

# The Importance of Language in Transatlantic Relations: The INF Treaty

Written by Sara Benkirane

This PDF is auto-generated for reference only. As such, it may contain some conversion errors and/or missing information. For all formal use please refer to the official version on the website, as linked below.

## The Importance of Language in Transatlantic Relations: The INF Treaty

<https://www.e-ir.info/2020/07/05/the-importance-of-language-in-transatlantic-relations-the-inf-treaty/>

SARA BENKIRANE, JUL 5 2020

Whereas some may argue that language is “cheap talk” (Payne 2007:505), this essay contends that language is important in enabling and constraining transatlantic relations between Europe and America. Specifically, the essay focuses on transatlantic relations between Russia –formerly known as the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR)– and the United States (U.S.) over the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty. The essay proceeds in four steps. First, it starts by outlining critical constructivism as the theoretical lens adopted to examine the powerful role of language in transatlantic relations between Europe and America, establishing why language is important. Second, a brief overview of discourse analysis is provided as the methodological tool used to evaluate the language of political actors over the INF Treaty. Third, the essay’s empirical case study is introduced highlighting the significance of language. In this section, a discourse analysis of the language that contributed to the making as well as the unmaking of the INF Treaty is conducted. Finally, the essay concludes that language is crucial in enabling and constraining transatlantic relations between America and Europe, as evaluated through the U.S.-Russia relationship over the inception and demise of the INF Treaty. For the purpose of this essay, “language” is understood as “an inherently unstable system of signs that generate meaning” (Hansen 2006:17), and the nouns “language” and “discourse” are used interchangeably.

### Theoretical Lens

#### *A Critical Constructivist Approach*

In this essay I adopt a critical constructivist lens to establish the important role of language in transatlantic relations between Europe and America. Noteworthy, there are different branches of constructivism in International Relations (IR) –the main division being between conventional and critical strands (Hopf 1998; Fierke 2016). First, it is important to comprehend what constructivism broadly is in order to understand why the critical constructivist branch was chosen for this paper. In brief, constructivism is characterized by a belief in the social construction of reality, an emphasis on ideational as well as material structures (Flockhart 2016:84), the assumption that agents and structures are mutually constituted, and an appreciation of the role of identity in shaping political actions (Reus-Smit 2013:217). In that sense, constructivists perceive “the world as a project under construction, as becoming rather than being” (Adler 2005:11). Therefore, all constructivists agree that the “world [is] of our making” (Onuf, 1989), which fundamentally opposes the realist stance that “we can do little to change things” (Flockhart 2016:80), or the liberal view that there is a specific path to human advancement (Ibid.).

The division between conventional and critical constructivism rests on epistemological grounds (Ruggie 1998:880). Conventional constructivism mixes a social ontology with a positivist epistemology, leading to an understanding of knowledge as being acquired. On the other hand, critical constructivism, having both a social ontology and a social epistemology, comprehends knowledge as being constructed (Fierke 2016:170) and focuses on the role of language in constructing knowledge (Donnelly 2013:17). Consequently, instead of contending that language describes reality, critical constructivists advance that language constructs reality. Resultantly, by adhering to a social epistemology, critical constructivism pays attention to language. In effect, “language use is part of acting in the world” (Fierke 2016:171). Hence, critical constructivism highlights that by uttering something, actors do something (Austin 1975:6).

# The Importance of Language in Transatlantic Relations: The INF Treaty

Written by Sara Benkirane

Nonetheless, one must not forget that “words do not speak for themselves” (Donnelly 2013:18). In that sense, sets of meanings residing in language (Neumann, 1996:160) do not just appear out of thin air. Instead, critical constructivists advance the notion that meanings are reliant on “the presence of an intersubjective linguistic context in order to be explained and understood” (Donnelly 2013:18). In brief, as expressed by Thomas Risse “if we want to understand and explain social behavior, we need to take words, language, and communicative utterances seriously. It is through discursive practices that agents make sense of the world and attribute meaning to their activities” (Risse cited in Donnelly 2013:17). Ultimately, critical constructivism is particularly suitable to examine the important role of political actors’ language as they make, remake and even unmake transatlantic relations between Europe and America.

## *Why is Language Important?*

Language creates beliefs, identities, interests and background knowledge. If we accept the definition of diplomacy by Lars G. Lose, we understand that “the essence of diplomacy can be described as a continuous process of dialogue and negotiation, that is, as a process of communication, explanation and persuasion, through which the foreign policy of different states is coordinated” (Lose 2001:188). Therefore, the language of political actors takes on an active role in the relationship between states. Notably, even if one argues that relationships between states are created through military or economic interests instead, one must recognise that, regardless, state actors have to interact and talk with each other in some way to form a relationship –this is done via language. Hence, without attempting to anthropomorphise the state, it is necessary to recognise that states are constituted of individuals, including state representatives, who –primordially– are “discursive subjects” (Lacan 1977:74; Epstein 2010:336). As such, we cannot get past the fact that states must communicate, they must talk, and as expressed by Charlotte Epstein, “this ‘talking’ is central both to what [states] do and who they are” (Epstein 2010:341). Therefore, “states, like individuals, position themselves in relation to other states by adopting certain discourses and not others” (Ibid.). In that sense, observing transatlantic political actors’ discursive shifts and how this makes or unmakes transatlantic relations illustrates the importance of language. Thus, language is not only socially constructed but it is, itself, a social constructor that can be used to initiate change. Accordingly, language is not neutral, it is a form of power and therefore it is important.

