacing ‘Scud’ ballistic missiles (it also replaced the OTR23 ‘Oka’ that the USSR agreed to destroy under the INF Treaty).<sup>24</sup> On the other, the Iskander-K cruise missiles would include the 9M728 (or ‘R-500’) as well as the newer and bigger 9M729. The 9M729, according to US sources, was tested at prohibited range at least six times before being deployed; it is now supposed to be operational in four battalions.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Missile Defense Project, ‘SSC-8 (Novator 9M729),’ *Missile Threat*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, published 23 October 2018, last modified 23 January 2019: <https://missilethreat.csis.org/missile/ssc-8-novator-9m729/>.

<sup>18</sup> Richard Johnson, ‘How Russia fired missiles at Syria from 1,000 miles away’, *The Washington Post*, 23 October 2015: [www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/world/russian-cruise-missile/](http://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/world/russian-cruise-missile/).

<sup>19</sup> *The Russian Navy: A Historic Transition*. Washington DC: The Office of Naval Intelligence, December 2015: [www.oni.navy.mil/Portals/12/Intel%20agencies/russia/Russia%202015screen.pdf?ver=2015-12-14-082028-313](http://www.oni.navy.mil/Portals/12/Intel%20agencies/russia/Russia%202015screen.pdf?ver=2015-12-14-082028-313).

<sup>20</sup> Mark Episkopos, ‘Russia’s Dangerous “Kalibr” Cruise Missile Could See Range Doubled: Report’, *The National Interest*, 12 January 2019: <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/buzz/russias-dangerous-%E2%80%9Ckalibr%E2%80%9D-cruise-missile-could-see-range-doubled-report-41427>.

<sup>21</sup> Missile Defense Project, ‘SS-N-30A (3M-14 Kalibr),’ *Missile Threat*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, published 11 August 2016, last modified 15 June 2018: <https://missilethreat.csis.org/missile/ss-n-30a/>.

<sup>22</sup> Gustav Gressel, ‘Under the gun: Rearmament for arms control in Europe’, *ECFR Policy Brief*, 28 November 2018: [www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/under\\_the\\_gun\\_rearmament\\_for\\_arms\\_control\\_in\\_europe](http://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/under_the_gun_rearmament_for_arms_control_in_europe).

<sup>23</sup> Igor Delanoë, *Marine de Guerre Russe: Atouts et Faiblesses d’un Outil en Mutation*. Paris: Note de l’Observatoire Franco-Russe, N° 17, March 2018: [http://obsfr.ru/fileadmin/Policy\\_paper/PP\\_17\\_FR\\_Delanoe.pdf](http://obsfr.ru/fileadmin/Policy_paper/PP_17_FR_Delanoe.pdf).

<sup>24</sup> Missile Defense Project, ‘SS-26 (Iskander),’ *Missile Threat*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, published 27 September 2016, last modified 19 June 2018, <https://missilethreat.csis.org/missile/ss-26/>.

<sup>25</sup> Ankit Panda, ‘US Intelligence: Russia Tried to Con the World With Bogus Missile’, *The Daily Beast*, 18 February 2019: <https://www.thedailybeast.com/us-intelligence-russia-tried-to-con-the-world-with-bogus-missile>.

No hard data has been made public to back the non-compliance claim, but NATO allies<sup>26</sup> and NATO itself endorsed the US position.<sup>27</sup> For the United States, the 9M729 clearly does more than undermine the INF Treaty; it is a destabilising move from Russia with ample security ramifications requiring support and unity from allies. Meanwhile, Russia considered the American accusations unfounded and pointed instead at US ballistic missile defence systems in Europe, especially the Mk41 launchers of NATO's AEGIS Ashore system in Romania, which it says can easily be reconfigured to launch cruise missiles.<sup>28</sup>

For European countries, things are a bit more complicated. French experts have argued that the end of the INF Treaty appears more concerning than the deployment of 9M729 itself: Europe is faced with various other nuclear-capable, smaller-range missiles (the ground-launched Iskander missiles, the air-launched Kh101/102 and sea-launched Kalibr) anyway, so the consequences of the current US-Russia spat are mostly political.<sup>29</sup> For German experts, the 9M729 aims to divide ranks within NATO and may well succeed in doing so.<sup>30</sup> Both studies concur on three things (at least): that European agency in this debate is very limited; that the current situation will renew questions on the future of NATO's nuclear deterrent; and that the demise of the INF Treaty is detrimental to arms control agreements in general – no matter what opinion one has of their effectiveness.

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<sup>26</sup> In November 2018, the Dutch Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Defense, Stef Blok and Ank Bijleveld-Schouten, confirmed to their national parliament that they could independently attest to Russia's violation of the INF. See: 'Kamerbrief Nederlandse conclusie over de Russische schending van het INF-verdrag (Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces)', available for download here: [www.rijksoverheid.nl/ministeries/ministerie-van-buitenlandse-zaken/documenten/kamerstukken/2018/11/27/kamerbrief-nederlandse-conclusie-over-de-russische-schending-van-het-inf-verdrag-intermediate-range-nuclear-forces](http://www.rijksoverheid.nl/ministeries/ministerie-van-buitenlandse-zaken/documenten/kamerstukken/2018/11/27/kamerbrief-nederlandse-conclusie-over-de-russische-schending-van-het-inf-verdrag-intermediate-range-nuclear-forces).

<sup>27</sup> 'Statement by the North Atlantic Council on the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty', *NATO.org*, 15 December 2017; 'Press conference by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg following the meeting of the NATO-Russia Council', *NATO.org*, 25 January 2019.

<sup>28</sup> Russia also brought up the use of intermediate range systems as missile targets and the delivery of weapons by drones as additional cases of potential treaty violations by the United States. For a rebuttal, see: Bureau of Arms Control, Verification and Compliance Factsheet Factsheet – *Refuting Russian Allegations of US Noncompliance with the INF Treaty*, 8 December 2017: [www.state.gov/t/avc/rls/2017/276360.htm](http://www.state.gov/t/avc/rls/2017/276360.htm) Also see: Thomas Moore, 'Russia Claims US INF Violations: A Wonk's Démarche', *Arms Control Wonk*, 4 August 2014: [www.armscontrolwonk.com/archive/604740/russia-claims-u-s-inf-violations-a-wonks-demarche/](http://www.armscontrolwonk.com/archive/604740/russia-claims-u-s-inf-violations-a-wonks-demarche/)

<sup>29</sup> Bruno Tertrais et al., 'La mort annoncée du traité FNI ou la fin de l'après-Guerre froide', *Notes de la FRS N°02/2019*, February 2019: [www.frstrategie.org/publications/notes/la-mort-annoncee-du-traite-fni-ou-la-fin-de-l-apres-guerre-froide-02-2019](http://www.frstrategie.org/publications/notes/la-mort-annoncee-du-traite-fni-ou-la-fin-de-l-apres-guerre-froide-02-2019).

