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FRANCE, THE UK AND THE PROSPECTS OF THE MULTILATERALIZATION OF FORMAL STRATEGIC ARMS CONTROL

Resume

During the 2019 and 2020 US-Russia debate on the New START extension, both countries raised again the issue of multilateralization of strategic offensive arms control. However, while the USA called for China's participation, Russia once again reiterated the Soviet Union's Cold-War position and invited France and the UK to join first. Having in mind China's refusal to join these talks, out of various reasons, the purpose of this article is to explore the attitudes of France and the UK, two European states and NATO members with strategic arms, vis-a-vis the Russian invitation and the prospects and preconditions for strategic arms control multilateralization through their involvement. In this endeavour, the author employs the concept of strategic stability, and analyses a variety of primary and secondary sources, including chronologies of negotiations and contents of strategic arms control treaties, and other relevant treaties, as well as French and British strategic documents, and statements by officials from these and other relevant countries. The author concludes that the UK and France would be more likely to enter into formal strategic arms control if at least three sets of preconditions are met – the US and NATO "permission", equality, and an improved strategic environment.

Keywords: arms control, strategic stability, European security, nuclear forces in Europe, nuclear weapons

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INTRODUCTION

The interest for researching the prospects of multilateralization of strategic arms control stems from the premise that it is not only the distinction between nuclear (NWS) and non-nuclear weapon states (NNWS), as established by the Non-Proliferation Treaty of 1968, that matters, but that the one between the NWS themselves is also important. This distinction is reflected not only in the wide disparity in nuclear capabilities and different nuclear weapons policies among the NWS, rather it is also seen in the fact that nuclear forces of some NWS are quantitatively and qualitatively constrained by legally binding agreements (arms control treaties) and subject to intensive verification measures, which is not the case with nuclear forces of other NWS. As perceived by both sides, this causes at least two “injustices”. Firstly, the USA and Russia complain that while they are reducing their nuclear arsenals, which are under legal constraints and subjugated to stringent verification provisions, other NWS are not faced with similar restrictions, a situation that is no longer acceptable for the former (Putin 2012; *VOA* 2020). Secondly, those NWS which are outside of the realm of such legal control— China, France, and the UK – argue that including them in strategic arms control at this stage would be unfair and futile because their nuclear forces are already incomparably smaller than those of the two leading NWS (*VOA* 2020; Tertrais 2020,51; Beckett 2007).

The United States and Russian calls for inclusion of third countries’ nuclear forces in strategic arms control regularly turned up during the US-Soviet Union (USSR), and later -Russian negotiations on strategic arms control. The choice of actors the US and Russia called for, however, depended on their perception of these actors – whether they are competitors and adversaries, or allies. A recent example is the 2019 US President Donald Trump’s attempt to involve China in the dialogue regarding the extension of “The Treaty between the United States of America and the Russian Federation on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms” (The New START), with Russians responding that, in that case, France and the UK should be involved as well (*WSJ* 2020; *TASS* 2020). However, China refused to join these talks, and declared certain preconditions for their participation in strategic arms control, such as: further reduction of the two largest nuclear arsenals possessed by the USA and Russia

in order for them to come closer to the Chinese level, reduction of the role of nuclear weapons in security and defence strategies and as a symbol of the great power status, as well as negotiations of a multilateral, not trilateral, nuclear arms control agreement, especially concerning the “no-first use” policy (Kostić 2020). For their refusal to join negotiations in 2020, the US accused China of violating the NPT Article VI, which obliges all NWS to pursue negotiations on disarmament in good faith and to end the arms race (*The Economic Times* 2020). Yet, what about France and the UK? The question remains what prospects are there for their participation in the strategic arms control negotiations and treaties?

In order to answer this question, in the first part of the article, I further explain and apply the Cold-War era concept of strategic stability which has been a cornerstone of strategic arms control architecture for several decades (for various meanings of the notion “strategic stability” see Colby and Gerson 2013). In the second part of the article, I present the British and French nuclear policies and capabilities and take them as a given for the purpose of the discussion in the last section. In this discussion, I define and explain three sets of preconditions for the British and French participation in strategic arms control and conclude what the possibilities are for the multilateralization of the strategic arms control negotiations and treaties through their involvement.

The concept of strategic stability applied in this paper suggests that the first two steps in the process of strategic arms control multilateralization would be to achieve consensus between the USA and Russia on (1) the very necessity of the multilateralization of strategic arms control, and (2) a framework agreement on the terms of this process (consensus about which actors they should invite, scope of the treaty or architecture of the treaties, and verification measures), and then to (3) obtain consent of the invited actors to join the strategic arms control negotiations and treaties previously formulated by the USA and Russia.

Having in mind these steps, I argue that the UK and France would be more likely to enter into formal strategic arms control if at least three sets of preconditions are met. The first pertains the US position, since the US and NATO would need to change their defence planning and calculations significantly in order to allow the French and British participation in strategic arms control. The second concerns equality, since both the UK and France hold that the US and Russia should first reduce the level of their nuclear

arsenals to the British and French level, as well as to accept equal participation of these two countries in treaty negotiations. At the same time, other actors must be fully committed to the non-proliferation norm. Finally, both states require a certain strategic environment that would favour their inclusion in strategic arms control. This entails at least: balance of conventional forces in Europe; global elimination of other WMD (biological and chemical weapons) and state-sponsored terrorism, as well as non-proliferation of nuclear arms, ballistic missiles, and other potentially disruptive technologies; limitation of anti-ballistic missile defence in Europe and; reduction or elimination of non-strategic missiles in Europe.

