

Russia, NATO, and the INF Treaty

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Abstract

Since 2014, the United States has publicly accused Russia of violating the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, a landmark Cold War nuclear arms control agreement. The new US president, Donald J. Trump, will face the tough decision about whether or not to remain committed to the treaty. This article recounts the history of the INF treaty and assesses Russian and US interests related to the treaty. It develops three possible future scenarios for Russian actions and their impact on, as well as possible responses by, the United States and its NATO allies. The conclusion is that NATO allies will most likely face an ambiguous Russian stance with respect to INF weapons, which will make it difficult to find a balanced response strategy, bringing together diplomatic and economic pressure as well as military means to respond to Russia's INF violation.

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By multiple standards, the 1987 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—referred to as the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty¹—can be considered a landmark arms-control and disarmament treaty.² Not only was it the first treaty to effectively eliminate a whole class of missiles between the Soviet Union and the United States, but it also lifted the most imminent nuclear threat to Western Europe, served as a turning point in US-Soviet relations, and introduced the most intrusive verification measures up to that point. Its previous history was one of the end of détente, of NATO's dual-track decision to counter the Soviet SS-20 threat, and of a negotiation record which finally achieved what almost no one would have expected.

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Almost 30 years after the treaty entered into force in 1988, the INF treaty is again in the headlines. In 2014, the United States publicly accused Moscow of violating it by testing a ground-launched cruise missile (GLCM) in the ranges banned by the treaty (500–5,500 kilometers).³ In late 2016, US officials expressed concerns that Russia is producing more missiles than are needed to sustain a flight-test program.⁴ Russia has continued to reject the accusations and tabled a number of counter-charges against the United States.⁵ The diplomatic back and forth has neither resolved the issue nor shed light on whether Moscow plans to produce and deploy an intermediate-range system. These uncertainties have triggered a great deal of speculation and come at a critical time. Since the illegal Russian annexation of Crimea, Russian relations with the West have plummeted to a post–Cold War low. Against the background of mutual accusations of violating the European security order, covert Russian involvement in the war in Eastern Ukraine, Russian nuclear saber-rattling and continued 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.”⁶

The renewed confrontation has also left its mark on the instruments of arms control and risk reduction. Russia violated the Budapest Memorandum of 1994 in which it, along with the United States and Britain, 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) and damaged further integrity of the 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 (CFE)—and walked out of that treaty’s decision-making body. 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. Taken together, these developments have led some to caution that the world might experience “the end of the history of nuclear arms control.”⁷ 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 such as the INF treaty.⁸ Against this background, the debate about whether to preserve or abandon the INF treaty is in full swing in the United States. The new administration faces a choice of what to do with the treaty, a decision which will have a significant impact on European security. Furthermore, any decision to abandon INF could ultimately disrupt the US-Russian strategic arms-control dialogue for years to come.

This article recounts the history of the INF treaty from the latter days of détente to the current US allegations. Departing from an assessment of the Russian and US interests related to the treaty, it develops three possible future scenarios for Russian actions and their impact on, as well as possible responses by, the United States and its NATO allies. It comes to the conclusion that NATO allies will most likely face an ambiguous Russian stance with respect to INF weapons, which will make it difficult to find a balanced response strategy, bringing together diplomatic and economic pressure and military means. Even though the current INF crisis might create additional ripple effects with a view to the Asia-Pacific and Middle Eastern regions, this article focuses primarily on its impact on the European theater.

The Origins of the INF Treaty

It is important to note that, from the very beginning, the history of INF was a history of European concerns. The precarious conventional NATO–Warsaw Pact balance came under increased pressure when Moscow decided to replace its aging SS-4 and SS-5 ballistic missiles (all single-warhead missiles) with the triple-warhead SS-20 ballistic missile. With a maximum range of 5,000 km, the SS-20 could potentially strike any target in Western Europe, targets in Southeast Asia, and also those in Alaska, from deep inside the Soviet territory. European NATO allies, first and foremost Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany Helmut Schmidt, identified the weapon as destabilizing, creating a gap in NATO's nuclear deterrence posture as the allies had no similar capabilities to match the threat.

When NATO allies decided in 1979 to effectively mount a response to the growing SS-20 threat, they opted for a dyadic concept.⁹ The dual-track decision had two components: On the deployment track, NATO threatened to introduce 108 newly built Pershing II ballistic missiles and

464 GLCMs to 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 NATO's deployment.

The first round of negotiations (1981–83) 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 zero-zero option (a proposal by Pres. Ronald Reagan), meaning that all SS-4, SS-5, and SS-20 missiles should be dismantled and the Pershing II and GLCMs not be deployed. In turn, the Soviets insisted on including British and French systems, limiting the geographical scope to cover only the European part of the Soviet Union (thereby allowing for Soviet INF-range deployments in the Asian part of the USSR), and including all American nuclear-capable missiles and aircraft in Europe. The impasse led the US to introduce the first intermediate-range nuclear weapons in West Germany in November 1983. As a direct reaction, the Soviet delegation to the INF talks in Geneva walked out.

While NATO strategists hailed the deployment as a symbol of alliance unity and solidarity, one should not forget how risky the decision was perceived to be in many European capitals and among NATO populations. In hindsight, Washington-based experts had paid little attention to the hefty political and societal arguments in Western European capitals that surrounded the contentious dual-track decision.

A Truly Historic Deal

When Mikhail Gorbachev took office as general secretary of the central committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in March 1985, resumption of INF talks had already been agreed upon two months earlier. However, it was only in 1986 that the Soviet position changed markedly. By the time of the Reagan-Gorbachev summit in Reykjavik (October 1986), the Soviets had already come close to the original US zero-zero proposal for intermediate-range forces, 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 by suggesting the inclusion of missiles of shorter ranges (between 500 and 1,000 km)—in concrete terms, the West German Pershing IA and the Soviet SS-23 and SS-12. 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; SSC-X-4 cruise missiles and launchers; all US Pershing II and Pershing IB ballistic missiles; and US GLCMs and launchers. In fact, the treaty banned all US and Soviet ground-launched nuclear and conventional missiles and launchers with a range between 500 and 5,500 km worldwide. By 1 June 1991, a total of 2,692 intermediate-range missiles had been eliminated entirely. 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 (SLCM) and air-launched cruise missiles (ALCM). A further novelty was the asymmetric character of the reductions. While the Soviet Union destroyed 1,846 missiles, the United States destroyed 846. To address possible compliance concerns and to oversee implementation, the treaty established the Special Verification Commission (SVC). For Europe, INF meant the beginning of a process which resulted in a densely institutionalized network of various multi-lateral arms-control and confidence- and security-building measures, including, among others, the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE), the various formal stipulations on military transparency and predictability of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (later the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe [OSCE]) as well as the bilateral Strategic Arms Reductions treaties (START I and II) and the Presidential Nuclear Initiatives (PNI).

