

NUCLEAR DETERRENCE: AN OBSTACLE OR A LEVER FOR LASTING PEACE?

Friday 29 September 2023, 2.00 p.m. - 3.30 p.m., Auditorium



Jean-Marie Collin, Héroïse Fayet, Xavier Chemisseur and Nicole Gnesotto

Security through the threat of annihilation

'Since the end of the Cold War, the doctrine of nuclear deterrence has been put forward to explain the balance of world order', began Xavier Chemisseur, journalist, and moderator of this debate. Just when we were beginning to imagine a world without nuclear weapons thirty years ago, the invasion of Ukraine on 24th February 2022 raised this crucial question: is nuclear deterrence still an effective tool for ensuring our collective security?

MODERATOR:

Xavier Chemisseur, Editor-in-Chief, France 24

SPEAKERS:

Jean-Marie Collin, director of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons for France (ICAN France)

Héroïse Fayet, researcher at IFRI (French Institute of International Relations) and coordinator of the Dissuasion and Proliferation research programme

Nicole Gnesotto, Vice-President of the Jacques Delors Institute

Nicole Gnesotto began by redrawing the broad outlines of the fight against nuclear proliferation, following the collapse of the USSR. Indeed, with '*a Soviet arsenal spread across several Soviet socialist republics, Washington had to negotiate an agreement with Moscow so that Russia would be the sole inheritor and repatriate it.*' Wanting to avoid proliferation at all costs, the Americans also set up '*a financial programme to host Soviet scientists to prevent nuclear brains from being sold to the highest bidders such as Iran or North Korea.*' The historian also explained that '*the demise of the USSR led to a deprogramming of arsenals on both sides.*' The war in Ukraine, '*via bellicose statements by Russian leaders threatening the use of tactical nuclear weapons*', brought this forgotten issue back into the spotlight. After Presidents Biden and Macron responded, indicating '*that they would not allow themselves to be pushed around and that they would defend every square*

inch of NATO's territory', no more public threats were heard. Nicole Gnesotto argued, however, that '*while we cannot say that there are no more risks, we can continue to rely on the strategic reasoning of rationality*', which assumes that Vladimir Putin '*won't attack because nuclear weapons deter any fighting and the cost of an attack is always greater than the result of a possible victory.*' She concluded by recalling an anecdote told by General de Gaulle in the early 1960s during the development of this policy of deterrence, when the Soviet ambassador warned him that '*a French attack would lead to the destruction of Paris*', to which he had replied: '*then we will die together, because I will have destroyed Moscow first.*'

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Nicole Gnesotto

Héroïse Fayet pointed out that only nine countries hold atomic weapons today, and these are divided into two categories. The first category includes the five countries that tested it before the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) was signed in 1968, none other than the permanent members of the UN Security Council (the United States, China, Russia, the United Kingdom and France). The other category includes countries that have not signed the treaty: India and Pakistan, which carried out tests in 1998, Israel, although it does not officially recognise it, and North Korea. But to understand the current context, it is '*important to know that in the 1970s, some thirty countries were conducting*



Héroïse Fayet

nuclear programmes' she noted, before explaining that it was '*ensured that the cost of development remained far greater than the benefits a state could derive from it.*' Today, '*the main candidate remains Iran, although the United States believes that there's been no sign of militarisation since 2003*' but the public debate on nuclear weapons has, in particular, '*been rekindled in South Korea and Japan.*'

In contrast to the two experts, the director of ICAN insisted on the definition of the term nuclear deterrence, not guaranteeing a balance but '*constituting a permanent threat of the use of weapons of mass destruction against civilian populations.*' This deterrence, explained Jean-Marie Collin, is '*the acceptance of a president going against international humanitarian law*' but also '*maintaining a large budget for this sector without democratic debate.*' '*To see nuclear deterrence as a lever for peace means to agree to threaten, to be threatened and to proliferate*', he concluded.