STRATEGIC STABILITY AND ARMS CONTROL TREATIES

I maintain that it is important to explore strategic arms control negotiations and treaties, and the possibilities of their multilateralization because they are a significant part of strategic stability preservation. The strategic stability concept as I believe is the most relevant concept for explaining the reasons why the USA and USSR/Russia engage in the strategic arms control process, and why they, from time to time, repeat their calls for the multilateralization of strategic arms control, especially if it has to do with the reduction of their forces.

Although not immediately termed “strategic stability”, this concept developed gradually over the course of the 1950s as a result of the “logical progression in thinking about the consequences of the nuclear revolution, the challenge of surprise attack, the kinds of targets upon which nuclear weapons might be used, how a nuclear war might be fought, and the requirements of credible deterrence” (Gerson 2013, 3). At that moment, the concept started to be developed around the USA-USSR relations, since they were the main competing parties in the international system of that time, and until 1952 the only possessors of nuclear weapons. Since these countries’ proposals (the US’s “Baruch plan” and USSR’s “Gromyko plan”) for disarmament failed almost immediately, the two countries had to find a way to manage their relationship in the context of nuclear weapons possession, which led to the establishment of strategic stability equation between them.

Although there are various definitions of strategic stability, for the purpose of this article, I use this term to mark the specific relationship between the USA and Russia that aims to create conditions which would allow them to avoid nuclear war. In its essence is the effort to maintain the effectiveness of strategic offensive forces and second-strike capabilities. This is illustrated, for example, in the 1972 Unilateral Statement of the US Delegation on the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT I), which notes that “the US Delegation believes that an objective of the follow-on negotiations should be to constrain and reduce on a long-term basis, threats to the survivability of our respective strategic retaliatory forces” (SALT I 1972: Unilateral Statements). It has been of paramount importance, therefore, to define what constitutes “threats to the survivability of” strategic retaliatory forces of the USA and Soviet Union/Russia, and to institute an environment which will contribute to limiting or eliminating these threats. I argue that this have included (1) the US-Russia parity in strategic forces and commitment to their modernization, (2) maintaining the “parity/disparity relationship” relating to other actors, which meant curbing proliferation, preserving a large disparity that existed compared to other NWS in order to deter them from “rushing into parity” with the USA and USSR/Russia, and preserve the credibility of their security guarantees. Furthermore, this concept also entailed the preservation of a bilateral form of strategic arms control and exclusion of third parties’ (British, French and Chinese) forces from any agreement that involved limitation or reduction of nuclear forces, and, lastly (3) when it comes to scope, the reduction or stabilization of all the other weapons that may diminish effectiveness of the US and USSR/Russia strategic offensive forces (such as anti-ballistic missile defence, conventional forces, and other weapons and forces from various warfighting domains) (for influence of these factors on strategic stability see also Yongming and Chalmers 2012, 11–14).

Reflecting on the first point, it is important to note that all treaties on the limitation and reduction of strategic offensive arms have permitted modernization and replacement of strategic offensive forces (SALT I 1972: Article IV; START I 1991, Article V; New START 2010, Article V). The New START has additionally differentiated between “new types” and “new kinds” of strategic arms, whereas “new types” refers to new classes of intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), submarine-launched

ballistic missiles (SLBMs), and heavy bombers equipped for nuclear armaments that meet the definitions of the Treaty, while “new kinds” signifies “new offensive arms of strategic range that do not meet the Treaty’s definitions of these existing strategic offensive arms” (New START, with Protocol 2010, 15). For at least the last fifteen years, all NWS have been conducting their modernization programmes which have raised, I believe, at least two important questions - one regarding the new types and kinds of weapons and warfare domains that might influence strategic stability, and the other about nuclear testing.

As regards the second point, early attempts of the USA and Soviet Union to establish strategic stability revealed four main points of contention: maintaining quantitative and qualitative balance, purview of the treaties (limited scope or comprehensive), verification provisions (with or without intrusive inspection measures, such as “on-site” inspections), and relation to other NWS, as well as NNWS, which should be committed to the non-proliferation norm (for these early attempts see Lebovic 2013, 9–41). While the first three points referred to the USA-USSR relationship, the fourth was the recognition that strategic stability was not only the function of their bilateral balance of power, but also the level of forces of other NWS and NNWS. I call this relationship the “parity/disparity element” of strategic stability. This argument is in contrast to claims that the existence of a negotiated bilateral process between the USA and Russia has its own logic, to which the level of other countries’ nuclear forces, such as the French, are foreign (Tertrais 2020, 51). Arms control treaties have been significant instruments for maintaining this “parity/disparity” element of strategic stability, especially through strengthening the non-proliferation norm and commitments to disarmament. I maintain that the possible disruption of this element is one of the reasons for renewed US and Russian calls for multilateralization of strategic arms control.