## **Methodology**

### *Discourse Analysis*

Whilst conventional constructivism sees no major differences with mainstream methods, critical constructivism has “roots in the linguistic turn” (Fierke 2016:170). Adopting a critical constructivist lens, it is not surprising that discourse analysis was chosen as the methodological framework for the empirical part of this essay. Discourse analysis can be understood as “an attempt to uncover the importance of language, how discourses work to construct one ‘self’ and an ‘other’ in particular ways, and how this thus directly impinges upon codes of conduct with regard to state behaviour” (Shepherd 2013:37). Significantly, there are different kinds of discourse analysis, but analysts employing it all agree that “language holds the key to meaning” (Ibid.). As highlighted by Karin M. Fierke, scholars employing a methodology such as discourse analysis are “not observing ‘the’ world, as it exists objectively, but rather looking at how ‘a’ world works in practice, including the power relationships and hierarchies that hold it together” (2007:82). As such, my analysis accepts the language of state articulations and dialogues as enabling and constraining structures of meaning that construct social reality (Phillips and Hardy 2002:4).

## **Empirical Case Study: The Making and Unmaking of the INF Treaty**

The INF Treaty was an arms control treaty between the U.S. and the USSR –followed by its successor state, the Russian Federation. The Treaty, which was pivotal to Euro-Atlantic security, was signed on December 8<sup>th</sup>, 1987 by then U.S. President Ronald Reagan and Soviet General Secretary Michael Gorbachev during the Washington Summit and ratified a year later (Lanoszka 2019:51). Importantly, the Treaty was the first deal to mandate the elimination of an entire category of nuclear weapons that threatened Europe, rather than simply limiting them (Ibid.:48). It required both states to eliminate their ground-launched ballistic and cruise missiles of travelling ranges between 500 and 5,500 kilometres (km) by an implementation deadline of June 1<sup>st</sup>, 1991 (Ibid.). On a symbolic level,

# The Importance of Language in Transatlantic Relations: The INF Treaty

Written by Sara Benkirane

the INF Treaty worked towards mending trust between the two superpowers and it catalysed a sequence of disarmament stages that facilitated the end of the Cold War (Arbatov 2016:167). In that sense, the INF Treaty eased transatlantic relations between the U.S. and the USSR.

However, over time, the INF Treaty weakened. Article XI of the Treaty had set in place a series of on-site inspections that lasted 13 years to ensure that each side complied with the elimination of the prohibited weapons (Lanoszka 2019:51). Yet, this mechanism eventually expired and was not renewed leading to satellite observations instead to track compliance (Ibid.:52). Contention over the Treaty began as far back as 2005 (Horloe 2015:100), but it was only on December 4<sup>th</sup>, 2018 that the U.S. issued an ultimatum to Russia. The subject of U.S. accusations was a ground-launched cruise missile, designated as SSC-8 by the U.S. and 9M729 by Russia (NATO 2019). Yet, Russia continuously denied any violations and in turn accused the U.S. of violating the Treaty due to their deployment of missile defense interceptors on land in the Navy's MK-41 missile launchers (Woolf 2019:26). On February 1<sup>st</sup>, 2019 the U.S. announced its suspension from the INF Treaty obligations and following a 6 month-period, during which Russia was to get back into compliance, the U.S. finally declared its withdrawal from the Treaty on August 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2019. Noteworthy, both in the Treaty's inception as well as in its demise, it is dialogue and negotiations via language that either enabled cooperation between the U.S. and the USSR –making the Treaty in 1987– or constrained the relationship between the U.S. and Russia –unmaking the Treaty in 2019. Therefore, as stated by Veronika M. Kitchen, “discourse frames problems in particular ways and makes possible certain kinds of arguments about policy while shutting out others” (2009:101). On that note, the way in which policymakers put language to use, enabling or constraining transatlantic relations, will now be analysed through the making and unmaking of the INF Treaty.

