Nuclear Deterrence and Disarmament: The View from Paris

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Why would a medium-sized country such as France, which does not face an immediate military threat, want to keep its nuclear weapons? The short answer is that the continued possession of nuclear weapons is judged to be more cost-effective than its abandonment. Paris believes that potential future threats warrant prudence and conservatism in these matters, is not inclined to rely on extended deterrence, and does not believe that abolition is a credible scenario today.

There is, in this regard, a fundamental divergence between France and the United Kingdom, the other "smaller nuclear power" among the Five. In 1956, Paris and London drew opposite lessons from the Suez crisis. France decided that only a fully independent deterrent could ensure its security and its freedom of action. The United Kingdom, on the contrary, decided that closer cooperation with the United States was the best way to influence Washington. Hence the two countries' different appreciations of what "nuclear independence" means: for Paris, it means full independence including the domestic construction of all components of the deterrent force (at a high financial cost); for London, operational independence (at a smaller cost) is judged to be enough.

The French Perspective on Nuclear Deterrence

The White Paper on National Defense and Security that was published in June 2008 has not substantially altered the French stance on nuclear policy.

In the post-Cold war world, political rationales for nuclear weapons such as "prestige" and "rank" are judged to be irrelevant by Paris, at least for France. Status considerations mattered in the 1950s and in the 1960s when France became a nuclear power. But they are no longer considered by the French as a reason to maintain nuclear weapons. The French are keen to note, for instance, that their UN Security Council seat had been secured much before they became a nuclear power; and that, if anything, their status as a permanent member gives them particular responsibilities in reinforcing non-proliferation and maintaining international security.

The French still believe that there is value in maintaining a nuclear deterrence

for security reasons. Two rationales are put forward. The first one refers to what Paris often call the "life insurance" function. Most French leaders and analysts believe that the world can change rapidly and that the emergence of a new major threat to Europe at the horizon of 15 – 20 years is not a far-fetched scenario. As then-President Chirac stated in 2006: "*In light of the concerns of the present and the uncertainties of the future, nuclear deterrence remains the fundamental guarantee of our security*".[1] He insisted that France is "*not shielded from an unforeseen reversal of the international system, nor from a strategic surprise.*"[2] Thus even in the absence of such a major threat today, since France now has nuclear weapons it might as well keep them if the cost of doing so remains bearable.

The idea that Russia or China could pose one day a major threat to Europe is far from being dismissed in French political circles. Russia is traditionally first on the list of major powers that could potentially be a threat to Europe. Moscow's decision to suspend its implementation of the Conventional Forces in Europe treaty, its threat to withdraw from the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces treaty, its invasion of Georgia and attempts to intimidate its neighbors are seen as factors enhancing the unpredictability of the strategic environment. China is a more hypothetical threat. In 1999, then-Prime Minister Lionel Jospin indicated that French deterrence should be able to counter any serious threat, "even a distant one".[3] One would be hard pressed to imagine a credible scenario where China would directly threaten France; but Paris worries about a future scenario where, for instance, Beijing seeks to deter French involvement in a crisis in Asia by exerting a veiled nuclear threat.

The second rationale is to guarantee that no regional power could blackmail or pressure France with weapons of mass destruction. The scenario that has French officials worried is one where, for instance, a country tries to blocks military intervention by threatening to strike the national territory. This concept could be called "counter-deterrence" or "counter-blackmail". A nuclear-capable Iran with the ability to strike Europe with ballistic missiles would certainly reinforce the general trend in France towards nuclear conservatism and continued modernization of its nuclear forces. Asian countries other than China could be of direct concern to France if they developed Intercontinental Range Ballistic Missiles. This could be the case

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[1] Allocution de M. Jacques Chirac, Président de la République, lors de sa visite aux forces aérienne et océanique stratégiques, Landivisiau — l'Île Longue (Brest), 19 janvier 2006.

[2] Allocution de M. Jacques Chirac, op. cit.

[3] Allocution de M. Lionel Jospin, Premier Ministre, devant l'Institut des Hautes Etudes de Défense Nationale, Paris, 22 octobre 1999.

for North Korea: as Pyongyang's missile ranges increase, for geographical reasons the European territory will be technically at reach before the US territory is.

