

note n°04/2019

14 February 2019

Julia Berghofer

Policy Fellow, European Leadership Network

FONDATION
pour la RECHERCHE
STRATÉGIQUE

Towards a German *Sonderweg*?

The US's suspension of the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces (INF) treaty has sparked an emotional debate in Germany. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced on 2 February that the US will immediately quit its obligations under the treaty, and will formally withdraw after a notice period of six months, unless Russia comes back into compliance. This would require the destruction of INF-violating missiles, their launchers and associated equipment. If Moscow ceases to do so - and that's the most likely scenario - "the treaty will terminate". German ministers and parliamentarians are now engaging in a discussion that oscillates between calls for a new disarmament movement and advocacy for *Nachrüstung* (catch-up armament) in Europe. While there is a growing threat coming from the Russian side, the debate does not reflect the political, technical, and legal obstacles for

deploying new conventional or even nuclear-tipped INF-range missiles in Germany and Europe.

Washington's INF suspension did not come as a surprise for Berlin

A possible demise of the INF treaty has been a tangible concern for German officials at least since 2017, when the US administration informed Berlin they would be ready to delay their plans to abandon the treaty until after federal elections have been held in Germany. After more than three years of ongoing dispute over Russia's assumed violation of the INF due to its deployment of a prohibited ground-launched cruise missile SSC-8 (Russian code: Novator 9M729) in Jekaterinburg and at the Kapustin Yar test site, and counter-allegations by the Russian side targeted at the US MK-41

launchers in Romania that could theoretically be used to carry cruise missiles, this may not have come as a surprise for Berlin. Neither is it surprising that Washington finally lost patience in 2019, yet their decision to abandon the INF treaty leaves a bad taste, not only because one of the last remaining bricks in the global arms control wall (which has recently become ever more fragile) is about to fall, but also because European leaders will now be plagued with the question as to whether they want to see a return of US conventional or nuclear-tipped missiles to the European theatre. And in the long-run, while the INF demise is far from being the primary cause for a new arms race, its fall will probably have detrimental consequences for the survival of the New START treaty.

NATO's double track decision: when Pershing entered Germany

Nevertheless, the definite will of the US to withdraw from the INF treaty is a shock for many politicians and security analysts, which is not least due to Germany's unique role during the Cold War. The slightest consideration of new US missiles on European territory, or even in Germany, evokes an unpleasant reminiscence of NATO's double track decision in 1979 and the *Nachrüstungsdebatte* (catch-up armament debate) that was followed by mass protestations at the beginning of the 1980s.

Deep concerns over the advanced Soviet SSC-20 missiles, aimed at Western Europe and with the capability to destroy NATO's nuclear systems before they could even be used, led to Chancellor Helmut Schmidt's firm advocacy for US nuclear missiles in Germany. While this was an unpopular decision among large parts of the population, and casted dark shadows on his chancellorship, his view was backed by a majority of Bundestag members who voted in November 1983 in favor of the deployment of nuclear-tipped Pershing-II ballistic missiles and BGM-109G Gryphon Block I ground-launched cruise missiles on German soil. Large-scale demonstrations which culminated in half a million people marching in Bonn in October of 1983, amongst them prominent peace leaders and intellectuals like Heinrich Böll, Joseph Beuys and Günter Grass, built up public pressure but were not able to avert the Bundestag decision.

Some politicians want to engage in a new *Nachrüstungsdebatte*

Browsing the German media today, a revival of the *Nachrüstungsdebatte* - a debate on rearmament measures - seems only a stone's

throw away, although the government tries to avoid it. Members of the Bundestag and prominent politicians, immediately after the US suspension, started engaging in a vigorous debate about whether Germany and Europe have to be open for "all options", or whether Europe needs a new disarmament initiative. Some of their public statements are reproduced in the following paragraphs.

