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On the Discourse of US and European Nuclear Deterrence Diapositives

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Abstract. The theoretical concept of nuclear deterrence as a complex paradigm of perception and interpretation manifests itself in its practical implementation in thousands of operational nuclear weapons of destruction. However, the perception and assessment of threats between nuclear states does not only focus on any changes in the use of nuclear weapons by the deterrent opponent, but must also constantly scan the system as a whole for modifications. For example, are there changes in political/military doctrine and/or new threatening language patterns in official and academic security policy rhetoric? Against this backdrop, Europe's long-perceived and accepted deficit in its tactical nuclear posture towards Russia and its continuous nuclear threat narrative against states supporting Ukraine in the military conflict in accordance with international legal terminology, as well as the possibility of a renewed US presidency of Donald Trump, are boosting the security policy discussion on the development of an independent European defense and deterrence.

Keywords: Threat perception, deterrence, nuclear weapons, Germany, Russia, France, USA

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Original article

К вопросу о диспозитивном дискурсе ядерного сдерживания США и Европы

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Аннотация. Теоретическая концепция ядерного сдерживания как сложная парадигма восприятия и интерпретации проявляется в ее практическом воплощении в тысячах действующих ядерных средств поражения. Однако восприятие и оценка угроз между ядерными государствами не только фокусируются на любых изменениях в применении ядерного оружия сдерживающим противником, но и должны постоянно изучать систему в целом на предмет изменений. Например, они вынуждены задаваться вопросом: произошли ли изменения в политической / военной доктрине и / или появились ли новые угрожающие формулировки в официальной и академической риторике в области политики безопасности? На этом фоне давно осознаваемый и принимаемый Европой дефицит в ее тактической ядерной позиции по отношению к России и ее постоянные заявления о ядерной угрозе в адрес государств, поддерживающих Украину в военном конфликте в соответствии с международно-правовой терминологией, а также возможность возобновления президентства Дональда Трампа

в США активизируют дискуссию о политике безопасности, о развитии независимой европейской системы обороны и сдерживания.

Ключевые слова: Восприятие угрозы, сдерживание, ядерное оружие, Германия, Россия, Франция, США

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FOREWORD

First of all, I would like to thank the peer reviewers for their suggestions and constructive criticism. This article has reflected on them and, where accepted by the author, taken them into account.

This is a thematically limited analytical-descriptive research analysis as a policy paper without narrowing down to legalistic and moral restrictions. The focus is solely on real political perceptions and assessments. All scientific research is interest-oriented, i.e. research always pursues intentions and therefore cannot be disinterested and objective. No analyst can take away this “baggage”. He must much more always be aware that there are no universally valid truths and objective findings. However, science can offer methodologically verifiable interpretations, question certainties and trigger reflection. The author follows this principle.

Interests form the basis of all politics. In the context of this political science topos, the question always arises as to the security policy determinants of the respective interests. The perception factor is of considerable importance here. As early as 1969, the renowned economic theorist Kenneth E. Boulding referred to the significance of perception determinants in political transactions: *“We must recognize that the people whose decisions determine the policies and actions of nations do not react to their ‘objective’ facts of the situation, whatever that may mean, but to their ‘image/perception’ of the situation. It is what we think it is, and not what it really is, that determines our behavior”* [Boulding, 1969, p. 423].

With Boulding’s research findings in mind, the author of this article discusses Russian security policy statements and military arsenals in Russia and NATO and attempts to make the resulting incremental threat perceptions and interpretations, particularly in Germany, comprehensible to the Russian reader. The Russian scientific colleagues are of course familiar with the sources discussed here by the author and will probably ask about the *cui bono*? The author intends to contribute to the discourse on mutual nuclear deterrence. It follows that

knowledge about the world is not simply derived from objective facts. Rather, historically changeable knowledge systems or imaginary worlds, i.e. certain discourses, provide a context of interpretation that is changeable in principle. Thus, the German author stands in his historical knowledge system with his socialized world of ideas. His Russian colleagues are in different ones. And that is why the contexts of interpretation can differ even if the factual knowledge is the same.

