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Models of Nuclear Disarmament

Case-Study: US Tactical Nuclear Weapons in Europe

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Abstract: This article attempts to explain (nuclear) disarmament by distinguishing between two types of models: the security model posits that disarmament occurs when the geostrategic tensions are low, and the domestic politics model builds upon the security model by adding the influence of domestic political actors such as the defense bureaucracy, the peace movement, public opinion, and political leaders. These theories are then applied to the current debate regarding the presence of United States tactical nuclear weapons in Europe.

Keywords: United States; Soviet Union; peace; arms race; security; arms control; defense bureaucracy; peace movements.

Introduction

Just as the literature on war is more extensive than the literature on peace, more thought seems to be given to providing reasons why states arm themselves rather than why and when states disarm. This article contributes to correcting this imbalance by focusing on answering the question of when the conditions for disarmament are ripe. I will limit the discussion to the issue of nuclear weapons by using as a case study the possible withdrawal of the United States tactical nuclear weapons from Europe. Disarmament equals substantial arms reductions—albeit it is not always the case in situations of mere arms control—and eventually, although not immediately, reaches a level of zero stockpiles, either unilaterally so or pursuant to a negotiated agreement.

The central question in this essay is: Which factors contribute to successful nuclear disarmament? Most of the literature concerning this matter seems to focus on countries' external security situation. Events with the capacity of yielding armament are, for example, tensions amongst the nuclear powers or between a nuclear power and its non-nuclear neighbors, and the anticipation of an arms build-up by other states. Disarmament, in contrast, follows from détente; without political détente, it is significantly more difficult to bring about disarmament. The implication for so-called realists such as Colin Gray is that there is even no need for arms control, let alone disarmament. Upholding Bruce Berkowitz's conclusion in his book *Calculated Risks*, Gray argues that

> in any true causal sense arms control is not capable of controlling arms.[1]

The best example of this classic model is the nuclear arms race and the build-down during and after

[1] Colin S. Gray, *House of Cards: Why Arms Control Must Fail*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press 1992, p. 10.

the Cold War between the two former superpowers, both concerning strategic and tactical nuclear weapons. If one applies this model—that I will call the security model—to the question of the remaining United States tactical nuclear weapons in Europe, the most one could expect in the current situation of tense geopolitical conflicts is a status quo and at worse a new arms race, including the installment of new United States conventional medium-range missiles in Europe, a possible redeployment of United States tactical nuclear weapons at the Royal Air force base in Lakenheath in the United Kingdom, and possibly even a first installment of nuclear weapons in Poland.

In this article, I argue that this mainstream disarmament model can and should be refined. Whether disarmament can and will occur depends not exclusively on a state's external security situation. A second major factor that determines whether disarmament happens is domestic politics, which is a force that is to some extent independent of what is going on abroad. Here, one can distinguish two actors that most of the time have an opposite effect on disarmament: non-governmental organizations (NGO) and public opinion on the one hand, and the defense bureaucracy on the other. The former tends to argue in favor of disarmament, and the latter argues for the continuation of spending money on arms for it is in its own parochial interest. Depending on the strength of either one of these actors and on the leadership qualities of the decision-makers, disarmament may happen or not and always takes place within the contours of the external environment.

Applying this refined domestic model to the current political situation with its geostrategic tensions in Europe, the Middle East, and in Africa, one could expect that politicians and to a certain extent also public opinion will not be eager to disarm. On the other hand, the process of the conclusion and the 2021 entry into force of the 2017 Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) that has galvanized NGOs in the so-called host nations—the European states that host United States tactical weapons—may have a positive influence on further reductions, and possibly even on the complete removal of the remaining United States tactical nuclear weapons in Europe, despite the geopolitical situation that is not in favor of nuclear disarmament. Moreover, in particular, after the war in Ukraine, there might be opportunities for renewed arms control and disarmament to occur, including with respect to the tactical nuclear weapons in Europe. In case that there is no peace agreement between Russia and Ukraine and in case that the Trump administration partly or completely delegitimizes NATO, there is also a chance that, as I have discussed in an earlier article, the French (and perhaps British) nuclear weapons are being Europeanized in one way or another.[2]

Models of Nuclear Disarmament

Advancements in science and technology enable a flurry of lethal nuclear, chemical, biological, sonic, and electromagnetic weapons systems whose lethality cannot be restricted to a regional theater of war. Each one of these weapons categories will need to be regulated globally in order to reduce the risk of accidental or reasoned pathological use. Here, I discuss two disarmament models concerning nuclear weapons.

The Security Model

The security model posits that disarmament depends on the geostrategic circumstances in international politics. The arms race in the 1950s corresponded to a tense geopolitical period between the United States and the former Soviet Union, the two major military and economic blocs in the world at that time. A major warning was the Cuban missile crisis in October 1962 and the arrival of China as the fifth nuclear-armed state two years later in October 1964. It is not by chance that the Lyndon Johnson administration helped initiate and conclude the 1968 Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) that included the goal of nuclear elimination.

The first major period of détente—at the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s—led to two arms control agreements in the year 1972: the first bilateral Strategic Arms Control Agreement (SALT I), and the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABM Treaty) on missile defense; also in the same year, the Biological Weapons Convention had been signed and entered into force in 1975. In the following years, SALT II was negotiated and concluded in June 1979. Due to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December, President Jimmy Carter withdrew from SALT II in January 1980, all in line with the security model.

[2] Tom Sauer, "Power and Nuclear Weapons. The Case of the European Union," *Journal for Peace and Nuclear Disarmament* 3/1 (May 2020), 41-59, here pp. 52-6.

The second Cold War at the end of the 1970s and the first half of the 1980s did not only prevent SALT II from entering into force but also led to the installation of intermediate-range nuclear missiles in Western Europe. The next period of détente—at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s which corresponds to the end of the Cold War—led to the largest number of arms control agreements between the United States and the Soviet Union (later on Russia): The Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF Treaty1987), the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty I (START I, 1991), the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty II (START II, 1993), as well as the geographically broader Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) and the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC). It also led to deep reductions with respect to the overall number of nuclear weapons, as predicted by the security model.

