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# Between enhanced commitment and structural opposition: nuclear deterrence in light of the war in Ukraine

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## Introduction

Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 brought the nuclear deterrence issue to the forefront. The nuclear dimensions of the events that have taken place since February 24 are of different types.<sup>1</sup> In particular, Russian leaders have made many references to their nuclear arsenal, intended to be used not only as a deterrent but also as a means of coercion. The concept of "sanctuarization" of Russia's territory under the nuclear umbrella has also been used to describe the policy conducted by Moscow.

Several phenomena can be observed in this context. Firstly, nuclear deterrence as a security doctrine is perceived with increased interest in regions where countries have nuclear weapons. But this heightened attention is not new. The 2014 annexation of Crimea by Russia considerably altered the analyses that had prevailed in the previous decade and which appeared to doubt that nuclear deterrence was an appropriate response to the security issues of the time (terrorism, proliferation, and regional crises).

In Western countries, defense strategy documents are underlining again that strategic competition is back and the need to rely on nuclear deterrence to avoid major armed conflicts. And this is reflected in both doctrines and acquisition programmes.

However, the war in Ukraine has also sparked a totally opposite interpretation because, to some countries and civil society players, the return of strategic competition and Russia's behavior demonstrate the urgent need to eliminate nuclear weapons from great power relations in order to avoid a global disaster. The two visions are totally at variance: while nuclear weapon states and their allies believe that nuclear weapons can prevent a conventional conflict according to the logic of deterrence, to others, they durably prevent peaceful resolution of disputes and keeps humanity under a constant, disproportionate threat of destruction. This second view is shared by a growing community of states and entities and is now supported by an international norm aimed at promoting the rapid elimination of nuclear weapons, the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW).

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<sup>1</sup> Isabelle Facon, "Guerre en Ukraine : le sens du signalement nucléaire russe", [Notes de la FRS](#), n° 30/2022, July 27, 2022; Bruno Tertrais, "Les armes nucléaires et la guerre en Ukraine : bilan provisoire et conséquences possibles", [Notes de la FRS](#), n° 28/2022, July 21, 2022.

The “comeback” of nuclear deterrence is therefore a controversial issue, but the critics have still not succeeded in influencing the strategic calculations of the major powers. In the West, although calls for disarmament are heard and give rise to specific policies, trust in the role of deterrence in guaranteeing national security is triggering long-term efforts and investments to equip these states with deterrent capabilities for the decades to come.

## 1. Reasserting the doctrine of nuclear deterrence

### 1.1. *A context that tends to reinforce the role of nuclear deterrence*

#### 1.1.1. *The return of competition between major powers*

The return of strategic competition between major powers and the deterioration in their relations have followed distinct pathways on the different continents while gaining speed since the 2010s. In Europe, hopes for improved relations between NATO and Russia were dashed in 2008 with Russia’s military intervention in Georgia. In 2014, the invasion of Crimea triggered a form of “cultural revolution” in several European countries when people realized the revisionist nature of Russian policy. Indeed, the intention of Putin’s regime to challenge the geopolitical order inherited from the Cold War and its refusal to accept the international rules agreed when the USSR collapsed were visible in this first violation of Ukrainian sovereignty. These ambitions were subsequently underlined in several crises, including when chemical agents prohibited by the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) were used to assassinate political opponents on the territory of a NATO member state (poisoning of Sergei and Yulia Skripal in Salisbury in 2018).

In the Indo-Pacific region, America’s attempt to treat China as a partner has gradually given way to the desire to contain the challenges to the region’s strategic equilibrium. The “pivot to Asia” initiated by the Obama administration in 2010 illustrated this approach even though the Democratic President tried to maintain a strong diplomatic engagement with Beijing.<sup>2</sup> US-China relations became increasingly strained during Donald Trump’s tenure, particularly in terms of trade confrontation. In addition, several incidents led European states to consider a less cooperative relationship with China and to anticipate the emergence of more conflictual relations in the Indo-Pacific.

The war in Ukraine is therefore a marker of a movement that began about ten years ago. This movement has seen the collapse of post-Cold War hopes for a lasting peaceful liberal international order based on international law and integration through trade. In this context, the renewed interest in nuclear deterrence as security doctrine comes as no surprise.

#### 1.1.2. *Nuclear deterrence and the war in Ukraine*

Despite the end of the Cold War, nuclear deterrence has continued to be an essential strategy in the military doctrines of nuclear weapon states. However, its role has been reduced, as it was seen as the ultimate assurance against a conflict between powers that

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<sup>2</sup> Kenneth Kieberthal, “The American Pivot to Asia”, [Brookings Institution](#), December 21, 2021.

was seen as increasingly unlikely. For example, the 2001 Quadrennial Defense Review mentioned deterrence as only the third priority in US defense policy.<sup>3</sup> At the time, the Pentagon was seeking to broaden its approach to deterrence by adding strategic conventional offensive capabilities and antimissile defense to nuclear forces in the “New Triad” concept.<sup>4</sup>

In a very operational perspective, several incidents that occurred in the United States from 2000 onwards appeared to mark the lesser priority given to the nuclear mission. These incidents, which led to the creation of a review board and the publication of a critical report, also illustrated the decline in investment devoted to these functions at a time when the US armed forces were largely deployed in very costly external operations.<sup>5</sup>

Within NATO, this reduced emphasis on nuclear issues was particularly visible, with some allies publicly questioning the role of the Alliance’s nuclear strategy in addressing emerging challenges. The debate over the legitimacy of keeping US gravity bombs in several European countries showed the split between allies. Admittedly, these debates were fueled by domestic political pressure in countries such as Germany, the Netherlands and Belgium, but also by a firm belief that this type of capabilities played only a minor role in ensuring Europe’s security.<sup>6</sup>

Less emphatically, other nuclear powers diversified their priorities in the 2000s and up to the early 2010s, with, for example, significant investments in Russia to develop modern conventional capabilities. In France, nuclear forces have always received strong political attention and substantial budgets, even though, at the same time, major efforts have been made to enable the deployment of the armed forces to external theaters and on the national territory.<sup>7</sup>

This nuclear pendulum has gradually swung the other way, though. The war in Ukraine has given visibility to a process that has convinced nuclear weapon states of the importance of deterrence over the past fifteen years and has led them to reinvest in this area, both in terms of capabilities and doctrine.

## 1.2. *A new emphasis on nuclear deterrence*

### 1.2.1. *Domestic efforts to reaffirm the role of nuclear deterrence*

The role of nuclear weapons has been reasserted to varying degrees from one state to another, and this reassertion has been more obvious in those that have sought to reduce its role in recent years. The United States has noticeably begun to regard it as a high priority mission again. For example, the most recent strategic document published by Washington

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<sup>3</sup> [Quadrennial Defense Review Report](#), Department of Defense, September 30, 2001.