From the Russian perspective, the German / Western postulated threat perceptions may be exaggerated or even (mis)interpreted as deliberate ‘anti-Russian’ propaganda. In fact, neither scientists nor addressees / readers can completely absolve themselves of biased fact selection on the one hand and selective perception on the other. Serious science is therefore characterized by source-critical analysis. The author is committed to such an approach. The British cognitive psychologist, Peter Wason, coined the scientific term ‘confirmation bias’ [Wason, 1968], which describes the general disposition to unconsciously seek, select and interpret information that confirms or reflects one’s own attitudes. The great US journalist and publicist Walter Lippmann, who strongly influenced media studies, political science and social psychology with his standard work “Public Opinion”, described the phenomenon of “confirmation bias” in literary terms without there already being any research on the subject: *“The most subtle and pervasive of all influences are those that create and perpetuate the repertoire of stereotypes. We are told about the world before we see it. We imagine most things before we experience them. And these preconceptions profoundly determine the entire process of perception, unless education has made us acutely aware of them”* [Lippman, 1946, p. 67].

IMMANUEL KANT

The brief reference to Kant at the beginning of the further discussions is intended to emphasize the unconditional incompatibility of a nuclear war. His philosophical and moral postulates are timeless.

They should serve as a guideline for political actors in Washington and Moscow.

Immanuel Kant's concise and comprehensible interpretation of the Enlightenment (1784) as "man's exit from his self-imposed immaturity" is world-famous. We can only speculate as to how the great philosopher would define the deterrence system today in a similarly memorable and easily comprehensible way. But his very well-researched thinking allows for approximate assumptions. The renowned philosophy colleague, Eduard von Hartmann, wrote about Kant a hundred years later (1883): "*What is certain, however, is that he was an empirical pessimist, i.e. a pessimist with regard to the state of happiness of the empirically given world... That optimism with regard to the purposeful development of the world is not able to overcome empirical pessimism... and with the progress of culture the plagues do not decrease, but increase*"¹. On this basis, two hypothetical Kant definitions will be ventured here as a deterrent.

1. 'Man's entry into his self-inflicted potential nuclear annihilation'. 2. 'Man's entry into reciprocal-necessary, relatively-stable self-taming through self-inflicted striving for invention in weapons technology'. Because human knowledge about the production of nuclear weapons cannot be reinvented / abolished, Kant would very probably appeal to the rationality, intellect and reason of the heads of state and government of the nine nuclear states with reference to his statement in the Enlightenment: "*Sapere aude! Have the courage to use your own reason*". It is therefore safe to say that he would have vehemently condemned the use of nuclear weapons to support his own offensive military operations in order to break the enemy's resistance or to prevent external military aid for the attacked state. He would probably also have considered a nuclear war avoidable for reasons of reason.

His statement in the treatise "On Perpetual Peace" from 1795 even reads like an early anticipation of a ban on waging nuclear war that emerged after the first nuclear attack on Japan: "*...that a war of extermination, where both can be destroyed at the same time, and with this also all that is right, would only allow perpetual peace to take place in the great churchyard of the human species. Such a war, therefore, and consequently the use of the means that lead to it, must be absolutely forbidden*" [Kant, 1953, p. 20].

A probable move towards nuclear war as the 'black side' of nuclear deterrence [Tugenhat, 1986] is the long-standing topos of the international

Nuclear Freeze movement². In an informative study from 2010, which is still relevant today, authors from Germany, the USA and Russia assess the numerous pros and cons of the chances of implementing such a nuclear weapons-free world.

RUSSIAN RADICAL NUCLEAR EXPERTS VERSUS...

The fear of technical failure or human misinterpretation as potential triggers of an unintended nuclear escalation, which is often discussed anyway, has recently been massively instrumentalized by some internationally renowned Russian political scientists in foreign and security policy think tanks, such as IMEMO RAS and the Council for Foreign and Defence Policy, for forced nuclear war fears in the West. Sergei Karaganov and Dimitri Trenin are examples of this. Some of their Russian academic colleagues sometimes emphasize in a relativizing way that both are not representative with their positions, and therefore even rather marginalized. But both are also given space for discussion in the media, in which they fervently knit a narrative and lament the same thing at the same time: namely that, despite Russia's enormous nuclear weapons potential and its multiple indirect and direct threats of use. NATO states would not be deterred from providing massive support to Ukraine.

In the Western / German assessment, both nuclear radical protagonists intend to weaken the perception of security in the West, with its implicit determinants of harmlessness, reliability and carelessness as the central category of state services of general interest, with nuclear threat connotations. Conversely, a non-threat is conveyed when "*the perceived image of the outside world can be relied upon and the processing of perception satisfies the criterion of 'correct cognition' of certainty*" [Kaufmann, 1973, p. 149]. However, the element of 'certainty' in the perception of security can only be experienced in a temporal dimension, because security expresses a state of mind in the future. "Certainty always refers to the future, it means certainty that 'good' will endure or that a change for the better will occur" [Frei, 1978, p. 5].