Political frictions between Russia and the United States restarted in the mid-1990s and the result was a status quo or only a minor build-down of the nuclear arsenals since then. Recently, due to geopolitical tensions, the overall number of nuclear weapons is going up again (especially due to China's military build-up). The George W. Bush administration unilaterally withdrew from the ABM Treaty in 2001. As a result, START II never entered into force (and CFE was suspended by Russia). In the period 1993-2021, only two limited bilateral strategic arms control treaties were concluded and implemented: the Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty (SORT, 2003) and the New START Treaty (2010). This is not surprising according to this model, given the tensions between East and West.

In short, at first sight, the security model seems to explain very well the ups and downs of disarmament when applied to the nuclear era. That said, it is remarkable that the United States' overall numbers that peaked in 1967 started growing again in the period 1971-1974 despite détente and arms control agreements, and that the Soviet Union's numbers kept steeply rising in the period 1977-1979 (despite détente). Mutatis mutandis, the period 2014-2021 also shows that despite substantial political frictions, New START Treaty continued to be implemented (although other arms control agreements such as the INF Treaty and the Open Skies Treaty were cancelled). These are three episodes that are hard to explain by the security model.

The security model is not refined enough. It is, for instance, not clear whether the policy changes with respect to arms control and disarmament as a result of the external security situation are predominantly elite-driven or pushed by civil society. The security model—in a neo-realist tradition—does not elaborate on this aspect. That is another reason why there is a need to refine the security model.

The Domestic Politics Model

Whether disarmament can and will take place depends not only on the existing external security situation. Domestic politics is a second major factor determining whether and when disarmament occurs, while the geopolitical and, therefore, security environment remains an important factor. This model is an example of liberalism in the context of International Relations theory. When applied here, one can distinguish two actors that most of the time have an opposite effect on disarmament: NGOs—such as peace movements, but also epistemic communities such as scientists (for example, the Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs) or physicians (for example, the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War, and the International Committee of the Red Cross)—as well as public opinion on the one hand, and the defense bureaucracy on the other. Generally speaking, the former is in favor of disarmament. Having said this, public opinion in general does not care very much about international politics, let alone nuclear arms control agreements, except maybe in the case of major international crises. Examples of such exceptions are the Cuban missile crisis (October 1962) and the Euromissile crisis in the first half of the 1980s. Lawrence Wittner chronicles that on those occasions, the existential fear resulted in pressure from NGOs and public opinion for nuclear disarmament.[3] The latter helped the political leadership to establish the Hotline between the United States and the Soviet Union in 1963, and as April Carter shows, to negotiate and conclude the Limited Test Ban Treaty in the same year, to start reducing the overall United States numbers from 1967 onwards, and to negotiate and conclude the bilateral INF agreement in 1987.[4]

[3] Lawrence S. Wittner, *Confronting the Bomb: A Short History of the World Nuclear Disarmament Movement*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press 2009, pp. 89, 119-20.

[4] April Carter, *Success and Failure in Arms Control Negotiations*, Stockholm, SE: Stockholm International

Yet even then, the major issues that determined the voting behavior were unrelated to foreign policy.

James Fallows argues that the military-industrial complex is generally in favor of the continuation of spending money on arms since that is in its own parochial interest.[5] The more money available for weapons for the government departments involved, the bigger the size of personnel and prestige will be. Remarkably, due to this bureaucratic pressure, arms control goes on many occasions hand in hand with re-armament. Sean Lynn-Jones points out that arms control agreements yield domestic compromises that include sponsoring of other weapon systems than those that are the object of the arms control and disarmament negotiations.[6] In the United States, Congress and those closely related to Congress (such as the military) have a lot of leverage in this regard, as the Senate has to agree with the ratification of arms control treaties. As Paul Stockton writes regarding the role of the armed services:

> That leverage over ratification gives the services a powerful voice in the drafting of U.S. treaty proposals, which the services—and their civilian allies in the executive branch—use to ensure that prospective treaties will accommodate the new weapons they deem necessary...Arms developments and arms control go forward in tandem, through an intra-governmental logrolling mechanism in which support for one is traded for support for the other.[7]

Stockton continues by stating that the domestic compromise with respect to the 1963 Limited Test Ban Treaty in the United States was ironically an acceleration of the testing program, however this time it happened underground (*NG* 154).

Whether NGOs and public opinion or the military-industrial complex wins the domestic battle depends on the strength of their lobbying efforts and political skills as well as on the nature of the political leadership. Most of the time, path dependency ensures that defense programs are continued, and new ones are developed, especially in times of tension. Consequently, inertia reigns in favor of the military-industrial complex, especially in larger states where these complexes are bigger in scale. This applies even more in autocratic regimes (such as the Soviet Union) where the role of NGOs and public opinion is nearly absent, which may explain why despite détente the number of weapons in the Soviet Union kept growing in the 1970s, even after 1977 when the overall Soviet numbers had equaled the ones of the United States.

Given this domestic politics model, let us have a second look at the factors that led to nuclear disarmament during the Cold War. The first arms control agreements in the beginning of the 1960s such as the Partial Test Ban Treaty (PTBT) cannot simply be explained by the security model alone. Domestic actors, including NGOs and public opinion, also played a substantial role. Matthew Evangelista compiled data to show that the first anti-nuclear protests in the 1950s were held because of studies that revealed the negative consequences of atmospheric nuclear tests for the health of people and nature.[8] While these protests did not lead directly to arms control agreements, one can argue that they helped influence the political atmosphere for reductions thereafter. The first arms control agreements resulted from the Cuban missile crisis when the world came close to nuclear war, something that was felt both by the elite and public opinion in many places around the world.