<sup>4</sup> David McDonough, “The ‘New Triad’ of the Bush Administration: Counterproliferation and Escalation Dominance in US Nuclear Strategy”, [September 2004](#).

<sup>5</sup> Kingston Reif, “Pentagon Releases Nuclear Reviews”, [Arms Control Today](#), December 2014.

<sup>6</sup> For example, see Polina Sinovets, William Alberque (ed.), *Arms Control and Europe. New Challenges and Prospects for Strategic Stability*, Springer, 2022.

<sup>7</sup> For example, see the French [White Paper on Defense and National Security](#), 2008.

emphasizes the central role of the nuclear deterrence policy, which aims to avoid a strategic attack against the US, and its allies and partners.<sup>8</sup>

In the United Kingdom, the 2021 publication of the strategic review *Global Britain in a Competitive Age: the Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy* drew a lot of attention.<sup>9</sup> On the one hand, it insists at length on the need to prevent state attacks and presents a disturbing analysis of the strategic environment. In this context, the new strategic review clearly defends the role of nuclear deterrence. In particular, the authorities believe that the maximum ceiling of nuclear weapons deployed by the country should be raised (from 180 to a maximum of 260 weapons).<sup>10</sup>

In France, the change has been less significant, because nuclear deterrence has always had a priority role. The emblematic speeches of Presidents Hollande and then Macron on the subject were keen to recall that “*the era of nuclear deterrence is not over*”<sup>11</sup> and that it continues to “*protect France and its people from state threat against our vital interests, wherever it comes from and in whatever form*”<sup>12</sup>

These strategic developments are very explicitly linked to the reassertion of the value of strategic forces on the Russian side, where Vladimir Putin boasted of the investments made to modernize an aging arsenal as a symbol of Russian military and technological strength.<sup>13</sup> In response, the Western powers said that they were not necessarily seeking to imitate the Kremlin’s policy views and action but wanted to confirm the credibility of their deterrence model.

### 1.2.2. Within NATO

At the level of NATO, the significant change in the nuclear posture has reflected a real paradigm shift. At the time of the adoption of the Strategic Concept in Lisbon in 2010 and the Deterrence and Defence Posture Review in Chicago in 2012, several member states had in fact supported a reduction in the Alliance’s nuclear mission, the withdrawal of US nuclear weapons deployed on the territory of several NATO member states, and advocated disarmament and arms control measures. Although the wording agreed at the time reflected an acceptable compromise, it illustrated the ambition not to consider nuclear forces as the only ones capable of ensuring deterrence.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Factsheet: 2022 National Defense Strategy, [U.S. Department of Defense](#), 2022.

<sup>9</sup> *Global Britain in a Competitive Age: the Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy*, [Cabinet Office](#), March 16, 2021.

<sup>10</sup> “*In 2010 the Government stated an intent to reduce our overall nuclear warhead stockpile ceiling from not more than 225 to not more than 180 by the mid-2020s. However, in recognition of the evolving security environment, including the developing range of technological and doctrinal threats, this is no longer possible, and the UK will move to an overall nuclear weapon stockpile of no more than 260 warheads*”.

<sup>11</sup> François Hollande, [Speech on nuclear deterrence](#) – Visit to the strategic air forces, Istres (13).

<sup>12</sup> [Speech by Mr. Emmanuel Macron](#), President of the Republic, on defense and deterrence strategy, in Paris, on February 7, 2020.

<sup>13</sup> Isabelle Facon, Bruno Tertrais, “La Russie et l’emploi des armes nucléaires : le sens des propos de Vladimir Poutine lors de Valdaï-2018”, [Notes de la FRS](#), n° 21/2018, November 5, 2018.

<sup>14</sup> “*Deterrence, based on an appropriate mix of nuclear and conventional capabilities, remains a core element of our overall strategy*” (Active engagement, modern defence – Strategic Concept for the Defence and Security of the Members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation adopted by Heads of State and Government in Lisbon, NATO, November 19, 2010); “*Deterrence, based on an appropriate mix of nuclear and conventional capabilities, remains a core element of our overall strategy*” (Active engagement, modern defence – Strategic Concept for the Defence and Security of the Members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation adopted by Heads of State and Government in Lisbon, NATO, November 19, 2010).

At the 2016 Warsaw Summit, negotiations on the paragraphs relating to nuclear forces proved easier. The press release issued at the end of the summit introduced few innovations, stating that it is necessary to take *further steps to strengthen deterrence and defence against threats*<sup>15</sup>

In 2022, the allies met in Madrid to draft a new Strategic Concept. The document follows on from the previous texts while reflecting some of the allies' doctrinal changes.<sup>16</sup> While the text continues to underline commitment to the principle of disarmament, it is described as a less urgent goal. The role of deterrence is clearly championed, with NATO stating that "*The Alliance has the capabilities and resolve to impose costs on an adversary that would be unacceptable and far outweigh the benefits that an adversary could hope to achieve*" (§ 28). In addition, the role played by the French and British nuclear arsenals is highlighted and the participation of non-nuclear weapon states in the nuclear mission is welcomed and considered "*central to the effort*". While repeating the traditional compromise between nuclear and conventional forces, the 2022 new Strategic Concept reaffirms that "*[n]uclear weapons are unique*" (§ 28) and emphasizes "*the unique and distinct role of nuclear deterrence*" (§ 30).<sup>17</sup>

For NATO leaders, the stronger support for NATO's deterrence policy is also reflected in statements made at the national level. Thus, on March 18, 2022, at the presentation of the "national security strategy", German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock stressed the wish to ensure the security and freedom of Germany and its allies by jointly strengthening the defense capabilities of NATO and the EU. While her party, the Greens, is traditionally known for its reluctance and criticism on the subject, Annalena Baerbock very clearly declared that nuclear deterrence is indispensable for the time being, that unilateral disarmament is not conceivable, and that arms control must be complementary to deterrence and defense.<sup>18</sup>

This clearer consensus in favor of a strengthened role for deterrence is also reflected in the decision of all nuclear weapon states to reinvest in sustaining current capabilities.

### 1.3. The evolution of policies and their impact on programmes

#### 1.3.1. A clear reinvestment in nuclear capabilities

At the level of NATO, efforts to modernize existing nuclear capabilities began long before the war in Ukraine, but the conflict has had an accelerating effect and has provided a basis for, and therefore facilitated, certain policy decisions. Germany has been talking about renewing

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*nuclear force posture currently meets the criteria for an effective deterrence and defence posture*" (Deterrence and defence posture review, [Press Release](#) (2012) 063, May 21, 2012).

<sup>15</sup> [Warsaw declaration on transatlantic security](#), issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Warsaw, July 8-9, 2016.

