



French vs. Australian nuclear policies: convergences, divergences and avenues for cooperation

Recherches & Documents

N°19/2020

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December 2020



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Introduction

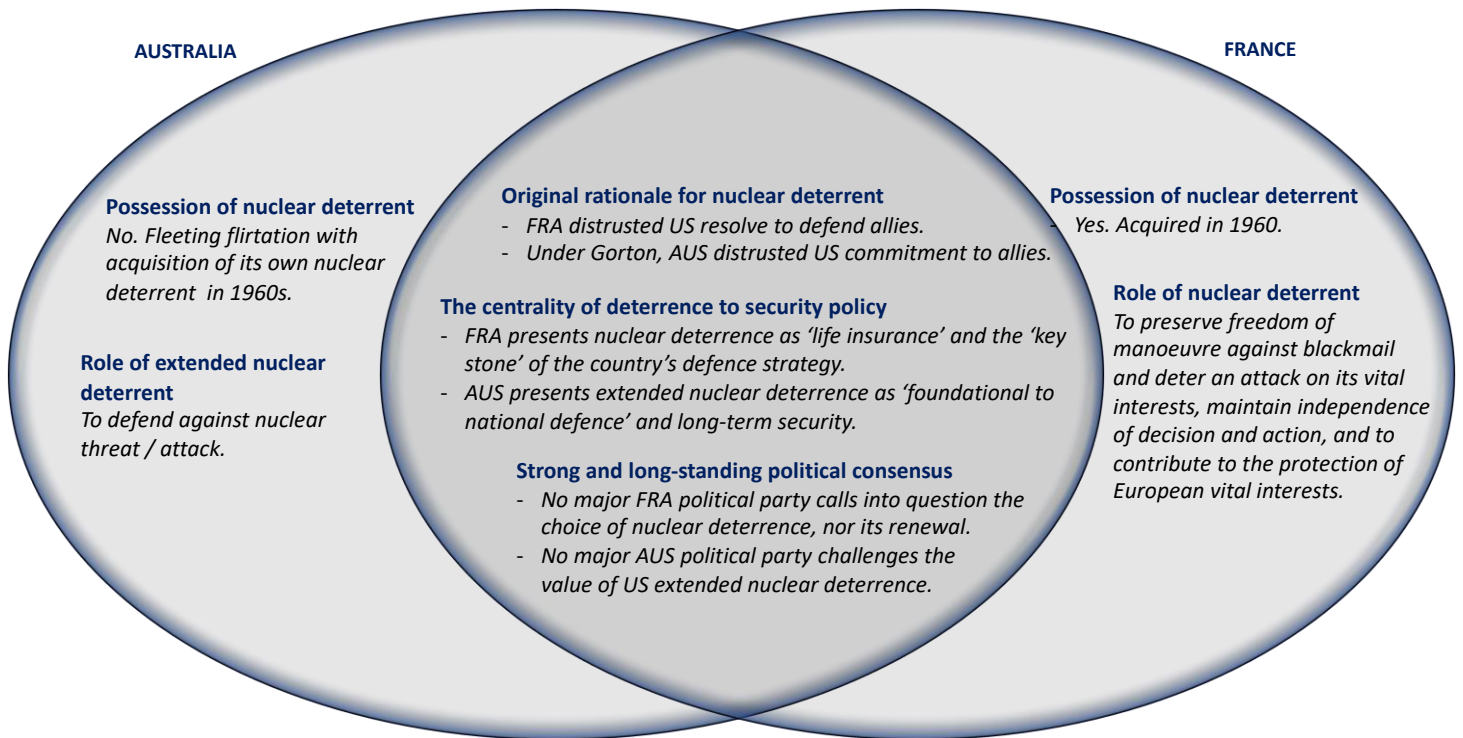
At first glance, France and Australia appear to have divergent policies with regards to nuclear weapons: the former has possessed them for over half a century, while the latter has opposed acquiring them for half a century. And yet, a closer look at the two countries' stance on nuclear deterrence, disarmament and non-proliferation reveals many similarities. This paper seeks to explore these similarities between Australian and French nuclear policy – from 1950 until present – while also illuminating their differences. Examining this issue is interesting not least because, while Australia vehemently opposed aspects of French nuclear policy up until the late 1990s – namely French nuclear testing in the Pacific¹ – their respective approaches towards nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament now share numerous points of confluence, and their strong bilateral cooperation on strategic issues has increased significantly in recent years,² specifically in the Indo-Pacific region.³ The paper also reflects on the prospects for change in each states' nuclear policy over the short- to medium-term, before concluding on opportunities for collaboration and dialogue between Australia and France to increase global and regional security and stability, including through nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament (NPD) measures.

¹ Australian citizens conducted mass demonstrations against French nuclear testing in the Pacific (Australia's "backyard") in the 1970s and again in the mid-1990s. The government also protested, including through public diplomacy and freezing its defence relations with France. See Kim Richard Nossal and Carolynn Vivian, "A Brief Madness: Australia and the Resumption of French Nuclear Testing," *Canberra Papers on Strategy and Defence* No. 121, Australian National University, 1997, p. 8.

² See *Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade*, "[Joint Statement of Enhanced Strategic Partnership between Australia and France](#)," 3 March 2017; *French Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs*, "Australia – France Selected for a Submarine Program – Statement by the Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Development," 26 April 2016.

³ See *Reuters*, "Macron Wants Strategic Paris-Delhi-Canberra Axis amid Pacific Tension," 2 May 2018; *French Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs*, "[The Indo-Pacific: 1st Trilateral Dialogue between France, India and Australia](#)," 9 September 2020.

