Universidade de São Paulo - USP
Faculdade de Filosofia, Letras e Ciências Humanas - FFLCH
Departamento de Ciência Política - DCP

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The Trump Administration and the United States withdrawal from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty

Autor: Vinicius Martins Dalbelo

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Abstract

In 2019, the Trump administration finalized the United States' withdrawal from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF Treaty). The INF Treaty originated from the fundamental roles of anti-communist Ronald Reagan and Soviet reformer Mikhail Gorbachev after an alarming increase in bilateral tensions in the early 1980s. For three decades, the INF Treaty was a fundamental part of the international nuclear non-proliferation regime, strategic stability in Europe and Russian-American relations. This investigation correlates with two prominent fields of contemporary American political studies: i) the growing influence of Trump's populist conservatism on American politics; ii) the emergence of a conflictive global system with the rise of China and the resumption of Russia. This paper employs a qualitative multimethod combining causal narrative with the historical method. Two sets of sources have been utilized: (i) declassified U.S. government documents and reports; (ii) narrative sources, such as press releases, interviews, Twitter posts and autobiographies. This within-case study is expected to contribute to recent discussions about Trumpism and its main features for U.S. foreign policy.

Keywords: INF Treaty; Donald Trump; United States; Foreign Policy.

Introduction[1]

This paper aims to understand the domestic and international factors of the United State's withdrawal from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (henceforth INF Treaty) under the Trump administration in 2019. The disengagement was unwelcomed by lawmakers (both Democrats and Republicans), international allies, and most scholars since no benefit could be explicitly displayed. Still, Trumpist advocates rejoiced in the president's isolationist, unilateralist and hawkish approach and his commitment to reassert American might against international foes. This inquiry correlates with two prominent fields in contemporary American political studies: i) the persistent influence of Trump's conservatism over American politics and its effects on foreign policy and international role; ii) the emergence of a conflictive multipolarity with China's ascension and Russia's resumption, which has been called "New or Second Cold War."

In 1987, Ronald Reagan (1981-1989) and Mikhail Gorbachev (1985-1991) reached a historic moment when they signed the INF Treaty. Under the INF, the superpowers agreed, in an unprecedented way, on the elimination of all their Intermediate-range ballistic missiles (IRBM) and Ground-launched cruise missile (GLCM) stockpile and related launchers. IRBM and GLCM are both ground-based, ranging from 500km to 5500 km and multi-setting because they can transport conventional, biological, chemical, and nuclear warheads (Hughes 2009). Until 1991, the U.S. and the Soviet Union (USSR) eliminated 2,692 missiles and initiated a 10-year on-the-spot verification (up to 2001). In 2014, the U.S. accused Russia of an alleged violation and material breach when bilateral tensions escalated. Moreover, American concerns about the Chinese current missile build-up have become central in its strategic unease since the late 2000s. Trump's response was to withdraw the U.S. from the INF Treaty unilaterally on August 2, 2019. The complete withdrawal was expected but still was met with broad concern. The INF's primary motivation had been a critical framework for European security since the 1980s, Russian-American relations, and the international non-proliferation regime.

The 32-years-old Treaty generated extensive research. Overall, the conclusions about its existence and continuity have been positive. In the 1990s, researchers established its

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success in the non-proliferation regime, but since the early 2000s, a vertical proliferation has been befalling in China, North Korea, Iran, India, and Pakistan. The international system presently faces a very high possibility of new testing, development, and deployment of formerly banned missiles by Russia and the U.S. European and Asian theatres are severely more affected by the INF's end; still, it engenders menacing security effects over the whole international system.[2]

Russian-American and Chinese-American rivalries have been ascending continuously since the early 2010s. The first is strategic competition, in which the two most important military powers keep their struggle over areas of influence (Pautasso 2014). The second is economic competition and future strategic one, given China's rapid military build-up and current preponderance in international trade, tech industries, and infrastructure. Although the concept of a "New or Second Cold War" is not widely embraced nor unanimous, a new competitive multipolar framework might be dominant from now on. So, the INF demise is a central piece because its security effects will overflow to other dimensions of geopolitics and international affairs.

Moreover, the American current political scenario has dominated media outlets worldwide with the recent 2020 presidential election. The Trumpist-4-years White House has placed the U.S. in an isolationist pathway not seen since before World War II and has been identified as a brand new variety of American conservatism (Ayerbe 2018; Pecequilo and Lopes 2018). The Republican party had been overwhelmingly Reaganist since the 1980s, but now, its future is uncertain. Still, even with Trump's defeat, political scientists are foreseeing a lasting and prevailing influence of this new American politics approach, this is, Trumpism.

