

# INF TREATY: THE FUTURE AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

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The Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty was a significant milestone in disarmament negotiations between the US and Soviet Union. These negotiations oscillated between an unrelenting power struggle between the two Cold War combatants and the realisation that the nuclear competition needed to be controlled, both to avoid a nuclear catastrophe and to reduce the costs of production and maintenance of a vast arsenal of nuclear weapons that went beyond any reasonable security needs.

The nuclear arms race between the US and USSR had gone out of hand. The Soviet Union/Russia and the US had produced 97 percent of the 125,000 nuclear warheads ever built. Of these, the US has historically built about 66,500 warheads, or 53 percent of the global total, and the Soviet Union/Russia some 55,000 nuclear warheads.

It is useful to have this perspective of an arms race gone mad in order to understand the whole disarmament exercise, of which the INF Treaty was a part. The clue to why the INF Treaty has been disowned by the US and subsequently by Russia lies in the ups and downs of past disarmament negotiations and US-Russia ties.

The INF Treaty was preceded by other disarmament steps. The Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) was one such. SALT comprised two rounds of bilateral conferences and associated treaties between the US and Soviet

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Union. SALT-1, concluded in 1972, led to the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty. SALT-2, agreed to 1979, envisaged a reduction in strategic forces of all categories of delivery vehicles to 2,250 on both sides. The US, however, did not ratify the treaty because of the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. The Soviet Union also did not ratify it, and, consequently, the treaty expired on December 31, 1985.

This was followed by the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaties (STARTs)—START-1 in 1991 which came into force in 1994, and START-2 in 1993, but which was not ratified by the US. Both these treaties involved limits on multiple-warhead capacities and restrictions on the number of nuclear weapons each side could hold. START-1 permitted only 6,000 nuclear warheads atop 1,600 Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs) and bombers. This treaty removed 80 percent of all existing strategic weapons.

START-1 expired in 2009 and was replaced by the New START in 2010, which entered into force in 2011, leading to further reductions in American and Russian strategic nuclear weapons. This treaty limited the deployed strategic nuclear warheads to 1,550 and also limited the number of deployed ICBM launchers, Submarine-Launched Ballistic Missiles (SLBMs) launchers and heavy nuclear bombers to 700. It allowed for satellite and remote monitoring, as well as 18 on-site annual inspections for verification, just as previous disarmament treaties had provided for very stringent inspection regimes so that adherence to the treaties could be verified by both sides. The New START did not, however, limit the thousands of operationally inactive stockpiled nuclear warheads in the Russian and American inventories.

The INF Treaty should be looked at in this large context. The salient points to note are that all these disarmament negotiations between the US and Soviet Union/Russia have been difficult, though progress in reducing strategic weapons has been achieved. The inspection mechanisms agreed to by both sides have been very stringent and intrusive.

All the treaties negotiated between the US and Soviet Union/Russia have not lasted. The US repudiated the 1972 ABM Treaty in 2001, with the then US president arguing that the treaty had been negotiated in a “vastly different world” and that it hindered the US government’s capacity to protect the American people “from future terrorist or rogue state missile attacks” by developing effective defences. Russia called the move a mistake, with China, not a party to the treaty, opposing it.

The pressure for negotiating the INF Treaty came when the Soviet Union began replacing its older intermediate-range SS-4 and SS-5 missiles with a new intermediate-range missile, the SS-20, bringing about what was perceived by the West as a qualitative and quantitative change in the European security situation. The SS-20 was considered mobile, accurate, and capable of being concealed and rapidly redeployed. It carried three independently targetable warheads, as against the single warheads carried by its predecessors. The SS-20’s 5,000 km range meant that it could cover targets in Western Europe, North Africa, the Middle East, and, from bases in the Eastern Soviet Union, most of Asia, Southeast Asia, and Alaska.

