

## The Nuclear Question

By

Dr. Spero S.Z Paravantis

University of Luxembourg

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### Text:

With the dropping of nuclear bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945, the United States ushered in a new era. For just over four years, it remained the world's sole nuclear power, and based its defence strategy on being the only nation capable, at least in the short-term, of creating and deploying these weapons of mass destruction. The situation changed on August 29th 1949, when the USSR demonstrated their possession of nuclear weapons. It would be just over three years later that the UK would accede to the group of nuclear powers on October 3rd 1952, and another 8 years after that, on February 13th 1960, that France would join WWII's 'Big Three,' in the possession of nuclear weapons. The possibility on needing to use or to be a target for nuclear weapons, spurred these four states on in the building, deployment and development of nuclear technology throughout the Cold War.

The nuclear arms race between the USA and USSR took a dramatic evolution in October 1962, in a confrontation over the stationing of Soviet nuclear ballistic missiles in Cuba. The Cuban Missile Crisis unfolded on television worldwide, and was the closest of the Cold War confrontations that could have broken out into a full-scale nuclear war. Afterwards, a direct telephone line between Washington and Moscow was set up to enable the leaders of the USA and USSR to speak directly in order to more rapidly avoid such situations in the future should they occur. Though competition and tensions between East and West remained high throughout the 1960s, the sobering effect of the Cuban Missile Crisis on heads of state worldwide, provided the impetus for engaging in negotiations to limit the arms race, control the spread of nuclear technology, and to gradually engage in disarmament.

One of the first agreements reflecting improving relations in terms of nuclear weapons between the East and West was the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). It was opened for signature on 1 July 1968 in New York, and the United States, the USSR and the UK were among the first nations to sign. The motivation behind the NPT was to reduce the threat of nuclear war by controlling the number of nuclear weapon states. The three main objectives of the NPT were nonproliferation, disarmament, and the right to use nuclear technology peacefully.[1] In September 1971, the US and USSR started the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) which in May 1972, culminated in a treaty which

limited the nuclear warheads in anti-ballistic missile defences.[2] Improving US-Soviet relations were demonstrated again, just before the ending of direct American involvement in the war in Vietnam on 15 August 1973. In June 1973, the US and USSR signed an agreement to prevent nuclear war, and added momentum to their improving relations.[3]

The Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) was another initiative begun to pursue disarmament during the period of detente. It opened in Helsinki on 3 July 1973 with 35 states, including the USSR and Warsaw Pact states, sending representatives. The CSCE continued in Geneva from 18 September 1973 until 21 July 1975. The conference returned to Finland from 30 July – 1 August 1975, when the Helsinki Final Act, was signed. The objectives of the CSCE were to improve relations between the East and West, its articles though, not being part of a Treaty, were not binding.

However, despite the improvement in East-West relations in the 1970s, the period of disarmament and détente declined with the Soviet deployment of the new SS-20 nuclear missiles on their Western borders. The deployment occurred in spite of Soviet Premier Brezhnev and US president Carter signing the SALT II treaty in June 1979.[4] Détente ended with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. A rapid re-escalation of tensions followed, as did re-armament. Tensions between the Soviets and the West remained high until in 1985, when Soviet Premier Mikhail Gorbachev agreed to begin negotiations to reduce nuclear weapons deployed on the USSR's western borders.

