

Contents

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Preface	ix
Twenty-five Years Later—Where INF Has Gone	1
<i>Vignette: Welcome to Geneva</i>	9
Why INF	11
Zero-Zero, MAYNARD GLITMAN	29
<i>Vignette: Welcome to the Bubble</i>	39
Some Key Legal Problems, GEOFFREY LEVITT	41
<i>Vignette: Rituals</i>	49
The INF Treaty in Perspective: Three Pieces	53
The INF Treaty Process from a Geneva Perspective, LEO REDDY	55
The End Game in Washington, ROGER HARRISON	75
<i>Vignette: A Meeting</i>	85
The INF Treaty, Another Perspective	87
<i>Vignette: It's in the Bag</i>	121
How the Treaty Would Operate	123
INF Verification—Making the Treaty Work	125
Swords into Plowshares: The Elimination Protocol, RONALD BARTEK	143
<i>Vignette: The Long Flight Home</i>	153
The Senate and INF Ratification	155
<i>Vignette: The Altar of Tack</i>	201

NATO and the Treaty	203
The INF Treaty: Lessons Learned for Dealing with NATO	205
The INF Treaty: NATO Nuclear Strategy and Arms Control	213
What Should Be Done about Tactical Nuclear Weapons? JOHN A. WOODWORTH	233
<i>Vignette: Shall We Give Thanks</i>	241
How to Negotiate with Gorbachev's Team	243
Asian Arms Control Attitudes Post-INF	263
Dispute Resolution in Bilateral Arms Control: The INF Experience, JOHN A. WOODWORTH	277
<i>Vignette: A Moment at Midnight</i>	289
Appendix: INF Treaty Text	291
Basic Treaty Text	293
Elimination Protocol	314
Inspection Protocol	331
Annex Provisions on Privileges and Immunities of Inspectors	354
Corrigenda	356
Agreed Minute	358
Diplomatic Notes	362
Basing Countries Agreement	368
Official Photos of INF Missiles	379
Endnotes	391
Index	392

Twenty-Five Years Later: Where INF Has Gone

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*There is a tide in the affairs of men.
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;
Omitted, all the voyage of their life
Is bound in shallows and in miseries.
On such a full sea are we now afloat,
And we must take the current when it serves,
Or lose our ventures.*

—Brutus, *Julius Caesar*

It is not the purpose of the following remarks to attempt to sort out the labyrinth of international arms control over the twenty-five years since the signing of the U.S.-Soviet INF Treaty. A phalanx of researchers, spear-tipped by a generation of graduate students, are already mining the memories of individual negotiators and the diplomatic archives of nations to extract nuggets of knowledge and insight from the dross of deadly dull commentary. Nevertheless, there are some useful perspectives looking back from a future that has now arrived, but which was often not even a glimmer in December 1987. Indeed, much has changed unalterably, and much is in the process of continuing to change.

Geopolitical Constants

We say, somewhat ruefully at times, that “change is the only constant.” It is also useful, however, to note what has *not* changed in the intervening quarter century since the signing of the INF Treaty.

First, the global security arrangements of fifty years ago remain structurally recognizable today. Essentially, the political-

social-economic structure of the West (the NATO “sixteen” of the time) and key non-NATO allies (Japan, India) continues unaltered. There have been no political revolutions among these countries: the structures of their governments remain the same. We even have the same Queen Elizabeth II presiding over an ever-diminishing British Empire. Almost none of the countries of the NATO Alliance of 1987 (Germany being the obvious exception) have changed geographic boundaries. “Canada” is still one country, and not separated into two or more nation states; the “United States” likewise remains territorially unaltered, still an *Unum* and not a *Pluribus*. Thus the NATO Alliance, although substantially expanded numerically (and bereft of the USSR/Warsaw Pact threat) continues; continental North American defense and security, epitomized by the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD), remains a concern.

Next, economies (despite the battering from the Great Recession) remain committed to free market capitalism. The lessened role and comparative strength of the United States does not eliminate the reality that the USA remains first (and still without equals).

