



European Security and Defence Assembly Assembly of Western European Union

Assembly Fact Sheet No. 2

European security policy, collective defence and nuclear deterrence

Throughout the process of setting up European defence, the issue of deterrence has been an underlying factor, something carefully hidden from view. It has played no part in speeding up the process, and the problem has frequently been put “on the back burner”. Entering into discussion at European level is not a simple task, for two reasons. Firstly, as far as many Europeans are concerned, “the defence of Europe” is a matter for NATO, relying primarily on the American deterrent, which leaves no room for “European defence” as such. Secondly, nuclear powers, including France and the United Kingdom, both member states of WEU and the EU, consider their nuclear strike force to be the ultimate means of defending their vital interests, and one which it would be difficult to share with other countries. It goes without saying that, if the underlying rationale behind deterrence is to work, no nuclear power would openly declare what it considers to be its vital interests. It is therefore essential to maintain a level of ambiguity.

In the section of the 1994 Assembly report on “The role and future of nuclear weapons”¹, entitled “Towards a European nuclear deterrent”, the Rapporteur already hazards the view that Europe, probably “*reluctant to jeopardise a minimal consensus achieved only with difficulty, [...] seems to have little interest in the matter for the present*”. However, in the draft recommendation to the report, the Assembly noted “*that it would be totally illogical to start the implementation of a European common foreign and security policy (CFSP) [...] without closely examining the role of the French and British nuclear forces*”.

It should be noted that Article V of the 1954 **modified Brussels Treaty** is a mutual defence clause. The Treaty is valid for the 10 signatory states.² Consequently, “*if any of the High Contracting Parties should be the object of an armed attack in Europe, the other High Contracting Parties will, in accordance with the provisions of Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, afford the Party so attacked all the military and other aid and assistance in their power.*” During the cold war, there was no doubt that nuclear weapons fell under the heading of such “aid and assistance”.

There are or have been a number of initiatives to explore the possibility of a more coordinated or, indeed, joint deterrent. “**The Hague Platform on European Security Interests**”, adopted by the WEU Council of Ministers in October 1987,³ provided the first common basis towards that goal. Setting out the broad direction of WEU’s work programme, the text includes a commitment that “*the construction of an integrated Europe will remain incomplete as long as it does not include security and defence*”. Ministers go on to say: “*To be credible and effective, the strategy of deterrence and defence must continue to be based on an adequate mix of appropriate nuclear and conventional forces*”. Other initiatives were taken after Maastricht within the framework of WEU. Meeting in Madrid on 14 November 1995, ministers noted that: “*The Preliminary Conclusions on the Formulation of a Common European Defence Policy [...] underline that Europeans have a major responsibility with regard to defence in both the conventional and nuclear field [...]. The independent nuclear forces of the United Kingdom and France, which have a deterrent role of their own, contribute to the overall deterrence and security of the Allies*”.⁴ Finally, France’s efforts to ensure coordinated deterrence at European level, including within the framework of Franco-German cooperation, should be noted.

NATO deterrence is essentially based on American strategic forces. According to its Strategic Concept, “*the Alliance will maintain for the foreseeable future an appropriate mix of nuclear and conventional forces based in Europe [...] Thus, they remain essential to preserve peace*”.⁵ It also underlines that “*the supreme guarantee of the security of the Allies is provided by the strategic nuclear forces of the Alliance, particularly those of the United States; the independent nuclear forces of the United Kingdom and France, which have a deterrent role of their own, contribute to the overall deterrence and security of the Allies*”.⁶

Press and Information Office

43, avenue du Président Wilson, 75775 Paris Cedex 16

Tel: (+33) 1.53.67.22.00 – Fax: (+33) 1.53.67.22.01 info@assembly.w eu.int – <http://www.assembly-w eu.eu>

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There is consultation within the Nuclear Planning Group (NPG), in which participant countries in NATO's integrated military structure (all member states except France) are represented. This group constantly monitors the Alliance's nuclear policy, taking into account worldwide strategic developments.