A significant part of WEU's efforts to coordinate West European defence and politics related to

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nuclear weapons. In 1958, the WEU Assembly requested information about the possible arrangements for the joint use and control of strategic nuclear weapons, but the British drafted the accepted reply for the Council, which stated that such issues were not for the WEU Council to decide, but were the responsibility of the North Atlantic Council, which was not currently considering such arrangements. [5] In 1960, when the Assembly raised the issue of creating a joint European strategic nuclear force under the control of WEU, the Council rejected the proposal.[6] The WEU Assembly also raised the issue of nuclear weapons by recommending that all members were equipped equally, maintaining the capability of responding to both limited and general aggression, and maintaining 30 divisions in Europe that were equipped with tactical nuclear weapons.[7] A consideration in the debates of the WEU Assembly, was also the size and location of these forces in West Germany. Though the recommendation for a European nuclear force was never followed through, the Assembly's focus on the issue, and its reporting of a lack of integration and adequate supply of existing member nations' forces, formed a significant part the Assembly's efforts to coordinate West European security policy.[8] After 1977, the WEU Assembly began to examine issues arising from more widespread use of nuclear energy and how the strategic concerns related to the supply and delivery of nuclear energy affected defence planning.[9] The Assembly also raised concerns about the spread of nuclear technology, and the WEU Council noted the common policy of WEU members to promote cooperation to control the use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. The Council also pointed out that responsibility in this area rested largely with the International Atomic Energy Association (IAEA), and that each nuclearcapable state was responsible for the protection of its nuclear facilities.[10]

Generally, the most frequently discussed difference between UK and French nuclear policies was in the area of coordination of forces (both nuclear and conventional) with the US and NATO. The British saw a

coordinated nuclear policy as a vital component of Western defence, while the French argued that this coordination subordinated European interests to those of the US.[11] Both France and the UK were determined to have an independent nuclear deterrent, but they pursued this objective in different ways. France withdrew its forces from NATO's integrated military command in order to maintain control over the production, deployment and decision-making protocols of their nuclear program. Though they maintained close relations and planning with the US and NATO, agreeing to purchase Polaris missiles from the US in December 1962, the British ensured that the sales agreement contained protocols guaranteeing an independent UK nuclear deterrent. However, the impact of the close US-UK relations on disarmament negotiations with the USSR was discussed in the WEU Council. The British described difficult relations with the USSR and a lack of progress in negotiations, while the French highlighted their good relations with the USSR, and the need to pursue disarmament with the Soviets.[12] Notwithstanding these differences, United Kingdom and France were jointly committed to maintaining a strong European, and by extension Western, nuclear deterrent, even though British forces were assigned to NATO and those of France were not.[13]

#### Defence planning

The theory of deterrence assumed prominence in military planning during the Cold War, as a result of the threat of using nuclear weapons or being subjected to nuclear attack. Prior to the nuclear age, the standard model in military thinking was that whichever side had a superiority in forces, tended to hold sway in diplomacy. However, as a result of the destructive power of nuclear weapons, in the nuclear age an inferior force could deter a superior force from attack, simply with the threat of using nuclear weapons.

The possibility on needing to use or to be a target for nuclear weapons, spurred France and Britain on in the building, deployment and development of nuclear technology throughout the Cold War. However, their methods of pursuing their nuclear policies followed different paths. In 1962, the British decision to pursue an independent nuclear deterrent linked to the US and NATO provoked

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confrontations with the French who desired a more unified European Nuclear deterrent, independent of the US. The disagreement was triggered by the British decision to purchase Polaris nuclear submarines from the Americans.[14] The decision was reached after the US cancelled the AGM-48 Skybolt, an air-launched nuclear missile, that would have formed the basis of the UK nuclear deterrent in Europe. On 22 December 1962, the Nassau Agreement was signed between the USA and UK, initiating the Polaris nuclear program for the UK. The Treaty provided for the US to supply the UK with Polaris missiles, in return for leasing the US a submarine base in Scotland. The UK's Polaris missiles would be a part of a joint nuclear force within NATO, but they could be used unilaterally in the case of a supreme national emergency.[15] Thus the British retained their independent nuclear deterrent, while agreeing to include their nuclear forces in a joint NATO framework.

