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**A French  
Nuclear Exception?**

**Camille Grand**

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*Pragmatic steps toward ideal objectives*



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## Preface

All five declared nuclear weapon states are committed under the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) to pursue the goal of ultimately eliminating all nuclear weapons, a commitment that was reiterated at the 1995 NPT Review and Extension Conference. France, the United Kingdom, and China have all indicated, however, that their participation in a process of multilateral reductions would be conditioned upon the achievement of substantial cuts in the nuclear arsenals of the United States and Russia, a goal that at this writing remains uncertain. If the Russian State Duma ratifies START II, the United States and Russia are committed under the 1997 Helsinki Agreement to begin negotiations on a follow-on agreement. Although the agreed guidelines for START III call for reductions in the two countries' arsenals to a level of 2,000 to 2,500 deployed strategic nuclear warheads each, some independent analysts have suggested that the next bilateral accord could pare nuclear arsenals even further. A "START IV" agreement would then be expected to take into account the capabilities of the three "second-tier" nuclear weapon states.

What are the prospects for involving the three smaller nuclear weapon states in a process of nuclear risk reduction? How are the future roles and risks associated with nuclear weapons viewed in France, Britain, and China? Under what circumstances would the three states be prepared to support progressive steps toward reducing and, perhaps, eventually eliminating all nuclear weapons?

Although there has been little public debate about nuclear weapons in France, Camille Grand's study, *A French Nuclear Exception?*, makes clear that French perspectives on future steps in arms control and disarmament have undergone significant changes. At the same time, there is also much continuity in French thinking about the future roles of nuclear weapons in French security and foreign policy.

Undeniably, France's nuclear program has enjoyed solid and broad public and political support for over twenty years. That support, Grand argues, has rested on more than "gaullist dogma," and reflects unique aspects of French strategic culture. The French decision to acquire and retain nuclear weapons reflects a rational solution to multiple security threats to France's territorial security, its integrity as a nation, its independence, and its influence in Europe and in the world. France's geography renders it vulnerable to invasion and defeat with conventional forces, while its history in this century has impressed upon French decisionmakers the unreliability and risks of alliance with other states, and the potentially devastating consequences of another defeat and occupation on the morale and very sustenance of the French nation.

The French doctrine of "*dissuasion*" reflects this perspective, as it is intended to meet a wide range of threats to the national territory, to Western Europe, and to regions outside of Europe in which France might have important interests, primarily sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East. France has relied on a limited nuclear capability to threaten an adversary's "vital centers" with

massive retaliatory strikes, which would inflict damage upon the adversary “equal or superior to the stake that France represents for it.” In contrast to US nuclear doctrine, Grand underscores, in French thinking, nuclear deterrence has never been associated with war-fighting but only with war prevention and peace.

In France, as in the other nuclear weapon states, the end of the Cold War has not led to major changes in French nuclear doctrine or policy. Despite some calls in the early 1990s for a major strategic reappraisal, the 1994 *Livre blanc sur la défense* (Defense White Paper) reaffirmed the role of nuclear weapons in French security policy, even as budgetary constraints and arms control efforts have led to a downsizing of deployed French nuclear forces.

Despite strong continuity in French nuclear policy, Grand observes, there also have been significant changes in France’s approach to arms control. Following decades of demonstrated reluctance to join in global arms control and disarmament efforts, in the early 1990s France joined the NPT, undertook a 15 percent unilateral reduction of its nuclear arsenal, signed the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), and announced new security assurances. With an eye to future arms control efforts, France supports a treaty banning production of fissile material for military purposes, although it has reservations about the intrusiveness of an associated verification regime, a reluctance consistent with the reservations, particularly in French military circles, regarding greater nuclear transparency.

French participation in a multilateral arms reduction process nevertheless is unlikely in the near term. Although President Jacques Chirac in 1996 declared his intention to make France a “champion of disarmament,” French leaders are likely to await the implementation of the START II and III treaties before agreeing to negotiated reductions in French forces, which would give France from 10 to 15 years before it is forced to confront the question directly. In the meantime, growing international interest in the elimination of nuclear weapons has prompted some French analysts to acknowledge the possibility of disarmament as a long-term goal, even while there is strong consensus that the goal remains infeasible under current and projected political conditions. Grand observes that the complete elimination of nuclear weapons is viewed as a “remote objective, highly dependent on the security environment.” A consensus does appear to be emerging, however, on the feasibility of many intermediate steps toward smaller arsenals, greater transparency, and confidence-building.

In the near-to-mid term, drastic changes in the French approach to disarmament are unlikely, although events in the international security environment or a major US or bilateral initiative to achieve very deep cuts in nuclear forces might lead to a shift in the French position on nuclear arms reductions. Absent such change, Grand concludes, the best strategy is to pursue a “cautious and realistic path.” Grand advises decoupling immediate, achievable objectives from the longer-term debate on nuclear elimination—a debate that could well prove counterproductive in France. In the author’s view, the emphasis “should be put on making the world safer by enhancing non-proliferation, safety, and confidence-building measures and dismantling excess stocks of weapons.”

The study is the second in a series that examines the problems associated with the eventual transition to a multilateral nuclear arms control regime. Other studies in this series explore British perspectives on the future of nuclear weapons and Chinese views on the no-first-use of nuclear weapons and other key arms control issues. The series was undertaken under the auspices of the Henry L. Stimson Center's project on "Eliminating Weapons of Mass Destruction," which is intended to encourage a national and international debate on the long-term nuclear future. The project is based on the premise that the end of the Cold War, the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and the grave dangers of proliferation provide both reason and opportunity to reexamine fundamental assumptions regarding the relative benefits and risks associated with weapons of mass destruction.

The Stimson Center is grateful to the Ford Foundation and the Public Welfare Foundation, whose funding makes this work possible. We are particularly grateful to Christine Wing and Mahnaz Ispahani of the Ford Foundation for their continued support. We would also like to thank Susan Welsh and Stephanie Ghetti for their comments and editorial support.

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This research is also in many regards the product of past and ongoing research in the nuclear field at the *Institut de relations internationales et stratégiques* (IRIS). The various research projects and papers written under the supervision of—or in cooperation with—Dr. Pascal Boniface, director of the Institute, and the numerous debates IRIS has had on French nuclear policy contributed to this paper in more ways than it is possible to list here. Thanks to Dr. Boniface and the other researchers working on nuclear issues, IRIS has established itself as a leading independent research body on nuclear policy in France. Since it was created, it has published seminal papers and organized many major debates on nuclear issues, including elimination.

My participation in the Peace Research Institute Frankfurt (PRIF)'s Programme on European Non-Proliferation Policy, lead by Dr. Harald Müller, was another major source of inspiration.

I also wish to thank two close and patient friends who read and corrected earlier drafts of this paper and provided advice on the writing and substance: Etienne de Durand and Gabriel K. Bernier. As always, my wife Anne gave me her patient support in my efforts to complete this paper on schedule.



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## About the Author

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## List of Abbreviations

ASMP	<i>Air-Sol Moyenne Portée</i> (Air-to-Ground Middle Range Missile)
CEA	<i>Commissariat à l'énergie atomique</i> (Atomic Energy Commission)
CD	Conference on Disarmament
CFE	Conventional Forces in Europe (Treaty)
CTBT	Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty
CWC	Chemical Weapons Convention
EU	European Union
FAR	Rapid Action Force
GDP	gross domestic product
HEU	highly enriched uranium
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
ICBM	intercontinental ballistic missile
IFRI	<i>Institut français des relations internationales</i>
IHEDN	<i>Institut des hautes études de défense nationale</i>
INF	Intermediate Nuclear Forces (Treaty)
IRBM	Intermediate Range Ballistic Missiles (with a strategic role)
IRIS	<i>Institut de relations internationales et stratégiques</i>
MOX	mixed-oxide
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NFU	no-first-use
NGO	non-governmental organization
NNWS	non-nuclear weapon state
NPT	nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty
NWFZ	nuclear-weapon-free zones
NWS	nuclear weapon state
PCF	<i>Parti Communiste Français</i> (French Communist Party)
PRIF	Peace Research Institute Frankfurt
PS	<i>Parti Socialiste</i> (Socialist Party)
PTBT	Partial Test Ban Treaty
RPR	<i>Rassemblement pour la République</i> (Gaullist Party)
SALT	Strategic Arms Limitation Talks
SIRPA	<i>Service d'Information et de Relations Publiques des Armées</i>
SNLE	<i>sous-marin nucléaire lanceur d'engins</i> (nuclear-powered ballistic missile launcher submarine)
SNLE-NG	<i>sous-marin nucléaire lanceur d'engins—nouvelle génération</i> (new generation nuclear-powered ballistic missile launcher submarine)
SSBN	nuclear-powered, ballistic-missile submarine
START	Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty
UDF	<i>Union pour la Démocratie Française</i> (federation of center-right parties)
UN	United Nations

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## A French Nuclear Exception?

The study of France's nuclear policy is full of misunderstandings. Anglo-Saxon analysts have for a long time portrayed, and often continue to portray, French nuclear policy as unrealistic and pretentious, or at best as the interesting but superfluous strategy of a country obsessed by its grandeur and great power status. On the other hand, the French tend to think that France has developed the perfect nuclear posture for a medium power, both reasonable and efficient, or, in a word, Cartesian, allowing no criticism.

The misunderstandings originate in different strategic cultures. To understand the present French rationale for keeping nuclear weapons, it is therefore necessary to address French strategic culture and, more broadly, France's nuclear history.

As a "second-tier" nuclear weapon state (NWS), France has had various experiences with nuclear weapons. A non-nuclear weapon state (NNWS) in the late 1940s and 1950s, France promoted disarmament and experienced the limits of alliances in the nuclear era during the Suez crisis. An emerging NWS in the late 1950s and 1960s, France encountered the first non-proliferation efforts of the superpowers and developed its own forces independently in a hostile environment. As an established NWS in the 1970s and 1980s, it proved reluctant to undertake arms control and non-proliferation efforts. A status quo nuclear power in the 1990s, France has taken an active part in preserving the international nuclear order by promoting non-proliferation, accepting some steps toward nuclear disarmament, but maintaining its nuclear capability.

Before studying France's present policy toward the prospect of elimination of nuclear weapons, it is first necessary to comprehend the French rationale for going and staying nuclear. This paper will therefore begin with an overview of French nuclear policy during the Cold War, before presenting the current French rationale for keeping nuclear weapons. In the third and fourth sections, French nuclear arms control policy will be examined, as well as French positions toward elimination.

### French Defense and Nuclear Policy during the Cold War

On 13 February 1960, France became the fourth country to test a nuclear device by detonating its first atomic bomb in Reggane (Sahara). This explosion was celebrated as a great national achievement by President de Gaulle: "Hurrah for France! Since this morning, she is stronger and prouder."<sup>1</sup> In 1964, the *Force de frappe* had become a reality with the first nuclear bomber squadron of *Mirage IV* entering operational service. France has since developed the whole range of

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<sup>1</sup> Message to Pierre Guillaumat (under-secretary for atomic affairs), who attended the test in Reggane, quoted in André Passeron, *De Gaulle parle* (Paris: Plon, 1962), 365.

nuclear capabilities and weaponry. These technical and military achievements were made possible by the commitment of almost all French governments since 1945.

The French program started slowly, after having been delayed by the Second World War.<sup>2</sup> The *Commissariat à l'énergie atomique* (CEA or Atomic Energy Commission) was created in 1945 and engaged itself more and more in military research. The Fourth Republic leaders (of various political parties ranging from the Socialists to the right) made the essential decisions secretly.

A few French military strategists (the future generals Ailleret and Gallois) started working on the advantages of a national deterrent force in the 1950s, underlining the relative cheapness of nuclear weapons<sup>3</sup> and their role in insuring an independent defense policy.<sup>4</sup> When General de Gaulle returned to power in May 1958, the decision to test a nuclear device by the first trimester of 1960 had already been taken by Premier Félix Gaillard in April 1958. The de Gaulle administration confirmed this commitment and provided the necessary budgetary support to establish an independent nuclear force. The true role of de Gaulle was more on the doctrinal side, as he clearly decided in the early 1960s that the French *Force de frappe* was to be truly and completely independent, whereas leaders of the Fourth Republic were more tempted to view it as an asset within the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) or a united Europe. It is nevertheless true as well that successive US administrations were unwilling to cooperate with France in the nuclear field (primarily because of the McMahon Act), and that this refusal certainly played a part in France's costly choice of a purely national option. Moreover, the refusal of de Gaulle's proposal for a three-power directorate for NATO<sup>5</sup> led de Gaulle to perceive nuclear weapons as a purely national means instead of a tool for influence within the Atlantic Alliance.<sup>6</sup>

France is a second-tier nuclear weapon state.<sup>7</sup> Comparisons with the other four NWS have to be handled carefully for a variety of reasons relating to the specific French strategic culture.<sup>8</sup> It is

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<sup>2</sup> In 1939, France was among the leading nations in the nuclear field, thanks to Frédéric Joliot's team. On these first years and on the commitment of French scientists in the US World War nuclear program, see Bertrand Goldschmidt, *Les pionniers de l'atome* (Paris: Stock, 1987).

<sup>3</sup> See Charles Ailleret, "L'arme nucléaire, arme à bon marché," *Revue de défense nationale*, December 1954.

<sup>4</sup> See Pierre Gallois, "Les conséquences stratégiques et politiques des armes nouvelles," *Politique étrangère*, 1958, no. 11.

<sup>5</sup> See Maurice Vaïsse, "Aux origines du mémorandum de septembre 1958," *Relations internationales*, no. 59 (Fall 1989).

<sup>6</sup> On Franco-American debates in the 1960s, refer to the major work by Frédéric Bozo, *Deux stratégies pour l'Europe, de Gaulle, les Etats-Unis et l'Alliance Atlantique 1958-1969* (Paris: Plon, 1996).

<sup>7</sup> On the concept of second-tier NWS, refer to John C. Hopkins and Weixing Hu, eds., *Strategic Views from the Second Tier: The Nuclear Weapons Policies of France, Britain, and China* (San Diego: IGGC, 1994).

<sup>8</sup> "Strategic culture is an integrated system of symbols (e.g., argumentation structures, languages, analogies, metaphors) which acts to establish pervasive and long-lasting strategic preferences by formulating concepts on the role and efficacy of military forces in interstate public affairs, and by clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the strategic preferences seem uniquely realistic and efficacious." This definition, paraphrasing Geertz's definition of religion as a cultural system, is drawn from Alastair Iain Johnston, "Thinking about Strategic Culture,"

therefore necessary to try to remember and understand how and why France went nuclear, and its Cold War nuclear posture to address the issue of its future nuclear policy.