Missile defense is viewed as a complement — not an alternative — to deterrence. In 2006, Chirac stated that missile defense could be a complement to nuclear deterrence "*by diminishing our vulnerabilities*".[4] In 2008, Sarkozy showed a similar view: "*In order to preserve our freedom of action, missile defense capabilities against a limited strike could be a useful complement to nuclear deterrence, without being a substitute for it*".[5]

The French nuclear deterrent covers "vital interests". These comprise, according to the official definition, "*the elements constituting our identity and existence a Nation-State, and in particular our territory, our population, and the free exercise of our sovereignty*".[6] An attack on vital interests would bring on a nuclear response in the form of "unacceptable damage" regardless of the nature of the threat, the identity of the country concerned, or the means employed. A noted part of Chirac's 2006 speech was the reference to State-sponsored terrorism.[7] He had made it clear that it considers that terrorism or weapons of mass destruction would not necessarily represent a threat to the country's vital interests, but that it would not hesitate to use nuclear means should the threshold of vital interests be crossed in Chirac's view — if it was clear that this was a State attack. In 2008, Sarkozy did not reiterate explicitly his predecessor's reference to terrorism, but made it clear that France's deterrent protects the country "*from any aggression against our vital interests emanating from a State — wherever it may come from and whatever form it may take*".[8]

The current doctrine is to deter essentially through the threat of destroying its political, economic and military "centers of power". It also includes the option to threaten an adversary who may have misjudged French resolve or miscalculated the limits of French vital interests with a limited strike ("nuclear warning"), aimed at "*restoring deterrence*".[9] French military authorities have let it be known in 2006 that a high altitude electromagnetic pulse strike could be an option.

France has consistently rejected the adoption of a "no first-use" posture, believing that it would weaken deterrence and help a potential aggressor's calculations. This

4 Allocution de M. Jacques Chirac, op. cit.
5 Discours de M. le Président de la République, op. cit.
6 *The French White Paper on Defence and National Security* (Paris: Editions Odile Jacob, 2008), pp. 64–65.
7 Allocution de M. Jacques Chirac, op. cit.
8 Discours de M. le Président de la République, op. cit.
9 Discours de M. le Président de la République, op. cit.

has been manifested by reservations attached to the Negative Security Assurances conferred in 1995. Paris sees nuclear retaliation as being consistent with the right to self-defense recognized by Article 51 of the UN Charter. Paris asserts that countries that do not respect their own non-proliferation commitments — including with respect to chemical and biological weapons — should not expect that the NSA would apply to them. The French believe that "no-first-use" statements are at best irrelevant, and at worst dangerous. Most countries would not believe them, and it is thus dubious that they would contribute to international stability or the reinforcement of the non-proliferation regime. And countries that do believe them might conclude that they can attack a nuclear power that has a no-first-use doctrine with anything short of nuclear weapons (including chemical weapons, biological weapons, or conventional missiles) without fear of nuclear retaliation.[10]

Paris regularly affirms that its nuclear forces are for deterrence only. As Chirac stated in 2006: "*Nuclear weapons, for us, are in no way war-fighting weapons*".[11] In 2008, Sarkozy referred to the potential use of nuclear weapons as being possible only in "*extreme circumstances of self-defense*".[12] The use of this expression, taken from the language of the July 1996 International Court of Justice advisory opinion, was meant to show that France had not broadened the role of its nuclear deterrent.[13]

Nuclear programs make up for about 10% of the defense budget (20% of the military equipment budget). In recent years (2003–2008 defense plan), on average, the nuclear budget as voted by the Parliament in 2002 was 2.8 billion € per year. In the coming years (2009–2014), it will average 3.3 billion € per year, a temporary increase due to the coming into service of several new systems. In contrast with the United Kingdom, France does not have to take decisions regarding its weapons systems in the coming years. It will have not have to make such decisions before 2020–2025.

Since the 1996 defense review, the number of SSBNs has been reduced from five to four. Three of them are always in the operational cycle, making it possible to maintain continued at-sea deterrence with at least one vessel on patrol at all times.

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[10] On objections to no-first-use see Bruno Tertrais, "The Trouble With No-First-Use," *Survival*, vol. 51, no. 5 (October–November 2009).

[11] Conférence de presse conjointe de M. Jacques Chirac, Président de la République et de Mme Angela Merkel, Chancelière de la République Fédérale d'Allemagne à l'occasion de la rencontre franco-allemande, Versailles, 23 janvier 2006.

[12] Discours de M. le Président de la République, op. cit.

[13] 2000 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, Final Document, Volume I, NPT/CONF.2000/28 (New-York, 2000), 15.