However, the agreement displeased the French, who had been pressing for an independent European nuclear deterrent. The French also opposed the multi-lateral nuclear programs as proposed in the Skybolt program and Nassau agreement, where the US attempted to create nuclear sharing and control within NATO.[16] It was the difference in views between the US and France that contributed to the French decision to leave the integrated military command of NATO. When General de Gaulle became

President of France, he continued to develop France's independent nuclear program, and to focus France's nuclear strategy on attempting to establish a joint European nuclear defensive framework. He also protested the United States' strong role in NATO, officially expressing his dissatisfaction with the 'Anglo-Saxon' domination of it. On 17 September 1958, he sent a memorandum to US President Eisenhower and UK Prime Minister Harold Macmillan that argued for the creation of NATO directorate that would put France on an equal footing with the UK and US.[17] When the US-UK response was received and deemed unsatisfactory, de Gaulle began constructing an independent defence force for France. The primary objective of this move was to secure French independence in the development, deployment and possible use of nuclear weapons. The French strategy for dissuasion was to maintain a large enough inventory of nuclear weapons, sufficient on their own to act as a deterrent, without pursuing parity or superiority. The French believed that they could never match the USSR and the USA in terms of numbers of nuclear weapons, so they never attempted to. The French simply built up their nuclear arsenal to such a level order to make a potential belligerent state re-assess their offensive in light of the potential losses they could suffer by attacking France. It was based on the Strategic theory of "counter-value," which meant that France maintained the ability to cause such a high level of damage on the USSR (or any potential belligerent), that the USSR would be discouraged from attacking France.[18] The strategic justification for the policy was "Force de frappe," or "Force de dissuasion." De Gaulle stated that as part of NATO, French nuclear priorities could be subjugated to those of the alliance, and that France could be endangered in the event of Soviet aggression should it have to wait for NATO approval / decision making on how to respond to a nuclear threat. The withdrawal was also part of a bid to re-establish France' standing internationally, and to allow it to regain and retain more international diplomatic independence.[19]

In the late 1960s, the debate between Britain and France in terms of an independent nuclear deterrent revolved around the issue of its level of coordination with NATO. However, by the mid-1970s, the British and French expressed a common position in regards to maintaining an independent European Nuclear deterrent, based on European supplies of Enriched Uranium, with which they could construct their own nuclear weapons.[20] Additionally, though UK nuclear forces were assigned to NATO and those of France were not, the Declaration of Atlantic Relations recognised the role that both played in reinforcing NATO's nuclear deterrence.[21] Notwithstanding France's rapprochement Britain by the mid-1970s over cooperation with NATO's strategic nuclear deterrent, Britain and France were in dispute over France not having signed the non-proliferation treaty. At this time, France was the only member of the WEU that had not signed the Non-proliferation treaty by the end of 1975, a fact that was repeatedly raised in the Council.[22]

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Into the 1980s, Britain and France were still intent on maintaining independence for their nuclear deterrents, in spite of the common threat posed by the deployment of the Soviet SS-20 nuclear missiles. Rather than encouraging a joint response, in 1981, French Prime Minister Pierre Mauroy stated that France still rejected the notion of a bipolar world and that a modernized nuclear deterrent was needed since the USA and USSR were continuing to build and deploy nuclear weapons.[23] The British expressed a similar intent to ensure that the British government had the final say on whether or not to use nuclear weapons, rather than surrendering the decision to NATO.[24]

Within WEU, the importance of developing a nuclear deterrent in Europe was demonstrated in February 1958, with the Franco-German-Italian agreement on the production of armaments. While stating that any agreements would conform to NATO guidelines, the signatories also agreed to possibly undertake scientific research into the military use of nuclear energy, saying that such studies 'were not excluded' from the agreement.[25] The WEU Assembly became more explicit in its intentions for nuclear weapons in the 1960s, recommending that all members were equipped equally and maintained the capability of responding to both limited and general aggression with 30 divisions in Europe that were equipped with tactical nuclear weapons.[26] Though the recommendation for a European nuclear force was never followed through, the Assembly's focus on the issue, and the reporting of a lack of integration and adequate supply of existing member nations' forces, formed a significant part of WEU's efforts to strengthen and coordinate a Western European nuclear deterrent. [27]