<sup>30</sup> Heinrich Brauß and Christian Mölling, 'Deterrence and Arms Control. Europe's Security without the INF Treaty: Political and Strategic Options for Germany and NATO', DGAP Compact, 02/2019, February 2019.

## 2. A BILATERAL COLD WAR TREATY IN A 'MULTIPOLAR MISSILE WORLD'

### 2.1. Evolution and proliferation of missile technologies

There is more to the INF Treaty than the Russia-US and US-NATO conundrum. The decay of the INF Treaty had not been lost on observers: it could hardly adjust to post-Cold War realities, including both the United States and Russia's heightened sense of vulnerability vis-à-vis the missile programmes of China and others. Defending against the missile threats of both 'revisionist powers' and 'rogue states' is the central theme of the 2019 US Missile Defense Review (MDR).<sup>31</sup> Little known by the wider public, the treaty remained on the screen of arms control specialists but appeared, at least in some quarters, increasingly out of sync with a world where new 'missile races' might be in the making. In Moscow, where he held talks with President Vladimir Putin and Foreign Minister Serguei Lavrov on the issue, US National Security Advisor John Bolton declared that the INF 'was a Cold War bilateral ballistic missile-related treaty in a multipolar ballistic missile world'.<sup>32</sup>

Bolton was right to highlight two things: that the INF was a distinct product of the Cold War, and that we are now in a world where missile technologies have proliferated. New technologies have brought about new prospects for missile development.

China, for instance, was the first country to deploy anti-ship ballistic missiles, the much-discussed DF-21 D 'carrier killer' and the longer-range DF-26.<sup>33</sup> More fundamentally, Beijing's arsenal of medium- and intermediate-range missiles is a pillar of the country's defence policy and military strategy.<sup>34</sup> It even elevated its missile branch, the Second Artillery Force, to the level of a 'service', alongside the Navy, Air Force and Army in 2015: it is now the 'People's Liberation Army Rocket Force' (PLARF).<sup>35</sup> Not only do these capabilities provide a strong deterrent against US naval operations in the Western Pacific, they also provide a strong hedge against regional

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<sup>31</sup> Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2019 Missile Defense Review. Available at: <https://media.defense.gov/2019/Jan/17/2002080666/-1/-1/1/2019-MISSILE-DEFENSE-REVIEW.PDF>.

<sup>32</sup> Michael Kofman, 'Under the Missile's Shadow: What does the Passing of the INF Treaty Mean?', *War on the Rocks*, 26 October 2018: <https://warontherocks.com/2018/10/under-the-missiles-shadow-what-does-the-passing-of-the-inf-treaty-mean/>.

<sup>33</sup> Andrew S. Erickson, 'China Reveals Two "Carrier-Killer" Missiles,' *The National Interest*, 3 September 2015: <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/showtime-china-reveals-two-carrier-killer-missiles-13769>.

<sup>34</sup> See, e.g.: Jacob Stokes and Alec Blivas, 'China's Missile Program and Potential US Withdrawal from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty', *US-China Economic and Security Review Commission Staff Research Report*, 28 January 2019.

<sup>35</sup> Adam Ni and Bates Gill, 'China's New Missile Force: New Ambitions, New Challenges (Part 1)', *China Brief*, 18 (14), August 2018: <https://jamestown.org/program/chinas-new-missile-force-new-ambitions-new-challenges-part-1/>; Adam Ni and Bates Gill, 'China's New Missile Force: New Ambitions, New Challenges (Part 2)', *China Brief*, 18 (15), September 2018: <https://jamestown.org/program/chinas-new-missile-force-new-ambitions-new-challenges-part-2/>.

'contingencies', not least in the advent of military operations against Taiwan. In concrete terms, it has been argued that if China were to subscribe to INF provisions, 95% of its missiles would have to be scrapped.<sup>36</sup> Similarly, for India and Pakistan, medium- and intermediate-range missiles have a distinct role to play in their overall defence posture and strategy. This is not to speak of Iran and North Korea, whose ballistic programmes have been the object of numerous condemnations and sanctions by the United Nations (UN) and other international actors.

The threat of sophisticated cruise missiles, integrating stealth materials and advanced propulsion, guiding and targeting systems, will likely grow in salience. The reason the maritime- and air-launched versions of cruise missiles were not prohibited by the INF Treaty in 1987 is that their launch platforms are easier to locate and track than a land-based system which can be easily concealed in periods of crisis and launched at very short notice. Furthermore, very few command, control and communication arrangements are required, rendering deployment of the missile system much more destabilising. Neutralising a cruise missile in flight is very difficult as it requires very sophisticated and networked systems, including powerful sensors, rapid data link and the necessary interceptors.

Meanwhile, hypersonic technologies have become a new topic of concern. These technologies mainly come in two forms: railguns and missiles. Railguns use high electromagnetic force rather than conventional propellants to fire rounds at much greater speeds than traditional guns. They would considerably upgrade the range, velocity and precision of long-range artillery fires, but still face major technological hurdles related to the production, storing and command of the huge electric power they require. Apparently, China is the first country in the world to have tested operationally such a railgun, and it may be fielding one by 2025.<sup>37</sup>

Hypersonic missiles are missiles capable of flying at five times the speed of sound or faster. There are two kinds: cruise missiles (using a scramjet engine to reach high speeds) and glide vehicles (released from a missile into near space and gliding to the target). The velocity and manoeuvrability of both types mean that they would defeat any existing missile defence systems. That was exactly what Russian President Vladimir Putin emphasised when he announced that his country had successfully tested its Avanguard hypersonic missile.<sup>38</sup> Should such missiles carry nuclear warheads, they would be very difficult to discriminate from conventional missiles.