Growing Russian Unease

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—10 years after the last INF systems had been destroyed. But below the level of public attention, Russian dissatisfaction with the treaty surfaced now and then. Russian officials and Pres. Vladimir Putin himself have questioned the continued viability of the INF treaty, and they have formulated arguments in favor of abandoning the agreement several times.¹⁰

In 2007 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.”¹¹ What Ivanov hinted at was the Russian military’s concern with China’s intermediate- and shorter-range missiles, a capability Russia could not match.¹²

In 2010, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs repeated its 2000 claim that the continued US use of “a whole family of target missiles” (the Hera, Long Range Air Launch Target, and Medium Range Target ballistic missiles) represented “direct violations” of the treaty.¹³ As we know today, at that time, Russia was already engaged in testing a new GLCM of intermediate range. Finally, the INF crisis reached the level of full public attention in 2014 when the US 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.”¹⁴ What followed was a fruitless diplomatic back and forth which culminated in November 2016 in the US request to reconvene the SVC—which had been dormant for over 13 years—in Geneva after information surfaced that Russia was allegedly producing more missiles than needed for a flight test program.¹⁵

The Russian Interest in INF Missiles

Currently, Russia publicly supports maintaining the INF treaty.¹⁶ But according to Russian nonproliferation expert Alexei Arbatov, the position of the opponents is growing stronger and not much would be needed to tip the balance.¹⁷ Putin asserts that Russia’s military policy is “not global, offensive, or aggressive [and it has] virtually no bases abroad.”¹⁸ Meanwhile, NATO is a global military power which spends ten times more than Russia does on defense and builds up its missile defense capabilities, which, according to the Russian logic, undermine strategic stability. In Putin’s words, “everything we do is just a response to the threats emerging against us. Besides, what we do is limited in scope and scale, but is, however, sufficient to ensure Russia’s security.”¹⁹ The 2015 National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation cites “the increased force potential of NATO and its acquisition of global functions, performed in violation of international law, the stepping up of military activities by countries of the bloc, further enlargement of the Alliance, its military infrastructure approaching Russian borders [as] a threat to national security.”²⁰ The assumption that Russia would need intermediate-range missiles primarily to counterbalance NATO’s conventional superiority is not unfounded. In

terms of the ability to project military power, Russia found itself in a comparative disadvantage at the end of the Cold War. While NATO extended its regional coverage, Russia lost many of its basing grounds and no longer had the capability to forward-deploy missiles in Europe. The only remaining territory is the Russian Kaliningrad Oblast, wedged between Poland and Lithuania, but short-range missiles below 500 km (such as the sub-strategic Iskander-M system) can only cover the Baltic states and certain parts of Poland. If INF weapons were to be added to the equation, 1,000-km range weapons in the Russian Luga Missile Brigade Base, for instance, could cover the entire territory of Poland without the necessity of deploying these systems in Kaliningrad, while 2,000-km range weapons could reach Germany and a 3,000-km range missile could threaten all other European NATO allies.²¹ With land-based intermediate-range missiles, Moscow could reach all European NATO members without the necessity of forward-deploying its assets. However, the important question is whether that perceived military disadvantage justifies reintroducing INF missiles.

With respect to the perceived conventional threat from NATO, the overwhelming conventional superiority of NATO is only relative. In terms of overall manpower and military capabilities, NATO is unquestionably stronger. However, in the immediate vicinity of the NATO-Russia neighborhood, Russia enjoys conventional superiority everywhere in terms of quantity, quality, and geographical depth.²² This means that Russia could easily withstand the highly unlikely scenario of a conventional NATO surprise attack.²³ Russia has the necessary capabilities to secure its western territories without the need to redeploy land-based intermediate-range weapons.

Even if Russia plans to hold certain sites in European NATO member states at risk with nuclear-tipped land-based cruise missiles of intermediate ranges, it already has the relevant nuclear capabilities. Russian strategic bombers or intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBM) can deliver nuclear warheads at much shorter ranges if modified.²⁴ With the potential redeployment of INF-range weapons, Russia could not hold at risk anything in Europe that it is not already capable of attacking with its existing nuclear forces. In addition, Russia plans to deploy a new long-range SLCM, a version of the 2,000-km range Kalibr land-attack cruise missile, which may be nuclear-capable,²⁵ on ships and submarines in all of its five fleets during the next few years.²⁶ The deployment of this missile on Russian

ships at port would already hold at risk all European NATO countries except for Spain and Portugal.

Another Russian justification often mentioned for (potentially) abandoning the INF treaty is the European Phased Adaptive Approach (EPAA) missile-defense system with its planned sites in Poland (under construction) and Romania (operational). Russia claims that the EPAA is part of a global US missile-defense architecture designed to undermine Russia's strategic deterrent. However, the EPAA is designed against intermediate-range ballistic missiles and currently has no capability to defend against cruise missiles. Most importantly, in its currently planned form, the SM-3 Block IIA interceptors at the Polish and Romanian Aegis Ashore sites (24 each) are not fast enough to intercept Russian ICBMs that are simply flying too high. Furthermore, Russia is in the process of modernizing its strategic nuclear forces, in the framework of which it plans five new types of land- or sea-based missiles with advanced penetration techniques, leaving the EPAA, even if further advanced than currently planned, little chance to intercept these weapons.²⁷ Nevertheless, Putin claims that, "the missile defense deployment sites can be used effectively for stationing cruise missile attack systems."²⁸ What Putin is referring to is the potential of the EPAA's Mk-41 vertical launchers to effectively launch Tomahawk cruise missiles if deployed on ships. According to the US Navy's "Fact File," the Mk-41 is "a multi-missile, multi-mission launcher, capable of launching SM-2, SM-3, SM-6, ESSM, *Tomahawk*, and Vertical Launch ASROC missiles."²⁹ The only distinction is that the Aegis Ashore systems are using different electronics and software.³⁰ Russian leadership seems to have a point—if the United States is actually exploiting a legal gray area in the INF treaty.³¹ But given these allegations, the Kremlin seems less concerned with the EPAA's potential future strategic implications and more with the scenario of a decapitating strike against Russian command-and-control installations.