In the 1970s, the climate of détente encouraged much consideration of disarmament efforts, and the WEU Assembly and Council frequently discussed the developments at various negotiations, and issued recommendations and replies to state a common European policy supporting disarmament.[28] However, the Euromissile crisis provoked a reappraisal of disarmament initiatives in light of the Soviet superiority in nuclear and conventional forces. In December 1981, the WEU Assembly called for the WEU Council to use whatever means it could to re-establish parity in military forces, whose imbalance was considered as a threat to peace.[29]. The support of the disarmament efforts of the previous decade were left further behind, though not completely abandoned, when the Assembly advised to continue preparing to deploy Cruise missiles and Pershing II from the US to counter the Soviet SS-20s.[30] The perceived value of a nuclear deterrent, either independent or part of NATO, was seen as a vital tool in the West's negotiations with the USSR, and when the balance was upset, the WEU Assembly acknowledged it and recommended a course of action which was echoed by the WEU Council.[31]

#### Disarmament

After the Cuban missile crisis in October 1962 had brought the world close to an outbreak of nuclear war, a direct line of communication was established between the White House and the Kremlin to allow the leaders of the USSR and the USA to speak directly to deal with possible crises. Afterwards, tensions between the superpowers, at least as far as the threat of nuclear war was concerned, gradually declined. Western Europeans, having become disenchanted with US and NATO intervention in Europe, were generally supportive of disarmament, which for them meant a reduction of the threat of nuclear war.

Improving relations between the East and West was demonstrated with the Treaty on the NonProliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). It was opened for signature on 1 July 1968 in New York, and the United States, the USSR and the UK were among the first countries to sign it. The motivation behind the NPT was to reduce the threat of nuclear war by controlling the number of nuclear weapon states. Its three main objectives were nuclear non-proliferation, disarmament, and the right to use nuclear technology peacefully.[32] In Helsinki in November 1969, the US and USSR began the

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Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT), and in September 1971, the US and USSR entered into negotiations to reduce the risk of nuclear war.[33] The results of SALT I were seen in May 1972, when the US and USSR signed a treaty which limited nuclear warheads in anti-ballistic missile defences.[34]

In June 1973, just before the ending of direct American involvement in the war in Vietnam on 15 August 1973, the US and USSR signed an agreement to prevent nuclear war, and added momentum to their improving relations.[35] The Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) was another initiative begun to pursue disarmament during the period of détente. It opened in Helsinki on 3 July 1973 with 35 states, including the USSR and Warsaw Pact states, sending representatives. The CSCE continued in Geneva from 18 September 1973 until 21 July 1975. The conference returned to Finland from 30 July – 1 August 1975, which the Helsinki Final Act was signed.[36] The objectives were to improve relations between the East and West, however, not being part of a Treaty, its articles were not binding.

Although a more open atmosphere existed between East and West in the mid-1970s, the political vacuum left by an ailing Soviet Premier Brezhnev, allowed the Soviet military industrial complex to expand and develop new weapons. In 1977, this expansion contributed to the ending of détente and disarmament efforts, when the USSR began to deploy SS-20 nuclear missiles, in spite of Brezhnev and Carter signing the SALT II treaty in June 1979.[37] Détente weakened with the Soviet deployment of the new SS-20 nuclear missiles and ended with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. A reescalation of tensions followed these developments, as did re-armament. Tensions between the Soviets and the West remained high until in 1985, Soviet Premier Mikhail Gorbachev agreed to begin negotiations to reduce nuclear weapons deployed on the USSR's western borders.