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<sup>36</sup> Statement of Admiral Harry B. Harris Jr., US Navy Commander, US Pacific Command Before the Senate Armed Services Committee on US Pacific Command Posture, 27 April 2017. Available at: [https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Harris\\_04-27-17.pdf](https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Harris_04-27-17.pdf).

<sup>37</sup> David Axe, 'China's Navy Railgun Is Out for Sea Trials. Here's Why It's a Threat to the US Navy.', *The National Interest*, 6 January 2019: <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/buzz/chinas-navy-railgun-out-sea-trials-heres-why-it-s-threat-us-navy-40812>.

<sup>38</sup> Nikolai Novichkov, 'Russia announces successful flight test of Avangard hypersonic glide vehicle', *Jane's*, 3 January 2019: <https://www.janes.com/article/85511/russia-announces-successful-flight-test-of-avangard-hypersonic-glide-vehicle>.

Given their unpredictable trajectories, they are intrinsically destabilising.<sup>39</sup> They leave possible defenders very little time (and actual data) to respond: retaliatory strikes would have to be decided on highly speculative grounds. Research on hypersonic missiles is ongoing in at least three countries: Russia,<sup>40</sup> China<sup>41</sup> and the United States.<sup>42</sup>

Parallel with these high-tech bids on the future of deterrence, and of more salience to the problem of a 'multipolar missile world', is the proliferation of sophisticated missile systems and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs or 'drones'). Ballistic and cruise missile technologies are more readily available to non-state actors and lesser powers: suffice it to mention the ballistic missile campaign used by the Houthi rebels in Yemen against Saudi Arabia. Defence against modified 'Scuds' and modified surface-to-air missiles has been a major challenge for the Kingdom, necessitating a major – and yet not very successful – effort in missile defence.<sup>43</sup> Meanwhile, UAV technologies have dramatically spread. Drones are an integral and growing part of contemporary battlefield realities. For instance, Russian forces operating from the Hmeimim air base in Syria have claimed to face numerous attacks from drones loaded with explosives.<sup>44</sup>

Such developments undoubtedly require an adapted response, which the INF was, for all intents and purposes, unable to provide. In this, Bolton had a point. Being the only party committing to a bilateral treaty is also not a sustainable option. In this, the US administration has another point (and Russia does not claim otherwise, although it lays the blame squarely on Washington). However, this line of argument completely bypasses the multilateral efforts that have since taken place on the issue, and their potential for addressing current arms control and disarmament issues.

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<sup>39</sup> Richard H. Speier, George Nacouzi, Carrie A. Lee, Richard M. Moore, *Hypersonic Missile Nonproliferation. Hindering the Spread of a New Class of Weapons*. Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2017.

<sup>40</sup> Vladimir Isachenkov (AP), 'Putin: Russia has enough missiles without violating treaty, and nobody has hypersonic weapons like theirs', *Military Times*, 18 December 2018: [www.militarytimes.com/news/your-military/2018/12/18/putin-russia-has-enough-missiles-without-violating-treaty-and-nobody-has-hypersonic-weapons-like-theirs/](http://www.militarytimes.com/news/your-military/2018/12/18/putin-russia-has-enough-missiles-without-violating-treaty-and-nobody-has-hypersonic-weapons-like-theirs/); Brad Lennon, 'Russia's "invulnerable" nuclear missile ready to deploy, Putin says', *CNN*, 27 December 2018.

<sup>41</sup> Minnie Chan, 'China fires up advanced hypersonic missile challenge to US defences', *South China Morning Post*, 1 January 2018: <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/2126420/china-fires-advanced-hypersonic-missile-challenge-us>.

<sup>42</sup> Aaron Mehta, 'Air Force awards nearly \$1 billion contract for a hypersonic cruise missile', *Defense News*, 18 April 2018: [www.defensenews.com/air/2018/04/18/air-force-taps-lockheed-for-new-hypersonic-cruise-missile/](http://www.defensenews.com/air/2018/04/18/air-force-taps-lockheed-for-new-hypersonic-cruise-missile/).

<sup>43</sup> 'Doubt cast on Saudi claims of Houthi missile interception', *Al Jazeera*, 28 March 2018: [www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/03/doubt-cast-saudi-claims-houthi-missile-interception-180326124054084.html](http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/03/doubt-cast-saudi-claims-houthi-missile-interception-180326124054084.html).

<sup>44</sup> 'Russian airbase in Syria destroys 45 drones over past month: ministry', *Xinhua*, 17 August 2018: [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-08/17/c\\_137396342.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-08/17/c_137396342.htm).

## 2.2. The problem is not regulation, it is enforcement

The INF Treaty did not address the developments of a ‘multipolar missile world’ and it was not designed to do so. Russia’s argument that US drones actually meet the definition of ground-launched cruise missiles under the INF Treaty illustrates this gap between text and stakes.

Ballistic missile proliferation is a longstanding and, arguably, growing concern for the international community. In 1987, the same year the INF Treaty was signed, G7 states agreed to set up a multilateral mechanism instituting a common set of rules and standards in their trade of missile systems and technology: the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR). Members of the MTCR pledge to review critically (‘exercise restraint’ in) any export of missiles, as well as associated parts and technologies, that would either have a range of 300 km or more and a payload of 500 kg or more (the ‘300/500 threshold’), or be capable of delivering weapons of mass destruction (including nuclear, biological or chemical warheads). The MTCR has, in effect, established a strong non-proliferation norm and is credited with many non-proliferation successes, mostly during the 1990s and early 2000s<sup>45</sup>.

However, the MTCR only targets exports of sensitive technologies: a missile developed domestically would not be bound by its provisions. The recent Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), which entered into force in 2014, similarly focuses on international transfers rather than on weapons themselves: it establishes common standards for the international trade in conventional weapons, including missiles and missile launchers.

