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The end of arms control ?

Summary of the conference at Bibliothèque nationale de France

May 14, 2019

As part of its partnership with the Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF), the Fondation pour la recherche stratégique (FRS) organised on May 14, 2019 in the Petit Auditorium of the BnF's François Mitterrand site a half-day conference on the future of arms control after the likely collapse of the Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty.

Introduction, by Dominique David, Advisor to the President, IFRI

The INF Treaty marked a symbolic step in 1987: confidence made it possible to open a phase of disarmament in the literal sense of

the decline in arsenals. Its current endangerment is equally symbolic. It comes at a time when a large part of the arms control/disarmament system is being challenged or broken down, and when the multilateral system gradually put in place after the Cold War is being deconstructed. What now prevails is the crude assertion of power interests (United States, Russia, China, regional powers...). This assertion is aggravated by the tactical position of the United States, which combines the blunt claim of unilateralism with the willingness to negotiate under the threat of coercion.

The consequences of a possible termination of the INF Treaty can be imagined at least on

three levels. In Europe, they could be marked by serious political divisions around nuclear power, disarmament strategies or anti-missile defences. A resumption of the missile deployment race is unlikely at this time, but divisions could be deep within the Atlantic Alliance itself. In Asia, a China that feels directly affected by American pressure, by new American deployments, or by Russian deployments east of the Urals could be encouraged to undertake major strategic changes, including in the nuclear field. Finally, America's arrogance in nuclear matters (ambiguities of the recent Nuclear Posture Review, withdrawal from the INF Treaty, sanctions against Iran, etc.) undoubtedly constitutes a formidable incentive to nuclearization.

The arms control/disarmament dynamic is not dead. No great power has any interest in its disappearance today. But it will undoubtedly have to take on new forms in order to survive, corresponding to the emerging world. And in these major manoeuvres, one actor is constantly absent: Europe, which has been incapable of agreeing on a common position, while it is primarily concerned by the new division of power and the geography of armaments that accompanies it.

Session 1 : Towards the end of the INF Treaty

The Russian posture, by Isabelle Facon, Deputy Director, FRS

At least five factors may have led to Russia's violation of the INF Treaty¹:

1. the fact that neighbouring States have systems prohibited by the INF;
2. a sense of permissiveness in the development of new systems since the American withdrawal from the ABM Treaty in 2002;
3. the influence of Russian arms manufacturers, some of which have strong connections with the political authorities, who are eager to maintain national technological capacities;
4. the traditional reflex of the Russian military institution to wishing for the most complete

set of tools possible;

5. the perception of the INF Treaty by some "hawks" in Moscow as an inappropriate unilateral concession.

The US withdrawal decision generated the reciprocal decision to suspend Russia's participation in the treaty, with Vladimir Putin instructing the Ministry of Defence to initiate programmes on a modification of the launcher of the Kalibr naval missile for a ground-to-ground variant, an on a new hypersonic ground-to-ground missile of short and intermediate range.

Politically, the case has been mobilised in a way that is in line with Russia's now well-known positions on the world order: pointing out the irresponsible behaviour of the United States, posing as a responsible actor, trying to get the Europeans out of what Russia sees as their strategic inertia, dramatizing the issues to stimulate the European public opinion.

Moscow's past desire to multilateralize the treaty or to arrange for a joint withdrawal with the United States was partly due to the Russian military's concern to correct an asymmetry with its Chinese neighbour. However, expressing such a position would imply that Russia feels threatened by China, a statement that in the current context is politically impossible to make. In this context, the prospect of deployments allowed only beyond the eastern Urals seems to be an unrealistic assumption.

With regard to Moscow's position on the future of arms control, Russia has long been committed to the subject as an essential tool to maintain strategic stability, as a source of participation in international governance on an equal footing with other major powers, and as a source of "great power-to-great power" dialogue with the United States.

