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A Common Deterrent for a United Europe? Revisiting European Nuclear Discourse

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Abstract

Nuclear weapons remain the unquestioned core of the defence postures of France and the United Kingdom. At the same time, the European Union is progressively enhancing its common foreign and security posture, notably through the establishment of a European Security and Defence Policy. Yet, despite evident progress in the CFSP, whose ultimate purpose is to lead to a "common defence policy", EU member states still deal with nuclear issues on a strictly national basis. Our paper seeks to contrast the progress of EU-integration with the continuance of national nuclear deterrence in Europe by analysing how this is presented in European public discourse. How is the raison d'être of the French and British nuclear deterrents conceptualised, and how is nuclear proliferation by the so-called "rogue states" portrayed? The paper inquires about the construction of the rationale of the French and British nuclear forces and in particular their compatibility with the emerging European defence policy. What is the alleged purpose of European nuclear forces in European defence? Could and should a "European nuclear deterrent" be envisaged as the final stage in the ongoing framing of a European defence?

Introduction

In the past few years, nuclear non-proliferation has developed into a key issue on the foreign policy agenda of the European Union (EU). This heightened attention marks a sharp contrast to Cold War times, when Western Europe tackled nuclear issues largely within in the framework of the Atlantic Alliance. The emergence of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) at the beginning of the 1990s laid the groundwork for the initiation of joint European non-proliferation efforts outside the Atlantic framework, which culminated in the adoption of the EU Strategy against the Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) in 2003. As a result of the talks conducted by the three major EU powers – France, Germany and the United Kingdom (UK) – with Iran over uranium enrichment, non-proliferation has acquired prominence as a CFSP objective. The EU's commitment to stemming proliferation is reflected in the inclusion of non-proliferation clauses in all new agreements concluded with third countries since December 2003, which obliges both parties to abide by their obligations under arms control and disarmament treaties.

This is part of an expansion of the EU's security agenda, demonstrating that despite some setbacks such as the failure of the Constitutional Treaty, the EU remains an active international player. Most significantly, it has activated its military realm in the shape of the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP), and released a European Security Strategy (ESS). Notwithstanding the increasing salience of WMD proliferation in international politics and the continued progress in the CFSP, one question remains ignored: The EU's incorporation of the goal of WMD non-proliferation to its common security policy has excluded the question of the European - that is French and British - nuclear arsenals from its purview. Little attention has been paid to the question of how the possession of nuclear weapons by European states themselves affects the international non-proliferation regime.

Against the background of significant progress towards the establishment of a common defence policy, the future of European arsenals becomes increasingly salient. At present, nuclear weapons remain the core of the defence postures of France and the UK. French proposals to gradually integrate both French and British nuclear forces into a joint European arsenal tabled in the early nineties but soon discarded in the face of opposition from European partners. Such proposals have been renewed by the French leadership, most recently by President Sarkozy. Fifteen years after the European debate on the *dissuasion concertée*, transformations in European security warrant a re-examination. The EU has acquired a military dimension by creating military structures in the Council and transferring the capabilities from the WEU to the EU, thereby completing a transformation from a purely civilian entity to an organisation with a manifest military and security dimension. In view of growing progress in the integration of defence policies among EU member states, the question of the "European option" is likely to be re-opened in the near future. This idea is likely to regain currency soon. In the 2008 revi-

sion of the EES, the question of how the EU should “deal with the military nuclear dimension” was raised.¹

The present contribution seeks to address the disconnect between increasing progress in the framing of a common European foreign and defence policy, particularly through the development of non-proliferation policies, with the continuance of strictly national nuclear deterrence in Europe. What is the purpose of European nuclear forces? Could and should a “European nuclear deterrent” be envisaged as the final stage in the ongoing framing of a European defence policy? The article first reviews and compares the core features of French and British nuclear strategies and the respective justificatory political discourses, inquiring about the potential role of these weapons in the emerging European defence policy. A second section looks at the current stage of development of the CFSP, analysing its degree of maturity in the framing of a common defence. A third part revises the arguments for and against a nuclear deterrent advanced in the 1990s, while the fourth section tests their soundness in the current strategic context. We conclude by presenting some reflections on the future of nuclear deterrence in Europe.

Exploring Discourse: A Note on Methodology

As we proceed through our analysis, we examine the role of prevalent nuclear discourses in an attempt to shed light on how language is used to frame proliferation and the logic of deterrence in Europe. We support our analysis with the help of the exploration of discourse. Our approach is based on two assumptions: First, language is not merely an objective reflection of meaning or a vehicle that conveys a, static signification. Second, it is only through language and the linguistic, intersubjective establishment of meaning that the world is structured. In other words: Neither subjects nor objects of knowledge have meaning in themselves. Instead, meaning is a contingent and never utterly fixed result of an ongoing social process of negotiation. This must not be understood to imply that there is nothing but meaning or discourse. However, following Laclau and Mouffe, we can argue that it is only through language that we make sense of the world and that non-discursive (“material”) matters are imbued with a specific meaning:

“The fact that every object is constituted as an object of discourse has nothing to do with whether there is a world external to thought, or with the realism/idealism opposition. An earthquake or the falling of a brick is an event that certainly exists, in the sense that it occurs here and now, independently of my will. But whether their specificity as objects is constructed in terms of ‘natural phenomena’ or ‘expressions of the wrath of God’ depends upon the structuring of a discursive field.”²

¹ Silvestri 2008

² Laclau and Mouffe 1985, p. 108

Consequently, discursive frames or narratives structure our understanding of the world, govern the public debate and delineate what is common-sensible and what is not. Objections such as “politicians don’t really mean what they say” are therefore misleading: even insincere acts, if accepted by the audience, constitute a form of discursive practice and thus influence the emergence of structures of meaning. Ultimately, discourses outline the very possibilities for policy action by generating the “playing field” upon which (foreign) policy action takes place and by making intelligible both who the objects and subjects are and how they relate to each other. This involves that certain discourses become hegemonic or dominant, thus providing relatively stable “grids of intelligibility”³ that help to make sense of the world. Other modes of conceiving of the world are contrariwise subjugated as “unintelligible” or illegitimate. At the same time our understanding of discourse does not imply that there is nothing else to the world apart from discourse. Yet, discourses - as structures of signification - provide a framework of representations which in turn ascribe and attribute meaning to both actors and issues of contention that are relevant in a specific situation:

"These representations (...) define, and so constitute, the world. They populate it with objects and subjects, endow those subjects with interests, and define the relations among those objects and subjects."⁴

Against this background we consider the respective nuclear discourses in order to gain a better understanding of how they pave the ground for specific ensuing policies.⁵ We limit our analysis to the study of *political* discourses expressed by members of the political elite⁶, considering speeches by high-ranking government officials, parliamentary debates, as well as governmental reports, defence postures/ white books and, in the case of the EU, also legal/ constitutional texts. This narrow focus on political discourse is in line with the fact that, in recent years, debates on nuclear issues have increasingly receded from the public sphere into the realm of security experts.

In order to situate our analysis of more recent developments, we start with a historical overview of the evolution of nuclear policies and related nuclear discourses in France and the United Kingdom.