Although NATO is a significantly more vocal threat in the Russian rhetoric, behind closed doors China is also mentioned as a potential military threat, and it might become a more important rationale for Russia's INF efforts in the future.³² Internal factors such as the Russian military-industrial complex also play a significant role in that regard.³³ In addition, the general proliferation of missile technologies, especially in Russia's southern neighborhood, has been mentioned several times.³⁴ Regarding the proliferation of missile technologies, at the mo-

ment seven countries (China, India, Pakistan, Israel, Iran, North Korea, and Saudi Arabia) have land-based intermediate-range missiles; some of those countries could hypothetically equip these missiles with nuclear warheads and reach the Russian homeland within minutes.³⁵ However, most of these weapons do not pose a real threat to Russia, at least not in the foreseeable strategic environment. China is officially a strategic partner, and its missiles are designed to hold at risk India, the South China Sea, and the Pacific region. However, one should not underestimate how quickly international relations can change—the latest ups and downs in the Russian-Turkish relationship are just one example. Toward that end, Russian strategists might view Beijing's growing economic and military capabilities at least with some ambiguity, a concern Russia cannot stress for political and diplomatic reasons. India is a key importer of Russian military technologies. Delhi's missile arsenal is meant to deter China and Pakistan, while the Pakistani missiles are directed exclusively against India. In the case of the Middle Eastern powers, the Israeli arsenal was developed against the Arab states and Iran, the Iranian missiles were designed against Israel and Iran's Arab rivals, and Saudi Arabia's missiles are meant to deter Israel and Iran. Finally, the North Korean missiles are also not directed against Russia as they were developed to hold at risk South Korea, Japan, and the United States and its military assets in the region. Therefore, missile proliferation in itself does not justify abandoning the INF treaty or building up Russian missile capabilities. Moreover, even if strategic directions change and relations between Russia and one of these states were to deteriorate significantly, the military capabilities, which are enough to deter the United States, should be enough to deter any of the above-mentioned states or even a coalition of them—at least for the time being. As a matter of fact, Russia's current strategic missiles, bombers, and short-range weapons can hold at risk any target. Therefore, land-based intermediate-range weapons would not have an added value for the execution of a strike plan. According to Arbatov, if the enormous Russian military potential does not provide enough deterrent, an INF violation and the deployment of intermediate-range missiles would not deter either.³⁶

As it stands, the Russian military interest in INF weapons would mostly make sense in relation to a possible conversion of Mk-41 launchers deployed in Eastern Europe and in relation to a quickly rising power

such as China and the strategic uncertainties Beijing's continued rise might bring for Russia.

Besides the military realm, INF weapons could be used as political tools as they would have an important psychological effect on NATO allies. This is especially true for the Baltic states and the Eastern European allies who are geographically more exposed to any potential Russian aggression. INF weapons would clearly demonstrate Russia's intention to have added military capabilities against Europe, broadening the "blackmail potential" on Russia's side. Without any doubt, such decision would trigger an intense disagreement within NATO on how to respond. It would reignite some of the most inconvenient debates during the Cold War about alliance cohesion, the resilience of reassurance measures, whether the United States would really be willing to defend its European allies, and whether Western European allies would come to the defense of the new NATO members as well, thus taking the risk of "losing Berlin for Riga." To be clear, for Russia, the INF crisis is still the perfect political tool to test NATO's cohesion.

US Interest in the INF Treaty

The compliance concerns of the United States with the INF treaty go back to 2008. The test detected then was not recognized as a problem for another few years until more tests and data were added to it.³⁷ Washington officially accused Russia of being in violation of the treaty in mid-2014.³⁸ There are many guesses about why it took Washington so long. Possible explanations for the delay include the following:

1. The difficulty of gathering information on the Russian modernization efforts and the actual military capabilities of the new system
2. The desire to build a strong case before going public
3. The Obama administration's fear that bringing up the INF compliance problem at the beginning of the first term would have undermined New START negotiations and the ratification process in Congress
4. The importance of Russian cooperation in other fields (such as Iran negotiations)
5. The hope that the whole issue could be addressed through regular diplomatic channels without the necessity of going public

In general, concerns about treaty violations occur rather often, and the US-Russian arms-control process has witnessed similar cases. The majority of these cases have been rather technical and were addressed by experts behind the scenes without making the compliance concerns public, or, if the violation was not so significant, the two sides simply waited until the issue lost relevance. In this case, however, the US administration had concluded that there was a violation and was obliged to include it in the State Department's annual compliance report, thus publicly accusing Russia of being in violation of its treaty obligations. This implies a number of things: first, the United States managed to gather enough information to confront Moscow; second, the administration decided that it was not possible to treat the issue silently and that public pressure was necessary to handle the situation; and third, the violation was too significant to just let it lose relevance. In addition to these factors, the worries of the allies (especially the Baltic states) and domestic politics (the opportunity for Congress to push back on Obama's disarmament agenda) might have contributed as well.³⁹

The first official accusation appeared in the July 2014 compliance report, and US concerns were repeated in the 2015 version of the report.⁴⁰ But despite the US decision to openly confront Russia, many unanswered questions remain. The unclassified version of the compliance report, for example, does not specify the Russian system to which the administration is referring. The compliance reports are silent on the issue of whether Russia intends to deploy the system or if it was "just" a technicality, involving the testing of a system otherwise allowed under the INF treaty.⁴¹ We do not know anything about the Pentagon's threat assessment of the Russian violation, and it is also not clear whether the violation was related to a nuclear or a conventional missile system, although in this respect, US Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter testified in his confirmation hearing that "Russia's INF treaty violation is consistent with its strategy of relying on nuclear weapons to offset US and NATO conventional superiority," which seems to imply that it is a nuclear-capable missile.⁴²

Over the last two years, administration officials have repeatedly stressed that the United States remains committed to saving the INF treaty and will try to bring Russia back into compliance.⁴³ There are several reasons why the White House is holding on to the treaty. From a purely military point of view, the United States simply does not need

land-based INF-range missiles to protect itself. With Canada and Mexico as benign neighbors it is, for the foreseeable future, unnecessary for the United States to deploy ground-launched intermediate-range missiles on US territory. American INF weapons would mostly make sense within with the European theater to reassure NATO allies.⁴⁴ Probably the most important political reason is that a US withdrawal from INF would be convenient for Moscow. It would place the blame for INF failure on Washington.⁴⁵ While the United States would not benefit significantly from abandoning INF, Russia would be free to deploy its new missile, which would certainly create a more threatening security environment and would upset both the US European and Asian allies. In other words, Russia could not only blame the United States for the collapse of the treaty but could also take advantage of the absence of the treaty in a way that it cannot do now.