<sup>16</sup> [Madrid Summit Declaration](#) issued by NATO Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Madrid, June 29, 2022.

<sup>17</sup> Bruno Tertrais, "OTAN : la dissuasion élargie confortée", *Bulletin n° 100*, [Observatoire de la dissuasion](#), FRS, Summer 2022.

<sup>18</sup> Annalena Baerbock, "Außenministerin Annalena Baerbock bei der Auftaktveranstaltung zur Entwicklung einer Nationalen Sicherheitsstrategie", [Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#), March 18, 2022.

its nuclear-capable fighter-bombers for over a decade. Yet, the final decision to acquire American F-35s to conduct this mission was taken only in March 2022.<sup>19</sup> This order illustrates the shift in Germany's perception of defense, with the decision to reinvest extensively in defense capabilities driven by the belief that it is *"no longer possible to reap the dividends of peace."*<sup>20</sup>

Russia's actions are not the only reason for modernizing deterrent forces. In the Indo-Pacific, states are also strengthening their extended deterrence relationship with the United States, be it Australia with the AUKUS program or Japan<sup>21</sup> and South Korea. These changes can also be seen in the debate on autonomous deterrence capability, particularly in the case of Seoul.<sup>22</sup>

As far as nuclear weapon states are concerned, their decision to renew and modernize their nuclear capabilities is unrelated to the war in Ukraine, since the major programs had already been initiated before it began. However, the security context does open the door to a somewhat unabashed debate on the reinforcement of nuclear capabilities beyond the existing scope.

### 1.3.2. *Emerging debates on strengthening nuclear capabilities*

In the United States, President Biden was elected on a platform of nuclear restraint. In several speeches delivered prior to his election, Joe Biden supported the adoption of a no-first-use posture by the United States as he did not envision any scenario that could justify a US nuclear first strike.<sup>23</sup> However, the recent events have prompted his administration to review certain policy choices. In drafting the new Nuclear Posture Review, the adoption of a no-first-use posture was ruled out. Although the publication of the full final document has been delayed for several months,<sup>24</sup> the Fact Sheet posted online by the Department of Defense reiterates that *"the fundamental role of U.S. nuclear weapons is to deter nuclear attack on the United States, our allies and their interests."*<sup>25</sup>

Another issue illustrates the influence of the strategic context in the US nuclear debate. In the 2018 Nuclear Posture Review, the Trump administration chose to add two capabilities to the investment program adopted with bipartisan support in 2010. These two weapon systems, described as adding flexibility and allowing a response to limited nuclear attacks, especially in a regional theater, gave rise to two separate programs: the addition of a low-yield nuclear warhead on intercontinental missiles carried by US nuclear submarines (W76-2) and the redeployment of nuclear-tipped cruise missiles that can be carried by attack ships or submarines (SLCM-N).

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<sup>19</sup> Ministerin Lambrecht: Neue Kampfflugzeuge für die Luftwaffe, [Ministry of Defense](#), March 14, 2022.

<sup>20</sup> [Das Ende der Friedensdividende](#), Bundestag, June 7, 2022.

<sup>21</sup> Japan-U.S. Extended Deterrence Dialogue, [Department of State](#), June 23, 2022.

<sup>22</sup> Jennifer Ahn, "The Evolution of South Korea's Nuclear Weapons Policy Debate", [Council on Foreign Relations](#), August 16, 2022.

<sup>23</sup> Adam Mount, "The Biden Nuclear Posture Review: Obstacles to Reducing Reliance on Nuclear Weapons", [Arms Control Today](#), January/February 2022.

<sup>24</sup> Paul Frailoi (ed.), "The US Nuclear Posture Review in limbo", *Strategic Comment*, vol. 28, Comment 14, IISS, July 2022.

<sup>25</sup> Fact Sheet: 2022 Nuclear Posture Review and Missile Defense Review, [Department of Defense](#), 2022.



The first of these two weapons, which is relatively simple to develop, was deployed as early as 2020, and the new administration has not sought to remove it from service.<sup>26</sup> However, when it released its budget proposals in 2022, the Democratic administration challenged the funding for SLCM-N, suggesting that it did not wish to develop this capability.<sup>27</sup> In June 2022, and in a rather unprecedented manner, top American military officials publicly contradicted this decision, deeming it inappropriate in view of the conflict in Ukraine and the expansion of the Chinese nuclear arsenal.<sup>28</sup> Their opinion hit home in Congress, among both Republican and Democratic senators, who reintroduced SLCM-N funding during the budget review process.<sup>29</sup>

In academic papers, out of decision-making circles, questions relating to withdrawal from binding arms control agreements and the growth of the US arsenal are back on the agenda, with experts considering that “simple logic and arithmetic make clear that the 1550-accountable warhead cap agreed in 2010 in the context of the New START Treaty is

”.<sup>30</sup> In this context, academics or former military officials, often known for their hawkish and conservative positions, call for deploying multiple warheads on ICBMs and building more nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines.<sup>31</sup>

In the nuclear weapon states, but also among their allies, the war in Ukraine has highlighted the swing of the pendulum in support of stronger defense policies and a reassessment of the role of nuclear deterrence. While these policy changes and the corresponding investments were largely initiated before the Russian invasion, in some cases it has been used to justify a reinforcement of past measures. However, this view of a less secure environment requiring a bigger defense effort is not universal. A large part of the international community feels that, on the contrary, the heightened tensions among powers call for more urgent efforts to eliminate nuclear weapons. Deterrence is therefore back in the forefront but in a context of controversy.

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<sup>26</sup> Shannon Bugos, “U.S. Deploys Low-Yield Nuclear Warhead”, [Arms Control Today](#), March 2020.

<sup>27</sup> “Nuclear-Armed Sea-Launched Cruise Missile (SLCM-N)”, [In Focus](#), Congressional Research Service, April 25, 2022.

<sup>28</sup> Bryant Harris, “US nuclear commander backs sea-launched cruise missile Biden would cancel”, [Defense News](#), June 7, 2022.

<sup>29</sup> Lawrence Ukenye, Connor O’Brien, “Congress poised to shoot down Biden’s nuclear rollback”, [Politico](#), June 7, 2022.

<sup>30</sup> Franklin Miller, “Outdated Nuclear Treaties Heighten the Risk of Nuclear War”, [Wall Street Journal](#), April 21, 2022.

<sup>31</sup> Eric Edelman, Franklin C. Miller, “Nuclear Weapons and Arms Control: Old Myths and New Realities”, [The Dispatch](#), May 13, 2022; Matthew Costlow, “The U.S. Needs More Nuclear Weapons”, [Wall Street Journal](#), January 30, 2022; Patty-Jane Geller, “U.S. Nuclear Weapons Capability”, Heritage Foundation, October 20, 2021.

