

CSIS European Trilateral Track II Nuclear Dialogue

2012 Consensus Statement

25 January 2013

1. In an effort to increase trilateral nuclear dialogue among France, the United Kingdom and the United States, the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) established a group of high-level Track 2 nuclear experts to discuss nuclear issues and to identify areas of consensus among the three countries, the catalyst of which was preparing a unified P-3 approach to the 2010 Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference. From 2009-2012, the dialogue has hosted three meetings a year (one in each nation's capital) and produced consensus policy statements signed by participants in order to promote trilateral understanding of the nuclear challenges facing the P-3. In 2012, the group's discussion has focused on the following issues.

NATO and Defense Spending

2. The implications for defense spending of the on-going economic crisis in Europe and the weak economic recovery in the United States are of great concern. As we have stated previously (see 24 August 2011 statement), North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) nations have a poor track record of keeping their commitments on defense spending. The economic downturn has exacerbated these trends, with reductions in public spending falling disproportionately on defense budgets in most Alliance nations. This trend makes it more unlikely that NATO will make good on its assertion in the 2010 Strategic Concept that there will be "sufficient resources" for the Lisbon package of "most pressing capability needs," as well as some other critical conventional force improvements. The imperative to make tough, smart decisions on how NATO members will spend the reduced levels of resources available for defense has grown stronger in the past year, and speaks to the need for coordination between Alliance members. We increasingly believe that in an age of significant fiscal austerity, most NATO states cannot afford to maintain all forms of military power; this may push many states towards specialization within the Alliance.
3. At the May 2012 Chicago Summit, NATO reaffirmed its support for the second time in 18 months for maintaining U.S. nuclear weapons forward deployed in Europe (the first having been in approving the new Alliance Strategic Concept in November 2010). We believe that the United States should continue to deploy these weapons in Europe as long as Alliance leaders believe that these weapons have a deterrent and reassurance value, and that NATO nuclear-basing states and the United States should continue to fund dual capable aircraft fleets. We support, as well, NATO's decision to continue with the phased adaptive approach for deploying missile defenses to protect the Alliance, in particular from the threat posed by Iran's growing arsenal of ballistic missiles.
4. As the United States, United Kingdom and France prepare to manage reduced levels of defense spending, each nation will have to prioritize capabilities within this constrained fiscal environment. The U.S. Department of Defense has started implementing the legislated mandate to reduce defense spending from projected levels by \$487 billion over

ten years and could (in March 2013) be compelled to take another \$500 billion in defense spending. Recognizing that the United States faces near-term modernization decisions with respect to its European-based nuclear weapons and their associated delivery systems, we urge the United States to commit the necessary resources to ensure that the Alliance's nuclear commitments are fulfilled. We note the debate in the United Kingdom over the nature and cost of the U.K. deterrent. We welcome the continuing policy of the United Kingdom to replace its Vanguard-class submarines at the end of their lives by the early 2030s by successor submarines carrying the Trident II missile, subject to investment approval for the project. While France has entered into a deep examination of its future defense expenditures, it has decided to maintain a nuclear deterrent based on air and sea components.

Russia

5. We have discussed Alliance relations with Russia, where we have observed a steady deterioration of the relationship, contradicting the hopes raised about it. One of the Russian leadership's central priorities is to maintain and reinforce its influence with its European "near abroad", Central Asia and the Middle East. In turn, Moscow's relations with NATO and European Union have suffered. Over the past three years, Russia has continued to place nuclear weapons at the heart of its security strategy; it has made both provocative statements and carried out provocative actions with nuclear capable forces against NATO countries; its stance at the negotiating table has been uncompromising; and Russian military doctrine characterizes NATO as a "military danger" and thus a potential enemy, while the opposite is not the case in NATO's military doctrine. Russia's behavior is redolent of the Cold War and has no place in the 21st century.
6. While NATO-Russia cooperation in missile defenses should be both possible and in Russia's interest (as well as NATO's), it does not appear that Moscow has any inclination to accept NATO's proposed Ballistic Missile Defense system as such. We believe Moscow has made a political calculation that it will be able to convince public opinion in European countries into abandoning or substantially modifying the phased adaptive approach. Moscow's use of its tactical nuclear weapons capability to threaten NATO allies, and its position that it will not discuss tactical nuclear arms reductions, stationing changes or transparency measures until NATO terminates forward deployments of U.S. weapons could be used by Moscow as leverage on European public opinions. Nevertheless, we do not believe NATO should alter its course on missile defense.

Iran

7. The CSIS dialogue has devoted several sessions to the implications for the Middle East—and for our three nations—should Iran in fact become a nuclear weapons state. These discussions have made us resolved in our belief that current efforts by the Group of Six, in a context of enhanced sanctions, should be further pursued in order to obtain Iranian compliance on its commitments regarding sensitive fuel-cycle activities and transparency to enable the IAEA to conclude that all of Iran's nuclear activities are exclusively peaceful. Beyond this point, however, we have reached two central conclusions if Iran, despite the best efforts of the Group of Six, becomes a nuclear-armed or nuclear-capable state. First, we believe a nuclear-armed or nuclear-capable Iran, while continuing its

support of terrorist operations, coercion and proxy-wars, will not engage in large-scale conventional military aggression against its neighbors as a result of its nuclear status. This arises in part because Iran lacks the conventional air and ground forces necessary for such operations.