During the strategic arms control negotiations, the USA and Soviet Union/Russia had difficulties to agreeing on the subjects and levels of parity. During the SALT and START negotiations, for example, the Soviets thought that the allowed US totals should include the European systems, since “those forces would most likely be used in coordination with U.S. forces in time of war” (Lebovic 2013, 151–152). However, the US ruled out non-US forces involvement in the negotiating formula since they were

“under the control of sovereign states with their own decisional processes, considerations, and sensitivities” (Lebovic 2013, 151–152). By “agreeing to disagree” on the actors that should be included in strategic arms control, the US and USSR/Russia have merely preserved the bilateral form of their strategic arms control agreements. Meanwhile, all other NWS have been constantly supporting the US and Russia to continue with bilateral strategic arms reduction agreements and assuring them that they will keep “minimal” (UK), “strictly sufficient” (France) and “lean, but effective” nuclear forces (China).

As for the last point, I argue that the strategic offensive forces reduction has been a culmination of a long incremental process of limiting actors and capabilities/forces (nuclear and conventional) that could endanger the effectiveness of US and USSR strategic offensive forces. This means that a formal agreement on the reduction of the strategic offensive arms of the two superpowers in 1991 (START) was possible only after the NPT inaugurated the non-proliferation and disarmament norms in 1968, the adoption of the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABM) limited missile defence in 1972, the elimination of intermediate-range nuclear forces in Europe owing to The Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF Treaty) of 1987, and the balancing of conventional forces in Europe through the 1990 Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty (CFE). The 1968 NPT (which entered into force in 1970) was the first step in the process of establishing the non-proliferation and disarmament norms. By inhibiting the spread of nuclear weapons, the NPT “has contributed to the creation of an international security environment that has facilitated U.S. and Russian arms reduction efforts” (State Department telegram 212527 1992, 2). Additionally, the strategic arms control agreements have constantly recognized the relationship between strategic offensive and defensive arms. The SALT I Preamble and provision on the simultaneous exchange of instruments of ratification of the SALT I and the ABM Treaty (SALT I, Article VIII), in order for the SALT I to enter into force, are prime examples. The limitation of the intermediate-range and shorter-range forces was also important for strategic arms reduction, as seen in the Soviet concerns that “the United States could hit the Soviet Union from Europe when Soviet intermediate-range systems lacked the capability to hit the United States in turn” (Lebovic 2013, 152). The USSR even proposed to have parity in the INF systems not only with the

USA, but also with the British and French strategic forces (FAS, INF Chronology). The INF negotiations were, after suspension in 1983, resumed in January 1985 with their inclusion in the Nuclear and Space Talks (NST) (along with the strategic offensive arms and defence and space weapons) (FAS, INF chronology). By the INF treaty's disarmament deadline (1 June 1991), the parties had destroyed all of their missiles covered by the Treaty provisions. After balancing conventional forces in Europe through the CFE agreement in November 1990, the US and Russia finally signed the START on 31 July 1991.

This comprehensiveness of the arms control architecture will be, as well, the precondition for the future US-Russia strategic arms control agreements, especially after the New START expires in 2026 (unless some of two parties decide to withdraw from it before its expiration). In the US, the military is calling for the adoption of a broader strategic deterrence review that evaluates nuclear, space, cyber, and missile defence issues as a unified whole" (Reif 2021). Also, the Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov said in February 2021 that "Russia's approach is to find a security equation that comprehensively takes into account all the factors that are important from the point of view of strategic stability" (AA 2021). He explained that this is not just about nuclear weapons, but the entire range of offensive or defensive weapons in nuclear and non-nuclear equipment, which could be included in the package of interrelated agreements on strategic stability, and not only in one agreement (AA 2021). This all-inclusiveness is also important for the UK and France since, if not constrained, some elements, such as missile defence or intermediate-range and shorter-range missiles, might question the ability and credibility of their strategic forces. The UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office also articulated in 2009 that "reducing and eliminating nuclear weapons without also addressing the balance of power in other respects could be dangerously destabilising" (Xiaobing and Ritchie 2012,31). Finally, French leaders have stressed that "broad steps on disarmament must take into account a wide range of issues, including missile defence, conventional and space capabilities" (Pifer and Tyson 2016, 20).

NUCLEAR POLICIES AND CAPABILITIES OF FRANCE AND THE UK: POLICY OF CONSTRUCTIVE AMBIGUITY AND MINIMAL CREDIBLE NUCLEAR CAPABILITY

The aim of this part of the article is not to discuss the accuracy of the French and British official positions contained in the strategic security and defence documents and policymakers' statements on their nuclear forces, but to determine and describe them in order to have a better understanding of the position from which the UK and France assess the possible participation in formal strategic arms control.

From the policy perspective, both France and the UK stress the importance of nuclear weapons for their defence and refuse to adopt the "no-first use" policy. The nuclear forces are a "core element of their national and Allied defence strategies" and both countries are "determined to maintain only a minimum credible nuclear capability, consistent with the strategic and security context of their commitments under Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty" (Teutates Treaty 2010, Preamble). The UK would use nuclear weapons in extreme circumstances of self-defence, including the defence of NATO allies; and France in cases of aggression against its vital interests, whatever the means employed (Tertrais 2007, 6). Neither France, nor the UK would use or threaten the use of nuclear weapons against any NNWS that is a party to the NPT, but they maintain "calculated ambiguity" regarding the use of nuclear weapons against a WMD threat (Xiaobing and Ritchie 2012, 21). Additionally, the 2021 UK Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy states that the Britain "reserves the right" to use nuclear weapons if future threats of WMD, "such as chemical and biological capabilities, or emerging technologies that could have a comparable impact, makes it necessary" (Global Britain in competitive age 2021, 77). Both countries remain deliberately ambiguous about when, how, and on what scale they would consider using nuclear weapons.