## 2. Constant appeals for progress in disarmament

### 2.1. Pressure in the face of growing nuclear risk

#### 2.1.1. Nuclear anxiety and calls for disarmament

While the war in Ukraine is prompting many NATO countries to reconsider the role of nuclear deterrence and put calls for disarmament on the back burner, in other parts of the world the lessons drawn from the war are quite different. To most non-nuclear weapon states that are not part of a nuclear alliance, the current conflict demonstrates both the futility and unacceptable nature of nuclear deterrence-based strategies.

Unacceptable because, in a context of perceptible nuclear anxiety, particularly in Europe, many believe that a nuclear war is more likely than the deterrence supporters think it is and that it could have disastrous consequences for the civilian populations of countries not involved in a conflict. This fear of a nuclear conflict triggered by the irresponsibility of a leader such as Vladimir Putin fuels the criticism that nine potentially irrational heads of state are holding the entire world hostage. The war in Ukraine is giving rise to discussions about the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons. For the first time since the end of the Cold War, the populations of Western Europe in particular, exposed to stressful presentations and media debates, are having to think about the risks and possible consequences of a nuclear attack on their country. In this context, arguments claiming that nuclear weapons bring a disproportionate risk to bear on humanity, and that shared security can only be if they are abolished, have some resonance. To pro-disarmament movements, the events in Ukraine support their theory. Moreover, the risk of accidents at Ukrainian nuclear power plants, caused by the negligence or voluntary action of Russian forces, contributes to fears related to the danger of nuclear power in general.<sup>32</sup>

In addition, proponents of rapid disarmament see the war as evidence that nuclear deterrence doctrines are pointless. They explain that, on the one hand, despite its aggressive rhetoric, Russia is not successful in preventing Western involvement in support of Ukraine. On the other hand, the nuclear deterrence doctrine of the whole Western bloc has not averted the Russian invasion.<sup>33</sup>

Moreover, these interpretations are aimed, above all, at countering the theories that Ukraine could have avoided the Russian aggression if it had retained a nuclear arsenal. When the country became independent, Kiev had some strategic and non-strategic nuclear weapons belonging to the Soviet arsenal on its territory. Following negotiations, Ukraine agreed to the withdrawal of these weapons and signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty

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<sup>32</sup> Mark Hibbs, "What Comes after Russia's Attack on a Ukrainian Nuclear Power Station?", [Carnegie Endowment for International Peace](#), March 17, 2022.

<sup>33</sup> A regular answer to this argument is that this was not its objective, and that NATO in particular was successful in deterring Moscow from attacking its territory directly. Nevertheless, the argument that the attack on Ukraine was a failure of NATO's deterrence strategy is often heard (for example, see Rebecca Johnson, "Ukraine war shows nuclear deterrence doesn't work; we need disarmament", [IPPNW](#), March 27, 2022).

(NPT) as a non-nuclear weapon state.<sup>34</sup> Since the beginning of the war, the long-term consequences of this decision have come under scrutiny.<sup>35</sup> Supporters of the abolition of nuclear weapons argue, for their part, that no credible scenario of nuclear weapons use would have prevented or warded off the current invasion.<sup>36</sup>

The states that are most vocal in advocating progress in the field of disarmament therefore continue to call for the dismantling of nuclear arsenals. In their view, the current crisis illustrates the urgent need to permanently suppress the risk of nuclear war, which is ever present and now even bigger, and this can only be achieved by eliminating nuclear weapons.<sup>37</sup>

### 2.1.2. *Challenging the global nuclear order*

In this context, the global nuclear order, underpinned by the NPT, continues to be challenged. But the pressure on the regime has not come about as a result of the recent events. Since the NPT came into force, the treaty and its means of implementation have faced criticism. As early as in the 1970s, some states felt that the treaty did not sufficiently reflect the disarmament aspirations of non-nuclear weapon states. Others condemned the unfairness of a system that allows five states to have a type of weapon but bans the others from possessing it.<sup>38</sup> Despite its shortcomings, the treaty has nonetheless received support over the years, as evidenced by its quasi-universal status and, above all, by the fact that in 1995 its member states agreed to permanently extend its term of application. This decision reflected the states parties' belief that the NPT plays a positive role in their security by limiting the number of nuclear powers, even if it does not integrate all their preferences. In parallel, the development of an implementation regime, based on the IAEA safeguards system, export control standards and targeted sanctions for proliferation programs, has also benefited by widespread international support.

Tension nonetheless surrounds the development of this regime and it has always been difficult to build a consensus around the global nuclear order. The current stalemate is particularly acute. The inability of the nuclear weapon states to respect the commitments they made in the framework of the NPT review conferences, particularly in matters of disarmament, leads to systematic opposition from a large part of the international community. As seen at the August 2022 NPT Review Conference, most Southern states (Latin America, Africa, Southeast Asia, the Pacific) reject all the arguments raised by nuclear weapon states, considering that the current disarmament deadlock is due to a lack of will all round, not to the actions of certain individual states. Fully opposed to the idea that deterrence can provide any form of stability in the current context, these states call for a

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<sup>34</sup> Benjamin Hautecouverture, "Les facteurs du désarmement nucléaire ukrainien", *Bulletin No. 96, Observatoire de la Dissuasion*, FRS, March 2022.

<sup>35</sup> Alexa Philips, "Russian invasion 'wouldn't have happened' if Ukraine still had nuclear weapons, Ukrainian political adviser says", *Sky News*, March 4, 2022; Andreas Umland, Hugo van Essen, "Putin's War Is a Death Blow to Nuclear Nonproliferation", *Foreign Policy*, March 21, 2022.

<sup>36</sup> Alexander Kmentt, "Prospects for the First Meeting of States Parties of the TPNW", *Event*, VCDNP, June 1, 2022.

<sup>37</sup> [Joint Statement](#) in relation to the Recent Orders by the Russian Federation to Increase the Readiness of its Nuclear Arsenal, New York, March 1, 2022.

<sup>38</sup> Emmanuelle Maitre, "Cartographie du désarmement : motivations et objectifs des principaux acteurs du désarmement nucléaire", *Recherches & Documents*, FRS, n° 02/2019, March 14, 2019.

clear timetable for the elimination of nuclear weapons and are skeptical about intermediate arms control measures. At the same time, these states are showing increasingly visible signs of rejecting binding non-proliferation norms, for example in the area of sanctions and export controls, as they regard these regulations as a disproportionate burden for non-nuclear weapon states. At the NPT Review Conference, one state mentioned the possibility of withdrawing from the treaty if no further progress on disarmament is achieved (Kiribati). This threat, which was so far advocated mostly by academics<sup>39</sup> or representatives of proliferating states, shows that the nuclear order established during the Cold War is at risk of crumbling. Although the threat weighs primarily on the non-proliferation regime in the short term, these protests seek more broadly to delegitimize nuclear deterrence strategies. Several aspects of this movement can be pin pointed.