As I have noted above, during the sixties, the Pugwash conferences inspired political decision-makers to cap the nuclear arms race in the form of SALT I. Here again, the caveat is that bureaucratic politics made the United States defense community receive compensation for SALT I in the form of accelerated defense spending for Trident, the B-1, and Multiple Independently-targetable Reentry Vehicles (MIRV). The latter explains the rise of the US overall numbers at the beginning of the 1970s in contrast to what could have been expected from the security model. The bureaucratic compensation for SALT II was the development of the MX missile.

Peace Research Institute 1989, pp. 42-52, 224-7.

[5] James Fallows, *National Defense*, New York, NY: Vintage Books 1981, pp. 4-11.

[6] Sean M. Lynn-Jones, "Lulling and Stimulating Effects of Arms Control," in *Superpower Arms Control: Setting the Record Straight*, eds. Albert Carnesale and Richard Haass, Cambridge, MA: Ballinger Publishing Company 1987, pp. 223-273, here p. 229.

[7] Paul N. Stockton, "The New Game on the Hill: The Politics of Arms Control and Strategic Force Modernization," *International Security* 16/2 (Fall 1991), 146-170, here p. 153. [Henceforth cited as *NG*]

[8] Matthew Evangelista, *Unarmed Forces: The Transnational Movement to End the Cold War*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press 1999, pp. 47, 56.

While the security model assumes that the arms control treaties are the result of political détente, the domestic politics model posits that domestic political actors such as the scientific community pushed the political leaders on both sides to cooperate on arms control which, in turn, helped to create political détente.

The best example of direct influence on domestic politics is the massive protests at the end of the 1970s and the first half of the 1980s, both in the United States (Freeze Movement) and in Western Europe (against the Euromissiles). Nowadays, the argument is sometimes heard that these gigantic protests in Europe did not yield any result as the Euromissiles were de facto installed in Germany, Belgium, and Italy. That is, however, only part of the story. First of all, thanks to the INF Treaty the missiles were installed only for a very short period of time (1985-1987). The latter was negotiated by President Ronald Reagan and President Mikhail Gorbachev, partly under the influence of the pressure of the protest movement. Secondly, the influence of the Western peace movement was also indirectly showing its effect. Gorbachev later on admitted that he had dared to propose reductions to the West because he was aware that his Western counterparts were under pressure from civil society to follow up on his demands. The security model is insufficient to explain the arrival of the INF treaty, except by assuming that the détente started already before 1987. It is more logical to see the INF treaty as the result of public pressure to cap the arms race and to improve the political relationship thereafter. With regard to INF, political leadership in the person of Reagan and Gorbachev was supported by public opinion and thereby surpassing bureaucratic politics. This time there was no compensation for the United States military-industrial complex. A whole category of weapon systems was eliminated.

The end of the Cold War led to a peace dividend (expected by the general public) thanks to the changed external circumstances. Here, the security model seems to suffice to explain what happened. Nevertheless, even in this episode, the military-industrial complex intervened. Paul Stockton carefully chronicles how START I was in United States politics directly linked to the approval of the Midgetman missile, the B-2 bomber, and missile defense.[9]

The period from the mid-1990s until the take-over of Crimea by the Russian Federation in 2014 seems to be a period of transition. From hindsight, one can see it as a period of the gradual worsening of the situation between the West and Russia. In the beginning, especially until 2003, it could have gone the other way around, for instance, if Russia had been included in the Euro-Atlantic security architecture on an equal footing. The security model is hard to apply as it is unclear whether this period should be defined as a period of détente or tension. The domestic politics model is more useful. Public opinion simply forgot about nuclear weapons as the Cold War formally ended. Many people believed that most—if not all—nuclear weapons were gone. In the absence of nuclear crises, people were more concerned about other threats such as terrorism or climate change. Peace movements such as the likes that assembled under the heading "Abolition 2000" (including IPPNW and Pax Christi) kept the anti-nuclear flame alive in the period from 1995 to 2005 but at a rather low visibility level. As a result, there was not a lot of pressure on politicians, and policy inertia resulted from it.

The failure of the NPT Review Conference in 2005 (not by chance during the Bush administration that became known for its unilateralism, including the discarding of the ABM Treaty) led to the idea of establishing a new anti-nuclear initiative, this time based on humanitarian concerns, comparable to the Landmines and Cluster munitions initiatives in respectively the 1990s and 2000s. The latter had successfully led to two major ban treaties. As I have argued elsewhere, together with the ICRC and like-minded states such as Austria, Switzerland, Norway, and Mexico, the so-called Humanitarian Initiative with respect to nuclear weapons was born.[10] The International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) saw daylight in the period 2007-2010—first in Australia, and later on worldwide. Three humanitarian conferences—both with a governmental and non-governmental gathering—were organized in the period 2013-2014. Later on, ICAN led the successful campaign toward the TPNW,

[9] Paul N. Stockton, "The New Game on the Hill: The Politics of Arms Control and Strategic Force Modernization," *International Security* 16/2 (Fall 1991), 146-170, here pp. 159-60, 164.

[10] Tom Sauer and Joelien Pretorius, 'Nuclear Weapons and the Humanitarian Approach,' *Global Change, Peace & Security* 26/3 (October 2014), 233-250.

for which it received the Nobel Peace Prize in 2017. The TPNW can rightly be regarded as a major victory of the worldwide peace movement. In its turn, it also gave a boost to the traditional peace organizations. That being said, the nuclear-armed states and their allies boycotted the TPNW negotiations. They firmly spoke out against the TPNW, fueling polarization. The latter provided the ideal cover for the military-industrial complex inside the nuclear-armed states to continue spending money on nuclear weapons and their delivery vehicles. For instance, in order to get New START ratified by the Republicans in the United States Senate in 2010, the Obama administration agreed to conduct a gigantic modernization program worth 1.2 trillion dollars spread over the next 30 years, which was exactly the same mechanism that was operative during the Cold War.