The UK and France have been officially committed to verifiable multilateral disarmament and have unilaterally been reducing their nuclear forces in the wake of the Cold War and the USA-USSR/Russia bilateral strategic offensive arms reductions, but were never part to any such agreement. On the other hand,

the greatest difference between the UK and France is the level of dependence on the US for the maintenance of the credibility and effectiveness of their strategic forces, where the UK is much more dependent than France.

France with approximately 290 and the UK with roughly 215 warheads have the smallest nuclear arsenals among the five NWS (Arms Control Association 2020a). While the UK relies on the sea-leg nuclear deterrence only, France has an additional airborne leg, but still largely depends on its nuclear submarine force (4 Triomphant-class SSBNs) which carries approximately 80% of its overall nuclear arsenal (Arms Control Association 2019). Both countries carry out a Continuous-At-Sea Deterrence with one SSBN always on patrol.

Some authors perceive the UK as the most “progressive” NWS based “on its commitment to a ‘minimum’ arsenal, policy and practice reflected in the nuclear force size, operational posture, and declaratory policy”, but also recognize its “deep and abiding commitment to nuclear deterrence as the cornerstone of British security” (Ritchie 2012, 21). Andrew Futter (2021, 141) writes that the UK nuclear policy rests on five central pillars: (1) commitment to a minimum nuclear deterrent capability; (2) continuous-at-sea-deterrence; (3) maintenance of strong links with the USA; (4) formal commitment to NATO and; (5) legal commitment to nuclear disarmament.

Although with the strongest anti-nuclear movement, the UK has recently decided to increase the upper limit of its nuclear arsenal to no more than 260, instead of 180, by the mid-2020s and to lower the transparency over its nuclear arsenal (Global Britain in competitive age 2021, 76–77). The strategic stability concept would suggest that in the new context created by “Brexit” and great power competition, the UK may want to have a nuclear arsenal of around 300 nuclear warheads, thus attaining numerical balance with China and France. This increase of the nuclear forces cap may also be seen as having a symbolical effect in the context of making “Britain great again” and its desire to strengthen its global role. Around 300-400 deployed warheads of the UK, France or China is also what appears these countries think is necessary to “inflict unacceptable damage on an opponent in a retaliatory strike which has been central to their nuclear planning” (Yongming and Chalmers 2012, 11). Having in mind the importance of the effectiveness of the second-strike

capabilities, the new UK decision could be, as well, a result of the development of new Russian weapon systems and the deployment of a wider and modernized ballistic missile defence around Moscow, as was claimed by the UK Defence Minister Ben Wallace (BBC 2021). Finally, the crisis of the US-Russia arms control architecture and adjustments to the overall US nuclear arsenal modernization process, especially the one announced by the previous Trump administration, must also be taken into account when considering the new UK decision to increase the cap on its nuclear stockpile. With regard to the issue of transparency, the UK decision to *return* to the lower transparency level on nuclear forces is similar to China's strategy regarding transparency over their nuclear weapons.¹ This strategy holds that China cannot have the same level of transparency as the two states with the largest arsenals (the USA and Russia) because it has a much lower level of nuclear forces. Instead, the level of transparency about its nuclear forces should correspond or be proportional to its "lean, but effective" nuclear forces, nuclear "no-first use" policy (Riqiang 2016, 229–230) and absence of alliance (Xiaobing and Ritchie 2012, 29). This approach to transparency is something I call *contingent transparency*, since the level of transparency is contingent upon the level of forces one state possesses – the lower the level of forces, the lower the level of transparency. This approach has great implications for the issue of verification as well, especially the one that would include "on-site" inspections, since intensive verification measures would be unacceptable for states with the smallest nuclear arsenals, for reasons of preserving the effectiveness of their retaliatory forces.

Because of a strong link with the USA some scholars describe the UK nuclear forces as "inter-dependent" (Heuser 1997, 63) or even "dependent" to the extent that without the US support the UK "would very probably cease to be a nuclear weapon state" (Ritchie 2012, 92–93). The US-UK 1958 Mutual Defence Agreement, renewed by the two parties several times, will be in effect until the end of 2024. Some organizations in the UK consider that constant renewals of this treaty, without public or parliamentary debate, constitute a violation of Article VI of the NPT by both countries, leading them to label

¹ I use the word "return" because the UK Strategic Defence Review from 1998, point 15, for example, stated that "Maintaining a degree of uncertainty about our precise capabilities is a necessary element of credible deterrence" (UK Strategic Defence Review 1998).