On this issue, Russian experts express disappointment about the collapse of the Cold War legacy structure, but to what extent is their nostalgic approach shared in Moscow? Russia has taken note of the weakening interest of the US (compared to its own) on the subject since the end of the Cold War, and has also grasped that its positions on the conditions for further disarmament are no longer likely to succeed in a politico-strategic context that is likely to deteriorate further. It has thus undertaken to respond to what it perceives as dangerous American initiatives in terms of maintaining strategic stability. The Russian military institution may be interested

1. A violation which the Russian authorities deny.

in having more freedom of action and being able to continue to cultivate ambiguity about its capabilities. The Russian government in general has been giving the impression that it wants to act without constraint lately. Some voices not very far from the government speak of soft arms control: it could mean moving from arms control based on deterrence to arms control based on the control of new weapons and technologies.

Ultimately, Russia believes that it has no good reason to appear to be the only one committed to efforts to save arms control, even if it probably has other priorities than investing excessively in a renewed arms race and certainly has an interest in measures that can ensure the predictability of military programmes and activities.

American motivations and implications, by Philippe Gros, Senior research fellow, FRS

The majority of experts and observers no longer question the administration's conclusions regarding the Russians' violation of the treaty. The question remained: what to do? The decision to withdraw from the INF came from John Bolton, a National Security Adviser who had long been hostile to both Russia and arms control. However, this decision is supported on the one hand by the Pentagon and on the other hand by a majority of Republican Congressmen. Indeed, politically, the withdrawal from the INF Treaty is in line with a major tightening of the US security strategy, aimed at preserving leadership against the Russian and Chinese "revisionist" powers. The US must no longer tie its hands against opponents, in this case Russia, which are seen as biasing, cheating and taking advantage of this to advance their interests. This hardening gives new vigour to unilateral neoconservative internationalism, which considers the logic of cooperation that underlies arms control as a weakness. For the Pentagon, the INF Treaty is seen as an obstacle to the re-creation of theatre ground fire options, complementary to naval and air, conventional and non-strategic nuclear fires, to recreate a graduated, credible scale of deterrence. As for Donald Trump himself, his probable lack of vision or even interest at the geostrategic level leads to contradictory positions: withdrawal from the INF Treaty for credibility reasons, criticism of the arms race for reasons of cost. The majority of the expert community, particularly the Liberals, disapproved of this withdrawal. The

Conservatives are more divided. These opponents explain that withdrawal ultimately only serves Russia, that the Americans do not really need these weapons and that, more broadly, the abandonment of this treaty means a historic shift by the United States opening the dangerous path to open-ended proliferation, and increases the insecurity of NATO's European allies. The contrasting positions of the latter are spread over fairly traditional diplomatic fault lines.

The main implication of this withdrawal on capacities concerns the US Army and conventional missiles. By 2028, the Army intends to be able to implement its new concept of "multi-domain operations" to counter access denial, consisting above all in disrupting, by the joint force, integrated air defence and fire systems. In this context, the Long-Range Precision Fires are its priority. Thus, withdrawal from the treaty could allow the Army to extend the range of its future operational fire system, the Precision Strike Missile (PrSM), currently arbitrarily set at 499 km. At these ranges, the Army also intends to develop new anti-ship capabilities similar to a revival of coastal defence with the Land-Based Antiship Missile, a capability that could also be of interest for the Marine Corps. In both cases, the main aim is to strengthen deterrence capacity by denying ("deterrence by denial") the Chinese naval forces. This year, the Army finally unveiled its ambition to develop strategic range fires, with two weapon systems: the Land-Based Hypersonic Missile (LBHM) glider, with a range of 2200 km, and the strategic long-range cannon, with a range of 1800 km. The Pentagon has studied other options in the event of the abandonment of the treaty: land-based cruise missiles (GLCMs), simple intermediate range ballistic missiles (IRBMs) or with trajectory shaping vehicles manoeuvring.

Finally, the abandonment of the Treaty strengthens some of the Democrats, the majority in the House, in their intention to reduce funding for the modernisation of the Triad. In addition, they have introduced a bill to set the prohibition of any "first use policy" in stone.