The deployment of the SS-20 alarmed Europe as it could strike most of Europe from deep within Russia. America had short-range missiles in Europe, but these could not reach Soviet territory. It had long-range ones at home and aboard submarines, but nothing in this middle category. The scenario that the US/Europe faced was that if the Soviets attacked Europe with the SS-20, America would be forced to use its US-based strategic weapons. America’s European allies were not convinced that America would do so to defend Europe and expose itself to a potential Soviet strategic strike on US territory. To assuage these concerns and fill the gap in deterrence in Europe, America deployed the Pershing II ballistic missiles and new ground-launched cruise

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missiles in Europe that could reach Moscow in 10 minutes. Anti-nuclear protests erupted across Europe as the new American missiles were deployed. The INF Treaty was negotiated to address this Euro-missile crisis in Europe.

In 1979, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) adopted a “dual track” strategy to counter Soviet SS-20 deployments, one calling for arms control negotiations to reduce INF forces substantially, and the second calling for the deployment in Western Europe, beginning in December 1983, of 464 single-warhead US Ground-Launched Cruise Missiles (GLCMs) and 108 Pershing II ballistic missiles.

The SS-20 and Pershing II could supposedly deliver warheads to their targets with unprecedented accuracy. They, thus, had the capability to destroy reinforced command bunkers and missile silos deep within enemy territory. Such missiles, it was argued, were not defensive in nature but were actually destabilising “first-strike” weapons that directly threatened both the military command structure of NATO and prime targets within the Soviet heartland. This created the political incentive for both sides to curtail such weapons through arms control negotiations.

In 1981, formal negotiations began, with the US announcing the so-called “zero-zero offer” that was to eliminate American Pershing IIs and GLCMs if the Soviet Union would dismantle all of its SS-20s, SS-4s, and SS-5s.

During the first two years of negotiations, which ended with a Soviet walkout in November 1983, the US continued to emphasise its preference for the “zero option” without excluding an interim agreement on a limited number of INF systems on both sides. During 1984, the US continued deployments in Germany, Italy, and the UK, while preparing for deployments in Belgium.

In 1985, the Americans and Soviets agreed to separate but parallel negotiations on the INF, strategic arms (START), and defence and space issues as part of the Nuclear and Space Talks (NST), which was a new forum. Formal talks resumed in all three areas. In the course of the talks, the Soviet Union outlined an interim INF agreement that would permit some US GLCMs in Europe, but which would also permit SS-20 warheads equal to the sum of all warheads on U.S., British, and French systems combined.

The Soviets also offered to freeze INF systems in Asia—contingent on U.S. acceptance of their proposals and provided the Asian strategic situation did not change.

In November 1985, President Reagan and General Secretary Gorbachev issued a joint statement calling for an “interim accord on intermediate-range nuclear forces.” Both sides presented their proposals during the course of 1986. Finally, after a series of high-level discussions, Reagan and Gorbachev announced in Reykjavik, Iceland, in October 1986, that the two sides had agreed to equal global ceilings of systems capable of carrying 100 INF missile warheads, none of which would be deployed in Europe. The Soviet Union also proposed a freeze on shorter-range missile deployments and agreed in principle to intrusive on-site verification.

In July 1987, Gorbachev agreed to a “double global zero” treaty to eliminate intermediate-range and shorter-range missiles. In August 1987, Chancellor Kohl announced that Germany would dismantle its 72 Pershing IA missiles and not replace them with more modern weapons if the US and Soviet Union scrapped all of their INF missiles, as foreseen in the emerging treaty. This was a unilateral declaration by the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and is not part of the INF Treaty, which is a bilateral US-Soviet agreement.

On December 8, 1987, the INF Treaty was signed by Reagan and Gorbachev at a summit meeting in Washington. At the time of its signature, the treaty’s verification regime was the most detailed and stringent in the history of nuclear arms control, designed both to eliminate all declared INF systems entirely within three years of the treaty’s entry into force and to ensure compliance with the total ban on the possession and use of these missiles.