## *The Importance of Language in the Making of the INF Treaty*

Language is socially constructed but it is, itself, a powerful constructor. Before anything, it is significant to reiterate that language is “context-bound” (Neumann 1996:160). Indeed, language is shaped by different contexts but it also constructs contexts. Hence, if contexts change, so does language and vice versa. In that sense, in Alexander Wendt's renowned example of two aliens –Alter and Ego– interacting on a desert island for the first time, Wendt demonstrates that relations are produced by social interactions rather than simply material capabilities (1992:404). However, what Wendt neglects is that Alter and Ego have a past, as such they are “already embedded in a context of social interaction” (Fierke cited in Donnelly 2013:16). Instead, Wendt presents ahistorical actors, without examining the way in which Alter and Ego's social context originated (Donnelly 2013:16). This is relevant to the making of the INF Treaty because one must recognize that Reagan and Gorbachev, the two main negotiators of this Treaty, operated in a context marked by the hostility and rivalry of the Cold War. Therefore, the discursive shifts that occurred in the dialogue between the U.S. and the USSR were interconnected with a changing context and this must be recognised in order to understand how language enabled the construction of the INF Treaty.

With this established, it is now worth noting that up until Gorbachev's rise to power in 1985, the Reagan administration had maintained the “most avowed anticommunist crusading policy in two decades” (Garthoff 1994:1). Throughout the early 1980s, President Reagan had continuously adopted a negative rhetoric towards the USSR, being very vocal about it representing a monolithic threat to the U.S. and the world (Farnham 2001:231). For example, in 1983 Reagan delivered an address in Orlando and described the USSR as an “evil empire” (Reagan 1983: March 8), which was “the focus of evil in the modern world” (Ibid.). He went on to express that the USSR was the sole culprit in the on-going nuclear arms race between them, highlighting that this conflict was one between “right and wrong and good and evil” (Ibid.). In that sense, the USSR was perpetually constructed as being “wrong” and “evil” whilst the U.S. was “right” and “good”. As such, the U.S. constructed the identity of the USSR through the discursive move of negative othering via defamatory oppositional terms. Nonetheless, by 1985 a discursive shift occurred in Reagan's stance towards the USSR. In effect, it should be noted that prior to the 1985 Geneva Summit, Reagan actively decided to change his language. He later acknowledged “once we'd agreed to hold a summit, I made a conscious decision to tone down my rhetoric to avoid goading Gorbachev with remarks about the 'evil empire'” (Reagan 1990:628). Here, the importance of language is underscored by one of the very actors involved in the negotiations of the INF Treaty. Equally, it should be recognised that Gorbachev's New Thinking doctrine that led to economic and political reforms conveyed a more promising atmosphere (Holloway 1988:75), contextually more favourable for cooperation and reinforcing the USSR's new language. Therefore, from 1985 onwards, both parties

# The Importance of Language in Transatlantic Relations: The INF Treaty

Written by Sara Benkirane

seemed to have relinquished one type of language for another.

Extending this line of enquiry, by evaluating the diplomatic language between the U.S. and the USSR in the crucial months preceding the eventual signing of the INF Treaty, how language enabled the making of this Treaty becomes evident. As will be discussed, the discursive moves present in their dialogic engagements evidence that the previous language of hostile rivalry, distrust and division was replaced with a new language. In effect, 3 discursive shifts are identifiable; the language emphasising the need for dialogue, the language of persuasion and lastly the language of growing trust, cooperation and unity. Together, it is this new language that improved U.S.-USSR relations and ultimately enabled the making of the INF Treaty. The chronological reconstruction of the dialogic interaction between the U.S. and the USSR with an interjection from NATO is now analysed by identifying these 3 types of discursive shifts. First, analysing an April 10<sup>th</sup>, 1987 letter from President Reagan to General Secretary Gorbachev, a language emphasising the importance of dialogue is present. Indeed, writing to Gorbachev, Reagan expresses the hope “that you and I can continue our dialogue” (Reagan 1987a: April 10). He also articulates that he is “encouraged ... by the improved dialogue between us on arms reduction” (Ibid.), before finishing by stating that he looks forward “to positive discussions” (Ibid.). Here, Reagan accentuates the notion that communication is key to their relationship. Moreover, the language of growing trust, cooperation and unity is also noticeable. In effect, throughout the letter the first person plural pronoun “we” is used often evoking unity. For instance, Reagan says, “Together we can make the difference in the future” (Ibid.), or “we are able to eliminate that distrust” (Ibid.). Here, not only does he use a language reminding that it is “together” (Ibid.) that they can make a difference “for both of [their] nations and the world” (Ibid.), but equally, such language reflects that they have managed to “improve the climate between [their] two countries” (Ibid.), revealing growing cooperation in the months preceding the making of the INF Treaty.

Likewise in Gorbachev’s September 10<sup>th</sup>, 1987 letter to Reagan, a similar rhetoric of growing trust, cooperation and unity through the persistent use of the first person plural pronoun “we” is employed. Additionally, phrases such as “our two countries stand on the threshold of an important agreement” (Gorbachev 1987a: September 10), or that the signing of the INF Treaty “will impart a strong impetus to bringing our positions closer together” (Ibid.) make use of the possessive determiner “our”, linking the actions of both parties and thus connoting unity and growing trust between them. Furthermore, a language of persuasion is also employed. Gorbachev specifies that “measures to genuinely reduce nuclear arms” are “urgently needed” (Ibid.), he also highlights that “genuine security can only be achieved through real disarmament” (Ibid.), before declaring that “it is time you and I took a firm stance on this matter” (Ibid.). Hence, Gorbachev here attempts to persuade Reagan of the urgency in materialising the INF Treaty, and in a bid to push Reagan to act quicker he affirms that “the fate of an agreement [...] now depends entirely on the U.S. leadership” (Ibid.). Thus, Gorbachev is here implying the full willingness of the USSR to get the INF Treaty signed as soon as possible. Furthermore, the language of dialogic importance is also emphasised as Gorbachev expresses the necessity to “find a common language” (Ibid.) to ensure good U.S.-USSR relations.

