



POLICY PAPER

The Looming Spectre of the 2.0 Nuclearization and the European Union

VOCAL
EUROPE

*This policy paper is written by **Pavel Vanev**.

 Rue de la Science 14, 1040 Brussels

 office@vocaleurope.eu

 + 32 02 588 00 14

Table of Contents

Introduction	2
A “No Deal” Future.....	3
Stop the Nuclear Madness?	4
Embrace the Nuclear Madness?.....	9
Conclusion	12

VOCAL EUROPE

RUE DE LA SCIENCE 14B, 1040 BRUSSELS

TEL: +32 02 588 00 14

VOCALEUROPE.EU



[TWITTER.COM/THEVOCALEUROPE](https://twitter.com/thevocaleurope)



[FACEBOOK.COM/VOCALEUROPE](https://facebook.com/vocaleurope)



[YOUTUBE.COM/VOCALEUROPE](https://youtube.com/vocaleurope)



[INSTAGRAM.COM/VOCALEUROPE](https://instagram.com/vocaleurope)

Disclaimer and Copyright

This document is prepared for, and addressed to Vocal Europe and its audience. The content of the document is the sole responsibility of its author(s) and any opinions expressed herein should not be taken to represent an official position of Vocal Europe. Reproduction and translation for non-commercial purposes are authorised, provided the source is acknowledged.

Introduction

The row between the US and Russia over the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Force (INF) Treaty began in July 2014, when the US State Department published a Compliance Report, alleging “that the Russian Federation [was] in violation of its obligations under the INF Treaty not to possess, produce, or flight-test a ground-launched cruise missile (GLCM) with a range capability of 500 km to 5,500 km, or to possess or produce launchers of such missiles.”¹ With subsequent annual findings reconfirming the presence of the prohibited technology, finally on the 26th November, 2018 the Russian Deputy Foreign Minister, Sergei Ryabkov, publicly admitted to the existence of the land-based cruise missile known as SSC-8/9M729.²

The revelation came about after President Trump hardened his resolve towards the Kremlin’s misconduct in late October 2018, threatening that “[The White House would] terminate the [INF] agreement” and “pull out”.³ Disregarding the reason for Mr. Trump’s withdrawal decisions, tensions escalated, with Mr. Putin officially declaring the suspension of the INF treaty on the 2nd February, 2019.⁴ This basically constitutes the *de facto* end of over 30 years of de-nuclearisation efforts, which have kept US and Russian (land) nuclear missiles away from Europe.

But to what extent does the INF affect the EU? On first glance, the suspension of the accord doesn’t seem to alter the status quo. None of the EU members are signatories of the INF agreement⁵, thus, the INF doesn’t directly concern the Union. Moreover, Russia’s military command (backed by a vast weapons arsenal) has been capable of ordering strikes on European targets, ever since the second half of the 20th century. The INF did little to change that.

Nevertheless, upon a closer look, the revocation of the INF agreement can have serious implications for Brussels. Here it is important to say that this paper will not investigate the possibility to mend the severed connection and reinstate an international accord for arms control, nor will it discuss whether President Trump rightfully quit the INF. It will, instead, focus on the potential repercussions for the EU. The study aims to offer a comprehensive explanation of the importance of the INF (and nuclear non-proliferation) to the EU by illustrating the likely impact of a severe breakdown.

Therefore, in order to propose an adequate evaluation, this commentary will take the continuation of the present crude realpolitik of Mr. Putin and Mr. Trump for granted. More importantly, the underlying assumption will be that in the event of INF breakdown, the US would sooner, rather than later, want to redeploy nuclear land-based IRBMs and SRMBs in Europe. The simple reasoning

¹ *Adherence to and Compliance with Arms Control, Nonproliferation, and Disarmament Agreements and Commitments*. U.S State Department, pp. 12, July 2014, available at <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/230108.pdf>

² Joseph Trevithick, “Russia Admits Its Allegedly Treaty-Busting Cruise Missile Exists, But Denies U.S. Claims.” The Drive. Nov 2018, at < <https://www.thedrive.com/the-war-zone/25151/russia-admits-its-allegedly-treaty-busting-cruise-missile-exists-but-denies-u-s-claims> >

³ “Trump says US will withdraw from nuclear arms treaty with Russia.” The Guardian. 20 Oct 2018, at < <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/oct/20/trump-us-nuclear-arms-treaty-russia> >

⁴ “Russia suspends INF nuclear deal with US.” CNBC. 2 Feb 2019, at < <https://www.cnbc.com/2019/02/02/russia-suspends-inf-nuclear-deal-with-us.html> >

⁵ *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)*. U.S. Department of State. 8 Dec 1987, at < <https://www.state.gov/t/avc/trty/102360.htm> >

behind the US decision would be that ground-launched missiles are “more survivable and sustainable than air or sea-based missile.”⁶

With this in mind, I will be outlining two potential scenarios along with their driving rationale. In the first one, the majority of EU member states would defy the US request, thereby widening the chasm between Washington and Brussels and putting the future of NATO at stake. In the second one, the EU would comply with the White House’s appeal, thereby provoking the Russian Federation to instigate reciprocal security measures. The latter scenario will analyze the probability of an “Iron Curtain descend[ing] [again] across the Continent,”⁷ and the potential for political unrest at home.