Another important reason is the political-military value of arms-control measures with Russia. As Rose Gottemoeller, former US undersecretary of state for arms control and international security, had put it: “The United States and its allies are made safer and more secure by such agreements . . . providing transparency and predictability.”⁴⁶ Particularly in times of heightened tensions and military muscle-flexing, the argument goes, communication is essential to avoid misunderstandings and misperceptions about the intentions of the other side.⁴⁷ Obama stated that after the ratification of the New START agreement his administration would seek reductions in the US-Russian nonstrategic nuclear arsenals⁴⁸ and, in his 2013 Berlin speech, he also held out the prospect of cutting the deployed strategic nuclear forces of the United States by one-third.⁴⁹ As a result of the strategic review process, US military planners came to the conclusion that the current levels under New START are too high and that cutting them by a third would be commensurate with US interests and security. However, Obama also clearly stated that these reductions should be based on reciprocity with Russia. Even though there is a precedent for unilateral reductions without a treaty framework (most importantly the PNIs), the current security environment does not warrant such measures. Whatever security situation the new US administration faces and whatever foreign and security policy it might pursue, codifying future US-Russian arms reductions in a bilateral treaty framework seems to be the more realistic policy choice. But none of these efforts will succeed if the already existing treaties are falling apart, one

after the other. After the Russian violation of the Budapest Memorandum and Moscow's "suspension" of the CFE treaty in 2007, the INF treaty is "one of the last few active bases of the European security system."⁵⁰ Thus the demise of INF could also have additional negative effects on the last remaining arms-control regimes, such as the New START agreement (in this case, losing the ability to monitor strategic nuclear modernizations would be even more critical).

However, there is also considerable skepticism about and outright rejection of the continued value of the treaty in the United States. Among the first to voice this was former US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, who commented in 2005 that he would not mind if Russia withdrew from the INF treaty (although this view did not seem to resonate with the rest of the George W. Bush administration).⁵¹ Recent proponents of a US withdrawal have argued that Russia is no longer a reliable partner as it continuously violates different arms-control agreements.⁵² Others have tried to point out that NATO is inferior to Russia's tactical nuclear forces in the European theater and must reconsider its adherence to INF. Accordingly, "to increase the credibility of NATO nuclear threats, the Alliance must deprive Russia of its overwhelming battlefield nuclear advantage [and] must plan for the development and deployment of a new generation of sub-strategic nuclear weapons to Europe."⁵³

Partisan politics plays a huge role when it comes to the INF crisis. Commentators from the Republican camp criticized the Obama administration's policy of bringing Russia back into compliance as "failed" and therefore conclude "that the treaty has outlived its utility and is no longer in the US interest."⁵⁴ Another argument in the domestic debate involves the potential capabilities of third states, such as China, Iran, and North Korea. John Bolton, US ambassador to the United Nations during the George W. Bush presidency, has argued that these states "face no limits on developing intermediate-range weapons" and that "with Russia's violations of the treaty, America remains the only country bound by and honoring a prohibition on deploying intermediate-range forces."⁵⁵ He inferred that "maintaining international security requires that the US have access to the full spectrum of conventional and nuclear options" and advocated eliminating the INF. China's growing military capabilities and particularly its large missile arsenal play an increasingly important role in such considerations, which somewhat mirror Russia's concerns over China. New US GLCMs with INF ranges could have additional

value for the military by bolstering its presence in the East and South China Seas. However, as long as the treaty is still in place, this option is not available. Therefore, Evan Braden Montgomery, senior fellow at the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, came up with the idea to consider modifying the INF treaty. “Washington and Moscow could agree to sanction the development of intermediate-range missiles, preserve the ban on missile deployments in Europe, and lift the ban on missile deployments in Asia.”⁵⁶ However, such a proposal starts from the assumption that Russia and the United States could find common ground and that both identify China as the greater military threat—though, perhaps, for different reasons.

Taken together, there is no domestic consensus in the United States on how to handle the INF treaty and the Russian violations. Contending views run mainly along partisan lines. This fact might have more to do with general controversies surrounding Obama’s arms-control legacy than the actual Russian threats that emanate from the violation and the potential response options Washington has at hand.⁵⁷ It also suggests possible changes to US foreign and security policy in the new administration with respect to INF.

Three Russian Options

Russia has basically three options for dealing with the self-induced INF crisis. It could return to full compliance with the treaty. It could openly produce and deploy new INF weapons, thus admitting its violation. Or it could produce and stockpile weapons in a clandestine manner without admitting its violation, thereby causing ambiguity about its intentions. The following assesses the advantages and disadvantages of each option.

The Compliance Option

A thorough Russian assessment of the consequences of reintroducing INF weapons might come to the conclusion that such a decision would be dangerous, costly, and destabilizing. If Moscow really feels threatened by its adversaries, it could still continue to improve its sea- and air-based intermediate-range systems, which would be compliant with the INF treaty. To be fair, this option would be extremely costly for Russia, which has a historical record of overreliance on land-based surface-to-surface missiles, and would thus almost certainly strain its monetary and

technological capacities. Toward that end, Moscow could promise not to produce, deploy, or stockpile the new missile systems, and it could agree to inspections and demonstrate that the missiles were destroyed. Building on such a transparency approach, Moscow could then seek to modernize the INF treaty with Washington, which has been a long-term Russian demand for technical reasons and which might even entail the political option of including other countries of Russian concern.

When the treaty was signed, the parties decided to overlook some technical problems for the greater good.⁵⁸ This is why there are still some gray areas and conceptual problems with the interpretation of treaty obligations, some of which became evident during the current crisis. Furthermore, the treaty does not cover some technologies, such as UAVs, which did not exist in the 1980s but could be included today. One of these conceptual problems is the range of cruise missiles. Cruise missiles, in general, are quite problematic to categorize. Their flight trajectory is nonlinear, and they navigate by terrain contour matching. Therefore, depending on the terrain, they might spend a significant amount of their range zigzagging.⁵⁹ According to the INF treaty, the range of a cruise missile is the “maximum distance which can be covered by the missile in its standard design mode flying until fuel exhaustion, determined by projecting its flight path onto the earth’s sphere from the point of launch to the point of impact.”⁶⁰ Although the United States has tried to clarify this definition, Moscow has refused to respond so far.⁶¹

When rumors arose about a potential Russian violation, there were three competing theories about which system might have caused a violation: the R-500 Iskander-K cruise missile, the RS-26 ballistic missile, and a new submarine-launched cruise missile.⁶² Even though the State Department has, meanwhile, clarified that none of these theories is accurate and that, instead, the violation comes from a state-of-the-art GLCM with INF range, the older theories provide some critical links to modernizing the treaty.⁶³ The category of nuclear-tipped submarine-launched cruise missiles is an important missing element from the coverage of INF. The treaty, in general, allows sea-based intermediate-range cruise missiles, and according to Article VII, these missiles can be tested from a land-based launcher, but only if it is used solely for testing purposes and if it is distinguishable from operational land-based launchers. Although the INF does not cover these systems, the United States and Russia agreed, as part of the 1991–92 PNIs, to remove nuclear-armed cruise missiles from

surface ships and nonnuclear ballistic missile-capable submarines.⁶⁴ Implementing these commitments, however, has never been subject to verification, and Russian general-purpose submarines are still assumed to carry nuclear-armed cruise missiles.⁶⁵ If Russia decides for the cooperative option, it could use the opportunity to clarify the definition of cruise missile ranges and have an honest discussion about the PNIs and the future of nuclear-armed submarine- and sea-launched cruise missiles as well.