If the West continues to show too little nuclear fear and does not stop its support for Ukraine, Trenin and Karaganov are even prepared to let the nuclear demon out of the bottle for real. They reject the

¹Immanuel Kant.

URL: https://www.rosalux.de/fileadmin/rls_uploads/pdfs/159_kant.pdf

²Eduard von Hartmann. URL: https://books.google.de/books?id=8oNVAAAYAAJ&pg=RA1-PA450&hl=de&source=gbs_toc_r&cad=2#v=onepage&q&f=false

intrinsic dimension of the security concept of nuclear weapons as deterrent political threat weapons and instead favor their alleged military usability as weapons of warfare against NATO states. In doing so, they assume that the US extended deterrence in NATO's Article 5 is a fiction. Trenin 2023: *"As for Russian nuclear attacks against NATO countries: hypothetically, Washington would most likely not respond to these attacks with a nuclear strike of its own against Russia for fear of Russian retaliation against the United States.... It is unlikely that the Americans would sacrifice Boston over Poznan, just as they had no intention of sacrificing Chicago over Hamburg during the Cold War"*¹.

Karaganov also writes analogously in 2023: *"Only if there is a madman in the White House who, moreover, hates his country, will America decide to strike to 'protect' the Europeans and thus incur a response of sacrificing 'Boston' because of 'Poznan'"* And after the Soviet technological breakthrough to second-strike capability: *"Washington, despite public bluffing, never again seriously considered the use of nuclear weapons against Soviet territory. And less than two weeks later: 'I would like to believe that our opponents are coming to their senses. Because if not, then Russia's military-political leadership faces a terrible moral choice and will have to make a difficult decision. But I believe that at some point our president will have to express his determination to use nuclear weapons'"*.

Such claims of supposedly low-threshold concern about the use of nuclear weapons do not stand up to fact-checking. Representative surveys in 2021 and 2022 in four NATO states on the "fear of the bomb" do indeed show the high level of concern about a nuclear escalation in connection with the "military operations / war" against Ukraine: it is highest in Poland at 75 %, followed by France – 73 %, Latvia – 71 % and Germany – 55 %².

Such doomsday threat announcements from the academic world – pre-emptive nuclear strikes against Western Ukraine-supporting states – are also often propagated in talk shows by the populist Vladimir Solovyov on Russian state television. The broadcasts from January 2021 and May 2024 are examples of many of this type. Because linguistic images with nuclear connotations are repeatedly used here, it can be assumed that they are intended to set frames / conceptual interpretative frameworks that (should) influence the political thinking and mobilization of TV viewers. "If you propagate certain linguistic images over a period of months ... then a so-called Hebbian learning process sets in with your fellow citizens: Your political perspective becomes

increasingly comprehensible to your fellow citizens, because linguistic repetition strengthens synaptic connections in the brain"³.

However, a representative survey conducted in Russia in June 2023 still reveals the limits of media influence: At least at this point in time, almost *"Three quarters of respondents (74 %) consider the use of nuclear weapons unacceptable if it leads to victory in hostilities. Only 16 % of respondents consider the use of nuclear weapons during a 'military operation' in Ukraine to be acceptable, while 5 % are of the opinion that such a step is only permissible if there is a threat of defeat"*⁴.

RUSSIAN NUCLEAR RATIONAL EXPERTS

In the debate on Russian nuclear strategy, however, the political scientists Alexei Arbatov, Konstantin Bogdanov and Dmitry Stefanovich, who are also well-known in the West, criticize their colleagues Trenin and Karaganov for wrongly assuming that the use of nuclear weapons would be suitable for de-escalation and as a means of dealing with strategic difficulties: *"A nuclear strike would raise the conflict to a fundamentally different level of unpredictability and multiply the risks of confrontation. The 78-year-old 'nuclear taboo' would be broken, and this would trigger a political and psychological shock of global proportions, which would be broadcast live on television and the Internet around the world. The reaction will be immeasurably greater and more violent than that of Hiroshima"*⁵. Ivan Timofeyev of the RIAC/MGIMO/Waldai Club also rates a pre-emptive nuclear strike as *"extremely dangerous"*... This also overestimates the possibility that a Russian nuclear strike could be accepted - albeit painfully - by China and other countries of the global majority. It overestimates the desire of the global majority to shake off the 'Western yoke' and it overlooks the potentially catastrophic consequences for Russia itself"⁶.