Within the parameter of both options, a juxtaposition will be established between the prospects for EU destabilisation and deeper integration. I will argue that in both cases the INF crisis can (to a limited extent) strengthen EU integration in the security/defence sphere,⁸ but this will boil down to specific consideration and individual choices. Moreover, I will demonstrate that the refusal option can provide more fruitful grounds for an European Defence Union (EDU) and ‘strategic autonomy.’

A “No Deal” Future

An unfortunate conclusion to the INF debacle will surely lead to a new dawn in EU security. Irrespective of the mutual Moscow-Washington allegations that the agreement hasn’t done enough, up to now the treaty “has visibly contributed to stability and peace” in Europe.⁹ As a *Time Magazine* article illustrates, the dissolution of the current arrangement would “lead to serious long-term consequences, potentially reshaping the global nature of the nuclear threat from Europe to Asia.”¹⁰ Widely praised for embodying the spirit of nuclear non-proliferation, the INF did directly lead to the destruction of a total of 2692 SRBMs, IRBMs, MRBMs,¹¹ with the ultimate goal achieved being “[the elimination of US and Russian ground-launched] intermediate-range and shorter-range missiles [and] systems.”¹²

If the treaty (and/or the spirit of it)¹³ was to disappear overnight, according to many analysts, it would favour Mr. Putin. Geo-strategic insecurities have historically dictated Russia’s foreign policy and in recent times the Kremlin has adopted a more aggressive posture towards its close neighborhood (e.g. Georgia 2008 and Ukraine 2014) in response to NATO/EU growing influence. If Russia could deploy ICBMs, capable of hitting Western European capitals in the matter of minutes, the Kremlin could

⁶ Ellehus, R, Beutin, R and Lopinot, Q. “What Comes after a U.S. Withdrawal from the INF Treaty? The Case for a NATO Strategy.” CSIS. Dec 4, 2018, at <<https://www.csis.org/analysis/what-comes-after-us-withdrawal-inf-treaty-case-nato-strategy>>

⁷ Churchill, W. “The Sinews of Peace (‘Iron Curtain Speech’)”. International Churchill Society. Mar 5, 1945, at <<https://winstonchurchill.org/resources/speeches/1946-1963-elder-statesman/the-sinews-of-peace/>>

⁸ Out of consideration for simplicity, I will use the words security and defence interchangeably. For an explanation on the distinction between the two, see Steven Blockmans ‘The EE’s Modular Approach to Defence Integration: An Inclusive, Ambitious and Legally Binding PESCO?’ in *Common Market Law Review*, Vol. 55, No. 6, 6 December 2018, pp. 1785-1826, at <<https://www.ceps.eu/publications/eu%E2%80%99s-modular-approach-defence-integration-inclusive-ambitious-and-legally-binding-pesco>>

⁹ Kearn, D. ‘Political/Military Implications of a U.S. Withdrawal from the INF Treaty’. In *Facing the Missile Challenge: U.S. Strategy and the Future of the INF Treaty* (RAND Corporation 2012), pp.99, at <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7249/j.ctt3fh15z.13?seq=22#metadata_info_tab_contents>

¹⁰ Hennigan, W.J. “Trump Is Withdrawing From a Landmark Arms Agreement With Russia. What Happens Now?”. *Time*. Feb 1 2019, at <<http://time.com/5518849/trump-is-withdrawing-from-a-landmark-arms-agreement-with-russia-what-happens-now/>>

¹¹ *The end of the INF Treaty?* European Parliament Briefing. 4 Feb 2019, at <[http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2019/633175/EPRS_BRI\(2019\)633175_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2019/633175/EPRS_BRI(2019)633175_EN.pdf)>

¹² See *INF Treaty*

¹³ See Hennigan

finally tip the strategic balance on the continent in its favour (or achieve parity).¹⁴ Moscow would be in possession of an invaluable long-term deterrent to dissuade the West from interfering in its ‘sphere of influence.’

In spite of continual appeals/threats by consecutive US administrations and the International Community to comply with the INF Treaty, in “its readiness to employ all means to project Russian power”¹⁵, Moscow has actively been reaching for nuclear rearmament. Therefore, it would appear that, after an ostensive 30+ year intermission, nuclear warfare is to retake its place towards the top of the global geo-strategic ladder.

Where does this leave the EU? Historically, from its formal inception in 1952, Brussels has benefited from the close relation with the US. In the turbulent settings of the Cold War (under the auspices of NATO) Washington provided a much-needed military nuclear umbrella, shielding the European states from the Soviet Union. Whilst the communist bloc collapsed, the Euro-Atlantic Alliance held steadfast. Recently, the endurance of the organisation, as well as “the fundamentals of the multilateral order”¹⁶, have been put the test by Mr. Trump’s “**America first**” policy:¹⁷

*We cannot continue to pay for the military protection of Europe while the NATO states are not paying their fair share and living off the fat of the land. We have been very generous to Europe and it is now time for us to look out for ourselves.*¹⁸

In light of all these developments, how would the EU respond to a potential US request for missile redeployment?

Stop the Nuclear Madness?

An anti-nuclear Dave Gaskill cartoon, featured in a *Church Times* article by Stephen Cottrell, portrays a wide range of personalities, holding posters in support of nuclear abolition with a clear message to “Stop the Nuclear Madness.”¹⁹ Although Cortell’s commentary revolves around the Trump-Kim Jong-un nuclear warmongering, the text and drawing perfectly encapsulate the prevalent public sentiment in Europe.