### **How Did France Go Nuclear?**

The Fourth Republic (1946 to 1958) had launched the military nuclear program and taken all the major steps leading up to the 1960 explosion.<sup>9</sup> The Fifth Republic and its five presidents (Charles de Gaulle, Georges Pompidou, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, François Mitterrand, and Jacques Chirac) continued the development and modernization of the national nuclear forces. France's nuclear choice is therefore not a "gaullist dogma" but has been backed since the late 1970s by all the major political parties. All presidents and parliamentary majorities in the past 20 years have been in favor of the constant development of the national nuclear capabilities.

This nuclear effort was extremely costly. At its peak in 1967, it represented 1.2 percent of the French gross domestic product (GDP), 26.4 percent of the defense budget, and 51.4 percent of the procurement share of this defense budget. Altogether, it has remained above the 30 percent mark of procurement for 30 years (from 1963 to 1992) and between 0.4 and 1.2 percent of GDP per year. In the view of French political leaders, this expenditure was the price of independence. It allowed France to deploy a mini-superpower arsenal, based on the classical triad, with nuclear bombers (operational since 1964), ground-to-ground ballistic intermediate range missiles (from 1971 to 1996), and nuclear submarines carrying sea-to-ground ballistic missiles (since 1971). France also developed tactical weapons, even though their role was always debated by the French strategic community (they were finally called "pre-strategic" instead of tactical weapons). France's nuclear force remained modest in size, growing from a few dozen warheads in the 1960s and early 1970s to a few hundred in the 1980s. It reached its highest point in 1991, with 540 warheads deployed, and has slightly decreased in recent years.<sup>10</sup> For both budgetary and strategic reasons, France also renounced very early the development of certain types of weapons as intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs).

There has been widespread speculation that France received covert foreign (i.e., US) assistance with its nuclear program.<sup>11</sup> The most recent historical research tends to suggest that limited forms of cooperation have existed since the 1961 mutual defense agreement between France and the United States.<sup>12</sup> This cooperation was slightly expanded during the Nixon administration with a US policy of "negative guidance," but remained on the whole very limited due to some

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*International Security* 19, no. 4 (Spring 1995).

<sup>9</sup> On French nuclear history under the Fourth Republic, see Dominique Mongin, *La bombe atomique française, 1945–1958* (Brussels: Bruylant/LGDI, 1997); and Lawrence Scheinman, *Atomic Energy Policy in France under the Fourth Republic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965).

<sup>10</sup> See: NRDC Nuclear Program, *Nuclear Data*, 1997 ([www.nrdc.org](http://www.nrdc.org)) and the tables reprinted in this report.

<sup>11</sup> See, for instance: Richard Ullman, "The Covert French Connection," *Foreign Policy*, no. 75 (Summer 1989).

<sup>12</sup> See Pierre Melandri, "Aux origines de la coopération nucléaire franco-américaine," in *La France et l'atome*, ed. Maurice Vaïsse (Brussels: Bruylant, 1994). For recent developments, see also Nicola Butler, "Sharing Secrets," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, January/February 1997, 11–12.

American reluctance to cooperate extensively (again because of the McMahon Act) and to French dissatisfaction with the level of information provided by the United States. Altogether, Franco–American cooperation during the Cold War never even approached the special nuclear relationship between the United States and Britain after the Nassau Agreements. As for Britain, the other possible partner for France, Franco–British nuclear cooperation is a post-Cold War phenomena. During the Cold War era, Britain followed US policy on this issue and, anyhow, it did not favor such cooperation after France’s withdrawal from NATO’s military bodies.

### **Why Did France Go Nuclear?**

When France made a clear decision to go nuclear in the mid-1950s, it was facing a different context than that which the United States, the USSR, or the United Kingdom faced in the 1940s. Along with China, France was a second-generation nuclear weapon state. It was also a former great power losing its influence. Its decision to go nuclear was not strictly speaking motivated by another country’s decision to acquire nuclear weapons (as the Soviet Union’s move to develop nuclear weapons was in response to the United States’ efforts), but was more than anything the choice of a medium power facing new threats to its independence and influence in a time when the outstanding weight and potential of atomic weapons in international security was already obvious, and at a time when disarmament and non-proliferation practically did not exist.

Many factors influence a country’s choice to go nuclear:<sup>13</sup> strategic culture<sup>14</sup> and history, technical and financial capability, threats and security perceptions and misperceptions, national and international norms of behavior at a certain point in time, and domestic issues. To understand a country’s decision to develop nuclear weapons, the key task is to establish a clear hierarchy that gives each of these potential causes their right place, without overestimating one factor or diminishing the influence of another.

For a threshold state, the first elements that should be taken into account are the economic, financial, and technical abilities to go nuclear. In the 1950s and early 1960s, the political and legal barriers to the acquisition of a nuclear status could in most cases be lifted (and did not exist for most states except in the cases of West Germany and Japan). On the contrary, the economic and technical barriers were extremely high. It should therefore be remembered that France was among the few countries that had the technical knowledge and economic strength to go nuclear at the time. Among the few other candidates, some did follow suit (the People’s Republic of China, Israel, and India), just as a few renounced the nuclear option primarily for political or economical reasons (Federal Republic of Germany, Italy, and Sweden). Therefore, comparisons between France and other European countries (besides the United Kingdom) should be handled carefully, as most of the other

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<sup>13</sup> For a brilliant study of this issue that will be discussed in the following paragraphs, see Scott D. Sagan, “Why Do States Build Nuclear Weapons ?” *International Security* 21, no. 3 (Winter 1996/97): 54–86.

<sup>14</sup> As defined above.

possible candidates faced insurmountable financial and technical, or political obstacles to the acquisition of nuclear weapons.

With this context in mind, what were the main motivations for France's nuclear choice? Anglo-Saxon political scientists usually argue that France went nuclear primarily in the name of its *grandeur* and acquired nuclear weapons precisely for the prestige conferred by these weapons.<sup>15</sup> To summarize the thesis recently argued by Scott Sagan,<sup>16</sup> France is a typical example of a country that followed the "norms model" in choosing to acquire nuclear weapons. According to this model, French efforts toward nuclear weapons acquisition were motivated by a desire to maintain its great power status as its colonial empire was vanishing. Many statements by General de Gaulle of course could tend to confirm this view. The famous discussion with President Eisenhower in 1959, recalled in de Gaulle's *Memoirs*, is a good example:

A France without responsibility would be unworthy of herself, especially in the eyes of Frenchmen. It is for this reason that she disapproves of NATO, which denies her a share in decision-making and which is confined to Europe. It is for this reason too that she intends to provide herself with an atomic armament. Only in this way can our defense and foreign policy be independent, which we prize above everything else.<sup>17</sup>

French perspectives would present a more qualified view of French motivations. While the "great power status" conveyed by nuclear weapons may have played a part in the French decision, the quest for security should be taken more seriously in considering French action. In the view of this author, France's decision to acquire nuclear weapons fits Scott Sagan's "security model" at least as much as the "norms model" and probably more.

In fact the decisive element in France's decision to go nuclear lies in its strategic culture and history. As a leading European and world power for over three centuries, France certainly wanted to maintain this status and nuclear weapons acquisition was viewed as essential to that end. This decision therefore had little to do with a poorly defined concept of French *grandeur* or the loss of the colonial empire, and a lot to do with an historically anchored self-perception of France as a nation with an independent international role. In the eyes of many Frenchmen, France's nuclear choice was obvious after three other major nations had taken the same option. France, as in past

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<sup>15</sup> For good examples of this view, see two early, but comprehensive, studies of the French nuclear policy: Wilfrid Kohl, *French Nuclear Diplomacy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971); and Wolf Mendl, *Deterrence and Persuasion: French Nuclear Armament in the Context of National Policy 1945–1969* (New York: Praeger, 1970). For an interesting view of French strategic culture, see Philip Gordon, *A Certain Idea of France: French Security Policy and the Gaullist Legacy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

<sup>16</sup> See Sagan, "Why Do States Build Nuclear Weapons?" 73–80.

<sup>17</sup> Quoted in Sagan, "Why Do States Build Nuclear Weapons?" from David Yost, *France's Deterrent Posture and Security in Europe*, Adelphi Paper no. 184 (London: IISS, Winter 1984/85). For the original text, refer to Charles de Gaulle, *Memoirs of Hope: Renewal and Endeavor* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1971), 209.

centuries, had to acquire the most modern weapons to remain an independent and sovereign nation. A similar logic would apply to the acquisition of jet-airplanes or aircraft carriers. In that respect, one could indeed argue as Scott Sagan did that France followed the “norms model,” which, at the time, identified nuclear weapons with “great power” status.

In addition, nuclear weapons had a strategic and political value, not so much because they provided France with a compelling (positive) power vis-à-vis the USSR, which they never did, but rather because they provided France with freedom of action and leverage within the Western Alliance, vis-à-vis the United States, and in the Third World. This political value of nuclear weapons cannot be reduced to the symbolic dimension (the prestige) conferred by them. If one characterizes prestige as a tool for influence and freedom, it obviously played a role, but if one instead defines prestige as an undefined glamorous symbolic status, France’s nuclear option cannot be confined to it.

Other factors in this decision are rooted in contemporary French history. Nuclear weapons gave—or at least were perceived to give—France an answer to an often underestimated security need: the trauma caused by the defeat and invasion of France in the 1940s and what had led to it.<sup>18</sup> In the 1950s and 1960s,<sup>19</sup> the memories of three invasions in less than 80 years, including the humiliating defeat of 1940, were still quite vivid. The nuclear choice was a “never again” answer to these memories. Nuclear weapons provided a security answer to multiple perceived threats, which are deeply connected with French geography and recent history:

- France could be conventionally defeated and invaded; no means of defense could provide absolute safety (France’s experience with the *Ligne Maginot*);
- France could not rely on alliances without taking the risk of being tied by other countries’ choices (as it had been in the case of American and British foreign policies between the two World Wars); and
- France and its people would not morally survive another invasion and occupation without disappearing as a nation.

With such premises, which are to a large extent unique to France, the nuclear choice has much deeper roots than a simple quest for *grandeur* would suggest. The perception of nuclear weapons as a unique tool for an autonomous defense policy and as an unchallenged war-prevention asset made them the right answer at a certain point in French history. They provided an unsurpassed and cost-efficient answer to these challenges.

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<sup>18</sup> See Elisabeth Kier, “Culture and Military Doctrine, France between the Wars,” *International Security* 19, no. 4 (Spring 1995).

<sup>19</sup> This was a time when Sweden, an often quoted example of a country that renounced the nuclear option in the 1960s, was getting ready to celebrate its 150 years of unbroken peace.



French geography and history also explain a certain French distrust in US extended deterrence, in addition to the fear of Soviet invasion. This distrust was not shared openly by other European states, even though German leaders, for instance, proved concerned on many occasions during the Cold War. General de Gaulle, however, was absolutely convinced that the US guarantee would be weakened and untrustworthy once US territory was directly threatened. A recently published book by one of his ministers, in which private conversations are recalled,<sup>20</sup> quotes de Gaulle on this point:

Since Russia and America are able to destroy themselves, the two deterrent forces balance and nullify each other.

You should know that the Americans will not risk their survival to defend Europe. They have never done it, they never will. They do not have the slightest desire to do so. It is as clear as daylight. In their history, they have never put their national existence at stake for a commitment abroad. They fought to death for their independence and during the Civil War. But, abroad, they have never sent more than expeditionary forces which represented only a small share of their means, even if they fought courageously.

Why would you want them to accept to be erased from the map, because a European country threatened by Russia calls for help? They will never use their bomb in such a case! It is no use for them to tell us stories. It is no use to tell ourselves stories! If France and Germany, upon which solidarity is imposed by geography, use all their forces if one of them is attacked, it is in the nature of things. That is why we should push further the alliance with Germany. But the United States will always sneak away.<sup>21</sup>

This statement reflects the crudest realism, but also a perception that has deeply influenced French strategic thinking. The point is not whether de Gaulle was right or wrong, but whether perceptions matter in the nuclear field, especially when they take their roots in two recent events: the 1956 Suez crisis<sup>22</sup> and the 1940 defeat.

Once the decision to develop a nuclear arsenal had been made, French strategists faced the task of defining a realistic and cost-efficient posture for a medium NWS vis-à-vis a superpower. In

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<sup>20</sup> Alain Peyrefitte, *C'était de Gaulle, Vol. I "La France redevient la France"* (Paris: de Fallois-Fayard, 1994).

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 289 (translation by the author).

<sup>22</sup> The fact that the British government developed a different policy after Suez does not change the French perception, especially since France was denied the special nuclear relationship with the United States that the United Kingdom has enjoyed since the Nassau Agreements. Moreover, Suez was also a much more important stake for France than it was at that time for Britain, as the Suez intervention was directly connected for Paris with the war taking place in Algeria, then a French territory.

the early 1960s, this was the task of a small group of military analysts, which defined for France an original nuclear posture, known as the “weak to the strong posture.”<sup>23</sup>

### **French Nuclear Strategy during the Cold War: The “Weak to the Strong” Posture**

During the Cold War, French strategy covered a wide range of potential threats ranging from an all-out attack by the Soviet and Warsaw Pact forces against Western Europe, to low intensity conflicts in sub-Saharan Africa. The theaters of action covered were the so-called “three circles”:

- the national territory covered by nuclear deterrence and territorial defense;
- the European theater, in which the First Army, and later the Rapid Action Force (FAR) were to assume the French commitments to the Western Alliances, as a part of a wider deterrent maneuver; and
- out-of-area action mainly in Africa and the Middle East.

There was some affirmation that French strategy should be multidirectional, namely in the famous paper written by General Ailleret in 1967 that proposed a *tous azimuts* concept.<sup>24</sup> De Gaulle had developed similar ideas in private since the early 1960s: the French deterrent was not supposed to be directed against a single enemy (i.e., the USSR), but should be ready to face any possible opponent in the future. Aside from these theoretical debates, however, the French nuclear strategy primarily dealt with an immediate and massive threat: the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, and in accordance with the Gaullist views on *tous azimuts*, the USSR was not explicitly named as the enemy in official documents until in 1983. The 1984–1988 Procurement Law prepared by the Socialist government stated: “One may fear that it is indeed the purpose pursued by the Soviet Union, thus challenging the security, and the independence, of our continent.”<sup>25</sup> Accordingly, the French nuclear arsenal and strategy were designed and developed to insure credibility vis-à-vis the Soviet Union in a “weak to the strong” posture.<sup>26</sup>

Behind this concept is an idea strongly advocated by General Gallois since the late 1950s: namely, that a medium power can deter a much stronger superpower by the threat of massive

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<sup>23</sup> For details on this process of defining a French nuclear posture, carried out by the *Centre de prospective et d'évaluation* (CPE) within the Defense ministry, and the various options taken into consideration, see the extensive interviews of a former member of this group, General Lucien Poirier, as presented in Lucien Poirier, *Le chantier stratégique*, entretiens avec Gérard Chaliand (Paris: Hachette, 1997).

<sup>24</sup> See Charles Ailleret, “Défense dirigée ou défense tous azimuts,” *Revue de défense nationale*, December 1967: 1923–32.