I. The European Nuclear Powers: France and the UK

During the Cold War, the nuclear landscape in Western Europe presented a mosaic featuring very different attitudes towards the notion of nuclear deterrence. The only two nuclear powers on the continent defined different roles for their “ultimate” weapons. British nuclear forces were fully integrated into the nuclear planning and defence strategy of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). By contrast, following France’s decision to leave the integrated military structure in 1966, its nuclear ar-

³ Milliken 1999, p. 230

⁴ Weldes et. al 1999, p. 14

⁵ Chilton 1996; Wæver 2004

⁶ For a different (intertextual/ intergenre) approach see for example Hansen 2006

senal remained separate from any international framework. Justified as a safeguard of French strategic independence, its nuclear deterrent officially fulfilled a purely national role. As for the non-nuclear powers, two main attitudes towards the notion of nuclear deterrence co-existed on the continent. With the only exception of Ireland, the member states of the then European Community (EC) were simultaneously members of NATO, and were thus covered by the US nuclear umbrella.⁷ Some NATO members like Germany or Belgium, despite being non-nuclear weapons states, hosted US nuclear weapons in their territory. Neutral states such as Sweden remained not only outside NATO but also of the EC. This heterogeneous landscape translated into multiple attitudes towards nuclear deterrence among non-possessor states: those who were protected by collective defence commitment of the Atlantic Alliance accepted the logic of nuclear deterrence, while neutral countries such as Sweden and Ireland openly opposed it.

Today, two of the currently 27 member states of the European Union maintain an arsenal of nuclear weapons: France and the United Kingdom. According to estimations, France possesses 348 deployed warheads; the UK is said to maintain a stockpile of currently approximately 160 nuclear weapons.⁸ Thus, the EU represents the global nuclear order of haves (nuclear weapons states, NWS) and have-nots (non-nuclear weapons states, NNWS) on a miniature scale.⁹ While France and the UK are not willed to abandon their weapons, disarmament supporters such as Sweden vehemently demand a significant reduction of nuclear weapons.

France

The beginnings of France's *force de frappe* date back to the early 1950s, when the French parliament agreed upon a five-year-programme to establish a nuclear complex. Although the final decision for the development of a military application was made not until late 1954, the ideational foundations of the French atomic capability are to be found earlier: Three consecutive invasions through German forces within less than one century had not only led to huge human losses, but also left the country deeply humiliated. Nuclear weapons therefore appeared as a useful means to secure French borders against any threat – be it German, Soviet or any other – and to regain both independence and self-esteem.¹⁰

Thus, the French case illustrates the mixture of motives that can shape the original decision to go nuclear: On the one hand, classical realist considerations of power and self-defence were responsible for the establishment of a French nuclear capability. In this reading, nuclear weapons function as a measure to defend the state against foreign aggression without being completely dependent on allied forces. These strategic reflections were mirrored in France's nuclear doctrine, which justifies the pos-

⁷ See Becker 2003

⁸ Kile, Fedchenko and Kristensen 2007, p. 515

⁹ Grand 2000

¹⁰ For an account of the evolution of the French nuclear programme see Tertrais 2004, pp. 51-122

session of atomic weapons as a means of "deterrence of the strong by the weak" (*dissuasion du faible au fort*). Mainly targeted at the Soviet Union, it was based on the idea that France could inflict unacceptable damage even on a comparatively military superior enemy.¹¹ On the other hand, there is also a symbolic edge to the decision to acquire a nuclear capability: atomic weapons were considered a symbol of modernity, strength and national greatness and thus represented a healing remedy to make up for the experienced trauma and humiliation – even more desired after the country's status as colonial power came to an end in the 1960s.¹² De Gaulle's exclamation "France cannot be France without greatness"¹³ captures this aspiration for national status and provides the rhetorical justification for the acquisition of nuclear weapons - not primarily as a military means, but as an embodiment of grandeur and prestige. Referring to this ideational aspect of French military considerations Scott D. Sagan later coined the expression of "nuclear symbolism".¹⁴ The doctrinal idea of *tous azimuts* ('targeted in all directions') embodies this concern, as it entails that France should be able to carry out a nuclear strike against any target in the world, thereby perpetuating a great-power self-perception.

The end of the Cold War, however, brought about profound changes to the French nuclear forces. Most noticeable was of course the change in the force structure: the ground-based missile systems were eliminated. France now relies on only two delivery systems: a fleet of four submarines plus 84 aircrafts (60 land-based Mirages and 24 carrier-based Super Étendard). Yet, more revealing than the simple numerical changes are strategic and doctrinal adjustments made within the last few years. In a speech given in January 2006 then-President Jacques Chirac announced that the envisioned scenario for use of French nukes had changed from a de facto non-use policy deterring major power threats, into a policy foreseeing a broader range of employment options. According to Chirac, France should develop a comprehensive nuclear posture that could also be applied in contingencies with smaller powers or terrorist groups.¹⁵ Whereas in former years such a strike had only been thinkable in case of a serious threat to France's "vital interests"¹⁶, the threshold was critically lowered. The following statement from the aforementioned speech spells out this development:

"The integrity of our territory, the protection of our population, the free exercise of our sovereignty will always be the core of our vital interests. But they are not limited to these. The perception of these interests is changing with the pace of our world, marked by the growing inter-

¹¹ Hymans claims that the French nuclear weapons programme was firstly directed against Germany: "[W]henver de Gaulle, as president of the Fifth Republic, would come to the CEA [Commissariat à l'énergie atomique] he would ask 'each time the same question: he wanted to know when, how, how fast and in how much time the Germans could in turn build themselves the bomb, if (...) they decided to make it'. Hymans 2006, p. 113

¹² The question of pride gains even greater significance if one keeps in mind that France has developed its nuclear capability on its own - unlike e.g. the UK which benefitted from US aid.

¹³ quoted in Markey 2000, p. 96

¹⁴ Sagan 1997

¹⁵ Chirac 2006

¹⁶ idem

dependence of European countries and by globalization. For example, safeguarding our strategic supplies and the defence of allied countries are, among others, interests that must be protected. Assessing the scale and potential consequences of an unbearable act of aggression, threat or blackmail perpetrated against these interests would be the responsibility of the President of the Republic. This analysis could, if necessary, lead to consider that these situations fall within the scope of our vital interests."¹⁷

Hence, the more specific reference to "strategic supplies" embodies a shifted assignment and a lower threshold of nuclear use compared to the idea of protecting "vital interests" only.

As the current President, Nicolas Sarkozy, has not yet issued a full doctrinal analysis on the future of the French nuclear forces, prospects are difficult to foresee. So far, signals are mixed: while having made several references to NPT-obligations, force reductions, and nuclear disarmament, Sarkozy also highlights the fundamental role of nuclear weapons as an integral part of French security. On the occasion of the launch of a new nuclear submarine, he declared:

"Our nuclear deterrence protects us from any aggression against our vital interests emanating from a state – wherever it may come from and whatever form it may take. Our vital interests, of course, include the elements that constitute our identity and our existence as a nation-State, as well as the free exercise of our sovereignty. (...) All those who would threaten our vital interests would expose themselves to severe retaliation by France resulting in damages unacceptable to them, out of proportion with their objectives. Their centres of political, economic and military power would be targeted on a priority basis."¹⁸

It remains to be seen if Sarkozy departs from the route taken by his predecessor Chirac. Yet there is little evidence of a comprehensive and far-reaching renunciation of the guidelines developed under Chirac. Instead, we seem to be witnessing the continued appreciation of nuclear weapons within French military doctrine.¹⁹ The latest White Paper on Defence (2008) points into that direction:

"Nuclear deterrence remains an essential concept of national security. (...) Given the diversity of situations to which France might be confronted in an age of globalisation, the credibility of the deterrent is based on the ability to provide the President with an autonomous and sufficiently wide and diversified range of assets and options."²⁰

Emphasizing nuclear weapons' utility in a "diversity of situations", not least as a protection against threats to "our identity", serves as a justification for their persistence. Hence, post-Cold War hopes for

¹⁷ Yost 2006, p. 701-721

¹⁸ Sarkozy 2008. The symbolic significance of delivering such a speech on the occasion of the launch of a new nuclear submarine casts doubt on sincerity of any disarmament pledge.

¹⁹ Tertrais 2008

²⁰ French White Paper 2008, p. 2

a de-emphasising of nuclear weapons and for progress in disarmament are shattered by the increase in their usability through the assignment of new tasks.