The problem lies yet again with adapting to a fast-changing technological and industrial landscape. Should the MTCR not specifically address hypersonic technologies, the risk may be that the regime fails to curb their proliferation. There is already a precedent with UAVs. The MTCR did not prevent drone proliferation, not least by non-MTCR members China and Israel, and American criticism over what is perceived as biased restrictions (drones are marketed with payloads just inferior to 500 kg) is growing.<sup>46</sup> And so does the frustration of US policymakers who believe that Russia’s position within the MTCR obstructs reform.<sup>47</sup>

Countries like China, India, Pakistan, North Korea, Iran or Israel developed their own missile programmes outside the MTCR framework, and outstanding cases of

<sup>45</sup> Leonard S. Spector, ‘The Missile Technology Control Regime and Shifting Proliferation Challenges’, *Arms Control Association*, 1 April 2018: [www.armscontrol.org/act/2018-04/features/missile-technology-control-regime-shifting-proliferation-challenges#endnote02](http://www.armscontrol.org/act/2018-04/features/missile-technology-control-regime-shifting-proliferation-challenges#endnote02).

<sup>46</sup> See, e.g. George Nacouzi et al., *Assessment of the Proliferation of Certain Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems. Response to Section 1276 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017*. Santa Monica: Rand Corporation, 2018: [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR2369.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2369.html).

<sup>47</sup> Michael C. Horowitz & Andro Mathewson, ‘A way to rein in drone proliferation’, *The Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*, 30 November 2018: <https://thebulletin.org/2018/11/a-way-to-rein-in-drone-proliferation/>.



problematic proliferation (such as China's assistance to the Saudi, Pakistani, North Korean and Iranian ballistic programmes, or North Korean and Iranian proliferation activities, including to Yemen and Syria) have cast a crude light on the regime's limitations. In 2002, the same year the United States withdrew from the ABM Treaty, the Hague Code of Conduct against Ballistic Missile Proliferation (HCoC) was established as an initiative spearheaded by MTCR members seeking to bring as many countries as possible to subscribe to transparency and confidence-building measures in their space and ballistic missiles programmes. It has now gathered 139 signatories – a much-needed development but one that similarly lacks enforcement mechanisms: the HCoC is explicitly 'politically binding'.

These multilateral mechanisms thus appear to be limited in both diplomatic (not all countries with potentially problematic missile programmes are part of them) and technical range (the difficulty of addressing the different capabilities of different classes and kinds of missiles, not to mention the all-important 'dual-use' nature of associated technologies). But they still serve a purpose. China, Israel and Pakistan have since pledged on numerous occasions support to the MTCR and committed to observe its guidelines, while India joined the regime in 2016. International sanctions against North Korea and Iran have used MTCR guidelines and annexes.

Enforcements of arms control agreements have always constituted the difficult part of diplomatic and political negotiations. In a world where missile technology is fast changing and further proliferating, new rules are warranted. But previous agreements have set useful precedents. They instituted mechanisms and principles that can still be of value in new, multilateral frameworks. Discarding such agreements as obsolete remnants of the Cold War does not help in charting a course for addressing the challenges of a multipolar missile world. Experience shows that when legal obligations go, so do the competences. More than ever, creative thinking over arms control enforcement mechanisms is needed, and experts of the INF Treaty have a fair share of insights and experience to contribute to the contemporary debate.

In a world headed toward possible new 'missile races', the weakness of the multilateral arms control architecture puts a premium on new capability-building efforts that the demise of the INF Treaty can only further heighten. It is likely that more and more countries will invest in missile defence as missile threats augment and diversify, but capability development in this realm is both extremely costly and not extremely reliable in operational conditions (given the tremendous technological challenges associated with intercepting missiles).

The demise of the INF Treaty does not fundamentally alter the parameters of a 'new missile world'. It rather demonstrates the shifting priorities of those countries most concerned about it: less investment in diplomacy and multilateral frameworks and more concentration on 'hard power' instruments; less concertation and more deterrence; and ultimately less transparency and more great-power politics.

### 2.3. The multilateral consequences of an INF withdrawal

What had long been a very technical conversation, featuring many more considerations than those listed above, suddenly turned into a hot political issue in October 2018 when US President Trump made public his intention to ‘terminate’ the INF Treaty. While claims of treaty violations were neither new nor anecdotal, the timing of this announcement had a significant impact on its reception in Europe. It came on the heels of a series of treaty-busting initiatives by the Trump administration,<sup>48</sup> most notably its withdrawal from the Paris agreement and the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) or Iran deal.

An inescapable corollary has been a renewed questioning on the future of New START, the only treaty that puts a cap on the strategic arsenals of the world’s two biggest nuclear powers: a treaty that the US president unsurprisingly considered a ‘one-sided deal’ and a ‘bad deal’.<sup>49</sup> A series of diplomatic consultations were necessary to clarify the US position on the INF and avoid a ‘spill-over effect’ from other issues and forums. But interrogations over New START remain.

A first and all-important implication of the demise of the INF Treaty would therefore be a blow to the global disarmament agenda. In recent years, the global conversation on nuclear disarmament has been much less focused on delivery vehicles (i.e. missiles, for the most part) than on force postures and on the humanitarian consequences of nuclear explosions. This may contribute to further polarising a debate that is already heated. The Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) review process appears stalled, much like the work of the UN Conference on Disarmament (CD), as most nuclear powers commit to the modernisation of their arsenals. The countries and civil society organisations that grew frustrated with this approach and have long called for an actual break from the past sponsored a new treaty: the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), which was passed in 2017. In the current situation, the ‘realistic’ and incremental approach advocated by those who favour existing disarmament formats (NPT mainly) and the ‘optimistic’ approach of TPNW supporters appear less and less amenable to compromise. The demise of INF will provide additional arguments to both sides and will probably further entrench their respective positions.

A second implication is, beyond the global disarmament agenda, the erosion of trust in arms control agreements in general. The demise of the INF Treaty undermines the US stated ambition of reaching a tougher ‘nuclear deal’ with Iran – one that would

<sup>48</sup> Scott R. Anderson, ‘Walking Away from the World Court’, *Lawfare*, 5 October 2018: <https://www.lawfare-blog.com/walking-away-world-court>.

<sup>49</sup> Aaron Mehta, ‘One nuclear treaty is dead. Is New START next?’, *Defense News*, 23 October 2018: <https://www.defensenews.com/pentagon/2018/10/23/one-nuclear-treaty-is-dead-is-new-start-next/>; Robbie Gramer and Lara Seligman, ‘The INF Treaty Is Dead. Is New START Next?’, *Foreign Policy*, 1 February 2019: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/02/01/the-inf-treaty-is-dead-is-new-start-next-russia-arms/>.

likely give greater attention to its missile programme – and a formal agreement over North Korea’s denuclearisation. Both endeavours were already considered close to impossible before October 2018. Prospects of arms control discussions with other actors, including China, have also been profoundly damaged.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, questions over the extension of New START have only become more salient.