On the other hand, in the November 16<sup>th</sup>, 1987 speech by NATO Secretary General urging the ratification of the INF Treaty, Lord Carrington also uses a language encouraging dialogic communication. Indeed, he expresses the need for all members of the Alliance –which includes the U.S.– “to be more vigorous in speaking up for the INF Treaty” (Carrington 1987: November 16). He also stresses that “the objective is not to respond to every rhetorical statement by Mr. Gorbachev but to make practical proposals to enhance mutual security” (Ibid.). Here, the importance of constructive dialogue towards the INF Treaty is underlined. Furthermore, his speech is permeated by a language of persuasion for the signing of the INF Treaty. In effect, he states that the INF Treaty “is a good deal” (Ibid.) and that “with an INF agreement the world will be lighter by megatons and better for it” (Ibid.), reminding that now “we have a further opportunity to get it right” (Ibid.). In this way, it is visible that the language employed is one that is favourable of the INF Treaty, encouraging its formation. Lastly, via a language of trust and cooperation, he also suggests the gradual disintegration of division. Indeed, he stipulates that “the logjam which has for so long impeded progress in the East-West relations and arms control is breaking up” (Ibid.), he also signals the “improved East-West relations and progress in arms control” (Ibid.). Therefore, this demonstrates how an amicable language is being put to use by an influential actor to construct a reality where the making of the INF Treaty is vastly encouraged.

Ultimately, in the remarks just before the signing of the INF Treaty, Reagan conveys the importance of language by saying that “For the first time in history, the language of ‘arms control’ was replaced by ‘arms reduction’” (Reagan

# The Importance of Language in Transatlantic Relations: The INF Treaty

Written by Sara Benkirane

1987b: December 8) enabling the construction of the INF Treaty. Reagan here illustrates how a discursive shift can create a new reality in lieu of another. In the same interaction, Gorbachev goes on to say that reaching that day has been “a 7-year-long road, replete with intense work and debate” (Gorbachev 1987b: December 8) highlighting again the importance of dialogue in the making of the INF Treaty and the notion that change does not happen over night. Additionally, the language of trust, cooperation and unity is also present. As before, the first person plural pronoun “we” is continuously employed, such as when Reagan states “we’ve made this impossible vision a reality” (Reagan 1987b: December 8), or when he acknowledges that “we’ve seen what can be accomplished when we pull together” (Ibid.), indicating both unity and cooperation. Likewise, unity is further accentuated when Gorbachev affirms that with the signing of the INF Treaty they are going to “move together towards a nuclear-free world” (Gorbachev 1987b: December 8) and that this Treaty is “for everyone, but above all, for our two great powers” (Ibid.). Thus, the previous language of rivalry is now replaced by one of unity enabling the signing of the INF Treaty a few moments later.

Interestingly, what is visible through these dialogic engagements is Deutsch’s “amalgamation” rather than “a sharpening of differences” (Deutsch 1970:29) in the Transatlantic relations between the U.S. and the USSR. Noteworthy, not only can it be said that language was important in constructing an environment where the INF Treaty could become a reality, but equally it is language itself that literally constituted the content of the INF Treaty. Nonetheless, it is significant to recognise that change is not easy, the making of the INF Treaty did not happen instantaneously. Instead, years of dialogue and negotiations via language were necessary for the construction of the Treaty. On the whole, language enabled the making of the INF Treaty in the 20<sup>th</sup> century –forging transatlantic relations between the U.S. and the USSR. As such, language is “powerfully constructive” (Kitchen 2009:112); yet, language can also be “powerfully destructive” (Ibid.), as I will now demonstrate with the unmaking of the INF Treaty in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## *The Importance of Language in the Unmaking of the INF Treaty*

Language is a powerful destructor and change itself can change. Whilst Reagan and Gorbachev negotiated and signed the INF Treaty, new actors were in charge of maintaining this Treaty in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Significantly, via language a personal observation or opinion can be turned into a social fact by attributing it “the status of truth” (Mattern 2005:597). Hence, language can be used to create a narrative legitimizing a certain course of action over another (Kitchen 2009:101). In that sense, strategic narratives can be assembled by actors to construct a particular knowledge. This narrative then “instantiates a ‘reality’ –that is, a social structure which organizes expectations, calculations and behavior” (Mattern 2001:364), and every subsequent utterance linked to that narrative acts as “evidence in support of that reality” (Ibid.). As such, the way the U.S. spoke of Russia as supposedly having violated the Treaty, constructed a reality where Russian culpability became a social fact taking on the status of truth.