If the force was fully generated, a total of 48 missiles and perhaps some 250–260 warheads on-board three SSBNs would be available. According to open sources, the M45 missile has a range of at least 4,000 kilometres and can carry up to six TN75 warheads, each of in the 100–150 kiloton range, but some SLBMs carry a reduced payload.[14] The fourth new-generation SSBN will carry the new M51.1 SLBM, with the same TN75 warhead. AM51.2 will begin entering service in 2015, armed with the new TNO warhead. The range of the M51 with a full payload is reported to be 6,000 kilometres. Many sources suggest that the missile could have a much greater range with a reduced payload (8,000–9,000 kilometres), in particular in its M51.2 version.

France also has two squadrons of Mirage 2000N and a small carrier-based fleet of Super-Etendard, carrying the ASMP (*Air-Sol Moyenne Portée*) 300-kilometre range air-breathing missile. The successor to the ASMP is the "improved" ASMP (*ASMP Amélioré*), which entered service in 2009, armed with the new TNA warhead. The Rafale will gradually replace both the Mirage 2000N and Super-Etendard. The range of the ASMP-A is reported to be 300–400 kilometres, and its accuracy better than that of its predecessor. When critics point out that the United Kingdom has retained only a monad since the end of the Cold war, analysts favouring the status quo note that the UK's Trident-2 ballistic missile is much more accurate than the French M45 and M51. They also point out that London's nuclear policy makes the need for an air-based component less salient: since the United Kingdom anticipates that dealing with a major threat would probably involve the Alliance as a whole, NATO deterrence would involve both UK missiles and US bombs delivered by European and US aircraft.

As announced by Sarkozy in March 2008, the current number of nuclear weapons in the French arsenal is less than 300. This is the total number in the stockpile and does not include only "operationally available weapons", a measure cited by the United States and the United Kingdom. Since 1996 all French weapons are lumped together in a single category of "strategic" systems, providing flexibility in nuclear planning and operations; France considers that any use of any nuclear weapon would be such a major decision today that the very notion of "non-strategic" or "sub-strategic" weapons or use does not make sense anymore.

France was initially sceptical about the very concept of extended deterrence.

[14] Theoretically, the French SSBN force could carry a total of 288 warheads (3 boats with 16 missiles per boat, and six TN75 per missile).

Indeed, the main reason it developed nuclear weapons was that it did not believe that the US nuclear guarantee to Europe was credible.

Things have changed significantly since the end of the Cold war. In particular, since the creation of the European Union (1993), French leaders have in increasingly suggested that the country's nuclear deterrent played an implicit role in the protection of Europe. In 2006, Chirac stated that "*the development of the European Security and Defense Policy, the growing intermeshing of the interests of European Union countries, the solidarity that now exists between them, make the French nuclear deterrent, by its mere existence, an unavoidable element of the security of the European continent*".[15] In 2008, Sarkozy used almost identical words, but also implied that the "collective solidarity clause" inserted in the new Lisbon Treaty made the existence of French nuclear deterrence even more important for Europe: "*by their very existence, French nuclear forces are a key element in Europe's security. Any aggressor who might consider challenging it must be mindful of this. (..) Our commitment to the security of our European partners is the natural expression of our ever-closer union.*" [16]

The fact is that Paris is increasingly comfortable with the idea of a "collective" dimension to deterrence. Large portions of the NATO Strategic Concept of 1999 devoted to nuclear deterrence were agreed upon at 19, thus committing France along with all its Alliance partners. In his 2006 speech, Chirac stated that "*the defense of allied countries*" could be part of vital interests.[17]

France also now has a mature cooperation with the United Kingdom. The communiqué issued at the July 2009 French–British summit stated that "*our independent nuclear deterrents are strictly for defensive purposes, to deter any threats posed to our vital interests; it is difficult to envisage a 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; we will continue to maintain only a minimum nuclear capability, consistent with the strategic and security context and our commitments under Article 5 of the Washington Treaty; our nuclear forces contribute to European security as a whole.*" [18] In a major security policy address a few months earlier, Sarkozy had made it clear that he sought a "c*omplementarity*

[15] Allocution de M. Jacques Chirac, op. cit.
[16] Discours de M. le Président de la République — Présentation du SNLE Le Terrible, Cherbourg, 21 mars 2008.
[17] Allocution de M. Jacques Chirac, op. cit.
[18] Joint French–UK Summit Declaration — Defence and Security, 6 July 2009

between these nuclear powers (..) and the security of Europe as a whole".[19]

Finally, it should be noted that Paris has security agreements with several Gulf countries: Kuwait, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. The contents of these agreements have not been made public, but it could be argued that the opening of a permanent French military base in Abu Dhabi in 2008 is tantamount to a form of security guarantee. This implies no change in the French nuclear doctrine, but Paris has not excluded that its nuclear deterrent could play a role in a crisis in the Gulf involving Iran, for instance.