the US-UK cooperation under this treaty as “secret nuclear relationship” (CND 2018, 2). The UK and the USA also have the 1963 Polaris Sales Agreement and the 2007 Defense Trade Cooperation Treaty. The UK-US cooperation includes: Trident II D-5 missile extension of the service life from 2028 until 2042 (Kile and Kristensen 2014, 484), production of the new class of UK’s and the US’s SSBNs *Columbia* and *Dreadnought* which will be conducted in both countries (Wolfe 2020, 3), parallel replacement warhead program (for W93), although London is responsible for the design and production of its warhead fleet (Reif and Bugos 2021), and preservation of US-based joint stock. At the same time, the UK government claims that it maintains “full operational independence” (National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015, 35). British nuclear forces are officially committed to NATO under the terms of the 1962 Nassau Agreement that facilitated the US Polaris SLBM system purchase and, later, Trident for the Royal Navy (Xiaobing and Ritchie 2012, 23). According to this agreement, the British nuclear forces would be “assigned to and targeted in accordance with NATO plans, except in circumstances where the British government decides that its supreme national interests are at stake” (Xiaobing and Ritchie 2012, 25–26). This also means that the size of UK nuclear forces would largely depend on the NATO’s and UK’s target sets and defence planning. Pointing to the “Moscow Criterion”, which assumed the British forces targeting Moscow during the Cold War, Davis claims that Moscow remains the primary, informal target of the British Trident force today (Davis 2015, vi), and that the “logic of nuclear deterrence continues to trump the logic of nuclear disarmament within the UK and NATO” (Davis 2015, vii).

On the other hand, France has always maintained national control of all the technologies and the related scientific and industrial tools essential to the constitution of forces and total national independence with regard to the planning and decision on the use of its weapons (Tertrais 2020, 44). Also, successive French governments claimed that nuclear deterrence is its ultimate guarantee of sovereignty (French White Paper 2013, 19–20). France first developed a nuclear triad, including strategic and tactical weapons (Granholm and Rydqvist 2018, 40), but after the Cold War, in 1996, it eliminated land-based ICBMs and retained only a nuclear dyad. Tertrais asserts that France had

always wanted equal status with the USA and the UK, in order not to depend completely on the Anglo-Saxons for its defence, as well as to share its strategic autonomy culture with the EU, which is not possible without nuclear weapons. (Tertrais 2009, 5–6).² At the same time, it is important to have in mind that during the Cold War any kind of proliferation of nuclear weapons in Europe was unacceptable for the Soviet Union, be it in the form of West Germany as sole new possessor of nuclear weapons, or as part of some kind of multilateral control of nuclear weapons in Europe, such as one of NATO, a “European Federation” or a “European state” (Alberque 2017, 17–28).

Ultimately, France and the UK share commitments to each other’s defence both through NATO (multilateral) and through bilateral agreements. When it comes to bilateral cooperation on nuclear matters, in 1992 the two countries established a Joint Commission on Nuclear Policy and Doctrine, and confirmed their commitments at the Summits in Saint Malo in 1998 and Le Touquet in 2003, and formalized it through the Lancaster House agreements (2010). Under the Lancaster House agreements, the two parties undertook to build a long-term mutually beneficial partnership in defence and security with the aims of, among others, “ensuring the viability and safety of their national deterrents, consistent with the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons” (Treaty on UK-France cooperation 2010, Article 1). As envisaged by the Teutates Treaty, the UK and France cooperate in the fields of safety and security of nuclear weapons, stockpile certification, and countering nuclear or radiological terrorism (Teutates Treaty 2010, Article 1.1). This involves cooperation on the nuclear stockpile stewardship and creation of a new joint facility with guaranteed and unhindered access for 50 years at Valduc in France (Expérimentations de Physique Utilisant la Radiographie Eclair (EPURE)) and the Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE) in Aldermaston in the UK (Teutates Treaty 2010, Article 1.2). According to the British government, all goals set in the Lancaster House treaties were achieved (building a joint nuclear facility; increasing cooperation around the aircraft carriers; developing the UK and French complex weapons systems and establishment of the Combined Joint Expeditionary Force which reached full operating capacity in November 2020) (Brader 2021).

2 Also, on the role of France in maintaining the idea of “Euro-bomb” see Egeland and Pelopidas 2020.

PRECONDITIONS FOR THE FRENCH AND BRITISH PARTICIPATION IN THE FORMAL STRATEGIC ARMS CONTROL

The various USA and Soviet Union/Russia demands to include third parties in strategic arms control has not yet led to its multilateralization. In this section, I will explore three sets of preconditions for the British and French participation in the strategic arms control that I found relevant from analysing the treaties negotiations, contents of treaties, and various statements attached to them, as well as strategic documents of France and the UK and officials' statements from these and other relevant countries.

The US and NATO considerations on participation of British and French forces in strategic arms control

The US demands to include China in strategic arms control have always been followed by the Soviet Union's/Russian calls to the UK and France to join the process, primarily due to their participation in NATO. In September 2020, the Russian Ambassador to the US Anatoly Antonov said that Russia's priority in a broader arms control treaty would be to get the UK and France involved as well, since they "not only possess nuclear arsenals comparable to that of China, but are also US NATO allies closely coordinating their nuclear policies" (RT 2020a). However, the US and NATO position, confirmed by their officials again in late 2020, remains the one of excluding French and British nuclear forces from any agreement, preservation of the bilateral US-Russia arms control regime, and engagement of only China in the dialogue on nuclear arms control (RT 2020b; NATO 2021b).

The "dependent" or "inter-dependent" character of the UK forces and membership of both the UK and France in NATO set specific constraints on their participation in strategic arms control and make it unlikely that they could make any decision on this issue independently. The membership in the collective defence system such as NATO implies obligations for both the UK and France in terms of defence and they can use all means, including nuclear weapons, to respond to possible aggression against any of the members of the Alliance. While the UK forces have been officially committed to NATO since 1962, the French policy has

been one of close coordination with the NATO nuclear policy. The French President Emmanuel Macron (2020) in February 2020 declared that France did not take part in the Alliance's nuclear planning mechanisms and would not do so in the future, but it would continue to contribute to "political-level discussions aiming to strengthen the Alliance's nuclear culture." According to NATO, both the British and the French nuclear weapons represent separate decision-making centres in Europe, which any adversary planning an attack on some of the NATO member country must take into account (NATO 2021b).

