

CSIS European Trilateral Track 2 Nuclear Dialogues

2018 Consensus Statement

The European Trilateral Track 2 Nuclear Dialogues, organized by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in partnership with the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) and the Fondation pour la Recherche Stratégique (FRS), has convened senior nuclear policy experts from the United Kingdom, France, and the United States (P3) for the past ten years to discuss nuclear deterrence, arms control, and nonproliferation policy issues and to identify areas of consensus among the three countries. The majority of the experts are former U.S., UK, and French senior officials; the others are well-known academics in the field. Since the Dialogues' inception, high-level officials from all three governments have also routinely joined the forum and participated in the discussions.

The Dialogues have been unique in bringing U.S., UK, and French representatives into a trilateral forum for discussing nuclear policy. The United States, United Kingdom, and France hold common values and principles directed toward a shared purpose of global peace and security, as well as an understanding of their respective roles as responsible stewards of the nuclear order. Their sustained engagement will thus, irrespective of political shifts in any of the three countries, remain unique in the context of international alliances and partnerships and essential into the foreseeable future.

In 2018, the group's discussion addressed a range of issues in the Euro-Atlantic security environment and beyond, prompting agreement among the group's nongovernmental participants to issue the following statement reflecting the consensus views of the undersigned. All signatories agree to this statement in their personal capacity, which may not represent the views of their respective organizations.

The Future of Arms Control

On October 23, after confusing initial statements, the United States announced its determination that Russia is in material breach of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty commitments. On December 4, NATO foreign ministers endorsed the U.S. position regarding Russian noncompliance. The United States then announced its intention to suspend commitments under the treaty in 60 days if Russia continues testing and deployment of prohibited systems, namely the SSC-8, which thereafter would begin

withdrawal procedures. The collapse of the INF Treaty coincides with a decline in U.S.-Russian relations, Russia's growing militarism along NATO's perimeter, and follows years of sustained violation of the treaty by Russia. If, as expected, the United States withdraws from the treaty, the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) Treaty will be the last remaining bilateral nuclear arms control treaty between the United States and Russia. This treaty will expire unless extended in 2021. We currently stand on the edge of a world in which bilateral, treaty-based nuclear arms control may cease to exist as we know it and with it will disappear the enhanced transparency, predictability, and cooperation that arms control can provide.

The onus for the collapse of the INF Treaty lies squarely at Russia's feet and its sustained non-compliance. However, it is also true that effective arms control has played and can continue to play an important strategic and political role by reassuring allies, building political and policy consensus on nuclear policy, and reducing nuclear risks. In addition, the INF experience highlights the importance of alliance cohesion in the face of these challenges. Close consultation and cooperation between the United States and NATO alliance members is essential and must improve. On the one hand, many European partners were slow to appreciate the seriousness of Russia's noncompliance and the threat it poses both to the treaty and the broader multilateral arms control regime. On the other, the United States was slow to share sufficiently detailed information about violations regarding the SSC-8 missile system and failed to consult sufficiently before decisions were announced. Going forward, the P3 must do better. In the near term, we encourage clear statements from European partners that acknowledge the seriousness of the Russian violations. In addition, we encourage clear U.S. assurances that the land-based deployment, by the United States or NATO, of INF noncompliant systems in Europe is unnecessary in the current security environment, even if the United States explores the development of such capabilities as a hedge against future risks. Such steps can reduce the divisions within the alliance that have emerged in recent months.

Additionally, concerns about the future of New START, will only rise as its expiration approaches. Coordination with partners and allies will be essential as will an approach to the treaty that values both continuity and compliance. We recognize the challenging nature of arms control with Russia today, but on balance, we support the extension of New START or its replacement with a new treaty before 2021, as long as both sides continue to comply. In the longer term, we should set out a positive vision of what comes next for arms control, recognizing that it may differ significantly from what came before. The goals of stability, transparency, and cooperation will remain even as we recognize the specific tools of the past may no longer be adequate to address the arms control challenges we face today. The time to start that hard work is now.

Facing a Resurgent Russia

The decline in U.S.-Russia relations reflects the increasingly competitive and contested relationship between Russia and the West. We believe Russia's increasingly bold assertive behavior and subversion of the rules-based international order writ large pose a substantial risk to European security and place a renewed premium on transatlantic relations. Russian actions and rhetoric are inconsistent with what is necessary to preserve peace and stability in Europe and beyond. Such behavior fosters an antagonistic nuclear relationship between Russia and NATO rather than one characterized by cooperation. In addition, Russia's expanding nuclear and advanced conventional programs further undermine stability in Europe. Furthermore, the growing list of nuclear-capable systems under development stands in marked contrast to the nuclear modernization programs of the United States, France, and the United Kingdom, which are far more limited in scope.