Nicole Gnesotto recognised an important paradox here: '*the flaw in nuclear deterrence is its amorality since it's col-*



Nicole Gnesotto

lective security is based on the threat of the annihilation of humanity.' Moreover, atomic weapons, 'enshrine an unjust world order that accepts these unequal rights between countries.' But if nuclear weapons should be abolished, it must be

The Russian nuclear arsenal will never be removed from the outside and it's unthinkable to force Russia to destroy it itself

Nicole Gnesotto

borne in mind that 'conventional deterrence has never existed in history' she warned, 'that nuclear deterrence is such an absurd and real threat that it annihilates any desire to start war.' This is why 'Putin's actions came as a surprise to everyone.' He is implementing 'an aggressive sanctuarisation doctrine, which consists of using Russia's status as a nuclear power to guard against Western reprisal.' A 'strategy that's working' according to her.



Watch the full debate on YouTube

Disagreeing profoundly, Jean-Marie Collin insisted on the uncertain nature of this doctrine, which is merely a 'bet on the opponent's rationality, a rationality that can be questioned in the case of Putin, the Kim family or even Trump.' If today 'the majority of states don't want atomic weapons, it's because they know it's a bad defence system', he explained. What's more, the example of Colonel Stanislav Petrov in 1983 shows the fallibility of this doctrine in the face of mistakes or accidents. When the Soviet officer, in one of the 'hottest years of the Cold War', detected American missiles aimed at the USSR, he warned his hierarchy that he did not believe his computers and avoided a nuclear apocalypse.

Héloïse Fayet adds the Chinese question to the debate, a new major player in the nuclear issue with '350 warheads in 2022, 410 in 2023' and 'refusing any discussion on limiting its armament.' This 'change in the global nuclear balance must call for a great deal of effort if deterrence is to work and we are to avoid a nuclear Third World War.'

Nicole Gnesotto pointed out that 'European nuclear deterrence doesn't exist.' The European Union is 'disunited on this issue, between the countries that have renounced it and rely on the NATO umbrella and France, which only protects its vital interests.' Asked how the Russian-Ukrainian conflict might be resolved, the historian stated her belief that scenarios of Russian capitulation and disarmament are unlikely because 'the Russian nuclear arsenal will never be removed from the outside and it's unthinkable to force Russia to destroy it itself.' While Nicole Gnesotto acknowledged that 'there's no debate worthy of French democracy on this subject today', she asserted that 'if China and Russia are allowed to keep their atomic weapons, why would France give theirs up?'

DEBATE

SOCIAL NETWORKS, WEAPONS OF MASS MOBILISATION?

Friday 29 September 2023, 2p.m. - 3.30p.m., Gold Room



Feurat Alani, Oxana Melnychuk, Julie Clarini and Gildas Leprince

A potentially dangerous but essential tool

'The same conference organised ten years ago would surely have been more optimistic, showing that social networks are transforming movements, making them visible and giving them strength', said Julie Clarini in her introduction, 'whereas today we're more measured in the face of these vectors of disinformation and destabilisation, which were supposed to help fledgling democracies but in the end are attacking old democracies.'

MODERATOR:

Julie Clarini, Editor-in-Chief, Ideas Department, l'Obs

SPEAKERS:

Gildas Leprince, YouTuber 'Mr Geopolitix'

Feurat Alani, reporter and film-maker

Oxana Melnychuk, director of the political analysis and communication centre, United for Ukraine

The fundamental thing is to always ask yourself what the level of deception is

Gildas Leprince

Oxana Melnychuk started by recalling the 'crucial role of social networks at the start of the war in Ukraine, while waiting for the traditional media to adapt.' Social networks made it possible 'for the President and the government to immediately reassure and organise 40 million people who were in the dark via Twitter.' Since then, 'President Zelensky has been speaking to Ukrainians every evening, in Ukrainian and English, talking to them directly on his phone, and that makes him human, which is part of our resilience.' The communicator explained that 'the government had to ask itself very