

THE FUTURE OF THE INF TREATY: FROM BILATERAL TO GLOBAL

BY NIK SKONDRIANOS

Nik Skondrianos is a Masters in International Relations student at the University of Sydney, specialising in International law.

On April 7, 2019, I had the honor of attending the sixth meeting of the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific (CSCAP) Study Group on Nonproliferation and Disarmament in the Asia-Pacific in Bali, Indonesia. Discussions, which ranged from the INF treaty to nuclear governance and disarmament, were enlightening and provided a comprehensive outlook on the current nuclear regime, including issues related to nuclear security, safety, and safeguards. Focused discussion on the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty provided an in-depth and insightful perspective on the current INF treaty and the future of arms control agreements.

The INF Treaty, until recently played an important role in the relationship between the Soviet Union (later Russia) and the United States since its signing in 1987. However, the changing international order and rising tensions between the two powers has transformed discourse around the creation of new arms control agreements into a sore point between them. In addition, as the rising nuclear powers, including China, India, Pakistan, and North Korea, increase their influence in the Asia-Pacific, there is increasing pressure for them to take on more responsibility for their own arsenals but also to regional security.

The discussion around the INF treaty provided three main insights into the current environment surrounding nuclear, and conventional, arms control:

- US withdrawal from the INF treaty has provided an opportunity to reimagine the nuclear weapons regime and consider the universality of arms control, including other nuclear weapons states (NWS), in future agreements;
- the United Nations (UN) is a forum for states to build trust and consensus on nuclear weapons to construct a new arms control regime;
- lack of control and political will in the international system is limiting the creation of a comprehensive and universal INF-style treaty.

The increasing irrelevance of the INF treaty as a remnant of the Cold War is evident in its ineffectiveness in an international system with NWS not bound by its obligations. Discussions within the session also noted the violations and noncompliance by both states to the treaty, as well as the disputes between confirmation of these allegations. The exclusion of NWS such as China and nuclear possessing states like India, Pakistan, and North Korea, is contributing to a more volatile Asia-Pacific without arms control agreements to ensure regional security and safety. The US withdrawal from the INF treaty has provided the international system a unique opportunity to improve the regime surrounding nuclear, and conventional, weapons.

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A universal and comprehensive INF treaty would ensure the security and safety of the Asia-Pacific

region and the globe by expanding its signatory states to all states that possess nuclear weapons. Most discussion during the session focused on the United States, Russia, China, and India and their actions toward an arms control treaty. In contrast, other regional states and non-nuclear weapons states (NNWS), seemed to not be regarded as a vital consideration toward such an arms treaty. While these agreements affect the major regional powers, states of the Asia-Pacific have an equal stake in the outcome of any agreement as it influences their own security and safety. A revitalized and universal INF treaty would require the contribution of all NWS and NNWS to consider the regional and global ramifications for their security and safety.

As discussion moved from issues of the past and present to the future, there was an optimism around key agreements and actions required to build trust and consensus around the future of the nuclear weapons regime. Some initial solutions put forward included Memoranda of Understanding and inspection exchanges between states to ensure compliance with obligations and expectations. Recommendations on global no-first-use of nuclear weapons and increased national implementation reports on treaty obligations provided pragmatic solutions to increase trust and dialogue.

While bilateral and multilateral solutions were proposed, what I believe was the most ambitious suggestion put forward was the use of the United Nations and the Security Council to promote trust, dialogue, and produce a comprehensive and universal nuclear arms regime. Public meetings in Beijing, incorporating academia, the media, and public service, attempted to consolidate consensus and increase trust between states and between different industries and sectors. They also attempted to increase coordination between the permanent five members of the UN Security Council and lay a foundation for the formation of a nuclear disarmament process.

My perspective was that if a universal and comprehensive INF was to be designed and

produced, the UN would be an ideal place to incorporate the missing elements the original INF treaty contained. It could potentially include states that possess nuclear weapons such as India, Pakistan, China, and North Korea, incorporate the considerations of NWS and NNWS equally, and include other delivery systems, like air and sea-based missiles. Proposals suggested the use of the UN Conference on Disarmament as a potential forum for this process to begin but was rejected citing the UN Conference on Disarmament would not take this on their agenda and suggested unilateral initiatives by individual states. This skepticism throughout the session challenged my confidence in the UN's ability to provide an effective, comprehensive and universal nuclear arms agreement. Yet, I still maintain the UN's ability to facilitate discourse and dialogue on nuclear arms control is one of primacy and a fundamental institution in the international system.

This optimism contrasted the recognition by experts that the current environment was in serious disarray and Russia-US relations regarding nuclear weapons and compliance was decreasing and threatening any possibility for a reset. There was an observable tension around the discussion of compliance and violation of these treaties and emphasized the decreasing trust and dialogue between nations. In addition, the above suggestions were undercut by the growing distrust between states, a result of increasing isolationist and nationalist policies coming from the major powers.

A retreating United States was the primary factor in its withdrawal of the INF treaty, in addition to a number of other treaties and obligations it has withdrawn or threatened to withdraw from. A resurgent Russia with a record of treaty violations and non-compliance threatens the political will of Asia-Pacific states to agree to any new agreements without the assurance of compliance by major powers, such as Russia. China and India's increasing political and military power threatens the states in the Asia-Pacific and is changing the relatively stable balance of power, previously ensured by the US.

The discussion identified the realization of a new, multipolar world order in which Russia and the United States had become anachronisms. There was an understanding that China was not willing to take control of the region or maintain the current order and that India or Pakistan lacked the ability to control their nuclear arsenals. Beyond the lack of control, there is a lack of political will for these countries to accede to a new nuclear weapons regime, favoring a restriction of others nuclear arsenals with exceptions for their own. The lack of faith in the current international order by the major powers greatly affects the willingness of regional countries to get involved and requires a restoration of the faith in the current institutions, the major powers, and their commitment to nuclear arms control. If a new INF treaty were to be agreed upon, it could still be vulnerable to the same issues of non-compliance and violations of obligations as the current INF treaty.

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The session on the INF treaty reflected a political toxicity in the region and a suspicion of the inherently political nature of the UN, limiting its effectiveness in creating a comprehensive and universal INF treaty. If the UN was to contribute to building trust and dialogue around nuclear arms control, states would have to navigate the political landscape to ensure a treaty would be comprehensive and universal as well as

enforceable and considerate of all states. A lack of trust and political will increasingly characteristic of the current international order currently hinders the progress on such a universal agreement. This session illuminated just how much mistrust between states and lack of political will has and continues to obstruct comprehensive solutions.

However, one thing that significantly affected my perspective since the conference, relevant to the creation of a universal INF treaty and international relations more generally, was the importance of continuing the process despite the outcome of summits and conferences. Without that we risk escalating distrust, increased mistakes, and increasing violence between states. All states must understand that despite the tensions between states, process and communication is key to maintain the safety and security within the Asia-Pacific and beyond.

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