The second area in which Moscow could benefit from reinvigorating the INF treaty is the question of combat drones. Although they meet some of the criteria of cruise missiles (drones are also remote controlled), they do not self-destruct after reaching their targets and are, therefore, not covered by the treaty. Russia, however, has accused the United States of being in violation of the treaty for these weapon systems.⁶⁶ With the newest technical developments, the range and payload of these UAVs have significantly expanded. Hence, if Russia is really worried about these capabilities, it could pressure Washington to start a dialogue about military UAVs. Even though Russia has started to develop its own long-range armed UAVs, the sides might still usefully work out language clarifying the difference between a prohibited GLCM and permitted UAVs. Such dialogue could take place in the Special Verification Commission.

Another topic for the SVC could be clarifying language in the treaty that distinguished banned intermediate-range ballistic missiles from permitted target missiles for missile defense. In conjunction with this, Russia has raised concerns about the SM-3 vertical launch box deployed in Romania being capable of containing and launching a GLCM.⁶⁷ Here, a transparency quid pro quo could help to break new ground: the United States might, for example, allow some transparency, perhaps even inspections, regarding the launch box in return for Russian transparency measures that assure testing of its GLCM has ended and that production has been reversed.⁶⁸ If Russia insists on more permanent measures regarding the EPAA, Washington could seek ways to make it technically impossible for the SM-3 to launch GLCMs. Of course, for any such quid pro quo to work, Russia would first have to admit that it had done something that raised compliance concerns.

An additional area where the parties could expand and improve the INF treaty is the issue of verification and compliance. In the 1980s, INF was groundbreaking for its verification measures as it included

unprecedented on-site inspections of selected missiles and facilities. The weapons under the scope of the treaty were disposed of by 1991, and, in accordance with the treaty provisions, the inspections ended in 2001.⁶⁹ In the framework of the SVC, the two sides could discuss the relevant new developments since 2001 and identify new missiles and facilities of concern. Reinstating some of the inspection measures in these updated locations could strengthen compliance, clarify technical misunderstandings, and create trust between the parties again.

Last but not least, reengaging on INF might offer Russia the possibility to press for multilateralizing the treaty. As it stands, the INF treaty still reflects the Cold War bipolarity. Obviously, that world is gone; today, China, India, and other states at Russia's southern periphery invest considerably in missiles of intermediate ranges. Since China is already a concern for the Russian (and the US) military, tentative consultation efforts could start in a trilateral setting, which might turn out to be more promising than simply continuing the bilateral INF legacy.

Altogether, there are several areas where Russia could benefit from returning to compliance and strengthening the INF treaty. Therefore, if Moscow were to decide for the compliance option it could actually use the momentum to open talks with Washington and maybe even Beijing and refurbish the treaty in a way that would better serve the national security interests of Russia and the United States. But the pure fact of the Russian GLCM test suggests that Moscow is operating on a different logic.

The Deployment Option

Given the destructive potential of the INF crisis with respect to attempts at political blackmail and testing NATO's political cohesion, Russia could decide for openly producing and deploying new INF missiles, thus confronting NATO with a military *fait accompli*. Such a step would likely enjoy strong internal support in Russia.⁷⁰ The Kremlin could use the George W. Bush administration's decision to abandon the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty in 2002 as a precedent and blame Washington for disrupting the arms-control process, calling the INF treaty a Cold War relic which no longer serves the national security interests of Russia. While being free to deploy INF systems against Europe, Moscow could hope that political considerations at home and among allies could block the United States from developing and deploying INF systems in Europe that could target Russia in response. As mentioned before,

the Russian tactic could, therefore, be seen as a way of testing the unity and resolve of NATO. By reintroducing a direct threat to the security of Western capitals, Moscow could hope to limit their political options to allow Russia greater maneuvering capability in eastern Europe. A deployment of weapons could also be used as a bargaining chip to achieve limitations on certain military capabilities that Russia considers a threat to its security. The threat of redeploying INF weapons in Europe could, for example, lead some European NATO members to press Washington to agree on legally binding limits on the European Phased Adaptive Approach, however futile such endeavor would be, given the obstinate stance of Congress about any restrictions to US missile-defense programs.

The downsides to this option are manifold. Most importantly, Moscow and Washington could slip back into a costly arms race, which could result in NATO answering the Russian *fait accompli* by also reintroducing INF missiles to Europe. Bringing INF-range weapons back to the European equation could lead to massive instability in Europe, which would benefit neither the United States and its nervous allies nor Russia. It could also trigger escalation dynamics that Moscow and Washington might not be able to control. A look into the history books is helpful in that regard. During the 1980s, in response to the deployment of the Soviet SS-20s, NATO deployed in Europe the fast-flying Pershing II ballistic missiles and the modified Tomahawk sea-launched cruise missiles, which were transformed into highly accurate mobile GLCMs. This actually created results opposite to those Moscow had originally hoped for. The Soviet leadership and command-and-control targets were suddenly endangered from Europe with missiles of a much shorter flight time of 8–10 minutes instead of the previous 30 minutes.⁷¹ As Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev remembered, “It was like holding a gun to our head It increased the risk of nuclear war, even one that was the result of an accident or technical glitch.”⁷² In essence, it was not the deployment of the SS-20s, but the later Soviet decision to sacrifice the missiles, which made Russia more secure in the end. Today an escalatory cycle *vis-à-vis* NATO could reemerge, ultimately fueling the existing tensions in the nuclear realm. Moreover, based on hypothetical military threat perceptions, Russia could end up making a nonexistent threat become real. If, in response to a Russian deployment, NATO decided to boost its missile defense capabilities, further strengthen its military ties with Eastern European allies, pre-position assets on their territories, and

ultimately reintroduce INF weapons to Europe, that would undermine Russia's security and significantly weaken its position. INF weapons in Europe could cover the most populated portion of Russia's territory, requiring a very costly and technically demanding overhaul of the entire Russian nuclear weapons complex and its command-and-control structure, as well as its air- and missile-defense capabilities.⁷³

However, it might not be these arguments that could block Russia from pursuing the deployment track but rather tactical and status considerations. When Russia abandoned the CFE Treaty after years of dissatisfaction, Moscow chose not to officially withdraw but to suspend it, an option not foreseen in the treaty text. By so doing, Moscow kept open the chance of returning to the agreement at a later stage and avoided taking the full international blame for acting as a spoiler of European security. Given this precedent, Russia might decide against the open-deployment option—which would be a *de facto* withdrawal—and could pursue a more ambiguous course.