Convergences & divergences in Australia & France's stance on nuclear deterrence



1. Stance on nuclear deterrence

1.1. The Australian position

1.1.1. Nuclear weapons acquisition: a fleeting flirtation

Australia's official position on nuclear weapons and nuclear deterrence has evolved considerably since the 1950s. **From the early 1950s to the early 1970s, Australia harboured some ambition to acquire a nuclear deterrent, initially through the transfer of nuclear weapons from its allies.** In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the conservative Menzies Government lobbied the US for arrangements to formalise the potential future transfer of tactical nuclear weapons to Australia for use in a wartime contingency,⁴ while also undergoing discussions with the UK over the potential transfer of British nuclear weapons.⁵ Despite these lines of cooperation, nothing concrete materialised,⁶ in part because the Kennedy Administration was less amenable than its predecessor to making US nuclear warheads available non-NATO allies, and Prime Minister Menzies saw the stability of the global nuclear order as guaranteed only if nuclear weapons remain confined to the great powers.⁷

⁴ See for example, Wayne Reynolds, *Australia's Bid for the Atomic Bomb*, (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, February 1997), p. 206.

⁵ Jim Walsh, "Surprise Down Under: The Secret History of Australia's Nuclear Ambitions," *The Nonproliferation Review* 5 (1), 1997: pp. 1-20, pp. 3-6.

⁶ A nuclear cooperation agreement was signed between Australia and the US in 1956, but it counted for little in terms of technology transfer. See *Friends of the Earth Australia*, "[The Push for Nuclear Weapons in Australia 1950s – 1970s](#),"

⁷ Christine Leah and Rod Lyon, "Three Visions of the Bomb: Australian Thinking about Nuclear Weapons and Strategy," *The Australian Journal of International Affairs* 64, 4 (2010): pp 449-477, pp. 453-454.

Throughout the 1960s, however, Australia shifted to seriously contemplating the domestic manufacture of its own independent nuclear weapons capability. Notwithstanding Menzies' more sceptical view of nuclear weapons acquisition, his Government nonetheless refused to provide the UN with a commitment that Australia would refrain from acquiring nuclear weapons,⁸ purchased US F-111 bombers in 1963 precisely (but secretly) for their capacity to deliver nuclear weapons,⁹ and began a uranium enrichment research program in 1965, for which the potential to produce weapons-grade enriched uranium almost certainly factored into the approval and funding decision.¹⁰ Conservative prime minister Gorton further propelled Australia's pursuit of a nuclear deterrent, driven largely by China's nuclear weapons development, the ongoing political and military instability in South-East Asia and burgeoning doubts about US resolve to defend Australia. In a secret cable to Washington, then-US secretary of state Dean Rusk allegedly compared Gorton's behaviour to then-French President Charles de Gaulle, "in saying that Australia could not rely upon the US for nuclear weapons under ANZUS in the event of nuclear blackmail or attack."¹¹ Gorton's government prevaricated about signing the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), negotiated a secret deal with France for the construction of a uranium-enrichment plant in Australia, and advanced its planning of a 500-megawatt nuclear reactor in Jervis Bay between 1969-70, with the potential to reprocess spent fuel as well as produce highly enriched uranium for military purposes.¹² It was not until the early 1970s that the Whitlam labour government definitively buried Australia's ambition to become a nuclear power – terminating the Jervis Bay project and ratifying the NPT in 1973.

1.1.2. Nuclear option shelved; 'extended nuclear deterrence' prioritised

Australian governments have long claimed to rely on US nuclear weapons for its defence under a policy of 'extended nuclear deterrence,' valuing it as a critical component in Australia's long-term security.¹³ This policy dates back to the 1960s, with the beginning of Australia's role in the US global nuclear early warning, intelligence and command network. By agreeing to host sensitive US facilities (initially a very-low-frequency communications station on the North West Cape in 1967, and later early warning and intelligence satellite control centres at Pine Gap and the Nurrungar), Australia engaged directly in the operation of US strategic nuclear forces – helping to monitor foreign weapons development, facilitate communication with military forces, and verify the use or testing of weapons of mass destruction and their delivery systems. The strategic rationale for hosting these defence facilities was and largely remains to activate the US nuclear umbrella should Australia be threatened by the nuclear forces of another country, increase deterrence stability, and access advanced US technology, military equipment and intelligence. The construction of such bases as well as anti-nuclear activism (including in response to French nuclear testing in the Pacific) heavily influenced Australia's declining interest in a domestic weapons capability.¹⁴

⁸ Garfield Barwick, "Letter Sent by the Minister for External Affairs to the Acting Secretary-General of the United Nations Concerning Resolution 1664, 15 March", tabled in Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates (House of Representatives). 5 April 1962.

⁹ Ian Bellany, *Australia in the Nuclear Age: National Defence and National Development*, (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1972), pp. 62-63.

¹⁰ *Friends of the Earth Australia*, "The Push for Nuclear Weapons in Australia 1950s – 1970s."

¹¹ Dean Rusk quoted in Tom Gilling, "The Push for an Aussie Bomb," *The Australian*, 31 August 2019.

¹² Jeffrey S. Lantis, "Elections and Enduring Realities: Australia's Nuclear Debate," *Arms Control Today*, April 2008.

¹³ Stephan Frühling and Andrew O'Neil, "Institutions, Informality, and Influence: Explaining Nuclear Cooperation in the Australia-US alliance," *Australian Journal of Political Science* 55, 2 (2020): pp. 135-151, p. 135.

¹⁴ Rory Medcalf and Amandeep Gill, "Unconventional Partners: Australia – India Cooperation in Reducing Nuclear Dangers," Policy Brief, *Lowy Institute for International Policy*, October 2009, p. 5.