The moods of the ordinary Europeans have continued to be severely critical of all and any nuclearisation. Ellehuus, Beutin and Lopinat attribute the wide-spread negative perception to the “ingrained memory of the Cold War arms race, which included massive public protests against deployments.”²⁰ The security environment has moved past the 1970-1980s Euro missile crisis, (created by the deployment of Soviet SS-20), but public opinion has remained as staunch as ever in

¹⁴ In terms of conventional forces the US military, including the NATO division, are clearly superior to the Russian counterpart. See Kearn, pp.95-99

¹⁵ Rapnouil, M., Varma, T., and Whitney, N. *Can Europe become a nuclear power?* ECFR. 3 Sep 2018, at <https://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_can_europe_become_a_nuclear_power>

¹⁶ Dennison, S and Zerka, P. “The 2019 European election. How Anti-Europeans Plan to Wreck Europe and What can be done to stop it”. ECFR. Feb 2019, at <https://www.ecfr.eu/specials/scorecard/the_2019_european_election>

¹⁷ “Donald Trump: ‘America first, America first.’” BBC. 20 Jan 2017, at <<https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-us-canada-38698654/donald-trump-america-first-america-first>>

¹⁸ “NATO members’ promise of spending 2% of their GDP on defence is proving hard to keep”. *The Economist*. 14 Mar 2019, at <<https://www.economist.com/special-report/2019/03/14/nato-members-promise-of-spending-2-of-their-gdp-on-defence-is-proving-hard-to-keep>>

¹⁹ Cottrell, S. “Break the Silence of Nuclear Weapons”. *Church Times*, 9 Feb, 2018, at <<https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2018/9-february/comment/opinion/break-the-silence-on-nuclear-weapons>>

²⁰ See Ellehuus, R

its commitment of reducing the number of nuclear weapons.²¹ In the outlined circumstances, it would be alluring to bestow public opinion with a tag *raison d'être*, dissuading national administrations from rebuilding IRBM hosting facilities. Yet, it is seldom the case that governmental policy fully coincides with public sentiments, even when de-nuclearisation is deeply rooted in the minds of European policy-makers.²² In reality, geo-political considerations over Moscow take precedence over ethical concerns.

Frictions have been commonplace on the fragile US-EU-Russia line. For instance, 2007 was a boiling point, leading *Euractiv* to assert “the tensions between Russia and United States [to be] reminiscent of the Cold War era, with Europe caught in the middle.”²³ Briefly, the frustrations had flared-up because Mr. Putin denounced the justification behind the US/NATO’s “planned anti-missile defence system, aimed to counter threat from Iran”²⁴ and retaliated by threatening INF withdrawal.²⁵ Unsurprisingly, the immediate effect was the fallout between the West and East counterparts. The developments of 2007 illustrate just how easy it is to light up a fire under Russia’s feet. The European decision-makers have to tiptoe their way around Moscow, preventing Mr. Putin from coming at them with all guns blazing. In that respect, Germany has been the strongest proponent of the “[continual engagement] with Russia, arguing that isolating it further would [ultimately] backfire.”²⁶

Of course, the economic incentive behind Berlin’s perceived lukewarm approach to the Kremlin cannot be ignored. Nordstream 2 has been actively sought after by Germany, who has risked clashes with the US, going as far as threatening the historical “Western bond” between Washington and Berlin.²⁷ Actually Mrs. Merkel and Mr. Trump have been at odds, since the latter took office back in 2017. Confrontations between Berlin-Washington have become a normality, with “the tensions... breaking wide open across a range of core issues,”²⁸ from Iran’s Nuclear Deal to Huawei 5G network. Matthew Karnitschnig argues the distrust has solidified into a “doctrine of mutually assured detestation,” based upon the “accepted wisdom among Germany’s political elite that the US is no longer a reliable partner.”²⁹

All of these factors (public opposition to nuclearisation, uneasy relationship with Russia, and loss of Euro-Atlantic trust) are sufficient enough ingredients to stir up an “IRBM rejection” concoction. In military terms, Brussels would become significantly disadvantaged vis-à-vis Moscow. President Putin already commands the largest conventional army on the continent³⁰ and the captivating prospect of bolstering it with nuclear missiles would only strengthen its stature and posture. Common sense and simple mathematics hold true in highlighting European strategic inferiority. Ultimately “the

²¹ Rapnouil, M.R, Varma, T and Witney, N. “Eyes Tight Shut: European Attitudes Towards Nuclear Deterrence”. ECFR, Dec 2018, at

<https://www.ecfr.eu/specials/scorecard/eyes_tight_shut_european_attitudes_towards_nuclear_deterrence>

²² Ibid. 23 member states answered that their countries are in favour (strongly or tentatively) of nuclear disarmament.

²³ “US-Russia Missile Dispute Causes EU Headaches.” *Euractiv*. 29 June, 2019, at

<<https://www.euractiv.com/section/med-south/news/us-russia-missile-dispute-causes-eu-headache/>>

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ See Kearns, pp.94

²⁶ Karnitschnig, M. “The Trump-Merkel Doctrine of Mutually Assured Detestation.” *Politico*, 5 April 2019, at

<<https://www.politico.eu/article/the-donald-trump-angela-merkel-doctrine-of-mutually-assured-detestation-nato-huawei/>>

²⁷ Kluth, A. “Germany’s Weakness: Tied to America” in Franklin, D. ed. *The World in 2019*. The Economist (The Economist Newspaper Limited, 2018), pp. 31

²⁸ See Karnitschnig, M

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Woody, C. “NATO and Russia are flexing their military might right next to each other — here are the 25 most powerful militaries in Europe.” *Business Insider*. 2 Nov, 2018, at <<https://www.businessinsider.com/these-are-the-25-most-powerful-militaries-in-europe-2018-11?IR=T#3-united-kingdom-overall-ranking-6-23>>

American army and [its] nuclear aegis provide protection against Russia.”³¹ In a more cynical manner, the *Economist* judged that a US vacuum is unthinkable because “[its] systematic power simply allows for no counterweight.”³² Whilst I would agree with the overall assessment, I believe that two aspects are over exaggerated– namely Russian aggression and European weakness.