British and French reactions to disarmament were mixed. On the one hand it was seen as an opportunity to reduce defence expenditures and to reduce the likelihood of a nuclear confrontation in Europe. By 1964, though interested in pursuing disarmament, British and French positions in regards to it varied in terms of how each reacted to the intentions of the USSR. The British took part in disarmament negotiations, while the French did not, but both were cautious when appraising actual soviet intentions, and stated that any agreements that may be reached would not endanger western defence.[38]

These concerns were shown by a disagreement between the French and British in 1971 over a British proposal to pursue Mutual and Balanced Force Reduction (MBFR) between the East and West in Central Europe. The French opposed MBFR because in their view it would simply result in the diminishing of Western Europe's defensive capabilities, while the US and Soviet forces would simply be displaced, but not removed. In their view, until disarmament was fully consolidated, such a reduction would only act as a potential source of conflict by weakening collective European defence. [39] British and French positions on MBFR remained opposed into 1973, as French President Pompidou stated that his government remained opposed to the 'bloc-to-bloc' system, which it believed would lead to an imbalance of military forces in Central Europe. The British argued that solidarity was needed between Western Allies in the MBFR negotiations with the USSR.[40] However, in 1975, the British acknowledged concerns over MBFR, based on their opinion that the Warsaw Pact members refused to acknowledge that their superiority in tanks and manpower in Central Europe was a major obstacle to making progress in the negotiations.[41] In Strasbourg in 1977, the British and French expressed common ground in the need to implement all of the accords of the Helsinki Final Act, produced by the CSCE, but due to the USSR not implementing the full accords, and their deployment of missiles along their western borders, in the WEU Council, the British and French stated that the success of détente and disarmament rested upon their maintenance of strong defensive capabilities.[42]

The climate of détente encouraged much consideration of disarmament efforts, and the WEU Assembly and Council frequently discussed the developments at various negotiations, and issued recommendations and replies to state a common European policy surrounding disarmament.[43] An example of WEU's efforts to encourage its members to adopt a common policy towards disarmament occurred in May 1975, when it submitted a recommendation to the Council to speak on behalf of all WEU members establishing a common policy on adhering to the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons treaty.[44] However, the Euromissile crisis of 1977 to 1983, provoked a reassessment of disarmament initiatives, stating that they should not compromise western peace and security.[45] The support of the disarmament efforts of the previous decade were left further behind, though not completely abandoned, when the Assembly advised to continue preparing to deploy the Cruise missiles and Pershing II from the US to counter the Soviet SS-20s.[46]

#### Euromissile Crisis: 1977-1983

The Euromissile Crisis started at the end of the period of disarmament of the 1970s. The crisis began when the USSR deployed its new SS-20 nuclear missiles in 1977 along its Western European borders. This gave them immediate nuclear superiority over the West, which could be translated into political leverage. The SS-20 missiles were capable of destroying NATO bases and European cities at short notice. European and American analysts believed that they would not be able to defend Western Europe against a Soviet launch. As tensions between the West and the USSR rose, the debate among Western governments was whether or not to negotiate with the Soviets or to deploy their own nuclear weapons in response. The initial Western approach, known as the dual-track approach, entailed pursuing negotiation with the USSR to remove the SS-20s, and should the Soviets fail to remove them, then the West would deploy their own weapons' systems.[47]

The Soviet wanted to 'decouple' Western Europe from the United States, attempting to circumvent the SALT I and II agreements.[48] The Soviets argued that nuclear parity meant only parity with US, French and British nuclear arsenals collectively, not parity with the US individually. If followed though, this 'parity' would have resulted in an overall Soviet nuclear superiority in Europe.[49] In light of the possible strategic and political leverage the Soviets could achieve, NATO decided that it was necessary to deploy a modernized Western nuclear weapon of its own.