1.1.3. **Continued reinforcement of extended nuclear deterrence in the post-Cold War era**

Particularly following the end of the Cold War, successive Australian governments and policy makers have consistently sought to **reinforce the value of extended US nuclear deterrence to Australian security, including through explicit reference in major strategic documents**. Indeed, the logic of references to the US nuclear umbrella has remained virtually unchanged¹⁵ since the Australian government's first official, public statement on the country's dependence on extended US nuclear deterrence – outlined in the 1994 Defence White Paper – reflecting a high level of political consensus on the issue (and the importance of the ANZUS alliance more broadly). The 1997 Australian Strategic Policy; the 2006 defence document *"Founded in History, Forging Ahead;"* the 2009, 2013 and 2016 Defence White Paper; and, the 2020 Defence Strategic review all specifically highlighted Australia's reliance on US extended nuclear deterrence *"against possibility of nuclear threats against Australia."*¹⁶

However, Australia has never received an explicit, public promise of nuclear assurance from Washington;¹⁷ both Labour and Coalition **Australian governments have refrained from making a concerted push for clearer US commitments¹⁸ and from pursuing a formal nuclear policy consultation process with the US on nuclear strategy**. The reason for this stems largely from concern about potential entrapment in US nuclear signalling and operations, with policymakers apprehensive that detailed bilateral discussions on extended nuclear deterrence *"could encourage unwanted planning assumptions on the part of US officials."*¹⁹ Caution about seeking further clarity from the US is also linked to Australia's fear that doing so could prove counter-productive, *"result[ing] in a more limited US commitment than would serve Australia's interests."*²⁰ Finally, Australia's impetus for requesting such clarifications has been limited because – until recently – it has both lacked a potential regional adversary with an advanced nuclear weapons capability and perceived the US as a constant, reliable partner with strong incentives to protect Australia through conventional and nuclear means.²¹

1.2. **The French position**

1.2.1. **The original strategic rationale: guarantee security, diplomatic standing and independence**

Nuclear deterrence has been fundamental to French security policy for over half a century. France's motivation to possess a nuclear deterrent can be traced to the immediate post-World War II period, when French leaders of all political leanings (excluding the Communists) believed that the defeat of

¹⁵ Frühling and O'Neil, "Institutions, Informality, and Influence," p. 143.

¹⁶ See ["Extended Nuclear Deterrence," Nautilus Institute](#); Australian Government Department of Defence (2016), [2016 Defence White Paper; 2020 Defence Strategic Update](#), p. 27.

¹⁷ Tanya Ogilvie-White, "Australia and Extended Nuclear assurance," in eds. Beyza Unal, Yasmin Afina and Patricia Lewis, "Perspectives on Nuclear Deterrence in the 21st Century," *Chatham House*, April 2020, pp. 23-27, p. 24.

¹⁸ Dr Stephan Frühling, Andrew O'Neil and David Santoro, "Escalating Cooperation: Nuclear Deterrence and the US-Australia Alliance," *United States Studies Centre*, 7 November 2019.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* This fear of potential entrapment in the US deterrence enterprise was also demonstrated by the Morrison Government's resolute dismissal of the stationing of US intermediate-range missiles on Australian territory in response to comments by Defence Secretary Mark Esper in August 2019 that America hoped for such stationing on US allies' territory. See Chris Mills Rodrigo, "Prime Minister Says US Won't Deploy Missiles in Australia," *The Hill*, 5 August 2019.

²⁰ See Frühling and O'Neil, "Institutions, Informality, and Influence," p. 146; and, Defence Committee, *Australian Strategic Analysis and Defence Planning Objectives*, Canberra: Australian Department of Defence, 2 September 1976.

²¹ Tanya Ogilvie-White, "Australia and Extended Nuclear assurance," p. 24.

1940 and the subsequent occupation necessitated a military nuclear option.²² General Charles de Gaulle's nuclear calculus was also influenced by the desire for prestige and the restoration of political and military parity between Paris, London and Washington;²³ a French nuclear programme would grant diplomatic standing and the ability "to sit at the table of the Great Ones."²⁴ Finally, France's nuclear aspirations stemmed from distrust in US commitment to defend its allies, particularly in the event of Soviet aggression – mirroring Australia's concerns under the Menzies and Gorton governments. De Gaulle led this line of thinking, emphasising that "no one in the world, especially no one in America, can say if, where, when, how and to what extent nuclear weapons would be used to defend Europe."²⁵ Thus, France made the decision to develop nuclear weapons in 1954, its strategic vision was solidified in 1958 by de Gaulle's concept of a fully independent *Force de Frappe*, and it became a nuclear power in 1960.

Ensuring freedom of action and strategic autonomy remains a key function attributed to the French nuclear deterrent. For France, the continued unpredictability of the strategic environment makes its nuclear deterrent the "fundamental guarantee of [its] security."²⁶ This was affirmed in the 2013 White Paper²⁷ and reiterated by both President Hollande in 2015 and President Macron in 2020, the latter stating that "[o]ur nuclear deterrence force [...] ensures our independence, our freedom to assess, make decisions and take action. It prevents adversaries from betting on escalation, intimidation and blackmailing to achieve their ends."²⁸ But the preservation of French independent decision and action extends beyond France's current and future adversaries to also include its allies. As de Gaulle first articulated, France's nuclear capability was a means by which to "exist by ourselves and, in the case of a drama, to choose our own direction"²⁹ – independent of the US. This logic persists today. France's deterrent capacity ensures its survival cannot be called into question by a major power,³⁰ its foreign policy remains autonomous and, accordingly, it "prevent[s] us from being drawn into a war that is not our own."³¹ Small parallels can be drawn between this approach and Australia's resistance to seeking more explicit assurances of protection under the US nuclear umbrella (for fear of potential entrapment in the US deterrence enterprise).

1.2.2. Chief components of nuclear deterrence policy

- For France, **nuclear weapons fulfil a strictly political role** – that is, they are not a weapon of battle but rather an instrument of deterrence designed, as a last resort, to guarantee

²² Céline Jurgensen and Dominique Mongin (ed.), "France and Nuclear Deterrence – A Spirit of Resistance", *Recherches & Documents*, No. 01/2020, *Fondation pour la recherche stratégique*, 2020.

²³ Bruno Tertrais, "French Nuclear Deterrence Policy, Forces, and Future: A Handbook", *Recherches & Documents*, No. 04/2020, *Fondation pour la Recherche Stratégique*, 2020, p. 12.

²⁴ General Alfred Buchalet, "Les Premières Étapes (1955-1960)", in Université de Franche-Comté - Institut Charles de Gaulle, *L'Aventure de la Bombe: de Gaulle et la Dissuasion Nucléaire, 1958-1969* (Paris: Plon, 1985), p. 52.