In terms of strategic stability and strategic arms control, I believe that the French and British membership in NATO created at least three major dilemmas for the Soviets: A dilemma about subjects and levels of parity (the US with or without British and French strategic forces), a dilemma about possible circumvention of strategic arms control treaty provisions, and a dilemma about the nature of the British and French nuclear forces. During the Cold War negotiations, the Soviet Union tried to mitigate these dilemmas through: (1) the inclusion of the French and British forces as part of the US forces, thus representing the single object of parity, and (2) the conduct of separate USSR-UK and USSR-France bilateral negotiations (Schroeder 1987, 26). Instead, historical record shows that the most the Soviets could do was to: (1) deliver unilateral statements regarding the French and British forces inclusion in US counts, (2) oblige the US through the treaties provisions not to transfer strategic weapons to their allies, and (3) oblige France and the UK to take political commitments to maintain minimal strategic forces.

In 1972, for example, the USSR Unilateral Statement to the SALT I Agreement (SALT I 1972, Unilateral Statements) stated that "if during the period of effectiveness of the Agreement U.S. allies in NATO should increase the number of their modern submarines to exceed the numbers of submarines, they would have operational or under construction on the date of signature of the Agreement, the Soviet Union will have the right to a corresponding increase in the number of its submarines." However, the USA did not accept this statement's validity. Also, during the INF Treaty negotiations in 1982, the Soviet INF Proposal was to include French and British strategic forces in the US count, which the US rejected through their criteria for the INF agreement (FAS, INF Chronology).

The Soviets were, also, concerned that the US could apparently “fulfil” the provisions of the strategic arms treaties through transfer of restricted or prohibited weapons systems to their allies, which is also why the USSR insisted on the inclusion of France and the UK in the negotiations (Schroeder 1987, 26). They tried to mitigate this dilemma through treaty provisions. For example, SALT II (Article XII) stated that in “order to ensure the viability and effectiveness of this Treaty, each Party undertakes not to circumvent the provisions of this Treaty, through any other state or states, or in any other manner.” Also, the First Agreed Statement to Article XVI of the START I stipulated that “The Parties agree, in the interest of the viability and effectiveness of the Treaty, not to transfer strategic offensive arms subject to the limitations of the Treaty to third States.” On this matter, the US issued a statement on 29 July 1991 that the US has this kind of cooperation only with the UK, to which “independent nuclear deterrent” US attached great importance “in helping maintain world peace.” (START I 1991, First Agreed Statement).

Finally, one of the reasons why Soviet Union demanded inclusion of France and the UK in the negotiations on strategic offensive arms control was its belief that any weapon system that can target the territory of one of the superpowers is “strategic”, which then excludes Soviet systems that can target American allies in Europe and Asia, but includes French, British and American extended systems which could target Soviet Union (Schroeder 1987, 25). This definition of “strategic”, however, was not accepted, but only the one that referred to the range of ballistic missiles – “ranges in excess of the shortest distance between the north eastern border of the continental United States and the north western border of the continental USSR” (SALT I 1972, Agreed Statements), which is about 5,500 km and longer.

The United States and its NATO allies’ opinion has always been to keep the French and British nuclear forces independent and exclude them from any USA and Soviet Union/Russia arms control negotiations (Lebovic 2013, 151; Gottemoeller 2019). In the 1980s, one of the US criteria for the INF treaty conclusion, which allies agreed with, was the “exclusion of third countries (i.e. British and French) nuclear deterrent forces from *any* (emphasis added) agreement” (FAS, INF chronology). Sir Lawrence Freedman (2009, 46), also, noted that “there has always been a clear determination to protect the British nuclear force from arms

control.” In 2020, during the debate on the New START extension, the US special envoy Marshall Billingslea confirmed this position by stating that “when speaking about a future treaty, we should keep in mind a tripartite treaty” and added that “Washington will keep the UK and France out of the deal, as neither are ‘actively developing and deploying nukes on the same scale as China’ (RT 2020b).

The US-Russia disagreement on the actors they should include in strategic arms control resulted in the continuation of bilateral format of strategic arms control and the political commitments of other NWS to maintain minimal nuclear forces. During the START Treaty conclusion in 1991, the UK Foreign Secretary Hurd, for example, had to issue a statement that “the British strategic force will remain a minimum one in no way comparable to the nuclear forces of the Soviet Union and the United States” (START I 1991, Other Statements). Also, during a visit to London in 1992, the Russian President Boris Yeltsin urged Britain, China, and France to include their nuclear forces in international disarmament talks. They disagreed, however, for the reason of large disparity of their strategic forces in comparison to US and Russian ones which “will have to sharply reduce warhead numbers first before general disarmament can be considered” (*Tampa Bay Times* 2005). Faced again with inability to include them directly in the strategic arms control, the Russian president accepted the UK’s requests not to emphasize the issue of British participation in international negotiations, and stated that the British forces were significantly smaller than Russian ones and that the issue was therefore “not worth talking about” (Freedman 2009, 46). Besides officials’ statements, British and French strategic security and defence documents have constantly repeated the commitment to “minimal deterrence” (UK) and “strictly sufficient” nuclear forces (France). Keeping the minimal size of British and French strategic forces, which are at the level of considerable difference compared to the US and Russian strategic arsenals, has been of paramount importance for the Russian acceptance of their exclusion from strategic arms control.