The Ambiguity Option

Instead of openly deploying INF weapons and thus taking the blame for effectively abrogating the treaty, Russia could decide to secretly produce and stockpile INF missiles while officially denouncing any such claims by NATO. The advantage of this option is that it would confront NATO and Washington with a threat much harder to deal with that would be ambiguous in terms of Russian capabilities and intentions, particularly leaving some ambiguity about the missiles' range and deployment mode. NATO allies would most likely struggle much more to find a common position in such a scenario than with the option of open deployment.

However, this option is also not without risk for Russia. Stockpiling the new missile systems could well result in further sanctions against Russia as allies could initially try to avoid military reciprocal actions. Additional sanctions could seriously harm the already faltering Russian economy. They might even affect internal support for leadership. Apart from that risk, should Russia acquire a significant breakout capability, the further strategic nuclear dialogue between Russia and the United States would be doomed to fail. The New START agreement, which foresees nuclear parity between the two sides in terms of deployed strategic warheads and launchers, expires in 2021. Even now, some US law-

makers aim to suspend funding the agreement if Russia does not return to full compliance with INF.⁷⁴ If Russia were to opt for the ambiguity option, the move would most likely kill all chances for ratification of a New START follow-on agreement in Congress. In that regard, the ambiguity option might backfire, creating additional ambiguities in the strategic nuclear realm. Furthermore, with the loss of military predictability through the breakdown of CFE, the inability of states to comprehensively update the OSCE's Vienna Document on Confidence- and Security-Building Measures, and the lack of transparency in nonstrategic nuclear weapons (below 500 km), the New START agreement is the only remaining nuclear agreement to monitor the military developments of the other side and address any concerns through bilateral dialogue. In times when the Cold War weapons systems are being gradually phased out and both Washington and Moscow are engaged in robust modernization programs, neither side might be willing to accept losing the capability to monitor the other. Since the peak of the Cold War, the nuclear capabilities of the United States and Russia have been significantly reduced. As the two sides are moving toward lower levels, cheating acquires a greater military significance—and so do advanced verification and transparency measures to monitor each other.

A possible breakdown of the strategic arms-control framework would create additional negative ripple effects at the international level and could undermine Russia's international status and further isolate it from the rest of the global community. Instead of being the victims of the growing Western influence and military build-up—rhetoric often used by the Kremlin—it could also support the unpleasant image of an irresponsible power that is fundamentally a major threat to the security of its neighbors in Europe and also Asia. The result could be a deterioration of relations with some of Moscow's closest partners and, in the end, a less secure environment for Russia. However, as explained above, the political leverage INF weapons could bring for Russia vis-à-vis NATO might feel too tempting for the Kremlin to completely let go of the ambiguity option and return to full compliance. Given anonymous US allegations that Russia is in the process of producing INF weapons,⁷⁵ the ambiguity option might, thus, be the most likely option for Russia to pursue over the next few years.

Three US Options

Whatever the different views on the issue, the US Department of Defense established that the Russian violation of the INF treaty could be a threat to the United States and its allies.⁷⁶ Therefore, silence on the issue is not a good solution for three reasons: first, it would send the wrong message to the allies who could see it as a sign of US disengagement from Europe; second, it would allow Russia military gains while the United States still showed restraint; and finally, hesitation to respond could also encourage noncompliance with other arms-control agreements involving third states (such as Iran). In the following pages, we analyze three possible ways for Washington and its allies to deal with the Russian options as outlined above, in each case considering the likely advantages and disadvantages.

Dealing with a Compliant Russia

The easiest option for Washington to deal with would be if Russia were to return to full compliance. However, given Russian behavior in recent years and Russian interest in INF missiles, it is also the least likely. Nevertheless, in such a case, Washington could concentrate on modernizing (and even expanding) the treaty, both because Russia has repeatedly expressed an interest in doing so and because of the need to prevent a future INF crisis. Efforts at modernizing the treaty could take place within the framework of the Special Verification Commission, which has the potential to maintain a secure line of communication between technical experts and the militaries, and could concentrate on transparency and verification measures. Although INF inspections and data exchanges have ended, the compliance concerns on both sides might justify the resumption of some of these measures. In light of the various missile tests that both sides have conducted over the past years, both sides might come to the conclusion that the INF treaty is the right legal framework to inspect these systems and related production facilities and make sure they are either treaty compliant or verifiably dismantled. In a second step, Washington could then take into account Russia's and its own concerns regarding China's growing capabilities, possibly opening an entirely new bargaining framework (including China) taking into account the new structural realities that have developed since the end of the Cold War.

Dealing with a Russian Deployment

If Russia were to openly produce and deploy INF weapons, a strong push in Washington and within certain NATO states to answer in kind could occur. So far, an open debate among allies about possible consequences of such a move has not surfaced, and assessing the different views is difficult. A recent study by the James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies concluded that, “the U.S. debate over nuclear weapon policy is far removed from the concerns of most respondents in Europe.”⁷⁷ According to the authors, frontline states in NATO have little appetite for the deployment of new nuclear weapons in Europe or for hosting such systems. And further: while these frontline states welcomed the reassurance measures of NATO’s 2014 Wales Summit, they don’t seem to be thinking much about nuclear weapons policy.⁷⁸ Hosting nuclear weapons, in the allies’ views, could heighten the risks of being involved in a nuclear confrontation. Additional arguments for such a stance would be that the introduction of new types of nuclear weapons could be counterproductive, creating an interalliance division along East-West lines—not to mention that it could increase already existing divisions in the nuclear realm among allies and would allow Russia to play out its well-known divide-and-rule tactics.

However, somewhat contrary to these arguments, the repeated calls for strengthened defense measures by NATO’s Central and Eastern European members, in light of Russia’s aggressive military posturing, seem to suggest that states such as Poland and the Baltics could drop their vocal restraint and call for nuclear countermeasures were Russia to deploy INF missiles. The call by Poland’s deputy defense minister to discuss the option of Poland joining NATO’s nuclear sharing program to strengthen the country’s ability to defend itself, even though immediately revoked by the Polish Defense Ministry, can be interpreted as an initial hint in that direction.⁷⁹

While responding in kind to the deployment option might sound logical at first glance, it has a number of obvious downsides, even from a military point of view. First, even if Russia were to deploy a limited number of INF systems—say on the order of 50 to 100 missiles—such a deployment would not immediately alter the overall military balance between NATO and Russia, given the general conventional superiority of NATO. It would also not constitute a completely new type of threat because of the existing Russian ability to modify its strategic nuclear forces. In addition, the United States already deploys conventionally

armed intermediate-range cruise missiles from the sea and on aircraft, which are perfectly capable of reassuring allies and protecting US military bases overseas.⁸⁰ Even during Cold War times, US leaders saw only limited military value in the deployment of ground-launched intermediate-range ballistic missiles, and they developed several other military capabilities to protect their allies. Therefore, reintroducing such weapons would have very little added military value.⁸¹ The United States not only has plenty of other means to reassure its allies, but it also has the necessary military capabilities (for example missile defense and aerial detection systems) to offset a potential Russian GLCM deployment.⁸²