<sup>25</sup> For a good collection of documents on French defense policy, including this procurement law, refer to: Dominique David, ed., *La politique de défense de la France* (Paris: Fondation pour les études de défense nationale, 1989).

<sup>26</sup> For a comprehensive overview of French deterrence during the Cold War, see David Yost, *France's Deterrent Posture and Security in Europe*, Adelphi Papers no. 184 & 185 (London: IISS, Winter 1984/85).

retaliation. As nuclear weapons can inflict destruction at an unacceptable level, a handful of these weapons suffices for a credible deterrent vis-à-vis any threat as long as three conditions are met: the arsenal needs to reach a certain level of credibility (i.e., a second strike capability), the vital interests of the “weak” have to be at stake, and the political decision-maker should be ready to use the weapons.<sup>27</sup> Even though some authors use the idea of “proportional deterrence” to qualify this posture, it is not part of the official language used to describe this policy.<sup>28</sup>

French *dissuasion* follows a narrow definition of deterrence. The French deterrence relies primarily on strategic assets to threaten the adversary’s “vital centers” with massive retaliatory strikes, following a counter-value targeting strategy. The American tradition would call it “deterrence by (threat of) punishment.” As was implied in the idea of “proportional deterrence,” the threat that hangs upon the aggressor is equal or superior to the stake that France represents for it. In other words, “proportional deterrence” aims at reducing drastically the gains-expectancy of the adversary by threatening to destroy “more than France” in the adversary’s territory.

Nuclear deterrence enters into play only if French “vital interests” are threatened. The definition of these “vital interests” (*intérêts vitaux*) is deliberately kept imprecise, but at least covers the national “sanctuary” (*sanctuaire*, the national territory and its surroundings).

“Deterrence is designed to avoid war, not to win it.”<sup>29</sup> This saying of President Mitterrand is the cornerstone of French strategic thinking and the basis for the French rejection of so-called “nuclear battle.” In this framework, pre-strategic (i.e., tactical) nuclear weapons are not an extension or even a limitation of conventional warfare; they only exist in limited numbers to deliver a single “ultimate warning” (*ultime avertissement*), before the possible all-out strategic strike. To fulfill these first roles, France only needs a limited nuclear capability, which follows the principle of “reasonable sufficiency” (*suffisance raisonnable*).

Finally, the decision to use nuclear weapons belongs to the *Président de la République* and to him only: in classical French nuclear thinking, there can be no form of decision-sharing, since the “autonomy of decision” is the guarantee of national independence and of French strategic

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<sup>27</sup> See the classic book by General Pierre Gallois, *Stratégie de l’âge nucléaire* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1960). The author establishes a distinction between the superpowers’ strategies primarily based on *coercition* (coercion) which is beyond the range of medium powers, and *dissuasion* (deterrence), which can be achieved with limited resources and nuclear means. According to Gallois, this second strategy allows medium powers to deter superpowers from using coercion on them.

<sup>28</sup> For a comprehensive overview, refer to the chapters on the French nuclear strategy in Marcel Duval and Yves Le Baut, *L’arme nucléaire française: Pourquoi et comment?* (Paris: S.P.M., 1991), 21–139. Refer also to the writings of one of the “fathers” of the French nuclear doctrine: Lucien Poirier, *Essais de stratégie théorique* (Paris: FEDN, 1982; reprint, Paris: Economica, 1997, under the title *Stratégie théorique*); Lucien Poirier, *Stratégie théorique II* (Paris: Economica, 1987) and Lucien Poirier, *Stratégie théorique III* (Paris: Economica, 1996).

<sup>29</sup> See the speech on French deterrence policy by François Mitterrand, *Président de la République*, Elysée Palace, 5 May 1994.

sovereignty. François Mitterrand bluntly summarized this last principle by stating in 1983 that “*La dissuasion, c’est moi.*”<sup>30</sup> The political will of the decision-maker therefore plays an important part in the French posture.

Some major differences between French and US doctrines should be made clear at this point. In the French strategic vocabulary, nuclear deterrence is never associated with war, but only with war prevention and peace.<sup>31</sup> Foster Dulles’s “massive retaliation” doctrine of the 1950s is the closest US equivalent to this deterrence posture *à la française*. From a French perspective, there is no other deterrence posture; intra-war, discriminate, conventional, or even extended deterrence or flexible response do not make sense. It should be further noted that the words themselves differ from English to French. “*Dissuasion*” describes a result, namely the restraint in the enemy’s behavior induced by the threat, while “deterrence” (from “terror”) focuses on the cause of this restraint. These linguistic differences illuminate differing French and US views on atomic bombs: a moral judgment was never implied in France’s nuclear posture, whereas “massive retaliation”—also known as deterrence by punishment—is a US phrase that carries a distinctive moral echo.

Finally, the seminal US question—what to do if deterrence fails?—does not make sense in the French Cold War posture. If deterrence had failed, war would have occurred, and been lost, and France would have disappeared as a sovereign nation for obvious geographical reasons and probably have been physically destroyed as well. Besides, not providing nuclear guarantees to other nations allowed such a rationale.<sup>32</sup>

All these principles follow one single goal: to insure the credibility of a medium power’s deterrence vis-à-vis a superpower. In this case, credibility does not rest primarily on numerical parity but on the principle of sufficiency. Of course, France puts its own existence at stake in the process: that is why the threat of massive—thus unacceptable—retaliation is credible. This is in every respect a “brinkmanship” posture: “whereby caution is forced on the aggressor uncertain as to how far to the “brink” [France] would be willing to go.”<sup>33</sup> A telling historical parallel is Xenophon disposing his hoplites with a ravine at their back in front of the Persian army so as to show Greek resolve by standing by the brink.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> This declaration, “I am deterrence,” is typical of the French “nuclear monarchy,” which gives a unique and unbalanced role to the president in security affairs. This was described by Samy Cohen in *La monarchie nucléaire* (Paris: Plon, 1986).

<sup>31</sup> A major article (among many other statements) referred to nuclear weapons as the “weapon of peace”; see Régis Debray, “L’arme de la paix,” *Stratégique*, no. 26, 1/1986: 21–34.

<sup>32</sup> Admittedly, this “all or nothing” strategy was made possible by France’s stand alone posture, which enabled France to face the challenges and dilemmas of extended deterrence.

<sup>33</sup> Lawrence Freedman, *The Evolution of Nuclear Strategy* 5th ed. (London: Macmillan Press, 1987), 86–87.

<sup>34</sup> Xenophon, *Anabasis* VI (5), 17, as quoted in Alain Joxe, *Le cycle de la dissuasion* (Paris: La Découverte, 1990), 127.

This chain of reasoning has its own logic, which relates to French strategic culture, geography, and history, and can be convincing given what is at stake.<sup>35</sup>

### **The Current French Rationale on Nuclear Weapons**

In spite of minor changes due to the enhancement of French nuclear capabilities, the basis of the French nuclear doctrine has remained unchallenged for over 25 years. Even the election of a Socialist President in 1981 did not lead to any major reappraisal. There have been many debates, for instance, on the issue of Europeanization, but they have never led to drastic changes of a posture that, according to French strategists, only gained in credibility as time passed and as US and Russian stockpiles grew to insane levels.

The end of the Cold War itself was not viewed as a reason to change the nuclear doctrine, which was consequently only slightly adapted to the new security environment. This lack of doctrinal reappraisal was criticized by isolated voices, such as Lucien Poirier,<sup>36</sup> who wrote an essay describing the French military doctrine as facing a “crisis of its foundations.”<sup>37</sup>

In the early 1990s, the fading of the “designated” enemy, and the new concern about proliferation in the wake of the Persian Gulf War, led to a new debate on the role of nuclear weapons in French security. On the one hand, most French strategists and decision-makers continued to defend the existing policy, arguing that no changes were needed, since a nuclear posture that had deterred the Soviet Union (or at least was perceived or misperceived to have achieved such a goal) could deter any other country. This was clearly the view of President Mitterrand. On the other hand, some experts in the political, military, and academic communities advocated major strategic reappraisals. These experts suggested a modification of the French strategic concept from a “weak to the strong” war prevention deterrent posture to a so-called “strong to the weak” or “strong to the crazy” warfighting strategy. Mirroring the US debate over counter-proliferation and also reflecting US–French disputes over “flexible response” during the Cold War, the debate ended up in a stalemate,<sup>38</sup> since François Mitterrand, the last President, and his successor, Jacques Chirac, confirmed on several occasions the traditional deterrent posture.

Despite this debate on the revision of the nuclear concept, nuclear weapons continue to play a major role in the French defense posture, as the 1994 White Paper on Defense and all official

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<sup>35</sup> Post-Cold War statements by Soviet military and civilian leaders tend to indicate that it had some credibility, at least in Moscow (various discussions of Russian analysts with the author).

<sup>36</sup> Quoted above as one of the “founding fathers” of the French nuclear doctrine.

<sup>37</sup> See Lucien Poirier, “La crise des fondements,” *Stratégique*, no. 53, 1/1992: 117–152, which was reprinted and completed in Lucien Poirier, *La crise des fondements* (Paris: Economica, 1994).

<sup>38</sup> On the debate about the revision of the French deterrence concept, see Pascal Boniface, *Contre le révisionisme nucléaire* (Paris: Ellipses, 1994).

documents have confirmed in the past few years. Moreover, France has made a new offer of concerted deterrence to its European partners. Maybe even more surprisingly, the French consensus on nuclear issues has remained almost as strong as ever, both in public opinion and among the political parties.

The following section will explore in depth the present French nuclear posture and rationale for keeping nuclear weapons. It will first summarize the arguments contained in the 1994 *Livre blanc sur la défense* (White Paper on Defense) and the subsequent official documents and decisions that reaffirmed the need for nuclear weapons in French, European, and international security and confirmed the French desire to keep nuclear weapons in the mid-to-long term. It will then address briefly the issue of a concerted European deterrence, before examining the French consensus on nuclear policy.

### **An Unchallenged Deterrence Policy**

Since the end of the Cold War, no decision-maker or official document has criticized or challenged the role of nuclear weapons in French security policy. The assessment of threats and risks facing France in the short-to-mid term contained in the 1994 *Livre blanc* continues to justify a role for nuclear weapons in some worst case scenarios. French nuclear strategy itself has remained more or less the same, even though budgetary constraints and arms control efforts have led to a down-sizing of the deployed nuclear forces.

#### **The Threat Assessment of the 1994 *Livre Blanc sur la Défense* and Beyond**

Beside being the first defense White Paper in 22 years, the 1994 *Livre blanc* produced the longest official report on the threats and risks facing French security after the Cold War. While many aspects of the defense policy set out in the White Paper have been changed significantly by President Chirac,<sup>39</sup> the threat assessment remains. In the first pages of the White Paper, one finds the following description of the post-Cold War international framework for France:

For the first time in its history, France does not face a direct military threat near its borders. However new risks can affect its security and its defense. . . . No one denies that the main and global threat—direct, concrete and measurable—that threatened our vital interest, has vanished today and probably for a long time.<sup>40</sup>

Thus admitting that a strategic reassessment is needed, the White Paper delivers the following threat assessment:

1) The global Soviet threat has disappeared. Nevertheless, in Europe, Russia will remain a strong military power, which must be taken as such in our strategic

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<sup>39</sup> To cite one major example, the Chirac Administration has decided to professionalize the French armed forces by 2002.

<sup>40</sup> *Livre blanc sur la défense 1994* (Paris: La Documentation Française, 1994), 17.

evaluation. Moreover, local or regional crisis, which might degenerate into conventional wars, may challenge the shift of the continent toward a new equilibrium.

More broadly, the main risk on security lies now in regional conflicts which could challenge the research of international stability . . .

2) The level of military equipment of a number of regional powers should rise not only in the field of conventional weapons, but also, given proliferation, in the field of weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear weapons, by the beginning of the next century.<sup>41</sup>

With regard to responses to these threats, the White Paper put new emphasis on conventional forces and clearly pointed to a reduced role for nuclear weapons in French strategy. Nevertheless, the French concept of nuclear deterrence was clearly reaffirmed. According to the White Paper,

the nuclear forces must permanently be capable of fulfilling two functions: to inflict a striking force causing unacceptable damage and liable to be repeated; to proceed to a limited striking force on military targets in view of the ultimate warning.<sup>42</sup>

The White Paper lists six scenarios, two of which clearly involve nuclear weapons (nos. 2 and 6). (See Table 1.)

Although President Chirac indeed announced many reforms to the French defense policy after his election in 1995, the threat assessment made in the 1994 *Livre blanc* remains valid. What the Chirac Administration slightly modified are the answers to these threats, which are now based on four main “functions”:

- nuclear deterrence;
- prevention by intelligence and pre-positioned forces;
- force projection; and
- safety and protection of the national territory vis-à-vis new types of threats (e.g., terrorism and drugs).<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> *Livre blanc sur la défense 1994*, 35.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 82 (Official translation).

<sup>43</sup> See Ministère de la Défense, *1997–2015 Une défense nouvelle* (Paris: SIRPA, 1996), 18–19.

Behind this wording, one finds a reassessment of budgetary priorities from nuclear weapons and territorial defense to intelligence and force projection, and more specifically a justification for moving to a professional army.

**Table 1: The 1994 White Paper Threat Assessment: Six Scenarios**

<b>Number</b>	<b>Scenario</b>	<b>Role for nuclear weapons</b>
No. 1	Regional conflict that does not involve French “vital interests”	No role for nuclear weapons
No. 2	Regional conflict that may involve French “vital interests” in Europe or “in a longer time-frame, in the Mediterranean and in the Near and Middle East”	“A deterrent maneuver, adapted to this particular context, might be necessary to accompany our decision to intervene”
No. 3	Attacks on French territories overseas (French West Indies, French Guiana, and Indian Ocean and South Pacific islands)	These territories are covered by deterrence, with no further details regarding the role for nuclear weapons
No. 4	“Implementation of bilateral defense treaties” (primarily with African countries)	No role for nuclear weapons
No. 5	“Operations in favor of peace and international law”	No role for nuclear weapons unless the peace mission evolved into a no. 2 scenario
No. 6	“Resurgence of a major threat against Western Europe”; although considered “hardly plausible today,” this scenario, if it ever occurred, would present “a deadly risk” for France	The role of nuclear deterrence is certainly central in this scenario

Source: *Livre blanc sur la défense*, 1994.



### **An Unchallenged Nuclear Posture**

The *Livre blanc* rejected any evolution from a purely deterrent posture to a “war-fighting” strategy. It was greatly concerned with the specific issue of nuclear proliferation, which is mentioned in chapter 1 of the White Paper (“Evolution of risks and threats”). “Arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation agreements” are referred to in chapter 3 (“Reference framework of our defense policy”). The no. 2 scenario, shown in the table, is of course the most interesting example of this new interest in proliferation. Nevertheless, the proliferation threat cannot be seen as the basis for a French counter-proliferation doctrine (in the way that the US administration views the proliferation threat as the motivation behind its counter-proliferation program), in spite of many efforts from some French politicians and military analysts to justify the creation of such a doctrine. The so-called “conventional deterrence” theories were described by the White Paper as “dangerous mistakes.” Despite the efforts to shift from a deterrent posture to a first-strike strategy against emerging third world, nuclear-armed rogue states, these ideas were abandoned as the discussions on the White Paper started. The word “counter-proliferation” not only remains taboo in the French official language, but the concept itself, after an interested first look, was not adopted in France.

