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# The Demise of the INF Treaty: What are the consequences for NATO?

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# The Demise of the INF Treaty: What are the consequences for NATO?

## Summary

In 1979 NATO decided to deploy a mix of 572 US cruise and ballistic missiles in Europe, while simultaneously expressing the willingness to “halt, modify or reverse” the deployment as a result of a concrete arms control agreement with the Soviet Union. This decision, known as “the Dual Track decision”, was seen as a triumph for Alliance cohesion and solidarity, achieved despite intense public opposition in several NATO members and from the Soviet Union. This success for NATO was further confirmed eight years later when the combination of deployment and arms control dialogue resulted in agreement for the complete elimination of US and Soviet intermediate range missiles through the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty.

In December 2018, NATO concluded that Russia had fielded a new nuclear missile system, the 9M729, violating the treaty. The US Secretary of State declared that the United States would withdraw from the agreement, if Russia does not come into compliance. On 1 February 2019, the US announced that it was suspending its participation in the INF Treaty, thus formally activating the six months withdrawal clause. One day after, Russia followed suit. The US affirms that Russia could save the treaty even now by coming into compliance within those six months, but prospects for a successful solution to save the treaty are dim. NATO is thus faced with the demise of the INF Treaty and the potential implications for its nuclear posture of an environment in which there are no constraints on intermediate nuclear forces.

The US may be considering deploying INF to Europe for the first time in 30 years. Before that point is reached, there are many **questions to answer concerning the new Russian cruise missile and its consequences for NATO’s strategy** and deterrence posture that this paper will discuss:

- Is it time for a major review of the NATO nuclear posture similar to the process that underpinned the 1979 decision?
- What can be learned from the 1979 decision?

As this paper points out, there are lessons even now to be drawn from the Dual Track decision, especially the debate on whether and how to maintain deterrence. Yet there are significant differences, among them the internal dynamics of NATO itself and changing attitudes to US leadership. **As NATO embarks on another nuclear debate, several more specific lessons from the 1979 period are available to guide its actions:**

- The implications of the demise of the INF Treaty should be studied by a High Level Group of experts representing all allies with the authority to make recommendations on the way ahead to NATO Ministers.
- Nuclear policy must be based on Alliance consensus deriving from a thorough review of deterrence posture and its adequacy.

- A review should **not** start with the assumption that a tit-for-tat deployment of new US missiles will be necessary.
- Consultation should involve all Allies equally.
- The US should lead but listen.
- Despite current problems, arms control must be an integral part of Alliance nuclear policy.
- The US withdrawal from the INF Treaty should not be presented as definitive; attempts should continue to reinstate the treaty, regionally, if not globally, and to save something from the wreckage.
- Strategic needs should be balanced against public sensitivity. In the digital age, public sensitivity to the deployment of new nuclear weapons in Europe will be even more acute than before.

What is clear is that 40 years on, we are about to discover that the debate over INF has lost none of its complexity or potency.

## Introduction

After lying dormant for almost 30 years, the nuclear debate in Europe is set to return. Allies have concluded that Russia has developed and fielded a missile system, the 9M729, which violates the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty and poses significant risks to Euro-Atlantic security.<sup>1</sup> On 5 December 2018, US Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo declared at a NATO Foreign Ministers meeting that if Russia does not come into compliance with the INF Treaty within 60 days the United States would withdraw from the accord. On 2 February 2019, the US formally gave the required six-month's notice to Russia that it would withdraw from the INF Treaty. The almost certain demise of the treaty has already been widely analysed and regretted both for the loss of the treaty itself and also for the future of arms control.<sup>2</sup> However, thus far little attention has been paid to the possible consequences for NATO's deterrent posture in the complete absence of constraints on Russian theatre nuclear forces and ongoing Russian nuclear modernisation.

Inevitably, there will be those who will suggest that Russian actions demand a strong NATO response, including new nuclear deployments. For their part, Russian commentators have remarked that US withdrawal from the INF Treaty paves the way for the introduction of new US intermediate range missiles into Europe, implying that Russia needs to act in anticipation of a new nuclear dynamic.<sup>3</sup>

For much of the post-Cold War period, new NATO nuclear deployments in Europe were politically inconceivable. Until Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, NATO and Russia had a cooperative, not a deterrent relationship, through the NATO-Russia Council. Since then, the strategic landscape has worsened considerably. Some of the more exposed NATO members are looking to strengthen deterrence. The US is already

developing nuclear weapons which could be used for this purpose.

For most of the post-Cold War period, NATO was relatively relaxed about its nuclear posture. NATO's 2012 review of its deterrence and defence posture found it "currently meets the criteria for an effective deterrence and defence posture".<sup>4</sup> However, the prospect of an unconstrained ground-based INF systems landscape presents a radically different situation and challenge.