This in turn enabled the U.S. to justify its withdrawal from this historic treaty. Indeed, it is important to understand that withdrawal from the Treaty needed to be justified. As specified in Article XV of the Treaty, the right to withdrawal was only granted if “[a signatory] decides that extraordinary events related to the subject matter of this treaty have jeopardized its supreme interests” (INF Treaty 1987). Hence, not only did the Treaty require justification for withdrawal, but paradoxically the very language constructing the content of INF Treaty also provided for its destruction. Noteworthy, if an actor hoping to gather support for a potentially disputable action –such as the U.S. withdrawal from the INF Treaty– can situate the intended action within “an existing frame” (Kitchen 2009:103) that already has resonance with the public, then the actor might be able to justify the desired action (Ibid.). In the case of the unmaking of the INF Treaty, the West had once learned the enemy to be Russia, and this was never truly unlearned. In that sense, claiming that Russia was violating the Treaty was perceived as possible within the spectrum of viable actions of a former enemy. Therefore, the U.S. accusations of Russian violations were rapidly taken as being true, even without sufficient proof. Consequently, the U.S. was able to justify its withdrawal by using language to create a persuasive narrative –one that became true knowledge, especially with NATO and U.S. allies.

Analysing the chronological reconstruction of the dialogue between both sides, how language constrained the transatlantic relationship between the U.S. and Russia, unmaking the INF Treaty, becomes evident. First, it is immediately noticeable that the mid-1980s language of growing trust, cooperation and unity had fully disappeared. Instead, a language of accusation, a language of good versus bad and right versus wrong permeated the dialogic

# The Importance of Language in Transatlantic Relations: The INF Treaty

Written by Sara Benkirane

interaction between both sides. Such interaction was one whose dynamic was action-reaction like with each utterance provoking a similar oppositional response. Starting on October 20<sup>th</sup>, 2018, the U.S. declared its intention to withdraw from the Treaty with President Donald Trump justifying the pull-out by stating that “[Russia had] been violating it for many years” (Trump cited in BBC 2018). Here, blame for the potential dismantling of the Treaty was explicitly placed on Russia. This was officially met by a response from the Kremlin’s spokesperson Dmitry Peskov who stated that if the U.S. was to withdraw from the INF Treaty, Russia would be compelled to do same. He also highlighted that Trump’s announcement was “cause for deep concern” (Peskov cited in Ellyatt 2018) as it would “make the world a more dangerous place” (Ibid.). In this initial reaction from the Kremlin, it appears as though Russia was still attempting to resonate with the U.S. in the hope that they would backtrack from pulling out by reminding them of the consequences of such an action.

Next in this escalating interaction was NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg who, on October 29<sup>th</sup>, 2018 at a press conference, called upon Russia to comply with the Treaty. He stressed “the problem is the deployment of new Russian missiles” (Stoltenberg 2018: October 29), clearly portraying Russia as being in the wrong. Moreover, he mentioned “we need to manage a difficult relationship with Russia” (Ibid.). By using the adjective “difficult” to describe the U.S. and NATO’s relationship with Russia, instead of simply saying “we need to manage a relationship with Russia”, his language explicitly reinforced the constructed knowledge of a cold relationship. On the other hand, on November 26<sup>th</sup>, 2018 Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov denounced U.S. claims as “fabrications” (Ryabkov cited in Woolf 2019:4) that were “inconsistent with reality” (Ibid.) and “an obvious attempt by the United States to distort reality” (Ibid.). He went on to specify that Russia had already discussed the matter with the U.S. and had informed them that the missile in question could travel only up to a maximum of 480km –within the range permitted by the INF Treaty. Here, Ryabkov’s language painted the U.S. negatively, suggesting that the Trump administration had lied and constructed fake accusations to justify their withdrawal. Building on this, it is important to remember that Russia’s non-compliance was not the only reason given by Trump when he stated the U.S.’s intention to withdraw. Indeed, he had also noted that countries such as China were not part of the Treaty (Lanoszka 2019:53). Hence, in an attempt to avoid “intellectual complacency” (Cox 2006:34), there is room to argue that the real reason for the U.S. pulling out might have been to allow them to balance with China, which would explain Ryabkov’s accusations of the U.S. fabricating claims against Russia as a pretext for withdrawal.