Russian ICBMs redeployments will definitely have a devastating effect on the EU’s security environment; significantly reducing the EU’s maneuverability in the East. The Central and Eastern Member States would be placed under high alert and would have to bear the burden of staring across a sea of missiles. The situation would be hard to stomach, but at the same time it will probably be manageable.

Naturally, nobody has any desire to live in an incessant state of paranoia from Russian missiles. That being said, in the settings of the late Cold War “Europeans began to enjoy peace with European weapons still around.”³³ It’s not the case that Russia ceased to be a nuclear power and evolved into a resolutely pro-EU country. If Mr. Putin is to be considered a rational IR actor, it would be improbable to imagine him cartoonishly pressing the big red button, ordering a nuclear strike. Alluding to the Cuban Missile Crisis, irrationality cannot be truly ruled out, since brinkmanship can stir up the cauldron of emotions, which in turn can defy logical reasoning. Still, back in 1962 Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) rang loud, forcing the parties to come to their senses and deescalate the tensions. The prospect of a nuclear Holocaust is likely to always be the fundamental deterrent, holding back the boldest of leaders. Taking into account that UK³⁴ and France are nuclear powers in their own right, Mr. Putin will be wise to tread lightly and try not to twist the lion’s tail.

The lion analogy draws to my second critique of the INF narrative, portraying Europe as a damsel in distress, incapable of protecting itself. I cannot go against the facts and figures (defence spending, size of army, number of tactical and strategic weapons, etc.), stating the obvious military discrepancies between the EU and Russia. In spite of the superiority of the latter, I believe that EU’s vulnerabilities are blown out of proportion. In comparison to Moscow, Brussels might be a malnourished dormant lion, but it is a lion nonetheless.

Evident by a progressive evolution of the CSDP, the EU has taken decisive steps towards strengthening its military capacity. Steven Blockmans demonstrates the breakthrough in EU common security through the Implementation Plan on Security and Defence (IPSD):

*The IPSD proposes a new “level of ambition” for a stronger union in security and defence that centres around three mutually reinforcing priorities: raising CSDP’s awareness and response capacities to external conflicts and crises in an integrated manner; strengthening CSDP’s ability to build capacities of partners and thus systematically increase their resilience; and protecting the EU and its citizens by tackling threats and challenges through CSDP.*³⁵

Blockmans goes through the ‘the alphabetical soup’ of the EU initiatives to underline the up-to-date commitments to military integration. The Coordinated Annual Review of Defence (CARD) and the European Defence Fund (EDF) have respectively aimed to tackle blatant strategic shortcomings - the

³¹ See Kluth, A.

³² Ibid.

³³ See, Rapnouil, M.R “Eyes Tight Shut: European Attitudes Towards Nuclear Deterrence”.

³⁴ Notwithstanding Brexit, Westminster has shown palpable interest in a “deep and special relationship” with the EU. Moreover, the British embody the “the idea that nuclear weapons are maintained as much as service to allies as for nation purposes,” see Ibid. Therefore, due to limited space, I will be ignoring the potential complications of Brexit.

³⁵ Blockmans. pp.1793-1794

lack of “synchronis[ation] [of Member States] defence budgets and capability development plans” and “the fragmentation and low levels of industrial collaboration [in the European defence market].”³⁶ The Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) has been the “structured form of CSDP in its own right,” helping the EU “to define its strategic autonomy.”³⁷

Although the framework has been successful in incorporating 25/28 Member states, it entails no “legally binding commitments,”³⁸ capable of overruling national sovereignty. Blockmans concludes that “[the lack of trust], structural differences between Member States and institutional preference for NATO are likely to impede the emergence of ‘common defence’ for some time to come.”³⁹ The current prospect of a ‘strategically autonomous’ EDU indeed seems bleak at best. However, a change of circumstances can drastically alter the success chances. Staring down the gun barrel of Russian ICBMs can induce Member States to pull together and look to the EU.

National governments could be better persuaded about the EU’s defensive credibility through the establishment of an exclusively European nuclear deterrent. The usually thrown around version of an EU deterrent necessarily involves the two European nuclear powers, France and Britain. Paris and London are expected to provide the nuclear umbrella for the EU partners, who in turn would contribute financial support and burden-sharing. The idea has been floating around, but to move it “from a mere notion into a credible offer” the patrons would have to be “increasingly explicit that they would view armed aggression against EU states as threatening their own vital interests.”⁴⁰

The sticking point to any such assurance would naturally be that “other countries in Europe would actively support, or at least tolerate, [the] new trajectory.”⁴¹ This will most definitely turn out to be a Herculean task. Brussels hasn’t quite managed to divert enough power away from national administrations to (always) generate a uniform response from its members. Defence and security have been by and large firmly grounded in the auspices of the nation-states. Even with the significant progress achieved in the CSDP, member states do sometimes sail against the Brussels current.