If, however, the new US administration decides to withdraw from the INF treaty, it might choose to close the so-called capability gap and focus on weapons systems that were prohibited under INF. The Joint Chiefs of Staff have already identified two such weapons, which are “ground-launched cruise missiles deployed in Europe or Asia, and ground-launched intermediate-range ballistic missiles equipped with technology that adjusts the trajectory of a warhead after it re-enters Earth’s atmosphere and heads for its target.”⁸³ Looking at the potential missions of INF-type weapons reveals a number of associated risks. Counterforce capabilities to prevent a strike would imply high readiness of forces and concrete measures to execute a strike plan as soon as possible, which could easily be misread in Moscow and lead to an escalatory cycle. At the same time, countervailing strike capabilities would require an improved ability to hit targets in Russia, which is problematic for the very same reasons.⁸⁴ A US commitment to new INF systems would also face financial difficulties. For Washington, redesigning Pershing III intermediate-range ballistic missiles does not seem feasible in the current tight budget environment. It would require time, and maintaining and modernizing the US nuclear arsenal would divert money away from other, more important modernization efforts, such as conventional systems and capabilities that the military might need more urgently and could actually use for war-fighting purposes.

While we assess the Russian deployment option as unlikely, Washington’s and NATO’s responses could, at some point, revolve around answering in kind—meaning to counter offense with offense. The disadvantages of such choice would be quite significant. Most definitely, there would be no immediate military need for countering a limited Russian deployment with new nuclear missiles. Aside from offensive systems, the United

States could also decide to boost defenses against cruise missiles. Such a move, as will be shown below, could also occur were NATO to face the ambiguity option.

Dealing with the Ambiguity Option

As argued above, the ambiguity option is the most likely option NATO would face if Russia does not return to full compliance. It is also the most delicate and complex one to deal with because it would happen in a gray area of obscure threats and vague countermeasures, easily misread and potentially disproportional. Since the ambiguity option is a more serious extension of the current situation, it might be helpful to start by looking at the current response strategies by the United States and NATO allies and see what measures are also suited to address the ambiguity option and which measures could be added.

In a 2014 congressional hearing, Gottemoeller laid out a strategy mix to bring Russia back into compliance. That mix consists of diplomatic steps and economic pressure as well as developing new defenses against cruise missiles to offset any potential gains Russia could achieve from violating the INF treaty.⁸⁵ Continuing such a preventive strategy might still have its benefits even though it has to be clear that diplomacy cannot last forever. Washington could explain to Moscow why Russia would not achieve any significant gains from deploying or stockpiling INF weapons and that it would face serious consequences if it were to do so. As mentioned before, the Russian violation is already a major political issue in Washington and, if unresolved, would most likely block ratification of any new US-Russian arms-control treaty in the future. Making it abundantly clear to Moscow that noncompliance with the INF treaty would kill any efforts at a New START follow-on agreement, thereby creating an atmosphere of strategic instability that neither side might find favorable, might be a good argument to help shift the Russian logic.

In addition to the diplomatic dialogue, Washington needs to take some sort of action to preserve the unity of NATO, to reassure worried allies, and to prevent further irresponsible steps by Moscow. However, these actions should be proportionate to the problem. They should aim at regular consultations and strong coordination between Washington and its allies and at increased conventional reassurance measures, as well as explore defensive military responses that would minimize Russia's potential gains from its violations. It will be important to convey the message

to allies that even if Russia decides to deploy or stockpile land-based intermediate-range missiles in a limited fashion, NATO's extended deterrence will not break down in the face of these systems.

Greater presence of conventional allied forces in such a scenario could certainly ease some of the fears of the Baltic states and the Eastern European allies. Increased NATO preparedness, joint exercises for Article V scenarios, and the development and modernization of air and missile defense systems against cruise missiles are also possible options. Therefore, in addition to the diplomatic efforts and the threat of economic sanctions, the United States might find it valuable to explore a wide range of possible military responses. The Department of Defense already started this process, and the 2015 National Defense Authorization Act contains a provision for the development of countermeasures to potential Russian deployments in violation of the INF treaty.⁸⁶ According to US Principal Deputy Undersecretary of Defense for Policy Brian McKeon, "the Joint Staff has conducted a military assessment [that] tells us that development and deployment of such a system by the Russian Federation would pose a threat to the United States and its allies and partners. The Joint Staff assessment has led us to review a broad range of military response options and consider the effect [of] each option."⁸⁷ In his confirmation hearing, Ashton Carter also noted that "the range of options we should look at from the Defense Department could include active defenses to counter intermediate-range ground-launched cruise missiles, counterforce capabilities to prevent intermediate-range ground-launched cruise missile attacks, and countervailing strike capabilities to enhance US or allied forces. US responses must make clear to Russia that if it does not return to compliance, our responses will make them less secure than they are today."⁸⁸ Without withdrawing from the INF treaty, concrete military measures of a conventional nature could include deploying additional sea- and air-launched cruise missiles, deploying intermediate-range ballistic missiles at sea with a range below 600 km (in order not to violate New START), expanding missile-defense deployments against cruise missiles, extending the range of guided artillery, deploying aerial detection systems in Europe, or selling advanced drones to allies.⁸⁹ Particularly in the realm of defensive systems, allies would face some serious technical and political difficulties. The EPAA is designed against ballistic missiles of intermediate ranges and not against cruise missiles. Since NATO allies continue to argue that the EPAA is meant to counter bal-

listic missile threats emanating from the south (predominantly meaning Iran), and because Russia is particularly worried about the system's alleged offensive strike capabilities, further expanding the EPAA to defend against cruise missiles might not be the best option from a political point of view. From a technical viewpoint, defenses against cruise missiles, as a matter of fact, can only engage incoming GLCMs extremely late due to their low-flying trajectory and only within a very limited area. They can thus only provide point defense (in an area of roughly 35 km) to selected military or civilian assets. A full-fledged area-defense system which could continuously monitor the airspace and help to defend large populated areas is currently not proposed, and aerial detection systems to increase warning time, such as the Joint Land Attack Cruise Missile Defense Elevated Netted Sensor System—basically a high-flying spying blimp—have not proven to be very reliable.⁹⁰

Notwithstanding these difficulties, if allies decided on a combination of increased point-defense measures against GLCMs and additional conventional military reassurance measures, these actions might convince Moscow to give up its efforts in the field of INF weapons. If Russia's nonstrategic nuclear arms are meant to counterbalance NATO's conventional superiority, further strengthening NATO's conventional advantage could actually prove that Moscow's efforts are pointless. Such a move could discourage Russia from wasting its increasingly scarce economic resources on INF weapons. In addition, the Department of Defense could even start studying possible options that would go against the INF treaty. Studying the options as such would not constitute a violation of the treaty. In fact, it could send a strong diplomatic message to Russia, calm down defense hawks in Congress, and also reassure allies about the commitment of the United States. Allocating some funds in the Pentagon's budget for a possible Pershing III feasibility study might get the Russian leadership to recall how much they feared the Pershing II.