And the Russian Foreign Ministry announced in November 2022: *"In implementing its policy of nuclear deterrence, the Russian Federation is strictly and consistently guided by the postulate of the inadmissibility of nuclear war, in which there can be no winners and which must never be unleashed. Russia's*

¹Dimitri Trenin. <https://globalaffairs.ru/articles/ukraina-yadernoe-oruzhie/>

²Angst vor der Bombe.

<https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/wien/20005.pdf>

³Russian State TV. URL: <https://youtu.be/15KUlfcWdQg>

⁴Ядерная война – плохое средство решения проблем. URL: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/6055340>

⁵Специальная военная операция» на Украине: отношение россиян. 12 волна (16–19 июня 2023). URL: <https://russianfield.com/12volna>

⁶A Preemptive Nuclear Strike? No!

URL: <https://eng.globalaffairs.ru/articles/a-preemptive-nuclear-strike-no/>

*doctrinal guidelines in this area are extremely clear, have a strictly defensive character and do not allow for a broad interpretation. A response with the use of nuclear weapons is hypothetically only permissible for Russia if aggression is carried out with the use of weapons of mass destruction or aggression with the use of conventional weapons and the existence of the state itself is at stake*¹.

However, it is well known that political intentions / interests are subject to change. Is this already the case eight months later when the Vice Chairman of the National Security Council, Dmitry Medvedev, insinuates a potential nuclear use in the “special operation” in Ukraine? *“The Kiev Nazi regime must be wiped out. And here I would like to say something that politicians of all stripes do not like to admit: Such an apocalypse is not only possible; it is highly probable. Nuclear weapons have already been used, by whom and where is known, so there is no taboo*”².

The political science debate on the sovereignty of interpretation in the Russian nuclear discourse is being observed by German security policy experts. The central interest is directed towards correctly categorizing the ambiguous declarations in science and politics and finding conclusive motives for the *cui bono* of the nuclear radicals. Apart from further fueling the nuclear threat perceptions in Western societies, their further intention could be to encourage the Russian leadership to implement the nuclear theoretical escalation strategy in the ‘*strategischeskoje sdershiwaniye*’ in a planned and targeted manner. Vice versa, the nuclear rationalists seem to be pointing out the risks of a potential nuclear escalation policy to the Russian government. It is of course to be welcomed when their protagonists call for a resumption of cooperative arms control. However, when refutable factual claims are made in this context, this leads to mistrust in the predetermined seriousness.

BRIEF DIGRESSION

The following brief digression is an example of this: In a substantive contribution to the IMEMO Institute’s expert forum on “Nuclear Deterrence in a Polycentric World” at the beginning of June 2024, Alexei Arbatov generally advocates a revival of nuclear disarmament negotiations: *“In the current situation, we need to talk more about restoring arms control,*

renewing the negotiation process and expanding it from bilateral to various multilateral formats and new weapons systems”. With regard to non-strategic, i.e. tactical, nuclear weapons, however, this will remain a pipe dream for the foreseeable future. After all, President Putin made a clear statement in drastic words at the plenary session of the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum on June 16, 2023: *“... we have more such weapons than the NATO countries. They know about it and are constantly convincing us to start negotiations on cuts. Fuck them, do you understand? That’s what we say. (Laughter.) Because, to use an economic cliché, that’s our competitive advantage: That’s our competitive advantage*”³.

In an article Arbatov diverts attention from the massive quantitative overweight in Russian tactical nuclear weapons by turning its attention to the claimed numerical dominance in the dismantled US strategic warheads. He writes: *“But because there were so many tactical nuclear weapons, there are still quite a few even after these reductions. The West believes that Russia has many more than NATO. But the US has more stockpiled nuclear warheads that have been removed from strategic weapons and can be quickly made operational again*”⁴.

Therefore, we first look at the tactical nuclear arsenals of both countries:

The Nuclear Notebook of the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists in the US is one of the best verified public sources on the nuclear arsenals of the US and Russia. The comparison for the year 2024 gives the following picture on table: The US has a total of only 200 non-strategic / tactical nuclear warheads 1-5 B61-3/-4/-12 bombs for their combat aircrafts F-15E, F-16 C/D, F-35A. 100 warheads type B61 1-4 are in Europe, which have been replaced by the modernized version B61-12 since the beginning of 2023 / 24. The other 100 bombs “are in central storage in the United States as backup and contingency missions in the Indo-Pacific region”.