The French Perspective on Nuclear Disarmament

France has never been keen to characterize the NPT as resting on "three pillars" (non-proliferation, peaceful uses, disarmament). Rather, it believes that Articles I and II are "*at the heart*" of the Treaty.[20] It doubts that additional nuclear disarmament measures would be enough to persuade countries such as Iran or North Korea to change their policies: "*Let us not be naive: eliminating more nuclear weapons will not persuade countries which violate their international commitments to respect them*".[21]

Paris considers that its nuclear policy is consistent with Article VI of the NPT. The head of the French delegation to the 2005 Review Conference stated that his country was "*intent on reaffirming its commitments under Article VI of the Treaty*".[22] It maintains its force at a level of "sufficiency" (a French expression broadly equivalent to "minimum deterrent") and has chosen "*not to equip itself with all the nuclear weapons systems it could have given the technological resources at its disposal*".[23] However, the French have also adopted a very strict interpretation

[19] Allocution de M. le Président de la République à la conférence sur la sécurité, Munich, 7 February 2009.

[20] Jean-François Dobelle, "Second Session of the Preparatory Committee for the 2010 NPT Review Conference, Statement by H.E. Ambassador Jean-François Dobelle, Permanent Representative of France to the Conference on Disarmament, Head of the Delegation, 'Cluster 1,'" Geneva, 30 April 2008, p. 1.

[21] Gérard Errera, *Discours prononcé par M. Gérard Errera, Secrétaire Général du ministère français des affaires étrangères à l'ouverture de la conférence Global Zero*, Paris, 8 décembre 2008.

[22] François Rivasseau, "2005 Review Conference of the State Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, General Debate, Statement by H. E. M. François Rivasseau, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of France to the Conference on Disarmament," New-York, 5 May 2005, p. 7.

[23] Ministère de la défense, Secrétariat général de la défense nationale, & Ministère des affaires étrangères, Fighting Proliferation, Promoting Arms Control and Disarmament: France's Contribution, 2005, p. 64.

of Article VI. France is keen to emphasize the multidimensional character of the article, including the goals of cessation of the arms race and of general and complete disarmament. It considers that its actions in favor of biological, chemical and conventional disarmament (including small arms and landmines) are part of its Article VI record — as is its assistance to nuclear threat reduction in Russia.[24] The preferred point of reference for French diplomats seems to be the "Decision Number Two" of the 1995 NPT Review Conference rather to the "Thirteen Steps" of the 2000 Conference. Sarkozy's disarmament and non-proliferation agenda as laid out in his March 2008 Cherbourg speech is meant to "*[take] us forward on the path to both nuclear disarmament and general and complete disarmament*", a reference to the inseparability of the two dimensions of Article VI.[25] In 2009, the head of the French delegation to the Preparatory Committee for the 2010 NPT Review Conference stated that France had "*engaged in good faith, in compliance with the objectives set by Article VI of the Treaty, in negotiations on nuclear disarmament and comprehensive and total disarmament*" which have led, inter alia, to the adoption of the CTBT and the Chemical Weapons Convention.[26]

France's firmness on the Article VI issue has been made stronger by the unilateral decisions and disarmament moves it had made since 1990. France has reduced the size of its arsenal by about 50% since the height of the Cold war (from 600 to 300). The nuclear share of the equipment budget has been reduced by half (from 40% to 20%). Paris has reduced its number of nuclear delivery vehicles by two-thirds since 1985. It is the only one of the five NPT nuclear weapon-States to have developed, deployed and then abandoned ground-launched ballistic missiles, to have dismantled its nuclear testing sites and fissile material production facilities, and to have given a public figure on the overall size of its arsenal. Three visits of the fissile materials production facilities were organized by the French government in 2008, for foreign diplomats, and in 2009, for non-governmental organizations and journalists. France was the first of the five NPT nuclear powers to officially support the so-called "zero option" for the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and, along with

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[24] François Rivasseau, Conférence des Etats Parties chargée d'examiner en 2005 le Traité sur la Non-Prolifération des Armes Nucléaires, Comité I, Intervention prononcée par S.E.M. François Rivasseau, Ambassadeur, Représentant Permanent de la France auprès de la Conférence du Désarmement, New-York, 19 mai 2005, p. 3.