The INF Treaty demise is a specific part of this context, however a critical one. During the Cold War, the two most dangerous scenarios were derived from missile development, testing, and deployment: the Cuban missile (1962) and Euromissiles (1983) crises. Although the INF had prohibited only two missile classes, those represent more geostrategic complexities than other varieties. First, in continental countries such as Russia and China, they can be deployed extensively and possibly threaten all of Europe

[2] The New York Times chief diplomatic correspondent in Europe, Steven Erlanger, made a summary about current American challenges in the nuclear arena. Presently, the U.S. faces a growing threat from nuclear adversaries, less arms control overall, and generalized doubt about its resolve to act, after Trump's isolationist approache (Erlanger 2021).

and Asia. Second, to deploy countervailing and countermeasure deterrence missiles, the U.S. would need special permissions from other governments. Since the demise, Japan, South Korea, Poland, and Germany explicitly warned they would not accept American IRBM and GLCM in their territories.

The theoretical assumption is based on Neoclassic Realism approach, in which the causality is expressed by the systemic condition, i.e., superpower competition and balance of power, but takint into account the intervening domestic conditions and players within the causal mechanism. The research design is based upon a multimethod process, combining the causal narrative with the historical approach to grasp the U.S. withdrawal pathway. I employ source-triangulation to enhance internal validity, which is also a crucial methodological tool to support the findings. This source-driven paper has engaged official unclassified U.S. government documents, such as reports on adherence to and compliance with arms control, the Congress' National Security Defensive Acts (NSDA), and Trump Administration INF Treaty Integrated Strategy. Narrative sources are also utilized, such as Trump's press releases and Twitter posts, John Bolton's memoir, and official communiqués. The spatiality encompasses the Department of Defense, Department of State, the U.S. Mission to International Organizations in Geneva, the U.S. Congress and the White House.

This paper has been divided into four parts. Section one begins by laying out the INF Treaty's historical background and looks at how it took a crucial role in the non-proliferation regime, European security stability, and Russian-American relations. Section two describes the missile proliferation during the Obama administration, the ascending rivalry with Russia and the alleged violation. In section three, I review the present pieces of evidence from the Trump administration to examine the INF's recent history and demise. Finally, the final remarks section assesses the outcomes and short and medium-term missile proliferation and impacts on contemporary international security.

The INF creation and importance for international security

In the 1960s, the USSR deployed its first intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM), placing the U.S. continental territory under an international foe's reach for the first time. The development, production, and deployment of ballistic missiles became central

concerns during the Cold War. In the 1970s, the Soviets developed a powerful intermediate-range ballistic missile (IRBM), the SS-20, threatening Western Europe. At the time, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) responded with a dual-track strategy: NATO would continue negotiating a diplomatic response towards the Soviet military build-up, whilst the U.S. would develop and deploy its improved IRBM version, the Pershing II (Collins 2009). Known as the Euromissile crisis, the 1983 IRBM American-Soviet dispute is considered the second most dangerous moment in the Cold War (after the 1962 Cuban missiles crisis). The works of McGeehan (1983), Haass (1988), and Hughes (2009) focused on the initial developments, NATO's response and the massive popular outrage, which stirred up the Nuclear Freeze campaign in the U.S. and Western Europe. Complementarily, Glitman and Burns (2006) and Rueckert (1993) focused on within-case studies and historical approaches to explore the negotiation itself. Overall, all scholars recognized the improving Soviet-American relations since 1985, when Reagan found Gorbachev a willing Soviet leader to negotiate.

After the USSR fall, the Treaty was inherited by six former republics: Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. However, Russia became the de facto successor, remaining the major military power after the Soviet secession. The Treaty kept a withdrawal rule, which stipulated that either party to request termination should respect a six-month deadline and present consistent motivation.

However, the INF restricted scope has always been criticized, and alternatives were put to lessen its fragility. The U.S. and its allies have created the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) to prevent the technology transfering needed to create offensive missiles. The MTCR was strengthened in the 1990s when Russia and other former members of the Warsaw Pact joined, promoting what Kearn (2012) called a "big cut in supply" (Kearn 2012, 24:26). In 2003, another significant development took place when the George W. Bush administration (2001-2009) launched the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) against trafficking in weapons of mass destruction and equipment necessary for its use, such as ballistic missiles (Bureau of International Security Initiative 2019). Kearn (2012) concluded the INF Treaty, the MTCR, and the PSI have been, jointly, successful in limiting horizontal proliferation, i.e., in countries that did not have prior technologies for ballistic missile development. However, during the 2000s, the international system observed a vertical proliferation, in which the former missile

possessors continued to develop and improve their technical capabilities. China, North Korea, Iran, and Pakistan refused to participate in the control regimes and managed to develop capable IRBM, among other offensive missiles (Kearn 2012). For a long time, India has also refused to be part of the MTCR, but that changed in 2016 after the country became an official member.