The most substantial hurdle on the road to EU ‘strategic autonomy’ will be none other than the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). From 1949 onwards, the US and various EU states have been tied to the alliance. Considering its history, “it is the largest, strongest and most enduring peacetime military alliance”⁴² to grace an otherwise conflict-ridden continent. It has emerged as the dominant authority, ruling on all matters of defence and security. An ECFR survey suggests that EU governments’ “national positions [on nuclear matters] are primarily influenced by consultations and decisions through the Alliance (and, consequently, by the US), rather than by consultation with other European partners.”⁴³ NATO has been around for so long that nowadays its existence has been taken for granted.

Logically, in a post-INF world Member States would be faced with two stark choices⁴⁴ – to turn their back on the US/NATO, embarking on a European route to security, or to go along the status quo and stick with the US/NATO, scrapping the possibility for an EDU. The former hinges on Brussels

³⁶ Ibid. pp. 1797

³⁷ Ibid. pp. 1817

³⁸ Ibid. pp. 1825

³⁹ Ibid. pp. 1825

⁴⁰ See, Rapnouil, M.R “Eyes Tight Shut: European Attitudes Towards Nuclear Deterrence”.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Joshi, S. “NATO at 70: A Nervous Celebration” in Franklin, D. ed . *The World in 2019*. The Economist (The Economist Newspaper Limited, 2018), pp. 34

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ An in-between median option – EU defence integration under NATO – is mentioned in the next chapter. However, I regard it to be essentially the same as flip-flopping back to NATO, recognising its supreme authority.

capability to convince the Member States that “Europe’s dependence on a faltering US security guarantee could leave the continent exposed to variety threats.”⁴⁵

By the same token, EU institutions will need to assure national administrations of the viability of a European alternative. A broad agreement on the untrustworthiness of Washington can be the impetus, knocking over the first domino in a long series, culminating in a defence union. The rapidly deteriorating Euro-Atlantic relationships taken together with stronger integration within the defence sphere might erode the credibility of NATO, empowering the EU to take its place.

On the flipside, countries would more often than not tend to revert to the comfort of NATO. For instance, Eastern EU states, notably Poland and Romania (but also the Baltics), have tried to extract concrete guarantees from US and NATO alike. Unlike the Western counterparts, the aforementioned states consciously seek increased deployments and bilateral agreements with Washington⁴⁶ as a means of deterring any Russian ambition on their respective territories. Eastern states “are much more aligned with Trump’s position on defence than Germany.”⁴⁷

On a wider scale, more powerful countries like Germany would also find it harder to disentangle themselves from the fabric of NATO. Belgium, the Netherlands, Italy and Germany all accommodate free-falling nuclear weapons. Their defences are deeply tied to the North Atlantic framework with European commitments largely being auxiliary.⁴⁸ Moreover, for all the rhetoric between EU leaders and Mr. Trump, Member States have continued their unwavering support for NATO. The INF is no anomaly – the alliance demonstrated unity in condemning Russian violation of the treaty.⁴⁹

Whether Western Europe decided to take a tougher stance on American deployments would also be subjected to considerations for EU destabilisation. If Brussels doesn’t manage to persuade the Eastern outskirts to back an EDU, the distressed countries might look for stronger connections with Washington, undermining the role of the EU altogether. This could send long-lasting tremors, exposing irreversible fissures across the political scenery of the continent.

A sufficient amount of factors could sway the EU to reject re-stationing of nuclear ICBMs. *Inter alia*, public opposition, uneasy Transatlantic discourse and Russian posture, could force European capitals to shun NATO in favour of an EU-inspired defence alliance. Favourable circumstances, allowing for a more cohesive and profound approach, do exist. However, the opportunity for deeper integration and evolution of PESCO- structures shouldn’t be overstated. NATO has been the main player on the bloc, and Europe can hardly rival its military might. To obtain the holy grail of ‘strategic autonomy’ the EU needs to be willing to leap into the unknown and slide down a narrow path, riddled with booby traps. Otherwise, Brussels might be left empty handed, or even worse – with a more fractured polarised EU.

⁴⁵ See, Rapnouil, M.R

⁴⁶ The Aegis Ashore programme being the most exemplary initiative. See Grady, J. “Aegis Ashore Could Have New Role Post INF Treaty Says Former Pentagon Official.” USNI News. 31 Oct, 2018, at <https://news.usni.org/2018/10/31/aegis-ashore-new-role-post-inf-treaty-says-former-pentagon-official>

⁴⁷ See, Karnitschnig, M

⁴⁸ See, Rapnouil, M.R “Eyes Tight Shut: European Attitudes Towards Nuclear Deterrence”.

⁴⁹ *Statement on Russia's failure to comply with the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty*. NATO, 1 Feb 2019, at < https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_162996.htm>

Embrace the Nuclear Madness?

Despite staggering public sentiments of non-proliferation, “keep[ing] government discussion on nuclear matters low,”⁵⁰ national administrations have, for the large part, adopted the US strategic thinking on nuclear matters. Germany is a fruitful example, where “the public has long been overwhelmingly hostile to NATO’s nuclear policy, but the government has traditionally supported it.”⁵¹ Irrespective of the strong civic opinions, European leaders cannot ignore the nuclear dimension of foreign policy.