²⁵ Press conference at the Elysée Palace, 14 January 1963, in Charles de Gaulle, *Discours et Messages* (IV), *op. cit.*, p. 73.

²⁶ *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 January 2006.

²⁷ White Paper on Defence and National Security, 2013, p. 20.

²⁸ See Emmanuelle Macron, *Speech of the President of the Republic on the Defense and Deterrence Strategy*, Paris, War College, 7 February 2020. François Hollande stated that French nuclear deterrence "permanently guarantees [France's] autonomy of decision and freedom of action [...] including against attempts of blackmail which could be exercised against [it] in the event of a crisis." See *Discours sur la Dissuasion Nucléaire, Déplacement auprès des Forces Aériennes Stratégiques*, Istres, 19 February 2015.

²⁹ Alain Peyrefitte, *C'était De Gaulle* (Paris: Gallimard, 2002), p. 1408.

³⁰ Speech by Jacques Chirac, *President of the French Republic, to the Institut des Hautes Études de Défense Nationale*, Paris, 8 June 2001.

³¹ Jean-Pierre Chevènement, *Speech at the Conference "L'avenir de la Dissuasion Française"*, Res Publica Foundation, 10 July 2006.

France's vital interests and show potential enemies a politically and materially credible threat of *"unacceptable damage"*.³²

- France exercises deterrence by promising a nuclear response to any aggression against its vital interests, whatever the means employed.³³ Herein lies the uncertain element of France's declaratory policy, essential to any deterrence strategy: **it is unclear about the circumstances that would constitute the exact threshold for action, but clear about the response.**³⁴
- France has consistently rejected a *"no first-use"* posture, which it believes would weaken deterrence.
- In the early 1970s it developed a **concept that became known as "final warning"** (which would be followed by a massive strike if the aggressor persisted) for use in the event where adversaries misjudge the precise limits of French vital interests or French resolve to defend them.³⁵ This concept endures to this day.³⁶
- Though foundational to France's deterrence strategy, nuclear weapons are not the sole component; **conventional capabilities also contribute to the overall deterrent effect** of its military policy.³⁷
- France has long drawn on the **right to self-defence** enshrined in Article 51 of the UN Charter **as a legal basis** for nuclear deterrence, but more recently has sought to promote the **moral basis** for its nuclear doctrine through a highly constructed ethical discourse that emphasises **the responsibilities linked to the status of nuclear power** under the NPT.³⁸
- Finally, though France has never explicitly expressed a concept of 'extended nuclear deterrence,' French presidents since the end of the Cold War have repeatedly stressed the **European dimension of French deterrence strategy** and the nuclear deterrent's implicit role in contributing to European and transatlantic security.³⁹ President Macron affirmed this element perhaps more clearly than ever in February 2020.⁴⁰

1.2.3. Continuity in – and commitment to – policy of nuclear deterrence

With the end of the Cold War, the principle threat justifying France's nuclear programme disappeared. This new strategic context, combined with the fact that major technological and budgetary efforts were required to keep the programme up to date, resulted in both **a contraction**

³² Macron, *Defense and Deterrence Strategy*, 2020.

³³ President Macron recalled that *"any threat of State origin against our vital interests, wherever it comes from and in whatever form" is the responsibility of the nuclear deterrent.*" See *Ibid.*

³⁴ Bruno Tertrais, "A Comparison between US, UK and French Nuclear Policies and Doctrines," *Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique*, February 2007, p. 6.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

³⁶ According to President Macron, *"In the event of a misunderstanding about France's determination to preserve its vital interests, a single, non-renewable nuclear warning could be issued to a state aggressor to send a clear signal that the nature of the conflict has changed and to restore deterrence."* See Macron, *"Defense and Deterrence Strategy,"* 2020.

³⁷ See for example, 1972 White Paper; Strategic Concept for the Defence and Security of the Members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, adopted by Heads of State and Government at the NATO Summit in Lisbon on 19-20 November 2010; and Macron, *"Defense and Deterrence Strategy,"* 2020.

³⁸ Macron recognised that nuclear weapons possession within the meaning of the NPT *"confers on the political leaders of the countries concerned a responsibility of a moral magnitude unprecedented in history,"* and called on leaders of other nuclear powers *"to renounce any temptation to use this deterrence strategy "for coercive or intimidating purposes"*. See Macron, *"Defense and Deterrence Strategy,"* 2020.

³⁹ See for example, *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 January 2006; "Discours de M. le Président de la République – Présentation du SNLE Le Terrible" (Cherbourg), 21 March 2008; and, Hollande, *Discours sur la Dissuasion Nucléaire*, 2015.

⁴⁰ On this point, see Benjamin Hautecouverture, "President Macron on French Nuclear Deterrence," *Canadian Global Affairs Institute*, September 2020, p. 4 ; and, Tertrais, "French Nuclear Deterrence Policy, Forces, and Future," p. 14.

and modernisation of France's nuclear arsenal.⁴¹ For example, France cancelled its testing programme in the Pacific in 1996, dismantled its fissile material production plants at Marcoule and Pierrelatte, and reduced its nuclear weapons by half between 1990 and 2006 under the principle of 'strict sufficiency' – that is, the operation of a nuclear force structure based on the smallest possible scale, without jeopardising the credibility of deterrence. Concurrently, however, France developed 'robust' thermonuclear warheads and has maintained a simulation program to ensure the continued reliability of its deterrence capacity.⁴² France has also **largely maintained its nuclear doctrine** since the early 1990s, **with occasional slight adaptations** that largely revolve around expanding France's targets for deterrence – for example, to include new regional powers with WMD and states that were developing vectors or WMD that could one day threaten European territory, as long as they could threaten 'vital interests'⁴³ – and increasing the 'flexibility' of its nuclear deterrent in light of new strategic realities.⁴⁴