INF's role in international regimes is vastly explored. It seems indisputable the INF Treaty wielded a crucial role in the non-proliferation regime. The first assessments came in the 1990s in Ozga (1994) and Bowen (1997), whose main concern was the MTCR first-decade effectiveness. The authors concluded the missile non-proliferation regime improved qualitative and quantitatively, with prominent missile exporters accepting self-imposed restrictions. In the 2000s, Feickert (2003) and Gormley (2008) continued such evaluation. Although their writings were not restricted to the INF Treaty, the scholars reassessed arms control and non-proliferation regimes and manifested the Treaty's continuous importance and effectiveness. However, it was noticed limited usefulness regarding the GLCM proliferation for two mains reasons. First, GLCM components are similar to civil aviation, so the trading restrictions were not viable restraint tools. Second, GLCM-related rocketry (as the American Tomahawk missile) was broadly used by the U.S. Army during the Gulf War (1990-1991) and Iraq (2003-2011) and Afghanistan (2001-) wars (Kearn 2012).

In parallel to the non-proliferation regime, and despite it, the beginning of the 21st century testified the gradual return of Russian-American rivalry. In 2002, Bush pulled the U.S. out of the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABM Treaty), another significant Cold War outcome signed by Richard Nixon in 1972. The ABM Treaty prevented a likely and costly arms race to create anti-ballistic missile defense systems (Schulzinger 2012).[3] Such defense systems have been a constant in international security since the early Cold War years because, as Matchett (2021) affirms, they create an overall feeling of safety, and its defensive nature is much more political admissible. However, missile defense systems have a fatal flaw: they are cost-prohibitive and are moderate easily overrun by offensive systems. Despite this weakness, defensive systems exert a strong appeal in American

[3] The ABM Treaty dealt with increasing concern with offensive capabilities, and the search for an effective defense system. With an effective defense system, one of the superpowers would have the ability to negate a first strike, destabilize strategic parity and encourage preemptive attacks.

presidents and lawmakers (especially Republicans), having Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative a meaningful case.[4]

Following this pattern, Bush proposed to develop missile defense systems in Poland and the Czech Republic, met with criticism and suspicion by Russian authorities. Although Bush claimed the operation targeted Iran's offensive capabilities, the Kremlin understood it as an anti-Russian initiative. In 2005, Russian officials privately informed the American government of their pretension to leave the INF treaty, which came out publically in 2007. Harding (2007) presented the most compelling argument, arguing that Russia used the INF withdrawal as an implicit threat and retaliation against the U.S. "missile shield" in Europe. It is crucial to have in mind that without the INF, Russia can develop and deploy offensive missile systems against Western and Eastern Europe that could easily overwhelm American defensive systems. Both in Russia and the U.S., the INF restrictiveness was criticized by hawkish characters, especially considering China's rapid IRBM developments and stockpiling. For the Kremlin, Russia had more enemies on its borders than the U.S., so the Treaty was ill-suited to tackle their regional security concerns. However, Russia would not leave the INF Treaty, and in 2007 it officially proposed at the United Nations (UN) its globalization or multilateralization to incorporate new regional IRBM-owners. The U.S. government supported the request, but countries like China refused the expansion (Kearn 2012).

The Obama Administration and the Russian violations

The missile proliferation came to be an acute dispute in current international security policy-making. The Obama administration (2009-2017) carried out the anti-missile defense project in Europe, renaming it the Phased Adaptative Approach (PAA). The PAA set up four phases to the European defense system deployment. It began with the SM-3 Block IB maritime interceptor missiles in the Mediterranean (2011), followed by SM-3 Block IA (2015) in Romania, then SM-3 Block IIA model (2018) in Poland, and finally would reach a more accurate and robust SM-3 Block IIB model around 2020 (U.S. Bureau

[4] The Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) was a Reagan's proposed missile defense system in outerspace to defend American and American-allies territories from ballistic nuclear weapons. He pledged for a defensive system to end nuclear-war possibility. Although the SDI had an important role in bilateral negotiations, it never came to fruition, given techonological and economic constraints.

of Arms Control, Verification, and Compliance 2017). Eventually, for budgetary and technical restraints, the PAA last phase was abandoned. The Russians continued their criticism, stating two potential menaces. First, the American system endangered global strategic parity because the interceptor missiles would be effective against their intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBM). Second, the American reasoning was unconvincing, and the Kremlin affirmed the Iranian inability to produce and deploy shortly a perilous IRBM against American allies in Eurasia (Collina 2014). The Russians became sharper unease in 2013 when Iran negotiated the Joint Plan of Action, an agreement to freeze its nuclear program in exchange for economic and technological assistance with six powers.[5] Even after the deal, the U.S. decided to stick to the defense system, which the Kremlin defended to be compelling evidence that the PAA was an anti-Russian initiative. Finally, the anti-missile defense systems issue has been expanding globally as the U.S. decided to supply its allies in the Middle East (United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia) and Far Asia (Japan and South Korea). Not for nothing, anti-missile systems came to be part of different countries' military doctrines in the 2010s, such as China since 2013 (Farnsworth 2013).