Additionally, many of the “intractable problems” of 1987 are still such today. The Middle East looks no closer to a solution. Cyprus remains deadlocked. India and Pakistan persist at daggers drawn (now with nuclear “daggers”) over Kashmir and most other elements of their bilateral relationship. Until the 2011 Arab Spring, many local actors (Mubarak, Qadaffi) and the power families in Tunisia, Syria, and Yemen had been unaltered since 1987. Even many of our enemies (or should we say competitors?) remain the same, specifically the Peoples Republic of China, Russia, North Korea, Iran, and Cuba. To be sure, the classic diplomatic axiom that that we have neither eternal friends nor eternal enemies remains pertinent, but at the twenty-five to fifty year mark, it sometimes seems like an eternity.

So What Has Changed?

It is also useful to recognize and appreciate the quotation from Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*. There *are* times and tides in the affairs of men and the history of nations that the fortunate seize, and oth-

ers regret. One cannot argue that had the United States and Soviet Union not acted adroitly to conclude an INF Treaty, something comparable would never have come to pass. But the aphorism that it takes two to make peace and only one to make war remains accurate. Without a credible interlocutor, no actor is willing to risk failure. It is even more difficult when the actors had a history of intense suspicion and mutual distrust (although happily never direct armed combat). Nevertheless, the opportunity to move productively toward agreement on intermediate range ballistic missiles was one that both Washington and Moscow elected to seize.

The first, most obvious change has been attitudinal. The “Doomsday Clock” in the *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists* (an always overrated “viewing with alarm” mechanism) has long ago backed away from its “one minute to midnight” nuclear holocaust setting. The palatable tension that gripped NATO nations for much of the Cold War, the idea that World War III was only a trivial miscalculation away from being a horrible reality, is now gone. The Soviet Union is history; its Khrushchevian era predications that the USSR would “bury” us is no longer remembered, let alone cited by the post-1989 generation.

The generation that took the baton from the hand of the World War II “greatest generation” was imbued with the almost desperate concern that the West might have to fight outnumbered and win against Soviet tank armies rushing through the Fulda Gap. The generation that executed the INF Treaty also had that constant fear in mind. It is a fear almost impossible to communicate to later generations, just as the horrors of WWI trenches are barely muddy memories today, and the survivors of Nazi holocaust still struggle against blithe “deniers.” It is perhaps the modern concept of a “reset” in Russo-American relations (albeit attenuated by a revanchist Russia) that has made war in Europe today seem such an unthinkable circumstance. It permits continued operation of a NATO Alliance with the flexibility to operate “out of area” at greatly reduced strength without the concern that an instant of inattention could result in Soviets on the banks of the Rhine.

Next, it would be to ignore the proverbial elephant in the living room not to specify the obvious: the collapse of the Soviet Union. Its replacement by the Russian Federation and an assembly of spin-

off states, from those as large as Ukraine to miniatures such as the Baltics (Lithuania, Estonia, and Latvia) is unquestionably the most basic and dramatic change in global foreign policy in the past twenty-five years. Just as we continue to sort out the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, virtually a century after the end of World War I, so we will continue to address the ramifications of the Soviet Union aftermath into the indefinite future. The most positive outcome thus far has been that these offspring are more or less democratic, mostly not a threat to neighbors, and without armament at a level to disconcert other European/Central Asian states. Is there a democracy in Russia's future with or without President Putin? No one can tell, but at least the chances for a Russian state not militarily aggressive appear relatively good; if the future holds a "jaw, jaw" rather than a "war, war," we can accept such an outcome.

No More Yugoslavia

If the disintegration of the Soviet Union came without bloodshed, the collapse of Yugoslavia was another story. The artificial construct that Josef Broz Tito created by grafting various Balkan elements around a Serbian nation simply could not hold. Its violent collapse may be the most regrettable development of the past 25 years; but one in which it is impossible to see how disaster could have been avoided. Despite the efforts of some of the most creative and dedicated diplomats available in the West, the shards of former-Yugoslavia have continued to fracture. The ethnic groups not "cleansed" from territory in which they are now a minority appear to have little future; there are more tragedies waiting to happen.