A third implication is the dreaded, if still remote, prospect of a new ‘Euromissiles crisis’. The demise of INF comes with the question as to whether the Pentagon would develop and field its own ground-launched intermediate-range missile system. The National Defense Authorization Acts for Fiscal Years 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019 all call for the development of military options in response to Russia’s treaty violations. In particular, in the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty Preservation Act of 2017, Congress is asking the Department of Defense to ‘report on the cost, schedule and feasibility to modify the Tomahawk, Standard Missile-3, Standard Missile-6, Long-Range Stand Off Cruise Missile, and Army Tactical Missile System missiles for ground-launch with [INF] range; and [to] report on the number and location of AEGIS Ashore sites with anti-air warfare capability necessary in Asia and Europe to defend US forces and allies from Russian ground launched missile systems’.<sup>51</sup>

The operational need for such a missile is, at best, limited. Testifying before Congress, General Paul Selva, Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said ‘[t]here are no military requirements we cannot currently satisfy due to our compliance with the INF Treaty. While there is a military requirement to prosecute targets at ranges covered by the INF Treaty, those fires do not have to be ground-based. However, ground-based systems would increase both the operational flexibility and the scale of our intermediate-range strike capabilities’.<sup>52</sup> Basing options for new intermediate-range missile are the tricky part of this discussion. The Euromissiles crisis had this issue at its core, and it clearly showed that alliance unity on this question was far from guaranteed. Basing options in Asia would be no less controversial. For example, deployment of the THAAD (Terminal High Altitude Area Defence) missile defence system in South Korea has been – despite North Korea’s threats – an important political and electoral issue in the country; it also put Seoul at loggerheads with Beijing.

While these two precedents (the Euromissiles crisis and oppositions to THAAD deployment in South Korea) obviously have their fair share of idiosyncrasies and should not be too readily compared with the current situation, they show how politically sensitive it would be for any allied country to host US ground-based interme-

<sup>50</sup> Bruno Tertrais et al., ‘La mort annoncée du traité FNI ou la fin de l’après-Guerre froide’, op. cit.

<sup>51</sup> S.430 – *Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty Preservation Act of 2017*, 115th Congress (2017-2018). Available at: [www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/senate-bill/430/text](http://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/senate-bill/430/text).

<sup>52</sup> Military Assessment of Nuclear Deterrence Requirements [H.A.S.C. No. 115-11], hearing before the Committee on Armed Services of the House of Representatives (1st session), 8 March 2017. Available at: [www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-115hrg24683/html/CHRG-115hrg24683.htm](http://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-115hrg24683/html/CHRG-115hrg24683.htm).

diate-range missiles. In Europe, such a scenario prompted the European External Action Service (EEAS) to issue a statement calling the ‘full and verifiable implementation’ of the INF Treaty ‘crucial for Europe’s and global security’, and warning that INF withdrawal may prompt ‘a new arms race’.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> ‘Statement on the Treaty on Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces in Europe’, *EEAS*, 22 October 2018: [https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/52520/statement-treaty-intermediate-range-nuclear-forces-europe\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/52520/statement-treaty-intermediate-range-nuclear-forces-europe_en).

## 3. EUROPE'S OPTIONS

### 3.1. A limited agency

Since October 2018, European allies have pressed the United States to take more time before putting an end to their INF Treaty commitments and attempted to pressure Russia to demonstrate (or return to) compliance with the treaty. French President Emmanuel Macron reminded his American alter ego of the importance of the INF Treaty in October 2018, during a phone call.<sup>54</sup> German Chancellor Angela Merkel apparently convinced President Trump to delay the withdrawal announcement. Meanwhile, the German Foreign Minister embarked on a last-ditch attempt to salvage the treaty.<sup>55</sup> At the Munich Security Conference, Angela Merkel offered the opportunity to China, via Yang Jiechi, the director of the Office of Foreign Affairs of China's Communist Party (CCP), to participate in discussions over the future of the INF Treaty.<sup>56</sup>

The problem is that Europe is not party to the treaty. It therefore has limited leverage over its future, despite being its principal beneficiary. Back in the 1980s, the threat perception gap was a major source of irritation between allies and within European countries. But eventually, through sound diplomacy (not least within a NATO context), European and American interests merged in a negotiating position vis-à-vis the USSR. The INF Treaty may have been a bilateral treaty, highlighting the actual power dynamics of the Cold War but it also constituted a litmus test of transatlantic security cooperation.

The context is very different in 2019, but intermediate-range missiles are no less a challenge for transatlantic relations and diplomatic relations with Russia. That implies that European allies and EU institutions cannot remain quiet on the issue. Instead of trying to salvage the INF Treaty, European countries should rather invest in creative thinking over new arms control and disarmament negotiation platforms and enforcement mechanisms. Part of the challenge is to both find common grounds among allies and to cooperate effectively with like-minded partners. What could be the best vehicle for such a programme, and what would be the most promising areas of cooperation?

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<sup>54</sup> 'Communiqué de presse – Entretien téléphonique du Président de la République avec le Président des Etats-Unis d'Amérique Donald TRUMP', Elysée, 22 October 2018: [www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2018/10/22/communique-de-presse-entretien-telephonique-du-president-de-la-republique-avec-le-president-des-etats-unis-d-amerique-donald-trump](http://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2018/10/22/communique-de-presse-entretien-telephonique-du-president-de-la-republique-avec-le-president-des-etats-unis-d-amerique-donald-trump).

<sup>55</sup> 'Germany demands Russia verify its commitment to INF missile treaty', *Deutsche Welle*, 24 January 2019: [www.dw.com/en/germany-demands-russia-verify-its-commitment-to-inf-missile-treaty/a-47206266](http://www.dw.com/en/germany-demands-russia-verify-its-commitment-to-inf-missile-treaty/a-47206266).

<sup>56</sup> Sebastian Sprenger and Joe Gould, 'Merkel nudges China to help save the INF Treaty', *Defense News*, 17 February 2019.