The Nuclear Notebook 2024 indicates for Russia in contrast 1558 nonstrategic / tactical warheads with the remark: *“Russia’s nonstrategic nuclear weapons are believed to be in storage and are not collocated with their launchers, and therefore are not formally counted as ‘deployed’ in this Nuclear Notebook; however, many regional storage sites are located relatively close to their launcher garrisons and in practice warheads could be transferred to their launch units on short notice*”.

¹Außenministerium der Russischen Föderation. URL: https://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/1836575/

²Russland-Analysen.

URL: <https://laender-analysen.de/russland-analysen/439/russlandanalysen439.pdf>

³Пленарное заседание Петербургского международного экономического форума.

URL: <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/71445>

⁴Академик А. Арбатов: нужно говорить не о разоружении, а о восстановлении контроля. URL: <https://www.interfax.ru/russia/964173>

Notabene: This separation of storage and launcher also applies to the 200 US tactical warheads.

The Russian launchers are divided into Naval (no details), Land-based air: 289, ABM / Air / Coastal defense added together: 882, Ground – based added together: 170¹.

Let us now come to Arbatov's claim about the possible rapidly disassembled and dismantled US-strategic warheads. Whether this is even technically possible, apart from the military sense, the author cannot judge. But, if possible, the same applies to the Russian warheads. However, Arbatov does not refer to this.

What do the numbers say? The entire US nuclear forces stockpile consists of 3708 warheads. Deployed: 1770; Reserve: 1938; Retired, awaiting dismantlement: 1336². Because Moscow does not allow public access research as Washington does, US scientists cannot give the data on Russian nuclear arsenals the same validity as their own. Nevertheless, deviations from reality are likely to be very small.

The Bulletin 2024 indicates the stockpile of Russian warheads with 4380. Deployed: 1710; Reserve: 2670; Retired, awaiting dismantlement: 1200³.

So, the US could theoretically 136 more than Russia already dismantled warheads reactivate. In this technically very questionable category: Arbatov's statement is therefore formally correct – but has no military-strategic insight value. The number of warheads actively held in reserve is much more important for a rapid return to service. And in this category, as shown, Russia has 732 more warheads than the USA. But nuclear warheads do not stand in a numerical comparison like tanks on the battlefield. The decisive factor is the range of capabilities that these systems should have and can potentially achieve. Against this background, from a German and European perspective, the aforementioned high preponderance of Russian tactical nuclear weapons is the key threat perception to then.

EUROPEAN NUCLEAR THREAT PERCEPTIONS – PROTECTION BY FRENCH NUCLEAR WEAPONS?

Threat-analytical knowledge includes the fact that military potential / capabilities can trigger powerful

threat perceptions simply through their quantity / quality and deployment, even without communicated intentions. For example, the West has long regarded Russia's extensive tactical nuclear arsenal as a major threat to European stability. The stationing of Russian nuclear weapons in Belarus⁴, which had been free of nuclear weapons for some time following the transfer of the Soviet nuclear systems stationed there to Russia under the Budapest Memorandum of 1994⁵, could lead to a further destabilization of European security.

European capitals were startled by Donald Trump's oft-repeated statement at election campaign appearances at the turn of 2023 that, *"when asked by a President of a big country said, Sir if we wouldn't pay and attacked by Russia, will you protect us. I said, you didn't pay, you delinquent? He said yes, let say that happened. No, I wouldn't protect you, by fact. I would encourage them to do whatever the hell they want. You have to pay your bills"*⁶.

Since then, politicians and scientists have been debating whether, in view of Trump's potential re-election and his political unpredictability, French nuclear weapons could provide a European deterrent umbrella. Under the impression of the irritating foreign and security policy of the Trump administration at that time Macron had already advocated a "strategic dialogue" in a keynote speech in February 2020. He repeated his offer in another programmatic speech in Sweden in January 2024. However, Chancellor Angela Merkel did not react at all to the offers from the Élysée, and her successor in office, Olaf Scholz, was dismissive: *"I believe it is very important to uphold transatlantic cooperation. That is why my government has decided to continue nuclear sharing with the USA and in NATO. I think this is the more realistic way forward"*. Since Macron's first offer, there has been concern in political Berlin that entering into a more in-depth nuclear discussion with Paris could be misperceived in Washington as an intended withdrawal from the US extended deterrent for Europe.