In its current state, a Euro nuclear deterrent is a distant dream. Decision-makers and ordinary citizens alike “have no current appetite for putting Euro-deterrence on any formal agenda.”⁵² It’s basically an early stage concept, requiring a tremendous amount of work, capabilities and resources. Consequently, the only other practical option for the EU to acquire a nuclear deterrent is the US/NATO. Rather than having to reinvent the wheel, Brussels could just continue tapping into the American resources. True, Mr. Trump has loudly voiced his concern of European free-riding, but it must be said that his demands are heard and worked on.

By 2025, according to NATO, 15 out of the 29 members would fulfil their obligations of 2% of their GDP on defence.⁵³ Additionally, in the case of an INF breakdown a US request for Europe to accommodate IRBMs and SRBMs would highlight the strategic importance of NATO for Washington and Brussels alike. For much of his rhetoric, Mr. Trump cannot indefinitely continue to “antagonise strategic allies”⁵⁴ especially in an envisioned post-INF Europe. The White House will have “to reinforce cohesion and alleviate danger of a widening political gap over NATO’s nuclear policy and to demonstrate ‘centre of gravity,’”⁵⁵ if it plans to ward off Russian geo-strategic ambitions.

The prevalent rationale for an EU welcoming of US missiles under NATO would be safety, simplicity and stability. Following the established NATO framework would be convenient, because “going with the NATO flow is the easiest and most advantageous course.”⁵⁶ Most of the EU (22) states are members of NATO, making them accustomed to its command structure, budget, burden-sharing, etc.

As already said, major EU countries have received (and hold onto) American nuclear weapons. The purely procedural and logistical process of stationing and maintaining ground-launched ICMBs would fall under the joint-jurisdiction of the North Atlantic organisation, i.e. Washington would be committed to sharing responsibility and costs. Supposing that the EU strongly favours a nuclear deterrent, it would be cheaper, easier and faster to work through NATO, than to start from ground zero on an exclusively EU version.

Perhaps, the greatest concern for such a provision would be Turkey. Though a long-serving member⁵⁷, in the 2010s Turkey has progressively worsened its status within the Alliance, “[with its]

⁵⁰ See Rapnouil, M.R “Eyes Tight Shut: European Attitudes Towards Nuclear Deterrence”.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Erlanger, S. “U.S. Revives Concerns About European Defense Plans, Rattling NATO Allies”. New York Times. 18 Feb, 2018, at < <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/18/world/europe/nato-europe-us-.html>>

⁵⁴ Delaney, R. “Donald Trump is alienating allies the US needs to confront China on trade, panel warns”. South China Morning Post. 9 June, 2018, at <<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/2150003/donald-trump-alienating-allies-us-needs-confront-china>>

⁵⁵ See Ellehus, R

⁵⁶ See Rapnouil, M.R “Eyes Tight Shut: European Attitudes Towards Nuclear Deterrence”.

⁵⁷ Ankara joined NATO relatively early in the day, 1951, out of then Western necessity to create a southern flank to contain the Soviet bloc.

irresponsible behavior is that it is not only damaging NATO, it is undermining the whole Western community—and its values system.”⁵⁸ Mr. Erdogan brushed off the North Atlantic command, “when he decided to buy a long-range air defence system from Russia rather than from a NATO ally.”⁵⁹ Virtually, Ankara has chosen to double down on NATO’s main adversary, the Russian Federation. Turkey could become an epicenter, sending ripples across the Alliance, threatening its unity.

In a post-INF climate, NATO HQ would have to closely coordinate its nuclear strategy, demanding full member compliance. On its current trajectory, Mr. Erdogan alignment to Russia can pose a massive security threat on the Alliance’s South flank.⁶⁰ The EU partners might be reluctant to entrust their security to a haphazardly committed Turkey, let alone agree to Mr. Erdogan receiving nuclear ICBMs. Although unlikely, this might compel Member States to set their sights on a purely EU arrangement.

An endorsement scenario would roughly contain three sets of ramifications: integrational, geopolitical and public. In hindsight, the re-empowering of NATO would probably be the end of any EDU, leaving it dead in the water. In fact, the precedent of the European Defence Community (EDC), voted down in 1954, can be considered to be a side-by-side comparison. It did, genuinely, highlight the “lack of political will and mutual trust among [then ECSC] Member States.”⁶¹ The EDC also showcased that no EU initiative could match with NATO.

It must be stated, however, that at the time the European project was at its infant stage and the security realm constituted a bigger bite than it could chew. For all its worth, the EU has undertaken meaningful steps in defence integration, which have been publicly supported by the NATO Secretary-General as “strengthen[ing] the European pillar [with]in NATO.”⁶²

Notably, by framing EU initiatives to ultimately be ‘pillars in NATO’ the High Command demonstrated its ubiquitous authority over the European theatre. In the event of approving redeployment NATO’s primacy would be reinstated, with the EU initiatives taking a back seat. Any urgency for an EDU would dissipate. Unquestionably, accepting the US missiles would represent a *fait accompli* with regards to Brussels’ quest of ‘strategic autonomy.’ The notion would be rendered null and void. The underpinning impetus of being less dependent would be thrown out the window because for all intents and purposes, the EU would be willingly becoming more dependent on the US. While not dying off completely, there would be a high chance of the EDU (or any of its successor) existing in name only for years to come.