Since the take-over of Crimea by Russia in 2014, the geopolitical security situation further worsened, making the prospects for arms control, let alone disarmament extremely bleak, at least from the security model perspective. But as already stated above, the implementation of New START continued and the numbers of the former superpowers came further down, be it at a very limited speed.

The Trump administration severely undermined nuclear arms control: President Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew from the INF Treaty in 2019 after having accused Russia of having violated the treaty (and after having withdrawn in 2018 from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, also called the Iran nuclear deal) and from the Open Skies Treaty in 2020; Trump also refused to extend New START, and during his first term he was the first United States president since Gerald Ford who did not conclude any arms control treaty at all. Had President Trump been re-elected in 2020, New START would in all likelihood not have been extended either, which would have meant the complete break-up of bilateral arms control; however, with the incoming Biden administration, the latter did not happen. That said, the invasion of Ukraine by Russia in 2022 gave a deadly blow to arms control and disarmament. Since then, the overall number of nuclear weapons worldwide started to grow again for the first time since the 1980s, especially because of increased nuclear weapons production in China.

To conclude, the domestic politics model can explain in greater detail than the security model what happened to the timing of nuclear disarmament. The following case study, namely the United States tactical (or sub-strategic) nuclear weapons stationed in Europe demonstrates this point and shows how the presence of these United States tactical nuclear weapons in Europe may be impacted by the TPNW, the current war against Ukraine, and the second Trump administration.

Case Study: The Remaining United States Tactical Nuclear Weapons in Europe

The build-up and build-down of United States tactical nuclear weapons in Europe resembles the curve of the strategic nuclear weapons: going up in the 1950s and 1960s, going slowly down in the 1970s, and remaining flat in the first half of the 1980s, to be followed by deep reductions in the second half of the 1980s and even deeper reductions at the beginning of the 1990s. The number of US tactical nuclear weapons in Europe diminished from 7,000 in 1970 (at its peak) to 700 in 1992. Since then, however, the reduction rate has substantially decreased: minus 600 over a period of nearly 30 years. The format of the complete curve looks like a snail whose neck keeps on being extended. Nowadays, it is estimated that there are approximately one hundred United States tactical nuclear weapons left in Europe.

The security model does the heavy lifting in explaining the build-up and build-down of the numbers of United States tactical nuclear weapons in Europe: the rise has to do with the Cold War. The détente period in the 1970s resulted in a decline, be it relatively limited. The new Cold War in the 1980s clearly halted the further decline and the numbers slightly increased a bit thereafter. The rather deep reductions in the period from 1985 to 1987 are more difficult to explain by this model. In contrast, the even deeper reductions the following years due to the end of the Cold War and more in particular due to the only—be it informal and so-called unilateral or reciprocal—agreements on tactical nuclear weapons between the former Soviet Union, the Russian Federation and the United States in the form of the so-called Presidential Nuclear Initiatives (PNI) in the period 1991-1993 can be explained by the security model. Maybe the most difficult to explain by the security model is why 700 United States tactical weapons remained in Europe despite the implosion of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact and despite the removal of all Soviet Union tactical nuclear

weapons to the Russian Federation's territory at the beginning of the 1990s.

This puzzle can be explained in the context of domestic politics, especially with regard to the host nations. The Air Force services in the host nations, and by extension the military, had, in addition, bureaucratic reasons to keep some of these nuclear bombs: the nuclear task gave them more prestige, both internally, that is, inside the military and externally vis-à-vis their counterparts of other NATO member states that are not hosting nuclear weapons. Furthermore, their dual-capable aircraft (DCA) made it more legitimate to purchase the most advanced United States tactical aircraft when they had to be renewed. It is, therefore, not by chance that over the last couple of years, the Netherlands, Italy, Germany, and Belgium decided to replace F-16 aircraft with F-35s.

Even more important for explaining why the United States kept hundreds of its tactical nuclear weapons in Europe after the Cold War (in contrast to Russia) is the political dynamic inside NATO. As I have argued elsewhere, although Russia was officially a NATO partner (which is different from being a member state) since the 1990s, frictions between NATO and Russia came rather soon to the floor: starting in the former Yugoslavia, both in the first half of the 1990s and with the bombing of Kosovo without a UN SC resolution in 1999, but mostly as a result of NATO expansion and later on the installation of missile defense in Eastern Europe.[11] In that deteriorating environment, the governments of the host nations did not feel comfortable asking for the removal of the tactical nuclear weapons. This argument fits both in the security model (especially since the 2007 Munich conference, the 2008 Georgia War, and certainly after the take-over of Crimea by the Russian Federation in 2014) and the domestic politics model, as left-wing politicians in the host nations did not want to be accused by more conservative politicians of undermining NATO solidarity. The latter can also be regarded as an example of a lack of political leadership.

The peace movements were rather weak and were not able to convince their governments to act, except maybe in Germany. As a result of what had been agreed in the coalition agreement in 2009, German Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle brought the issue of the potential withdrawal of the United States tactical nuclear weapons from Germany and Europe on the agenda of the informal NATO Summit in Tallinn with the support of Norway, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxemburg (although it is unclear to what extent their support was genuine). Leopoldo Nuti reports that United States Secretary of State Hillary Clinton however—probably under pressure from the Eastern European states, France, and the United Kingdom—immediately closed the discussion.[12] It was also at that Summit that the notion of NATO being a nuclear alliance was initiated, which would make nuclear disarmament even more difficult thereafter.

Since the mid-1990s, the gradual reductions with respect to United States tactical nuclear weapons in Europe have been taken unilaterally by the United States without much discussion inside the Alliance. One could argue that the last remaining bombs will be taken out in this way as well. A counterargument is that the last ones are more symbolic than the previous ones and that as a result, it may take even more time to withdraw them.