Many NATO members are traditionally committed to arms control and nuclear non-proliferation as offering the best means to preserve strategic stability in Europe. They would consider the introduction of new nuclear systems as further destabilising an already tense NATO-Russia relationship.

## The Parameters of the Coming Debate

With the demise of the INF Treaty, a debate in NATO about whether to strengthen deterrence, including through new nuclear deployments is inevitable, even if the outcome is not. The Trump administration is already considering to "develop and deploy ground-launched missiles at the earliest possible date"<sup>5</sup>. Discussions will focus on the consequences for NATO's nuclear posture of an unconstrained INF world. Should NATO respond to the deployment of the new Russian missile system and if so, how? Is NATO's existing nuclear posture still credible? Does the new Russian cruise missile create an imbalance in nuclear capabilities and a new level of risk? Does the new situation require a review of NATO's nuclear posture?

It may be instructive therefore to look back to the late 1970s period to see how NATO responded to a rapidly changing strategic environment which contained serious implications for NATO strategy; how the Alliance arrived at the 1979 NATO "Dual

Track” decision, combining modernisation (new deployments) and arms control; and to ask what relevance does that decision have for the challenges NATO faces today.

The situation now is, of course, radically different. The strategic situation has been transformed. The former bipolar US – Soviet relationship now sits in a broader multilateral context with regional influences playing a greater role. The ideological confrontation with the Soviet Union has been replaced by a competitive relationship with Russia. NATO is now an alliance of 29, including former adversaries. NATO’s deterrent policy is set in a very different political context, with nuclear weapons not given the prominence they once had. And US policy has to take account of a radically different global context. The fact that China, not a party to the INF Treaty, is free to develop and deploy INF missiles, whereas US is not, features significantly in the US debate now in contrast to the Cold War.

*“Debate in NATO about deterrence is inevitable, even if the outcome is not.”*

And yet, in other respects, there are some important similarities. Russia has succeeded the Soviet Union as NATO’s principle adversary. Russia’s ability to threaten NATO’s exposed eastern flank is again driving NATO’s defence posture. Russia’s attitudes towards the use of nuclear weapons and their coercive potential have again become a matter of uncertainty and concern. Likewise, the basic elements of NATO’s nuclear policy have remained unchanged, irrespective of the changes in the strategic environment, including the indispensability of nuclear weapons in deterrence doctrine.

### **Factors in the Dual Track Decision<sup>6</sup>**

One striking similarity, now as in 1979, was the doubt about the reliability of the

US guarantee to defend European allies. European allies have been perennially concerned about “decoupling”, that is the fear and perception that the US might not be unequivocally committed to their defence.

This concern intensified during the negotiations of the second Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT) II.<sup>7</sup> Europeans were suspicious that, in its anxiety to conclude SALT II, the US was neglecting European security interests. SALT II excluded new Soviet intermediate range systems – the SS20 and Backfire aircraft – specifically capable of striking European targets. Many European policy makers saw the lack of a credible US response options from Europe against Soviet territory as creating a gap in NATO strategy that could invite Soviet exploitation. In that event, would the US use its strategic forces to defend Europe?<sup>8</sup> Today this concern is reflected not only in the demand for “reassurance” by the Baltic and other eastern European members through the forward deployment of NATO forces, but also in the unease at what is seen by some allies as a shortage of NATO options to counter Russia’s lower range nuclear forces.

Another similarity with today is the personality of the US President. This has always been a factor in the nuclear equation. In the late 1970s, Europeans were concerned over the leadership of newly elected President Carter, particularly his views on arms control and nuclear weapons<sup>9</sup>, fearing that the US would do deals with the Soviet Union over the heads, and against the interests, of European allies.

Europeans were also nervous that the US would trade away capabilities in the SALT process by accepting restrictions on cruise missiles which could be of use for NATO’s conventional defence.<sup>10</sup> The apparent US ambivalence to the expression of European interest in cruise missiles was interpreted by Europeans as the US giving priority to its own interests in the SALT process.<sup>11</sup>

European allies were ever sensitive to US

nuclear plans and to any sign of weakening the role of nuclear weapons in NATO's deterrence strategy. Already in 1977, German Chancellor Schmidt had begun to warn of strategic trends which he considered would undermine the American commitment to the defence of Europe.<sup>12</sup> He wanted the US to pay more attention in the SALT process to this "grey area".<sup>13</sup>

### **The Importance of Effective Consultation**

These sensitivities ran deep in the relationship between the US and its European allies, providing fertile ground for misunderstanding which was then exacerbated by inadequate consultation. Then as now, the debate in the US on nuclear weapons tended to outpace the ability of the Europeans to keep up and absorb the implications of them. Without effective consultation in NATO, European allies are forever playing a game of resentful catch-up. The discussions within the Alliance in the 1970s and 1980s over INF and broader nuclear policy provide positive examples where consultations led to understanding and consensus, but also warnings of what can go wrong if consultations over crucial issues are constrained or perfunctory.