Within French society and among the French political elite there is a virtual lack of contestation of nuclear weapons. Instead, a vivid nuclear consensus prevails that is tightly linked to a conception of France's role in the world that dates back to De Gaulle. Wisotzki emphasises that his role was crucial for the development of nuclear thinking in France, which later came to be known as "monarchie nucléaire": the incommensurable shaping power of the French president in nuclear issues.²¹

French nuclear discourse developed in a rather streamlined and, as Larsen has carved out, almost "mythical"²² fashion of which two key concepts are indicative: *L'arme de la paix* and *Dissuasion du faible au fort*. The *l'arme de la paix* (*weapon of peace*) understanding severely downplays the devastating effects of nuclear weapons by euphemistically suggesting that they bring about a beneficial result: peace. *Dissuasion du faible au fort* (deterrence of the strong by the weak) purports an exclusively defensive character of the nuclear forces. By recurring to the metaphor of the "small" it is suggested that vulnerable France has only one measure to defend itself against the Soviet threat. The possession of nuclear weapons has thus long been legitimised as a means of last resort against the superior enemy - an image that persists, although the scenario of nuclear weapons' use has changed significantly. This predominant view on the assumed legitimacy and necessity of atomic weapons has long prevented the rise of any nuclear critical voices. Therefore, it does not come as a surprise that France's 2006 nuclear doctrine has hardly attracted attention, let alone fundamental criticism. The French anti-nuclear movement remains comparably small and muted.

A close look at the case of the UK will show that – idiosyncrasies notwithstanding – France's stance toward nuclear (non-) disarmament is far from unique: both European nuclear states share many commonalities in their nuclear policies.

United Kingdom

The UK nuclear programme dates back to the early post-World War II years. In 1947 the administration of Prime Minister Clement Attlee secretly decided to start an autonomous British weapons programme.²³ Beforehand, the US government had decided to discard the close US-UK-cooperation in the nuclear field which came to be known as the *Manhattan Project* and which had existed for several years. Interestingly, one important motive behind the British decision to commence an independent

²¹ Wisotzki 2005, p. 127-156

²² Larsen 1997, p. 120

²³ Milne 2003, p. 13

programme was the attempt to exert influence on Washington and to "blackmail" it into a revived nuclear collaboration²⁴:

"By so doing [developing its own thermonuclear weapons], Britain was, in part, attempting to demonstrate to the United States that it was an ally worthy of collaborating with and that it intended to remain a nuclear power."²⁵

The related diplomatic effort of re-establishing the US-UK "special relationship" eventually succeeded – the British nuclear endeavour became closely tied to the American nuclear complex.²⁶ Unlike the French, who developed their own capability not least to gain greater independence from the US, the British quest for autonomy was rather weak - too appealing was the prospect of participating in the advanced US programme. The still visible high degree of connectedness with the American nuclear forces becomes further apparent when one looks at British doctrines and force structure plans: The "nuclear visions" oscillated between establishing either a rather autonomous force of last resort, that could – at least in theory – be used independently against the Soviet Union should the US be unwilling to get involved, or merely an eastward deployed add-on to the US arsenal.²⁷ In the end – not least under the dictate of economic constraints – Britain opted for a strategy of "countervalue", a euphemistic term concealing the strategic target of annihilating 15 Soviet cities. In terms of Cold War strategic thinking this was designed to complicate any war initiation for the Soviet leadership by constituting a "second centre of decision-making" in the West. For the course of the Cold War this meant that British forces became integrated into NATO and that any UK nuclear strategy was basically part of the overarching principle of deterrence based on the huge destructive capability of the US arsenal.

However, the end of the Cold War suddenly posed a dilemma to the conceptual spin-web of "no-first-use", "deterrence", "mutual assured destruction": the classic threat had disappeared. Yet the weapons persist: today, the UK maintains a fleet of four nuclear-powered submarines equipped with 12-14 Trident missiles.²⁸ Almost 200 nuclear warheads, thereof 160 operational, complete the arsenal. That is indeed a reduction of about 30 percent compared to Cold War sizes.²⁹ Furthermore, the only one submarine that is nowadays on patrol is "maintained at a level of reduced readiness with a 'notice to fire' measured in days, and its missiles are de-targeted"³⁰. One reason for this tentative reconsideration and

²⁴ However, the British programme was successful: even in the absence of American support, the UK established a small strategic nuclear force comprising of bombers to be equipped with nuclear warheads.

²⁵ Baylis 2001, p. 37

²⁶ Perhaps the most important tangible aspect of this cooperation is the proliferation to the UK of missile systems (Polaris, Trident) capable of carrying nuclear warheads

²⁷ Quinlan 2004, pp. 261-274

²⁸ All other means of delivery, that is ships and aircraft, have been decommissioned.

²⁹ Norris and Kristensen 2002, p. 103-104

³⁰ Kile and Kristensen 2005, p. 589

the gentle adjustments made since the end of the Cold War is to be seen in the comparatively strong anti-nuclear movement in the UK and particularly in Scotland, where the nuclear complex is based.³¹

Instead of going down the path of arms reductions consistently, the British government's strategy remains ambivalent: while it reiterates its commitment to the NPT and eventual nuclear disarmament, it is still attached to the idea of maintaining a 'minimum' nuclear deterrence. One year after coming to power the Labour government announced reductions in the nuclear forces, and at the 2000 NPT Review Conference, the British delegation helped to achieve a minimal consensus. Yet, overall, it failed to follow up on these first steps. This ambiguity still exists: While the Brown administration – in accordance with his forerunner Tony Blair – seeks new uses for its nuclear weapons and presses ahead with the modernization of the Trident nuclear weapons system³², several high-ranking government officials (such as then-Foreign Secretary Margaret Beckett or then-Defence Secretary Des Browne) expressed their sympathy for nuclear disarmament.³³ Browne acknowledged that "our chances of eliminating nuclear weapons will be enhanced immeasurably if the Non-Nuclear Weapon States can see forward planning, commitment and action toward multilateral nuclear disarmament by Nuclear Weapon States. Without this, we risk generating the perception that the Nuclear Weapon States are failing to fulfil their disarmament obligations and this will be used by some states as an excuse for their nuclear intransigence."³⁴ Even Prime Minister Gordon Brown claimed that in 2010 the UK will be "at the forefront of the international campaign to accelerate disarmament amongst possessor states"³⁵. Yet, at the same time the government asserted that the "Cold War threat has been replaced by a diverse but interconnected set of threats and risks, which affect the United Kingdom directly and also have the potential to undermine international stability."³⁶ Consequently, defence could only be guaranteed through an independent nuclear deterrent as "fundamental principles relevant to nuclear deterrence have not changed since the end of the Cold War, and are unlikely to change in future"³⁷. What is particularly interesting about the first quote from a discourse analytical perspective is the inherent distinction between the hostile international environment ("diverse ... set of threats and risks") on the one hand and British nuclear weapons as a source of stability on the other. The maintenance of nuclear weapons is not only framed as a necessity in order to preserve international stability, but implicitly also as a service to the international community. This rhetorical move removes the nu-

³¹ Hence, the administration's recent decision to modernize the nuclear arsenal was accompanied by quite large scale protests and a fierce parliamentary debate. Johnson 2007

³² In March 2007, the UK Government voted for the replacement of current Trident systems and for retaining UK's nuclear weapons posture. Johnson 2007

³³ Beckett 2008

³⁴ Browne 2008

³⁵ Brown 2008

³⁶ National Security Strategy of the United Kingdom 2008, p. 3

³⁷ The Future of the United Kingdom's Nuclear Deterrent 2006

clear weapon issue from a purely national agenda, relating it instead to the need for international stability.