If one applies the security model to the future of United States tactical nuclear weapons in Europe, the most one could expect in the current situation of tense geopolitical conflicts is a status quo and at worse a new arms race, possibly with the installment of new United States conventional medium-range missiles in Europe, maybe the re-introduction of United States tactical nuclear weapons at the United Kingdom Lakenheath base, and perhaps a first installment in Poland. The security model predicts that the remaining tactical nuclear weapons will not be withdrawn in the coming years. Only with an end of the war in Ukraine, new opportunities for arms control and disarmament, both for strategic and tactical nuclear weapons, may see the daylight. One could even argue that due to the novel installation of Russian tactical nuclear weapons in Belarus in 2024, both sides may come faster to a bilateral agreement as the previously asymmetrical situation, namely that only the United States installed tactical nuclear weapons in Europe, has now come to an end.

[11] Tom Sauer, "The Origins of the Ukraine crisis and the Need for Collective Security between Russia and the West," *Global Policy* 8/1 (2017), 82-91.

[12] Leopoldo Nuti, "NATO's Role in Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Arms Control," *IAI Istituto Affari Internazionali* 21/3 (January 2021), 1-41, here pp. 31-2.

At first sight, the picture does not change dramatically if one moves to the alternative model that includes the domestic politics factor. That said, regarding domestic politics, it will be crucial to put this issue on the political agenda once the war in Ukraine has ended. Thanks to the TPNW and the second Trump administration, the issue of nuclear weapons did not completely disappear in the societal and political debate in Western Europe.

The Potential Influence of the TPNW and the second Trump administration on the Remaining United States Tactical Nuclear Weapons in Europe

The 2017 Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons was negotiated and concluded by 122 non-allied non-nuclear weapon states and explicitly forbids the stationing of nuclear weapons on other states' territories. Based on the security model, the TPNW will not make any difference as long as the security situation between the major powers does not improve. The domestic politics model, in contrast, predicts that the resurrection of the peace movement in the host nations as a result of the conclusion and entry into force of the TPNW may help get rid of the last remaining tactical nuclear weapons in Europe, but not before the end of the Ukraine war. In addition, the bureaucratic counterpressure may be more limited than in the cases described before. The renewal of the B-61 bombs in the United States is completed; the money—more than ten billion US Dollars—has already been spent. The new bombs are currently being installed in Europe. Most of the host nations have already decided to acquire the F-35. What is left is the prestige to represent the host nation at the NATO Nuclear Planning Group (NPG). There is even a bureaucratic argument in favor of the removal, namely the installment of low-yield submarine-launched ballistic missiles in the United States by the first Trump administration, which can be regarded as an alternative for the free-fall bombs.

At this moment, the pressure by the NGOs and civil society is not sufficient to convince the host nations' governments to change course, and that has for a substantial part to do with the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and the start of the second Trump administration. This does not mean that it cannot change in the future, once the war is over. In addition, President Trump is a wild-card; he is known for his unpredictability. He may or may not withdraw the remaining 90,000 American soldiers and/or the remaining 100 United States tactical nuclear weapons from Europe, or even withdraw the United States from NATO. In an unpublished 2021 report by Claire Nardon (under my supervision), the effect of the humanitarian initiative and the resulting TPNW on the peace movement and civil society, in general, is described for the following three host nations: Belgium, the Netherlands, and Germany. I will use details from this report to sketch out the role of the peace movement in these three countries.

Belgium

There are different reasons why there is a pacifist tendency in Belgium: first, Belgium is a small country, and small countries tend to invest less in defense, except if situated in a dangerous geopolitical spot, which is not the case anymore for Belgium since the end of the Second World War. Secondly, Belgium has been the battleground of many wars throughout history and was occupied by the Romans, the Habsburgs, the Spanish, the French, and the Dutch. For instance, Flanders Fields experienced the first full-scale use of chemical weapons during the First World War. As a result, pacifism is to a certain extent part of the DNA of Belgium.

Belgium also has an institutional challenge due to the two or three linguistic regions, that determine its political and parliamentary culture. Partly because the country is politically and institutionally complex, and a government coalition needs always two times the number of parties as in other countries, decision-making is generally slower. Institutional matters take up a lot of time and energy at the expense of other issues such as foreign policy. For the same reason, there is not much room for independent actions by individual members of parliament. In other words, Belgium is basically governed by the political party leaders who control the ministers in the government.

Belgium joined the Atlantic Alliance right from its beginning in 1949. Its headquarters only moved to Belgium in 1966 after President Charles De Gaulle decided to leave the integrated military structures of NATO. When the United States proposed to install its tactical nuclear weapons in Europe in 1957, the Belgian government agreed, be it in secret. It was not discussed in the Belgian parliament. In a hearing before the Belgian Senate on 14 January 2010, Eric

David details events taking place in 1962, namely, when member of parliament Henry Rolin proposed to ban the transport and installation of nuclear weapons on Belgian territory, Prime Minister Paul-Henry Spaak told him that the latter was not needed as the government would always ask for permission from the parliament in advance.[13] Quod non. One year later, in 1963, the first United States tactical nuclear weapons were installed in Belgium without any debate—let alone approval—by the Belgian parliament.

The Belgian peace movement has its origins in the First World War, partly as the result of the linguistic fight of the Dutch-speaking soldiers against the French-speaking officers, which continued thereafter. The first major street protests had to do with the 1970s purchase of relatively expensive F-16s. However, the peace movement in Belgium got a gigantic boost with the NATO double track decision in December 1979.[14] In the same month already fifty thousand people gathered in Brussels. Two years later, that number quadrupled. And the biggest protest march ever in Belgian history occurred in 1983: 400,000 protesters (out of a population of 10 million) coming by buses and trains from every village of the country. Although protests continued in the years after, they were in lesser numbers: 150,000 in March 1985, 115,000 in October 1985, 75,000 in 1987 and 75,000 in 1989. The peace movement was able to bring so many people on the streets thanks to the general fear of nuclear war due to the deteriorating geopolitical situation, which says something about the confluence of the security and the domestic politics model. Furthermore, the peace movement collaborated both with the (socialist and catholic) unions and the third world, environmental, and human rights movements. The Green party had its origins in these so-called "new social movements" in the 1970s.