For the three-year elimination period and for ten years thereafter, the INF Treaty established various types of on-site inspections, including baseline inspections; close out inspections of facilities and missile operation bases; short-notice (quota) inspections of declared and formerly declared facilities, and elimination inspections to confirm elimination of INF systems in accordance with the agreed procedures. In addition, the United States also received the right to monitor, on a continuous basis, for up to 13 years, the

access (or portals) to any Soviet facility manufacturing a Ground-Launched Ballistic Missile (GLBM), not covered under the INF Treaty, which has a stage outwardly similar to a stage of a GLBM limited by the treaty. The Soviets received a similar right to monitor the U.S. facility that previously produced the Pershing rocket motor.

In May 1991, the US eliminated its last ground-launched cruise missile and ground-launched ballistic missile covered under the INF Treaty. The last declared Soviet SS-20 was also eliminated in May 1991. A total of 2,692 missiles was eliminated after the treaty's entry-into-force.

Following the December 1991 dissolution of the Soviet Union, the US sought to multilateralise the INF Treaty with 12 former Soviet republics which the US saw as INF Treaty successors. Of the 12 successor states, six—Belarus, Kazakstan, Russia, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan—have inspectable INF facilities on their territories. Of these six, four—Belarus, Kazakstan, Russia, and Ukraine—are active participants in the process of implementing the treaty.

The INF Treaty was certainly ground-breaking in so far as the US-Russia arms race and European security were concerned. All missile systems that had a range of between 500 and 5,500 km were banned, including their flight-testing, development and deployment. The treaty also required destruction of 430 US missiles and 979 Soviet missiles which were in storage or otherwise not deployed. The Pershing IAs, under joint US-German control, were not formally covered by the INF Treaty but were also to be eliminated under a US-Germany agreement.

The treaty was also a first in its stringent verification measures to ensure that every weapon in the class was destroyed along with all INF-related training missiles, rocket stages, launch canisters and launchers, and that such missiles were not produced or flight-tested. Although only five countries were active states-parties to the treaty, several European countries have destroyed INF Treaty-range missiles since the end of the Cold War. Germany, Hungary, Poland, and the Czech Republic destroyed them in the 1990s, and Slovakia in October 2000 after extensive US prodding. In May 31, 2002, the last possessor of intermediate-range missiles in Eastern Europe, Bulgaria, completed their

destruction. France no longer possesses land-based nuclear missiles as they were all scrapped in 1999. All French Army units equipped with short-range missiles were disbanded, their missiles scrapped and their fissile nuclear material recycled.

Following the INF Treaty's entry into force in 1988, inspectors from each side began a set of extraordinarily intrusive on-site inspections. These inspections continued for over a decade and ended in 2001.

Alongwith these on-site inspections, the use of surveillance satellites for data collection has continued. The INF Treaty established the Special Verification Commission (SVC) to act as an implementing body for the treaty and resolve questions of compliance. The states-parties could convene the SVC at any time. Despite these stringent and intrusive inspection mechanisms agreed to, it is surprising that both the US and Russia accuse each other of violating the treaty. This would suggest that both sides want to withdraw from the treaty principally for geo-strategic reasons that have intervened in recent years.

The INF Treaty could be seen as Gorbachev's efforts to reduce tensions with the US and move towards phased nuclear disarmament consistent with the internal changes in the Soviet Union in favour of more openness and reform that led eventually to the demise of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. With subsequent post Cold War developments that have seen the inexorable eastwards expansion of NATO and the European Union (EU) and a sharp deterioration over time of US-Russia relations, it is not surprising that the INF Treaty has steadily run into trouble.

The INF Treaty has been in a slow demise. Since the mid-2000s, Russia has raised the possibility of withdrawing from the INF Treaty for more than one reason. Russia has been suggesting that the proposed US deployment of strategic anti-ballistic missile systems in Europe might trigger a Russian withdrawal, no doubt, to be able to deploy missiles targeting any future US anti-missile sites. It has also argued that the treaty unfairly prevents it from possessing weapons that its neighbours such as China are developing and fielding. Still, the US and Russia issued a statement at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in October 2007 reaffirming their support for the

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treaty and calling on all other states to join them in renouncing the missiles banned by the treaty.