Both **across the political system and the general population, France have long maintained support for the nuclear deterrent.** Much like Australia's political class, which has by and large maintained consensus on the value of extended nuclear deterrence, few French politicians question the relevance of nuclear deterrence and even fewer support France's unilateral disarmament.⁴⁵ In fact, there was only one leader among the main presidential candidates for the last presidential election in 2017 – Jean-Luc Mélenchon of the far-left party *La France Insoumise* – who proposed scaling down the nuclear deterrent. Similarly, France's population appear to value the nuclear deterrent. Since 2012, public opinion has remained reportedly around 60 to 70 % in support of the maintenance of the nuclear deterrent,⁴⁶ and there has been systematic majority support for its sustainability. Meanwhile, open protest action against nuclear deterrence today mobilises a limited portion of the population and the reduction of the nuclear arsenal has always received less than 20% support.⁴⁷

⁴¹ Félix Arteaga, "French Nuclear Deterrence According to President Chirac : Reform, Clean Break or Reminder ?" Real Instituto Elcano, *ARI No. 11/2006*, January 2006, p. 2.

⁴² Corentin Brustlein, "France's Nuclear Arsenal: What Sort of Renewal?" *Politique Étrangère*, 3 (2017): 113-234, p. v.

⁴³ See *Discours de M. Jacques Chirac, Président de la République, sur la politique de défense de la France, la stratégie militaire, le désarmement nucléaire, la défense européenne, la réforme du système de défense, les interventions militaires extérieures de la France et la force de dissuasion française*, Paris, 8 June 2001. Additionally, in 1997 France replaced its 'weak vs. strong' deterrence strategy with a 'tous azimuts' strategy that could be aimed at anyone, thereby expanding its targets of deterrence from purely 'strong' nuclear powers to also include smaller nuclear powers. See Arteaga, "French Nuclear Deterrence According to President Chirac," p. 3.

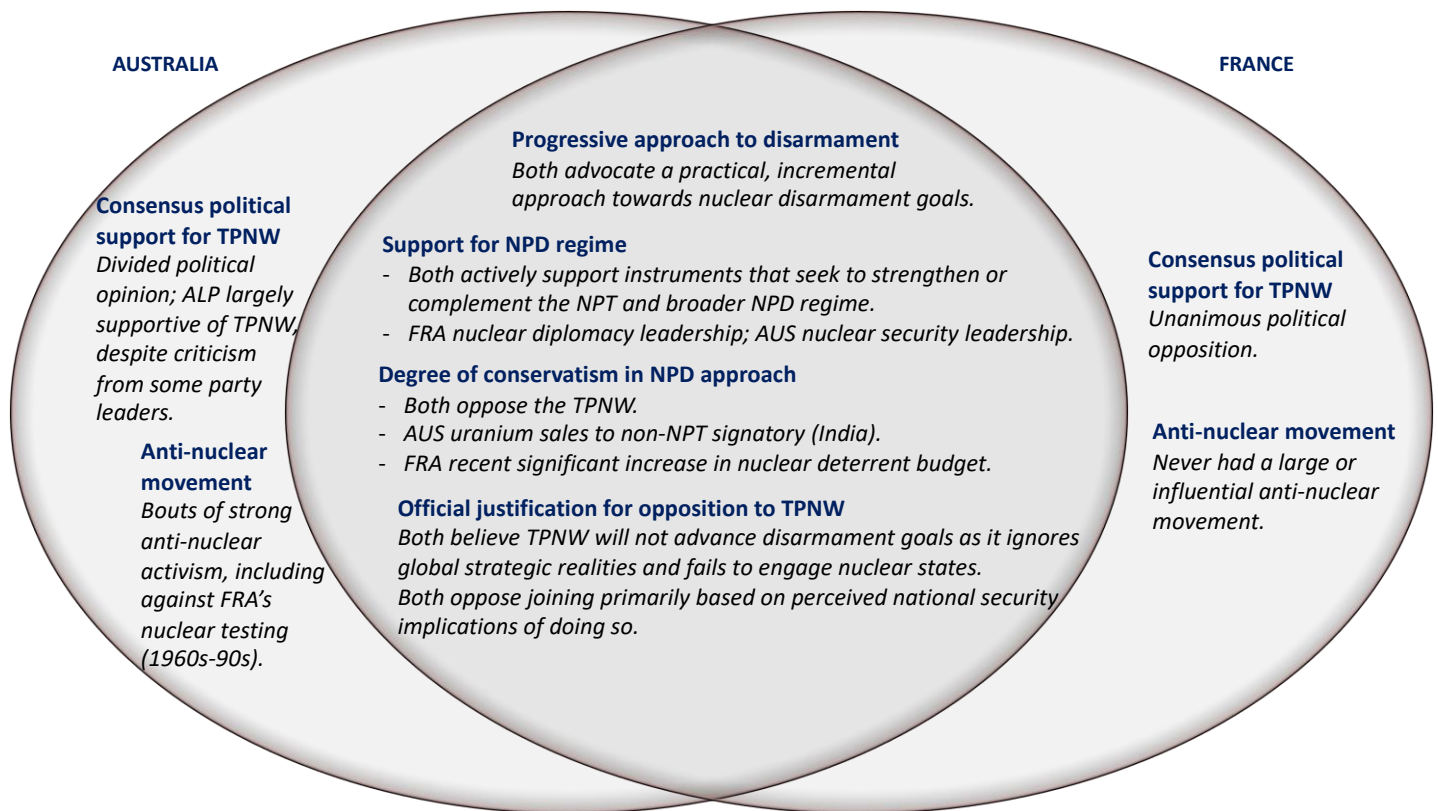
⁴⁴ For example, the 1994 White Book - though maintaining the key principles of deterrence - also made a call for flexible and diversified resources to adapt to strategic changes. In November 2004, former Minister of Defence Michèle Alliot-Marie admitted that the availability of precision weapons would increase the credibility of the doctrine of nuclear deterrence. See Assemblée Nationale, *Journal Officiel de la République Française, Débats Parlementaires*, 17/XI/2004, 9485.