A Quarter Century of Arms Control

*I met a traveler from an antique land
Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert. Near them, on the sand,
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, ...;
And on the pedestal these words appear:
"My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!"*

*Nothing beside remains. ...
The lone and level sands stretch far away.*
— Percy Bysshe Shelley
The Examiner, London, January 11, 1818

There was a touch of arrogance in the builders of the INF Treaty. We were venturing into the unknown: an “agreement” with a most disagreeable adversary. Moscow historically had never adhered to such an agreement; violations great and small with all range of partners were the hallmark of agreements with the Soviets. At one point, there was even the perhaps apocryphal claim that Moscow had *never* fully honored an agreement. Hence, the frequently cited Reagan sobriquet, “Trust but verify” was constantly on our minds.

Nevertheless, we hoped that the INF Treaty would be the benchmark “first” in a series of defining arms control agreements; that we would break the pattern and start a relationship between Moscow and the West that would accord with NATO’s objectives since its 1949 inception: enhanced security at a lower level of armament. What we feared was that the INF Treaty would be a “one off” (a phrase not then invented) exercise; that it would at best be a stepping stone to nowhere, or at worst another failed agreement in which the Soviets were identified as having cheated on various treaty provisions, discrediting further arms control negotiation.

Instead, we have had an agreement that indeed met our hopes rather than our fears; a building block that has led to further agreement on conventional forces, strategic nuclear systems (most recently “New START”), and agreements to eliminate chemical and biological weapons. Likewise, following the collapse of the USSR, there have been agreements to secure fissile material and to assure that weapons in parts of the old Soviet Union that became separate independent states were returned to Russian control.

The process has neither been fast, inexpensive, nor comprehensive. We failed in efforts to secure Senate ratification of a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, and there is still no anti-satellite agreement (the PRC demonstrated ability to shoot down a satellite in 2007). We are still far from agreement on a strategic antimissile defense agreement (our deployments in Alaska remain a point of difference). Efforts to devise a theater antimissile system,

protecting NATO allies against prospective attack from rogue states such as Iran, have encountered many political and technical difficulties. In this regard, the U.S. government has struggled not only with internal policy conflicts in the transition from the Bush to the Obama administrations, but also second thoughts by possible basing countries in Europe, and relentless hostility to such a system from Moscow.

New Threats

The passage of a quarter century has sparked developments that did not even qualify as the proverbial “cloud the size of a man’s hand” on the politico-military horizon of 1987. In effect, technical progress has created and produced “INF” missiles in a series of countries: India; Pakistan; North Korea; and Iran. Significantly, China also retains such capabilities. Obviously, none are constrained in any way by the U.S.-Soviet INF Treaty. Nor is there any serious likelihood that these states, either individually or corporately, would accept the INF Treaty provisions. For most of them, the INF Treaty eliminating ground launched missiles between the ranges 500 and 5,000 kilometers would eliminate their entire missile force.

Although India and Pakistan are focused on each other, North Korea and prospectively Iran are potentially threats to many neighbors and even relatively distant states. Certainly, the prospect is that both North Korea and Iran will continue to develop and expand their missile forces (and concurrently nuclear weapons—despite Iranian demurs that it has no nuclear weapons program). This circumstance prompts the question whether the INF Treaty remains valid, so far as its purpose was eliminating the threat to Europe and Asian allies from INF range missiles. To be sure, the threat is no longer Soviet missiles; however, while Soviet missiles might have been regarded as an ancillary threat to Asian allies such as Japan, Taiwan, and the Republic of Korea but more of a concern to the PRC, a North Korean ballistic missile force is a direct threat to Japan and the ROK. Likewise, sanguine observers might regard an Iranian nuclear ballistic missile force as primarily designed to be a deterrent against action by nuclear armed neighbors and a surety against U.S. attack; however, more skeptical governments through-

out the Middle East and Europe could see it as a direct threat for which they have no obvious deterrent. One need only attempt to factor in the Israeli nuclear program to move a simple headache to migraine status, contemplating resolving the Middle East political problems simultaneously with nuclear security issues.

Conclusion

Perhaps political analysts should simply accept the axiom that “sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof” and avoid any vast prescriptions based on half-vast conclusions. Contemporary historians, perhaps from self-indulgent hubris, repeatedly conclude that every bend in the political road is a seminal turning point in the sweep of history (see *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, a saga of Chinese political military action 2,000 years ago, expressing a full range of human drama with its parallels into the twenty-first century). In that context, the INF Treaty remains a useful, functional agreement that has enhanced the midterm security of those negotiating and concluding it. It is not necessary to ask for more.