## 2.2. *Initiatives to challenge deterrence based on an emerging norm*

### 2.2.1. *Consolidation of the TPNW*

Notably, the international movement challenging nuclear deterrence led to the signing of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) in 2017. When it was adopted in the United Nations, 122 states voted in favor of the treaty. The TPNW was opened for signature by the UN Secretary General on September 20, 2017 and was immediately signed by 53 states. On October 24, 2020, Honduras becomes the fiftieth state to ratify the treaty, allowing it to enter into force 90 days later, in accordance with its article 15(1).

After passing this milestone, the TPNW has continued to find support, mainly in three regions: Central and South America and the Caribbean; Africa; and Southeast Asia and the Pacific. It should be noted that most of the states that have ratified the treaty are already members of one of the Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zones (NWFZs) established by the Treaty of Tlatelolco (Latin America and the Caribbean), the Treaty of Pelindaba (Africa), the Treaty of Bangkok (Southeast Asia), the Treaty of Semipalatinsk (Central Asia), and the Treaty of Rarotonga (Pacific). In Europe, only six states and micro-states are parties to the TPNW (Austria, Cyprus, Ireland, Malta, San Marino and the Vatican), which is a notable exception.

Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, a few states have ratified the treaty.<sup>40</sup> To date, the TPNW has 66 parties and 86 signatories. Several other states are well advanced in the ratification process, particularly Nepal, Niger, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Dominican Republic. Five years after its adoption, although the pace of ratifications is relatively slow, momentum for the treaty is still present and NGO advocacy has been successful. While, not surprisingly, the treaty is not supported in countries where nuclear deterrence is regarded as a security tool (Euro-Atlantic, East Asia, South Asia), it is popular in those that have already rejected nuclear weapons.

The States Parties to the TPNW met in Vienna from June 21 to 23, 2022, for the first official meeting after the entry into force of the treaty. The meeting was an opportunity for them to

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<sup>39</sup> Tom Sauer, Joeli Pretorius, "When is it legitimate to abandon the NPT? Withdrawal as a political tool to move nuclear disarmament forward", *Contemporary Security Policy*, vol. 43, 2022.

<sup>40</sup> Congo, Guatemala, Cape Verde, Grenada, Timor Leste and Malawi.

recommit to the principle of abolition, despite the criticism from nuclear weapon states that the treaty is unrealistic and inappropriate. Against the backdrop of the war in Ukraine and Russia's use of nuclear weapons as a means of coercion, the meeting showed that the divide in the international community over the role of nuclear deterrence has increased in recent months. The rejection of nuclear weapons by TPNW States Parties remains based primarily on humanitarian concerns and the conviction that nuclear deterrence does not work or is too dangerous. In this context, the meeting was an opportunity to discuss some key issues that were left pending during the negotiation of the treaty in 2017 and to adopt an action plan to promote its universalization and implementation. After the treaty came into force in January 2021, this meeting was a second step in its institutionalization.

At the NPT Review Conference that followed, the TPNW was a subject of disagreement among the States Parties. While its signatories and proponents wanted a reference to be made to the positive role of the treaty for the non-proliferation and disarmament regime, this approach was rejected by the nuclear weapon states, together with some allies and partners, due to their conviction that the TPNW not only is contrary to their own security interests but also undermines the non-proliferation norm.<sup>41</sup>

### *2.2.2. A concrete challenge to nuclear deterrence: disinvestment*

In concrete terms, there is tangible pro-disarmament pressure at several levels. At the political level, pro-disarmament activists seek primarily to influence the debate in parliament and among local elected representatives. The results of this advocacy vary, but in many countries, particularly on the left of the political spectrum, it has succeeded in maintaining the issue of disarmament on political party platforms.

Another means of action consists in pushing for divestment from companies that produce nuclear weapon components. Promoting divestment from the military nuclear sector is an attractive choice for several reasons. Firstly, it gives activists scope for action even if they are from non-nuclear weapon states and therefore have no direct means of influencing the policies of nuclear weapon states. Secondly, it has a direct, concrete and short-term effect, whereas the goals of most pro-disarmament movements are abstract and long-term (to bring about a world without nuclear weapons). And thirdly, this type of action gives each individual the impression that they are able to do something for a worthy cause, and therefore feel that they are playing a role in the fight against nuclear weapons.

To some private players, especially investment funds, nuclear weapons, regarded as illegal and illegitimate by a growing number of countries, belong to the category of "controversial weapons". This concept has no legal basis but is defined by each player in its exclusion policies which generally take into account weapons banned by domestic legislation or treaties, such as cluster munitions and land mines in Europe, as well as chemical and biological weapons. More and more international groups are deciding that nuclear weapons should be included in this category of "controversial" weapons. For example, this is the

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<sup>41</sup> The parties finally agreed on a relatively neutral text on the subject. Unfortunately, the final document was not adopted by consensus because Russia rejected it, due to references to the security risks caused by its military control of the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant.

recommendation of *Sustainanalytics* company that advises a number of investment funds on the “acceptability” of certain investments.<sup>42</sup>

Efforts to deprive the military nuclear sector of funding have existed for a long time and have recently taken the form of the “Don’t Bank on the Bomb” campaign led by the Dutch NGO Pax, in coordination with the abolitionist movement ICAN. Today, the “Don’t Bank on the Bomb” reports are the main tools used to inform disinvestment campaigns. Eight such reports have been published since 2012 and they above all aim to identify commercial companies directly involved in the production, development or maintenance of nuclear warheads or nuclear-capable missiles. Profundo, the Dutch firm specializing in responsible investment issues and advising financial institutions, is then responsible for identifying the financial institutions that support these companies.

The “Don’t Bank on the Bomb” reports regularly draw attention to financial groups that have adopted exclusion policies covering nuclear weapons. The authors draw a distinction between “Hall of Fame” firms, which clearly exclude all investments in nuclear defense, and “Runner-up” firms, which do refer to nuclear weapons in their policies, but reserve the right to finance some nuclear weapons companies on some conditions. The latter group is large and includes major commercial banks such as Deutsche Bank, Crédit Suisse, and BNP Paribas. The internal policies of these groups indicate, for example, that they do not invest in the nuclear weapons programs of countries not recognized as nuclear weapon states by the NPT. However, these strategies have a very limited effect. Others claim that they do not fund transactions specifically related to nuclear weapons programs. The effect is also modest, as for most of the groups involved, nuclear defense activities represent only a small part of their business, and the funds raised are fungible, and may thus ultimately benefit the controversial activities. In fact, most of the groups adopting this type of strategy continue to contribute to financing one or more of the 26 private companies present in the military nuclear sector.