[25] Dobelle, op. cit., p. 6.

[26] Eric Danon, "Statement by H.E. Eric Danon Ambassador, Permanent Representative of France to the Conference on Disarmament, Third Session of the Preparatory Committee for the 2010 NPT Review Conference," New-York, 4 – 15 May 2009, Chapter 1.

the United Kingdom, to ratify the CTBT in 1998.

Paris is keen to emphasize a number of concrete steps which should have, in her eyes, the priority. The agenda proposed by France was laid out in President Sarkozy's 21 March 2008 speech in Cherbourg. Sarkozy proposed a eight points agenda, which included: the ratification of the CTBT; the dismantlement of testing sites; the launching of a negotiation of a FMCT; a moratorium on the production of fissile material; the establishment of transparency measures by the five NPT Nuclear Weapon States; the opening of negotiations on a treaty banning short and intermediate-range surface-to-surface missiles; the universalization of the Hague Code of Conduct Against Ballistic Missile Proliferation; and a general "*mobilization*" in all other fields of disarmament.[27]

For France to go significantly further, the international framework of strategic stability and non-proliferation would need to be maintained, and other nuclear weapons States would need to be ready to play along. As Chirac stated in 2006: "*it is obvious that we will only be able to go forward on the road towards disarmament in the event that the conditions of our overall security are maintained and if the will to make progress is unanimously shared*".[28] Sarkozy insisted in 2008 that collective security and disarmament should be based on "*reciprocity*".[29] The implementation of his initiative might create a favorable atmosphere, but there is no reason why they would in themselves lead France to further reduce its arsenal.

What about the impact of further US and Russian reductions ? France indicated in 2005 that if "the disproportion [between its forces and those of the US and Russia] changed its nature, it could envision to draw consequences" from such an evolution.[30] If the United States and Russia went down to, say, a total of 2000 nuclear weapons each (a distant prospect), it is dubious that France would feel compelled to reduce its arsenal. It does not engage in "counterforce"; therefore and French political leaders have repeatedly stated that the level of the country's arsenal is not dependent upon that of others. Things might be different if there was then a serious proposal initiated or supported by the United States to go for multilateral and proportional reductions. For political reasons, France would probably not stay away from a general trend towards nuclear reductions — especially if British, Chinese and French participation

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[27] Discours de M. le Président de la République, op. cit.
[28] Allocution de M. Jacques Chirac, op. cit.
[29] Discours de M. le Président de la République, op. cit.
[30] Conférence des Etats Parties chargée d'examiner en 2005 le Traité sur la Non-Prolifération des Armes Nucléaires, Comité I, Intervention prononcée par S.E.M. François Rivasseau (2005).

was an explicit precondition for Moscow and Washington to go in this direction.

Given the importance of nuclear weapons for France, the abandonment of nuclear deterrence by Paris is an extreme hypothesis. In contrast with the United States or other allies, few experts or former officials in France call for the abolition of nuclear weapons.[31] What could be the circumstances under which Paris could give up this capability? In a recent publication for the Stimson Center, the author envisioned four possible scenarios.[32]

Abolition by Example. Abolition by example is hardly a credible scenario. A British decision to give up its own deterrent, for instance, would not be enough: the "exemplary effect" that could be expected would be in all likelihood compensated by the realization that France would then be the sole nuclear power in Europe —probably giving it a sense of responsibility as well as a new status on the continent. An American decision to renounce nuclear weapons would be different —but France would still claim that it's the forces of its adversaries that matter to her, not those of her allies.

A Unilateral Decision to Disarm. A consistent feature of the French nuclear stance is the insistence on the need to retain nuclear weapons as long as other States can exert a major military threat against her. In 1961, President de Gaulle said that "*as long as others have the means to destroy her, [France] will need to have the means to defend itself*".[33] In 1998, Prime Minister Lionel Jospin said that "*as long as general and complete disarmament will not be realized, nuclear weapons will remain necessary [for France]*".[34] In 2000, President Jacques Chirac said that "*as long as risks persist and we have not achieved general and verified disarmament, which does not concern nuclear weapons alone, France will retain the capability to protect itself from any threat to its vital interests*".[35] Nevertheless, the circumstances under which potential major threats to the security of France have disappeared can

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[31] A rare exception was the joint article by four personalities including two former Prime ministers and a former defense minister: Alain Juppé, Bernard Norlain, Alain Richard & Michel Rocard, "Pour un désarmement nucléaire mondial, seule réponse à la proliferation anarchique", *Le Monde*, 14 octobre 2009.