Beside its putative military usefulness³⁸, such a strategic conception has grave implications for both international security and common European defence. One is that the assurance to use these “weapons of last resort” only for defensive purposes is misleading, as Paul Rogers points out:

“The problem with this is that it is one of the great myths of the nuclear age. (...) Nato as an alliance, and Britain as a state, have long planned to fight nuclear wars at levels falling far short of a cataclysmic central nuclear exchange. This also means that Nato and Britain have had, and still maintain, policies that can envisage ‘first use’ of nuclear weapons.”³⁹

Furthermore, the recurrent reference to the UK’s disarmament record is deceptive. Admittedly, the UK might be the most conciliatory and “arms control-friendly” of the nuclear weapon states. Yet, the British government has (as have France and the US⁴⁰) announced the modernisation of its arsenals and also developed new options of use for what is called “sub-strategic” weapons, i.e. weapons with a low-yield that might be used as a final warning or to “decapitate” a rogue state’s leadership.⁴¹ These sub-strategic weapons lower the threshold of nuclear use, blurring the distinction between conventional and atomic weapons and thus undermining the nuclear taboo.⁴² All three aspects – the modernisation of existing weapon systems, the refusal to implement a no-first-use policy as well as the development of smaller, more “usable” and “credible” nuclear weapons – have rendered the use of such weapons has become more likely than during Cold War times.

Moreover, the “deterrence” trope and the related link to the reputed Cold War stability blights a more thorough debate about this very concept. To put it differently: The light-minded praise of deterrence leads us to ignore the many problems inherent to this strategy. It assumes that deterrence works – even under the fundamentally different conditions of the post-Cold War era. It makes one rely on a model of political behaviour that is oversimplified. It suggests that there are what Lebow calls easy “technical fixes”⁴³ to problems which might in fact be very political in nature. And it purports that the roles of defender and challenger in a conflict are always unproblematic, evident and clear-cut.

France and the UK: Convergent frames

Despite the different origins and rationales of the French and British deterrents, the past two decades have witnessed an increasing convergence in the formulation of their nuclear doctrines. This is part of

³⁸ Ritchie convincingly challenges the myth of nuclear weapons’ usefulness in the contemporary security environment. Ritchie 2008

³⁹ Rogers 2006

⁴⁰ Jasper 2002

⁴¹ The Future of the United Kingdom’s Nuclear Deterrent, p. 23

⁴² Tannenwald 2007, pp. 383-387

⁴³ Lebow 2005, p. 772

a growing approximation of the defence policies of these two countries witnessed in the aftermath of the Cold War: The traditionally Atlanticist Britain has come to accommodate a defence role for the EU, while exceptionalist France has gradually reintegrated into Atlantic structures.⁴⁴ Also, Franco-British approximation in the field of nuclear doctrine presumably owes much to the establishment of regular bilateral talks on military nuclear issues in the early nineties.⁴⁵ Joint statements underlined a “considerable convergence...on nuclear doctrine and policy” already in 1995: “We do not see situations arising in which the vital interest of either France or the United Kingdom could be threatened without the vital interests of the other also being threatened”.⁴⁶

Yet, British and French similarities are not limited to the domain of doctrine development, but are also traceable in publicly accessible documents. The public discourses on nuclear proliferation in the two countries have also converged. They are nowadays dominated by the recurrent theme of how the “custodians of law” succeed in not only protecting themselves, but also in inducing countries such as North Korea or Iran or non-state actors to give up their aspirations for nuclear programmes. Underlying these postures are linguistic frames and metaphors of (in-) security which portray the “world out there” as an inherent danger to “benevolent” Europe, hence legitimating the given nuclear order of haves and have-nots. As Gusterson argues:

“The discourse on nuclear proliferation legitimates this system of domination while presenting the interests the established nuclear powers have in maintaining their nuclear monopoly as if they were equally beneficial to all nations of the globe. And, ironically, the discourse on non-proliferation presents the subordinate nations as the principal source of danger in the world.”⁴⁷

Consequently, by framing the current nuclear order as a dichotomy of (i) the passively deterring “benign” and “rational” Self against (ii) the “evil” and “passionate” Other, the very order is constructed, naturalized and legitimated in the first place. This prevailing frame is used as a justification for a policy of continued nuclear deterrence and of non-proliferation efforts directed at potential nuclear enemies while ignoring problems arising from the European nuclear status. Some references to the desirability of complete nuclear disarmament notwithstanding, nuclear weapons will continue to be the cornerstone of British and French military postures in the foreseeable future. Their existence is recurrently justified through a certain set of frames, metaphors and tropes which dominate the public nuclear discourse. How is this approach to global security reconciled with the security vision upheld by the EU and by its member states? What does this imply for the further process of European integration and the long-term goal of a common European defence? In the following section, we revise the current

⁴⁴ Matlary 2008

⁴⁵ Croft 1996, pp. 777-780; Kile et. al report that this cooperation presumably embraces the coordination of submarine patrols. Kile, Fedchenko and Kristensen 2006, p. 653

⁴⁶ British-French Joint Statement on Nuclear Co-operation, 30 October 1995

⁴⁷ Gusterson 1999, p. 132

state of the CFSP and attempt to ascertain its degree of “maturity” to host a common European deterrent.

II. The CFSP: Towards a common European defence force?

More than 50 years of European integration have led to an unprecedented depth of cooperation not only in “soft” foreign policy areas, but even in security policy – a core element of the traditional notion of the sovereign state. If ratified, the Lisbon Treaty will streamline internal decision-making processes and help strengthening the EU’s position as an international actor. It will increase the perception of EU actorness abroad: be it through the common European diplomatic service⁴⁸; the creation of a European Council President with a mandate of two and a half years⁴⁹; or through the newly established High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.⁵⁰ The extension of “enhanced cooperation” to “permanent structured cooperation”⁵¹, permitting groups of states to proceed to new levels of interstate military teamwork (“core Europe”), as well as the establishment of a European Armaments Agency⁵² will reinforce collaboration in military and security affairs. In sum, these changes will – if eventually accepted by the European peoples – pave the way for a progressively Europeanized approach to foreign and security policy ultimately including a common defence, as heralded in the Treaty:

“The Union’s competence in matters of common foreign and security policy shall cover all areas of foreign policy and all questions relating to the Union’s security, including the progressive framing of a common defence policy that might lead to a common defence.”⁵³

What can be discerned from recent developments in European foreign and security policy is the potential for increasingly harmonised and integrated security policy behaviour. The Lisbon treaty provisions explicitly sketch a movement toward comprehensive European security actorness.

The idea of equipping the EU with an autonomous military capability existed at least since the run-up to the Treaty of Maastricht of 1992, but agreement on the concrete shape this should take remained elusive until the end of the decade. The establishment of a European Rapid Reaction Force was made

⁴⁸ TEU Art. 27 (3)

⁴⁹ TEU Art. 15

⁵⁰ TEU Art. 18

⁵¹ TEU Art. 42 (6)

⁵² TEU Art. 42 (3); Although the agency had already been established in 2003, its mention in the Constitution has been criticised by many who regard it as an indication of the EU’s further militarisation.

⁵³ TEU Art. 24 (1) In order to underline its importance, this intention is repeated in almost identical wording a few paragraphs later: “The common security and defence policy shall include the progressive framing of a common Union defence policy. This will lead to a common defence, when the European Council, acting unanimously, so decides.” Art. 24 (1)

possible thanks to Britain's green light given at the French-British summit at St Malo in December 1998⁵⁴. Partly a reaction to Europe's poor record of managing the conflict in Kosovo, this was largely accomplished through the transfer of capabilities of the moribund Western European Union (WEU) to the EU. Thus, when at the June 1999 summit in Cologne the European leaders agreed upon establishing EU military capacities, these were meant to manage crises in their vicinity, somewhat relaxing Europe's military dependence on the US.