⁴⁵ While France has experienced several major public debates on the nuclear deterrent, it should be noted that in 2006-2007, 2011-2012 and 2016-2017, the vast majority of official presidential candidates supported continued nuclear deterrence. See Tertrais, "French Nuclear Deterrence Policy, Forces, and Future," p. 23; Brustlein, "France's Nuclear Arsenal," p. ix.

⁴⁶ Xavier Pintat and Jeanny Lorgeoux, eds., *La Nécessaire Modernisation de la Dissuasion Nucléaire*, Information Report for the Commission des Affaires Étrangères, de la Défense et des Forces Armées [Foreign Affairs, Defense and Armed Forces Committee of the French Senate] (Paris: Sénat, May 23, 2017), pp. 120-124, www.senat.fr.

⁴⁷ Annual surveys commissioned by the Armed Forces Information and Public Relations Service, then the Defence Information and Communication Directorate (DICOD), quoted in Tertrais, "French Nuclear Deterrence Policy, Forces, and Future," p. 24.

Convergences & divergences in Australia & France’s nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament policies



2. Stance on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation

2.1. The Australian position

2.1.1. A champion of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation

Since the 1970s, Australia has constructively supported the nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament (NPD) regime. Consecutive governments have adopted **an approach that advocates sustained, incremental and verifiable steps towards nuclear disarmament**. This includes championing the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT),⁴⁸ actively supporting a Fissile-Material Cut-Off Treaty (FMCT)⁴⁹ and the South Pacific Nuclear-Weapon-Free-Zone Treaty (NWFZ), and positively contributing to the International Partnership for Nuclear Disarmament Verification (IPNDV) and other verification measures.⁵⁰ The country’s staunch commitment to the Nuclear Non-

⁴⁸ For example, Australia jointly initiated and has since co-chaired the “Friends of the CTBT” foreign ministers’ meeting, it was a lead sponsor of the annual UN General Assembly resolution on the CTBT, and it has installed 21 of the treaty’s 300 monitoring facilities around the world – the third-largest number in the world. See Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), “Steps Towards a Nuclear-Weapons-Free World,” 2018.

⁴⁹ For example, Australia participated in the High-level FMCT Expert Preparatory Group and the Group of Governmental Experts on an FMCT – two processes that have sought to further understanding of the necessary elements in a future FMCT.

⁵⁰ For example, through support for the UN-established Group of Governmental Experts (GGE), which seeks to understand challenges of effective verification of agreed armed reduction measures. Canberra also conducts regular outreach to encourage more countries to adopt the IAEA Additional Protocol, allowing enhanced access to and inspections of nuclear facilities.

Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the broader NPD regime is also demonstrated by its prominent role in state-sponsored NPD initiatives, including the Canberra Commission on the Elimination of Nuclear Weapons (1995-96), the Blix Commission (2004-2009), the Seven Nation Initiative (2005-2010) the International Commission on Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament (ICNND) (2008-2010) and the Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Initiative (NPDI) (2010). This stance aligns with Australia's relatively strong anti-nuclear public opinion.⁵¹

Concurrently, **Australia has made some notable practical contributions to slowing or mitigating nuclear proliferation**, including through actively participating in numerous inter-governmental regulatory bodies centred on the control of nuclear materials and equipment involved in the nuclear fuel-cycle,⁵² applying rigorous national export controls, serving as a member of the IAEA Board of Governors and the Vienna Group of 10 – which promotes progressive positions on non-proliferation and peaceful use issues⁵³ – and urging regional countries to join the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI),⁵⁴ of which Australia is a founding member. Moreover, pundits laud Australia as a 'world leader' in nuclear safety and security,⁵⁵ partly due to its expertise and skill in securing radioactive materials and facilities at home and its help building similar capacity in neighbouring states (including via domestic safeguards training).⁵⁶

2.1.2. *Divided opinion and a weaker track record*

Despite this net positive track record, **the consistency of Australia's stated non-proliferation and disarmament policies has, at times, wavered** – particularly as the country seeks to balance its NPD efforts with its commercial interests in exporting uranium and its desire to remain nestled under America's nuclear umbrella. These apparent **tensions in Australian nuclear policy have been exacerbated by divergences within the Australian political system**, with the Australian Labour Party (ALP) typically associated with a more anti-nuclear view.⁵⁷ Accordingly, **Australian policy on nuclear energy and exports has sometimes oscillated**. For example, in 2007, Howard's liberal government abandoned the formerly high-minded nuclear exports policy for an essentially commercial one,⁵⁸ when it committed to selling uranium to non-NPT signatory India (subject to preconditions)⁵⁹ and announced its commitment to launching a full-scale nuclear energy program. The late 2007 election

⁵¹ For example, the Lowy Institute has conducted numerous polls which demonstrate that Australians place nuclear proliferation high on their list of global threats (2007), believe that nuclear disarmament should be a top priority of the Australian government (2009) and are strongly against Australia developing nuclear weapons (2010). See <https://poll.lowyinstitute.org/charts/nuclear-weapons-in-australia/>

⁵² This includes the informal Zangger Committee and the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), through which Australia notably had a pivotal role in the 1992 establishment of comprehensive regulations mandating compliance with the standards of the IAEA. See Gareth Evans and Bruce Grant, *Australia's Foreign Relations: In the World of the 1990s*, 2nd ed. (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1995), p. 86.

⁵³ Guakhar Mukhatzhanova, "[Coalitions to Watch at the 2015 NPT Review Conference](#)," *Nuclear Threat Initiative*, 24 February 2015.

⁵⁴ The PSI seeks to strengthen international cooperation so as to interdict transfers of weapons of mass destruction, their delivery systems and related materials.

⁵⁵ Tanya Ogilvie-White and David Santoro, "Preventing Nuclear Terrorism: Australia's Leadership Role," *Australian Strategic Policy Institute – Special Report*, January 2014, p. 1.

⁵⁶ See Fissile Materials Working Group, "Nuclear-Security Lessons From Australia," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 18 December 2013; and, Geoffrey Shaw, "Australia's Efforts to Enhance Regional Safeguards and Nuclear Security," Australian Safeguards and Non-Proliferation Office, 24 July 2008.