[32] See Bruno Tertrais, "French Perspectives on Nuclear Weapons and Nuclear Disarmament" in Barry Blechman (ed.), *Unblocking the Road to Zero* (Washington, D.C.: The Henry M. Stimson Center, 2009).

[33] Press conference, 11 April 1961, in Charles de Gaulle, Discours et Messages, vol. III (Paris: Plon, 1970), p. 72.

[34] Discours du Premier ministre, M. Lionel Jospin, à l'Institut des Hautes Etudes de Défense Nationale, 3 september 1998.

[35] Jacques Chirac, entretien avec Armées d'Aujourd'hui, janvier 2000.

be imagined. A prerequisite would be a fully democratic Russia, firmly entrenched in the "Western camp" in terms of fundamental values and policies. A second condition would be that proliferation is being convincingly "rolled-back". The risks of nuclear proliferation in the Middle East and North Africa would have to disappear. The development of medium- and long-range ballistic missiles in the same region would need to have ceased. This does not mean that all major threats would have disappeared — only that the costs and benefits calculus of maintaining a nuclear deterrent would then be drastically changed. The continued possession by the United States of a nuclear deterrent might help a French decision to go to zero. The US extended deterrent to Europe would remain a "last line of defense" in case of a sudden and dramatic reversal of the strategic environment. In other words, paradoxically, a French decision to forego its nuclear arsenal may be impossible if the United States was to disarm unilaterally.

A US-led Initiative to Go to Zero. For France to go along a US initiative for nuclear abolition, there would also need to be a dramatic change in the international environment for the better. The coming into force of the CTBT and of a FMCT would probably be needed. Nuclear proliferation would have to be demonstrably and verifiably stopped, and all nuclear-capable States would need to be ready to participate in a global move towards zero. But there would also need to be very significant progress towards non-nuclear stability and disarmament. This would require, at the least, fully implementing and maintaining such instruments as the Conventional Forces in Europe treaty, the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention, and the Chemical Weapons Convention. A limitation of ballistic missile proliferation would also need to be ensured; a NATO missile defense architecture which effectively shields Europe from any significant missile attack (whatever the payload such missiles would carry) may be needed as an insurance policy. A democratic evolution in Russia, better relations between Moscow and its immediate neighbors, as well as the political stabilization of the Greater Middle East region — from Morocco to Pakistan — would certainly be needed to help France considering a move toward zero.

A "Great Powers" Initiative to Go to Zero. While Paris would find it easy to resist a US-only initiative, it would be much more difficult politically to do so if both Russia and China took part in it. Beijing's participation would seen as critical, because it would then imply a very strong pressure on New-Delhi, and therefore on Islamabad, to give up nuclear weapons. In such a dramatic scenario, there

would in all likelihood be strong pressures from within the European Union for France to follow suit. Assuming the United Kingdom was ready to play along, there would then be strong pressures from key countries such as Germany, Italy, Spain, and Sweden, in which public support for nuclear deterrence has never been very strong. (Only some countries Eastern European countries such as Poland and the Baltic States might refrain from such pressures, given their traditional fear of Russia — which may lead them, in the absence of a US nuclear guarantee, to see UK and French forces with increased interest.) Given France's willingness to remain one of the key political actors in Europe, such political pressure would be hard to resist. Before giving up its arsenal, Paris would certainly attempt to secure its existence for several years, waiting for concrete disarmament steps by the major nuclear players — notably the United States and Russia, given the size of their arsenals — and for proof that verification measures would be efficient.*

As conservative as it may seem, the French position is not as isolated among Western allies. In December 2008, the 27 members of the European Union agreed to an Action Plan on nuclear disarmament agenda that was largely based on Sarkozy's March 2008 Cherbourg speech. In July 2009, Paris and London agreed in a common statement that they "share similar ambitions in terms of arms control and disarmament, notably in the nuclear sphere", and they are "*committed to seeking a safer world*".[36] Most importantly, a few days later, the G8 Heads of States and Governments agreed for the first time on common language on nuclear abolition: "*We are all committed to seeking a safer world for all and to creating the conditions for a world without nuclear weapons, in accordance with the goals of the NPT*".[37]

[36] Joint French–UK Summit Declaration — Defence and Security, July 6, 2009.
[37] L'Aquila Statement on Nonproliferation, July 8, 2009.