

The end of the INF: the beginning of tough negotiations

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On 4 December, the NATO Foreign Affairs Ministers issued a statement confirming that Russia had violated the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty on the elimination of ground-launch ballistic and cruise missiles with a range from 500 km to 5,500 km), by developing and fielding the 9M729 missile system. NATO's Foreign Affairs Ministers have agreed that this poses a significant risks to Euro-Atlantic security and that the situation whereby the United States abide by the treaty and Russia does not, is not sustainable. Furthermore, they have underlined that NATO is committed to preserving strategic stability and the credibility of deterrence and defence posture as well as to the preservation of international arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation. In a separate statement, the US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced that unless Russia returns to the full and verifiable compliance within 60 days, the USA would suspend its obligations under the treaty.

Commentary

- The fact that a NATO joint statement has been issued is a success for the USA which managed to convince its allies to officially admit that Russia had violated the INF treaty, by presenting credible intelligence material. Washington also managed to convince its allies to accept the decision of Trump administration concerning the US's withdrawal from the INF regime. This is even more important, if one considers that Trump's announcement on withdrawal from the treaty in October provoked mixed reactions from some of the allies and accusations that Washington was again undermining multilateralism and disregarding European security interests. The unanimous recognition by all NATO member states that Russia has been in material breach of its obligations under the treaty places the responsibility for ending the INF regime on Moscow. Russia is unlikely to accept the ultimatum as it claims that it has complied with the treaty and has accused the USA of being in breach of it. Moscow names the possibility of adapting the US Aegis Ashore missile defence systems deployed in Poland and Romania for the use of intermediate-range cruise missiles among others. Therefore, it may be expected that in February 2019 the USA will make a formal decision to withdraw from the treaty. This will be used by Russia as a justification for the continued development of the ground-launched intermediate-range missile systems which will aggravate the threat of a Russian missile attack faced by the whole of Europe. This threat has already been present, posed by the sea-launched intermediate-range (Kalibr on Baltic and Black Sea fleets' vessels) and air-launched cruise missiles.

- The end of the INF treaty will start tough negotiations within NATO. Firstly, the adjustment of the allied and US deterrence and defence posture will be discussed. The 'defensive' option may envisage strengthening the allied early warning system and adjusting missile defence in Europe to make it capable of intercepting Russian intermediate-range missiles. The 'offensive' option may include the development of intermediate-range cruise missiles sea-and air-launched and the beginning of work on a ground-launched missiles and plans for their potential deployment in Europe. The *US Nuclear Posture Review* published by the Pentagon already in February 2018 recommended commencing INF treaty-compliant research and development for a conventional, ground-launched, intermediate-range missile system and a sea-launched nuclear-capable cruise missile. Secondly, the most likely issue to be discussed is burden sharing. NATO's possible reaction will entail intensive investment, for example, in the development of missile defence. Therefore, the Trump administration may raise the issue of the European allies' greater share in the adjustment of NATO's defence and deterrence posture to the post-INF reality. Thirdly, the revision of NATO's nuclear policy will be raised as the Russian 9M729 systems are nuclear-capable and will change the balance of power if stationed in Europe. Fourthly, the allies may become divided with regard to the choice of allied reaction to the end of the INF regime. Some Western European countries, especially Germany, fearing an arms race in Europe and an escalation of tensions with Russia, will not want NATO to take any far-reaching measures, which might be favoured, for example, by the USA, the UK and the eastern flank allies. Germany and France will also oppose any US actions that might be taken as part of bilateral co-operation with the allies on the eastern flank, if there is no consensus inside NATO. All these issues will generate strong tension within NATO.
- In parallel to the discussion within NATO, individual members – in particular Germany – will insist on resuming talks on arms control and disarmament on the international arena. The goal would be to restrict the military response from NATO and the USA in Europe that might result in escalating tension with Russia. Berlin also wants to counteract the global arms race in the face of intensified US-Chinese military competition and to calm German and European public opinion. The German Minister of Foreign Affairs Heiko Maas announced already in November this year that actions would be taken in this area. Berlin will make efforts to resume dialogue on confidence building measures between the USA, Europe and Russia. Germany will engage in developing an international set of rules that would cover ballistic and cruise missiles. Berlin intends to start a dialogue with China on transparency and arms control in military build-up. Germany underlines also its engagement in initiative in the United Nations to ban fully autonomous weapons (LAWS).
- It also cannot be ruled out that Germany, France or Italy may raise the issue of signing a 'European INF treaty' with Russia, given the differences of opinions within NATO. It may envisage not taking any action on the territory of the European NATO members if Russia refrains from deploying the 9M729 systems in a manner that poses a threat to Europe. Such proposals will be justified by the desire to 'exclude' Europe from the arms race between the USA and Russia (and China) and may be presented as an element enhancing European autonomy in security and defence. However, the possible proposals of establishing a 'European INF treaty' will disregard the fundamental change in the

European security environment and the fact that Russia has been developing its missile potential in all branches of the armed forces to increase its ability to put pressure on Europe. Such proposals will also be viewed by the Kremlin as a successful result of Russian moves aimed at increasing the divide between the USA and its European allies.

- From the US point of view, negotiating a new INF regime makes sense only if the treaty is signed not only by Russia but also by China. The USA is watching the development of the Chinese missile potential with growing concern as it increasingly threatens the US's allies in the Asia-Pacific region. In case of such negotiations, Russia will certainly use the argument that US/NATO missile defence bases in Poland and Romania should be disbanded, and will want to link such talks with the renewal of the New START treaty on measures to further reduce and limit strategic offensive arms. However, the potential negotiations of such a new INF regime will depend on the stance taken by China. Beijing is unwilling to give up its missile arsenal which has been intensely developed also within the scope of the INF, because this would seriously affect the possibilities of its power projection in the region.