Kearn's vertical proliferation hypothesis has been proved, and it became further accentuated in the 2010s. India successfully tested two IRBMs in the period, its Agni-4 (3500 km) and Agni-5 (5000 km), which government officials considered a major technological breakthrough in the country's military capabilities. The Indian example is exciting to understand the subtleties of missile proliferation in international relations. The IRBM class encompass missiles varying from 500km to 5500km, which raises meaningful geostrategic balance. In the Indian case, it is well documented its geopolitical rivalry with Pakistan, and both hold deterrence IRBMs aimed at each other. However, 1000km-IRBM is adequate for strategic deterrence. Thus Agni-4 and Agni-5 IRBMs are very likely not directed against the Muslim rival, but China. Not surprisingly, the Agni-5 could reach Beijing from anywhere in India (Crail and Masterson, 2012). Moreover, other countries developed their capabilities in the same period. Israel developed its Arrow-3, used in missile defense systems. Iran tested the Quad-F and Quad-H models in the Indian

[5] The Geneva Interim Agreement was the first formal agreement between the U.S. and Iran since the 1979 diplomatic breakup. Eventually, it led to the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, when Iran signed up a nuclear deal with the United Nation's Security Council permanent members plus the European Union. The JCPOA has receiving great attention since the Trump administration unilateral withdrawal. Recently, the Biden administration has promised to reengage America commitments to the deal (Davenport 2021).

Ocean. North Korea tested its 2010 Musudan model several times, although not always successfully. Two important conclusions can be drawn. First, in all of these cases, the missiles are IRBM models that would be banned if the INF Treaty was multilateralized after the Russian-American initiative. Secondly, the intermediate-range missile proliferation has its main stage in Asia, fostering a dangerous arms race in the region, which has been escalating recently.

With the acceleration of ballistic-missile vertical proliferation, INF critics grounded their views in this new geopolitical environment. In the U.S., a hard-line approach suggested the country could not adequately answer new challenges imposed by regional contesters, such as Iran, North Korea, and China. During the Obama administration, the Iranian nuclear program evolved into an existential threat to American hegemony in the Middle East (Pecequilo and Forner 2017). Fitzpatrick and Chipman (2009) concluded that Iran was moving towards nuclear capability, which could be attached to their also in development IRBM arsenal. Rubin (2012, para. 36) described Iranian missile development as "a showcase of missile proliferation" and argued that all the major obstacles to development, testing, and deployment would be rapidly overcome. In a very pessimistic conclusion, Rubin affirmed the missile non-proliferation regime's feebleness to restrain Iran.

The North Korea case was assessed by Cha (2009), Fitzpatrick (2011), and Visentini and Pereira (2014). Similarly, the authors concluded the continuous threat imposed by a very isolated and recalcitrant state, engaged in a political game of concessions and extractions with the U.S. based on its nuclear development. Kearn (2012) contends that North Korea is potentially more dangerous than Iran, given its biological and chemical weapons capabilities, which also could be attached to the multi-setting IRBM. North Korea also poses a critical problem as an essential source of prohibited missile technologies, providing missiles and components to Iran, Syria, among others.

In turn, China represents a much more significant challenge for future American international position and security strategies. The Asian aspirant to superpower has been receiving a lot of attention from scholars and policy analysts worldwide, including its missile build-up, as can be seen in Mulvenon et al. (2006), Carmo and Pecequilo (2014), and Pinotti (2015). For our purpose, it suffices to understand that China has engaged in a rapid arsenal-building, and two critical concerns arise. First, about 90% of the Chinese

arsenal is compounded by IRBM, and its missile build-up continues. Second, although the U.S. continental territory could not be reached from China with this missile model, the American presence in the Pacific ocean is severely compromised by the Chinese strategy known as A2/Area-Denial.[6]

Thus, it is not surprising that hawkish neoconservatives characters and institutions in the U.S. vocally expressed resentment with the INF, which they saw as limiting to American hegemony. On the other hand, the majority of scholars thought otherwise. Kearn's 2012 seminal work is a primary example. The author argued the U.S. had several conventional options to respond to the emerging regional security challenges, and the INF treaty withdrawal would just add costly and unnecessary political disputes. Even worse, the Treaty's demise would probably foster a new missile race.