A “discursive battleground” (Diez 2001:6) was largely underway between both sides. This was further cemented on December 4<sup>th</sup>, 2018 when the U.S. made a formal statement announcing that Russia had 60 days to return to “full and verifiable compliance” (U.S. Department of State 2018: December 4) or the U.S. would suspend its obligations under the Treaty. Again, the statement’s language was one of accusation, highlighting Russia’s “denials, obfuscation, and falsehoods” (Ibid.), that “Russia refuses to provide the United States any more information about the missile” (Ibid.) and that “Russia has initiated zero expert meetings with the United States on this topic” (Ibid.). Such accusations and hostility towards Russia were further accentuated through the language used in a NATO statement issued by the NATO Foreign Ministers on the same day. They stated that “Russia is in material breach” (NATO 2018: December 4), that this violation is “part of Russia’s broader pattern of behavior intended to weaken the overall Euro-Atlantic security architecture” (Ibid.) and that NATO Ministers “strongly support the finding of the United States” (Ibid.). This was rebuked by President Vladimir Putin in a statement to the press on December 5<sup>th</sup>, 2018 where he expressed that he did “not agree with the destruction of this deal. But if this happens, we will react accordingly” (Putin cited in MacFarquhar 2018). In addition, General Valery Gerasimov, the Chief of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces, informed foreign military attachés that if the U.S. was to “destroy” (Gerasimov cited in Woolf 2019:4) the Treaty, U.S. missile sites on allied territory might become “the targets of subsequent military exchanges” (Ibid.).

Yet, through this aggressive and menacing language, Russia simply aided the U.S. in their construction of the Russian threat. Notably, on January 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2019 Russia attempted to respond to the U.S. complaint of “Russia refus[ing] to provide the United States any more information about the missile” (U.S. Department of State 2018: December 4) by holding a military exhibition inviting Pentagon officials. There, the disputed missile was exposed publically to demonstrate its inaptitude to reach the prohibited INF range of 500km; however, U.S. officials did not attend (O’Connor 2019). This prompted Ryabkov to tell the public “the United States were not interested in giving us the opportunity to disprove their erroneous or fabricated information, because it would allow us to close this question

# The Importance of Language in Transatlantic Relations: The INF Treaty

Written by Sara Benkirane

once and for all” (Ryabkov cited in O’Connor 2019). Hence, the language of accusation and right versus wrong strengthened the tension in U.S.-Russian relations.

This “war of words” (Lanoszka 2019:53) reached a climax on February 1<sup>st</sup>, 2019 when President Trump issued Russia a final ultimatum. Russia was given 6 months to come back into compliance “by destroying all of its violating missiles, launchers, and associated equipment” (Trump 2019: February 1), or the U.S. would finally withdraw from the INF Treaty. Nonetheless, Russia continued to deny non-compliance and by August 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2019 the U.S.-Russia “discursive battleground” (Diez 2001:6) of crisscross accusations and denials culminated in the unmaking of the INF Treaty with the U.S. formally withdrawing from it. In a press statement, Secretary of State Michael Pompeo announced “the U.S. withdrawal pursuant to Article XV of the treaty” (Pompeo 2019: August 2). He went on to state that “Russia is solely responsible for the treaty’s demise”, that “Russia failed to return to full and verified compliance”, and that “Russia chose to keep its noncompliant missile”. Hence, Russia was clearly attributed full culpability in the Treaty’s destruction.

On the other hand, Pompeo described the U.S. as having put countless “efforts seeking Russia’s return to compliance”. This was responded to with a statement by the Russian Foreign Ministry declaring that “Washington has committed a grave mistake [...] based on deliberately misleading information” (Russian Foreign Ministry 2019: August 2), that “the United States intentionally plunged the Treaty into a crisis” (Ibid.), and that “the United States wanted to free itself from the existing restrictions” (Ibid.). Lastly, the Russian Foreign Ministry stated that “All our proposals regarding viable solutions to settle the existing problems based on mutual transparency measures were turned down” (Ibid.). Resultantly, it becomes clear that a language of distrust, accusation, and disagreement, permeated the dialogue between the U.S. and Russia. As such, compared to their mid-1980s relationship where amalgamation took place, in 2019 this was replaced by a verbal “sharpening of differences” (Deutsch 1970:29). Consequently, it is a language where each party blamed the other, and each party viewed itself as right and good, whilst the other was described as wrong and bad, that constrained the relationship between the U.S. and Russia resulting in the unmaking of the INF Treaty.

## Conclusion

In the overall assessment, this essay has demonstrated that language is important in enabling and constraining transatlantic relations between Europe and America. In effect, the essay has focused specifically on the transatlantic relationship between the U.S. and Russia over the INF Treaty. In that sense, adopting a critical constructivist lens and conducting a discourse analysis of the language of the political actors involved in the negotiations surrounding the INF Treaty, the essay established that language was crucial both in the making of the INF Treaty in 1987, as well as in the unmaking of the Treaty in 2019. As such, not only can it be said that change itself can change and thus the “self” and the “other” are never truly formed, but remarkably, whilst language is socially constructed it is also a powerful social constructor and destructor; therefore, language is important.