⁵⁷ Support for nuclear disarmament is a strong part of the ALP custom. It has traditionally opposed nuclear energy for Australia and appeared more responsive to general public unease with nuclear power. Meanwhile the Liberal Party have appeared more receptive to the views of major corporations who see nuclear energy as a growth industry.

⁵⁸ Jacques E. C. Hymans, 'Isotopes and Identity: Australia and the Nuclear Weapons Option, 1949–1999', *Nonproliferation Review*, Spring 2000, p. 14.

⁵⁹ These preconditions included establishing appropriate, India-specific IAEA safeguards, concluding a bilateral safeguards agreement between Australia and India, and IAEA and NSG acceptance of the US-India nuclear deal.

of Rudd's Labour government then saw a swift reversal of these decisions, but this Labour policy was once again changed in 2011 under Gillard to allow nuclear exports to India – largely driven by anticipated strategic and commercial benefits. The Liberal government under Abbott signed a civil nuclear cooperation deal with India in 2014 – which some argued would undermine Australia's credibility as a responsible nuclear supplier⁶⁰ and weaken non-proliferation norms – “*if not logistically, then definitely in spirit,*”⁶¹ and by 2017 Australia made its first shipment of uranium to India.

Additionally, Australia's **refusal to participate in the negotiations for a Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) – let alone sign or ratify the treaty – is a departure from its decades-long bipartisan commitment to multilateral nuclear disarmament efforts.** The official Australian rationale for opposing the TPNW (which opened for signature in September 2017) is three-fold. Firstly, the liberal government purports that the treaty does not offer a practical path to effective disarmament because it fails to engage key states that possess nuclear weapons and address the security dimensions of the issue.⁶² Secondly, it risks undermining the NPT given that it creates parallel obligations and its safeguard provisions are weaker than the existing NPT framework. Finally, Australia considers the TPNW as incompatible with its US alliance obligations, contending that ratification would obligate Australia to renounce its military alliance with the US, including its nuclear umbrella.⁶³ This logic derives from the requirement that any state wishing to sign the nuclear treaty must pledge not to assist a nuclear weapon state in its nuclear plans, including in its policies of nuclear deterrence.

Yet **opposition to the TPNW is not universal across Australia.** In fact, public appetite for signing the TPNW was reportedly widespread: 78.9% of the public stated they support Australia joining the treaty.⁶⁴ Energetic civil society actors such as the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, whose genesis was in Australia,⁶⁵ have also striven to secure pledges from Australian federal parliamentarians to join the TPNW. Moreover, there is a strong movement within the Labour party to join the ban treaty, with the ALP having voted in December 2018 to sign and ratify it if elected. However, the party conditioned signing the treaty upon taking account of the presence of effective verification and enforcement mechanisms as well as ensuring the treaty's compatibility with the NPT and working to achieve universal support for the Ban Treaty.⁶⁶ This caveat seemingly affords some flexibility to any future ALP position on the treaty given the nuclear powers have refused point blank to support it. Moreover, current and former Labour leaders have expressed strong scepticism

⁶⁰ Crispin Rovere, “Australia-India Nuclear Treaty: A Non-Proliferation Disaster,” *The Strategist* -ASPI, 14 October 2014; and, Crispin Rovere, “Text of Australia-India Nuclear Cooperation Agreement: Short-sighted, Unnecessary, Dangerous – Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties,” 7 November 2014.

⁶¹ On this point, see Aiden Warren quoted in Kelsey Davenport, “[Australian Ships Uranium to India](#),” *Arms Control Today*, September 2017.

⁶² As the then-foreign minister explained in 2018, “*the global community needs to engage those countries that have chosen to acquire nuclear weapons and address the security drivers behind their choices. They are the only ones that can take the necessary action to disarm.* » See DFAT, “*Steps Towards a Nuclear-Weapons-Free World.*”

⁶³ “[W]e are concerned that the prohibition treaty doesn't contain viable mechanisms for verification of disarmament [...and...] the prohibitions contained in article 1 of the [TPNW] are fundamentally inconsistent and incompatible with Australia's alliance relationship with the US.”. See Testimony of Richard Sadleir, DFAT, before the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Legislation Committee, *Hansard Senate Hearing Transcript*, May 31, 2018, pp. 83-84.

⁶⁴ See Ipsos Public Opinion Poll, “Support for the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons,” November 13, 2018.

⁶⁵ ICAN was launched from Australia; its first office was opened in Melbourne in mid-2006. Dr Ron McCoy first proposed the campaign in 2005, receiving strong backing from the medical, peace and nuclear-free movements, namely the Medical Association for Prevention of War (MAPW) and International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War. See Dimity Hawkins, Dave Sweeney, Tilman Ruff, “ICAN's Origins – From Little Things, Big Things Grow...” October 2019.

⁶⁶ Mike Head, “[Australian Labor Party Steps up Commitment to US Alliance in 'Disrupted World'](#),” World Socialist Website, 19 December 2018.

about the TPNW based on its implications for the ANZUS alliance and thus Australian security⁶⁷ or its potential to weaken the NPT.⁶⁸

2.2. The French position

2.2.1. Taking the disarmament and non-proliferation high-road...

Like Australia, France has made valuable contributions to the NPD regime, though it was slower to do so – having remained outside the NPT until 1992. **Throughout the 1990s, the country took notable, irreversible unilateral disarmament measures in line with its policy of “sufficiency” in nuclear deterrence.** For example, it was the first state to transparently dismantle its nuclear testing site in the Pacific, the first state to dismantle in its entirety its land-based nuclear capability, and also reduced its air-based nuclear component by one third. In 2008, then President Sarkozy announced the reduction of France’s nuclear stockpile to fewer than 300 warheads, a position that remains today.