To the dismay of international security policy-making specialists and scholars, a 2014 dispute between the U.S. and Russia led to the 2019 INF Treaty collapse. On January 30, 2014, State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki confirmed an alleged Russian violation after The New York Times had come up with the public allegation on January 29. The paper quoted "a possibility that Russia might have violated the INF Treaty," and the Undersecretary of State for Arms Control and International Security, Rose Gottemoeller, had initiated dialogue with Russia and NATO members (Gordon 2014). Presently, new pieces of information have been released and permit a more detailed analysis. The U.S. first raised INF concerns in May 2013, when Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs Thomas Donilon and Deputy Secretary of State William Burns met with Russian Security Council Secretary Nikolai Patrushev. In June, the Russian Ambassador to the U.S. Sergey Kislyak denied any non-compliant activity, which was reasserted in November by Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov, who reaffirmed Russian commitment to the Treaty (U.S. Mission in Geneva 2019).

In July 2014, the American government confirmed the violation through the "Adherence to and Compliance With Arms Control" report (Department of State 2014, 5), although providing few details. Media outlets reported that Obama and Putin talked directly about the issue, agreeing to organize high-level meetings to find a solution.

[6] According to Kearn (2012, 60:61) "anti-access measure to be any action by an opponent that has the effect of slowing the deployment of friendly forces into a theater, preventing them from operating from certain locations within the theater, or causing them to operate from distances farther from the locus of conflict than they would normally prefer".

However, Russian authorities categorically denied American accusations, starting years of mutual recriminations.

In September 2014, the first high-level meeting occurred in Moscow. Soon after, State Department spokeswoman Marie Harf reported both parties were unable to reach common ground (Barnes 2014). Then, in December, a joint session of the Armed Services and Foreign Affairs congressional committees summoned White House officials to discuss the violations. Gottemoeller stated the administration's willingness to resolve the impasse and possible responses were to be released. Among them, military alternatives caught up the attention because they allowed the U.S. to respond to the violation also transgressing the INF treaty. However, the Obama administration seemed determined to bring Russia back to compliance. Deputy Undersecretary of Defense for Policies, Brian McKeon, certified this idea in "the U.S. wants to avoid an escalatory cycle of action and reaction" (quoted in Collina 2015, para. 7).

During 2015 and 2016, Russian-American accusations and counter-accusations pattern reached a stalemate. The alleged INF violation became part of an increasing tension involving Crimea annexation, sanctions rounds, and Russia beginning an air campaign in Syria. As a consequence, the Obama administration adopted a broader response strategy towards Russia. Gottemoeller and McKeon testified in committees that "Russia is not violating the INF in isolation from its overall aggressive behaviour" (quoted Fieldhouse 2016, para. 23). Several bilateral and multilateral meetings took place, and NATO members were briefed about the Russian violation. In July 2016, during the Warsaw NATO Summit, members expressed their assessment, stating, “Allies therefore continue to call on Russia to preserve the viability of the INF Treaty through ensuring full and verifiable compliance” (NATO 2016, para. 62).

After 2014, the Republican party gained control of the Senate, becoming the majority party in both legislative houses. Republicans lawmakers escalated the dispute, organizing more than 60 briefings, hearings, and meetings about the alleged INF violation. The more hard-line approach was felt in both the 2015 and 2016 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) and reveal the increasing domestic political pressure over the administration to adopt tougher responses. The NDAA gathers all the provisions related to the annual budget and total expenditures of the Department of Defense, which allow, in practice, Congress to influence and directly impact agencies’ structures,

personnel and even set the policies to be pursued. Notwithstanding, the American Congress exerts a formidable influence over foreign policy through its capacity to withhold or release necessary funds for diverse goals. In the 2015 NDAA, the Russian violation is acknowledged in Section 1244 (2), and in subsection (3) is quoted General Martin Dempsey's assessment, stating "these violations are a serious challenge to the security of the United States and our allies. These actions, particularly when placed in the broader context of Russian regional aggression, must be met with a strategic response". Section 1651 outlined Congress expectations about American responses. The lawmakers demanded a "detailed description of any steps being taken or planned […] to reduce the negative impact of such actions on the national security." However, no drastic and specific military countermeasures were demanded (U.S. Congress 2015, 238, 274).

On the other hand, the 2016 NDAA represented a qualitative and quantitatively change. Not only the Russian violation had gained much more consideration, as it also called for a tougher and hawkish stance. Congress praised Obama for "efforts taken to compel Russia to return to compliance" using military and non-military options, however criticizing his open-ended approach. In line with the official administration posture, Russian violation was seen as part of its overall aggressive and cheating behaviour. It was stated:

> "not only should the Russian Federation end its cheating with respect to the INF Treaty, but also its illegal occupation of the sovereign territory of another nation, its plans for stationing nuclear weapons on that nation's territory, and its cheating and violation of as many as eight of its 12 arms control obligations and agreements" (U.S. Congress 2016, 1061).