There are a number of reasons why France did not move to adopt a counter-proliferation doctrine. First, the defenders of traditional deterrence (President Mitterrand in the first place) retained a key role in the decision-making process that led to the White Paper. Second, “American” counter-proliferation was criticized very early in France as inefficient and undermining deterrence and non-proliferation efforts.<sup>44</sup> It was (improperly at times) almost only likened to a preemptive nuclear strike strategy, and was thus dismissed as inconsistent with the French deterrence posture. Under these circumstances, France did not develop an actual military counter-proliferation doctrine. Nevertheless, scenario no. 2—regional conflicts that may involve French “vital interests”—could be used as a starting point for the evolution of such a doctrine if interpreted differently. The “deterrent maneuver, adapted to this particular context” could indeed evolve into a military counter-proliferation posture, if the president decided it should.<sup>45</sup> Yet, neither Mitterrand nor Chirac have made such a new interpretation. On the whole, the new concern over proliferation did not lead to a French counter-proliferation doctrine. Proliferation continues to be addressed primarily with the classic tools of non-proliferation and deterrence. Such proposals might reappear, however, if a consistent threat from the South was to be perceived or misperceived.

Altogether, the 1994 *Livre blanc sur la défense* was an extremely consensual paper. It did not challenge French defense policy and was obviously meant to adapt the Cold War posture more than to conceptualize a brand new strategy. It was clearly an expression of the traditional French consensus on defense. In order to preserve this consensus in a period of “*cohabitation*,” it was

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<sup>44</sup> See Camille Grand, “Counter-Proliferation: A French Perspective,” (Paper presented at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace Conference, Nuclear Non-Proliferation: Enhancing the Tools of the Trade, Washington, DC, 9–10 June 1997).

<sup>45</sup> This would be a major doctrinal change.

decided to leave many options open and defer the tough decisions to the president to be elected in May 1995. Jacques Chirac did make many of these decisions. In the first place, he decided on the resumption of nuclear testing, which he judged necessary.<sup>46</sup> Later, he announced several important disarmament initiatives.<sup>47</sup> Finally, as a part of his redrafting of French defense policy, he reviewed and downsized the nuclear posture by dismantling the two ground-to-ground nuclear systems (Albion S-3 D missiles and Hadès missiles). The new president nevertheless did not decide to change the nuclear strategy, as he stated on 23 February 1996:

this ambitious program of adaptation and modernization of our deterrence shows the will of France to continue to guarantee its ultimate security in any circumstances. Based on deterrence, the French nuclear strategy remains, *ne variatur*, a defensive one. Nevertheless any aggressor who would want to strike our vital interests must remain convinced of our capacity and resolution to preserve them.<sup>48</sup>

The election of a left-wing parliamentary majority (Socialists, Communists, and Greens) in June 1997 did not change this general trend. In a speech before the *Institut des hautes études de défense nationale* (IHEDN) in September 1997,<sup>49</sup> the new Socialist prime minister, Lionel Jospin, confirmed that France intended to retain a nuclear weapons capability. In this speech, he very clearly stated that “deterrence remains the pillar of our defense strategy.” At the same time, the new government continued in the 1998 budget to cut nuclear spending.

### **The Future of the French Nuclear Arsenal: Modernization under Budgetary Constraint**

A procurement law for six years (*Loi de programmation militaire 1995–2000*), adopted in April 1994, implemented the White Paper. It confirmed the decline in nuclear spending, which started in 1990. The procurement law allotted 129 billion francs for equipment for the nuclear forces, primarily for the development and purchase of two of the four new-generation nuclear submarines (SNLE-NG) slated to replace the first generation SNLES. In general terms, nuclear military spending has declined by more than a third since the end of the Cold War, falling from more than 40 percent

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<sup>46</sup> The official reasons for the resumption of nuclear testing for a limited series of 6 tests were: (1) to test once the series version of the new TN-75 warhead then entering operational service, and (2) to study the safety and reliability of the aging of nuclear weapons in order to secure the long-term credibility of the French nuclear arsenal.

<sup>47</sup> See Part II below.

<sup>48</sup> Speech before the *Ecole militaire*, 23 February 1996, as quoted in Ministère de la Défense, *1997–2015 Une défense nouvelle*.

<sup>49</sup> For a reprint of the speech, see Lionel Jospin, “La politique de défense de la France,” *Défense Nationale*, November 1997, 3–14.

of the military procurement budget in the 1960s (1964–1969), to 30–35 percent in the 1970s and in the 1980s, to about 30 percent in the early 1990s, and about 20 percent at the time of this writing.<sup>50</sup> This general decline in nuclear spending has been accelerated by growing budgetary constraints, which have necessitated more cuts in military spending. In 1995, the then minister of defense, Charles Millon, had set up a “strategic committee,” which decided to make new cuts in military spending. A new Procurement Law (1997–2002), which was drafted and adopted in 1996 (it replaces the one adopted in 1994), includes another 18 percent decline in military procurement spending. This new procurement law allots 105.8 billion francs over six years to nuclear deterrence. Under these new budgetary conditions, the nuclear share falls below the level of 20 billion francs per year to an average of 17.6 billion. In comparison, during the past decade (1986–1995), the nuclear share of procurement on average totaled more than 30 billion francs per year.<sup>51</sup> The share of nuclear forces within the *Titre V* (procurement) of the defense budget is down to 21 percent, the lowest level since the birth of the French nuclear arsenal. This trend was confirmed and emphasized by the new government, which imposed more cuts in military spending. The 1998 procurement budget has been reduced another 10 percent altogether, down to 81 billion francs, and with the nuclear share down to 16.3 billion, another 15 percent less than in 1997.<sup>52</sup>

Most major military (and especially nuclear) programs have been delayed. French deterrence has moved from the triad to a dyad in 1996–97 with the dismantling of the 18 Albion ground-to-ground missiles.<sup>53</sup> French nuclear forces now primarily rely upon four new generation ballistic missile launcher submarines (SNLE-NG), two of which will be permanently at sea; additionally, a new missile (M51) is under development to replace the M45 by 2010–2015. The second component will be a renewed air-to-ground capability (with both a strategic and a pre-strategic role), with the *Rafale* fighter-bomber plane carrying an upgraded version of the ASMP (*Air-Sol Moyenne Portée*) missile.<sup>54</sup> President Chirac announced in February 1996 the complete dismantling of both the Albion IRBMs

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<sup>50</sup> For an historical overview of French nuclear spending, refer to the tables in Duval and Le Baut, *L'arme nucléaire française: Pourquoi et comment?*, 247–248. These tables are based on official figures, which do not necessarily represent the overall cost of the nuclear program or of the maintenance end of operating the nuclear forces.

<sup>51</sup> On these budgetary problems and on French defense policy in general, see “France” in the Yearbook *L'Année stratégique*, ed. Pascal Boniface (Paris: IRIS, published yearly since 1987); see specifically the 1995, 1996, and 1997 editions.

<sup>52</sup> See *Le Monde*, 26 September 1997.

<sup>53</sup> The dismantling started in September 1996 and was completed in 1997; see section 3 below on further developments in French nuclear arms reductions.

<sup>54</sup> The future of the Air force *Rafale* program, however, remains unclear at this point. The mission is for the moment fulfilled by *Mirage 2000N* jetplanes, with a standard (unrefuelled) range of 690 km, to which should be added the range of the present ASMP missile of 250 km at high altitude (80 km at low altitude). The air-to-ground capability has primarily the “pre-strategic” role of delivering the “ultimate warning.”

(Intermediate Range Ballistic Missiles with a strategic role) and of the Hadès short-range missiles (already stored since 1993).<sup>55</sup> In the 1998 budget, most of the programs of the 1997–2002 Procurement Law have already been further delayed, including the entry into service of the second SNLE-NG.<sup>56</sup>

**Table 2: French Nuclear Forces, End 1996**

Weapon System	No. deployed	No. warheads deployed
submarine-based missiles	48 MSBS M4 A/B 16 M45	288 TN 70/71 96 TN 75
ASMP/Mirage 2000	45	45 TN 81
ASMP/Super-Etendard on aircraft carrier	24	20 TN 81
Total		around 450

Source: NRDC Nuclear Notebook ([www.nrdc.org](http://www.nrdc.org))

Altogether, in the mid-to-long term, two points are clear as regards nuclear policy: France intends to retain a nuclear capability and a deterrence posture; and the budgetary constraints, combined with a set of new priorities (e.g., outer-space, projection capabilities, intelligence, and peacekeeping missions), will continue to reduce the role of nuclear weapons in French strategy and their share of military spending.

### A “Concerted” European Deterrence?

Building up some form of common European nuclear policy is an old idea whose time has not yet come. Various proposals for Europeanization of the French nuclear arsenal have been formulated since the 1950s.<sup>57</sup> France, however, was always reluctant to share the core of nuclear deterrence, namely the decision-making. Only in January 1992 did President Mitterrand propose studying the basis for a European nuclear doctrine.<sup>58</sup> Since this proposal, there has been an ongoing

<sup>55</sup> The dismantling of both systems was announced by President Chirac in a TV interview, 22 February 1996. See Ministère de la Défense, *Propos sur la défense*, no. 57 (Paris: SIRPA, February 1996), 139–140.

<sup>56</sup> See *Le Monde*, 26 September 1997.

<sup>57</sup> Suggestions of this sort date as far back as the Chaban-Delmas/Strauss/Taviani 1957–1958 agreements. On this issue, refer to Georges-Henri Soutou, “Les accords de 1957–1958: vers une Communauté stratégique et nucléaire entre la France, l’Allemagne et l’Italie,” in *La France et l’atome*, 123–162.

<sup>58</sup> *Le Monde*, 13 January 1992.

debate in France on the ways and means of nuclear cooperation in Western Europe.<sup>59</sup> The *Livre blanc sur la défense* also discussed this perspective in very general terms.

In January 1995, Alain Juppé<sup>60</sup> introduced the concept of “*dissuasion concertée*” (concerted deterrence), defined as a proposal for a “dialogue among equal partners” on nuclear issues.<sup>61</sup> It would be unfair to see these proposals only as a tactical move to counter the campaign against French nuclear testing, even though this certainly played a role in the new French initiatives announced in the summer and fall of 1995.<sup>62</sup> The obvious lack of interest in this proposal expressed by the possible non-nuclear partners led France to essentially drop the subject for a year. It nevertheless remains an important topic in France and is proposed in every single official paper or speech. Yet, despite the fact that France is more open than ever to discussions among Europeans, for the moment cooperation is more likely to develop among the three Western nuclear powers and with select non-nuclear states on an informal basis.

An interesting point about concerted deterrence is that, according to some French officials, it covers the whole spectrum of nuclear issues, including arms control and non-proliferation, and doctrine. Earlier French proposals were often offering a second-rate “extended deterrence” and “nuclear sharing,” trying to replace the American nuclear umbrella with a French nuclear umbrella in spite of the much smaller size of the French nuclear arsenal. Concerted deterrence is therefore a more realistic approach, which, instead of offering a “finger on the trigger,” emphasizes French readiness to “talk nuclear” without taboos within the European Union. Former Prime Minister Alain Juppé also insisted very much on the idea that concerted deterrence meant cooperation among “equal partners” and was not a proposed French leadership in security affairs.

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<sup>59</sup> For a debate on concerted deterrence, see the dossier titled “La France, la dissuasion et l’Europe” in *Relations internationales et stratégiques*, no. 21, Spring 1996. For various perspectives on a European deterrent, see for example: Frédéric Bozo, “Une doctrine nucléaire européenne: pour quoi faire et comment?” *Politique étrangère*, no. 2/1992; Roberto Zadra, *European Integration and Nuclear Deterrence After the Cold War*, Chaillot Paper no. 5 (Paris: WEU, Institute for Security Studies, November 1992); David Yost, “Europe and Nuclear Deterrence,” *Survival*, Autumn 1993; M. de Decker, *Le rôle et l’avenir des armes nucléaires*, Document 1420 of WEU Assembly, 19 May 1994; Bruno Tertrais, “Quelle dimension européenne pour la dissuasion nucléaire,” *Relations internationales et stratégiques*, no. 18, Summer 1995; and Pascal Boniface, “French Nuclear Strategy and European Deterrence: *les Rendez-vous Manqués*,” *Contemporary Security Policy* 17, no. 2 (August 1996).

<sup>60</sup> Gaullist Foreign Affairs Minister (1993–1995) and Prime Minister (1995–1997).

<sup>61</sup> See his speech titled “What Horizon for French Foreign Policy?” (30 January 1995) as reprinted in *Politique étrangère*, no. 1/1995: 245–259; Juppé clarified this proposal in September 1995 in a speech titled “Nuclear Deterrence in the New International Context,” also reprinted in *Politique étrangère*, no. 3/1995: 743–751. For a debate on concerted deterrence, see also the dossier “La France, la dissuasion et l’Europe,” *Relations internationales et stratégiques*, no. 21 (Spring 1996).

<sup>62</sup> The resumption of nuclear testing was announced in June 1995 and the first test was conducted on 5 September 1995. The last of six occurred on 27 January 1996. On the history of French nuclear testing since the 1960s, refer to Yves le Baut, ed., *Les essais nucléaires français* (Brussels: Bruylant, 1996).

This proposal should also be viewed in connection with the new French openness toward NATO, which (in spite of its mixed results so far) makes French proposals more acceptable to many of its partners. France has even announced its readiness to talk nuclear within NATO, even though it still refuses to join NATO's Nuclear Planning Group.<sup>63</sup> The new left-wing government led by Lionel Jospin has proved more reluctant to participate in NATO military structures, however, especially since France has failed to achieve its goals within the Alliance in terms of expansion, reform, and access to regional sub-commands for Europeans.

Even though the French proposal for concerted deterrence has not given birth to any formal agreement or talks among the European countries, the progress of bilateral Franco-British nuclear cooperation has raised some hopes. The key issue nevertheless remains the participation of NNWS in talks on concerted deterrence.