Counterintuitively, stockpiling American missiles might heighten rather than lessen the EU’s security dilemma. Common sense would dictate that US ICBMs empower European capitals, providing them with an invaluable nuclear deterrent against Russian transgressions. However, if the Cold War is the example to abide by, nuclearisation actually puts nations more at risk, raising the overall threat level. A revamped great power nuclear stand-off would surely re-draw European borders, akin to an Iron Curtain. The old faithful Soviet paradigm will dictate that “[Russia’s] insatiable craving for security, more than anything else, [will be] the root cause of East-West tensions.”⁶³ Coming against an arsenal of US IRBMs and SRBMs, would incentivise the Kremlin to take necessary precautions (even if the

⁵⁸ Dempsey, J. “Judy Asks: Is Turkey Damaging NATO?”. Carnegie Europe. 24 Jan 2018, at <https://carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/75345>

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ In absolute numbers of army size, Turkey is the second largest in NATO.

⁶¹ See Blockmans pp.1786

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Mastny, V. *The Cold War and Soviet Insecurities*. Oxford University Press, 1997. Available at, <https://www.history.ac.uk/history-online/node/6484/rd>

underlying assumption is that Mr. Putin would be the first to act). On the 18th December 2018, President Putin straightforwardly declared that the INF treaty dissolution will force the Russian Federation to “take additional measures to strengthen its security.”⁶⁴ A self-feeding cycle of perception and misperceptions on security matters would precipitate the emergence of a military boundary, insulating Russia. Much alike 1945-1949, Moscow is distrustful of the Western actors and ICBM redeployment would solely convince it of the EU/NATO’s malicious intents. It would bolster Russia belief that the US, through proxies, “seeks maximum military capability and the flexibility to effectively intervene anywhere around the world.”⁶⁵ With this in mind, Russia would seek to consolidate its defensive parameter to satisfy its security needs.⁶⁶

The international developments might have a profound impact on the domestic scene. The “excruciating discussions 1970-1980 for nuke deployment”⁶⁷ have laid the foundation “for popular opposition to nuclear deployment to emerge once again.”⁶⁸ If the EU was to welcome the return on ICBMs, national governments would encounter vast hostility from their very own citizens. The climate is already quite explosive. The example of the *gilets jaunes* (yellow jackets) illustrates a general backlash against the political establishment, carried out by a wide-range of people, “com[ing] from all walks of life, do[ing] all sorts of jobs, and hav[ing] diverse political allegiances.”⁶⁹ The popular craze has also reached the most stable of democracies, the UK, with “the crowd re-emerging as a force in politics.”⁷⁰

The archetype of “politics belong[ing] in the debating chamber, not on the streets”⁷¹ has been turned upside-down – people are fed up with “politicians, [who] claim to speak for [them] but ignore [their needs], except when it is time to solicit votes.”⁷² Provoked by a fuel tax, mobs in France raced to expand their grievances into anti-government protests. Environmental regulations have unmasked the discrepancies between the ruling elites and the ordinary folks.

Compared to the fragmented landscape of climate considerations, the dominant public consensus on nuclear non-proliferation holds a far greater potential to deal a huge blow on political trust. European acquiescence to US nuclear missiles can supercharge “the growing difference between public opinion and governments, [forcing it] to burst out... into the open.”⁷³ The breach in trust will alienate constituents from their representative further away, expanding the widening gap and threatening the established political fabric as such. Brussels would be unlikely to quietly weather the storm and come out unscathed with disillusioned citizens already having it in their crosshair.⁷⁴ Therefore, EU institutions have to be wary of stirring popular unrest, deepening the EU’s legitimacy crisis, since Brussels will be rather limited on breathing room.

⁶⁴ Reif, K. “After the INF Treaty, What is Next?”. Arms Control Association. Jan/Feb 2019, at <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2019-01/news/after-inf-treaty-what-next>

⁶⁵ See Kearn, pp.98

⁶⁶ Due to its limited nature, this commentary, unfortunately, will not attempt to outline the all possible courses, open to Russia. Regardless, two assumptions can be brought to the foreground. Firstly, European Neighbourhood will probably bear most of the brunt because it will likely be drawn in Russia security parameter. Second, being a rational IR actor, Mr. Putin will not jump the gun and cross the laid out NATO/EU boundaries.

⁶⁷ See Ellehus, R

⁶⁸ See Rapnouil, M.R “Eyes Tight Shut: European Attitudes Towards Nuclear Deterrence”.

⁶⁹ Bonelli, L. “‘Gilets jaunes’ shock the politicians”. Le Monde Diplomatique. Jan 2019, at <https://mondediplo.com/2019/01/02gilets-why-now>

⁷⁰ “The Roar of the Crowd”. The Economist Vol. 430, No. 9135, pp.30, 23 Mar 2019.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² See Bonelli, L.

⁷³ See Rapnouil, M.R “Eyes Tight Shut: European Attitudes Towards Nuclear Deterrence”.

⁷⁴ Judging from turnout for European Parliament elections, Member states’ population have been disconnected from the European project for some time. Populist have further fuelled popular discontent, through their anti-EU platforms.

By all accounts, an approval hypothesis would restore NATO's credibility, renewing its primacy over any EU defence scheme. Whether EDU plans are completely wiped out or are slowly grounded to a halt, Brussels would be *de facto* recognising the North Atlantic monopoly over security. In all probability, this will mend the Euro-Atlantic ties to an extent. Despite the comfort and convenience of redeployment, Brussels should still think twice about agreeing to US requests. It would be putting the idea of 'strategic autonomy' to bed. The scenario could aggravate Russia to such lengths as to galvanise a renewed 'Cold War.'