This time, the hawkish approach usually associated with the Republican party is very explicit in the Congress requirements. It was requested an Executive plan for developing the military capabilities, divided into counterforce and countervailing strike capabilities, outlining "whether or not such capabilities are in compliance with the INF Treaty" (U.S. Congress 2016, 1063). Doing so, the Republican-majority Congress not only allowed as also demanded an American response that ultimately would violate the INF treaty, opposing Obama's diplomatic approach.

The Trump Administration: Hawkish, unilateralist and isolationist foreign policy

While the INF treaty demise represents a very important development in contemporary international relations and international security, it was relatively overshadowed by Trump's administration bursting foreign policy agenda. In the last four years, scholars and specialists have been trying to grasp what such an erratic and unpredictable Trumpist foreign policy signifies for America's great strategy, hegemonic role, and liberal international order. Trump has been acknowledged as an "isolationist" or "neo-isolationist," and Teixeira and Gonçalves (2019) argue that despite his unpredictable nature, Trump followed his isolationist agenda, represented in the America First and Make America Great Again (MAGA) approaches. His political approach is based on "jacksonian populism, nationalism, and individualism" (Gonçalves and Teixeira 2019, 194). Pecequilo (2017, 347) argues that Trumpism represents the apex of "guilty outsourcing," i.e., the former president inclination to attribute guilty to everybody else, which supported his foreign policy. However, the author sustains that Trump continued the "internationalism unilateralist," normally associated with the neoconservative movement and the Republican party. Overall, it seems to exist a common consent that Trump represents both a symptom and a booster for the current extremely divided American political landscape (Cruz 2019).

When Trump took office in 2017, the INF Russian violation remained in a deadlock. Despite its overall hard-line rhetoric, his administration kept a similar Obama's stance towards the subject, avoiding aggressive confrontation and prioritizing a diplomatic approach. The new Secretary of State, Rex Tillerson, and Secretary of Defense, James Mattis, kept direct negotiations with their Russian counterparts, however unsuccessfully. Further, Trump decided by another Obama's diplomatic approach using the Special Verification Commission (SVC), the Treaty's dispute resolution body founded in 1987 to follow the IRBM and GLCM destruction and on-spot verification. The SVC gathered on November 16, 2016, and on December 12-14, 2017, with no positive results. For the first time, the National Security Council (NSC) Senior Director Christopher Ford announced which Russian missile model was in violation: known as SSC-8 by NATO members and 9M729 in Russia. The Kremlin recognized the existence of the 9M729 model but objected to its capacity to reach INF ranges (U.S. Mission in Geneva 2019). Since the first accusation in 2014, the U.S. government kept this piece of information hidden, which can be presumed to prevent Russian officials from understanding how

current American intelligence information is gathered (U.S. Mission in Geneva 2016, 2017).

The hawkish and unilateralist approach, largely associated with Trump's foreign policy, would be felt in December 2017 after the administration released its INF Treaty Integrated Strategy, which stated:

> "The Administration firmly believes, however, that the United States cannot stand still while the Russian Federation continues to develop military systems in violation of the Treaty. While the United States will continue to pursue a diplomatic solution, we are now pursuing economic and military measures intended to induce the Russian Federation to return to compliance. This includes a review of military concepts and options, including options for conventional, ground-launched, intermediate-range missile systems, which would enable the United States to defend ourselves and our allies, should the Russian Federation not return to compliance. This step will not violate our INF Treaty obligations. We are also prepared to cease such research and development activities if the Russian Federation returns to full and verifiable compliance with its INF Treaty obligations." (U.S. Departament of Defense, 2017, para. 3)

The Integrated Strategy signals an important change: diplomacy would not exert the main role in inducing Russian return to compliance. In line with Republican lawmakers in Congress, the White House set a new approach to tackle the Russian violation, substantiating more economic sanctions and military pressures. A few weeks later, the U.S. Federal Register published a final rule adding Novator and Titan, two companies involved in developing Russian 9M729 missile, to the Department of Commerce Entity List (U.S. Mission in Geneva 2019). Doing so, both companies became subject to special license requirements to export or transfer specified items, pressuring them to abnegate their ties with the Kremlin. More importantly, the White House seized the opportunity given by Republican-majority Congress to reinstate IRBM research and possible development to sway Russian authorities into compliance.

However, the new economic and strategic pressures proved unsuccessful. In 2018, the American INF treaty withdrawal began. In June, by U.S. initiative, a third expert meeting took place, evincing Trump's final effort towards a diplomatic resolution. However, after the meeting, Russian authorities refused any further discussion about the violating missile topic, seemingly shutting down a diplomatic solution. As Reif (2018, para. 4) suggests, after the Russian stance, Trump's decision has "come together quickly". In July, following American leading, the Brussels NATO Summit Declaration stated

harshly, “Allies believe that, in the absence of any credible answer from Russia on this new missile, the most plausible assessment would be that Russia is in violation of the Treaty” (NATO 2018, para. 46).