The distinct and unique role of the US as the supreme nuclear guarantor of the Alliance<sup>14</sup> gives the issue of consultation with allies a particular significance. The US has the right to make independent decisions on its nuclear weapons but also the obligation to consult with the allies it protects and on whose territory some of its weapons are deployed. Consultation is essential to building trust and confidence. However, this means it is equally important for the allies to ask the right questions and where necessary challenge US assumptions.

Consultation by the US with its NATO allies on nuclear policy has a broad and flexible application, varying from the mere sharing or imparting of information to a more detailed

involvement in plans, policy and posture. The sensitivity and layers of classified information surrounding nuclear weapons adds a further complication. Consultation between the US and its allies on nuclear policy operates at several levels – strategic, theatre and tactical – each bringing its own problems.

Consultation on strategic arms negotiations under the SALT process were of direct interest to the allies.<sup>15</sup> However the bilateral US-USSR nature of the talks placed constraints on how much the US could tell the allies of its negotiating position. As the process progressed, US reluctance to divulge sensitive negotiating detail and constraints on full transparency caused tension, suspicion and a loss of confidence, arousing European allies' suspicions of a US sell out to the USSR.

***"Without effective consultation in NATO, European allies are forever playing a game of resentful catch-up."***

Consultation within the Alliance on NATO's own nuclear policy was equally essential due to the location in Europe of many shorter-range weapons. The US had to decide how much of its own thinking and policy on tactical or theatre nuclear weapons it would or could share with its allies. At what point should it inform the allies of decisions taken or to be taken, when to solicit their views and at what level? Should consultation take place before or after the US had made up its mind? This dilemma continues today over projects such as the US B61-12 nuclear bomb, a significant updating of nuclear capability.<sup>16</sup> When, where and in what detail are allies informed?

The dangers of a botched consultation in NATO's nuclear policy were demonstrated by the neutron bomb fiasco of 1978.<sup>17</sup> The abrupt cancellation of the neutron bomb project provoked further doubts

about President Carter's reliability and his inability to demonstrate leadership in NATO. It also reminded the public of the stark consequences of the use of nuclear weapons, and as a result in the words of one US official, "created the nuclear problem in Europe".<sup>18</sup>

In short, inadequate consultation with its Allies over nuclear weapons was causing them to question the credibility of the US guarantee. The Alliance agreed to address this problem by establishing a special task force to review NATO's nuclear posture.<sup>19</sup> Ironically, though President Carter wanted to spur the European allies to improve their conventional defences, the most significant outcome of this 1977 initiative was the decision in December 1979 to deploy INF in Europe.

### **The US fixes the Consultation Problem**

Though NATO Defence Ministers met twice yearly in the NATO Planning Group (NPG)<sup>20</sup> to discuss nuclear issues, there was concern on the American side that consultation was not working properly. A High Level Group (HLG) was therefore created at the meeting of the NPG in Bari, October 1977, comprising senior officials drawn directly from national capitals with sufficient authority and expertise to discuss the intricacies of nuclear policy and deployments, while simultaneously having high level access to the ministers.<sup>21</sup>

During its first meeting, the HLG decided to focus on the problem of longer-range (or INF)<sup>22</sup> nuclear systems and the apparent imbalance in Europe in nuclear capability in this range of nuclear weapons between NATO and the Soviet Union.

In the initial HLG discussions, European allies participated pro-actively. They were prominent in creating the consensus that the focus should be on the imbalance in Europe in long range nuclear capability. By contrast, the US played a relatively unassertive role,

listening rather than proposing. US officials took note of European views, suggested options but did not state a preference.<sup>23</sup> They also tried to reassure the Europeans that all potential targets were covered by US systems based in the US. The US had more than enough strategic assets for Alliance deterrence; it did not need more.

US reassurances were seen as self-serving by the European allies who were not persuaded that existing arrangements sufficed. They insisted that a gap existed that could be exploited by the Soviet Union, but which could not be filled by US strategic or sea-based systems.