US-Russia relations have, however, been steadily deteriorating over the years. Not surprisingly, reports began to emerge in 2013 and 2014 that the United States had concerns about Russia's compliance with the INF Treaty. In July 2014, the US State Department claimed that Russia was producing and testing an illegal ground-launched cruise missile, which Russia refuted. Through 2016, US officials began expressing concerns that Russia was producing more missiles than

needed solely for flight testing and was on the verge of deploying a banned missile. In February 2017, US officials declared anonymously that Russia had deployed an operational unit of the non-compliant cruise missile now known as the SSC-8. In March 2017, Gen Paul Selva, the vice-chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, confirmed press reports that Russia had deployed a ground-launched cruise missile that "violates the spirit and intent" of the INF Treaty.

The State Department's 2017 annual assessment of Russian compliance listed details on the steps Washington took in 2016 to resolve the dispute, including convening a session of the SVC, and providing Moscow with further information on the violation. The report says the missile in dispute is distinct from two other Russian missile systems, the R-500/SSC-7 Iskander GLCM and the RS-26 ballistic missile. The R-500 has a range below the 500 km INF Treaty cut off, and Russia identifies the RS-26 as an intercontinental ballistic missile falling under the New START. The report also appeared to suggest that the launcher for the allegedly non-compliant missile was different from the launcher for the Iskander.

Russia denied that it was breaching the agreement and has raised its own concerns about American compliance. Russia's charge was that the US was placing a missile defence launch system in Europe that can also be used to fire cruise missiles, using targets for missile defence tests with similar characteristics to INF Treaty-prohibited intermediate-range missiles, and making armed drones that are equivalent to ground-launched cruise missiles.

The US Congress has, for the past several years, urged for a more assertive military and economic response to Russia's INF Treaty violation. The fiscal year 2018 National Defence Authorisation Act (NDAA) authorised funds for the Defence Department to develop a conventional, road-mobile, ground-launched cruise missile that, if tested, would violate the treaty. The fiscal year 2019 NDAA states that by January 2019, the president would submit to Congress a determination on whether Russia is "in material breach" of its INF Treaty obligations and whether the "prohibitions set forth in Article VI of the INF Treaty remain binding on the United States." The Act expresses the sense of Congress that in the light of Russia's violation of the treaty, the United States is "legally entitled to suspend the operation of the INF Treaty in whole or in part" as long as Russia is in material breach.

Eventually, President Trump announced on October 20, 2018, that he would "terminate" the INF Treaty in response to the long-running dispute over Russian non-compliance and concerns about China's unconstrained arsenal of INF Treaty-range missiles.

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On November 30, 2018, the US Director of National Intelligence, Daniel Coats, provided more details on Russia's treaty violation, stating that Russia

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cheated by conducting legally allowable tests of the 9M729, such as testing the missile at over 500 km from a fixed launcher (allowed if the missile is to be deployed by air or sea), as well as testing the same missile from a mobile launcher at a range under 500 km. He noted that “by putting the two types of tests together” Russia was able to develop an intermediate-range missile that could be launched from a “ground-mobile platform,” in violation of the treaty. These seem to be rather technical arguments that can be understood for their import by qualified arms control negotiators and not non-specialists.

On December 4, 2018, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced that the United States had found Russia in “material breach” of the treaty and would suspend its treaty obligations in 60 days, as provided by the treaty, if Russia did not return to compliance in that time. Though NATO allies in their December 4 statement expressed for the first time the conclusion that Russia had violated the INF Treaty, the statement notably did not comment on Pompeo’s ultimatum. Understandably, the Europeans know that the cost of the US-Russia rivalry over the INF Treaty will be principally borne by Europe. Europe-Russia relations will deteriorate further, delaying any prospect of normalisation of ties.

President Putin’s December 5 response was that Russia would respond “accordingly” to the US’ withdrawal from the treaty, with the Chief of Staff of the Russian military Gen Gerasimov noting that U.S. missile sites on allied territory could become “targets of subsequent military exchanges.” On December 14, a Russian Foreign Ministry official was reported as saying that Russia was ready to discuss mutual inspections with the US in order to salvage the treaty. The US and Russia met two more times after this, but with no new result.