### **Franco-British Progress and Prospects for Cooperation with Non-Nuclear European Countries**

Franco-British nuclear cooperation has never been as successful as in the past few years.<sup>64</sup> During the Cold War, Franco-British cooperation had always been jeopardized by the two countries' disagreement over NATO and their political disputes over the European construction. Since 1992, a true "spring of Franco-British relations"<sup>65</sup> and parallel Franco-American progress in nuclear cooperation<sup>66</sup> has made the advancement of Franco-British nuclear cooperation possible. The NATO disputes have vanished to a large extent, and both countries have come to admit their many common interests in security affairs. In 1992, France and Britain established a Joint Commission on nuclear policy and doctrine, and even though its work remains classified, both sides have expressed extreme satisfaction. The commission appears to have discussed very detailed technical issues and exchanged broad political views. The joint statement by Jacques Chirac and John Major in October 1995 was a clear sign of its achievements: "We can not imagine a situation in which the vital interests of one of our two countries could be threatened, without the other's vital interests to be threatened as well."<sup>67</sup> Among the reasons for this new Franco-British cooperation is the obvious fact that, as medium nuclear states, both countries face the same problems and are more and more isolated in international arms control negotiations, being caught between pressures from the NNWS and

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<sup>63</sup> On these trends, see Camille Grand, "La diplomatie nucléaire du Président Chirac," *Relations internationales et stratégiques*, no. 25 (Spring 1997).

<sup>64</sup> See Bruno Tertrais, "Le printemps des relations franco-britanniques," *Relations internationales et stratégiques*, no. 17 (Spring 1995); and Sir Christopher Mallaby, "Dissuasion britannique et dissuasion européenne," *Relations internationales et stratégiques*, no. 21 (Spring 1996).

<sup>65</sup> See Tertrais, "Le printemps de relations franco-britanniques."

<sup>66</sup> Today, and since the Franco-US nuclear agreement of 4 June 1996, the cooperation among the three countries seems to have finally led to a fairly balanced system of nuclear information sharing. See Nicola Butler, "Sharing Secrets," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, January/February 1997, 11-12.

<sup>67</sup> Franco-British Summit, Chartres, 30 October 1995.

US–Russian bilateral initiatives. To become European, this bilateral cooperation nevertheless needs to include non-nuclear countries.

Concerted deterrence faces for the moment a complete lack of public interest from non-nuclear European countries. Putting aside those with a long anti-nuclear tradition (e.g., Sweden and Ireland), even NATO members have so far shown very little support or interest, with the encouraging but relative exception of Germany in late 1996.

The participation of Germany in these discussions is viewed both as desirable and necessary in Paris. The basis of German participation has been reset with the “Franco–German concept on security and defense” issued after the Nuremberg Franco–German summit of December 1996.<sup>68</sup> It mentions the two countries’ readiness to start “a dialogue on the role of nuclear deterrence in European defense policy.” Yet, the Kohl government (not to mention the German Socialist–Green opposition) remains reluctant to launch a public nuclear debate with France. Moreover, publics in Germany and elsewhere seem absolutely not ready to hear of any form of European common nuclear policy and, as a consequence, most governments will not take any risk on the topic, which is perceived as neither urgent nor vital.

Any open progress on developing common European nuclear policy seems unlikely in the near future, as everyone concerned seems to have chosen the “wait and see” approach, with France waiting for European commitments and non-nuclear states expecting France to be more precise about possible cooperation and discussions. If none of the nations involved breaks this deadlock, the gap between governments that still rely on nuclear weapons for their security and others will continue to widen, undermining the chances for a Common Foreign and Security Policy to truly emerge. NATO and European Union (EU) expansion might offer new partners for a European concerted deterrence, as some Central European countries (e.g., Poland) could be interested in getting the most extensive security guarantees possible. France, however, does not seem ready to offer back-door nuclear guarantees beyond NATO policies.

In any case, the topic of a common European nuclear policy is likely to remain a part of the European security debate and to reappear publicly once in a while and under various forms, as long as European construction goes on with two NWS and thirteen or more NNWS.

### **The French Consensus on Nuclear Weapons: A Unique French Specialty**

The enduring and broad-based political commitment to the establishment and upgrading of the nuclear *Force de frappe* is a French specialty among the democracies. Whereas the development of the British nuclear forces has always faced strong domestic opposition and hesitation, and US nuclear choices have been the product of heated internal debates and compromises between opposing

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<sup>68</sup> The full text can be found in *Relations internationales et stratégiques*, no. 25 (Spring 1997).

views, the French nuclear consensus has faced no major opposition since the 1970s, when all major political parties declared themselves in favor of the national deterrence policy.

In the early years, President de Gaulle indeed faced a strong opposition on nuclear issues, which combined three types of opponents: anti-nuclear and pro-Soviet Communists, anti-nuclear leftists (primarily Socialists), and pro-US, pro-NATO center-right and center-left individuals who favored a nuclear option within the Alliance or a united Europe. What Raymond Aron called the “great debate”<sup>69</sup> on nuclear strategy was settled in the mid-1970s. In 1977–1978, the Socialist Party (PS) and the Communist Party (PCF) decided to change their policies regarding nuclear weapons, thus forgetting the “common program” they had presented in 1972, which favored giving up nuclear forces. The nuclear consensus was confirmed when François Mitterrand won the presidential election of 1981 (becoming the first Socialist President of the Fifth Republic) and formed a government that included four Communist ministers. Ever since, no government has faced major opposition concerning nuclear weapons policy. Furthermore, this political consensus has led to a wide consensus in public opinion. In the early 1980s, when pacifist movements were so powerful in Western Europe, such movements were extremely weak in France in comparison to Germany, the United Kingdom, Italy, or Belgium.

The almost unique example of a public nuclear debate occurred over the resumption of nuclear testing in 1995–1996. An August 1995 poll showed that 63 percent of the French were against the resumption of nuclear tests, while 64 percent wanted a referendum on the decision, and 65 percent believed that the President could not take this decision alone, although the law gave him the right to do so. One must not associate the 1995 debate on nuclear testing with the question of the possession of nuclear weapons, however. Another survey ordered by the SIRPA (*Service d’Information et de Relations Publiques des Armées*) in 1995 indicated that 67 percent of French citizens regarded the possession of nuclear weapons by France as a good thing. Most people (78 percent) nevertheless did not support the development of new nuclear weapons.<sup>70</sup> Yet, even President Chirac’s decision to resume nuclear testing did not generate a great protest movement in France. In spite of its disapproval, the French public showed no real concern over the testing and was not as engaged in protesting it as the publics in other countries in Europe or the Pacific. The political opposition to the tests, expressed by most Socialists, the Communists, and the Greens, did not open the way to a large united protest movement coming from the left.

After the 1995 debate on nuclear testing, things went back to normal in France: nuclear issues were no longer a subject of public debate. As noted by Pascal Boniface and François Thual as early as November 1995, the French nuclear consensus was rebuilt on “four pillars”: “keeping a nuclear deterrence, refusing a ‘war-fighting’ strategy, Europeanizing the French deterrence and promoting

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<sup>69</sup> Raymond Aron, *Le grand débat* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1963), translated as *The Great Debate* (New York: Doubleday, 1965).

<sup>70</sup> *Damoclès*, numéro special, no. 66, 3/1995.



disarmament<sup>71</sup> as long as it does not lead to the complete elimination of nuclear weapons in the short term. The three leading French political parties (Gaullist RPR, center-right UDF and Socialist PS) broadly share these principles. Moreover, a vast majority of the public agrees with these views. A poll commissioned by SIRPA in July 1996 showed that 61 percent<sup>72</sup> of the French thought that nuclear deterrence was necessary for French security (only 28 percent opposed that view). The only parties that continue to show some opposition to nuclear weapons are two rather small parties—the Greens and the Communists<sup>73</sup>—which together get only 10 to 15 percent of the votes.

The June 1997 parliamentary election opened another round of “cohabitation,” this time between a left-wing National Assembly,<sup>74</sup> a government led by Socialist Prime Minister Lionel Jospin, and Gaullist President Jacques Chirac. This come-back of the left to government is unlikely to have a major impact on nuclear policies, however. Moreover, since the Greens and the Communists joined the government in 1997 as junior partners, they put aside their opposition to nuclear weapons, deciding it was not a key issue conditioning governmental participation. One could therefore say that the consensus has broadened in recent years.<sup>75</sup>

There are very few non-governmental organizations (NGOs) promoting nuclear disarmament in France and they get very little popular support. For instance, during the resumption of nuclear testing, even though a majority of the French opposed the decision, there were never more than a few thousand people who demonstrated against it. Most of the major international NGOs committed to nuclear disarmament (e.g., Greenpeace and Pugwash) have a French section, but these sections are weak and prove more active and successful on the environmental front, for instance against the fastbreeder reactor (Superphénix) or on nuclear wastes (campaigns against the COGEMA reprocessing and stockpiling plant in La Hague), than on issues of nuclear weapons policy. Altogether, military nuclear policy has remained rather a non-issue in the French public debate since the 1970s.

The strategic community of politicians and decision-makers, officers and diplomats, and researchers and experts involved in nuclear issues is extremely small in France. This community has had its own debates over NATO, European construction, and nuclear policies, especially in the 1960s, yet, its members broadly share the same views on nuclear weapons. A vast majority within the strategic community supports the present nuclear policy and the few dissenting voices would primarily favor a reassessment of the nuclear posture toward the Southern proliferation threat. Those who support elimination of nuclear weapons in the short term are extremely isolated. Admiral

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<sup>71</sup> See Pascal Boniface and François Thual, “Refonder le consensus sur la dissuasion nucléaire,” *Le Monde*, 24–25 November 1995. The authors were both noting an emerging consensus and suggesting these pillars.

<sup>72</sup> Three points more than in 1995 after the resumption of nuclear testing

<sup>73</sup> The Communist PCF has changed its 1977 position to opposition to nuclear weapons again in the mid-1980s during the Euromissile crisis.

<sup>74</sup> With a parliamentary majority created by the addition of the Socialists, the Communists, the Greens, and two other small leftist parties.

<sup>75</sup> The author is indebted to Pascal Boniface for this idea of a new “broader consensus.”

Sanguinetti, the single French signatory of the retired generals' and admirals' call for elimination,<sup>76</sup> is a unique example of opposition to nuclear weapons coming from within the military establishment.<sup>77</sup> Former Socialist Prime Minister Michel Rocard was also very isolated when he participated in the Canberra Commission on the Elimination of Nuclear Weapons, receiving no institutional support, even from his own party.<sup>78</sup> As compared to the United Kingdom, for instance, in France, the leftist tradition of opposition to nuclear weapons and support for unilateral disarmament has been extremely weak and marginalized within the leading Socialist party since the early 1980s.<sup>79</sup>

Within the small think-tank community, almost none belongs to a true arms control tradition favoring elimination. An explanation for this could be the lack of private funding for this type of research since the very few French foundations are not concerned at all with nuclear issues. In addition, the think tanks' position undoubtedly reflects the fact that the nuclear consensus in France remains very broad.

To summarize the strategic community debate, the "doves" do support the elimination of nuclear weapons as a very long-term and remote perspective,<sup>80</sup> even though they doubt its feasibility. A few "hawks" oppose elimination and fear further disarmament would be dangerous for French security. Both sides see the utility of nuclear weapons in the mid-to-long term on the basis described above.

### **French Nuclear Arms Control Policy: From Refusal to Careful Commitment**

Having opposed many arms control initiatives in the 1960s, France became a more active participant in arms control in the 1970s and joined the move toward arms reductions and non-proliferation in the early 1990s. After its more-than-symbolic unilateral gestures of nuclear disarmament in 1993–1996, the emphasis is no longer on reductions. France now appears more

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<sup>76</sup> This "Statement on Nuclear Weapons," released on 5 December 1996, was signed by 58 high-ranking military officials from 17 countries and reprinted in the *Washington Quarterly* 20, no. 3 (Summer 1997): 125–130.

<sup>77</sup> It is interesting to recall here that, in the 1960s, Alexandre Sanguinetti "urged the establishment of a total nuclear defense system for France and the virtual abandonment of conventionally armed forces" (see Alexandre Sanguinetti, *La France et l'arme atomique* (Paris: Juillard, 1964). This point was noted in Kohl, *French Nuclear Diplomacy*, 177.

<sup>78</sup> Boniface noted that the French Socialist Party "refused to endorse as such the Canberra Commission Report, as asked by Michel Rocard, since this document was regarded as too antinuclear, in spite of the restraint of its proposals." See Pascal Boniface, *Repenser la dissuasion nucléaire* (La Tour d'Aigues: Editions de l'Aube, 1997), 63.

<sup>79</sup> François Mitterrand, for instance, gave decisive support to the deployment of the Pershing 2 missiles in a 1983 speech before the German Bundestag, at a time when most of the European left was campaigning against the Euromissiles.

<sup>80</sup> See the following section for further elaboration of this perspective.

concerned about other areas of arms control and more interested in transparency measures. Further reductions could be envisaged, however, under certain conditions once the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaties (START) I, II, and possibly III are ratified and implemented.

After an overview of the past French arms control policy, the present diplomatic commitment to nuclear disarmament will be discussed here, including the possible future steps in which France could be involved (safety and security, verification and accounting standards, and security assurances).

### **Background of the French Arms Control Policy**

In the early ages of nuclear arms control and disarmament, France demonstrated a great reluctance to join arms control treaties and negotiations. France never signed the Partial Test Ban Treaty (PTBT) of 1963, refused to join the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) for more than twenty years, and never took part in any bilateral or multilateral disarmament agreements. In the 1960s, this attitude was justified by the fact that most arms control negotiations were seen as a means to maintain the superpower nuclear duopoly and not as true disarmament steps. France even practiced an “empty chair” policy in the various disarmament fora to protest this duopoly. The French also emphasized the overwhelming difference in the size of the existing nuclear arsenals between superpowers and medium powers.

During the 1970s and 1980s, France followed the same principles even though it proved more open-minded. It did join the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva but was still reluctant to sign any nuclear limitation agreement. The French government supported the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) process and the Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, but never took an active part in nuclear disarmament as the French stockpile was still growing.

In 1983, President Mitterrand set the conditions for French participation in nuclear disarmament: “correction of the fundamental differences” between the arsenals of the two superpowers and those of the other nuclear weapon states, end of the conventional disparity in Europe, and end of the race in anti-missile, anti-submarine, and anti-satellite weapons.<sup>81</sup> For a long time, these conditions remained operative, as President Mitterrand made clear in May 1994, when he said:

if one compares two countries which possess 20,000 nuclear devices each to a country with 500 nuclear warheads, one cannot just say, let’s reduce our arsenals by 500 warheads each! We shall then decide later, at what time, we will join the move [toward nuclear disarmament].

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<sup>81</sup> Speech before the United Nations (UN) General Assembly, 28 September 1983.

This policy of refusal to participate in nuclear disarmament has nevertheless undergone drastic changes since 1991. In the early 1990s, the new concern over nuclear proliferation and the global changes in international security led to a major policy shift. This shift was announced by President Mitterrand in his June 1991 United Nations speech promoting an international disarmament plan.<sup>82</sup> Besides various actions in favor of chemical and conventional disarmament, France decided to join the NPT as a nuclear power (it acceded to the Treaty in August 1992). In the years 1991 to 1993, the Socialist government announced various unilateral nuclear disarmament steps: early withdrawal of several unreplaced, pre-strategic weapon systems (Pluton short-range missiles and AN-52 air-dropped bombs); reduction of the alert level; and non-deployment of the Hadès short range missile.<sup>83</sup> In April 1992, President Mitterrand also initiated a moratorium on nuclear testing,<sup>84</sup> which lasted for three years.