The HLG reached a consensus at its second meeting in Los Alamos in February 1978 on the need to deploy land-based missiles in Europe that could hold Soviet territory at risk – characterised somewhat disingenuously as an "an upward evolutionary adjustment in long range forces".<sup>24</sup>

The HLG recommended a mix of Pershing ballistic and ground launched cruise missiles<sup>25</sup>. How many of these intermediate range systems were needed? Estimates presented to the HLG ranged from a few hundred to several thousands, depending on the criteria used,<sup>26</sup> demonstrating the elusive nature of the concept of "coupling". Too few systems would not be credible, too many would mean decoupling, signifying NATO's willingness to contain a nuclear war to Europe. The HLG finally narrowed down the range of weapons to be deployed to between 200 and 600. The final figure recommended to ministers was 572. According to a senior US official, this figure was deliberately on the high side "for bargaining purposes with the Soviet Union and ourselves".<sup>27</sup>

The decision by the HLG to fill "the gap" by modernisation was not surprising as the HLG participants were in the main from ministries of defence; this meant that the problem came to be seen through the prism of deterrence and defence.



## The Arms Control Alternative

However, from the outset, there were those who thought that the problem of the nuclear imbalance in Europe could be addressed through arms control and negotiation.<sup>28</sup> Arms control appealed to several constituencies. There were those who believed in arms control as an integral component of security.<sup>29</sup> They were joined by others who acknowledged its necessity as a means to assuage public opinion but were sceptical of its potential. And then there were those who saw it principally in terms of its public relations value.

Those who favoured the inclusion of an arms control approach as a concomitant to modernisation and deployment were rapidly reminded that NATO had no credible assets to negotiate with. Without the deployment of, or the threat of, a credible NATO capability there was little incentive for the Soviet Union to negotiate. As a German official noted “we could not talk of arms control until we had a decision for deployment”.<sup>30</sup>

In order to explore the arms control option, NATO established another expert committee, the Special Group (SG),<sup>31</sup> to develop a NATO approach to an INF arms control agreement<sup>32</sup>. As with the discussion of deployment options in the HLG, Alliance consultation was essential to the work of the Special Group and most crucially when the US was negotiating the INF Treaty with the Soviet Union. The weapons were American, the talks bilateral, but the US was negotiating on behalf of allies which meant achieving the right balance in the degree of involvement. The US received high marks from the allies and European officials for the quality of the consultation.<sup>33</sup>

The Special Group worked alongside the HLG, but started its work later, in April 1979. As its starting point, it took the HLG’s consensus on the need for modernisation. This established the relationship between

the two tracks - decide to modernise, then negotiate from a position of strength and credibility to lower levels.

Maintaining the linkage and balance between the two tracks was not easy. Modernisation was seen as necessary to justify and stimulate negotiation but also managed to arouse public opposition, particularly in countries facing growing political pressure and protest at home.

***“We could not talk of arms control until we had a decision for deployment.”***

The NATO decision of December 1979 at a special joint meeting of foreign and defence ministers was culmination of the two strains of work and the first formal endorsement of the dual track approach.

Despite apparent consensus about the relationship of the modernisation and arms control tracks, there were differences in terms of priorities and negotiating tactics. These were a normal result of the different roles of defence and arms control in security policy.<sup>34</sup> Tensions emerged over the adoption of the “zero option” - the elimination of INF missiles on both sides – an idea that gained momentum as the arms control options were hotly debated both within the HLG, Special Group and in public. Some allies had already seized on the language in the December 1979 communique - which linked the number of NATO deployments to the negotiations - as opening the possibility to lower levels, and even zero, as long as it applied to both sides.<sup>35</sup>

The Reagan Administration, initially for public relations purposes, adopted the zero option as the US position when strategic arms limitation talks reopened in Geneva in November 1981.<sup>36</sup> However, the zero option was not consistent with NATO’s strategy of flexible response, which had provided

the framework for the HLG's analysis and the identification of an exploitable gap in NATO's capabilities. The "gap" in flexible response had not been caused by the Soviet deployment of the SS20 missile system; its deployment only made NATO's alleged vulnerability worse because of its accuracy and mobility. Why then negotiate away the INF capability "designed" to close that gap?

There were those in the military and defence world who pointed out this inconsistency.<sup>37</sup> However, doctrinal theory was put to one side in favour of the political high ground of pursuing an arms control agreement. Moreover, the assumption was that the Soviet Union would never accept the zero offer: this did not allow for the flexibility of Gorbachev who in July 1987 accepted Reagan's proposal for the elimination of all INF missiles.

The INF Treaty was signed at a summit meeting in Washington between Reagan and Gorbachev in December 1987. Inevitably, there were those in NATO who still pointed out that the gap which INF modernisation was designed to fill still existed, and that the elimination of all INF perpetuated the vulnerability of NATO Europe. However, this criticism was overshadowed by the political significance of the agreement.<sup>38</sup>

### **The Significance of Public Opposition**

The effect of public debate and significance of opposition to the modernisation of INF should not be underestimated. The dual track decision faced fierce public hostility in several countries, particularly the countries which had agreed to the basing of the new missiles on their territory.<sup>39</sup> This opposition went beyond the usual suspects of entrenched anti-NATO and anti-nuclear activists. It extended to supporters of NATO's deterrence posture who nevertheless considered the deployment of new US systems to Europe as unnecessary.<sup>40</sup> Political and public opposition to the deployment of INF was a

significant spur to the serious pursuit of an arms control solution to the problem, and to the adoption of the zero option.