Some investors, however, choose to turn away from the nuclear weapons sector altogether. This is not a legal obligation, but rather a marketing and communication choice to avoid any image risk with audiences sensitive to these issues. This sensitivity of public opinion is stronger in some countries. Since large industrial and banking groups have a global footprint, disinvestment can produce a series of indirect effects. However, in light of the figures available, the impact of these campaigns appears to have been limited. Most financial groups that have withdrawn from the military nuclear sector did not play a major role. One exception is the Dutch pension fund ABP, which held shares in companies that manufactured nuclear weapons. Its decision to exit the sector in 2019 was therefore significant, given the extent of the assets under management and the fund’s ability to set an example for other institutions.

At the international level, disinvestment from military nuclear power remains a marginal issue compared to other concerns such as the climate and the environment. Demand for “ethical” investment remains fairly weak compared to the “sustainable” label, which so far does not exclude defense or nuclear power. Furthermore, the number of banks adopting exclusion policies could plateau as more ethically-minded groups join the campaign. However, the

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<sup>42</sup> Terence Berkleef, “Nuclear Weapons: The Next ‘No-Go’ Area for Investors?”, *Sustainanalytics*, March 14, 2018.

situation differs from one country to another, and there is no doubt that for disarmament activists, disinvestment movements remain one of the most concrete means of action on a global scale.

### 2.3. *The challenges of disarmament in light of the strategic situation*

#### 2.3.1. *A structured protest movement struggling to emerge*

The strategic situation is encouraging traditional pro-disarmament players to step up their efforts for early abolition of nuclear weapons. The institutionalization of the TPNW as an effective international norm has provided a forum and a legal basis for these efforts (even though the treaty is contested by states that have not signed it). NGO activism, including their action in favor of disinvestment, reveals the concrete effects of the campaigns and brings the voice of disarmament to the forefront, especially in NATO countries.

Despite this impact, pro-disarmament movements are still penalized by several factors. At governmental level, TPNW States Parties do not form a monolith.<sup>43</sup> The first meeting of the States Parties brought certain differences to light. European states and New Zealand unambiguously denounced Russia's acts and underlined the unacceptable nature of the war in Ukraine and its disastrous effect on the non-proliferation regime. Other states were more discreet and even refused to allow the final communiqué to explicitly condemn the invasion of Ukraine. Moreover, states are fairly evenly divided on the value of the additional non-proliferation commitments made.<sup>44</sup> The support of countries such as New Zealand or Ireland for export control regimes or additional protocols to IAEA safeguards agreements is not at all matched in some Latin American or Southeast Asian states. While the promotion of the TPNW remains an objective shared by its member states, strategies for action may differ widely and prevent truly coordinated efforts.

Several difficulties can be seen among NGOs. First, although nine states possess nuclear weapons, NGO activities focus on only some of those states. It is logically inconceivable for civil society to promote disarmament in North Korea, China or Russia. For a variety of reasons, there is also virtually no action in India, Pakistan or Israel. Campaigns therefore focus almost exclusively on the United States, the United Kingdom, France and their allies. This bias can be seen not only in activist efforts, but also in the expression of views that often struggles to address the nuclear policies of non-Western states and assess the danger of them.

Furthermore, even in Western countries, NGOs find a limited echo, with actions tending to be stronger on subjects related to climate change or societal issues for example. In this context, while the deterioration in the international situation, as illustrated by the war in Ukraine, points to the urgent need for disarmament to some, to others it would seem to signal the lack of prospects for the fight. For example, some sponsors have decided to stop supporting NGOs and research centers working on disarmament. In some cases, these

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<sup>43</sup> Michal Onderco, Valerio Vignoli, "The supporters of the ban treaty are not a monolith. Don't treat them as such", [Commentary](#), European Leadership Network, August 1, 2022.

<sup>44</sup> Emmanuelle Maitre, "Implementing Prohibition: An Overview of the Meeting of States Parties to the TPNW and Possible Ways Forward", [Recherches & Documents](#), n° 8/2022, FRS, July 6, 2022.

decisions have been due to changes in political priorities, for example in the case of Norway, which stopped funding the NGO ICAN in 2017 following a change of government.<sup>45</sup> In other cases, the lack of concrete progress has led some foundations to withdraw from this area of action.<sup>46</sup>

### 2.3.2. *Paralysis of the non-proliferation and multilateral disarmament regime*

Indeed, pragmatically, the prospects for progress on disarmament are today very limited. North Korea continues to pursue its nuclear program, and efforts to convince the country to denuclearize have so far been unsuccessful. In South Asia, the inability to resolve the territorial dispute between India and Pakistan, in particular, rules out the possibility of progress on disarmament in the short term. The situation is also deadlocked in the case of Israel. With regard to the nuclear powers recognized by the NPT, certain trends observed since the end of the Cold War are beginning to reverse. For example, global volumes of nuclear weapons, which declined dramatically from 1985 onwards, are now stable or even beginning to increase again. The United States and Russia, which still account for 90 per cent of the world's nuclear weapons, have committed to the ceilings imposed under the New Start Treaty until 2026. Both countries have now reached the limits and are no longer considering any reduction. Moreover, while President Joe Biden had left the possibility of a successor treaty to New Start open,<sup>47</sup> it is highly unlikely under the circumstances today that Russia and the United States will be able to negotiate a text acceptable to both parties.<sup>48</sup> The structural difficulties, related, for example, to the development of increasingly asymmetrical arsenals making it difficult to clearly define a form of strategic parity, are heightened by the security context. Vladimir Putin's refusal to authorize the resumption of inspections in the framework of the New Start treaty illustrates the profound crisis that arms control is currently experiencing.<sup>49</sup> On a more minor scale, given the volumes involved, the United Kingdom, which for decades has been very keen to portray the image of a reasonable nuclear power committed to disarmament, has signaled that it has reached the end of a process by allowing itself to significantly increase the maximum number of nuclear warheads deployed.<sup>50</sup>

More notably, China continues to expand its arsenal, and is not open to even modest arms control measures. China's refusal is also an obstacle to the US and Russia renewing their commitment in this area, as both countries have more or less openly said that accepting restrictions on their arsenals could be contrary to their security interests if China does not.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> "How Norway crippled Nobel laureate ICAN by cutting vital funding", [Development Today](#), December 8, 2017.

<sup>46</sup> Dylan Matthews, "The biggest funder of anti-nuclear war programs is taking its money away", [VOX](#), March 17, 2022.

<sup>47</sup> Michelle Nichols, "Biden, Putin strike conciliatory tones as nuclear arms talks start at U.N.", [Reuters](#), August 2, 2022.