On February 1, 2019, President Trump and Secretary of State Pompeo announced separately that beginning February 2, the US would suspend its obligations under the INF Treaty and also formally announced its intention to withdraw from the treaty in six months. Shortly thereafter, President Putin also announced that Russia would be officially suspending its treaty obligations as well.

Why has the INF Treaty collapsed? One reason is the US' accusations of Russia's non-compliance with the treaty. America and its NATO allies have accused Russia of flight-testing, and then deploying, an INF-range cruise missile designated as the 9M729. Another is China. In the 2000s, Russia toyed with the idea of leaving the deal as other states, including a rising China, whose relationship with Russia was not as good as it is today, was developing a large number of non-nuclear intermediate-range missiles. As ties between Russia and China have become strategically close, the expression of these concerns has become muted. It has now become America's turn to feel concerned that China has been accumulating land-based missiles untrammelled by the INF Treaty, while America had to put its own missiles aboard ships, submarines and aircraft. That seems to have convinced Mr Trump to walk away from the treaty.

America's decision to withdraw would have several consequences. American experts speculate that Russia might quickly build up intermediate-range missiles aimed at Europe. These could include not only the 9M729, but also the RS-26 "Rubezh", an ICBM that has been tested at ranges skirting the upper limit of the INF. America, in turn, would seek to rapidly build a matching capability, though officials admit that research was at an early stage and that a working missile was years away. The US military has not developed any land-based missiles within the prohibited ranges for decades and has only just started funding a new ground-launched cruise missile to match the 9M729. Russia, on the other hand, could rapidly expand deployment when released from the constraints of the treaty. Russia, according to American experts, could also modify the RS-26 Rubezh, an experimental system that has been tested just above the INF Treaty's 5,500 km limit, as an Intermediate-Range Ballistic Missile (IRBM) so as to increase its INF deployments and, in the process, exclude it from the New START Treaty that governs longer-range systems.

Deploying US missiles in Europe may not be easy, as European leaders and public opinion would resist, and another Euro-missile crisis may erupt, especially as relations between the US under Trump and key EU countries are tense for various reasons, including Trump bullying them on defence budgets, repudiating

the climate change agreement and the Iran nuclear deal, and European anger at the extra-territorial application of US domestic laws to European companies. Putin had already threatened last October that those hosting American missiles in Europe “would expose their territory to the threat of a possible retaliatory strike”. If America were to make a bilateral deal with allies like Poland over NATO’s head, the repercussions on the alliance could be severe.

The reaction of America’s Asian allies to US deployments in the Pacific may not be easy to manage either. Japan has reacted negatively to America’s withdrawal from the treaty and South Korea, which is trying to improve ties with China, may not want to host the missiles either. We have seen the diplomatic fall-out of America’s stationing of its Terminal High Altitude Area Defence (THAAD) system in South Korea. America can put missiles on Guam, although it is argued that ground-based missiles stationed on a small island would be vulnerable.

All such moves could well undermine the 2010 New START Treaty as questions on the linkage between intermediate and strategic systems that were settled by the elimination of ground-based, intermediate-range missiles would be reopened.

Trump’s National Security Adviser, John Bolton, we know, is opposed to arms control treaties. Before he assumed office, he had advocated US withdrawal from the INF Treaty. It was on his watch that the US withdrew from the ABM Treaty. He might also wish to pull the US out of the New START agreement.

The China factor in the demise of the INF Treaty is important. China has had 30 years to build its own missiles, without constraints. The Chinese Navy is becoming the world’s largest, changing the balance of naval power in the Eastern Pacific.

The Indo-Pacific Command Chief Adm Philip Davidson has described China as a “peer competitor” and one “capable of controlling the South China Sea in all scenarios short of war with the United States.” With US aircraft carriers no longer being able to operate within the first island chain as before, the era of American naval dominance in East Asia is thought to be ending.