At a time when countries' strategic doctrines are being updated in response to new threats, it is necessary for Europe to reopen this debate on deterrence and also on whether it is still a valid concept. These new threats – terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction – are discussed in the **European Security Strategy**.⁷ However, the solutions put forward are not the same: the European Security Strategy does not discuss the potential for deterrence, whereas France is reassessing its nuclear strategy in the light of these new threats. In March 2007, the British Parliament awarded its support to a governmental decision to renew the British nuclear submarine system by extending the life of its strategic arsenal and by developing and building a new fleet of submarines, thereby maintaining the United Kingdom's current deterrence system against future threats.

What has the **EU's Reform Treaty** to say on this issue? Article 42 (2) sub-para.2 (TEU) states that the common security and defence policy "shall not prejudice the specific character of the security and defence policy of certain Member States" but makes no mention of the issue of nuclear deterrence. The Treaty does not contain any specific provisions, even though two European countries have nuclear weapons and the means of their delivery. On the other hand, the solidarity clause (Article 222 TFEU) provides, in the event of terrorist attacks, for mutual assistance using all EU instruments including military resources. Are nuclear weapons to be included in these?

What might the future of a "European deterrent" be? A December 2007 Assembly report entitled 'The future of nuclear non-proliferation' encourages greater discussion between all 27 EU Member states 'of the significance of France and the United Kingdom's respective nuclear deterrents for Europe's security'.⁸ Given the closeness of European countries, their vital interests are closely interlinked. Does France's deterrent extend as far as the boundaries of the EU? This is what former French President Jacques Chirac appeared to be saying in a speech he gave during a visit to the strategic maritime force at Ile-Longue on 19 January 2006: "*The development of the European Security and Defence Policy, the growing interweaving of the interests of European Union countries and the solidarity that now exists between them, make French nuclear deterrence, by its very existence, a core element in the security of the European continent*". However, he also said that it would be worth opening the debate on deterrent forces within a common defence, only "*when the time comes*". In a speech given in March 2008,⁹ the current French President, Nicolas Sarkozy, recalled that "*by their very existence*" French nuclear forces were "*a key element in Europe's security*". He proposed "*to engage those European partners who would so wish in an open dialogue*" on the role of deterrence and its contribution to common European security. President Sarkozy also referred to a "*major decision*" that had been taken with the United Kingdom, according to which there could be "*no situation in which the vital interests of either of our two nations could be threatened without the vital interests of the other also being threatened*". As regards any decision to use nuclear weapons, the question of what system should be used for consultation between those European countries which possess them and those which do not has still to be addressed. Furthermore, some European countries continue to rely first and foremost on the protection afforded by the "American deterrence umbrella" through NATO. It is time for Europeans to engage in a dialogue on these questions which are vital both for the security of European citizens in the light of new threats and for the degree of autonomy and the development of the common security and defence policy.

¹ Assembly Report on "The role and future of nuclear weapons" submitted on behalf of the Defence Committee by Armand De Decker, Rapporteur, 19 May 1994.

² Belgium, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and the United Kingdom.

³ <http://www.weu.int>

⁴ "European security: a common concept of the 27 WEU countries", Madrid, 1995, <http://www.weu.int>

⁵ "The Alliance's Strategic Concept", paragraph 46.

⁶ "The Alliance's Strategic Concept", 23rd and 24th April 1999, paragraph 62. See also the Declaration on Atlantic Relations, "[The Ottawa Declaration](#)", approved by the North Atlantic Council in Ottawa on 19 June 1974.

⁷ A secure Europe in a better world, 12 December 2003. See also the report on the Implementation of the European Security Strategy - Providing Security in a Changing World, 11 December 2008. <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/showPage.aspx?id=266&lang=EN>

⁸ Assembly Report on "The future of nuclear non-proliferation" submitted on behalf of the Political Committee by Mr. Charles Goerens, Rapporteur, 3 December 2007, http://www.assembly-w.eu.org/en/documents/sessions_ordinaires/rpt/2007/1982.php

⁹ <http://www.elysee.fr/accueil> (speech by Nicolas Sarkozy, President of the French Republic, during his visit to Cherbourg on 21 March 2008 for the presentation of the nuclear submarine *Le Terrible*).