Therefore, the domestic political scene was such that the decision to install the Euromissiles in 1985 was politically difficult, especially for the left wing of the Christian Democrats. The conservative government calculated that it was more important to follow what had been agreed inside NATO than to listen to the silent majority that does care more about the economy than about American missiles. That political assessment seemed to be correct as the governmental parties did not lose the elections despite having installed the missiles. The opposition, the Socialist party, gained votes (probably also because of topics other than the Euromissiles), but not enough in order to break into the government ranks.

While many protesters were probably disillusioned because the missiles were installed in 1985, the argument can be made that the protests did make a difference in the thinking of the United States and certainly Soviet leadership and helped disarmament to get back on track. The Euromissiles had already left Belgium in 1987, owing to the INF agreement. More generally speaking, the peace movement in the 1980s democratized Belgian foreign and defense policy in the sense that these issues were now included now in societal debate too, at least more than before.

Occasionally, thereafter, the Belgian government (sometimes under pressure by the parliament) did take the lead on disarmament issues. The socialist Minister of Defense Guy Coëme succeeded in 1990 to block the modernization of the nuclear short-range Lance missile inside NATO, which can be partly explained by the fact that the nuclear weapons issue was still on the agenda of the left-wing parties, due to the protest activities of the peace movement in the years before. A couple of years later, Belgium was also a leading force behind the anti-personnel mines ban, and later—be it to a lesser extent—the cluster munitions ban.

After the Cold War, the nuclear weapons issue got much less traction in society. That said, the Bomb Spotting actions at the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s in Kleine Brogel, the Air Force base where the United States tactical nuclear weapons were supposed to be stationed, attracted hundreds and at a certain moment two thousand people, many of them climbing over the fences, which on many occasions reached the headlines of television, journals, and newspapers. Amongst the protesters were members of parliament of left-wing parties,

[13] Rapport du groupe de travail "désarmement nucléaire," Belgian Senate, 4-1630/1, 5 May 2010, section II/A/1, https://www.senate.be/www/?MIval=publications/viewPubDoc&TID=67116958&LANG=fr.

[14] Patrick Stouthuysen, "The Belgian Peace Movement," in *International Social Movement Research: Peace Movements in Western Europe and the United States, Vol. 3*, ed. Bert Klandermans, Greenwic, CT: JAI-Press 1991, pp. 175-99.

occasionally a liberal, and once even a minister from the Flemish region.

The remaining nuclear weapons on Belgian territory were and still are not popular. Surveys show that a majority of the Belgian people is in favor of withdrawal (ICAN, 2020), although the current war in Ukraine may have an influence in this regard. The section of the worldwide Mayors of Peace that was most successful was the Belgian one, including several Christian-Democrat mayors. Resolutions in the Flemish (2000, 2010, 2015) and federal parliament (2005, 2009) were voted in favor of taking steps to withdraw the tactical nuclear weapons. Two former Prime Ministers from conservative parties (Guy Verhofstadt and Jean-Luc Dehaene) together with a former NATO Secretary-General (Willy Claes) and a former Minister of Foreign Affairs (Louis Michel) wrote a joint op-ed in 2010 asking for the withdrawal.

But while there has always been a societal majority in favor of the withdrawal, if push came to shove the political parties in government—be it from the right or the left (including socialists and the green party)—apparently calculated that a withdrawal was not worth the political cost, namely being criticized of being an *Einzelgänger* inside NATO. Under the adagio "Time To Go", the peace movement organized one more protest action in Brussels in 2013, which was not much of a success.

The Belgian government in the period 2013-2014 did not send a high-level representative to the Humanitarian Conferences, voted against the October 2016 TPNW resolution in the United Nations General Assembly (like most other NATO member states), and boycotted the TPNW negotiations in 2017 (like any other NATO member state except the Netherlands), but did not join the diplomatic protest by the United States and many of its allies in the United Nations corridors in April 2017.

The Humanitarian Initiative and the TPNW did, however, energize the peace movement, specifically Pax Christi Flanders (that rejuvenated its Security and Disarmament working group in the fall of 2020), the activist group Vrede vzw in Flanders, and to a lesser extent the Coordination Nationale d'Action pour la Paix et la Démocratie (CNAPD) in the French-speaking part. They resurrected the Belgian Anti-Nuclear Coalition in the period 2018-2019. Their lobbying activities led to a nuclear divestment policy change of the KBC Group, one of the biggest Belgian banks, that in a press release in June 2018 explicitly referred to the TPNW.[15] Indirectly, their lobbying activities did have an impact at the end of 2019 when the Flemish Socialist Party (at that time in the opposition) succeeded in getting a resolution approved in the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Belgian parliament, which led to a relatively long debate in the plenary in January 2020. The *Brussels Times* reported that the resolution that called upon the government to sign and ratify the TPNW and to work on a roadmap to remove the nuclear weapons from Belgium was narrowly defeated and apparently caused upheaval in NATO and the United States.[16]

Perhaps most striking was the result of the government coalition negotiations on 30 September 2020 when the Greens and the Socialists lobbied for recognizing the TPNW in the coalition agreement while the more conservative parties (Liberals and Christian Democrats) pushed back. The result was a compromise that was still much more positive than what had come out of NATO. The coalition agreement stated:

> Belgium will play a proactive role in the 2021 NPT Review Conference and, together with its European allies, it will examine how to strengthen the multilateral nonproliferation framework and how the UN TPNW can give new impetus to multilateral nuclear disarmament.[17]

This is rather remarkable given the very negative declarations vis-à-vis the TPNW coming out of NATO and its member states in 2017 and 2020.[18],[19]

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[15] https://www.kbc.com/content/dam/kbccom/doc/newsroom/pressreleases/2018/20180608_PB_policies_ENG.pdf.