### **The New Commitment to the Principle of Nuclear Arms Control and the Downsizing of the French Nuclear Arsenal**

Altogether, from 1991 to 1995, according to the sub-director for disarmament in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, France completed a 15 percent unilateral reduction of its nuclear arsenal.<sup>85</sup> During that period, the non-replacement of the 30 *Mirage IV-P* medium-range bombers had already been announced,<sup>86</sup> and since then further unilateral steps have been decided on and announced by President Chirac.<sup>87</sup> The dismantling of the *plateau d'Albion* 18 *S-3D* IRBMs was started in September 1996 and completed in September 1997.<sup>88</sup> The complete dismantling of the 30 small-range *Hadès* missiles has been announced as well. In terms of warheads deployed, this means another 10 percent cut in the coming years.<sup>89</sup>

Even though many of these reductions were mainly motivated by budgetary constraints and only *a posteriori* presented as disarmament measures, they nevertheless show a new trend in French nuclear policy. Until 1991, the French nuclear arsenal was growing in size and capacity. These decisions have thus put an end to growth in the arsenal and started a true disarmament process. From

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<sup>82</sup> Plan issued 3 June 1991. In this plan, France announced its intention to join the NPT.

<sup>83</sup> *Le Monde*, 19 March 1993.

<sup>84</sup> Decision announced by Prime Minister Bérégovoy 8 April 1992 and maintained by President Mitterrand until the election of Jacques Chirac in 1995.

<sup>85</sup> Michel Duclos, "La Conférence de prorogation du TNP et les questions de désarmement nucléaire," *Politique étrangère*, no. 3/1995: 723–729.

<sup>86</sup> *Rafale*, a more modern fighter-bomber plane that should enter full operational service by the turn of the century, was not designed to replace the *Mirage IV-P*. It should fulfill the primarily pre-strategic, present mission of the *Mirage 2000*.

<sup>87</sup> As already stated, the dismantling of both systems was formally announced by President Chirac in a TV interview, 22 February 1996. See Ministère de la Défense, *Propos sur la défense*, 139–140.

<sup>88</sup> *International Herald Tribune*, 27–28 September 1997.

<sup>89</sup> See also the previous discussion of reductions in the nuclear budget.

its peak in 1991 (540 deployed warheads), the French nuclear arsenal has been reduced to less than 450 warheads deployed. Finally, it is important to remember that the current French warhead stockpile remains below five percent of the arsenals of either the United States or Russia, and was for a long time below one percent of their arsenals.

**Table 3: Evolution of the Nuclear Stockpiles of the 5 NWS**

Year	United States	USSR/ Russia	United Kingdom	France	China	Total
1950	369	5	0	0	0	374
1960	20,434	1,605	30	0	0	22,069
1970	26,492	11,643	280	36	75	38,526
1980	23,916	30,062	350	250	280	54,858
1990*	21,781	37,000	300	505	435	60,021
1997*	12,000	23,000	260	450	400	36,110

\*United States and Russian warhead stockpiles for 1990 and 1997 include warheads that are active, retired, non-deployed, awaiting dismantling, or put in reserve.

Source: NRDC Nuclear Notebook ([www.nrdc.org](http://www.nrdc.org))

As far as the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) is concerned, France was for decades strongly opposed to nuclear tests limitation or interdiction. Given its history of opposition, the decision announced on 4 July 1993 to participate in the CTBT negotiations was indeed a great step.<sup>90</sup> After the announcement, France became an active participant in the Conference on Disarmament (CD) negotiations, and the French moratorium (1992–1995) contributed to the progress in the CTB talks.

During the 1995 NPT Review and Extension Conference, the French delegation accepted the 1996 deadline for the completion of the CTBT negotiations, but insisted on the wording “utmost restraint” concerning testing during the period before the entry into force of the Treaty, instead of a more restrictive formula. This was obviously meant to leave an open door for a resumption of nuclear testing by the new President (elected on 7 May 1995). Even though (or because?<sup>91</sup>) France

<sup>90</sup> It was the first time France declared favoring “a treaty banning tests completely, on condition it was global and verifiable.” See *The Arms Control Reporter* 1993, July 1993, 608.B.268.

<sup>91</sup> See Thérèse Delpech, “France’s Last Tests: A Catalyst for New Policies,” *The Nonproliferation Review* 3, no. 1 (Fall 1995): 58–59.

conducted six tests in the fall and winter of 1995–96, it was, in August 1995, the first nuclear weapon state to support the “zero-yield option” in the CTBT negotiations (“prohibition of any nuclear weapon test explosion or any nuclear explosion, no matter how small”) and to accept the so-called “Australian” definition of a nuclear test.<sup>92</sup> The announcement of this decision, which was immediately followed by a US statement, was clearly a breakthrough in the CTBT negotiations, since other NWS rallied behind the same position later in 1995. France was among the first signatories of the CTBT in September 1996 and has taken a further step by closing its test site<sup>93</sup> and signing the Rarotonga Treaty in March 1996, thereby becoming one of only two nuclear weapon states—with the United Kingdom—without a national test site available. The resumption of French nuclear testing appears unrealistic in the event of a failure of the CTBT or even of a single isolated nuclear test in India or elsewhere.<sup>94</sup>

France has also announced new security assurances, both positive and negative, in a letter, dated 6 April 1995, to the UN Secretary General, and in a statement to the CD on the same day. Regarding negative security assurances, France clarified the existing security assurances given in 1982,<sup>95</sup> specifically:

France reaffirms that it will not use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear-weapon States Parties to the NPT, except in the case of an invasion or any other attack on France, its territory, its armed forces or other troops, or against its allies or a State toward which it has a security commitment, carried out or sustained by such a State in alliance or association with a nuclear-weapon State.”<sup>96</sup>

This declaration harmonizes the French position with the statements made by the United States, the United Kingdom, and Russia. Its main novelty lies in the limitation of the assurances to NPT Parties, which was not mentioned in the 1982 statement.

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<sup>92</sup> See Ambassador Errera’s speech before the Conference on Disarmament, 10 August 1995 (confirmed by a communiqué of the *Présidence de la République*, 16 August 1995). This move has been explained first of all by a desire to recapture the initiative after the announcement of the resumption of nuclear testing; it might also be true that French scientists feared that a low yield option would favor the United States, since the other NWS would be less able to conduct tests at an extremely low yield.

<sup>93</sup> TV interview of President Chirac, 22 February 1996.

<sup>94</sup> France has added technical and legal difficulties to the political barriers to a future (and unlikely for the moment) resumption of underground testing, making it almost impossible at the former test site. Moreover, a new resumption of nuclear testing in the South Pacific would jeopardize French presence in the region and probably lead to another series of problems within the EU as the 1995–1996 resumption of testing did. It is therefore highly unlikely that France would resume nuclear testing unless all the other NWS did so.

<sup>95</sup> See the speech of Claude Cheysson (External Relations Minister) before the UN General Assembly, 11 June 1982, which stated that France “will not use nuclear arms against a State that does not have them and that has pledged not to seek them, except if an act of aggression is carried out in association or alliance with a nuclear-weapon State against France or against a State with which France has a security commitment.”

<sup>96</sup> Letter, dated 6 April 1995, to the UN Secretary General. The wording is now exactly the same for the United States, Russia, and the United Kingdom.

On positive security assurances, France had abstained in 1968 when the United Nations Security Council adopted resolution 255.<sup>97</sup> It was therefore accordingly considered that France had never granted positive assurances. The French decision announced in April 1995 gave the following assurances:

France, as a Permanent Member of the Security Council, pledges that in the event of attack with nuclear weapons or the threat of such attack against a non-nuclear-weapon State party to the NPT, France will immediately inform the Security Council and act within the Council to ensure that the latter takes immediate steps to provide, in accordance with the Charter, necessary assistance to any State which is the victim of such an act of aggression.

Following this statement, France co-sponsored the United Nations Security Council resolution 984 (11 April 1995).<sup>98</sup>

The new French policy on security assurances is more of a change than one might first think. Cheysson's 1982 speech had been on several occasions discussed or corrected by other French officials. It was common, even recently, to hear comments that it was undermining the French deterrence posture.<sup>99</sup> It is interesting to note that uncertainties remain regarding the scope of the negative security assurances granted by France. In a declaration before the French *Sénat* commenting on the given assurances, then Foreign Minister Alain Juppé explicitly mentioned the use of "weapons of mass destruction" as potentially justifying a nuclear response.<sup>100</sup> This view contradicts the negative security assurances granted, but legally the international commitment should prevail over the ministerial interpretation.<sup>101</sup> The issue of the proper response to an attack by chemical or biological weapons has not been resolved or discussed in detail yet and is not a big issue in France so far. Broadly, the general idea in military circles is that a massive chemical or biological attack or threat (that would require a nuclear response) is unlikely in the near future, but if one occurred, France could always reverse its present policy. Accordingly, a certain level of uncertainty for the potential aggressor is usually seen as preferable.

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<sup>97</sup> For the full French declarations of 1968 on the NPT and on security assurances, refer to Jean Klein, ed., *Maîtrise des armements et désarmement* (Paris: La Documentation Française, 1991), 81–83.

<sup>98</sup> For a brief summary of the security assurances granted in April 1995, see *The Arms Control Reporter* 1995, July 1995, 850.393–394.

<sup>99</sup> The French deterrence posture was to prevent any form of aggression (conventional or nuclear) against France's vital interest.

<sup>100</sup> Quoted in Xavier de Villepin, "La lutte contre la prolifération nucléaire," *Rapport au nom de la Commission des Affaires étrangères, de la Défense et des Forces armées du Sénat*, no. 311, June 1995.

<sup>101</sup> As noted in Pascal Boniface, "Dissuasion et non-prolifération: un équilibre difficile, nécessaire mais rompu," *Politique étrangère*, no. 3/1995: 707–721.

The French position on providing security assurances through nuclear-weapon-free zones (NWFZ) has also changed. Besides signing and ratifying both protocols of the Tlatelolco Treaty,<sup>102</sup> France refused until recently to commit itself to the other existing NWFZ, the Rarotonga Treaty. This position has changed greatly since 1995. Not only did France support the “declaration on objectives and principles” wording on NWFZ at the 1995 NPT Review and Extension Conference,<sup>103</sup> but it also signed two NWFZ treaties in 1996. After the last testing campaign, France signed the three protocols of the Rarotonga Treaty (on 8 March 1996), together with the United States and the United Kingdom. A few days later, France signed, without any reservations, Protocols I, II, and III (as France has some territories in the African NWFZ) of the Pelindaba Treaty at the Cairo signing ceremony on 11 April 1996.<sup>104</sup> It is the only NWS to have deposited its instruments of ratification to the Pelindaba Treaty to date.<sup>105</sup> President Chirac also said in March 1996 that France would soon sign the protocol to the Bangkok Treaty establishing a South-East Asian NWFZ once “some technical details with the other nuclear powers” are solved.<sup>106</sup>

### **French Views on Upcoming and Possible Nuclear Arms Control Steps**

France agrees with the principle of a cut-off treaty. It supported the idea of a cut-off agreement as early as December 1993 in a United Nations General Assembly vote and in 1995 backed the “early conclusion of negotiations on a non-discriminatory and universally applicable convention banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices” at the NPT conference.<sup>107</sup> France stopped plutonium production for military purposes in 1992, and highly enriched uranium (HEU) production has ended as well, as President Chirac announced in February 1996.<sup>108</sup> The Pierrelatte production plant was shut down and emptied in 1996–1997. France’s fissile material stockpiles are nevertheless relatively large.<sup>109</sup> According to the most recent estimates, France possesses 5 tons of plutonium and 24 tons of HEU.<sup>110</sup> Since President Chirac referred to the available stockpiles as a good reason to stop producing weapon-grade fissile material, it is unlikely that these stocks will be demilitarized and transferred in large quantities to

<sup>102</sup> France ratified Protocol I in 1974 and, much later, Protocol II in 1992.

<sup>103</sup> “Principles and Objectives for Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament,” NPT/CONF.1995/L.5, para. 5 and 7: “The conviction that the establishment of internationally recognized NWFZs . . . enhances global and regional peace and security is reaffirmed.”; “The cooperation of all the NWS and their respect and support for the relevant protocols is necessary for the maximum effectiveness of such NWFZ and the relevant protocols.”

<sup>104</sup> See *PPNN Newsbrief*, no. 34 (2nd Quarter 1996), 2.

<sup>105</sup> On 20 September 1996.

<sup>106</sup> Statement during the first Asia–Europe Summit, 3 March 1996; quoted in *The Arms Control Reporter* 1996, May 1996, 458.B.59. There has not been any progress since.

<sup>107</sup> “Principles and Objectives for Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament,” para. 4b.

<sup>108</sup> TV interview of President Chirac, 22 February 1996.

<sup>109</sup> According to the French Defense Minister, French stockpiles are enough for the “next 50 years.” See *Midi libre*, 6 March 1996, quoted in David Albright, Frans Berkhout, and William Walker, *Plutonium and Highly Enriched Uranium 1996*, SIPRI (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 121.

<sup>110</sup> As the information remains classified, refer to the best available estimations: Albright, Berkhout, and Walker, *Plutonium and Highly Enriched Uranium*, 66–75 and 121–126. The authors assign an uncertainty of 30 percent to these figures.



civilian purposes in the near-to-mid term, even though France “may have transferred some undisclosed amount of plutonium from dismantled weapons to its civilian programmes.”<sup>111</sup> Nevertheless, French support for the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) “93+2” process and a more transparent policy might lead France to place some small quantities of demilitarized fissile materials under IAEA safeguards, if the present stocks are judged sufficient. Albright, Berkhout, and Walker consider that some excess weapon-grade material exists.<sup>112</sup>

The political commitment to a fissile material cut-off agreement remains very strong, as recently stated by the new prime minister in a September 1997 speech.<sup>113</sup> A treaty would be a major non-proliferation step and would also allow for more transparency, as the nuclear facilities of the five NWS would have to open their doors to more or less intrusive inspections. The issue of talks among the declared NWS for mutually agreed, unilateral cut-offs and data exchange has not been studied in depth in Paris, but could be a part of broader talks and confidence-building measures among the five NWS.

Some French reluctance, however, has been perceived on two points. First, the level of intrusiveness of the cut-off treaty has raised some worries in French nuclear circles.<sup>114</sup> The French nuclear establishment is obviously not yet used to the idea of IAEA inspections of its military facilities. Second, the idea expressed by some arms controllers to move from a “fissban” to a ban on all plutonium production, both civil and military, would lead to strong French opposition, as such a plutonium ban would not be compatible with the French nuclear industry’s projects (e.g., the development of mixed-oxide (MOX) fuel). Some voices have also insisted on the idea that mousing the weapon-grade plutonium was needed for irreversible disarmament. According to these experts, it is illogical to favor elimination and oppose plutonium management at the same time, as mousing is the safest insurance of complete elimination of weapon-grade plutonium.<sup>115</sup>

As far as transparency and confidence-building measures are concerned, a strong reluctance still exists, at least within military circles. The proposal for a nuclear weapons register raises bad memories in Paris, as everyone recalls the Kinkel proposal of December 1994 as a blow to both the European Common Foreign and Security Policy and Franco–German cooperation.<sup>116</sup> But, putting

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 75. The author, however, has not found any evidence or confirmation of this.