The significance of a Europeanised foreign and defence policy can hardly be overestimated in politico-symbolic terms, as it breaks with national autonomy in defence, so strongly connected to the traditional notion of state sovereignty. For the time being, ESDP missions are conducted with contingents committed by member states on a case-by-case basis. Yet, some proposals have been tabled by integrationist leaders to create a standing European army. Most recently, the German Chancellor Angela Merkel claimed that the EU should establish a European army within the next 50 years.⁵⁵ While no agreement among member states exists yet, the ambition of a steady "Europeanisation" of foreign and security policy, reflected in the project of a unified European military, might become a reality in a not distant future.

Arms Control and Non-Proliferation

A similar trend can be observed in the more specific realm of arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation: Over the past few years, the Union has evolved into an active and energetic proponent of initiatives in this issue area. While EU activities in support of non-proliferation pre-date the release of its first Strategy against the Proliferation of WMD in 2003⁵⁶, the organisation has significantly increased its attention to non-proliferation issues. The emergence of the Strategy must be understood against the backdrop of the pronounced disagreements over the US intervention in Iraq, which had been largely justified on proliferation concerns. The fact that the Union failed to agree on a common stance on how to address alleged Iraqi proliferation revealed an embarrassing lack of unity in the CFSP.⁵⁷ Indeed, the transatlantic and, perhaps even more dramatically, the inner-European rift between supporters and opponents of military intervention– the "Old" and "New" Europe – exposed incompatible allegiances, beliefs, and foreign policy identities.⁵⁸ As EU foreign policy making appeared in shambles after the Iraq crisis, the development of a comprehensive, genuinely European

⁵⁴ Joint Declaration Issued at the British-French Summit, Saint Malo, France, 4 December 1998

⁵⁵ In an interview, Merkel said: "In the EU itself, we have to come closer to a common European army". Bild 2007 (Translations from French and German language sources are the authors').

⁵⁶ Portela 2003

⁵⁷ Everts and Keohane 2003, p.167

⁵⁸ The division reached its climax in January 2003, when five current EU members and three acceding countries issued the so-called "Letter of Eight", published in several European and American newspapers, where they outspokenly aligned themselves with US plans to attack Iraq – in open opposition to the French and German rejection of the war. Wall Street Journal 2003

approach to non-proliferation offered an opportunity to rebuild the capacity for joint action and to reunite the continent under a common goal. As Anand Menon argues, the dispute over Iraq might even have been "salutary" for the future of ESDP⁵⁹. The very calamity worked as a wake-up call, providing a coercive stimulus which culminated in two EU documents adopted in late 2003: The European Security Strategy and the Strategy against the Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction.⁶⁰ For the first time, the EU member states made non-proliferation a priority of their common agenda and sketched out a comprehensive strategy – an initiative motivated by the desire to balance the hitherto dominant US "counter-proliferation" approach. Under the heading of "effective multilateralism" the EU pledges to strengthen multilateral arms control regimes and to enforce WMD non-proliferation by civilian and if necessary also by military means.⁶¹

As a part of the G8 Global Partnership against the Spread of Nuclear Weapons⁶², the EU funds threat reduction initiatives. Most EU non-proliferation activities are canalised through relevant international organisations, primarily the International Atomic Agency (IAEA) and the Organisation for the entry into force of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBTO): these bodies receive EU funds to support specific programmes such as the strengthening of export controls in third countries. This strand of activity builds on early EU initiatives in support of non-proliferation in Russia, where the EU funded nuclear safety measures and the destruction of chemical weapons stockpiles in implementation of to the Chemical Weapons Convention in the 1990s⁶³. The EU undertakes diplomatic demarches to multilateralise and strengthen the implementation of international regimes. Again, this activity builds upon the EU's past record, which found its most remarkable expression in the successful campaign in support of the indefinite extension of the NPT at its 1995 Review Conference.⁶⁴ After 2003, the EU has devoted its efforts to the promotion of the signing and entry into force of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) and of the Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty (FMCT), to which end it has adopted a number of CFSP Common Positions. The EU has also incorporated proliferation concerns in bilateral relations with third countries. In particular, co-operation with the US in non-proliferation matters has flourished. The EU has embraced the US-launched Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) geared to-

⁵⁹ Menon 2004, p.631

⁶⁰ European Security Strategy "A Secure Europe in a Better World", December 2003, URL: <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cmsUpload/78367.pdf>; "Strategy Against the Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction", December 2003, URL: <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cmsUpload/st15708.en03.pdf>; also of further interest are the "Basic Principles for an EU Strategy Against the Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction" and a related Action Plan for their implementation, adopted at the June 2003 summit in Thessaloniki, URL: http://www.sipri.org/contents/expcon/eu_wmd_ap.pdf

⁶¹ The 2005 NPT Review Conference supports this mixed judgment. Whereas the Conference as such failed, Europe's performance as broker between several blocs was promising and could have been even more successful, had France not decided to leave the European consensus to align itself with the US position. Müller 2005

⁶² See: <http://www.g8.gc.ca/2002Kananaskis/kananaskis/globpart-en.asp>

⁶³ Threat reduction initiatives by the Commission also include the establishment of Science and Technology Centres in Kiev and Moscow to employ scientists formerly involved in military nuclear programmes. Anthony 2004.

⁶⁴ Fischer and Müller 1995

wards the interception of illegal shipments of proliferation-relevant materials. Bilateral agreements concluded with third countries since 2003 include a WMD clause whereby the EU's partner commit to non-proliferation goals. The most visible development in the aftermath of the adoption of the strategy has been the upgrade of the EU's role in the management of proliferation crises. Previously, EU involvement in the resolution of the nuclear questions in North Korea and elsewhere were limited to the provision of financial support. The enhanced role played by the UK, France and Germany in the Iran nuclear conflict since revelations about uranium enrichment raised concerns in August 2002 is representative of Europe's pro-active attitude.⁶⁵ In view of the US reluctance to enter negotiations with the Iranian leadership, the "EU-3" adopted a leading role as broker. As suggested by Perthes, the EU had "for once adopted a proactive approach, rather than limiting itself to supporting or criticizing American politics"⁶⁶.

Nevertheless, EU non-proliferation policy sidelines nuclear disarmament, given that it is based on the "lowest common denominator" among states with diverging attitudes towards nuclear weapons. While the text of the NPT recognises the link between disarmament and non-proliferation, the EU has hardly addressed disarmament in its declarations and action plans. However, the omission of nuclear disarmament from EU discourse does not prevent pro-disarmament states from advancing their goals: EU members Ireland and Sweden are simultaneously members of the New Agenda Coalition (NAC).⁶⁷ But a close look at EU discourse reveals a dramatic misfit: When Europe talks about arms control and non-proliferation it is rarely concerned with itself or its member states. Instead, this frame suggests that both issues have to be enforced predominantly among "the others". Yet, declining European responsibility for the present situation endangers progress in arms control and disarmament. In no other field this becomes more visible than with regard to nuclear weapons.

In EU rhetoric, the omission of disarmament questions is made possible through several means. Firstly, the Union ascribes itself a specific role in the field: "The EU wants to act before the threat materialises, we want to 'prevent'".⁶⁸ However, it is not explained in which way proliferation is best prevented. Secondly, the EU looks upon its policies as a domain where it can demonstrate its capacity for internal coordination and external visibility, circumventing the question of impact of its policies by remaining "self-centred": "within the UN system, the EU is now identified as the major sponsor of the

⁶⁵ Denza 2004; Sauer 2004

⁶⁶ Perthes 2005, p. 17

⁶⁷ The Swedish commitment to nuclear disarmament became most visible in its establishing of the "Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission" (WMDC) chaired by the former Executive Secretary of UNMOVIC Hans Blix to explore the prospects of WMD disarmament in 2003. Also indicative of the Swedish and Irish position is the Working Paper submitted by the New Agenda Coalition to the 2005 NPT Review Conference, which calls upon all NPT state parties "to accelerate the implementation of the practical steps for systematic and progressive efforts to achieve nuclear disarmament."