[16] Gabriela Galindo, "Belgium Narrowly Rejects Removal of US Nuclear Weapons," *Brussels Times* (Friday, 17 January 2020), https://www.brusselstimes.com/belgium/90143/removal-of-us-nuclear-weapons-from-belgium-narrowly-rejected-by-lawmakers-nato-kleine-brogel-deterrant-tpnw-un-npt-nuclear-heads/.

[17] *Regeerakkoord 30 september 2020*, https://www.belgium.be/sites/default/files/Regeerakkoord_2020.pdf, p. 77, my translation.

[18] NATO Press Release 135, 20 September 2017, "North Atlantic Council Statement on the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons," https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_146954.htm.

[19] NATO Press Release 131, 15 December 2020, "North Atlantic Council Statement as the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons Enters Into Force," https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_180087.htm.

The implications of the Belgian coalition agreement with respect to the TPNW and the issue of tactical nuclear weapons were mixed. On the one hand, the left-wing parties inside the government lost the internal debate with respect to the TPNW resolution in the United Nations General Assembly in the autumn of 2020. That said, Minister of Foreign Affairs Sophie Wilmès admitted in parliament on 30 November 2020 that the TPNW at least has the merit of putting pressure on the NPT Review Conference.

In contrast to their German colleagues, Belgian diplomats apparently also tried to soften NATO language on the TPNW on 15 December 2020 but failed. Maybe most importantly, as one of the few NATO member states—together with Germany and Norway—the Belgian government was present at the first and second meetings of the TPNW states parties in 2022 and 2023, be it merely as an observer and without being very active. In 2025, due to a more conservative government and the worsening geopolitical circumstances, Belgium was absent, together with Germany, Norway and the Netherlands (in contrast to Australia).

The Netherlands

Similarly to Belgium, the Netherlands was a NATO member state right from the beginning, yet Dutch foreign policy has always been more Atlanticist than its Belgium counterpart. From 1960 onwards, United States tactical nuclear weapons have been installed in the Netherlands. Like in Belgium, there were also massive protest marches to prevent the installment of the Euromissiles in the Netherlands in the first half of the 1980s. The Dutch government, at that time headed by Christian Democrats, succeeded—in contrast to Belgium and Germany—to postpone the installation date. In the end, the Euromissiles were never installed in the Netherlands.

The peace movement in the Netherlands was and still is bigger, more diverse, and better organized than in Belgium, certainly after the Cold War. It is bigger since the peace organization PAX grew out of the merger of Pax Christi the Netherlands and the Interchurch Peace Council (IKV), and it has received a significant number of subsidies from the Dutch government. In the 2010s, Pax alone had more than one hundred people on its payroll (although also working in the field of development policy), while the four main peace organizations in Belgium reached at most an estimated thirty staff members. For instance, PAX, with its "Don't Bank on the Bomb" program, is the major worldwide actor behind the nuclear divestment initiative, asking banks and pension funds to divest from nuclear-related businesses. In short, the Humanitarian Initiative energized the Dutch peace movement.

The peace movement in the Netherlands is more diverse than the one in Belgium as it has an active group of physicians aligned with the activist group International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW) and a more active Red Cross section. Furthermore, its churches (both catholic and protestant) have been more active in it. The peace movement is better organized than in Belgium, for instance, in the form of the civil society coalition Balieberaad, which was able to group all these groups and movements under one umbrella.

From a disarmament point of view, all these initiatives have had a positive impact on government policy. It is not by chance that the only NATO member state that did not vote against it, but abstained, on the TPNW United Nations General Assembly resolution in October 2016 and the only NATO member state that was present at the TPNW negotiations, yet in the end voted against it, was the Netherlands, despite much pressure by the United States, the United Kingdom, France, and other NATO member states. The reason why the Dutch government did so were resolutions agreed upon by both the coalition and opposition parties in the Dutch parliament, due to a long parliamentary debate in April 2016 in the presence of the Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs Bert Koenders (a member of the Labor Party). The members of parliament, in turn, had to debate the issue as PAX and IPPNW had been able to raise more than 40,000 signatures on the streets, which automatically yielded a parliamentary debate.

The Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs Arms Control Section is bigger and more active than in Belgium. It participates in more groupings such as the Stockholm Initiative and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Initiative, although both are rather moderate in their nuclear disarmament demands.

The Dutch government had tasked its Advisory Council on International Affairs to come up with a report and recommendations. The latter turned out to be rather conservative and did not seem to translate into more activities concerning the removal of tactical

nuclear weapons, except with respect to transparency. On the other hand, the government's response to this report made some openings in 2019:

> The government's aim is still to ensure that the Netherlands no longer needs to fulfil a nuclear task when the F-16 is eventually replaced by the F-35...In view of the rising tensions and the risk of an arms race, the government will therefore work with its allies... to identify possible ways of achieving the withdrawal of all Russian and American sub-strategic nuclear weapons from throughout Europe (from the Atlantic to the Urals)…The logical time to take such steps would be when the nuclear weapons deployed in Europe are due for modernisation.[20]

On the issue of transparency with respect to the presence of United States tactical nuclear weapons on Dutch soil, the Dutch government took some substantial steps (especially in comparison with Belgium). At an interview with the Dutch public broadcasting station WNL on 18 October 2020, the Minister of Defense Ank Bijleveld admitted for the first time that there are United States tactical nuclear weapons on Dutch territory.[21] The Netherlands, like Belgium, was also an observer to the first meeting of States Parties of the TPNW in 2022.

More recently, the Dutch position regarding nuclear armament became more conservative than the Belgian one for two reasons. First of all, there is a very conservative government in power. Secondly, the war in Ukraine had even more impact in the Netherlands than in Belgium, this was in part because the Netherlands is historically more Atlanticist and partly because of the incident with the civilian airliner with a considerable number of Dutch people on board that was shot down by the Russians. It was, therefore, not completely surprising that the Netherlands, in contrast to Belgium and Germany, did not attend the second meeting of States Parties of the TPNW in 2023.