## References

- Adler, E. (2005) *Communitarian international relations: the epistemic foundations of international relations*. Routledge.
- Arbatov, A. (2016) Saving nuclear arms control. *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*. [Online] 72 (3), 165–170.
- Austin, J. (1975) *How To Do Things With Words*. [Online]
- BBC (2018) *President Trump to pull US from Russia missile treaty*. [Online] Available from: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-45930206>.
- Carrington, P. (1987) *Speech by the Secretary General of NATO The Rt. Hon. the Lord Carrington*. November 16, 1987. [Online] Available from: [https://archives.nato.int/uploads/r/null/1/4/141251/STATEMENT\\_CARRINGTON\\_1987-11-16\\_ENG.pdf](https://archives.nato.int/uploads/r/null/1/4/141251/STATEMENT_CARRINGTON_1987-11-16_ENG.pdf)

# The Importance of Language in Transatlantic Relations: The INF Treaty

Written by Sara Benkirane

- Cox, M. (2006) the transatlantic crisis: the wolf is at the door. *European Political Science*. [Online] 5 (1), 34–40.
- Deutsch, K. W. (1970) *Political community at the international level: problems of definition and measurement*. Archon Books.
- Diez, T. (2001) Europe as a Discursive Battleground. *Cooperation and Conflict*. [Online] 36 (1), 5–38.
- Donnelly, F. (2013) *Securitization and the Iraq war: the rules of engagement in world politics*. Routledge.
- Ellyatt, H. (2018) *Gorbachev says Trump's nuclear treaty withdrawal 'not the work of a great mind'*. [Online] Available from: <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/10/22/gorbachev-says-trumps-nuclear-treaty-withdrawal-not-the-work-of-a-great-mind.html>.
- Epstein, C. (2010) Who speaks? Discourse, the subject and the study of identity in international politics. *European Journal of International Relations*. [Online] 17 (2), 327–350.
- Farnham, B. (2001) Reagan and the Gorbachev Revolution: Perceiving the End of Threat. *Political Science Quarterly*. [Online] 116 (2), 225–252.
- Fierke, K. M. (2007) *Critical approaches to international security*. Polity Press.
- Fierke, K. M. (2016) "Constructivism." In Dunne, T., Kurki, M. and Smith, S. (eds.), *International Relations Theories: Discipline and Diversity*. Oxford University Press, 161–178.
- Flockhart, T. (2016) "Constructivism and Foreign Policy." In Smith, S., Hadfield, A. and Dunne, T. (eds.), *Foreign Policy: Theories, Actors, Cases*. Oxford University Press, 79–94.
- Garthoff, R. L. (1994) *The great transition: American-Soviet relations and the end of the Cold War*. The Brookings Institution.
- Gorbachev, M. (1987a) *Letter from General Secretary Gorbachev to President Reagan, English version*. September 10, 1987. [Online] Available from: [https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB238/usdocs/Doc%207a%20\(Letter%20from%20Gorby%20to%20Reagan,%20English,%2009.10.87\).pdf](https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB238/usdocs/Doc%207a%20(Letter%20from%20Gorby%20to%20Reagan,%20English,%2009.10.87).pdf)
- Gorbachev, M. (1987b) *Remarks at the Signing of the INF Treaty with Soviet Premier Gorbachev*. December 8, 1987. [Online] Available from: <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/december-8-1987-remarks-signing-inf-treaty-soviet-premier>
- Hansen, L. (2006) *Security as practice: discourse analysis and the Bosnian war*. Routledge.
- Holloway, D. (1988) Gorbachev's New Thinking. *Foreign Affairs*. [Online] 68 (1), 66–81.
- Hopf, T. (1998) The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations Theory. *International Security*. [Online] 23 (1), 171–200.
- Horlohe, T. (2015) The mysterious case of the Russian INF Treaty violation. *Sicherheit & Frieden*. [Online] 33 (2), 99–105.
- INF Treaty (1987) *Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF Treaty)* [Online] Available from: <https://www.acq.osd.mil/tc/inf/INFtext.htm>
- Kitchen, V. M. (2009) Argument and Identity Change in the Atlantic Security Community. *Security Dialogue*. [Online] 40 (1), 95–114.



# The Importance of Language in Transatlantic Relations: The INF Treaty

Written by Sara Benkirane

Lacan, J. (1977) *Écrits: a selection*. W.W. Norton.

Lanoszka, A. (2019) The INF Treaty: Pulling Out in Time. *Strategic Studies Quarterly*. [Online] 13 (2), 48–67.

Lose, L. G. (2001) "Communicative action and the world of diplomacy." In Fierke, K. M. and Jorgensen, K. E. (eds.), *Constructing International Relations: The Next Generation*. M.E. Sharpe, 179–200.

MacFarquhar, N. (2018) *Putin Vows to 'React Accordingly' if U.S. Withdraws From Nuclear Treaty*. [Online] Available from: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/05/world/europe/putin-missiles-trump-pompeo.html>.

Mattern, J. B. (2001) The Power Politics of Identity. *European Journal of International Relations*. [Online] 7 (3), 349–397.

Mattern, J. B. (2005) Why 'Soft Power' Isn't So Soft: Representational Force and the Sociolinguistic Construction of Attraction in World Politics. *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*. [Online] 33 (3), 583–612.