⁶⁸ Gianella 2008a:4

multilateral treaty system"⁶⁹; the fact that the High Representative Solana has received a mandate by the US, Russia and China in the negotiation with Iran is "a recognition of the EU's growing role on the international scene"⁷⁰, and the Lisbon Treaty provides him "with the instruments to ensure a stronger coordination between first and second pillar activities".⁷¹ These references suggest that EU action is not exclusively evaluated in terms of the contribution it makes to advance non-proliferation and disarmament goals – this represents just one among other functions.

Some acknowledgement of the tensions that mar the NPT regime is also present in EU discourse: "there are persisting problems in the non-proliferation system that can undermine its well-functioning if not its sheer existence".⁷² However, the problem is presented as a question of misperceptions: "dissatisfaction with the disarmament process leads [NNWS] to believe that non-proliferation is simply a concern of nuclear weapons states, or more widely of developed countries, and that they do not really need to care about the non proliferation regime".⁷³ NNWS discontent with the regime is not viewed as resulting from lack of implementation, but framed as "mistrust due to differing understandings and varying perceptions of the obligations and benefits of the system".⁷⁴

This evidences the complex and inconsistent nature of European actorness. On the one hand, the European states have reached an undreamt level of integrative depth: common European practices already cut deep into the realm of defence, long associated with state sovereignty. On the other hand, speaking of "one European actor" particularly in the field of defence policy conceals the multitude of diverging and partially even contradicting positions among member states. The issue of nuclear weapons can almost function as a focal point for this paradox: it symbolises the discrimination between European nuclear haves and have-nots while it serves as the fundament for very different arms control concepts among its members.

III. "Concerted Deterrence": The 1990s Debate

The idea of integrating the European nuclear forces surfaced shortly after the end of the Cold War. The geopolitical transformation provoked by the disintegration of the Warsaw Pact profoundly affected the nuclear setting of the continent, not least through the subsequent removal of most US nukes from their European storage sites. While no official numbers are available, NATO sources indicate that the Alliance "currently deploys a few hundred nuclear weapons in Europe".⁷⁵ NATO's nuclear planning groups and consultations committees reduced their activities to a minimum. The European

⁶⁹ Gianella 2008a:6

⁷⁰ Gianella 2008b:7

⁷¹ Gianella 2008a:11

⁷² Gianella 2007:6

⁷³ Gianella 2008a:8

⁷⁴ Gianella 2008b:6

⁷⁵ NATO deputy assistant secretary-general for weapons of mass destruction policy and director for nuclear policy Mr Guy Roberts; quoted in Meier 2007

nuclear powers France and the UK drastically reduced their military nuclear capabilities. Yet, the end of the Cold War left them in a situation where the maintenance of what was left of their arsenals turned out to be increasingly difficult to justify.

Against this background, France formulated the first proposal to move towards the integration of the European atomic arsenals: Whilst British nuclear forces were already internationalised in the framework of NATO, France's attachment to the independent role of its nuclear deterrent had lost its rationale. Indications of the French shift towards an Europeanisation of its arsenal became apparent as early as 1992.⁷⁶ The first sign was given by President Mitterrand in the framework of a colloquium on European integration in January 1992, where he unexpectedly stated that "the issue of adjustment between the French nuclear doctrine and France's European vocation would have to be addressed" at some point.⁷⁷ He also noted that the formulation of a common European nuclear doctrine would "quickly become one of the major questions in the construction of a common European defence".⁷⁸ The fact that this initial indication fell short of a fully-fledged proposal suggests that the intention was merely to launch a reflection on the subject.⁷⁹ Only a few weeks on, Deputy Defence Minister Mellick elaborated the initiative by presenting several options for its realisation, coining the term "*dissuasion concertée*", which translates as "concerted deterrence".⁸⁰

Subsequently, the idea was further elaborated by senior officials. However, after other EU Member States strongly objected to the proposal, the French leadership re-positioned itself. Distancing itself from previous statements, it noted that European deterrence could not come about "until vital interests fully converged".⁸¹ As a result, the question became marginalised from public discourse by mid-1994. In the aftermath of the French nuclear tests of 1995 Jacques Chirac and Alain Juppé re-launched the concept of a *dissuasion concertée*. Only at that stage was the proposal debated beyond France's borders. However, the division between opponents and advocates of the concept ran along nationality lines. Amidst the international condemnation provoked by the tests, the proposal was resolutely rejected by European partners. As the original 1992 proposal had hardly enjoyed any resonance outside France, the French move was largely perceived by its neighbours as a manoeuvre geared at legitimising the nuclear tests.⁸²

The notion of a *dissuasion concertée*, meant to add a European dimension to the French deterrent by extending its nuclear umbrella to the rest of the EU, was left vague by the various politicians who advanced it. This imprecision might have been intended to attract the interest of the addressees by

⁷⁶ This was not the first attempt by France to internationalise the role its atomic forces after it left NATO's integrated structure; Schmidt 2004.

⁷⁷ quoted in Boniface 1996

⁷⁸ quoted in Tertrais 1999

⁷⁹ Boniface 1996

⁸⁰ Schmitt 1997

⁸¹ quoted in Boniface 1996

⁸² Schmitt 1997

allowing them to contribute to the configuration of the actual arrangement. In any case, the indeterminate nature of the concept was criticised by observers as having contributed to its unpopularity.⁸³ According to leadership's statements, the concept of the *dissuasion concertée* is defined by the ultimate aim of extending the scope of the French deterrent to cover other member states. The 1994 French proposal was not meant to include necessarily the entire EU into the arrangement: "This is not about unilaterally extending our deterrence or imposing a new contract on our partners...We do not propose a ready-made concept, but a gradual process *open to those partners who wish to join*".⁸⁴ The expected method was thus to progressively include new members into the bilateral consultations on nuclear questions already in place with the UK, the principal addressee being Germany. Prime Minister Juppé declared that concerted deterrence was based on "the necessity for dialogue between two equal partners, on a subject that concerns their common future. Germany has no intention of acquiring nuclear weapons...that commitment makes it even more important for Germany's security to be guaranteed against that threat".⁸⁵ The rationale for the establishment of the *dissuasion concertée* was justified on a double footing: a "de-facto security interdependence" that binds EU members together, and the path of European integration, whose ultimate aim was presented as the creation of a "strategically autonomous" actor. From this perspective, the process of European integration was portrayed as incomplete in the absence of a common nuclear deterrent. In this vein, Chirac claimed that "this is about drawing all the consequences from a community of destiny, of a growing and intertwining of our vital interests".⁸⁶ This was to be accomplished through a process in which partners gradually join on an individual basis. The ultimate decision on use of atomic weapons was to remain in French hands – at least, no indications to the contrary were made.⁸⁷ The presentation of the *dissuasion concertée* as a joint enterprise within the context of the EU without requiring the participation of all members echoes the Schuman Declaration: The French Foreign Minister proposed that Franco-German production of coal and steel be pooled "within the framework of an organisation open to the participation of the other countries of Europe".⁸⁸ The seminal proposal for the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community originated as a Franco-German project and marked the first step of European integration, which eventually attracted membership of virtually the entire continent.