<sup>48</sup> David Logan, "Trilateral Arms Control: A Realistic Assessment of Chinese Participation", [Issue Brief](#), Stimson, August 9, 2021.

<sup>49</sup> Julian Borger, "Russia suspends US inspections of its nuclear weapons arsenal", [The Guardian](#), August 9, 2022.

<sup>50</sup> Kingston Reif, Shannon Bugos, "UK to Increase Cap on Nuclear Warhead Stockpile", [Arms Control Today](#), April 2021.

<sup>51</sup> Rebecca Lissner, "The Future of Strategic Arms Control", [Discussion Paper Series on Managing Global Disorder No. 4](#), CFR, April 2021.



At the multilateral level, the main systems for limiting or reducing arsenals are also at a standstill. Prospects for progress, particularly *via* the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) or the negotiation of a treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons (FMCT), are very limited in the short term. More modestly, efforts to adopt risk-reduction and confidence-building measures among the nuclear powers are yet to produce tangible results.

While the challenges to the nuclear order remain deep in the international system and tend to become institutionalized, they appear to be disconnected from the strategic reality. Despite constant efforts by a part of the international community to regulate nuclear competition and lay the foundations for a nuclear-free world, the unilateral decisions of certain nuclear weapon states show their contempt for international regulations in this field and the inability of multilateral structures to enforce certain standards. In this context, strategic relations remain largely based on the concept of balance of power, even if the normative and political environment has an indirect effect on policy choices, especially for the Western nuclear powers (United States, France and United Kingdom).

### **3. Possible developments in the Western nuclear weapon states (P3)**

#### *3.1. A still marginal public debate*

Among the three Western nuclear weapon states (United States, France, and United Kingdom), the reappraisal of nuclear deterrence comes with still limited debates.

In the United States, a small fringe of the Democratic Party has in recent years attempted to promote a policy less focused on nuclear capabilities and more ambitious on disarmament. This group, represented in particular by Massachusetts Senator Ed Markey, has tried to prevent the development of certain weapons, such as the SLCM-N, and has questioned the relevance of renewing the ICBM force or acquiring a new nuclear cruise missile. Adam Smith's nomination to head the House Armed Services Committee in 2019 gave the movement a chance to express some of its preferences.<sup>52</sup> But even in this position of relative influence, none of the policies advocated by this progressive group were adopted during the last term. As these politicians noted themselves, the majority in Congress still defends a conservative posture on this issue and supports the policy advocated by the Pentagon. Even within the Democratic Party, members have clearly expressed their preference for a comprehensive and ambitious modernization of the triad. This is particularly true of elected representatives and senators from states that play an important role in implementing deterrence, such as Senator Jon Tester of Montana, a strong supporter of ICBMs, some of which are deployed in his state.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> "Nothing Endangers the Planet More Than Nuclear Weapons", interview with Adam Smith, [Arms Control Today](#), December 2018.

<sup>53</sup> *Strategic Nuclear Modernization in the United States*, [Webinar](#), Brookings Institution, March 4, 2021 (see, in particular, the remarks of Amy Woolf).

Ironically, while some assumed a few years ago that Congress might be holding back the Pentagon's modernization goals, it now actually seems to be pushing for military programs that are as robust as possible. The presentation of the 2022 Nuclear Posture Review and the attempt to do away with the SLCM-N program showed that Congress was *a priori* a bastion against any attempt to reduce the role of nuclear weapons in the US posture or to downsize the arsenal. Similarly, Congress pays close attention to how bilateral arms control treaties are implemented, and potentially has the power to block the ratification of arms control agreements. At the multilateral level, the refusal to ratify the CTBT, but also the delay in ratifying the protocols of several nuclear-weapon-free zones, show the crucial role played by Congress and its partisanship on these issues. As for bilateral agreements, elected representatives on both sides regularly speak out against Russian violations of arms control treaties and the development of China's nuclear arsenal outside any arms control mechanisms. Consequently, whatever the balance of power in Congress, it is unlikely that a New Start-style treaty would be ratified swiftly should such a treaty be successfully negotiated.<sup>54</sup>

While part of the Democratic electorate remains in favor of a more pro-disarmament policy and can rely on active research centers and NGOs, the experience of the Biden administration shows that this is not sufficient to influence policies largely conceived in the Pentagon.

The issue is quite different in the United Kingdom. The latest discussions on the advisability of renewing the SSBNs showed that a majority of MPs are in favor of maintaining the nuclear force. However, two small political groups voice dissent in Westminster. On the one hand, some Labour MPs assert anti-nuclear views. This movement was given some visibility when Jeremy Corbyn, himself an abolitionist activist, was appointed party leader.<sup>55</sup> However, it does not represent the majority of Labour MPs and has not played a prominent role so far. More notably, the Scottish Nationalist Party (SNP) has been historically opposed to nuclear weapons and has made it a campaign argument. At the national level, its criticism does not have a decisive impact. However, the prospect of a new referendum on Scottish independence is worrying some British military officials,<sup>56</sup> as the SNP has indicated that if it wins, it will call for the closure of the naval base at Clyde (near Glasgow), the home port of the British SSBN fleet. Building a new base in England would entail considerable costs and could jeopardize the country's nuclear mission.<sup>57</sup>

In France, the far-left parties (Insoumis, Communist Party) and the ecologists occasionally question the national "consensus" on nuclear deterrence. However, the topic is a relatively minor concern in their platforms and the stands taken on this are not frequent and do not come with specific demands. Leaders such as Jean-Luc Mélenchon have indicated that they

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<sup>54</sup> Bruno Tertrais, Emmanuelle Maitre, "Le Traité New Start : bilan et perspectives", [Notes de la FRS](#), n° 59/2020, August 27, 2020.

<sup>55</sup> Emmanuelle Maitre, "La dissuasion : quelle évolution sur l'échiquier politique britannique ?", [Bulletin no. 71, Observatoire de la dissuasion](#), FRS, December 2019.

<sup>56</sup> Conor McLaughlin, "Scottish independence and the implications for British defence", [The Interpreter](#), February 12, 2020.

<sup>57</sup> Richard Norton-Taylor, "The uncomfortable costs of moving Trident", [The Guardian](#), July 10, 2013.

do not support a policy of unilateral disarmament.<sup>58</sup> Despite calls in the French National Assembly for more significant efforts on disarmament, a majority determined to revise the policy pursued by successive governments since the end of the Cold War is yet to emerge. In fact, on defense and security issues, the contestation on the opposition's part is essentially based on a willingness to challenge France's membership of NATO and to criticize American policy at large.<sup>59</sup>

### 3.2. *Drivers of the P3 disarmament policy*

Thus, in the national political debate, the pressure is insufficient to push the P3 to reduce the role of nuclear deterrence in security policies. However, this does not mean that there is no strategic and political interest in taking these objectives into account.