Article 4 of the Franco-German Treaty of Aachen / January 1919 states: *"In the event of an armed attack on their territories, they shall afford each other all the assistance and support in their power, including military*

¹Atomwaffe A-Z. URL: <https://www.atomwaffena-z.info/glossar/begriff/b61-12-bombe>

²Bulletin of The Atomic Scientists 2024. URL: <https://thebulletin.org/premium/2024-05/united-states-nuclear-weapons-2024/>

³Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists 2024. URL: <https://thebulletin.org/premium/2024-03/russian-nuclear-weapons-2024/>

⁴Liviu Horowitz/Lydia Wachs. URL: <https://www.swp-berlin.org/10.18449/2024A28/>

⁵Budapester Memorandum URL: <https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/Volume%203007/Part/volume-3007-I-52241.pdf>

⁶Donald Trump. URL: <https://www.spiegel.de/politik/trump-biden-und-die-nato-ich-wuerde-euch-nicht-beschuetzen-vs-amerika-ist-zurueck-a-e065962-e4d4-4b13-8b0c-48ab3a070c4b>

⁷Scholz, Interview. URL: <https://olaf-scholz.spd.de/aktuelles/detail/news/olaf-scholz-im-interview-mit-der-zeit/25/01/2024>

means”¹. The content of this mutual assistance clause is more precise and far-reaching than that of Article 5 of the NATO Treaty and Article 42.7 of the EU Treaty². It is completely unclear, although it is not in either party’s interest, whether the assurance of mutual assistance on the French side also includes nuclear weapons.

Some German Military and security policy experts have recently been increasingly calling for Macron’s offer of strategic dialog to finally be accepted in order to create a second nuclear pole of political incalculability as the constitutive element of the deterrence concept in and for Europe. As a first step in this direction, the former Chairman of the NATO Military Committee, retired General Klaus Naumann, proposes “to present the French with the demand to certify French nuclear weapons for the Future Combat Air System, which cannot be realized without German money and German technology, in the form of a Franco-German sharing arrangement analogous to the NATO model. This would not only secure FACS in the long term, but would also create a Franco-German nuclear sharing arrangement that would complement rather than replace the American nuclear sharing arrangement anchored in NATO” [Naumann, 2024].

What is proposed as a technological, deterrent-potentiating, creative consideration would probably but have destructive effects in terms of alliance policy. This is because other larger European states, such as Spain, Italy and especially Poland, which are already often suspicious of the Franco-German ‘axis’ as a step towards a European condominium, could see this as an attempted exclusive German deterrent advantage.

However, Macron’s vague proposal on the nuclear discourse seems to be aimed at the European dimension. Here are just five of many other questions to be resolved in this context: Which states should the French nuclear program offer protection to? Moreover, how could this be reconciled with the ‘sacred’ dogma of nuclear sovereignty? How sustainably stable would a future French nuclear umbrella be for Europe in view of a potential presidency of Marie Le Pen? In the case of the German Tornado aircraft, soon to be the F-35, with US nuclear gravity bombs and conventional stand-off weapons, Berlin would at least have the right to refuse to allow the German pilots to take off. Would Paris actually establish a nuclear sharing program, similar to the USA, and train pilots from Germany and other European countries and allow

them to take off in their nuclear-capable aircraft in the event of war? And is the Force de dissuasion nucléaire française / French nuclear deterrent force at all compatible with a potential European deterrent in terms of purpose, structure, purpose-target deployment principles and capabilities?³

Nota bene, the French nuclear arsenal⁴ comprises between 280 and 300 warheads, depending on the estimate, and is therefore around three times as large as the estimated 100 US warheads in Turkey, Belgium, Germany, Italy and the Netherlands.

1996 under the presidency of Chirac, the SSBS S3 medium-range systems were dismantled as intercontinental missiles according to French understanding. Already in 1993, the mobile tactical short-range systems Pluton and 1997 the Hades were removed from service. France’s nuclear doctrine, with its four nuclear submarines, is geared towards strategic deterrence through the principle of ‘massive retaliation’ to an attack on France, analogous to that in the USA until the mid-1960s, but largely sea-based and not land-based. Not in relation to the international category of ranges but in relation to potential targets in Russia, the French sea- and air-based are perceived in Moscow as strategic. The extent to which the ASMPA / ASMPA-R air-to-ground stand-off weapons of the Rafale B fighter aircraft could overcome the deeply echeloned Russian air defense (S-300 / 400) is not discussed in open sources in France.

Extended nuclear deterrence requires a wide range of capacities for multiple options. The French nuclear weapons do not possess these multiple capabilities. Against this background the French nuclear weapons technically as a nuclear shield might only be used for the immediate neighbors Germany and BeNeLux. But an extended French deterrence for all European NATO states is completely impossible.