German defence minister von der Leyen warns of a relapse into Cold War thinking; instead, she calls for "new answers, new solutions", vaguely referring to a "broad mixture" of measures to be discussed and implemented within the framework of the Alliance.¹ Her counterpart in the Auswärtiges Amt, foreign minister Heiko Maas, wants to see a new global disarmament initiative. On February 1 he tweeted: "We don't need a rearmament debate but comprehensive arms control". Norbert Röttgen (CDU), chairperson of the foreign affairs committee of the Bundestag calls for enhanced pressure on Russia and warns of naive considerations vis-à-vis Russian intentions.² Paul Ziemiak, acting secretary-general of the CDU, puts it a bit more frankly in directly criticizing the SPD's (and probably Mr. Maas's) naivety, and claims that "Germany should be clear that all options remain on the table". He added that "Russia's violation of the INF treaty must not be rewarded by naive German foreign policy". SPD secretary-general Lars Klingbeil replied, "Union parties quit Cold War ways of thinking". Earlier he tweeted, "I want no new nuclear arms race".³

Others articulate their fear that Germany could go for some kind of solo action, thereby risking NATO cohesion. In that vein, Johann Wadephul, deputy chairperson of the CDU/CSU parliamentary group, stated NATO "should stand together", while at the same time emphasizing, "there must not be a German Sonderweg" (*Sonderweg* means a solo effort). He wants to avoid an arms race, said Mr. Wadephul, yet "no option should be ruled out *a priori*", whether they include sea- and air-based systems, missile defence, or development of a ground-based system. His

1. Welt Online, "Von der Leyen will 'neue Lösungen' im Rüstungsstreit", 4 February 2019, <https://www.welt.de/politik/ausland/article188246537/INF-Vertrag-Von-der-Leyen-will-neue-Loesungen-im-Ruestungsstreit.html>.

2. Deutschlandfunk, "CDU_Politiker Röttgen warnt vor Naivität gegenüber Russland", 6 February 2019, https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/nach-inf-ausstiegen-cdu-politiker-roettgen-warnt-vor.1939.de.html?drm:news_id=974021.

3. FAZ.net, "Die SPD spielt Putin in die Hände", updated 3 February 2019, <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/inland/cdu-spd-spielt-putin-in-die-haende-16021952.html>.

stance is backed by CDU/CSU foreign policy spokesperson Jürgen Hardt.⁴ Some kind of cross-party initiative came from MPs Roderich Kiesewetter (CDU) and Rolf Mützenich (SPD) who jointly proposed in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung* to convince Russia to move its SSC-8 weapons eastwards until they cannot reach Europe anymore; the US in turn, should open its MK-41 Aegis Ashore launchers for Russian controls in order to invalidate Russian allegations of an US breach of the INF.⁵

Bipolar competition is over, and politicians have to accept it

History, unpleasant as it is, tends to repeat itself. However, there is no guarantee that the same maneuver - deploying new *Euromissiles* in Germany or Eastern Europe - would produce the desired results today. Drawing a line between 1979 and 2019 means misinterpreting or even ignoring the complex orchestra of interests, priorities, and technological capabilities in an emerging multipolar great power competition that we face today. During the Cold War, a bipolar world was engaging in a brute arms race, while trying to prevent a major nuclear escalation. For this reason, the US and Russia as the key actors in that confrontation were open to agree on reduction and confidence building measures - sometimes more, sometimes less.

The idea behind the deployment of *Euro-missiles* in the 1980s was the creation of a legal framework constraining Russian and American capabilities, which proved to enhance European security and was a decisive step towards the end of the Cold War era. There is no such thing looming on the horizon today: even if Washington and Moscow were ready to talk about a new arms control agreement, this would have to involve at least Chinese INF-range weapons. Moscow started to raise concerns in 2007 as to whether abiding by the INF without having on board countries like China would still meet Russian security interests. China currently possesses the largest arsenal of ballistic missiles, around half of them being intermediate-range weapons, and they are not bound by any legal framework. But even if there were any attempts and enough political will to multilateralize the INF, there is probably little

4. [johann-wadepful.de](https://www.johann-wadepful.de), "Die NATO muss geschlossen bleiben" 1 February 2019, <https://www.johann-wadepful.de/artikel/die-nato-muss-geschlossen-bleiben>.

5. [rolfmuetzenich.de](https://www.rolfmuetzenich.de), *Mit diesem Vorschlag wollen deutsche Politiker den INF-Vertrag retten*, <https://www.rolfmuetzenich.de/pressespiegel/diesem-vorschlag-wollen-deutsche-politiker-inf-vertrag-retten>.

interest by the Chinese Politburo to join such treaty, not least due to president Trump's bad habit of dumping agreements that he judges detrimental for US national security.