But, will the UK and France accept participation in strategic arms control negotiations even if the US changes its position and, in agreement with Russia, calls France and UK to join strategic arms control? I believe that this would certainly be a necessary, but not a sufficient condition for the British and French

participation in strategic arms control, since some of the drivers for their decision lie in the preservation of their status and deterrence capability. These considerations I draw from the frequently reiterated French and British requirements or preconditions for their participation in strategic arms control, as well as by analogy with their approach to other nuclear arms control treaties.

Parity in forces and negotiations on equal footing

The second set of preconditions is about equality. Both France and the UK want active and equal participation in the arms control negotiations and treaties, and not simply to join those that the US and Russia previously negotiated on their own, which is a condition that contradicts the strategic stability model. This argument was once used by the French president de Gaulle as an explanation (even if considered as just an excuse) for the French refusal to accede to the NPT in 1968. He maintained that France “was not adequately consulted by Washington and Moscow when the treaty was being negotiated” (*The New York Times* 1991). Secondly, both France and the UK stress that they would be part of the strategic nuclear arms control negotiations only when the two nuclear superpowers reduce their level of nuclear weapons to the French and British level (now around 200-300), and commence negotiations on complete disarmament (Macron 2020; Hitchens 2019). This precondition also contradicts the strategic stability model. However, both British and French position on the participation in multilateral nuclear arms control negotiations, in the case the US and Russia reduce their strategic arsenals, is ambiguous. On the one hand, they emphasize that they would reduce their already “minimal” nuclear arsenals only if the two nuclear superpowers had reduced their level of nuclear weapons first (Beckett 2007; Tertrais 2009, 15). But, on the other hand, this would not automatically be the case since the UK “deterrence requirements... does not depend on the size of other nation’s arsenals but on the minimum necessary to deter any threat to our vital interests” (UK Strategic Defence Review 1998, 24) and the level of French “arsenal is not dependent upon those of others”, as claimed by French political leaders (Tertrais 2009, 15). Additionally, France makes participation in the negotiations conditional on the existence of a certain relationship with others and stresses that it will not set up the goal of “disarming our democracies

while other powers, even dictatorships, would (retain) or develop their nuclear weapons... nor sign any agreement” (Macron 2020).

Strategic environment that favours further reduction of strategic forces

Finally, the third set of preconditions for French and British participation in the strategic arms control is the creation of a certain environment regarding other factors that could undermine efforts for reduction of nuclear arms. They include: (1) balance of conventional forces in Europe, (2) global elimination of other WMD (biological and chemical weapons) and state-sponsored terrorism, as well as non-proliferation of nuclear arms, ballistic missiles and other potentially disruptive technologies, (3) limitation of anti-ballistic missile defence in Europe and (4) limitation or elimination of non-strategic missiles in Europe.

Besides reduction of the quantitative and qualitative gap between the superpowers and the French nuclear arsenals, in 1983, France highlighted two other conditions for its participation in multilateral negotiations on nuclear arms control: reduction of imbalances in conventional weapons in Europe with the global elimination of chemical and biological weapons, and end of the offensive-defensive weapons race with limitations on anti-ballistic missiles defence, since it could endanger the effectiveness of the French nuclear deterrence (Tertrais 2009, 12). An additional argument in the 1990s would have been the uncertainty surrounding the WMD and ballistic missile technology proliferation as well as state-sponsored terrorism (Tertrais 2009, 3; National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015, point 4.64).

Commenting on the importance of the missile defence for French and British nuclear planning, Mawdsley (2013, 107) highlighted that the US missile defence “has caused more disruption to the established nuclear politics in Europe than even the end of the Cold War did.” France and the UK preferred the US not to deploy strategic ballistic missile defence (Strategic Defence Initiative (SDI) in the 1980s and National Missile Defence in the 1990s and 2000s), since it would have undermined their minimal nuclear forces effectiveness in the event the Soviets had deployed their strategic defence systems. They were strong supporters of the ABM Treaty and pushed for its preservation after the Cold War, since it made their deterrence possible and credible (Tertrais

2009,9). France argued that invulnerability undermined strategic stability and deterrence, and that it would be willing to take part in strategic nuclear arms control negotiations only in the presence of limitations of strategic defences (Dietl 2018, 42).

Regarding the progress with respect to limiting non-strategic weapons and missiles, this issue was raised several times during the strategic arms control negotiations. I have already mentioned the Soviet Union's and later Russia's concerns and dilemmas regarding the character of French and British nuclear forces, as well as its attempts to mitigate these concerns. Recently, France has called for stronger European involvement and participation in the negotiations on the INF systems (Macron 2020). However, it is important to underline that the French President Macron spoke only about the INF Treaty, since it would constrain large amounts of Russian tactical nuclear weapons, which could be a threat to France and the UK, but would not constrain these states' strategic nuclear arsenals. However, in the case of multilateralization of only the INF negotiations, French and British strategic nuclear forces would remain intact, while Russian forces would be considerably constrained, which would be hardly acceptable for Russia. After the withdrawal of the USA from the INF Treaty in 2019, the Russian proposal was to impose a moratorium on all short and medium-range missiles deployment in Europe (Arms Control Association 2020b). But this proposition was not accepted by the NATO countries, which is mostly the consequence of the Ukraine crisis, as well as disagreements on the verification of such a moratorium (*The Moscow Times* 2019). Furthermore, there are calls in NATO member countries in Eastern and North-Eastern Europe for NATO to deploy missiles with conventional weapons that were previously prohibited by the INF Treaty in order to most effectively respond to Russia's advantage in land-based missile systems and create the "local balance" between the EU and Russia (Simón 2019, 24).