RUSSIA’S TACTICAL AND INF-NUCLEAR WEAPONS AS A THREAT

During the East-West conflict, the military forces and weapons of the Warsaw Treaty states were massed against West Germany. “At the height of the Cold War, the United States stationed around 7,300 nuclear weapons in Europe to provide NATO allies with extended deterrence and security guarantees”⁵. These

¹Vertrag von Aachen. URL: https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/vertrag_von_aachen_cle857ef9.pdf

²EUV. URL: <https://www.bundestag.de/resource/blob/396620/0a70a7885e83aca60333593f753ccbbf/kollektiver-beistand-in-der-eu-data.pdf>

³Bulletin of The Atomic Scientists 2023. URL: <https://fas.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/French-nuclear-weapons-2023.pdf>

⁴SIPRI-Yearbook 2024. URL: <https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/YB24%2007%20WNF.pdf>,

⁵Nato Review. URL: <https://www.nato.int/docu/review/articles/2020/06/08/nuclear-deterrence-today/index-ge.html>

were intended to deter a potential conventional attack from the East with its numerically far superior tanks, artillery/mortars, attack helicopters, soldiers through nuclear deliberate escalation/intra war deterrence. But the “Soviet Union kept about 3000 tactical nuclear weapons ready for forward deployed forces in Europe¹”. This gave it the capacity for nuclear counter-escalation and enabled it to neutralize the NATO option. Today’s militarily neuralgic region with its conventional forces, which are massively weaker than those of Russia, are the three Baltic states and, in an extended geographical context, the so-called eastern flank of NATO.

In the wake of the collapse of the USSR, President George H. Bush issued the ‘Presidential Nuclear Initiatives’ of September 27, 1991 as the basis for the extensive reduction and destruction of its tactical nuclear systems in Europe. “*The United States destroyed approximately 2,000 nuclear artillery shells and short-range ballistic missiles, removed all tactical nuclear weapons from warships, submarines, and naval aircraft, destroyed all naval nuclear mines, reduced the readiness level of strategic bombers, and cancelled planned modernizations of some nuclear weapons systems*”². President Gorbachev and his successors promised to do the same with their tactical systems. “*By 2010, Russia had consolidated its tactical nuclear weapons in centralized storage sites in Russia, removed tactical nuclear weapons from its ground forces, and drastically reduced the tactical nuclear arsenal of its air force, missile defense forces and navy, reducing the number of non-strategic nuclear weapons by about 75 per cent*”. The Bulletin of Atomic Scientists 2010 gives the number of deployable non-strategic Russian warheads for that year with about 2000. This order of magnitude is supplemented by the analysts with the reference to the estimated number of reserves and dismantled warheads: “*We estimate that an additional 3.300 nonstrategic warheads are in reserve or awaiting dismantlement, leaving a total inventory of approximately 5.300 nonstrategic warheads*”³. Russia has reduced its arsenal in this category by just under a quarter between 2010 and 2024. As mentioned above, 1558 operational non-strategic nuclear warheads are deployable in 2024⁴.

But how many warheads are kept in reserve or stored as retired in depots is unknown.

By contrast, in 2010, the US had only 500 deployable non-strategic warheads. *The U.S. government does not count spares as operational warheads. We have included them in the reserve, which we estimate contains approximately 2,600 warheads. Several thousand other retired warheads are awaiting dismantlement. “Approximately 200 B61 bombs are deployed at six bases in five European NATO countries”*. Compared to 2010, the total deployable stock was reduced by 60 percent in 2014 and by 100 percent in Europe⁵.

In accordance with Clausewitz’s strategic trias, the end-goal-means relationship, a large scale of tactical and INF nuclear weapons is undeniably available as a massive potential means of deployment. These include the deployment of 9K720 / Iskander in Kaliningrad Oblast⁶ among other places within range of Tallinn, Riga, Vilnius, Warsaw and Berlin, as well as the 9M728/729/SSC-8 as medium-range systems⁷. They trigger threat perceptions in the target countries mentioned and that cannot be discarded as threat pareidolia. Russian scientific colleagues would very probably answer the German author’s question about their purpose and goal: According to Russian military doctrine, only to deter a US / NATO nuclear attack or other weapons of mass destruction, or if Russia’s existence were threatened with conventional weapons. However, there is no official definition of what is meant by a potential existential threat.