Although, theoretically, a bloc system can be beneficial in consolidating the EU in its current form⁷⁵, it would be doubtful to speculate that the EC would be better off under the circumstances, especially given the high probability for popular unrest and anti-EU backlash.

Conclusion

After an extensive analysis of probable outcomes of INF treaty breakdown, I can ascertain to only one specific fact - the INF accord is immensely important to the EU. The writing on the wall lays out an erratic post-INF security order. The devil will be in the details as every future sequence of events will hinge on specific choices at key junctures, with approval/disapproval of US missile deployments being one in the line of many.

The two outlined strands are comprised of various sub-selections, which stand to determine the end result. In a refusal scenario, Europe might be more independent and flexible in the long term, but in the short term it can estrange the US and be susceptible to Russian intimidation. If the Euro-deterrent doesn't manage to hit the ground running, the EU might decide to revert back to NATO line, shelving the EDU. On the other hand, accepting US ICBMs might ensure Europe safety in a trade-off with public discontent and European integration. However, a bloc consolidation can hypothetically improve the unity between the Member States, particularly if Tukey proves to be an unreliable NATO partner.

The timelines aren't set in stone, since everything is pretty much in flux. Just because some outcomes appear more logical than others, doesn't convert them into the default settings. Contrary to the main supposition of this paper, Mr. Trump might never ask Europe to bear the burden of IRBMs and SRBMs. For the moment there is "no indication that the US will take this course."⁷⁶ Then again the strategic edge of hosting missiles is debatable in itself.⁷⁷ British defence commitment to the EU is also ambivalent. Fortune-telling is not a science. The two described scenarios might never materialise, but it is, nonetheless, important to be aware of their benefits and drawbacks.

Interestingly, with respect to its significance, the INF treaty hasn't quite received the adequate media coverage. Albeit seeming a bit odd, this might be attributed to the wishful thinking, entrenched in European identity. Truth be told, Europeans have no appetite for nuclear warfare; "nuclear weapons [have] disappeared from the public debate."⁷⁸ Policy-makers also share their constituent's views on de-nuclearisation, with the High Representative of the EU, Federica Mogherini stating:

Europe has been probably the one that has benefited the most from [INF] Treaty that we have valued enormously, that we value enormously. Our wish and our call is for this

⁷⁵ The EEC evolved under similar settings.

⁷⁶ See Ellehus, R

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ See, Rapnouil, M.R "Eyes Tight Shut: European Attitudes Towards Nuclear Deterrence".

*Treaty to be preserved with full compliance by both parties and you know where the issue stands there.*⁷⁹

The clock is running down and roughly one-third of the 180-day withdrawal period has elapsed. The EU leaders are finding it difficult to break the deadlock, as the parties don't intend to compromise. The lack of negotiations and the amped rhetoric foreshadow darker times in Europe.

On a final note, for Europe the INF agreement is much more than just another non-proliferation treaty. Notwithstanding its substance, the agreement epitomizes the EU's "[longstanding] aim to promote rule-based cooperation on the global stage."⁸⁰ To be able to compete with the global heavyweights (US, China and Russia) Brussels needs to "adopt and implement a 'rules first' strategic approach,"⁸¹ whereby it utilizes its regulatory and market clout to promote multilateral cooperation. The spirit of the INF treaty is worth its weight in gold to the EU. Its dissolution would be a catastrophic precedent, setting a dangerous tone in international relations.

The START treaty, set to expire on 5th Feb, 2021, might just as well be the next victim in the long list.⁸² In order to secure the vibrant multilateral order, the EU must vow to oppose perilous deviations and to attempt to keep partners on track. Ironically, the deteriorating state of the INF accord has exemplified that the EU doesn't hold enough 'strategic autonomy' to enforce a 'rules first' international order, guaranteeing its 'strategic autonomy.'

⁷⁹ Mogherini, F. *Remarks by High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini at the press conference following the informal meeting of the EU Foreign Affairs Ministers (Gymnich)*. EEAS. 1 Feb 2019, at https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/57529/remarks-high-representativevice-president-federica-mogherini-press-conference-following_en

⁸⁰ Grevi, G. "Shaping Power: A Strategic Imperative for Europe". EPC. 22 Feb 2019, at http://www.epc.eu/pub_details.php?cat_id=4&pub_id=9038&year=2019

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² For text of START Agreement see *New START*. U.S. State Department, at <https://www.state.gov/t/avc/newstart/>

VOCAL EUROPE

RUE DE LA SCIENCE 14B, 1040 BRUSSELS

TEL: +32 02 588 00 14

VOCALEUROPE.EU



[TWITTER.COM/THEVOCAL EUROPE](https://twitter.com/thevoCALEUROPE)



[FACEBOOK.COM/VOCAL EUROPE](https://facebook.com/vocaleurope)



[YOUTUBE.COM/VOCAL EUROPE](https://youtube.com/vocaleurope)



[INSTAGRAM.COM/VOCAL EUROPE](https://instagram.com/vocaleurope)

Disclaimer and Copyright

This document is prepared for, and addressed to Vocal Europe and its audience. The content of the document is the sole responsibility of its author(s) and any opinions expressed herein should not be taken to represent an official position of Vocal Europe. Reproduction and translation for non-commercial purposes are authorised, provided the source is acknowledged.