<sup>112</sup> Their estimates are at least 1.5 tons of excess weapon-grade plutonium and somewhere between 7 and 15 tons of excess weapon HEU. See Albright, Berkhout and Walker, *Plutonium and Highly Enriched Uranium*, 75 and 126.

<sup>113</sup> See Jospin, “La politique de défense de la France,” 8.

<sup>114</sup> According to a presentation by Tom Cochran in an NGO forum. See *Disarmament Times*, May 1994, quoted in *The Arms Control Reporter 1995*, July 1995, 612.B.3.

<sup>115</sup> This view is widely shared in Paris, not only in the nuclear industry, but also within the strategic community (the issue was raised by the author in many private conversations).

<sup>116</sup> The German proposal for a nuclear weapons register made before the UN General Assembly in 1994 was an ill-prepared, unilateral initiative that was criticized in Paris, even though it does certainly deserve a second look. For further discussion on the issue, refer to Harald Müller, ed., *Europe and Nuclear Disarmament* (Brussels:

aside this episode, one can observe a new French openness in nuclear matters, which may mean that similar proposals of transparency measures could become more acceptable. Moreover, since 1994–1995, there is a growing French readiness, at least among the decision-makers, to accept nuclear transparency (the military and nuclear establishment might prove more reluctant).

The issue of dealerting is taken seriously in France but the military and nuclear establishments seem likely to oppose the most ambitious measures, putting forward serious technical and strategic problems. Some of the dealerting measures discussed in the United States just do not make any sense for France. First of all, as France never developed a first-strike capability (and no longer fields ground-to-ground systems), the measures proposed for these most destabilizing weapon systems designed for launch on warning do not apply to France. Among other examples, driving French nuclear-powered, ballistic-missile submarines (SSBNs) off firing range while on patrol, when they are within range when at port, would be a strange form of dealerting. Some other dealerting and transparency proposals raise specific problems for a medium power in terms of credibility, for instance putting 50 percent or more of the French (or British) submarine fleet off alert status or forcing submarines to surface periodically would mean relying on one single submarine at sea. This would undermine the entire strategy of an insured second strike capability, which is the core function of both countries' nuclear forces. As a consequence, the interesting measures proposed by US analysts<sup>117</sup>—which make a lot of sense for the United States and Russia—should probably be designed differently to take into consideration the concerns of smaller NWS at a latter stage. Moreover, France has reduced the alert status of its remaining nuclear forces since the end of the Cold War. In September 1997, President Chirac announced in Moscow that France was also joining the move toward detargeting (it was, however, the last NWS to do so).

On the issue of no-first-use (NFU) of nuclear weapons, France remains extremely reluctant to make such a commitment because it would be in contradiction with its deterrence strategy, which allows first use whenever vital interests are threatened. According to the French doctrine, it is precisely the credible threat of use that allows nuclear weapons to prevent war and therefore the use of nuclear weapons, especially since France's strategy is by definition non-aggressive (i.e., it will not use nuclear weapons first in an act of aggression but only in response to an aggression). There have been some supporters of no-first-use in the academic community,<sup>118</sup> but they remain rather isolated. Summarizing the French perspective, a leading French analyst, Pascal Boniface, recently

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PRIF/European Interuniversity Press, forthcoming), including chapters "France" and "Germany".

<sup>117</sup> For a good summary of dealerting measures that have been proposed by US experts, refer to: Bruce Blair, Harold Feiveson, and Frank von Hippel, "Taking Nuclear Weapons off Hair-Trigger Alert," *Scientific American*, November 1997, just translated in French in the magazine *Pour la Science*, January 1998, with a comment by Etienne de Durand on France's position.

<sup>118</sup> See for instance Marisol Touraine, "Le facteur nucléaire après la guerre froide," *Politique étrangère*, 2/1992: 395–405. The author suggests leaving to aggressive powers the responsibility of crossing the nuclear Rubicon. See also the statement by Jean-Marie Guehenno (then head of policy planning for the Foreign Affairs Ministry) in *Un nouveau débat stratégique*, 1992 symposium papers (Paris: Documentation Française/SIRPA, 1993).

wrote: “No-First-Use is by definition incompatible with deterrence, but not necessarily with the use of nuclear weapons. . . . It is typically a false good idea.”<sup>119</sup> The same author added: “Far from the idea of establishing a rule, the non-use of nuclear weapons is the logical consequence of a strategy constantly suggesting the possibility of use.” Accordingly, the French nuclear school intends to preserve the “inhibitory” character of nuclear weapons by refusing no-first-use. Changes on this issue are extremely unlikely in the near-to-mid term unless other NWS make a major move.

### **The French Conditions for Entering a Multilateral Nuclear Arms Reduction Process**

During the 1995 NPT Conference, France accepted the principle of future cuts as it accepted the declaration on “Principles and Objectives for Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament.” Going beyond the traditional wording in article VI of the NPT, Section 4 of the “Principles and Objectives” includes in its “Programme of Action”

the determined pursuit by the nuclear-weapon States of systematic and progressive efforts to reduce nuclear weapons globally, with the ultimate goal of eliminating those weapons, and by all States of general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control.<sup>120</sup>

This commitment was confirmed in a P-5 statement during the 1997 Prepcom to the 2000 NPT Conference. This statement, delivered by France on behalf of the five NWS, expressed, among other things, their determination to implement fully all the provisions of the NPT, “including those of article VI.”<sup>121</sup>

What remains to be seen is how this goal will be implemented, and to what extent the French government will fully agree on the scope of this commitment, which was emphasized by the July 1996 International Court of Justice Advisory Opinion on the legality of the threat or use of nuclear weapons.<sup>122</sup>

In 1996, Chirac announced his intention to turn France into a “champion of disarmament.”<sup>123</sup> Hervé de Charette, then Minister of Foreign Affairs, explained that view further in an article printed in *Le Monde* titled “*La France, championne réaliste du désarmement*,”<sup>124</sup> which promoted the CTBT and listed French commitments in favor of the implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), the negotiation of a cut-off convention, the updating of the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty, and the review of the inhumane weapons convention.

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<sup>119</sup> See Boniface, *Repenser la dissuasion nucléaire*, 109–117.

<sup>120</sup> See “Principles and Objectives for Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament.”

<sup>121</sup> *PPNN Newsbrief*, no. 38 (2nd Quarter 1997): 3.

<sup>122</sup> On the ICJ Advisory Opinion, see *Die Friedens Warte*, Band 71, Heft 3, 1996, including Camille Grand, “Legality of the Threat or Use of Nuclear Weapons—A French Perspective on the ICJ Advisory Opinion.”

<sup>123</sup> Statements during his visit to South-East Asia, March 1996.

<sup>124</sup> See *Le Monde*, 13 July 1996.

France, with the previously described unilateral disarmament steps, and commitments announced during the NPT extension process and in the CD in Geneva, has clearly shifted its nuclear disarmament policy from strong reluctance to cautious but serious participation.<sup>125</sup>

In 1995, Hervé de Charette, then minister of foreign affairs, announced France's readiness in principle to participate in a "multilateral discussion among nuclear powers" to accelerate the move in favor of nuclear disarmament.<sup>126</sup> Jacques Chirac, however, made it clear that the minister of foreign affairs was somewhat too open to future nuclear disarmament talks. In a June 1996 speech, the President said:

I do not think nevertheless that a French participation in international negotiations on the reduction of nuclear weapons is a topical subject. Our deterrence posture has been defined, in the new planning, at a strictly measured level to insure our security. . . . Today, other fields of disarmament should draw our attention.<sup>127</sup>

One can argue that some of the conditions set in 1983 by President Mitterrand for French participation in nuclear disarmament have not yet been met, especially the "end of the race in antimissile, antisubmarine and antisatellite weapons."<sup>128</sup> To a certain extent, France is waiting to see if the START treaties are implemented before getting involved in any negotiation; it will probably not accept further major cuts until the two "big" NWS (the United States and Russia) have reached START II or even START III levels. This position does not forbid participation in nuclear disarmament talks, but it leaves France (and the other two medium NWS) another 10 to 15 years before being directly involved. The January 1997 British government position<sup>129</sup> is often quoted in Paris as the most appropriate.

If another NWS (Britain for instance) proposed NWS talks on nuclear issues, France would probably agree on the principle; these discussions already exist to a large extent in an informal manner. The NWS framework is also viewed in Paris as the most appropriate for nuclear talks. France is not using its own nuclear forces as a bargaining chip to get the other NWS to reduce, however.

<sup>125</sup> On this point see Camille Grand and Philippe Richard, "France," in *European Non-Proliferation Policy 1993–1995*, ed. Harald Müller (Brussels: PRIF/European Interuniversity Press, 1996), 61–84.

<sup>126</sup> See Speech of Hervé de Charette before the *Institut des Hautes Etudes de Défense Nationale (IHEDN)*, 12 October 1995.

<sup>127</sup> Jacques Chirac, Speech before the *IHEDN*, 8 June 1996, as reprinted in "La politique de défense de la France," *Défense nationale*, August–September 1996: 7–18.

<sup>128</sup> The ongoing development and deployment of national missile defenses in violation of the ABM Treaty would, if continued, cause major strategic problems for France and probably increase its reluctance to undertake arms control measures and raise objections in Paris to further cuts.

<sup>129</sup> "A world in which American and Russian forces were no longer counted in thousands but in hundreds would be one where we were ready to join in multilateral negotiations on the global reduction of nuclear arms." Sir Michael Weston, UK Ambassador to the CD, 21 January 1997 (CD/PV.751), as quoted in Rebecca Johnson, *British Perspectives on the Future of Nuclear Weapons*, Occasional Paper no. 37 (Washington, DC: Henry L. Stimson Center, January 1998), 30.

## **France and the Elimination of Nuclear Weapons**

It is interesting to recall here as a first point that elimination was for a while a French diplomatic theme. A second point will examine the French reluctance toward the idea of elimination and the ongoing and possible changes of this trend. This reluctance is primarily due to a perceived feeble rationale for and the infeasibility of complete elimination.

### **An Old Theme That Had Disappeared in the French Debate**

In the early days of nuclear diplomacy and as a non-nuclear weapon state, France favored elimination as a goal. The seminal declaration on this point was made by Ambassador Parodi before the United Nations in June 1946:

The goals assigned by the French government to our scientists and engineers are purely peaceful. Our wish is that all the nations in the world do the same as soon as possible. To achieve this aim, France will happily submit itself to the most appropriate rules set to control atomic energy.<sup>130</sup>

As Bertrand Goldschmidt commented, this statement was logical “at this early stage of our efforts.”<sup>131</sup>

During the Fourth Republic, some leading figures fought in favor of disarmament and elimination. A Socialist and former defense minister, Jules Moch was for ten years (1951–1960) the head of the French delegation to the various UN disarmament conferences and committees. Jules Moch also became a leading figure of the opposition to the *Force de frappe* in the 1960s.<sup>132</sup> In his first role and after his resignation, he was a leading voice in favor of a realist nuclear disarmament program and played a major part in the French positions in the first inconclusive arms control negotiations.<sup>133</sup> During the 1960s, the French political left favored unilateral disarmament; it was, for instance, a point in the 1965 Presidential campaign of François Mitterrand (who was then defeated by de Gaulle).

At this early stage of arms control, French diplomacy favored and defended much broader nuclear disarmament measures than the superpowers’ proposals.<sup>134</sup> France proposed a verified

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<sup>130</sup> Alexandre Parodi, 14 June 1946, quoted in Bertrand Goldschmidt, *Pionniers de l’atome* (Paris: Stock, 1987), 392.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 392.

<sup>132</sup> See Jules Moch, *Non à la force de frappe* (Paris: Laffont, 1963). Jules Moch had formed the *Ligue nationale contre la force de frappe* in March 1963.

<sup>133</sup> For a comprehensive French view of these first years, refer to Jean Klein, *L’entreprise du désarmement 1945–1964* (Paris: Cujas, 1964), with a foreword by Jules Moch.

<sup>134</sup> As an example, refer to the “Note du département sur le désarmement” (29 February 1960), *Documents diplomatiques français*, vol. 17, 1st Semester 1960 (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1995), 233–237.

process leading to the elimination of nuclear weapons. It put the emphasis on “true” disarmament, including verified dismantling of delivery vehicles, cut-off of fissile material production, and reprocessing to civilian use the remaining stocks under international control. France also emphasized the need for simultaneous conventional disarmament.

This policy was indeed typical of the nuclear diplomacies and rhetoric of emerging nuclear powers and during the 1960s it remained a major topic of French foreign policy. It is true as well that France refused at the same time all arms control measures that would have hindered its ability to become a nuclear power; for instance, de Gaulle strongly opposed the Partial Test Ban Treaty of 1963. As Wilfrid Kohl recalls,

The Treaty was also viewed as discriminatory against France, which was just beginning to acquire a nuclear arsenal. As Foreign Minister Couve de Murville said of the Moscow Treaty, ‘What is at stake is not to disarm those who are armed, but to prevent those who are not armed from arming, and that is why we, as far as we are concerned, cannot find it satisfactory.’<sup>135</sup>

The theme of nuclear disarmament progressively vanished as France became an actual nuclear weapon state. The support for a true and verified disarmament remained but became more and more rhetorical. After France refused to take part and chose an “empty chair” policy in the Eighteen Nation Geneva Disarmament Conference in 1961,<sup>136</sup> the French speeches on disarmament were dominated by a strong criticism of a bipolar international system dominated by Moscow and Washington. Accordingly, France never signed the PTBT and refused for 25 years to sign the NPT. For example, in 1968, when France refused to sign the NPT, the French Ambassador to the United Nations, Armand Bérard, made a statement typical of that era, declaring that “the real issue was the disappearance of atomic arms.”<sup>137</sup>

During the 1970s and 1980s, when France became more open to disarmament and non-proliferation efforts, it also almost completely dropped the rhetoric of elimination, which was pushed into an undefined future. This abandonment of elimination by French diplomacy was both realistic and cynical, as France was becoming a *status quo* nuclear weapon state.

### **The Current Debate on Elimination of Nuclear Weapons**

Nevertheless, the idea of elimination has made a quiet come-back in the French strategic debate in the past few years. The end of the Cold War of course played its part, as did the reductions undertaken by the two superpowers in accordance with the INF and START treaties. The 1995 NPT

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<sup>135</sup> Radio interview, 7 January 1967, quoted in Kohl, *French Nuclear Diplomacy*, 167.