Trump's change of heart can be evidence of the great influence of his new national security adviser, John Bolton. Bolton had been a vocal critic of the INF treaty and was fundamental in the 2002 Bush ABM treaty withdrawal. In his 2020 memoir, he states, “Since my days in George W. Bush’s Administration, I had wanted to extricate the United States from the INF”. His arguments synthesize very well the widespread criticism from hard-liners in the U.S.: i) persistent Russian breaches vitiated INF’s purpose; ii) The Treaty bounded no other countries, including the biggest threat facing the U.S., China; iii) the INF was outdated technologically, given sea- and air-launched missiles could hit the same targets (Bolton 2020, Cp.6). Bolton’s narrative must be apprehended cautiously due to his role as an observer-participant in the policy-making. However, important insights can be observed and critically analyzed. Three aspects deserve detailed analysis: i) His personal opinions about Trump role and actions; ii) the neoconservative stance regarding American allies, especially European countries and NATO; iii) the Russian responses to the Trump administration.

As Gonçalves and Teixeira (2019) argue, Trump exhibited erratic behavior, which was quite pronounced in his foreign policy agenda. The INF withdrawal and Bolton's accounts seem to demonstrate such behaviour. For instance, Bolton recounts that a mutual agreement between the NSC, the Department of Defense and the Department of State conformed to an exit schedule starting on December 4, 2018, when the U.S. would officially notify and begin the departure process. However, just three days after being briefed on all the negotiation steps and planning, Trump announced the exit during a rally in Nevada, disregarding his staff completely and not considering any diplomatic and legal provision. Trump expressed: "Russia has violated the agreement; they have been violating it for many years. And we're not going to let them violate a nuclear agreement and go out and do weapons and we're not allowed to" (quoted Reif 2018, para. 5). After Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis' great insistence, Trump would agree to return to the original schedule. Still, after a few days, he once more made inflammable statements about the U.S.'s departure, claiming that he would not accept “playing games" with the Russians and the Chinese. It is interesting to note that Bolton brings up such erratic behaviour,

further claiming that he suspected the president did not fully understand what was going on. Implicitly, the former adviser argues that Trump was unable to understand the Treaty's technical and legal aspects, having an almost childlike desire to leave as soon as possible to demonstrate a position of strength. While such a stance seems to have deeply bothered Jim Mattis, Bolton did not care at all because Trump's posture was perfectly in line with his own goals.

Bolton's neglect of Trump's behaviour indicates another significant feature of Trumpism: its close association with the neoconservative movement, ideologically and pragmatically. As Pecequilo and Lopes (2018) affirm, Trump can be framed in the internationalism unilateralist approach in American foreign policy, which is largely associated with neoconservatives. The way the Trump administration managed European concerns during the withdrawal ground and deepened this instance. Bolton lampoons Europeans because they supposedly believe in living in a falsely peaceful world, while their enemies only grow stronger and threaten them more and more. He is troubled by European leaders' reluctance to affirm the Russian violation, fearing that they would be pressured to accept U.S. nuclear weapons in their territories in the future. Furthermore, his distress covers NATO, and Bolton is uncomfortable with Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg because even after he was presented with substantive evidence of the Russian material breach, he still questions the U.S. stance. Despite this, German Chancellor Angela Merkel managed to convince Trump to postpone the exit process by 60 days, committing herself to effectively supporting the exit decision if a diplomatic solution was not found. Interestingly, Bolton reports that Trump only accepted German request by privately indicating to his staff that the U.S. would withdraw from the Treaty, one way or another. Thus, it is possible to substantiate Pecequilo and Lopes' claim, showing that Trump had no real intention to accommodate European concerns, focusing on his unilateralist and America First views.

The Trump White House disregard for its allies benefited Russian political efforts to vilify the U.S. among European countries. There is some consensus among experts that the INF end had greater advantages for the Russians than the Americans. The Kremlin was very effective in publicly pinpointing the U.S. at fault for the demise. For instance, during a press conference in Moscow in October 2018, Putin harshly accused American, but in private, Bolton tells the Russian leader seemed very little concerned about the

Treaty's demise and much more focused on what the United States intended after. Putin questioned whether the U.S. had any intention to deploy new IRBM in Europe, which would resume the same tensions from the 1980's Euromissile crisis. More importantly, however, Putin has publicly and privately declared that Russia would respond with its own IRBM deployment against any European country that eventually could accept American former prohibited missiles. Hence, while the vertical proliferation had Asia as its main stage in recent years, the INF demise and the U.S. future development, production, and deployment have enormous potential to escalate tensions in the European theatre in the short and medium-term.