Official—including military—talks between the United States and Russia could offer an opportunity to reduce tension and develop mutual understanding of each sides' national security priorities, goals, red lines, concerns, and thoughts on escalation. We encourage the continuation of these discussions and

recommend expanding them in terms of content and participation. The inclusion of other NATO members, perhaps through a revitalized and repurposed NATO-Russia Council, would also be useful.

While dialogue is important, we believe it is similarly important that NATO members remain unified in their Article V commitments to safeguard the alliance not only through their political statements but also by ensuring that NATO has the right tools and capabilities to deter Russian aggression effectively. Furthermore, NATO should increase its focus on its own “nuclear IQ” (the depth of knowledge and understanding of nuclear deterrence and related policies, postures, and requirements among NATO staff, missions, and governments) through international exchanges and dialogue between nuclear states and engage non-nuclear allies in the dialogue. In addition, efforts to broaden the basis of strategic and security expertise, including nuclear expertise, should also include nongovernmental and academic institutions, especially those that will encourage and nurture the next generation of security experts across Europe.

Additionally, NATO should continue to bolster its conventional forces and maintain appropriate nuclear forces to respond to a range of circumstances. A strong, unified NATO is necessary to deter Russian aggression and maintain peace in Europe. We recommend that concerned nations act to enhance NATO’s nuclear posture and capabilities. We urge nations concerned to embrace and act upon those recommendations.

Competing with a Rising China

China’s continued use of intimidation in the South and East China Seas—and vis-a-vis Taiwan—which occurs in the context of China’s continued modernization of its medium- and long-range missile capabilities and development of military facilities on disputed islands, poses a significant danger to the region. We are concerned that China’s concepts of escalation and stability are not well understood and may differ from NATO’s, especially in terms of the integration of space, cyber, and other advanced technical capabilities. China’s increasingly aggressive employment of cyber capabilities is a particular concern, especially given the absence of arms control or codes of conduct designed to shape and manage the introduction of these capabilities into the strategic space. We should think about whether it is possible to manage new technology via traditional arms control approaches or whether new tools and concepts are required. We understand that China has been reluctant to engage in government-led strategic stability talks, but perhaps renewed efforts at track two dialogues could encourage greater transparency.

Deterring and Disarming North Korea

Despite a new spirit of dialogue and exchange with North Korea’s supreme leader, Kim Jong Un, North Korea’s intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) capabilities and continued nuclear weapons development are increasingly a global threat, and the need for P3 cooperation and coordination in response to this threat has grown dramatically. As three responsible, like-minded nuclear weapons states, the United States, United Kingdom, and France should stand together against this growing threat, making it clear that North Korea will not gain from its use or threatened use of nuclear weapons. The P3 should take every possible step to avoid war on the Korean Peninsula and focus on pragmatic steps to reduce nuclear risks through pressure, containment, and deterrence.

By far the best way to reduce these dangers is through verified elimination of DPRK nuclear programs, accompanied by both military and political initiatives to reduce tensions on the Korean Peninsula. Summits between North Korea and South Korea and between the United States and North Korea have improved relations, but nonproliferation is absent from the dialogues, and there has been no meaningful movement on nuclear disarmament. Despite this, South Korea is moving towards a peace declaration with North Korea and is pushing allies to lift sanctions on North Korea. An agreement on denuclearization

will need to be accompanied by meaningful steps to meet North Korean interests and priorities, but we are concerned a peace declaration without meaningful progress on North Korean disarmament could have damaging implications for long-term stability on the peninsula and could have serious adverse implications, such as the potential decoupling of the essential security alliance with the United States.

Therefore, the priority for now with North Korea remains containment and deterrence of nuclear use as well as prevention of conventional aggression or proliferation. That will require enhanced conventional and defensive capabilities in East Asia necessary to counter North Korean threats and prepare for any contingency on the peninsula. In addition, we believe that the P3 should make it clear to North Korea that as long as it has nuclear weapons, it will not be able to use them as a shield to enable conventional aggression or as a tool of coercion against the United States or its allies. The P3 should clearly communicate that any attempt at nuclear blackmail will fail. Finally, the P3 should stand together in sending the strongest possible message, including clear and explicit agreements on definitions and consequences, to ensure both North Korea and potential recipients understand that onward proliferation of North Korea's nuclear and missile capabilities will not be tolerated.

Iran—What comes next?