Taking these aspects into account there is no reason to assume that new US missiles in Europe could lead to negotiations on a multilateralized INF successor. Hence the main thinking behind a *Nachrüstungsdebatte 2.0* would consist in an effort to significantly raising deterrence measures vis-à-vis Russia, with the obvious potential of maneuvering Europe towards increased tensions, dwindling opportunities for dialogue and risk reduction, and perhaps escalation. Against this backdrop it is understandable that parts of the German government has little appetite to let this debate grow.

At the same time, Mr. Maas' wish for a new disarmament initiative sounds like an anachronistic idea, too. There was a huge outcry among peace activists in the 1970s and 80s, but German peace movement has lost its traction over the last decades. Only a handful of activists meet at the Büchel air base every year to protest against US B61 bombs stationed there; and climate change is more important today for the German population than a nuclear doomsday scenario. Also, there has already grown in the past few years a new disarmament initiative that brought about the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), acting effectively on a global scale but less visibly than it was true for the mass protestations in the 80s. Any new civil society disarmament movement would unavoidably align itself with the TPNW supporters. Taking into account Berlin's concerns that the TPNW could undermine the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), it is quite unclear what kind of disarmament movement Mr. Maas had in mind.

A deployment of new US missiles in Europe sounds more feasible than it is

Let aside considerations of a possible outcome of new *Euromissiles* in the longer term, calls for new US missiles in Europe to counter Russian aggressions are potentially overlooking political, legal, and technological obstacles and wide-ranging consequences for Europe as well as for Germany, that will necessarily result from such a decision. These include the following.

1. Any deployment of conventional or nuclear-tipped ballistic or cruise missiles of intermediate range as part of a bilateral agreement between Berlin and Washington will necessarily require the **approval by the Bundestag**. As a

host country, Germany would need to consent to the stationing of allied troops and weapons systems through a Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA). The weapons systems in question are of high significance for German security policy as these systems would be capable of reaching the territory of a nuclear-armed state, and could render Germany a possible target. Hence, a decision by the Bundestag would be indispensable.

2. Generally speaking, it is possible to handle a stationing of new US ballistic/cruise missiles on German soil bilaterally. In case of INF-range capabilities, however, there should always be a **NATO consensus** as allied countries have adopted a common stance on these type of weapons; the more so since any deployment of intermediate-range missiles (and possible Russian counter-reactions) would affect the security environment of all European NATO members. Especially a bilateral stationing agreement of *nuclear* INF-range missiles would mark a break with the actual strategy of the Alliance, while a change of this strategy requires a consensus decision. Nevertheless, Eastern European countries like Poland and the Baltic States tend to favor bilateralism over consensus when it comes to countering the Russian threat. This tendency could match recent US renunciation of multilateralism, and could perhaps lead to a division within NATO, which in turn is in Moscow's interest.

3. A deployment of nuclear US INF-range missiles on the territory of the former Warsaw Pact states would be a breach of the **NATO-Russia Founding Act**, that states, "The member States of NATO reiterate that they have no intention, no plan and no reason to deploy nuclear weapons on the territory of new members".⁶ A deployment in any of the former GDR *Bundesländer* would run counter to the **Two Plus Four Agreement**, stressing that after the withdrawal of Soviet Forces from the territory of the former GDR, "units of German armed forces assigned to military alliance structures (...) may also be stationed in that part of Germany, but without nuclear weapon carriers", as well as, "Foreign armed forces and

nuclear weapons or their carriers will not be stationed in that part of Germany or deployed there".⁷

4. There are no INF-range ground-launched weapons available for NATO countries; they have all been destroyed until the early 1990s. But the United States is pressing ahead with the **development of new capabilities**. There are three viable options, including modification of an existing air-to-air cruise missile towards a greater range; modification of the Tomahawk sea-launched cruise missile towards a ground-launched capability; and the development of a new type of cruise missile. The first two options could be realized rather quickly.