[20] Nederlands Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, "Government Response to the AIV Advisory Report 'Nuclear Weapons in a New Geopolitical Reality: An Urgent Need for New Arms Control Initiatives'," 18 April 2019, p. 8, https://www.advisorycouncilinternationalaffairs.nl/binaries/advisorycouncilinternationalaffairs/documenten/government-responses/2019/04/18/government-response-to-nuclear-weapons-in-a-new-geopolitical-reality/Nuclear_Weapons_in_a_New_Geopolitical_Reality_AIV-Government-response_20190418.pdf.

[21] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tygiHl_JUkI.

Germany

Germany is the elephant in the room, also amongst the host nations. Despite its economic heavy-weight, owing to its history, it has for a long time been soft-spoken regarding foreign and defense policy. Germany joined NATO only in 1955. Already two years later, it agreed with the United States' demand to station tactical nuclear weapons. In contrast to Belgium and the Netherlands, the parliament in Germany agreed with nuclear sharing in 1958. Many observers believe that United States extended nuclear deterrence prevented Germany from building its own bomb. That said, there is a strong anti-nuclear culture (also with respect to nuclear energy), and its Constitution also forbids acquiring nuclear weapons. At the same time, German leading politicians (including those from the Left) have always been very Atlanticist, being afraid that the United States would retreat. It was, for instance, a speech by Chancellor Helmut Schmidt (SPD) in 1977 that led to the famous 1979 NATO double-track decision and the installation of Euromissiles in Western Europe, including in Germany. Numerous protest activities took place in Germany in the first half of the 1980s, just as in Belgium and the Netherlands.

Similarly to other Western European states, the nuclear weapons issue has been on the back burner since the end of the Cold War. When the Green Party joined the federal government in the second half of the 1990s, Minister of Foreign Affairs Joschka Fischer tried to change NATO's declaratory policy going in the direction of "no first use," yet his attempt failed. Similarly, the German Ministers of Foreign Affairs in the period 2009-2010—both the Liberal Guido Westerwelle and the Socialist Walter Steinmeier—were in favor of the removal of the United States' tactical nuclear weapons. Although the German coalition agreement in 2009 contained a sentence asking for the removal of the tactical nuclear weapons, Germany did not succeed in convincing the United States and its other NATO partners in 2010.

Already the arrival of the first Trump administration and now especially with the second one caused fear in German foreign policy circles. For the first time in a very long time, the originally minor debate concerning a possible European nuclear deterrent is now being openly discussed. At the same time, and in all likelihood partly also as a result of the TPNW, the discussion of the replacement

of the dual-capable aircraft Tornados led to a debate in 2020 between German Minister of Defense Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer (CDU) asking for the continuation of the DCA role, and Rolf Mützenich (SPD) along with the Green Party questioning it.

Both the Humanitarian Initiative and the TPNW energized the German peace movement. For example, additional protest actions at Büchel, the Air Force base where United States tactical nuclear weapons are supposed to be stationed, and successfully convincing Deutsche Bank to divest in 2019. Furthermore, some members of parliament have grouped themselves in a sub-group dealing with the issue of nuclear weapons. Also remarkable is a 2021 study of the Scientific Service of the German Bundestag that states that the NPT and the TPNW are complementary, in contrast to what NATO and NATO member states have been saying.

More than in other countries, the views of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Defense seem to differ. Defense is clearly in favor of keeping tactical nuclear weapons (and probably carried the day during the negotiations about the NATO declaration of 15 December 2020), while Foreign Affairs was more critical. That makes the Chancellery have an important mediating role. With Angela Merkel (CDU) as Chancellor, the result was a status quo.

The 2022 war in Ukraine, however, drastically changed the scene in Germany, both economically and security-wise. Shortly after the start of the war, chancellor Olaf Scholtz (SPD) announced a *Zeitenwende* with respect to defense expenditures. The government (including the SPD and Green Party) also agreed to purchase DCA F-35s from the United States. The newly elected new chancellor, Friedrich Merz (CDU), fully supports the development of a European nuclear deterrent capacity, preferably as a compliment to the United States tactical nuclear weapons in Europe.

Conclusion

When do states disarm? This article distinguishes between two disarmament models. One is the security model, which posits that whether a state is willing to disarm basically depends only on its geopolitical context; that is, in case that there are geopolitical tensions, there will be no disarmament, and in case that there are no or few tensions, there is a possibility to disarm. The second model, the domestic politics model, states that not only the external circumstances but also domestic politics determines whether a state is willing to disarm. Under domestic politics, two interest groups are to be distinguished: on the one hand, NGOs along with public opinion, and on the other hand, the military-industrial complex. The former tends to be in favor of disarmament, the latter against it. Their relative strength and the presence of political leadership will determine in which direction the decision goes.

Empirically, this article addressed the nuclear build-up and build-down of nuclear weapons during and after the Cold War and argues that the domestic politics model is not only richer than the security model, but it is also better in explaining what happened. Nonetheless, the security model remains the best starting point for analysis.

The article then explores the predictive question of what the chances are that the remaining one-hundred-or-so United States tactical nuclear weapons in Europe will be withdrawn in the foreseeable future. While the security model clearly expects them to stay, the domestic politics model leaves both options open. Especially when the war in Ukraine ends, there will be opportunities to improve the relationship between East and West, partly through arms control. Apart from a follow-up treaty for New START on strategic nuclear weapons, an initiative with respect to tactical nuclear weapons is also imaginable. The previously assumed odds that political leadership with respect to nuclear disarmament is easier to obtain with progressive parties such as the Greens and Socialists than with conservative parties such as Christian Democrats, Nationalists, or Liberals will need to be reevaluated considering Europe's renewed appetite for nuclear arms buildup.