***"The dual track managed to reconcile the 'modernisers' and the 'arms controllers'"***

Public opposition in Belgium and the Netherlands, two of the designated basing countries, resulted in their adding conditions to their endorsement of the 1979 decision.<sup>41</sup> Public discontent and Soviet opposition meant that the decision and the actual deployment phase became a test for NATO cohesion and solidarity and its ability to take and implement difficult defence decisions. The fact that NATO passed this test, first in terms of modernisation and then in successfully supporting the elimination of all INF, was due to the process of Alliance consultation which operated at all levels, including the meeting of the four leaders on Guadeloupe in January 1979.<sup>42</sup>

NATO's success was also due to the reconciliation of those who believed that the Soviet threat had to be countered by military strength with those who preferred to place more emphasis on the détente side of NATO's longstanding policy of the simultaneous pursuit of deterrence and dialogue.<sup>43</sup> The dual track managed to reconcile the "modernisers" and the "arms controllers". Nevertheless, there was a high price to pay in political capital. The strength of the peace movement in several countries meant that for the next two decades the role of NATO's nuclear weapons was a subject most members preferred to avoid.

## The INF Debate – Déjà vu all over again?

How relevant is the experience of 1979 to the challenges that confront NATO today?

The merits and methods of the 1979 INF decision are clear. When INF deployment started in 1983 in the face of intense public opposition in the West, it was regarded as a major success for NATO's unity and solidarity. Subsequently, when the US and the Soviet Union signed the INF Treaty eliminating all INF class ground missiles, it was considered a landmark decision in improving East-West relations.

The probable demise of the INF Treaty reverses this successful sequence. To abandon the treaty in order to seek to deploy new US nuclear systems into Europe would plunge NATO into an acrimonious debate, for which it is ill-prepared. Having replaced in the early 1990s the precision of the flexible response strategy with a deliberately much vaguer Strategic Concept, NATO no longer has an agreed policy framework within which to conduct a debate of such significance. NATO's latest Strategic Concept of 2010 is ill-suited as a political framework for such a debate. It is a compilation of considerations and contradictory aspirations, promoting the benefits of cooperation with a Russia which NATO again sees as an antagonist. Moreover, the commitment to dialogue between adversaries, as established by Harmel, has been reduced by restrictions and conditions on Russian behaviour.

The current US Administration nevertheless seems intent of prompting a debate on deploying INF to Europe without carefully preparing the ground. Former US Defense Secretary Mattis was reportedly ordered to "develop and deploy ground-launched missiles at the earliest possible date."<sup>44</sup> If so, the habits and methods from the 1970s of close consultation amongst allies on nuclear issues will have to be relearned. Alliance consultation during the INF process proved

critical to reconciling competing views and interests. This success was in turn due to the US getting the balance right between leading and listening, even though the final call rested with the US.

NATO's Secretary General has emphasised that it is Russia, by deploying a new intermediate missile capable of carrying nuclear warheads, which has undermined the INF Treaty. He noted that "the new missile system poses a serious risk to the strategic stability of Europe".<sup>45</sup> Assessing how serious is the risk requires addressing several questions: does the new system provide new options, expose a gap in NATO's capability, and hence weaken NATO deterrence? If so, how should NATO react? By asking the US to deploy intermediate range missiles to Europe in reply? Answers to these questions cannot be found unilaterally or in isolation but on the basis of a collective and considered Alliance response – which may not necessarily be military.

Here too, there is a lesson from the first INF debate in the creation of the HLG. The Secretary General should propose to allies that a dedicated High Level Group, this time with France participating, should be established with a mandate to address not just the narrow response to Russia's new missile, but to examine the sufficiency of NATO's wider capabilities and whether NATO needs to respond militarily at all. And he should ask nations to ensure the appointment of officials with sufficient experience and authority for the task.

According to the Secretary General NATO has asked its military authorities to look into the consequences of a world without the INF Treaty, where Russia continues to deploy its missiles. But the military dimension is only one part of the problem. As the experience of the Dual Track decision underlines, the issue has to be assessed taking account of all relevant factors, which are more political than military. This is why a broader HLG type

review is necessary and appropriate<sup>46</sup>.

NATO's Secretary General has confirmed that NATO has no intention of deploying new nuclear missiles in Europe, but "as an Alliance we are committed to the safety and the security of all our nations". He added, "If we want to avoid nuclear weapons, we need to make sure our conventional deterrence and defence is strong".<sup>47</sup> This must surely be the starting point for a new review by the new HLG.