The threat of the SS-20 Soviet missile system, was used by Western European heads of military and state, to press for the creation rapid nuclear response capability of their own. However, this response, the American-built Pershing II Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM), would not be available for delivery to NATO prior to 1983. This delay therefore gave further time for the Soviets to engage in a public relations' campaign to present the West as violators of the SALT agreements. The 'Euromissile Crisis' provoked massive public demonstrations against the deployment of American nuclear weapons in Europe, just as various European governments were voting whether or not to deploy them. West German chancellor Helmut Schmidt stated that the dual approach had threatened to give the Soviets time to exploit political divisions between NATO members, thereby delaying or even eliminating a coordinated Western response.[50]

Because the Soviet SS-20's were a more precise weapon and were designed to strike specific NATO targets, rather than large population centres, the Soviets argued that the West was the aggressive party provoking the Soviets, by planning to deploy US nuclear weapons that could target Soviet population centres. The USSR supported numerous Western European protest movements in order to undermine

Western European governments' responses to the SS-20 missiles and some NATO members responded in favour of not allowing US missiles in Europe. Sweden, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom experienced some of the largest public demonstrations against American nuclear weapons being deployed on European soil. For example, in the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Belgium and in

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Sweden led by Prime Minister Olaf Palmer, mass protests arose against a western response to the Soviet deployment. The pause in deployment caused by the pursuit of negotiations with the Soviet Union allowed the Soviets to exploit divisions between NATO European members, whose populations opposed US nuclear deployment in Europe. The Soviet Union was able to portray the Western counter-deployment as the aggressive act.[51]

However, the West German and French governments supported the installation of the US missile systems, believing that only an equilibrium of forces with the USSR could guarantee peace.

In 1983, with Thatcher and Kohl being elected in Britain and Germany, the Pershing II missile deployment in Europe was assured to go ahead. On 22 November 1983, the West German parliament voted in favour of accepting missile deployment, which began shortly thereafter. The Soviets were also confronted with increased French support for nuclear weapons production and deployment in Europe. In 1981, the French Prime Minister Pierre Mauroy used the crisis to justify pursuing the increase and modernization of France's nuclear capabilities. President Mitterrand echoed these beliefs, and in September 1981 in the WEU Council, the UK recommended rejecting any Soviet offers of missile reduction, since the Soviet offers were contingent upon WEU / EEC members of NATO withdrawing from the Atlantic Alliance.[52] Tensions remained elevated in Europe, and were only eased in mid 1985, when Soviet Secretary General Gorbachev agreed to reduce the number of SS-20 systems deployed against Europe in correspondence with the number of western missile batteries that were removed.

In spite of the common threat posed by the deployment of the Soviet SS-20 nuclear missiles, the British and French reacted differently in opposing the USSR. French Prime Minister Pierre Mauroy stated that France still rejected the notion of a bipolar world and that France needed a modernized nuclear deterrent since the USA and USSR were continuing to build and deploy nuclear weapons.[53] Later the same month, French President Mitterrand stated that France's security was based primarily on its independent deterrent, and secondly on its alliances.[54] The British recommended the rejection of Soviet offers for a resolution to the crisis based on the one-sidedness of the Soviets' proposals and expressed the intent to ensure that the British government had the final say on whether or not to use nuclear weapons, rather than surrendering the decision to NATO.[55] The British also supported a collective response in the WEU council, drafting a reply that called for continued preparations for Cruise missiles and Pershing II deployment to counter the Soviets' SS-20s.[56]

In the WEU Assembly and Council in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the Euromissile crisis provoked a reappraisal of disarmament initiatives in light of the Soviet superiority in nuclear and conventional forces. For example, in December 1981, the WEU Assembly called for the WEU Council to use whatever means it could to re-establish parity in military forces, whose imbalance was considered as a threat to peace.[57] The Assembly also advised that preparations should be continued to deploy Cruise missiles and Pershing II from the US to counter the Soviet SS-20s.[58] The value of a nuclear deterrent, either independent or part of NATO, was seen as a vital tool in the West's negotiations with the USSR, and



when the balance was upset, the WEU Assembly acknowledged it and prescribed course of action which was echoed by the WEU Council.[59]

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