China's maritime power has been multiplied by shore-based, anti-ship missile systems such as the new generation of medium range, anti-ship missiles, the DF21-D and the DF26-D. The DF26-D, called "the Guam Killer," by the Chinese media, was first seen in a parade in 2015. According to the People's Liberation Army (PLA) Rocket Force it has recently been deployed in mobile trucks for quick launch in China's remote, northwest plateau desert region. Such capabilities have opened up a new era of naval strategy in which hard to locate, land-based, anti-ship missiles could become dominant over considerable distances at sea.

This could be particularly true against surface ships which cannot effectively fend off swarming missile attacks. These missiles are also capable of striking all U.S. and allied bases in the region, including Japan and Korea, raising concerns over Chinese preemptive, conventional attacks against such installations in any crisis.

The INF Treaty has prohibited the US for over three decades from developing comparable land-based, medium-range missiles. Both the US and Russia have had to rely on ships and aircraft for the launch of such systems.

At the time that the INF Treaty was ratified, it made sense to do so. The Soviet Union and the United States were in a nuclear standoff in Europe. With only a few minutes of reaction time for either side to assess whether or not it was under a nuclear or conventional missile attack, nuclear-capable intermediate range missiles in Europe were a source of huge concern. The treaty was a positive move to reduce tensions, and encourage broader disarmament initiatives, including the START and New START.

The treaty's prohibition on intermediate land-based missiles was made global in order to also remove the threat of a Russian missile attack against Japan in the Pacific. China, not then the military power that it is today, was not a factor in the INF Treaty-making process. Today, the US and its Pacific allies face Chinese mid-range missile capability in the air, on sea and on land.

Even on the sea and in the air, America's intermediate-range missiles have less reach today than China's DF26-D with its 4,200 km range. America's Tomahawk missile has a range of only of 2,400 km. To launch the Tomahawks, the US Navy would have to move its surface ships within

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range of China's ground-based DF26-D. US nuclear carriers too would have to approach China's coast and be well within the range of China's ground-to-ship missiles to be able to launch attack aircraft with the necessary air-to-ground missile reach.

The air force's latest generation of air-to-surface missiles, the Joint Air-to-Surface Standoff Missile (JASSM) and JASSM-ER, also have ranges that are less than those of the DF26-D. America's stealth bombers, the B-1 and B-2, carrying such missiles, could presumably threaten China's land missile forces, but they would face various challenges too.

Furthermore, land-based medium range launchers have significant advantages over their sea and air variants, according to experts. Missiles fired from land are less expensive to deploy and easier to conceal and defend compared to launching missiles from costlier surface ships or from manned aircraft taking off from nuclear carriers or air bases. For the US, the ability to deploy medium range land missiles in Japan, South Korea, Australia and the Philippines could have a major impact on Chinese military calculations, exposing China's naval and military bases to new risks.

China's security community apparently fears that the US may quickly develop and then massively deploy medium- and intermediate-range land-based missiles around the region. Even if the US were to arm such missiles with non-nuclear warheads, this could challenge Beijing's military capabilities and significantly shift the current balance near China's coast. Chinese military strategists also believe that US missiles would pose an unacceptable counter-force threat to the survivability of China's own small nuclear arsenal, requiring China to boost its own nuclear capabilities.

In the view of US strategic experts, abandoning the INF Treaty frees the US to develop and deploy other cutting-edge ground-based medium- and intermediate-range weapon systems such as missiles with trajectory shaping vehicles that are cheaper and less complicated to build than hypersonic weapons. It is highly likely that China would try to counter the new U.S. capabilities by expanding its own investments in similar technologies and other counter-measures. A broader arms competition that spills over into additional technological domains other than traditional ballistic and cruise missiles would seem unavoidable.

Beijing believes that in the case of the INF Treaty, both Russia and the United States have been prepared for a way out since long. Any effort to include China in a multilateralised arms control treaty will, therefore, be strongly resisted.