In this context, it is important to recall that the nuclear weapons contributing to NATO deterrence comprise US strategic forces and those of UK and France, together with US nuclear warheads for use on the dual capable aircraft of four allies<sup>48</sup> and the US.<sup>49</sup> There are advanced plans to modernise the posture by purchasing new aircraft and upgrading the weapon itself.<sup>50</sup> As noted earlier, the review in 2012 of NATO's Defence and Deterrence Posture (DDPR) found that the nuclear force posture "currently meets the criteria for an effective deterrence and defence posture."

***"The situation today is different - as might be the conclusion."***

With the deployment of new Russian systems and the almost certain demise of the INF Treaty some NATO members, especially those in central and eastern Europe, may judge that NATO's existing conventional and nuclear posture no longer meets the demands of the new strategic situation. There may be a demand for more conventional, but also potentially nuclear systems in Europe capable of striking targets in Russia at greater range, thus offering the US more options short of using its strategic assets. This would mirror the argument used to support INF modernisation in 1979.

The situation today is different - as might be the conclusion. NATO has yet to engage

collectively on the practical implications of Russia's actions for the Alliance. NATO has merely "strongly supported the finding" of the United States that Russia is in material breach of the INF Treaty. When NATO does consider the practical implications of the US "finding", it should not start with the assumption that a tit-for-tat deployment of new US missiles will be necessary. It should begin with an assessment that takes account of strategic need, the redundancy in US nuclear assets for deterrence, political acceptability of different options and acknowledgment that arms control still remains the only long-term solution. The possibility of arms control is a forlorn hope. But even in the days of the "evil empire", NATO managed to find common ground for negotiation, so all is not yet lost.

One major difference from the first INF debate is the European attitude to US leadership. European angst now is of an entirely different nature. Then they sought US leadership and their greatest fear was the "de-coupling" of US security from Europe's. Now, with the rise of the EU and European confidence, some Europeans in the EU are de-coupling themselves. President Macron, endorsed by Chancellor Merkel, has put the "the defence of" European interests and values by Europeans firmly on the agenda, the implication being that with an unreliable and unsympathetic US leadership, Europe can only look to itself for security through the EU. If so, any US attempt to raise the issue of new nuclear deployments in Europe will be met with a hostile response.

### **What next?**

If there is one significant lesson to be drawn from the dual track decision, it is that any proposed deployment of new nuclear systems to Europe stirs up deep fears and provokes intense opposition, unless allayed by the serious pursuit of a political track, in the form of dialogue and arms control.

As NATO embarks on another nuclear debate,

several more specific lessons from the 1979 period are available to guide its actions:

- The implications of the demise of the INF Treaty should be studied by a High Level Group of experts representing all allies with the authority to make recommendations on the way ahead to NATO Ministers.
- Nuclear policy must be based on Alliance consensus deriving from a thorough review of deterrence posture and its adequacy.
- A review should not start with the assumption that a tit-for-tat deployment of new US missiles will be necessary.
- Consultation should involve all Allies equally.
- The US should lead but listen.
- Despite current problems, arms control must be an integral part of Alliance nuclear policy.
- The US withdrawal from the INF treaty should not be presented as definitive; attempts should continue to reinstate the treaty, regionally, if not globally, and to save something from the wreckage.
- Strategic needs should be balanced against public sensitivity. In the digital age, public sensitivity to the deployment of new nuclear weapons in Europe will be even more acute than before.

In 1979 the European allies saw INF deployments as a means of binding US security more firmly to Europe's: initially the Europeans were demanding what the US appeared reluctant to give. Significant public opposition in Europe was only managed by the negotiation of a zero outcome. This time round the possibility of deployments is mooted without the prospect of negotiations. An unconstrained INF world is in no one's interest. While negotiations remain a forlorn prospect, it is important nevertheless to avoid actions that may exacerbate the situation. The logic of "arm to disarm" risks an escalation of tensions and an expensive over-investment in nuclear hardware, which in the end may not be necessary.

Serious discussion of potential new US deployments in Europe has yet to begin. If and when it does, we will discover that the INF issue has lost none of its complexity or potency over the years.

## Endnotes

1 Statement on the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty issued by the NATO Foreign Ministers, Brussels, 4 December 2018

2 See Katarzyna Kubiak “Can the INF withdrawal be a win - win for all?” ELN November 2018

3 See articles by Dmitri Trenin, Alexey Arbatov and Andrey Kortunov. Articles by Carnegie Moscow Centre 24/26/ 25 2018.

4 The NATO Deterrence and Defence Posture Review 20 May 2012.

5 Washington Post, 4 December 2018.

6 Some of this material is based on the report for the US Congress on “The Modernisation of NATO’s Long-Range Theatre Nuclear Forces” 1980 by Simon Lunn, and on interviews with officials closely involved in the 1979 Dual Track decision in the US and other capitals and at NATO.