NATO (2018) *Statement on the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty Issued by the NATO Foreign Ministers*. December 4, 2018. [Online] Available from: [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_161122.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_161122.htm)

NATO (2019) The INF Treaty – NATO's Position. *NATO Press Fact Sheets and Backgrounders*. [Online] Available from: [https://www.nato.int/nato\\_static\\_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf\\_2019\\_06/20190617\\_190617-factsheet-INF-Treaty\\_en.pdf](https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2019_06/20190617_190617-factsheet-INF-Treaty_en.pdf)

Neumann, I. B. (1996) Self and Other in International Relations. *European Journal of International Relations*. [Online] 2 (2), 139–174.

O'Connor, T. (2019) *Russia gives a first look at the weapon that's causing the U.S. to leave a nuclear missile treaty* [Online] Available from: <https://www.newsweek.com/russia-first-look-weapon-us-treaty-1301969>.

Onuf, N. (1989) *World of our making: rules and rule in social theory and international relations*. Univ. of South Carolina Press.

Onuf, N. (1998) "Constructivism: A User's Manual." In Kubalkova, V., Onuf, N. and Kowert, P. (eds.), *International Relations in a Constructed World*. M. E. Sharpe, 58–78.

Payne, R. A. (2007) Neorealists as Critical Theorists: The Purpose of Foreign Policy Debate. *Perspectives on Politics*. [Online] 5 (3), 503–514.

Phillips, N. & Hardy, C. (2002) *Discourse Analysis: Investigating Processes of Social Construction*. Sage Publications.

Pompeo, M. R. (2019) *U.S. Withdrawal from the INF Treaty on August 2, 2019*. August 2, 2019. [Online] Available from: <https://www.state.gov/u-s-withdrawal-from-the-inf-treaty-on-august-2-2019/>

Reagan, R. (1983) *Remarks at the Annual Convention of the National Association of Evangelicals in Orlando, Florida*. March 8, 1983. [Online] Available from: <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/research/speeches/30883b>

Reagan, R. (1987a) *Letter from President Reagan to General Secretary Gorbachev*. April 10, 1987. [Online] Available from: [https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB238/usdocs/Doc%201a%20\(letter%20Reagan-Gorby%2004.10.87\).pdf](https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB238/usdocs/Doc%201a%20(letter%20Reagan-Gorby%2004.10.87).pdf)

Reagan, R. (1987b) *Remarks at the Signing of the INF Treaty with Soviet Premier Gorbachev*. December 8, 1987. [Online] Available from: <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/december-8-1987-remarks->

# The Importance of Language in Transatlantic Relations: The INF Treaty

Written by Sara Benkirane

signing-inf-treaty-soviet-premier

Reagan, R. (1990) *Ronald Reagan: an American legacy*. Simon and Schuster.

Reus-Smit, C. (2013) "Constructivism." In Burchill, S. and Linklater, A. (eds.), *Theories of International Relations*. Palgrave Macmillan, 217–240.

Ruggie, J. G. (1998) What Makes the World Hang Together? Neo-utilitarianism and the Social Constructivist Challenge. *International Organization*. [Online] 52 (4), 855–885.

Russian Foreign Ministry (2019) *Foreign Ministry statement on the withdrawal of the United States from the INF Treaty and its termination*. August 2, 2019. [Online] Available from: [https://www.mid.ru/en/press\\_service/spokesman/official\\_statement/-/asset\\_publisher/t2GCdmD8RNlr/content/id/3750394](https://www.mid.ru/en/press_service/spokesman/official_statement/-/asset_publisher/t2GCdmD8RNlr/content/id/3750394)

Shepperd, T. (2013) *Sino-US relations and the role of emotion in state action: understanding post-Cold War crisis interactions*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Stoltenberg, J. (2018) *Joint press conference with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg and the Minister of Defence of Norway, Frank Bakke-Jensen at the Trident Juncture 2018 distinguished visitors' day*. October 29, 2018. [Online] Available from: [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions\\_159853.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_159853.htm).

Trump, D. J. (2019) *Statement from the President Regarding the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty*. February 1, 2019. [Online] Available from: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/statement-president-regarding-intermediate-range-nuclear-forces-inf-treaty/>

U.S. Department of State (2018) *Russia's Violation of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty – United States Department of State*. December 4, 2018. [Online] Available from: <https://www.state.gov/russias-violation-of-the-intermediate-range-nuclear-forces-inf-treaty/>.

Wendt, A. (1992) Anarchy is what states make of it: the social construction of power politics. *International Organization*. [Online] 46 (2), 391–425.

Wolf, A. F. (2019) Russian Compliance with the Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty: Background and Issues for Congress [Updated June 27, 2019]. *Library of Congress. Congressional Research Service*. [Online] R43832 (35), 1–46. Available from: <https://www.hsdl.org/?view&did=826878>

*Written at: University of St Andrews*

*Written for: Dr Faye Donnelly*

*Date written: April 2020*