There is no easy path forward. At the core of the problem is the issue of credibility. If Europe is serious about its role in supporting multilateral arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation regimes and practices, it needs leverage. This, in turn, implies defence capabilities. This will not be easy. When French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Angela Merkel emphasised the need for a European army, in part as a reaction to the anticipated American withdrawal from the INF Treaty, they were subject to criticism, not least from US President Trump.<sup>57</sup>

To connect this question of capabilities with diplomacy requires that European countries figure out a way to make the best out of the existing framework, organise themselves, liaise with like-minded partners, and reach together a 'critical mass' supporting a coherent arms control and disarmament strategy. Problematically, there is no single venue to do that: NATO is where most of the effort is likely to take place, but it is most affected by the erosive effect of Trumpian politics – not to speak of other divisions within the Alliance over potential policy on Russia. The EU has stepped up its ambitions in the defence realm over the last few years, but capability development will remain difficult. The OSCE and UN frameworks, meanwhile, offer interesting entry points to engage other partners but offer little more, in this context, than liaising and mediating opportunities.

Making matters worse, the advent of a multipolar missile world has an inescapable corollary that the demise of the INF Treaty only stresses: the question of missile defence and, at the most fundamental level, that of nuclear deterrence. When non-proliferation and arms control agreements fail, how do you defend against missile threats, old and new?

### **3.2. A complex alternative to a revised 'dual track' decision**

The INF Treaty was the result of a convergence of views on nuclear deterrence. This convergence was far from easy to achieve. The United States and USSR had their respective perspectives and interests. Within the United States and the former USSR, these perspectives and interests have themselves been constantly subject to difficult political arbitration. For instance, the Russian military establishment has been said to be most unhappy with Gorbachev's inclusion of the then recently developed OTR23 'Oka' missile system in the list of missiles to be destroyed under the INF Treaty.<sup>58</sup> More recently, President Trump's hasty comments have obscured a long-running conversation over INF Treaty compliance and alignment with national interests taking place within and between the executive and legislative branches of US govern-

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<sup>57</sup> Maïa De la Baume and David M. Herszenhorn, 'Merkel joins Macron in calling for EU army to complement NATO', *Politico*, 13 November 2018: <https://www.politico.eu/article/angela-merkel-emmanuel-macron-eu-army-to-complement-nato/>.

<sup>58</sup> Stefan Forss, 'The Russian Operational-Tactical Iskander Missile System', National Defence University, Department of Strategic and Defence Studies Series 4: Working Papers No 42, 2012: [www.doria.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/84362/StratL4\\_42w.pdf?sequence=1](http://www.doria.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/84362/StratL4_42w.pdf?sequence=1).

ment.<sup>59</sup> The Euromissiles crisis was proof that within NATO, solidarity on such critical issues as nuclear deterrence and escalation control has to be cultivated carefully, and not simply assumed from the Alliance's most powerful member(s). The INF Treaty crisis of 2018-19 similarly shows that support for the US position from European allies entails a demand for a robust arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation posture.<sup>60</sup>

European agency in the INF Treaty debate is necessarily limited. But in the broader context of a fast-eroding arms control and disarmament architecture, European contributions are important. Such contributions, especially if they energise a wider political and military debate, are all the more valuable that a revised version of the 1979 NATO 'dual-track' decision would not be sufficient to address the challenges of a multipolar missile world.

Multilateral rules and practices in arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation are in need of support and reform, but their politicisation complicates such efforts: President Trump's off-the-cuff announcement that the United States would 'terminate' the INF Treaty exemplifies how a political grammar that may resonate in specific contexts does not accord with the needs of a rules-based, multilateral order nor with the demands of alliance politics. While the motive for withdrawal may be legitimate, the timeframe, narrative and one-sided approach to it might have cost the United States the moral high ground. Meanwhile, the threat environment is fast-changing, imposing necessary reforms and investments in military doctrines and capabilities.

The way forward therefore implies investment in three parallel courses of action: diplomatic activism, political leadership and smart military investments.

### 3.3. Multilateral diplomacy

The first line of action concerns multilateral diplomacy, where European countries and institutions are already very active. There is no legally binding multilateral instrument covering the threat of ballistic and cruise (hypersonic or otherwise) missiles. The INF Treaty constituted an important, if biased, exception, and its demise leaves little in this realm other than political commitments to implement MTCR or HCoC measures. Sponsoring a multilateral treaty in due form, be it a 'universalised INF' or something else, is probably too ambitious a goal. The risk of promoting such a treaty, for instance, at the UN General Assembly, could even contribute to further entrenching antagonistic positions among 'haves' and 'have nots', as the debates

<sup>59</sup> Frank Jones, 'INF Treaty Withdrawal: The Congressional Role', *War Room*, 15 November 2018: <https://warroom.armywarcollege.edu/articles/inf-congressional-role/>.

<sup>60</sup> Robert Bell, 'The Challenges of NATO Nuclear Policy: Alliance management under the Trump administration', Finnish Institute of International Affairs, Working Paper 105, 10 May 2018: [www.fiia.fi/en/publication/the-challenges-of-nato-nuclear-policy](http://www.fiia.fi/en/publication/the-challenges-of-nato-nuclear-policy).

over the TPNW ('nuclear ban treaty') have done. Still, even if a universal or multilateral INF Treaty is beyond reach, the mechanisms it instituted can offer lessons for reinforced multilateral formats. Technological and industrial developments will only heighten the need for common rules on UAVs, hypersonic technologies, but also Artificial Intelligence (AI), cyber operations or even bio-technologies and 3D printers.

Concrete proposals could see the EU increase support to specific frameworks and initiatives (e.g. the HCoC), foster international cooperation over updated methods and definitions (for instance, what criteria should be used to differentiate drones from cruise missiles or how to regulate intangible technology transfers or 'ITT'), continue to invest in Track 1.5 initiatives (for instance, online working groups gathering policymakers and experts) and work on a European white paper on drone and missile technology proliferation, or at least the means to have such a conversation at the European level.

The EU has a major stake in the continued relevance of international treaties and conventions pertaining to nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament, space policy or conventional arms control. The NPT, especially, should remain the cornerstone of the global nuclear non-proliferation regime. To be a force to be reckoned with in the NPT review process, the EU needs a more united front. That implies sorting out – at least partially – how Member States can agree on the means to pursue nuclear disarmament. Upholding these longstanding efforts is important to ensure that any meaningful conversation about missiles reinforces a multilateral, rules-based approach to arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation.