The end of the INF Treaty seen from Beijing, by Emmanuel Puig, Advisor, DGRIS, MOD, France

The American withdrawal from the INF Treaty offers Washington new strategic options in view of the competition being played with

Beijing.

American forces could rapidly deploy conventional mid-range conventional ballistic and cruise systems in the Chinese neighbourhood.

This new possibility reduces the defences that Beijing had put in place over the past two decades.

For the Chinese regime, this new situation complicates the strategic equation: whereas its stance towards the United States consisted in demonstrating an ability to impose a crippling cost on the potential deployment of American forces in its periphery, the permanent location of American systems within the anti-access zones considerably reduces the harshness of the architecture.

Nevertheless, the Chinese regime still has the means to counter American objectives militarily (whether through the development of new programmes, or increasing investment in existing ones, such as hypervelocity) and diplomatically (pressure on Japan, South Korea and the other states – Philippines – that could host these systems).

Beyond that, the possibility of China participating in a trilateral treaty on this type of weaponry is almost non-existent: Nearly 80 % of China's conventional and nuclear arsenal is based on "INF-type" delivery systems; a treaty limiting these capabilities would be perceived as playing into the hands of the United States and Russia while excessively constraining China. Finally, Beijing considers that it is not concerned by arms control in view of the considerable quantitative gap between its arsenal and that of the US and Russia.

Session 2 : Arms control in question

The future of New Start, by Emmanuelle Maitre, Research fellow, FRS

With the disappearance of the ABM Treaty in 2002 and the INF Treaty this year, and the difficulties encountered by the Conventional Forces Treaty, the Open Skies Treaty and the Vienna Document, the New Start is a relic in bilateral arms control. Nevertheless, its future is uncertain. Its disappearance would signal a

profound challenge to the current arms control system and raise questions about its adaptation to the new strategic context.

The New Start was signed in 2010 and entered into force in 2011. The planned reductions were to be achieved 7 years after that date, which was the case, and the treaty was concluded for a period of 10 years, bringing it to February 2021. According to the text of the Treaty, the New Start can be extended for 5 years, by presidential decision of both parties. Russia has already reportedly indicated that it favours this option, which is officially under consideration on the American side. It now seems that domestic policy considerations will play an important role in the United States in deciding whether or not to extend the New Start. However, capacity and operational considerations must be carefully considered. In terms of strategic arsenals, the disappearance of the Treaty would not necessarily mean a drastic increase in capacity on both sides, as armaments programmes are the result of long-term investments and depend on budgetary trade-offs and limited production capacity. Nevertheless, increases could be anticipated in some categories of weapons. This would signal the abandonment of parity in certain segments and would result in political pressure to "catch up" with the opponent. In addition, the New Start is characterized by an extensive verification and inspection regime. Its disappearance would produce after a few years a notable lack of information, particularly on the American side, on enemy arsenals and deployments. It would require increased intelligence efforts in this area and would deprive both governments of reliable and uncontested sources, allowing strategies of uncertainty and postures of ambiguity to flourish.

Beyond the political considerations specific to the Trump administration, which makes it impossible to predict the outcome of the case, the post-New Start issue raises several points:

- The relevance of strategic arms control in a context of asymmetric capability developments: the issue is not new but seems to be taking on considerable importance as the three major nuclear powers develop their strategic arsenals on diversified segments and as infra-conventional/conventional and strategic lines seem blurred.
- The relevance of continuing these discussions in a bilateral context: Russia and the United States regularly mention

their willingness to include China in these discussions. Such a perspective would require a complete rethinking of the concept of arms control agreements and probably a move away from quantitative rationale.

- The question of verification. The INF case has had a lasting impact on arms control by demonstrating the risk of violation. For many, arms control cannot work unless there is a minimum of trust in the fulfilment of commitments made. This trust can be created through robust verification measures, which is required by NPR 2018. Nevertheless, the US administration remains divided on this issue, with for example National Security Advisor John Bolton admitting his preference for more flexible systems such as the SORT Treaty, negotiated in 2002.