7 SALT II was finalised in 1979, but never ratified by the US in response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979.

8 NATO had deployed American medium range missiles in Europe in 1957. They were phased out in 1963. The capacity to strike the Soviet Union from Europe was then provided by American F111s and UK Vulcans and the allocation of 400 nuclear warheads on Poseidon submarines. However, over time the credibility of these systems was questioned because the aircraft were aging or because offshore systems, being invisible,

did not convey the appropriate political message of reassurance.

9 According to a senior US Defence official “under Carter they [the European allies] saw us as weak, vacillating, erratic and unpredictable”. It should be noted that European concerns over US leadership were mirrored by concerns of US officials over what was seen as a German preoccupation with maintaining the Détente relationship with the East.

10 The Soviet Union had been pressing in the SALT framework for permanent constraints on cruise missiles including a non – transfer clause. US officials confirmed that cruise missiles would prove an additional complication.

11 In the words of a senior US official “The Europeans began to worry that the Carter Administration was trying to keep its hands free on cruise missiles to negotiate SALT with the Russians”.

12 In a significant and wide-ranging speech to the IISS in London in 1977 he expressed concern that the loss of US superiority in strategic forces through parity in SALTII would magnify “the significance of disparities between East and West in nuclear tactical and conventional weapons” He made no mention of new nuclear weapons in Europe – pointing to the problem rather than the solution. Most people in the defence world recognised the problem he was getting at.

13 As a senior German official noted “Any disparity below the strategic level in the grey area would cause concern to us because of its destabilising effects”

14 While noting, as per the 2010 NATO Strategic Concept, that “the independent strategic nuclear forces of the United Kingdom and France, which have a deterrent role of their own, contribute to the overall deterrence and security of the Allies”.

15 The SALT II negotiations had three related elements of concern to Europe: the non-circumvention clause; the Protocol; and reciprocity of limitations

16 The B61-12 tactical bomb performed its first development flight test in July 2015. The first production unit of the B61-12 nuclear bomb is scheduled for March 2020. See Hans M Kristensen. Chapter 3 “B61-12 Guided Nuclear Bomb” in “Building a Safe, Secure and Credible NATO Nuclear Posture” the Nuclear Threat Initiative Washington DC Jan 2018

17 The Enhanced Radiation Reduced Blast (ERRB) weapon became known as the bomb “that kills people and spares buildings” and caused an enormous public outcry particularly in Germany. The US had decided to develop the weapon, and informed the NATO allies. Germany had agreed to deploy as long as it was not the only basing ally. Fierce public opposition caused hesitations within NATO Europe. President Carter deferred his decision, informing the NATO allies at the last minute.

18 As one official put it “the half-life of the ERW effect is long lasting”.

19 This was Task force 10 of a major initiative by the Carter Administration to improve conventional forces.

20 NATO’s top-level nuclear decision-making body, the Nuclear Planning Group, met twice a year at Defence Minister Ministerial level.

21 In the words of one US official, the consultations on the nuclear posture in Europe should be entrusted to “those [high level officials] who write, not read, the political guidance at the other end”

22 The terms long, medium, intermediate and theatre range are used interchangeably in this report, reflecting the changes in terminology over time. They all refer to the INF class.

23 According to senior UK officials the Americans let the Europeans in the group do the talking “the Americans were anxious not to thrust anything down anyone’s throat” and “The American input was a model of its kind”

24 The question of sea basing was also thoroughly discussed as this would help with the participation of more allies but was not considered visible enough.

25 The mix was the result of an internal interagency study by the US.

26 The criteria used included mobility, survivability, cost and military requirement. In fact, according to US officials “all targets are covered by central systems – we had more than enough warheads.”

27 The actual number 572 was a result of the organisation and logistics of the cruise missile flights and launchers in each basing country plus 108 Pershings. Each launcher carried 4 single warhead cruise missiles.

28 As a senior German official noted” at a very early stage we saw the problem in the context of the credibility of deterrence and arms control”.

29 Germany and the Netherlands were prominent in urging an arms control approach, with the UK and US recognising the need but more sceptical on the prospects. Views often varied within national administrations depending on whether the Ministry concerned was Defence or Foreign Affairs.

30 A US official noted that arms control was “a politically necessary ingredient, without which consensus on modernisation would not have been possible “. The two were tied closely together and the Special Consultative Group which succeeded the Special Group became responsible for “the political management of the issue as well as for arms control”.