In view of the indeterminacy of the notion of *dissuasion concertée*, sympathising scholars fleshed it out by developing concrete options for implementation. One of the most elaborated proposals featured a progression starting with institutionalised consultations mechanisms on nuclear strategy and doctrine

⁸³ Boniface 1996

⁸⁴ Chirac 1996; our emphasis

⁸⁵ Juppé 1995

⁸⁶ Chirac 1996

⁸⁷ Müller 1996

⁸⁸ Schuman 1950

and eventually culminating in the creation of a “single European deterrent”.⁸⁹ An “unofficial” catalogue of the conditions which European partners would need to embrace in order to participate in the arrangement was also formulated. The point of departure consists in subscribing to the permanence of nuclear weapons “as a determining factor in strategy and international relations” for the foreseeable future, and accepting their continued relevance as a “last safeguard against the return to large conflicts in Europe”. The “maintenance of the political primacy of nuclear powers” constituted another pre-condition.⁹⁰ From the vantage point of military strategy, it also entails the maintenance of “sufficient levels in both nuclear and conventional forces to deter potential aggressors”.⁹¹

For vocal proponents of nuclear disarmament like Sweden and Ireland the acceptance of the logic of nuclear deterrence was out of question. The most obvious obstacle to the adoption of the *dissuasion concertée* was the fear of weakening of the transatlantic security link. While the UK was not fundamentally opposed to the French proposal, it made clear that it would only consider its implementation in a transatlantic context. The continued presence of a small number of atomic weapons in some European states under NATO’s nuclear sharing arrangement was perceived as having a strong symbolic value as an embodiment of the continued US commitment to European security and Alliance solidarity. France’s neighbours were fearful of undermining the transatlantic link through a de-facto replacement of the US nuclear guarantee by a French-led arrangement with which they feel ostensibly less at ease. A second difficulty relates to the implications for the proliferation regime. From a legal vantage point, it remains controversial whether the *dissuasion concertée* would be permissible.⁹² But beyond legal controversies, a key concern here is that the creation of a common European deterrent covering a growing number of states would severely undermine the spirit of the NPT.⁹³ Since the logic of nuclear deterrence is generally perceived as contradicting that of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, some member states such as Germany fear that the Europeanisation of the French arsenal would be regarded as “internal proliferation” and undermine efforts to stem the spread of nuclear weapons at global level.⁹⁴ “Internal proliferation” would have been especially difficult to justify in times where the

⁸⁹ Tertrais 1999

⁹⁰ Bozo 1996

⁹¹ Fricaud-Chagnaud 1996

⁹² Germany foresaw the possibility already at the time the NPT was drafted, and acceded on condition that the treaty would not be interpreted “in such a way that it would hamper the further development of European integration, especially in the establishment of a European Union with its corresponding areas of competency”; Kuntzel 1995:146. In contrast, the Anglo-American view is that the extension of the Franco-British nuclear umbrella to other countries would entail a breach of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, bar transfer of nuclear weapons or control over them to any recipient, including a multilateral entity, unless the nuclear-weapon states concerned ceased to exist; Butler et al 1997.

⁹³ Butler et al. 1997; Müller 1996

⁹⁴ Schmidt 2004

possibility of a massive attack against Europe is minimal, and when nuclear weapons are experiencing a “legitimation crisis”.⁹⁵

Finally, some questioned that the European unification project was in a sufficiently advanced state to accommodate nuclear integration. The then Spanish Foreign Minister Solana, who would later become NATO Secretary-General and subsequently High Representative for the CFSP, argued that dealing with nuclear issues at that stage was “like starting to build a house from the roof down”.⁹⁶ In particular, intergovernmental co-operation in the CFSP was regarded as too underdeveloped to allow for the inclusion of nuclear deterrence questions. As French analyst Bozo put it, “how can we entertain the ambition of a European deterrent after the Union has failed to bring peace to Bosnia?”.⁹⁷ Instead, he suggested starting by establishing a European consensus on proliferation and disarmament, given that these are “at the heart of the post-Cold War nuclear question”.⁹⁸ To these concerns, one must add the reticence of small member states to witness the creation of a *Kerneuropa* or *noyau dur européen* in the security field. Small and peripheral member states were suspicious that they might be confronted with the creation of a nuclear arrangement managed by a *directoire* of the three big member states operating at the margins of small members’ interest.

The motivation for the French proposal of a *dissuasion concertée* might have been misunderstood at the outset. The international legitimation of the French atomic arsenal, virtually uncontested domestically, can partly account for the framing of the proposal. However, the search for centrality in the construction of *l’Europe de la défense* possibly was an equally powerful driving force. This motivation is not alien to French defence policy: it was already present in the decision to withdraw from NATO’s integrated structures in the sixties.⁹⁹ France’s proposal can be understood as an attempt to regain relevance in a field where it can make a major contribution and at a stage of European integration where the increasing number of member states threatens to diminish the leadership role it had traditionally shared with Germany.

IV. A European Deterrent for the XXIst Century?

Despite the failure of the idea of *dissuasion concertée* in its initial stage, French leaders continue to reiterate their proposal.¹⁰⁰ Most recently, President Sarkozy proposed “to engage those European partners who so wish in an open dialogue on the role of deterrence and its contribution to our common secu-

⁹⁵ Schmitt 1997

⁹⁶ Solana 1996

⁹⁷ Bozo 1996

⁹⁸ Bozo 1996

⁹⁹ Commenting that decision, Freedman acknowledges that according to de Gaulle’s plans “France was to be the focal point for the new Europe, but the problem of inconsistencies between the national interests of France and the more general interests of her neighbours was not followed up. The consequences of de Gaulle’s policy were the opposite to those intended”; Freedman 2004, p.307

¹⁰⁰ Schmidt 2004

city".¹⁰¹ Elements from the original idea reappear. Sarkozy presents extended deterrence as a function the French nuclear arsenal is already fulfilling:

"Our deterrence also takes into account changes in...our alliances and in European construction. [...] As for Europe, it is a fact: by their very existence, French nuclear forces are a key element in Europe's security. Any aggressor who might consider challenging it must be mindful of this."

This is followed by a direct linkage to European integration: "our commitment to the security of our European partners is the natural expression of our ever-closer union". Thus, the current French proposal maintains the essential traits of its predecessors: it frames the idea as a further step in European integration, while presenting it as an offer to interested parties. Interestingly, however, Sarkozy's speech also serves another purpose. He interweaves the "common European deterrence"-frame with references to Europe as a "community of values":

"Never in history has our national security been so intimately tied to that of our allies and our European partners. Our common destiny lies with the European Union and beyond that, with all nations that share our values: peace, freedom, fraternity, the defence of the equal and irreducible dignity of human beings regardless of colour, creed and origin."

Taken together, these two argumentative threads function as a twofold justification of French nuclear weapons: Not only is the continued reliance on nuclear weapons justified by the necessity for France to fulfill its duties as EU-member and to protect both French territory as well as its European neighbours. It is additionally justified on a moral basis through the depiction of Europe as a benign community of peace-loving democracies. By rendering French nuclear weapons an essential constituent of the defense posture of "civilian power Europe", Sarkozy grants these weapons additional moral justification and legitimacy as "weapons of the Good".

How do these arguments fare fifteen years after the first proposals were tabled? The following paragraphs re-examine the pertinence and force of the arguments of the 1990s debate under the present circumstances.

Why the proposal is (still) impracticable

In several respects, considerable progress in the construction of a European security policy in the fifteen years that have elapsed since the original proposal has placed the EU in a better position to accommodate a concerted deterrence arrangement. In the mid-nineties, supporters of the *dissuasion concertée* suggested to locate it in the WEU, at the time an organisation with modest capabilities and an uncertain future. The existence of the WEU at the sidelines of the EU, with some timid attempts to link