New challenges and issues, by Zacharie Gross, Deputy Director, Nuclear Disarmament, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, France

The foundations of Euro-Atlantic security are now undergoing profound change and the relationship between deterrence, conventional/anti-missile defence and arms control for Europeans needs to be rethought. The deterioration of strategic American-Russian relations has weakened the scope of arms control instruments, which, although mainly bilateral, affect the security of the European continent. Russia's violation of the INF Treaty and the prospect of an American withdrawal from the treaty increase the risk of the disappearance of this entire architecture, which is subject to serious tensions. In parallel, the future of the New Start concluded in 2010 between the United States and Russia, which entered into force in 2011, is uncertain. New Start is due to expire in 2021 and at this stage, no option to renew the commitments has been agreed upon between the two parties. At the same time, the implementation of commitments in the field of non-strategic weapons remains opaque and Russian and American nuclear doctrines are under criticism.

In addition to the challenges of arms control, challenges of nuclear and ballistic proliferation (Democratic People's Republic of Korea - DPRK, Iran) and the development of new weapons systems (President Putin's Armoury speech) raise new questions in terms of strategic stability. The questioning of

American-Russian arms control instruments therefore forces Europeans and Allies to rethink their security architecture (what place for deterrence? What arms control objectives? What new systems could be destabilising? What follow-up to New Start?)

These questions arise in a context of heightened public expectations in terms of nuclear disarmament (prohibitionist movement) and ethics (humanitarian approaches) and loss of familiarity with the culture of deterrence and even with strategic issues. This calls, particularly in the perspective of the 2020 Review Conference of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), for an unambiguous defence of European security interests, the non-proliferation norm, a pragmatic approach to disarmament and a reflection on the conditions for a revival of arms control.

Is arms control still a relevant discipline for managing conflict between states? by Benjamin Hauteau, Senior Research Fellow, FRS

In 1962², Raymond Aron proposed a broad definition of arms control for the French public that remains useful and practical to this day. In his view, it included all mechanisms, initiatives, actions, behaviours, concerted or uncoordinated, unilateral, bilateral or multilateral, political or legal, legally binding or non-binding, designed to limit the volume of violence in international affairs rather than the actual use of violence.

Arms control under international law lies between the disarmament process, which is intended to be part of legally binding and universal processes, and the various reactive initiatives to combat the proliferation of weapons. These three approaches correspond to three successive periods. The first is schematically that of the League of Nations and the meeting of the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva in 1932. The second one accompanies the doctrinalization of nuclear deterrence during the Cold War. The third is the post-Cold War era and the emergence of what were called "new threats" to security almost twenty years ago. In this chronology, the arms control lived its golden age between 1961³ and July 1991⁴.

2. *Paix et Guerre entre les nations*, Calmann-Lévy, 1962

3. Zorine-McCloy Declaration.

4. START 1.

To say that arms control is a Cold War discipline is not only to put it in a chronology. First of all, arms control must be based on a tripod: bipolar world order, structuring conflict between the two poles, bilateral acceptance of the notion of strategic parity. Arms control then reminds us that generically, the subject seeks to frame and stabilize nuclear deterrence in a pragmatic way. Arms control is therefore an integral part of nuclear deterrence. It has become a tool in the diplomat-strategist toolbox. Arms control is no longer a generic collective security discipline but an intergovernmental security policy. The corollary of this new reality makes it possible to further circumscribe the definition of arms control, which becomes any form of cooperation between adversaries aimed at reducing the risks of war and nuclear escalation and/or limiting competition in the field of armaments. Arms control led the United States and the Soviet Union to co-manage deterrence. It was a bilateral technique. Another generic characteristic: arms control must be consensual because it translates into reciprocal commitments that strengthen mutual trust. It is therefore a paradoxical form of partnership.

If we go even further into the implications of the theoretical core, arms control is not so much about eliminating a weapon system as it is about shaping a predictable nuclear relationship through transparency mechanisms with a dual virtue: avoiding strategic planning based on the worst-case scenario, avoiding miscalculations and perceptual errors more generally. For the USSR and the United States, legally binding constraints on their arsenals gradually shifted towards two main objectives: approximate parity and force survivability. Naturally, with the end of the Cold War, the very detailed numerical parity objective lost its prominence in the American debate, as illustrated by the American withdrawal from the ABM Treaty and the conclusion of the SORT Treaty in spring 2002.