European diplomatic efforts and Russia threats had been no significant in Trump's conviction. On February 2, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo formally declared the U.S. to withdraw within the 6-months deadline and the suspension of obligations. Russia reciprocated immediately, also informing its withdrawal. The six-month period was extremely bustling. On February 12, NATO Secretary Jens Stoltenberg reported that the alliance was "planning for a world without the INF treaty." In March, officials told that formerly banned missiles tests were scheduled for August, few days after the official withdrawal. The Pentagon was adapting the Navy's Tomahawk sea-launched cruise missile (SLCM) to turn it into a GLCM and expressed the possibility of deployment within 18 months (Taheran 2019). For the first time, the administration requested a boost of $100 million in IRBM and GLCM research and development, which was denied by Congress, now with the Democratic majority. Finally, on August 2, the U.S. formalized its complete withdrawal.

Final Remarks

It is undeniable that the INF Treaty has played an important role in international relations over the past 30 years. Its existence became possible after a significant increase in tensions between the U.S. and the USSR during the 1980s when the superpowers clashed over the presence of intermediate-ballistic missiles in Europe. Among nuclear delivery systems, IRBM is very destabilizing, as they present geostrategic controversies much more complex than their alternatives, such as ICBM (intercontinental ballistic missiles), SLBM (sea-launched ballistic missiles) and ALBM (air-launched ballistic

missiles). Furthermore, the INF became a milestone in the last years of the Cold War. It demonstrated the anti-communist American president, Ronald Reagan, to negotiate pragmatically with the new Soviet leadership, represented by reformer Mikhail Gorbachev. The INF Treaty was the first time that the superpowers effectively managed to eliminate an entire class of nuclear weapons, which improved bilateral relations, fostered more security in Europe.

In the next two decades, INF and other bilateral and multilateral initiatives played a key role in the nuclear non-proliferation regime. The creation of the MTCR and the PSI fostered self-restrictions on the commercialization of equipment that could be used to produce offensive missiles. There seems to exist a consensus that the regime successfully prevented horizontal proliferation, hampering ballistic missiles arsenals from stretching globally. However, in recent years, a vertical proliferation has been observed in countries that already had their own technology, such as China, India, Pakistan, North Korea and Iran. Especially in this decade, this proliferation has accelerated while, at the same time, these countries have become important contesting centres of U.S. hegemony.

In parallel, Russian-American rivalry has rekindled recently, and the alleged 2014 Russian violation fatally wounded the INF treaty. To be true, policy-makers and analysts in the United States believe that Russia has a general disregard for its commitments to arms control treaties and, most likely, its INF violation dwells far longer. During the Obama administration, a diplomatic approach was exerted to compel Russians to return to compliance. When Obama took office, he promised to reset the bilateral relations, but diverse geopolitical events heightened tensions and put the US-Russia rivalry back on the international stage. Simultaneously, the challenging and aggressive behavior of Iran and North Korea and the Chinese arsenal rapid growth have forced the United States to rethink its strategic position. Despite the new conflictive international system, no evidence suggests Obama’s intention to leave the Treaty, which his top officials considered effective and relevant to the United States' long-term security.

Nonetheless, Donald Trump's arrival in power significantly changed American foreign policy. Despite his aggressive rhetoric, Trump initially maintained a similar attitude to Obama, seeking a diplomatic resolution. However, with the arrival of a well-known hawkish to the post of NSC adviser (John Bolton) and constant failures in the diplomatic talks, Trump took a more unilateralist, isolationist and hawkish position.

Moreover, with a Republican-majority Congress, the administration approved budgets that ultimately weakened the INF's objectives and put the United States on a path of non-compliance. In late 2017, Trump's change-of-mind was swift. The INF Integrated Strategy assumed the more hawkish content since the beginning of the conflict, pledging more economic sanctions and military responses. Diplomatic encounters during 2018 were to no avail, and despite requests from European allies, the administration followed its way out. On August 2, 2019, the INF treaty effectively ended.

Since the INF demise, the Department of Defense has conducted at least two IRBM and GLCM tests previously prohibited. However, after the 2018 midterm elections, the Democratic party regained control of Congress and has systematically refused and downplayed budgetary provisions for research and testing new IRBM. With Biden's victory in 2020, arms control talks between the U.S. and Russia seem well-balanced for the moment, evinced by the Russian-American extension of the New START, an Obama era treaty and the last functioning nuclear deal in place. On the other hand, although the Russian-American and Chinese-American tensions have escalated further, the coronavirus pandemic has shrouded diverse geopolitical disputes while countries manage the domestic difficulties raised by this unexpected scenario. Nonetheless, for the medium-term, it is expected that new disputes regarding missile proliferation resume and further investigations will be vital to better understand the INF Treaty outcomes and consequences for international security.

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