



EUROPEAN LEADERSHIP NETWORK

A European response to US withdrawal from the INF Treaty

ELN group statement November 2018

President Trump's declared intention to withdraw the United States from the 1987 US-Russia Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) calls into question not only the fate of this pivotal accord but also the future of nuclear arms control, with potentially grave consequences for European security.

The INF treaty may indeed have been violated. And it may be anachronistic. But it is symbolic of great power cooperation on nuclear risks and it has been a stabilising force in Europe's security over the past three decades. Europe is the sandpit in which US-Russia confrontation over INF will be played out. Europe is entitled to a say in what happens next.

US intentions have been poorly communicated in Europe. This leaves America's European Allies supporting Washington's judgment about Russian non-compliance, but not necessarily Washington's response. Divergent European and American approaches to the INF crisis would be highly damaging. Even more troubling would be the likely consequences of the Treaty's demise.

The New START Agreement, which limits US and Russian strategic nuclear warheads and delivery vehicles, expires in 2021 and the INF crisis increases the risk that it will not be extended or replaced. Collapse of INF would spur the development of new nuclear and strategic conventional weapon systems, including INF-class missiles. These systems claim to strengthen deterrence but are more likely to fuel an arms race. The costs to international nuclear stability, European security, and taxpayers in all countries concerned could be high. And unless INF is maintained or replaced, its loss will deepen international cynicism about gradual nuclear disarmament, with consequent damage to the nuclear non-proliferation regime.

Strong voices in the US share these views.

The INF crisis has focused the attention of European decision-makers on arms control. They should now move beyond statements of concern towards action on the following recommendations:

- The INF's collapse is still preventable. If the two sides work in good faith on the non-compliance issues instead of just trading allegations, solutions can be found. Non-governmental experts and organisations, including the ELN, have developed proposals that address all the issues raised by each side, including the new Russian cruise missile and the configuration of US missile defence installations in Europe. We urge Washington and Moscow to use the coming months to explore these proposals seriously and halt the INF's breakdown. Neither side should unilaterally withdraw without a further effort.
- Moscow - which has always protested that it has not deployed non-compliant missiles - should pledge that it will not deploy such missiles against Europe, provided that NATO and the United States do not deploy them. We welcome NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg's recent statement that any such NATO deployment is improbable.
- European governments, especially members of NATO, should make clear that if Russia can verifiably demonstrate that it is INF-compliant, they will support the transparent verification of NATO's land-based ballistic missile defence installations by Russia.
- As Washington is genuinely concerned about Chinese intermediate range missiles remaining outside any arms control mechanism, it should construct a joint US-Russian approach towards Beijing and should be able to count on support from European and Asian partners. These efforts might be unsuccessful but would demonstrate a continuing US commitment to nuclear arms control.
- Europeans should urge the US and Russia to immediately resume talks on strategic stability. To create some measure of stability and mutual confidence, the two sides should agree the extension of the New START Treaty as a priority. At the 11 November 2018 Trump-Putin meeting, the leaders should also agree a statement of reassurance to the international community that nuclear war cannot be won and should never be fought.
- While Ukraine will remain the primary joint agenda item in the NATO-Russia Council, Europeans should advance proposals for wider, more up-to-date arms control designed to increase decision time and predictability for both NATO and Russian leaders.
- As part of a broader response, Europeans should press the case for the security benefits of restraint and collaborative arms control, vigorously countering the pernicious belief that arms control could be ineffective, or even detrimental, to national security.

If implemented, these steps would prevent the INF crisis further worsening the West-Russia confrontation. It could turn a crisis into an opportunity for fresh, innovative arms control that is fit for the 21st century.