In May of 2018, the United States announced it would withdraw from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) between the P5+1 (China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States—plus Germany) and Iran. In the following months, the United States re-imposed sanctions on Iran. The European Union is attempting to maintain its support for the JCPOA by creating a special purpose vehicle to finance trade with Iran and make it illegal for EU companies to abide by U.S. sanctions, but success is not assured. As a result of U.S. sanctions, Iran will face, as it did in 2014, a growing economic crisis, but with some key differences. Today, Iran has more international political support than before, as well as revenue from Chinese business investments, and Russian support of the Iranian oil sector. Despite the United States' attempt to apply maximum economic pressure to force Iran into negotiation, these key differences will allow Iran greater freedom of action than it enjoyed in the period prior to the completion of the JCPOA.

The United States' decision to withdraw from JCPOA remains a significant point of tension between the United States and its European partners. As recently as November 12, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) found Iran to be in compliance with its commitments under the JCPOA. Iran's continued compliance with the terms of the JCPOA should be encouraged and sustained even as the United States seeks to open negotiations on a new agreement. Cooperation and flexibility regarding the re-imposed U.S. sanctions is essential for nations that are continuing to implement important conversion activities at some of Iran's nuclear facilities. Continued technical and financial support to the IAEA is essential as well. We have no illusions as to the serious challenge Iran poses in areas outside of the JCPOA, from its regional malign activities in support of international terrorism to its rapidly expanding missile program, and all three countries are urged to exercise continued vigilance in addressing these issues while delinking them where possible from the terms of the JCPOA. Regardless, all three of our countries, whether through a renegotiated deal or supplemental policies, should work to prevent Iran from returning to its status as a proliferation risk country. The P3 should ensure they have a coordinated approach to prevent potential Iranian nuclear breakout.

New Risks and Challenges for Escalation and Strategic Stability

Over the last few years, the world has witnessed a steady increase in gray zone conflict and aggression. While these activities do not have an explicit nuclear dimension, they can complicate Russia/NATO perceptions of stability and risk unintended escalation. Russia and China have successfully manipulated the "gray zone" to support their interests and challenge Western concepts of conflict, especially through clandestine

manipulations in cyberspace and the widespread dissemination of disinformation. Maintaining stability and deterring adversaries in the gray zone will be a growing challenge and could require substantial rethinking of our deterrence approaches. We have seen few indications that symmetrical responses to gray zone conflict will be effective; instead, we believe success relies on changing the adversary's calculus by establishing and communicating clear thresholds. While NATO remains divided on both the risk posed by gray zone activities and the nature of effective responses, absent NATO action, the challenges will only continue to grow. We believe the P3 should take the initiative to create cohesion, unity of purpose, and unity of command to address the growing issue of gray zone conflict.

Engaging the Public and Non-Nuclear Weapon States on Nuclear Issues

Proponents of the Treaty on the Prohibition on Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) seek to build support for a world free from nuclear weapons and to hold nuclear-armed states accountable for their Article VI commitments in the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). We believe, however, the TPNW's practical and legal flaws pose significant challenges to the long-standing and highly successful NPT-based nonproliferation regime. These include the lack of meaningful and detailed verification procedures, which risk undermining the NPT verification framework centered on IAEA through duplication, overburdening, and competing funding requirements. We also believe the TPNW serves to further polarize the nuclear and non-nuclear weapons states by creating a treaty designed to drive political and normative changes. This polarization is further aggravated by the tactics of some TPNW proponents who seek to apply disproportionate criticism and political leverage against Western liberal democracies that possess nuclear weapons and their allies and partners. Nevertheless, a more constructive dialogue with TPNW proponents is necessary especially as 2020 NPT Review Conference looms on the horizon.

There is a growing recognition that the P3 must engage in a broader discussion and genuine substantive, well-informed debate with advocates of the TPNW. Moreover, the P3 governments need to do more to engage the broader narrative on the value of their responsible possession of nuclear weapons and their support for nuclear deterrence policies, as well as an approach to nuclear arms control that is verifiable, enforceable, and contributes to security and stability, rather than engaging in direct and sometimes confrontational rhetoric with proponents of the TPNW. To date, P3 diplomats have insufficiently defended the legitimacy of nuclear deterrence, ceding both control of the narrative and the ethical high ground to supporters of the TPNW. The P3 should engage in a broader discussion and genuine substantive, well-informed debate with advocates of the TPNW in order to counter false information and offer a credible alternative vision. The current conversation on the treaty has not led to a substantive discussion on nuclear issues; furthermore, there has been no emphasis on the important and mutually reinforcing linkages between arms control, nonproliferation, deterrence, and disarmament. These debates should be tailored to the appropriate audience and avoid dismissive and disparaging tones. We also encourage increasing education and literacy on nuclear weapons through different educational initiatives with students, policymakers, and the public. We should not be afraid to face debates on difficult issues of morality, legitimacy, legality, and ethics head on when defending nuclear deterrence and its continued relevance to the security environment we face today and for the foreseeable future. ■

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