The post-Cold War era tried to adapt arms control to a more flexible strategic environment based on non-binding cooperation and the ambition for flexibility. This shift has not worked, as illustrated by the almost complete deconstruction of the security architecture in Europe, except for the Open Skies Treaty because it remains a useful source of information for States parties, especially for Russia.

With the return of the nuclear factor to the

centre of international security relations since the middle of the current decade, the accounting pragmatism that drives arms control once again makes this approach relevant after more than two decades of uncertainty. But as a discipline it can probably no longer structure the global strategic order.

Conclusion, by Bruno Racine, President, FRS

This half-day of debates focused on the following question: does arms control belong to a bygone era? Indeed, the conceptual and geographical premises that had founded arms control during the Cold War seem outdated: The acceptance of mutual vulnerability thanks to the drastic limitation of defensive systems embodied in the ABM Treaty and the shared desire to regulate the otherwise indefinite increase in offensive armaments on the one hand, the centrality of the European theatre as an issue of the rivalry between the two main protagonists on the other hand. The American withdrawal from the ABM Treaty in 2002, the uncertainty about the future of New Start, the clinical death of both the INF Treaty and the CFE Treaty undoubtedly signal the change of era. In addition, the two-component equation no longer reflects the world's evolution, while China intends to assert itself as a major strategic competitor of the United States and highly unstable regional equations (India-Pakistan, North Korea, Iran and the Middle East) have multiplied. In addition, there has been a climate of mistrust between Washington and Moscow for several years, very different from that prevailing during the Cold War, when it can be said that the two adversaries respected each other – also in the sense of being held in respect of each other. It is this mutual mistrust that explains why the treaties have gradually disintegrated from within and gradually been gutted of their substance. It is striking that this progressive collapse of the arms control architecture has therefore taken place, if not in indifference, then at least in the resignation of Western opinion, in contrast to the heated debates of the 1970s and 1980s. This is therefore not a time for optimism, as indicated by the fact that a simple limited extension of New Start, which would only save time, would appear to be the greatest possible success under the current circumstances.

If we focus on the purpose of arms control, our question becomes: what would be the objective of a new policy in this field today,

assuming that the old architecture is largely obsolete? We must return to the starting point of arms control. At the time of the Cold War, the goal of the two protagonists was to prevent one of them from having a disarming first strike capability, which would have destabilised the strategic relationship, and it was not imagined, after the Cuban crisis, that a nuclear escalation could take place outside the European theatre. In a very different geostrategic and technological environment, what would be the common interests of the United States and Russia today? There are several areas of concern that would justify bilateral dialogue: For example, how to prevent a regional crisis from turning into a nuclear crisis, involving the effective use of weapons (the Syrian crisis showed that the two powers can talk to each other to avoid inadvertent clashes)? What would be the equivalents of disarming first strike capability today, at a time of increasingly sophisticated conventional capabilities, spatial or cyber vulnerabilities? From there, there would be two ways to relaunch a bilateral dialogue on arms control: from the top, as following the Reagan-Gorbachev summit in 1986, or from the bottom, as has been done in Syria. The second option, which is more technical and less politically and symbolically engaging, would probably be the most realistic one in the current political climate between the two capitals. The question of extending the dialogue to China does not seem very likely in the short term, but both Beijing and Washington have an interest in avoiding the accidental outbreak of a direct confrontation.

As for Europe, which is seeing the INF Treaty erased after the CFE Treaty, it is almost orphaned by the attitude of its main ally. Donald Trump's policy is already widening the gap between those who, like Poland, will want to give Washington as many guarantees of loyalty as possible, and those who are convinced of the need to develop Europe's strategic autonomy. The forthcoming Atlantic Alliance Summit will be an important test of the ability of Europeans to unite in vision and action.

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