

Between the two quarrels, the third suffers

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On Friday 1st February 2019, The Trump presidency withdrew the United States from the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, following his October 2018 announcement on doing so. The Russian response came the next day, with Putin announcing Russia's withdrawal too. The INF Treaty -signed by the former US President Ronald Reagan and the former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev in 1987- was one of the first steps that led to the end of the Cold War and to a long time of peace in Europe. Under the treaty's terms, both Superpowers were prohibited from testing, producing, or possessing ground-launched ballistic and cruise missiles with ranges between 500 and 5,500 km¹, and both of them destroyed a total of 2,692 short-, medium-, and intermediate-range missiles by 1991². Thus, the first question

one should ask is: **what changed in these 32 years?**

According to the American administration, Moscow has not respected the conditions of the treaty at least since 2014, when Russia started to develop the so-called SSC-8 missile system in the Dombrovskiy base. In October 2018, the Trump administration gave Moscow an ultimatum (and 2nd February as a deadline) to shut down its new missile system. In the meantime, Putin from his part also accused the United States of failing to comply with the terms of the 1987 Treaty.

Moreover, outside the framework of the Treaty, another rising power was starting to develop new nuclear weapons while not violating any international law: the People's Republic of China³. According to Adm. Harry Harris, the Asian power has now 'more than 2,000 ballistic and cruise missiles' in the range of 500 to 5000 kilometers, which would be prohibited if China were an INF

¹ Owens, E., 'Trump is right about the INF', *Foreign Policy*, October 24, 2018, (<https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/10/24/trump-is-right-about-the-inf/>).

² Arms Control Association, 'The Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty at a Glance', February 2019 (<https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/INFtreaty>).

³ Owens, E., op. cit

Treaty signatory; this makes Beijing 'the largest and most diverse missile force in the world'⁴. The Chinese missiles may destroy US facilities in the Pacific area (especially in countries such as the Philippines, Japan and Guam) and also carriers at sea⁵.

While some may support Trump's decision, his withdrawal from the INF agreement is just the last of a series of Trump's decision of withdrawing from international/multilateral agreements (such as the TPP agreement, the Paris climate accord, and the Iranian's nuclear deal). This last move may leave Washington more isolated and 'encircled' with enemies. Even if NATO (through the words of its Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg) supported the United States in condemning the Russian actions and in calling Moscow to be more transparent about its nuclear weapons' capacities, the Atlantic allies are now worried about the possible return to an arms race, with Europe being the battlefield of the tension between Russia and the US.

In a Guardian's article, numerous European personalities are cited talking about this topic. Firstly, the HR/VP Federica Mogherini stated that, while the INF Treaty is one of the bases of the European Security architecture, a new arm race (provoked by both parties withdrawal) would create more instability; secondly, the French President Macron, the UK's defense secretary Williamson and the deputy head of the

international security division at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs Oliver Meier all expressed their concerns about the issue⁶. Moreover, even if countries such as the Netherland, Germany, Italy, and Belgium once agreed to the deployment on their national soils of the so-called 'Euromissiles', none of them seems to be willing to accept them in 2019. The same thing can be said about the American allies in the Pacific under the threat of China's nuclear arsenal (Japan, South Korea, the Philippines and Vietnam).⁷

This may be a strategy from President Trump - to show some muscles in order to come to distension and discussion of nuclear weapons, as it happened with North Korea. Trump may also want to find a new agreement with both Russia and China on arms limitation in the future. However, given the current circumstances, the US will try to catch up and modernize its arsenal in order to be competitive with both Beijing and Moscow⁸.

As a matter of fact, to paraphrase an Italian saying: '*between the two quarrels, the third suffers*'. Therefore, a second question should be posed: **what about Europe, and the European Union in particular?**

All the responses and announcements made by European personalities on this matter were made in October 2018, when the US withdrawal from the INF Treaty was just a threat. However, as things stand today, even though multiple sensible

⁴ Taylor, A., 'How China plays into Trump's decision to pull out of INF treaty with Russia', *The Washington Post*, October, 23, 2018, (https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2018/10/23/how-china-plays-into-trumps-decision-pull-out-inf-treaty-with-russia/?utm_term=.4d64282c16f5) and Panda, A., 'The Uncertain Future of the INF Treaty', *Council on Foreign Relations*, October, 22, 2018, (<https://www.cfr.org/background/uncertain-future-inf-treaty>).

⁵ Lockie, A. 'Trump's SOTU revealed he had China in the crosshairs when killing a key nuke treaty with Russia', *Business Insider France*, 6 February 2019, (<https://www.businessinsider.fr/us/trumps-sotu-reveals-chinas-in-the-crosshairs-of-inf-withdrawal-2019-2>).

⁶ Borger, J., and Roth, A., 'EU warns Trump of nuclear arms race risk after INF withdrawal move', *The Guardian*, 23 October 2018, (<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/oct/22/eu-us-nuclear-arms-race-inf-treaty-bolton-moscow>).

⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁸ Boot, M., 'On the INF Treaty, Trumps finally gets something right', *The Washington Post*, 24 October 2018, (https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/global-opinions/on-the-inf-treaty-trump-finally-gets-something-right/2018/10/24/5ce56314-d7b6-11e8-83a2-d1c3da28d6b6_story.html?utm_term=.3cc9eb1f7dd7).

issues are discussed in Brussels at the moment – the situation in Venezuela, the upcoming European Elections in May 2019, the upcoming Brexit, tensions between EU member states, the rise of populism and nationalism - the end of the INF Treaty and the consequent security threats for the region (and for the eastern European countries in particular) seems to be left out from the higher European fora. Unilateral statements have been made by European prime ministers or foreign minister and within the framework of the Atlantic alliance, but nothing has been produced at the EU level so far.

The European Union, through its institutions and through a unified voice of its 28 (almost 27) Member States may call for a new Treaty, as it has the capacities and 'soft skills' to commit itself in a long diplomatic process, in order to make both Washington and Moscow cooperate on this delicate matter. This time a new treaty may involve actors such as Beijing, even though it may take more time to convince the Chinese government to reduce its arsenal, since it has given a red light to the German's proposition for a Global Arms Control Deal at the moment⁹.

The world order is now quite different from thirty years ago. The end of the INF Treaty will not make us return to the bipolar system of the Cold War, because new actors and issues are coming up to complicate things a bit more. Moreover, the rise of nationalism in numerous world countries is making those same countries more isolated, suspicious between one another and against multilateral agreements and frameworks.

The world is becoming a powder keg, and if no solution is to be found in the near future that will

put aside the strictly national interests of countries (at least in the West and between the US, China, and Russia), the arms race will be the spark that will blow everything up.

⁹ Scimia, E., 'Why China opposes a global INF Treaty', *Asia Times*, 24 February 2019, (<https://www.asiatimes.com/2019/02/article/why-china-opposes-a-global-inf-treaty/>).



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