The developing scenario has major implications for building a regional security architecture in Asia. Negotiations in the East Asia Summit on such a security architecture will become more complicated. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) will be faced with the problem of steering a middle course between the US and China, of having to take a position on a new arms race between the US and China, which it would wish to avoid. Russia's deepening strategic ties with China will put it in the awkward situation of politically opposing US intermediate missile deployments in the Indo-Pacific while justifying its own deployments of such missiles in Europe and addressing European concerns on this count. It is also no secret that Russia is concerned about the gap in its deterrence vis-à-vis China in the absence of IRBMs in its panoply. Russia would want China to be included in an INF Treaty but would find it politically difficult to openly press China on the issue without damaging the strategic understanding between the two countries in the face of America's adversarial policies towards both.

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For China, as some argue, the era of relying on the US-Russia bilateral arms control agreements is at its end. Previous arms control arrangements had put constraints on the US and Russia, while allowing China to build up its own arsenals without any limits. As China becomes increasingly powerful militarily, it will come under pressure to pursue cooperative arms control, especially to manage the challenge of US deployments of medium range conventional missiles to counter the Chinese missile build-up.

It could be argued that the 1987 INF Treaty no longer applies to the geo-strategic conditions that exist today. A new variant of the treaty that includes China would seem unlikely at present, even if, in the thinking of some American strategic experts, the elimination of the 1987 INF Treaty constraints may give the US and its Pacific allies the opportunity to greatly complicate the Chinese military calculus by fielding a new US force of land-based ballistic and cruise missiles with conventional warheads. This could, it is argued, as during the Reagan era, create a dynamic that leads to substantive negotiations with the Chinese, leading to reduction of their inventory of conventional missiles in exchange for halting any deployment of new US conventional land-based missiles.

The argument that the potential deployment of American ground-based conventional missiles in the Pacific region will “raise tensions” with China is rejected by some on the ground that the Chinese have already “raised tensions” throughout the Western Pacific with the deployment of the DF-21D ostensibly capable of striking US aircraft carriers and the DF-26 reaching as far as Guam. Adm Harry Harris, the former head of the Pacific Command has observed that the US has no ground-based capability that can threaten China because of, among other things, America’s rigid adherence to the INF Treaty.

In a testimony submitted to Congress last year, Harris had observed that the Chinese Rocket Forces had more than 2,000 ballistic and cruise missiles, most of which would violate the INF Treaty if China were a signatory. The United States deployment of its own land-based conventional missiles in the Pacific would give it significant leverage to check Chinese hegemonic efforts in the region, including the militarisation of the South China Sea. One

consequence, in the view of US experts, would be to reverse the waning of confidence of America's Asian allies in its extended deterrent and further deter North Korea in the absence of an agreement to eliminate its nuclear arsenal.

As National Security Adviser John Bolton seems to have quipped recently, it is perfectly understandable that the Chinese would want the United States to stay within the framework of the INF Treaty: "If I were Chinese, I would say the same thing. Why not have the Americans bound, and the Chinese not bound?"

India has to be very watchful of these developments. India, of course, has been traditionally a great proponent of nuclear disarmament. However, all the Cold War arms control agreements between the US and the Soviet Union and later initiatives such as the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) and Fissile Material Cut-off (FMCT) Treaty were, in India's views, not veritable disarmament measures, but various ways of maintaining the nuclear hegemony of the nuclear weapon states at the cost of the security of the non-nuclear states. India did not benefit in any way from such arms control agreements. If the INF Treaty is multilateralised in a new form, with China included, pressure on India, and others as well, to join the negotiations would inevitably grow. The issue for India could become a serious one as our Agni missiles are in the INF Treaty range. We have not developed long-range missiles of the ICBM category. Given the scenario that could well develop over time, India has to begin testing and deploying ICBMs, besides developing air and sea launched IRBM/cruise missile capability at an accelerated pace. We should have time for this as a multilateralised INF Treaty is not for tomorrow, given the repercussions of such a treaty on China's missile capability which is crucial for its defence against US power in the Western Pacific and its determination to prevent Taiwan from becoming independent.