<sup>136</sup> According to de Gaulle’s views, the only appropriate forum for a true disarmament would have been a meeting of the then four atomic powers.

<sup>137</sup> For the full French declarations of 1968 on the NPT, refer to Klein, ed., *Maitrise des armements et désarmement*, 81–83.

Conference and the successful negotiations of non-nuclear disarmament conventions (e.g., the CFE, CFE IA, and CWC) also put nuclear issues on top of the agenda. The multiple initiatives aimed at undermining the legitimacy of nuclear weapons in international security after the Cold War and at promoting nuclear disarmament have also had an impact. The International Court of Justice procedure on the legality of the threat or use of nuclear weapons, the Canberra Commission Report, the resolutions adopted year after year by the United Nations General Assembly, the choice of the Nobel Prize Committee to reward in 1995 the Pugwash movement, and the proposals made by non-aligned countries in the Geneva Conference on Disarmament all have forced the French government to approach the issue seriously, and even with some anxiety.

Most of the writing coming from the government or the strategic community insists on keeping nuclear weapons at least in the mid term.<sup>138</sup> There have also been some important voices proposing further steps toward elimination.<sup>139</sup> It is important to recall as well that a strong and influential minority continues to refuse to address the issue, as it openly considers that nuclear weapons have not lost any of their strategic relevance in the long term.<sup>140</sup>

France seems nevertheless ready to accept, in the future, international negotiations on further limitations to nuclear forces. Yet, it is for the moment highly unlikely that France will support any initiative that would disable its ability to remain a nuclear power in the mid-to-long term. Therefore, a treaty on the elimination or prohibition of nuclear weapons would not get Paris's approval in the present situation.

A recent debate, among other events and publications, has demonstrated, however, that attitudes toward elimination have changed.<sup>141</sup> This debate involved two major politicians, Michel Rocard (former Socialist prime minister, now member of the European parliament) and Pierre Lellouche (Gaullist Member of Parliament and close adviser to President Chirac); a physics Nobel prize winner, Georges Charpak; and two leading analysts of nuclear policy: Georges Le Guelte (formerly *Commissariat à l'énergie atomique*) and Pascal Boniface (director, IRIS). In spite of the

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<sup>138</sup> Among other books, refer to: Boniface, *Repenser la dissuasion*; Thérèse Delpech, *L'héritage nucléaire* (Brussels: Complexe, 1997); Georges Le Guelte, *Histoire de la menace nucléaire* (Paris: Hachette, 1997); and Paul-Ivan de Saint Germain et al., *Demain, l'ombre portée de l'arme nucléaire...* (Paris: CREST/Documentation française, 1996).

<sup>139</sup> The major piece came from Michel Rocard (former Prime Minister and member of the Canberra Commission), who published the Canberra Report with a 70-page introduction, as *Rapport de la commission de Canberra, Éliminer les armes nucléaires* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 1997). Another major book in the debate was published by two leading physicists: Georges Charpak and Richard Garwin, *Feux follets et champignons nucléaires* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 1997). The Pugwash Conference also published recently in French its 1993 report on elimination with two additional French papers: *Conférence Pugwash, Éliminer les armes?* (Paris: Transition, 1997).

<sup>140</sup> Coming from within the military, industrial, and nuclear establishment, this opposition is usually not very active in public debates.

<sup>141</sup> "Faut-il éliminer les armes nucléaires?" Public debate organized by the *Institut de relations internationales et stratégiques* (IRIS) and the *Centre international Pierre Mendès-France*, 16 October 1997 (Papers forthcoming in the quarterly journal *La Revue internationale et stratégique* in 1998).

extremely different backgrounds of the participants, a form of consensus emerged. First, all of the speakers agreed that the elimination of nuclear weapons could be discussed as a long term goal. Agreeing on the positive role that nuclear weapons played during the Cold War,<sup>142</sup> they all accepted as well that an incremental approach was necessary and that elimination would raise many technical issues in terms of costs and verification systems. There were of course some points of disagreement on the proper pace to choose and on the role France should play. Favoring elimination in the mid-to-long term, Michel Rocard and Georges Charpak favored a major diplomatic gesture in favor of deep reductions by France, while Pierre Lellouche and Pascal Boniface favored a more careful approach and insisted on intermediate steps. All the members of the panel favored going down to a minimum deterrence with as few weapons as possible, but lines of division appeared again when it came to defining the conditions for going down to zero. Some, such as Pierre Lellouche, judged that, in some worst-case scenarios, nuclear deterrence still had a role to play in the foreseeable future. Others, however, including Michel Rocard, judged that elimination was a realistic prospect for the mid-to-long term.

A consensus emerged on two broad principles: both deep reductions and elimination as a long-term objective were commitments already made by the nuclear weapon states and should be pursued. Complete elimination (to a zero-level) nevertheless remained a very remote objective, highly dependent upon the security environment. On the debate between very few weapons (“two-hundred is zero”) as opposed to complete elimination, all the participants agreed that deep reductions should be the first goal pursued. None favored unilateral nuclear disarmament by France.<sup>143</sup>

To summarize, for most of the French strategic community both the desirability and the feasibility of elimination remain challenged. The vast majority of the members of the French strategic and political communities is, to this day, convinced that elimination is neither desirable nor feasible in the near-to-mid term. Elimination has nevertheless become a part of the French nuclear debate as a remote perspective. Moreover, if “disarmament” is understood as going down to very low levels, combined with confidence-building and transparency measures, a consensus is likely to be reached. Most analysts and decision-makers see “elimination” as such a remote objective that it will never be fulfilled, and only a minority favors a more active policy.

It remains to be seen what is long term in international relations and how far the nuclear asymptote will go. Most French analysts (including the author) still think that nuclear weapons have a role to play in international security as a stabilizing and war-preventing factor and would not recommend taking the risk of going down to zero even in the long term. A majority nevertheless

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<sup>142</sup> Even Michel Rocard has distanced himself from the Canberra Commission report on this point, in his introduction to the French edition, he states that we owe “balance of deterrence” for “the peaceful outcome of the Cold War.”

<sup>143</sup> This consensus on a few principles should not be taken for granted, however, for the entire French strategic and political community as explained earlier.



agrees on the feasibility of many of the intermediate steps toward elimination in terms of downsizing, transparency, and confidence-building measures.

The next decade will be the occasion to test the new French commitment to more nuclear arms control and disarmament: will France implement article VI of the NPT, or will it stick to the logic of its deterrence posture? All depends on the future legitimacy of nuclear weapons and on the future evolution of European and international security (including the policies of the other NWS). A deterrence posture and a non-proliferation policy are compatible, as are disarmament steps and continued minimal deterrence. Complete elimination of nuclear weapons remains, however, incompatible with the French view that nuclear weapons retain a stabilizing role in international security and deterrence is primarily aimed at preventing major wars.

### **The Factors Likely to Influence French Positions**

French positions on elimination are unlikely to change in the mid term, unless some dramatic and unpredictable event occurs, such as nuclear accident or use. French views will nevertheless be influenced by some external and internal factors.

The general evolution of international security in the mid term will obviously play a major part in shaping French views. Further proliferation of nuclear weapons (and other weapons of mass destruction) would justify an enduring reliance on atomic arms to counter emerging NWS, especially in the Middle East and North Africa. The pursuit of an efficient non-proliferation policy is key to the establishment of a trustworthy non-nuclear regime; any breach in the present non-proliferation regime will be used to delay further nuclear disarmament.

Moreover, the choices of the two leading nuclear powers (the United States and Russia) will be a determining factor in French future choices. If the START process and the deep cuts announced in Helsinki continue, France is likely to join the move to lower levels under certain conditions, as described above (specifically the non-deployment of large-scale national missile defenses by both great nuclear powers). If the United States and Russia retain a nuclear capability of a few thousand weapons, France can hardly down-size its own arsenal much further than to a few hundred, according to the principle of "strict reasonable sufficiency." On the contrary, if a major US or bilateral initiative in favor of either very deep cuts or elimination was set up by the United States or on a US–Russian bilateral basis, France would probably follow and take part in negotiations. In any case, as a second-tier NWS, France could probably not oppose such a move alone.

European construction could slightly influence French positions as well, as many of France's partners harbor anti-nuclear sentiment. The establishment of a true Common Foreign and Security Policy could induce France (and the United Kingdom) to adopt a low profile on nuclear issues and be more open to nuclear disarmament to please its fellow European countries. Nevertheless, although

European construction might lead France to include a nuclear disarmament chapter welcomed by many member states to its “concerted deterrence,” it is unlikely to deeply influence French choices at this point.<sup>144</sup>

The internal debate seems even less likely to influence French policy. The recent political changes (a new right-wing Gaullist president in 1995 and a new left-wing parliamentary majority in 1997) have not induced major nuclear policy changes and the new coalition formed by the Socialists, the Communists, and the Greens seems to be taking the same steps as previous governments in preserving the French nuclear status while reducing the nuclear budget. Those who favor an active policy on elimination are not in the government and have put their criticisms aside. Moreover, the *cohabitation* between a Gaullist president and a left-wing government does, to a large extent, freeze the present situation, as none of the political actors are likely to engage in a battle over nuclear issues. As in Britain with Tony Blair, the new French left led by Lionel Jospin does not put nuclear and military issues at the top of its political agenda, concentrating its action instead on the economy and social reforms.

The budgetary constraint that weighs heavily on defense spending is, however, likely to be a source of further down-sizing as it has been in the past. It is nevertheless unlikely to impose elimination, as all decision-makers remain committed to preserving the national nuclear assets in the foreseeable future. A decision undermining this goal would, in the present situation, lead to a major political crisis in France. As with the United Kingdom, all major nuclear programs are on track for the next fifteen years and are unlikely to be abandoned. The future choices (replacement of the new generation SSBNs and missiles) will not have to be made before 2010–2020.

NGOs are unlikely to have a great influence on the French debate either. French officials typically did not distinguish between NGOs that proposed a realistic and cautious approach to the issue of elimination and the activists opposing nuclear weapons in all circumstances (e.g., Greenpeace). Although the work of some NGOs is now taken more seriously,<sup>145</sup> their actions still have a very limited impact on the government.

In short, there are very few factors that could have a decisive influence on French nuclear policy, besides the international security environment. This reflects the very cautious approach of the French strategic community to the issue of elimination; an approach that is reinforced by an (almost) all-party consensus and the lack of support from any significant share of the public. As already explained, the inner-rationale of elimination remains challenged in France.

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<sup>144</sup> On this point, see Müller, ed., *Europe and Nuclear Disarmament*, including the chapter “France,” by Camille Grand.

<sup>145</sup> Among other examples, the research of the Stimson Center, BASIC, and Vertic are recognized by both the academic and governmental segments of the strategic community as providing useful and serious information and thinking, while this is not always the case for the work of older NGOs.

## Conclusion

Contemporary France has inherited a special nuclear history. France's attitude toward nuclear issues is anchored in an old strategic culture, which explains, to a large extent, the enduring reliance on nuclear weapons. As France is a second-tier nuclear weapon state that joined the nuclear club in the second generation, its nuclear strategy and rationale are accordingly less rooted in Cold War memories than those of the United States and Russia. The policy of reasonable sufficiency always followed by France, even if it was for obvious economic reasons, has isolated France from the Cold War era excess, far from the madness of the US–Soviet arms race. Combined with a nuclear posture aimed at preserving peace by deterring aggression against French vital interests, this strategy has built a special consensus in favor of nuclear deterrence. Nuclear weapons also provided France with a unique tool in interstate relations that allowed Paris to develop an autonomous international policy backed by an independent security policy, or at least what was perceived as such.

The end of the Cold War nevertheless has led France to abandon its perfect nuclear ivory tower to enter a new world. In this world, France has had to enter a process of negotiated arms control and disarmament bargaining, which is challenging year after year the French rationale for keeping nuclear weapons. This major turn in French nuclear policy and diplomacy occurred over a very short period of time (1990–1996). In this process, France probably lost part of its exceptionality and realized suddenly that it had many things in common with the other nuclear weapon states: first of all, a desire to remain nuclear. France is now fully involved in international nuclear debates and its special strategic past and culture probably have something to bring to these debates. Hopefully, France will play its part in the emerging discussions on the future of nuclear weapons in international security.

### **Minimal Deterrence versus Elimination?**

While France favors most of the steps leading to a major down-sizing of nuclear arsenals and a minimum deterrence posture (a posture that it already holds to a large extent), the strong reluctance toward elimination that remains in the French strategic community (beyond rhetoric) could paradoxically turn France into an opponent of major moves on the nuclear weapon front.

In spite of rhetorical commitments, the international debate on the ultimate goal that should be pursued through arms control is not resolved. This is all the more true in the French case, where nuclear weapons are still perceived as an unchallenged war-prevention (i.e., peace and international stability preserving) tool.

If the arms control community wants to avoid turning France into an opponent again, a very cautious and realistic path should be followed. The debate on nuclear elimination should therefore probably decouple some immediate objectives (aimed at reducing the weight of the nuclear shadow) from complete elimination, which, as the most serious US reports have pointed out, would require

certain conditions in international security.<sup>146</sup> Complete elimination could remain a long-term objective to be undertaken once the security conditions are met, if they ever are.

An approach setting complete elimination as the goal could prove counter-productive by giving arguments to those in France, the United States, and elsewhere who favor the maintenance of almost Cold War-type capabilities over deep cuts in nuclear arsenals. The emphasis should be put on making the world safer by enhancing non-proliferation, safety, and confidence-building measures and dismantling excess stocks of weapons.

The theological debate between those who cherish nuclear weapons for their stabilizing role in international security and those who favor a non-nuclear security should probably be left aside for the moment.<sup>147</sup> This way those who favor further cuts and confidence-building measures without judging complete elimination feasible could work along with those who favor elimination as a final stage. The five NWS should first agree on both practical and symbolic measures to de-emphasize the role of nuclear weapons, and to go down to a level of minimum or existential deterrence. Once a new cooperative and stable equilibrium is found, the respective virtues of minimum deterrence and complete elimination should be discussed again. This is a long-term perspective and, as John Maynard Keynes used to say about trends in economy: “In the long term, we are all dead.”

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<sup>146</sup> Refer to the three reports of the Steering Committee of the Henry L. Stimson Center’s Project on Eliminating Weapons of Mass Destruction: *Beyond the Nuclear Peril, The Year in Review and the Years Ahead*, Report no. 15 (Washington, DC: Henry L. Stimson Center, January 1995); *An Evolving US Nuclear Posture*, Report no. 19 (Washington, DC: Henry L. Stimson Center, December 1995); and *An American Legacy, Building a Nuclear-Weapon-Free World*, Report no. 22 (Washington, DC: Henry L. Stimson Center, March 1997). Refer as well to the report of the Committee on International Security and Arms Control (CISAC) of the National Academy of Science, *The Future of U.S. Nuclear Weapons Policy* (Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 1997).

<sup>147</sup> If, as some have said in the US debate, “200 is zero,” then France is pretty close to the goal.