Additional efforts should and will likely take place in other settings, including at the European Council and the OSCE where, for instance, Germany spearheaded the call for a relaunch of conventional arms control discussions. In 2016, a group of 'like-minded states' (14 in total) co-signed the 'Berlin declaration', stating:

Confronted with the increasingly unstable security situation in Europe, we see an urgent need to re-establish strategic stability, restraint, predictability and verifiable transparency and to reduce military risks.

We are convinced that a relaunch of conventional arms control is one important path towards a genuine and effective cooperative security allowing for peace and stability on our continent.<sup>61</sup>

The group of like-minded states continues its consultations, and the effort has resulted in the launch of the 'Structured Dialogue' (SD) within OSCE as the main venue to discuss inclusively conflict of a political-military nature in Europe. However, the SD suffers from both the OSCE's weakness of being primarily concerned with

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<sup>61</sup> 'Ministerial declaration by the foreign ministers of the like-minded group supporting a relaunch of conventional arms control in Europe', *Federal Foreign Office*, 25 November 2016: [www.auswaertiges-amt.de/en/newsroom/news/161125-erkl-freundesgruppe-konv-ruestungskontrolle-europa/285610](http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/en/newsroom/news/161125-erkl-freundesgruppe-konv-ruestungskontrolle-europa/285610).



transparency and confidence-building measures and from the more than limited support from the United States and Russia.<sup>62</sup>

### 3.4. Political leadership

The second line of action concerns political leadership. Diplomatic initiatives are important, but they require political backing to have a sustainable impact. The main question here does not concern political differences within the EU or within NATO – these differences have always existed, and they will remain. Rather, the issue is with the erosive effect of self-centred, competitive political narratives, which are experiencing a dramatic surge in popularity both in Europe and across the Atlantic.

Trumpian politics have taken their toll on transatlantic relations. Self-centred expectations of allied support and solidarity in cases like the Iran deal and rumours of withdrawal from NATO<sup>63</sup> only reinforced supporters of greater European ‘strategic autonomy’. As argued by Sven Biscop:

The Trump administration seems to believe that allies are meant to pay and obey. When it comes to Europe, this may pose a problem. During the Cold War, what was good for the United States was good for Western Europe. But in a multipolar world in which multiple powers are competing and cooperating with each other, this is not always the case.<sup>64</sup>

The EU’s permanent structured cooperation on security and defence (PESCO) was launched in December 2017, pooling the efforts of 25 European countries in defence matters, only to be met with criticism from Washington. A surprise for NATO officials and many diplomats in Europe, especially since American opposition seemed to focus on risks of duplication with NATO and European protectionism in military procurement programmes.<sup>65</sup> It should be clear, however, that the EU is not going it alone. In Daniel Fiott’s words:

The EU is not presently seeking strategic emancipation from all of its dependencies. The constellation of national interests in the EU does not yet permit it and the Union does not have the required defence capabilities or strategic culture, either.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>62</sup> Peter van Ham, *Modernizing conventional arms control in the Euro-Atlantic region*. The Hague: Clingendael Report, September 2018: [https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/2018-09/Modernizing\\_CAC.pdf](https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/2018-09/Modernizing_CAC.pdf).

<sup>63</sup> Julian E. Barnes and Helene Cooper, ‘Trump Discussed Pulling US From NATO, Aides Say Amid New Concerns Over Russia’, *The New York Times*, 14 January 2019: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/14/us/politics/nato-president-trump.html>.

<sup>64</sup> Sven Biscop, ‘Letting Europe Go Its Own Way’, *Foreign Affairs*, 6 July 2018: [www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2018-07-06/letting-europe-go-its-own-way](http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2018-07-06/letting-europe-go-its-own-way).

<sup>65</sup> Steven Erlanger, ‘US Revives Concerns About European Defense Plans, Rattling NATO Allies’, *The New York Times*, 18 February 2018: [www.nytimes.com/2018/02/18/world/europe/nato-europe-us-.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/18/world/europe/nato-europe-us-.html).

<sup>66</sup> Daniel Fiott, ‘Strategic autonomy: towards “European sovereignty” in defence?’, *EUISS Brief N° 12*, 30 November 2018: [www.iss.europa.eu/content/strategic-autonomy-towards-european-sovereignty-defence](http://www.iss.europa.eu/content/strategic-autonomy-towards-european-sovereignty-defence).

What is true is that the sorry state of political communication across the Atlantic pushed European allies in the direction of China or Russia, among others, for diplomatic support in multilateral formats, as is the case for World Trade Organization (WTO) reform, for instance. The US administration's withdrawal from the Iran deal and its threats of a 'trade war' have already pushed the EU to look for alternative sources of support in its sanctions policy (instituting a 'Special Purpose Vehicle' or 'SPV' to counter US sanctions on firms dealing with Iran) and trade policy (through new trade agreements with like-minded partners like Japan, Australia, Singapore and others).

Meanwhile, the rise of populist parties and leaders in Europe and uncertainty over Brexit complicate the overall political landscape. This means, in effect, that American perspectives on strategic stability, NATO politics and relationships to the EU, as defended by the Trump administration, will probably reinforce centrifugal forces in Europe and further undermine the good efforts of diplomats and officials upholding the sheer value of transatlantic cooperation. Corrosive politics cannot be assumed to be only temporary.

Both within the EU and NATO there needs to be a more concerted effort by European countries to uphold a rules-based international order, not as a mantra but as a politically meaningful objective and interest. Self-centred political narratives can easily stigmatise joint efforts and multilateral platforms as unaligned with national interests. Conventions, treaties and complex political agreements are easy targets in such a context. The challenge is therefore not to resist further politicisation of these important pillars of international cooperation and stability, but to embed them in an ambitious and positive collective defence and security agenda. One that would make sense to European governments and domestic constituencies. In the current context, it may no longer be possible to argue, as Mitterrand did, that 'the missiles are in the East, and the Pacifists are in the West'.