It is important to note, again, that all these steps should be withheld until significant and unambiguous evidence of Russia producing and stockpiling INF missiles is available to all allies. Rhetorical muscle-flexing can be useful in parallel to diplomatic dialogue, but concrete action should be based on the principle of proportionality. While strengthening conventional reassurances to European allies would create the vision of a confident and united alliance, engaging in a robust US missiles

program could easily backfire and trigger Russian countermeasures that could further weaken the security of the allies.

Apart from these measures, European allies need to be more vocal. Ultimately, this is a treaty matter between the United States and Russia. But new INF missiles, if deployed or stockpiled, would first and foremost affect European security. Allies should ask themselves: how would Europe deal with an ambiguous Russian breakout capacity? So far, European leaders have not publicly expressed great concern about Russia's INF violation. Their silence might lead the Kremlin to assume that Europe does not care and that only the US-Russian dimension matters or, even worse, that the allies are following a strategy of duck and cover. Such false assessment should be rectified head-on by NATO's European allies and they should start thinking about possible responses. Should credible evidence be found that Russia really is stockpiling new INF weapons, allies should push hard to address the issue with Russia. In parallel, allies should think about an economic punishment strategy. The threat of specifically tailored economic and financial sanctions against Moscow, Russia's military-industrial complex, and related personnel might convince the Kremlin to give up its efforts, particularly if the message resonates with Putin that Russia's violations are becoming a problem not only for Russia's relations with Germany, Italy, France, Hungary, the Netherlands, and other allies but also in Asia, where Japan, South Korea, and China might be most concerned. Such a closely coordinated strategy could affect the Kremlin's calculus.

A more active role for NATO allies could also be beneficial for Washington. In testimony at a 1 December 2015 hearing, held jointly by House Armed Services and the Foreign Affairs subcommittees, McKeon said that "Russia is not violating the INF treaty in isolation from its overall aggressive behavior; therefore we concluded that our responses cannot focus solely on the INF treaty. . . . Accordingly, we are developing a comprehensive response to Russian military actions and are committing to investments that we will make irrespective of Russia's decision to return to compliance with the INF treaty due to the broader strategic environment we face."⁹¹ These remarks highlight a possible change to US policy on INF. The measures taken to bolster NATO in response to more general concerns about Russia's military intentions are also seen as sufficient to respond to the INF problem. In other words, there will not be a direct INF response by Washington for the time being. The problem

with this approach is that if Russia stays within the treaty, Washington might not see a need to withdraw, maybe even in light of Russia stockpiling INF weapons. And if there is no security benefit for Russia, because US responses would not change, why would Russia see any reason to return to the treaty? To prevent such a murky state of limbo, European allies must raise their voices and exert pressure on both Moscow and Washington. The delicate issue for the Europeans will be to avoid pressuring the new US president into hastily responding to Russian INF missiles with American INF missiles. In the end, allies could end up with a trap of their own making.

All in all, the new US administration might face the difficult task of abiding by the treaty while, at the same time, hedging against the possible consequences of an ambiguous Russian threat. As has been argued, a US withdrawal from INF should only be considered as a measure of last resort. Rather, Washington should continue to rely on a number of diplomatic and economic means to resolve the crisis, and it should push its European and Asian allies to be more active in voicing their concerns in relation to Russia. If Russia verifiably continues down the ambiguity path, military options should not be ruled out. But they should only be used in accordance with the significance of the Russian violation, and they should be proportional. Reminding Russia about the importance of the treaty and the potential consequences of abandoning it provides valuable leverage. Building up the US conventional presence in Europe and boosting missile-defense capabilities against cruise missiles, for example, could hurt Russian interests and would start to affect the Russian deterrent. For the Trump administration, waiting until this message resonates with the Russian leadership, using the diplomatic channels to address the technical concerns of both sides, and providing information to allies would be the right strategy to pursue.

Conclusions

The INF treaty, long a cornerstone of European security, is in acute danger of collapse since the United States and Russia are operating on the basis of different, indeed contrasting, logic. While the Obama administration had a genuine interest in maintaining the treaty and bringing Russia into full compliance, the Kremlin finds value in violating INF. Our assessment of the Russian interest in acquiring INF weapons in the NATO-Russia relationship has shown that the Kremlin's motivations

stem more from political than from purely military considerations, even though it is hard to find incontrovertible evidence to support this conclusion. Nevertheless, secretly produced and stockpiled INF missiles present a formidable opportunity for Russia to exert additional political pressure on NATO's European allies. Assessing the US interest in maintaining the treaty reveals that Washington and its allies remain much better off without a renewed *Euromissiles* debate. So far, the US strategy of combined diplomatic pressure and the announcement of possible military countermeasures has not yielded the desired results. Particularly if Russia were to choose the ambiguity option of stockpiling INF missiles in a clandestine manner, Trump might choose to step up the pressure. As this article has argued, any future responses in the military realm should be proportional to the Russian threat capabilities, and decisions should be based on an inclusive dialogue among NATO allies. Given the wide-ranging political and military consequences, a US withdrawal from INF should only be considered as a measure of last resort. Indeed, European allies need to be more vocal and should begin to publicly voice their concerns vis-à-vis Moscow. They should also consider developing a genuine European strategy of punishing Russia for its INF transgressions. Most importantly, allies should internalize the fact that it will take time and convincing arguments to alter the Russian logic. Beyond the more narrow European perspective, Russia seems to find convincing military arguments for INF weapons in Asia. This circumstance offers Washington a genuine chance to engage with Moscow, as both players share mutual concerns there. A possible new negotiation framework, including China and other actors, could represent a breakthrough. But as it stands now, the INF crisis has the potential to become a major security issue for the whole of Europe and Asia over the next several years if it is not resolved in a cooperative manner. Here, a possibly more cooperative and conciliatory stance toward Russia under President Trump—as controversial as such policy would be seen in Washington and among allies—might actually help with the INF dispute. Even if relations between Washington and Moscow warm again, the Russian leadership must understand that continued noncompliance will yield no political or military gains and will thwart any efforts at concluding a New START follow-on agreement. For Washington and its allies, this core message must be communicated to the Kremlin. ■■■

Notes

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36. Arbatov, “An Unnoticed Crisis?”

37. Woolf, “Russian Compliance with the Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty.”

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