Thomas Schelling, the internationally highly regarded US nuclear and disarmament strategist, introduced the differentiation between “deterrence” and “compellent / coercive” within the deterrence theorem. The deterrent threat focuses on the prevention of a military attack as a deterrent purpose / goal, but is not itself aggressive. The compellent / coercive threat, on the other hand, focuses aggressively on political enforcement objective. The Russian systems mentioned could according to Western assessment also serve this purpose. Research by US nuclear analyst Tristan Volpe has shown that in the past, nuclear weapon states have used these weapons several times as a means of exerting pressure for various purposes⁸.

¹SWP-Aktuell. URL: https://www.swp-berlin.org/publications/products/aktuell/2020A48_nukleare_teilhabe.pdf

²Presidential Nuclear Initiatives. URL: <https://www.nti.org/analysis/articles/presidential-nuclear-initiatives/>

³Bulletin Russia. URL: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/epdf/10.2968/066001010?needAccess=true>

⁴Bulletin Russia. URL: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/epdf/10.2968/066001010?needAccess=true>

⁵Bulletin USA. URL: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/epdf/10.2968/066003008?needAccess=true>

⁶Agnieszka Legucka. URL: <https://laender-analysen.de/polen-analysen/287/polenanalysen287.pdf>

⁷SSC- 8. URL: <https://missilethreat.csis.org/missile/ssc-8-novator-9m729/>

⁸Tristan A. Volpe. URL: <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/book/>

The agreement of July 10, 2024 between the USA and Germany on the fringes of the last NATO summit in Washington to station new US medium-range systems at the US Multi Domain Task Force¹ in Germany from 2026, should be understood in this context. It states: “When fully developed, these conventional long-range fires units will include SM-6, Tomahawk, and developmental hypersonic weapons, which have significantly longer range than current land-based fires in Europe. Exercising these advanced capabilities will demonstrate the United States’ commitment to NATO and its contributions to European integrated deterrence”². One such project was already announced in the first German National Security Strategy in 2023: “The Federal Government will promote the development and introduction of future capabilities such as stand-off precision weapons”³.

The German government justifies the future deployment of these precision stand-off weapons as a response to the Russian build-up of dual-use / conventional nuclear missiles and cruise missiles in recent years⁴. Parallel to the deterrent function of the military-technical and security-political link to the US posture, the other function is to overcome the Russian Anti-Access / Area Denial (A2/AD) with them. What does that mean? “Their first task is those

Russian deep-strike capabilities designed to keep the Alliance at a distance (hold at risk) and possibly destroy them before they fire on NATO territory. If the Kremlin loses these systems because they were destroyed or withdrawn, it would make it easier NATO to push back the attack. This should deter Russia from attacking NATO countries.

The second task of the medium-range weapons is to destroy at least some time-critical high-value targets in Russia. These include mobile command centers or launching pads or ballistic missiles and cruise missiles. This signals to Russia that NATO has the option, in the event of an attack to massively reduce Russia’s ability to continue hostilities. This should deter an attack as well”⁵.

This exclusively conventional armament and its limited system deployment⁶ is intended to convey the Russian General Staff’s perception and assessment of the Nato-inability to launch a military strategic decapitation. However, there would still be time until 2026 to bring all three US systems into arms control negotiations: No deployment in exchange for verified dismantling of the Russian INF systems.

NATO can do without equality in quantity, but must guarantee credibility in the quality of its capabilities. In this sense the European NATO countries are also planning to build up their own/independent non-nuclear deterrence system by denial: The European Sky Shield⁷.

nuclear_latency_and_hedging_-_concepts_history_and_issues.pdf

¹Multi Domain Task Force. URL: <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF11797/13>

²Joint Statement White House. URL: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2024/07/10/joint-statement-from-united-states-and-germany-on-long-range-fires-deployment-in-germany/>

³Nationale Sicherheitsstrategie. URL: <https://www.bmvg.de/resource/blob/5636374/38287252c5442b786ac5d0036ebb237b/nationale-sicherheitsstrategie-data.pdf>

⁴Nationale Sicherheitsstrategie. URL: <https://www.bmvg.de/resource/blob/5636374/38287252c5442b786ac5d0036ebb237b/nationale-sicherheitsstrategie-data.pdf>

⁵Augen geradeaus. URL: <https://augengeradeaus.net/2024/07/dokumentation-die-nun-doch-anlaufende-debatte-ueber-us-mittelstreckenwaffen-in-deutschland/>

⁶SWP Aktuell. URL: https://www.swp-berlin.org/publications/products/aktuell/2024A36_US-Mittelstreckenwaffen_Deutschland.pdf

⁷European Sky Shield initiative.

URL: <https://www.bmvg.de/de/aktuelles/european-sky-shield-die-initiative-im-ueberblick-5511066>

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