Certainly not all European governments would share the same threat perception. But they all risk being faced with tough choices in the near future.<sup>67</sup> Should Russia decide to deploy 9M729 regiments closer to the EU's borders or develop new intermediate-range missiles, what would be Europe's posture? Should the United States pressure European allies to deploy American intermediate-range missiles in their territory, where would we stand? Basing options for new American intermediate-range missiles, be they in European countries or in Asia, are all destabilising: it is difficult to see Russia or China not reacting angrily to such deployments in their neighbourhood, but more importantly it would be very divisive within NATO. Western European allies would likely resist any such deployment in Eastern European countries. Without a major brainstorming exercise on European perspectives and interests in a multipolar

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<sup>67</sup> Ulrich Kühn, 'The New Arms Race and Its Consequences', *Valdai Club*, 13 December 2018: <http://valdai-club.com/a/highlights/the-new-arms-race-and-its-consequences/>.

missile world, consensus will always remain elusive and threat perceptions will remain a matter of national perspectives.

More recently, the German Foreign Minister sponsored an international conference to ‘promote a well-informed international dialogue on the nature and implications of the current technological trends and to discuss whether new solutions are needed to ensure that the global arms control architecture can effectively capture new technologies’.<sup>68</sup> This kind of effort, in relation to German activism in the context of the OSCE and in bilateral relations with the United States, is worth supporting. It should also lead to concrete proposals.

### **3.5. Military capabilities**

The third line of action, of course, pertains to capabilities, especially in the military realm. Not only do you need military forces as a guarantee when diplomacy fails, you also need military strength to give diplomacy a chance. One condition for greater and wider support for the EU’s multilateral agenda is to have some in-house capacities. There are important enabling technologies (including radar, sensor technology, propulsion, new materials, 3D printing, etc.) on which a lot of European companies, as well as European institutions, are already working. PESCO projects and Commission-funded research projects, including those on strategic technology foresight and ‘Key Enabling Technologies’ (KETs) are an important step in a good direction. More can and should be done, however, but the difficulty is to rally a critical mass of public and private actors around a common sense of purpose: for instance, talking about space policy, Commissioner Elżbieta Bieńkowska declared in January 2019: ‘in Europe, we do not have a clear collective sense of where we are going together on space matters’.<sup>69</sup>

However, such capabilities may help foster greater cohesiveness among Member States, substantiate PESCO, and further energise the debate on – and political commitments to – strategic autonomy, but they aren’t fitted to face the perils of a renewed missiles threat from Russia, nor to address the challenges of a multipolar missile world. Nor are they intended to: EU diplomats and policymakers have been extremely clear that their ambition is to complement and collaborate with NATO, not duplicate it.

The defence concepts and capabilities required to address a more complex, diversified and changing missile threat will also need to be revised, and NATO is the place where this discussion takes place. Key concerns will remain the fundamentals of the alliance’s nuclear forces and escalation control. But the current crisis highlights the

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<sup>68</sup> See the conference website: <https://rethinkingarmscontrol.de/>.

<sup>69</sup> Her speech is available here: [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/commissioners/2014-2019/bienkowska/announcements/11th-annual-conference-european-space-policy-opening-speech\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/commissioners/2014-2019/bienkowska/announcements/11th-annual-conference-european-space-policy-opening-speech_en).

importance of other missions, including NATO's Integrated Air and Missile Defense (NATO IAMD). It further reinforces the need for new, networked platforms within the alliance, and a good example of what can be achieved is the procurement of five RQ-4B Global Hawk drones by 15 allied countries, which will be operated by – and for the benefit of – NATO, as the Alliance Ground Surveillance (AGS) system. Air defence, especially if relations with Russia deteriorate further, will require major investments and important choices on the part of allies.

Upstream of NATO pooling and sharing and other capability-building efforts, critical choices will have to be made in individual European countries as well, pertaining to military missions and hardware in a 'multipolar missile world'. Not having the budgetary resources of the United States, what are the key technologies, organisational reforms, infrastructure development, procurement priorities, simulation and training programmes – not to mention budgetary choices – that European allies should support? Only if such effort is undertaken can a European leverage be found vis-à-vis Washington. Cooperation should be reinforced, not discarded. Political fixations over defence spending figures risk missing the point of accompanying and supporting the necessary upgrade of doctrines and capabilities in the face of a changing threat environment.

Relationships with the private sector and industrial policy considerations will also have to be managed with the view to consolidating an adjustable, competitive, high-quality and reliable source of technologies, goods and services.

## 4. CONCLUSION

The demise of the INF Treaty should not be conflated too readily with a return to the worst days of the Cold War. The treaty had been in dire shape for many years before the Trump administration decided it was probably time to end it. More than a cause, the slow death of the INF Treaty is a symptom of deeper political and diplomatic trends. The post-INF Treaty world is a fluid ‘multipolar missile world’ that shapes up great power competition, imposes greenfield investments in the trying territory of missile defence, challenges non-proliferation measures and introduces new variables to nuclear deterrence.

The EU cannot be caught unprepared by these changing tides. It would do well to try its hand at an ambitious missile-related agenda, if only for the sake of clarifying its understanding of the rapidly changing missile threat. Similarly, NATO has to adjust to these new realities while facing destructive political forces. For the Alliance, necessary reforms in deterrence options – both nuclear and conventional – will have to be connected to a reinforced arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation agenda. This is an important condition for EU-NATO cooperation to be further increased, and a major condition for ongoing ambitions and projects in both frameworks to gain political currency in Europe.

The EU should not try to salvage the INF Treaty. Certainly, the diplomatic course should follow its path, supporting concertation between Russia and the United States – especially on New START extension – reinforcing the OSCE’s Structured Dialogue, discussing concrete options for MTCR and HCoC reforms and guideline updates, and further engage with third partners via such forums and processes as the UN General Assembly or the NPT Review Process.

However, the diplomatic and military ingredients of this European response, straddling the EU and NATO spheres, must come with a degree of political leadership and creativity that would alone ensure the credibility and sustainability of the exercise. Concrete ideas, flagship projects with European money delivering twenty-first century jobs and technologies will be key to domestic buy-in in many European countries. Without a European strategy, such initiatives would be highly dependent on a volatile political landscape; they would also add little to a transatlantic relationship in need of positive reinforcements. Challenges are numerous, of course, but pursuing a common understanding of the trends and threats of Bolton’s ‘multipolar missile world’ would at least signal a European intention to gain a degree of agency in the great-power dynamics that are transforming its strategic environment and undermining the pillars of its security and prosperity. The alternative is simply for all to be swept away by the current.

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