¹⁰¹ Sarkozy 2008

both organisations, indicated a taboo about the creation of robust European military structures outside NATO. The fact that the EU absorbed WEU in the aftermath of St. Malo was symptomatic that this taboo has been considerably relaxed. An appropriate institutional framework is already in place. The military dimension of the EU is now endowed with tailor made structures replicating those of NATO. The Political and Security Committee, a Military Committee and a Military Staff are already commanding ESDP operations and a security strategy provides guidelines for its action. Provisions in the Treaty of Lisbon codify these practices and enshrine a mutual defence commitment. In addition, the permanent structured co-operation in the field of ESDP, while falling short of accommodating nuclear questions along the lines of the French proposal, paves the way for optional arrangements involving only a group of states. Thus, the fundamental rejection of nuclear deterrence by some member states would not be an insurmountable obstacle. However, the progress made in developing the EU's strategic role also reveals the limits of the European consensus on military questions. The preoccupation for the health of the transatlantic link is still present. The most serious CFSP debacle of the decade was triggered by divisions among Europeans over their support to the planned US intervention in Iraq. Several European leaders backed the US, admittedly more out of a sense of allegiance rather than out of a conviction that Iraq represented a threat to their security.¹⁰² The very inception of the EU Strategy against the proliferation of WMD responded to a desire to rebuild the transatlantic partnership. This concern has not prevented the attainment of some European autonomy with the creation of an ESDP. Yet, the operations that the EU has been conducting under ESDP are predominantly civilian operations, while the few military missions dispatched belong to the lowest end of intensity in the Petersberg spectrum.¹⁰³ They are mostly peacekeeping operations in areas of marginal importance to the US such as Africa or the Balkans. But this does not mean that the transatlantic security link has declined in importance to Europeans. On the contrary, the fact that the transatlantic partners increasingly operate outside the NATO framework – and that the NATO mission in Afghanistan is under growing strain – reinforces the perceived need to preserve a link outside the operational field. Once operations are run separately, if Europeans arrange their own independent nuclear deterrent, what common project is left to the Alliance? For many European leaders, it is the permanence of the US commitment to European security what is at stake, and what compelled them to continue to hosting nukes in their territory long after they outlived their strategic purpose.

The maintenance of the transatlantic link continues to be a European priority in and of itself. But underlying this preoccupation, there are also limits to how comfortable Europeans feel about EU-only defence arrangements. While the times when European states distrusted each other have long passed, there is still resistance to the idea of fully integrating defence in the EU. ESDP operations are invaria-

¹⁰² Stahl 2008

¹⁰³ Only two out of twenty ESDP missions so far have deployed over 1,000 military personnel; Engelbrekt 2008:18

bly made up of contingents allocated on a case-by-case basis, and proposals for a standing European army remain elusive. Prime Minister Rasmussen of Denmark, a member state with a notorious opt-out in ESDP, justified his support for the Iraq war by emphasising the centrality of the US to European security: “Who else could guarantee our security? Could France – could Germany?” (Copenhagen Post 2003). In an only-European context, the fears of small countries to become subject to the dictates of powerful member states come to the fore. The fact that the possessors of atomic weapons are two of the biggest member states aggravates the internal imbalance in the EU’s membership. To follow up on the metaphor formulated by Solana, while the foundations of the house are in place, a few stores still have to be built before we get to the roof.

Why the proposal is unadvisable

Even if these objections were to disappear in the coming years, the creation of a *dissuasion concertée* arrangement would still be unadvisable. The main reason is that it contradicts the declared CFSP objective of “preserving the NPT by all means”.¹⁰⁴ The NPT consists in a deal by which NNWS forego atomic weapons in exchange for access to civil nuclear technology and the eventual nuclear disarmament of the NWS. After NNWS denounced the lack of progress in the disarmament commitment for decades – and to some extent also of access to technology-, some decisive steps towards the eradication of atomic arsenals are needed in order to restore confidence in the NPT regime. Adopting a *dissuasion concertée* arrangement would be detrimental to that goal. Hopes for the elimination of atomic weapons in Europe after the Cold War failed to materialise because European states were afraid to give up their ultimate safeguard against an unstable, disintegrating Soviet Union and of weakening the US security commitment. The replacement of a US-dominated nuclear deterrent by a Franco-British equivalent does not represent a step towards nuclear disarmament. To the contrary, it would reinforce the growing perception of NNWS that the NWS are unprepared to abide by their commitments. This further undermines the legitimacy of efforts to prevent the acquisition of nuclear weapons by have-nots. If countries which find themselves surrounded by allies and protected by the double security guarantee enshrined in the Washington and Brussels Treaties are unwilling to remove nuclear weapons, why should states surrounded by hostile neighbours refrain from acquiring them?

This leads us to the second reason why a *dissuasion concertée* is unadvisable: Europe does not actually depend on nuclear weapons to meet its security needs. The fact that European defence autonomy started out in the operational field of ESDP is not by coincidence: it reflects what the EU needed to do to enhance its security, i.e. conducting out-of-area operations. The ESS has, for all its shortcomings, unequivocally identified five threats to the security of the EU: failed states, terrorism, proliferation of

¹⁰⁴ Michel 2005

WMD, organised crime and regional conflicts outside the EU. None of these threats can be satisfactorily addressed with nuclear weapons.

Finally, any arrangement contemplating nuclear deterrence forcibly has to take into account the possibility of the 'failure of deterrence', i.e. it needs to foresee the possibility of the actual use of atomic weapons. During the Cold War, the Atlantic Alliance witnessed profound disagreements over nuclear strategy, which entailed the key questions of when and how the nuclear threshold could be trespassed. Such controversies were only overcome through compromise solutions thanks to the presence of a dominant power.¹⁰⁵ Setting aside the fact that the precise modalities for nuclear decision-making have never been specified by proponents of the *dissuasion concertée*, participation in a collective arrangement is risky. This is especially the case since the last editions of French and British defence strategies foresee the potential employment of atomic weapons, thus lowering the nuclear threshold. There is no reason to believe that, in the absence of a preponderant US leadership and a unifying Soviet enemy, the diffused "current threats" will elicit sufficient agreement among Europeans to allow for joint nuclear decision-making.

Conclusions

The EU faces a serious dilemma in its common foreign and security policy. On the one hand, we can witness increasing integration of member states' policies in this realm. On the other hand, no serious consideration has been given to what can be the future role for European, i.e. British and French, nuclear weapons, in the light of progressing integration. The question becomes more salient in view of EU activity in the field of non-proliferation and arms control, vigorously demanding compliance with arms control obligations in its relations with third states. This position, however, smacks of double standards: as long as the UK and France maintain their arsenals and continue to develop new weapons and doctrines of use, Europe cannot lend much credence to its own policies of non-proliferation. French and British nuclear discourses reveal that there is little prospect for far-reaching progress in nuclear disarmament. Both countries discursively justify their continued reliance on atomic weapons by reference to their own 'benignancy' as opposed to the dangerous international environment and the indispensable deterrence of existential threats or the defence of vital interests. Particularly in France, nuclear weapons carry a symbolic meaning great power status and national sovereignty that exceeds the weapons' military utility – while it makes disarmament even more unlikely.

The timid advances for EU-nuclear sharing repeatedly made by the French government in the last years cannot conceal the inherent double-standard. Instead, as the analysis has shown, a common European *dissuasion concertée* is both impracticable and inadvisable. While from an institutional perspective the EU is today in a better position to accommodate its own nuclear force, the political posi-

¹⁰⁵ Freedman 2003

tions regarding arms control among the currently 27 EU-members are far too diverse to allow for a common European deterrence. It is almost inconceivable that an energetic disarmament proponent like Sweden would support any such project. Even if the EU had the institutional capacities to establish a European nuclear force, this would seriously put under strain the transatlantic link. Lastly, a European *dissuasion concertée* is inadvisable from an arms control perspective, for it severely undermines the spirit of the NPT. It is not only questionable that a common European deterrent would be useful from a purely militarily-strategic point of view: Weakening the NPT could even bring about the opposite effect: a deterioration of European security.

However, disregarding or repudiating the option of nuclear sharing does not automatically solve the conundrum of Europe's nuclear weapons. Neither a common European nuclear force, nor a continued national reliance on nuclear weapons can truly be reconciled with Europe's aspirations to stem proliferation. Even if France and the UK continue to rely on nuclear weapons for their own military purposes, this ultimately casts an unfavourable light on Europe's performance in nuclear arms control: it implies that all European policies in this matter reflect the lowest common denominator, and are more preoccupied with guaranteeing inner-European cohesion than with advancing the cause of arms control.

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