In the multilateral framework, all three countries have historically supported the non-proliferation regime. In France, the United Kingdom and the United States, particularly when a Democratic administration is in the White House, the prevailing conviction is that the balance created by the NPT must be preserved. It is recognized that to ensure that all States Parties actively contribute to enforcing non-proliferation rules, goodwill is needed in the implementation of Article 6 of the Treaty, which is about negotiating in good faith to achieve a world without nuclear weapons.

In recent years, the P3 has presented rather weak results in this area since the strategic context has not been conducive to major progress. Diplomatic efforts have therefore been made to explain these cyclical difficulties,<sup>60</sup> but also to assure the community of NPT States Parties of the P3's serious commitment to disarmament in the long term. Therefore, in addition to advertising past efforts, the three states regularly highlight their activities in strategic risk reduction, nuclear disarmament verification, the entry into force of the CTBT, and the start of negotiations on an FMCT.

It should be noted that the administrations of G.W. Bush and D. Trump paid less attention to this issue because they did not prioritize multilateral action to resolve security issues. In general, compliance with these international commitments does not lead the P3 to adopt policies that would be perceived as contrary to their security imperatives. These obligations do, however, prompt them to invest at the diplomatic level to demonstrate some form of goodwill and interest in disarmament.

As mentioned earlier, national politics is not currently a decisive factor, even though it used to be more important in the past. In the United Kingdom, in particular, some MPs are in favor of the government pursuing a balanced nuclear policy. In a democratic country, choices can be justified by domestic policy considerations, in particular being transparent

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<sup>58</sup> Emmanuelle Maitre, "Élections présidentielles françaises et questions nucléaires", *Bulletin no. 97, Observatoire de la dissuasion*, April 2022.

<sup>59</sup> Jean-Luc Mélenchon, "L'intérêt de la France, c'est d'être indépendante, non-alignée et altermondialiste. La paix des Français est à ce prix !", *Revue Défense Nationale*, n° 852, Summer 2022.

<sup>60</sup> For example, see [Statement by Assistant Secretary Christopher Ford](#) at the Opening of the 2018 NPT PrepCom, U.S. Mission in Geneva, April 23, 2018.

about doctrine or deployed capabilities, or openly debating budgets for nuclear deterrence forces.

A third factor must also be factored in. NATO's three nuclear powers have every reason to take the positions of their close allies into account, including the views of countries where pro-disarmament pressure is strongest. The P3 indeed seeks the support of these states, whether in multilateral forums or in the implementation of NATO policy. It is easier for the government of a country like Germany to support American, French or British positions if it can show its public opinion that its allies are working to strengthen the arms control framework and take its historical preference for disarmament into account.

### 3.3. Perspectives

The conflict in Ukraine has made P3 leaders even more convinced of the relevance of nuclear deterrence, which now enjoys stronger political support and is being reinforced at the level of NATO. However, several additional and concrete factors must be considered.

Firstly, the recapitalization of nuclear forces in the exact same format demands a significant budgetary effort. This effort leads to peaks in investments which weigh on defense budgets. For the P3, these peaks have been anticipated and efforts have been made to smooth out the effects of cycles.<sup>61</sup> Nevertheless, this cyclical nature, which is related to the very high cost of certain systems, such as SSBNs, makes deterrence budgets both predictable and inflexible on the whole. Programs are launched several decades before the systems are commissioned, and any increase in the volume of weapons acquired would require major budget adjustments. In particular, in the current circumstances, it is difficult to imagine any increase in nuclear force equipment programs without reducing budgets for conventional forces. In the United States, the funding of the nuclear triad modernization program adopted in 2010, on a like-for-like basis, has already been accused of causing trade-offs detrimental to certain Services.<sup>62</sup>

But the limits do not solely lie in budget issues. Each nation's industrial and technological base has a limited capacity, which prevents any sudden increase in the order book. Here again, the American example is interesting because it shows that in the current format, tritium production capacities, for example, are insufficient to achieve the 2030 production objectives. The production rate of plutonium cores is also judged too slow in relation to current and expected needs.<sup>63</sup> In France, demands placed on the industry must also be calibrated by taking into account the challenges that could arise, for instance, in terms of acquiring and maintaining skills in certain sectors.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Emmanuelle Maitre, "Coût de la dissuasion nucléaire : des investissements cycliques", *Recherches & Documents*, FRS, n° 11/2017, December 15, 2017.

<sup>62</sup> Theresa Hitchens, "Nuclear Modernization Casts Budget Shadow Over Air Force Plans", *Breaking Defense*, September 20, 2021.

<sup>63</sup> Rebecca Hersman, Joseph Rogers, "Nuclear Modernization under Competing Pressures", *Critical Questions*, CSIS, February 12, 2022.

<sup>64</sup> National Assembly, Constitution of October 4, 1958, Fourteenth Legislature, Registered at the Presidency of the National Assembly on December 14, 2016, *Information report* submitted pursuant to Article 145 of the Rules of Procedure by the Committee on National Defense and the Armed Forces at the end of a fact-finding mission (1)

In this context, the margins of maneuver in the short term are limited and it is difficult to swiftly “reinforce the deterrence policy” through building up capabilities without challenging fragile balances. This observation questions the realism of proposals calling for an increase in arsenals, particularly in the United States, even though they are often backed by arguments to the effect that trade-offs are possible in theory, if there is indeed the political will.

The “nuclear comeback” dramatically demonstrated by Vladimir Putin’s statements and his underlying threats to use Russia’s nuclear arsenal for coercion can be interpreted in many ways. To the P3, the recent events corroborate its efforts to reassert the role of deterrence, which again date back to before the war in Ukraine. This analysis is now also shared in some NATO countries by political forces that were traditionally skeptical about nuclear deterrence.

This increased commitment, which can be seen in both doctrine and capabilities, comes at a time when, worldwide, new forms of protest are seeking to promote the early elimination of nuclear weapons. These campaigns are now based on a norm, the TPNW, and seek to have a concrete impact on weapons programs.

It may seem that two parallel worlds are taking shape: the world of diplomatic forums, where disarmament is supported vigorously, and the strategic world of power relations, where all the mechanisms of restraint, arms control and even nuclear risk reduction seem to be falling apart. The growing gap between these two worlds is weakening the entire non-proliferation regime in the short term. As concerns the longer term, it will be interesting to see whether this divide in interpretations of strategic developments continues and whether it affects the strategic choices made by major powers.

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on the industrial and technological challenges of renewing the two components of deterrence and presented by Mr. Jean-Jacques Bridey and Mr. Jacques Lamblin, Deputies.