8. Second, we do not believe a nuclear-armed or nuclear-capable Iran could not be deterred. We find it unlikely that the current Iranian leadership would risk the existence and survival of Iranian civilization in a future crisis by using a nuclear weapon against Israel or one of its neighbors. Despite its revolutionary and messianic rhetoric, the Iranian leadership has been extremely careful not to put Iran's vital interests at risk and there is no evidence to suggest they do not understand that the nuclear retaliation which would surely follow a nuclear strike against Israel or one of Iran's neighbors—to say nothing about an attack on the United States, United Kingdom, or France—would result in Iran's utter destruction. This is not to say that we believe deterring a nuclear-armed Iran would be easy. In fact, deterring a nuclear-armed Iran will be a very difficult and likely a very expensive proposition. Although a bolt from the blue attack by Iran remains a low probability, numerous statements by Iranian leaders provide grounds for great caution in predicting exactly how they might behave in times of crisis, raising the danger of an accident and or miscalculation.
9. We are less certain that the Iranian leadership would calculate that its use of a nuclear weapon in a tactical environment against Western naval forces would result in a nuclear response. As a result, we are concerned that a nuclear-armed Iran could be emboldened, using its conventional and para-military forces to provoke and attack NATO member-states' conventional forces in the Persian Gulf and Arabian Sea and then threaten a nuclear strike to forestall a major conventional response. Declaratory policy should make it clear that this tactic will fail.
10. While we are concerned that Iran's acquisition of a nuclear weapons capability could give impetus to nuclear proliferation elsewhere in the Middle East, neither our governments nor the CSIS group have yet coalesced on an optimal U.S.-U.K.-French response to such a possibility. Iran's failure to comply with the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty could have dire consequences for the regime, and as a result, the future of nonproliferation worldwide. We will continue to pursue this topic.

Asia

11. The CSIS dialogue has only recently begun discussion on Asia and the P-3's role in Asia. We are approaching these issues with several assumptions and preliminary conclusions, which will guide further discussion. First, there is a need for dialogue with China. Events in Asia, particularly the Indian subcontinent, are so dangerous and the potential for escalation so high, that dialogue with China, especially on the dangers of nuclear use by India or Pakistan, would be useful. While there is no ongoing formal dialogue with China on nuclear issues, China is increasingly willing to discuss these issues in Track 1.5 and Track 2 forums—a promising sign that P-3 governments should continue to work to formalize dialogue in official channels. The P-5 dialogue, which began leading up to the 2010 Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference, offers an existing forum to continue

to press China on questions of transparency and nuclear confidence building. Secondly, despite some movement, China is unlikely to shift from its opaque force posture, as Chinese thinking views transparency on behalf of the weaker party as inherently problematic. China's force posture, while not always strategically clear, appears consistent with modernizing to maintain survivability.

Deterrence in the 21st Century

12. Deterrence during the Cold War was dominated by the existential threat of nuclear weapons and the bipolar nature of the ideological struggle between “the West” and the Soviet-led communist bloc. While deterrence in the 21st century does not have the same apocalyptic, zero-sum quality that it did during the Cold War, it is far more complex and involves multiple actors (nations with very different strategic cultures and non-state actors), multiple domains (land, sea, air, space and cyberspace) and a broad range of military capabilities (nuclear weapons, advanced conventional weapons, ballistic missile defenses, anti-satellite weapons and offensive cyber attacks, to name a few). In part driven by the increased reliance in modern warfare on space and cyber assets, much of the recent discussion on “cross-domain deterrence” has focused on the challenge of deterring cyber attacks by threatening retaliation either in cyberspace or in other domains, including possibly nuclear weapons. Nevertheless, the term “cross-domain deterrence” is both misleading and distracting: nuclear weapons could be employed in many domains but do not themselves constitute a domain. Simply put, we don't deter domains; we deter individual actors from taking individual acts. For want of a better term, it is just deterrence in the 21st century—perhaps less threatening, but certainly more complicated.
13. Deterrence in the 21st century could involve a “back to basics” return to the classical concepts of deterrence. Given the potential weight and breadth of cyber attacks, it may be impossible to deny our adversaries the possession of cyber capabilities which they believe have a reasonable probability of successful attack, despite our efforts to harden our cyber systems through cyberdefense and cybersecurity. As result deterrence by denial (an increasingly popular concept near the end of the Cold War) may lack credibility. It may be necessary to rely therefore on threats of retaliatory action (also known as deterrence by punishment), although, in another indication of 21st century complexity, attribution – that is, identifying the perpetrator of an attack – is not a trivial matter in the domain of cyberspace. An additional issue arises when our dependence on cyber systems—particularly with regard to critical infrastructure—might be disproportionate to such dependence by potential adversaries. We believe that the recently-released U.S. statement on space deterrence is a significant step forward, particularly with respect to its declaratory policy: “Be prepared to respond to an attack on U.S. or allied space systems proportionally, but not necessarily symmetrically and not necessarily in space, using all elements of national power.” While this statement retained the traditional “strategic ambiguity” of U.S. declaratory policy with respect to the possible employment of nuclear weapons, the credibility of retaliatory actions in response to cyber attacks could potentially be enhanced by explicitly ruling out the use of nuclear weapons as an appropriate response.

14. As this issue (and many other 21st century deterrence issues) requires further analysis and discussion, we agree that a critical first step is for their respective governments to reach common understandings and definitions to both guide our internal development of doctrine and provide a common basis for American, British and French policy and public statements. This could include an initial set of principles for 21st century deterrence, a task that the dialogue will address in its 2013 deliberations.

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