



NATO'S STRATEGY IN A POST-INF WORLD: A NEW DUAL-TRACK APPROACH?

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Abstract

The Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty – known as the INF Treaty – was an arms control agreement concluded between the U.S. and the Soviet Union in 1987 that eliminated an entire class of missiles. Having served as a central pillar of the Euro-Atlantic security architecture for over 30 years, its recent demise not only raises concerns about a new nuclear arms race and the future of arms control more generally but has also sparked a debate about possible responses to ensure strategic stability in a post-INF world. NATO, whose 'Dual Track' decision in 1979 based on the combination of strengthened deterrence and arms control efforts laid the groundwork for INF negotiations, once again faces an increased nuclear threat to its allies in a destabilized and almost entirely unconstrained arms control environment as well as fears about a potential decoupling of U.S. and European security reminiscent of the 1970s and 80s. While NATO has generally reaffirmed its commitment to pursue a dual-track strategy, it remains unclear how the Alliance will balance deterrence and dialogue in times where the U.S. administration seems indifferent, if not opposed, to the current strategic stability framework and relations with Russia are far from 'business as usual'. Drawing from the success of NATO's 1979 'Dual Track' decision which is still viewed as a historic landmark in the area of arms control, this thesis first examines the consequences of the INF Treaty's dissolution for Euro-Atlantic security as well as the strategic and political considerations that led to the adoption of a two-pillared strategy in the past. Using a comparative approach, it then analyzes the key similarities and differences to today's context and gives an evaluation as to whether the underlying concepts of the decision could produce similar results today and, thus, represent a viable and effective strategy for NATO to implement in a post-INF environment. In light of Russia's nuclear modernization, bolstering deterrence alone risks spurring an arms race and is therefore unlikely to ensure Euro-Atlantic security in the long-term. Today, the predominant challenge therefore stems from the potential disintegration of arms control. While NATO's 'Dual Track' decision cannot serve as a ready-made template for current response options, balancing deterrence and dialogue as well as strengthening arms control remains crucial to maintain unity within the alliance which is needed if NATO is to remain a credible guarantor for peace and security.