31 The SG was created in April 1979 – later becoming the Special Consultative Group (SCG) - comprising experts from national capitals, mainly from Ministries of Foreign Affairs. Chaired by the US

32 After initial skirmishing in 1980 over the start of INF negotiations and despite the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in Dec 1979, the non-ratification of SALT 11 and the uncertainties posed by the new Reagan Administration, negotiations on INF resumed in Geneva in November 1981. The Soviet Union then walked out on November 23, 1983 following the deployment of the Pershing missile to Germany. Talks eventually resumed on November 22, 1984. For a first-hand account of the negotiations see “The Last Battle of the Cold War”. Maynard

W. Glitman, Initiatives in Strategic Studies. Palgrave Macmillan, 2006..

33 According to one well-placed German official “the US did a good job and took into consideration all European sensitivities. The Special Group was a constant give and take. The US presented papers and the Europeans modified them”. Another said there was a clear distinction in the quality of consultation between SALT and INF – “for START it was information, for INF it was real consultation”.

34 Both seek to enhance security. Defence does so through more effective capabilities; arms control through lower levels, a regulated environment and the building of confidence. In theory they should work together but in practise and for organisational reasons they are frequently at odds with each other; often prompting the question “which defines which?”

35 “NATO’s TNF requirements will be examined in the light of concrete results reached through negotiations.” Communique issued at the special meeting of the Foreign and Defence Ministers. Brussels. December 12, 1979.

36 The President announced the decision at a speech to the national Press Club Washington DC November 18 1981 - one up on a tweet!

37 For examples of officials drawing attention to the contradictions inherent in the zero option see the report by the “Special Committee on Nuclear Weapons in Europe” by the North Atlantic Assembly, November 1982. A British official told the Committee that “because the number of NATO deployments are not a function of Soviet capabilities, the



zero option is a non-starter... However, in the unlikely event the Soviet Union was prepared to get rid of all of its SS20s, then NATO would be in a different position. In that case, we could go for a zero option, but on political grounds, not strategic doctrine.”

38 For an analysis of the consequences of the INF Treaty for the credibility of NATO's strategy of extended deterrence and the problem of the substantial number of short range “ battlefield “ nuclear weapons that remained on both sides see “West Germany faces nuclear modernisation” by Ronald D Asmus. Survival IISS Nov/Dec 1988.

39 Belgium, the Federal Republic of Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom.

40 “It is doubtful that any amount of juggling with the location of United States capabilities can ever satisfy the permanent doubters of the United States guarantee.” Klaas G de Vries (Netherlands) report to the Military Committee of the North Atlantic Assembly Oct 1979.

41 Both said they would confirm their participation in the light of progress in arms control negotiations. The Dutch said they would decide on full participation in two years; Belgium, on the application to Belgian territory in 6 months. See the report for Congress. “The Modernisation of NATO's Long Range Theatre Nuclear Forces” by Simon Lunn Dec 1980.

42 This extended to the highest levels including the meeting in 1979 before the decision was made of the four leaders on Guadeloupe - President Carter, Chancellor Schmidt, President Giscard, Prime Minister

Callaghan They exchanged views on the basic principles of the decision, the range of options and the role of negotiations. France was not directly involved in the dual track decision, but it was important to have French support.

43 The 1967 “Report of the Council on the Future Tasks of the Alliance”, also known as the Harmel Report, was a seminal document in NATO's history. It effectively introduced the notion of deterrence and détente as the twin pillars of NATO policy towards the Soviet Union.

44 Washington Post 4 December 2018.

45 “New Russian missile undermines European security” Op-ed by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg in El Pais and la Republica 29 Nov 2018.

46 [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions\\_162658.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_162658.htm)

47 Ibid.

48 These weapons are kept at bases in Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Turkey.

49 The reference to “a NATO nuclear capability” normally refers to these DCA arrangements. The U.S. warheads in Europe remain under U.S. control.

50 For details of the introduction of the F35-A and the upgrading of the B61-12 guided nuclear bomb see chapters by Hans M Kristensen in “Building a safe, secure and credible NATO nuclear posture” NTI Jan 2018. However, there are those who point out that in the short term the existing DCA are not only

limited in range but vulnerable to Russian air defences.

51 NATO's Defence and Deterrence Posture Review, May 2012. Reports by the HLG examining the range of options for NATO's nuclear posture concluded that DCA remained the appropriate option. The report was noted by Defence Ministers in 2011. See chapter one "NATO Nuclear Policy" by Simon Lunn in "Reducing Nuclear Risks in Europe" Nuclear Threat Initiative Washington DC 2011.

52 Thus far the implications for the nuclear dimension of European security have only been fleetingly alluded to in articles - normally dismissive. However, if and when the debate on new US deployments in Europe occurs this dimension will surely reappear reviving traditional arguments about deterrence.