There will be no German *Sonderweg*

Concerns have been raised that Germany could embark on some kind of *Sonderweg*, whereas there seems to be confusion as to what actually that means. Keeping in mind the points listed above, a possible *Sonderweg* would consist in deploying conventional or even nuclear-tipped INF-range missiles as part of a bilateral agreement with the United States and with the consent of the Bundestag, but lacking corresponding NATO consensus. A different *Sonderweg* scenario could involve a German vote that hinders NATO consensus about the deployment of US INF-range missiles on the territory of one or more European NATO members (and that is possibly what politicians like Mr. Ziemiak and Mr. Wadehul are warning of).

The first option is unlikely to become a reality since there is no indication that a majority in the Bundestag would be ready to give its approval, especially when there is no NATO decision. A new disarmament movement could support this stance, but would probably not be a decisive aspect in the current situation. The deployment of any new missiles, be it conventional or nuclear, would significantly change risk perceptions in Europe and Russia, and the political climate in Berlin is less confrontational vis-à-vis Moscow than it is probably in Warsaw and the Baltic capitals. Nevertheless, if the Bundestag were to approve a stationing, a minimum condition would be an allocation of associated risks and capabilities to a number of NATO members.

6. NATO, *Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security between NATO and the Russian Federation*, 27 May 1997, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_25468.htm.

7. U.S. Diplomatic Mission to Germany, *Treaty on the Final Settlement with Respect to Germany*, September 12, 1990, Article 5 (3), <https://usa.usembassy.de/etexts/2plusfour8994e.htm>

The other option, a German vote against a NATO decision is no more realistic. Berlin would certainly want to avoid a situation where it appears to act against NATO solidarity.

In sum, the most likely scenario would be a stationing of new US conventional cruise missiles in one or more European countries, following a bilateral agreement or backed by an Alliance consensus. In the latter case, Germany would rather align itself with a NATO stance, while there are no indications

that Germany itself would host US INF-range missiles. A German *Sonderweg* is rather unrealistic, and any concerns that Berlin would risk NATO cohesion through raising its voice against new *Euromissiles* underestimate Germany's utmost fear of a further rift within the Alliance. For the foreseeable future, there will be no serious *Nachrüstungsdebatte* in the Bundestag - at least not one that will lead to new missiles in Germany - and even less are we likely to see Berlin embarking on a *Sonderweg*.◇

The opinions expressed in this text are the responsibility of the author alone.