CONCLUSION

The New START extension in February 2021 for another five years gives the USA and Russia additional time to create a framework for the multilateralization of strategic arms control and agree on the actors they would like to involve. However, that

would not be the end of the road for the multilateralization of strategic arms control, since other NWS have their conditions as well. In this article I have tried to identify what these conditions are for France and the UK and, according to them, what are the prospects of the French and British participation in strategic arms control. This identification was possible through examination of various primary and secondary sources, including chronologies of negotiations, and the contents of strategic arms control treaties and other relevant treaties, as well as French and British official strategic documents and officials' statements. In the end, I conclude that at least three sets of preconditions determine French and British participation in the strategic offensive arms control negotiation and agreements.

Firstly, having in mind that both the UK and France are part of NATO and that the UK forces are specifically connected to the US forces and defence planning, it is important that the US and NATO change their historically maintained position regarding the French and British participation in strategic arms control. Secondly, even if the US changes this position, there are some other conditions that France and UK officially highlight, or that can be drawn from their position on the participation in other nuclear arms control negotiation and treaties, as the preconditions for their participation in the strategic arms control. Both the UK and France would accept participation in these negotiations and treaties only on an equal footing and when the two largest strategic arms possessors reduce their strategic forces to the French and British level. At the same time, other actors must respect the non-proliferation norm. Thirdly, France and the UK view their nuclear forces as already minimal or strictly sufficient, and they are unwilling to subject them to treaty limitations and verification processes unless other security challenges are met as well. Their forces credibility and effectiveness remain the strong factors that influence their position on the possible participation in strategic arms control. Thus, the strategic environment that favours further strategic offensive arms reduction must include at least (a) restoring the balance of conventional forces in Europe by reviving the Russian adherence to the CFE Treaty or in any other way, (b) global elimination of other WMD (biological and chemical weapons) and state sponsored terrorism since UK and France nuclear weapon policies do not rule out the possible nuclear weapons use in the event of an attack by any other WMD. It also includes nu-

clear arms, ballistic missiles and other potentially disruptive technologies non-proliferation, (c) both the US and Russian anti-ballistic missile defence limitation. France and the UK would not prefer any US proposal that would force Russia to develop strategic defences that would undermine their nuclear deterrent. This is now evident with the increase of the ceiling for British nuclear forces, (d) limitation or elimination of non-strategic missiles in Europe. France promotes the multilateralization of the INF negotiations, but conditions the strategic arms talks. In this way, it tries to limit Russian tactical nuclear systems, which NATO countries see as one of the greatest security threat in Europe, and from the Cold War period constantly try to limit it. Following the strategic stability model presented in the first part of the article and having in mind previously mentioned preconditions, in the sum, I argued in this article that the UK and France would be more likely to enter into formal strategic arms control if at least three sets of preconditions are met – the US and NATO “permission”, equality and an improved strategic environment – which makes their participation in this process any time soon highly unlikely.

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ФРАНЦУСКА, УЈЕДИЊЕНО КРАЉЕВСТВО И ПЕРСПЕКТИВЕ МУЛТИЛАТЕРАЛИЗАЦИЈЕ ФОРМАЛНЕ СТРАТЕШКЕ КОНТРОЛЕ НАОРУЖАЊА

Сажетак

Током америчко-руске дебате о продужетку Новог СТАРТ-а током 2019. и 2020. године, обе земље су поново покренуле питање мултилатерализације стратешке офанзивне контроле наоружања. Међутим, док су САД позвале на учешће Кине, Русија је још једном поновила хладноратовски став некадашњег Совјетског Савеза о неопходности учешћа Француске и Велике Британије у контроли стратешког наоружања. Имајући у виду одбијање Кине да се придружи разговорима о продужетка Новог СТАРТ-а, на које их је у више наврата позивала Трампова администрација, из различитих разлога, сврха овог чланка је да истражи ставове Француске

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и Велике Британије, две европске државе и чланице НАТО-а са стратешким оружјем, у односу на руски позив и изгледе и предуслове за мултилатерализацију контроле стратешког наоружања кроз њихово учешће. У овом настојању ауторка користи концепт стратешке стабилности и анализира низ примарних и секундарних извора, укључујући хронологију преговора и садржај уговора о контроли стратешког наоружања и других релевантних уговора, француских и британских стратешких докумената, као и изјаве званичника из ових и других релевантних земаља. Ауторка закључује да би се Велика Британија и Француска вероватније укључиле у формалну контролу стратешког наоружања ако су испуњена најмање три скупа предуслова - „дозвола” САД -а и НАТО -а, једнакост у стратешким снагама и током преговора и побољшано стратешко окружење.

Кључне речи: контрола наоружања, стратешка стабилност, европска безбедност, нуклеарне снаге у Европи, нуклеарно оружје

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