Recently published

- Bruno Tertrais, « The death of the INF Treaty or the end of the post-Cold war era », note n° 03/2019, 4 february 2019
- Bruno Tertrais, « La mort annoncée du traité FNI ou la fin de l'après-Guerre froide », note n° 02/2019, 1^{er} février 2019
- Jean-Luc Racine, « La communication dans le domaine de la 'dissuasion stratégique' : le cas de l'Inde et du Pakistan », note n° 01/2019, 21 janvier 2019
- Isabelle Facon, « La communication dans le domaine de la 'dissuasion stratégique' : le cas de la Russie », note n° 23/2018, 19 décembre 2018
- Bruno Tertrais, « Coexistence pacifique dans l'Arctique ? La Russie, la Norvège et l'archipel du Svalbard », note n° 22/2018, 10 décembre 2018
- Isabelle Facon, Bruno Tertrais, « La Russie et l'emploi des armes nucléaires : le sens des propos de Vladimir Poutine lors de Valdai-2018 », note n° 21/2018, 5 novembre 2018
- Loïc Trégourès, « Serbie-Kosova : options et scénarios », note n° 20/2018, 12 octobre 2018
- Gilles Boquérat, « India's response to China's assertiveness over the seas », note n° 19/2018, October 1, 2018
- Antoine Bondaz, Jean-François Heimburger, « La marginalisation du Japon dans le dossier nord-coréen », note n° 18/2018, 17 septembre 2018
- Nicolas Mazzucchi, « China and Europa electricity networks : strategy and issues », note 17/2018, 12 septembre 2018
- Nicolas Mazzucchi, « La Chine et les réseaux électriques européens : stratégies et enjeux économiques », note n° 16/2018, 11 septembre 2018
- Eric Hazane, « Sécurité numérique des objets connectés, l'heure des choix », note n° 15/2018, 3 septembre 2018
- Emmanuelle Maitre, « La communication dans le domaine de la « dissuasion stratégique : le cas des Etats-Unis », note n° 14/2018, 6 août 2018
- François Christophe, « La crise centrafricaine, révélateur des nouvelles ambitions africaines de la Russie », note n° 13/2018, 26 juillet 2018
- Nicolas Mazzucchi, « Les données sont-elles une marchandise comme les autres ? », note n° 12/2018, 25 juillet 2018
- Thrassy N. Marketos, « Eastern mediterranean energy geostrategy on proposed gas export routes », note n° 11/2018, 4 July 2018
- Emmanuelle Maitre, « Kazakhstan's nuclear policy: an efficient niche diplomacy? », note n° 10/2018, 1st July 2018
- François-Albert Stauder, « Tchad : une nouvelle République sans état de droit », note n° 09/2018, 12 juin 2018
- Nicolas Mazzucchi, « Perspectives in gas security of supply: the role of Greece in the Mediterranean », note n° 08/2018, 24 mai 2018
- Juan José Riva, « The Impact of Organized Crime on Peacekeeping Operations: The Case of Minustah in Haiti », note n° 07/2018, 9 April 2018
- Régis Genté, « La question libérale en Russie », note n° 06/2018, 22 mars 2018
- Valérie Niquet, « Testing Times for Security in East Asia: Evaluating one Year of the Trump Presidency », note n° 05/2018, 19 March 2018
- Isabelle Facon, « Le 'discours du 1^{er} mars' de Vladimir Poutine : quels messages ? », note n° 04/2018, 12 mars 2018
- Valérie Niquet, « Chinese Objectives in High Technology Acquisitions and Integration of Military and Civilian Capabilities: A Global Challenge », note n° 03/2018, 7 March 2018
- Benjamin Hautecouverture, « L'interdiction des armes chimiques en question », note n° 02/2018, 6 mars 2018
- Nicolas Mazzucchi, « 2018, année charnière pour l'Europe dans le cyber ? », note n° 01/2018, 22 janvier 2018
- Benjamin Hautecouverture, « Why must the sanctions against Pyongyang be strengthened ? », note n° 22/2017, 19 December 2017
- Mohamed Ben Lamma, « Face au chaos libyen, l'Europe se cherche encore », note n° 21/2017, 14 décembre 2017
- Benjamin Hautecouverture, « Pourquoi il faut renforcer les sanctions contre Pyongyang », note n° 20/2017, 6 décembre 2017
- Benjamin Hautecouverture, « Crise nucléaire nord-coréenne : que peut faire l'UE ? », note n° 19/2017, 15 novembre 2017
- Emmanuelle Maitre, « Le couple franco-allemand et les questions nucléaires : vers un rapprochement ? », note n° 18/2017, 7 novembre 2017
- Monika Chansoria, « Indo-Japanese Strategic Partnership : Scope and Future Avenues », note n° 17/2017, 19 September 2017
- Antoine Vagneur-Jones, Can Kasapoglu, « Bridging the Gulf: Turkey's forward base in Qatar », note n° 16/2017, 11 August 2017
- Patrick Hébrard, « Pérennité du groupe aéronaval : enjeux stratégiques et industriels », note n° 15/2017, 10 août 2017
- Régis Genté, « Le jeu russe en Libye, élément du dialogue avec Washington », note n° 14/2017, 26 juillet 2017
- Antoine Vagneur-Jones, « Global Britain in the Gulf: Brexit and relations with the GCC », note n° 13/2017, 18 July 2017
- Stéphane Delory, Can Kasapoglu, « Thinking Twice about Iran's Missile Trends : the Threat is Real but Different than Predicted », note n° 12/2017, 29 June 2017

The Foundation for Strategic Research is an independent research centre. It conducts studies for French government departments and agencies, European institutions, international organizations and companies. It contributes to the strategic debate in France and abroad.

WWW.FRSTRATEGIE.ORG

4 BIS RUE DES PÂTURES 75016 PARIS TÉL : 01 43 13 77 69 FAX 01 43 13 77 78

ISSN : 2273-4643

© FRS-TOUS DROITS RÉSERVÉS