Akin to Australia, France adopts a progressive, verifiable approach to disarmament, including by promoting a FMTC,⁶⁹ and actively supporting the CTBT⁷⁰ and the treaties of Tlatelolco (1992), Pelindaba (1996) and Rarotonga (1996) that establish nuclear-weapon-free zones. It also proposed a global Action Plan on disarmament with its European partners in 2008, comprising numerous constructive, critical steps for global nuclear disarmament.⁷¹ Its nuclear non-proliferation record is equally strong. Particularly noteworthy on this front has been France’s active role in seeking to resolve proliferation crises faces the nuclear non-proliferation regime, including through its ongoing, multilateral diplomatic efforts to engage Iran over its nuclear program. It also participates in the PSI, applies strict national export controls and supports the NSG, the Zangger Committee and the Missile Technology Control Regime – for which it provides the permanent secretariat.

2.2.2. ...but also the low-road?

However, **France’s approach to nuclear disarmament is also cautious and conservative,** not least because it has long conditioned disarmament on improvements in global security.⁷² In 2006, for

⁶⁷ Shadow defence minister Richard Marles claimed that the TPNW “raises the prospect of Australia needing to repudiate our longstanding defence relationship with the US” and might undermine the ANZUS security agreement with the US. Former labour foreign affairs minister Gareth Evans stated “[By...] signing or ratifying the ban treaty [...] we would effectively be tearing up our US alliance commitment.” See Hon Richard Marles, “The Nuclear Weapons Prohibition Treaty, National Security and ANZUS,” *United States Studies Centre*, 15 October 2018; Paul Karp, “Labor Set for Nuclear Showdown as Gareth Evans Warns of Risk to US Alliance,” *The Guardian*, December 17, 2018.

⁶⁸ Shadow foreign minister Penny Wong claimed that the alleged weakness of the safeguards provisions “not only undermines the potential effectiveness of the Ban Treaty, [but] has the unintended effect of undermining the effectiveness of the existing NPT’s safeguards system.” See Penny Wong, “The Disarmament Challenge in a Time of Disruption,” Speech at the Australian Institute of International Affairs National Conference, Canberra, 15 October 2018.

⁶⁹ For example, France was the first state to decide to close and dismantle its fissile material for weapons production facilities, and it proposed a draft FMTC treaty in 2015.

⁷⁰ For example, France was the first nuclear power to propose, in August 1995, that the CTBT be based on the ‘zero option’ (a total ban on low-energy tests); it conducted its last test on 27 January 1996; it was the first nuclear state along with the UK to ratify the CTBT in 1998; it contributes 7 million Euros to the CTBTO’s annual budget and hosts 16 CTBT monitoring stations on its territory.

⁷¹ “Nuclear Disarmament: France’s Concrete Commitment,” *Working Paper Submitted by France*, New York, 3-28 May 2010, accessed at <https://www.francetnp.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/eng-dsmt.pdf>

⁷² In 1996, for example, President Chirac stated that he saw no reason to put French nuclear forces on the arms control agenda, highlighting the far greater size of US and Russian arsenals, and the uncertainties about the future of the ABM Treaty and non-proliferation regime. See *Discours du Président de la République, M. Jacques Chirac, à l’Institut des Hautes Etudes de Défense Nationale*, Paris, 8 June 1996.

example, President Chirac noted that progress towards disarmament was possible only if “*the conditions of our global security are maintained and if the will to progress is unanimously shared.*”⁷³ President Hollande reemphasised the stance in 2015, when he noted: “*I share the ultimate objective of the total elimination of nuclear weapons, but I add: when the strategic context permits it.*”⁷⁴

This line of strategic thinking lies at the heart of **France’s vociferous and unanimous political opposition to the TPNW**. France considers that the nuclear states will not sign up to the TPNW because it fails to take account of current strategic realities or do anything to address them and thus “*it will not serve the disarmament cause.*”⁷⁵ Indeed, as is the case for Australian political leaders, national security implications associated with signing the TPNW are the ultimate concern for France’s political class. As President Macron elucidated, even if France gave up its nuclear weapons under the TPNW, “[...] *the other nuclear powers would not follow suit [...and this] would be akin to exposing ourselves as well as our partners to violence and blackmail.*”⁷⁶ Similar to Australia, France also believes that the TPNW risks weakening the non-proliferation regime, in particular the NPT.⁷⁷ Moreover, **France significantly increased its budget for revamping the nuclear deterrent between 2019 – 2025**,⁷⁸ spurring some to question the integrity of France’s commitment to disarmament. In particular, the replacement of its nuclear-powered ballistic-missile submarines (SSBNs) testifies to a commitment to deterrence well beyond a generation.

3. Possible future policy trajectories

What might prompt France to rethink the merits of maintaining its nuclear deterrent and Australia to step out from under the US nuclear umbrella? There are no **indications that France is questioning the necessity of its nuclear deterrent**⁷⁹ – quite the contrary, as this paper highlights – nor is this likely to change without major improvements in the strategic environment.⁸⁰ Such improvements would probably include components linked to the global framework of strategic stability and non-proliferation, such as the entry into force of the CTBT and FMCT, an assessment that nuclear proliferation had demonstrably and verifiably stopped, and a general improvement in great power relations leading great powers to reduce their nuclear arsenals.⁸¹ Yet, in the current climate, these prospects appear distant or entirely unachievable and France’s perceived military threats are unlikely to dissipate to the extent that encourages its unilateral nuclear weapons abandonment in the short-

⁷³ Address by Jacques Chirac, President of the French Republic, During his Visit to the Strategic Air and Ocean Forces, Landivisiau – L’Île Longue (Brest), 19 January 2006.

⁷⁴ François Hollande, *Discours sur la Dissuasion Nucléaire, Déplacement auprès des Forces Aériennes Stratégiques*, Istres, 19 February 2015. He added: “*If the levels of other arsenals, notably Russian and American, were one day to fall to a few hundred, France would draw consequences, as it has always done. But we are still far from that today.*”

⁷⁵ “Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT): Our Dossier,” French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, last updated April 2019.

⁷⁶ Macron, “Defense and Deterrence Strategy,” 2020.

⁷⁷ Interestingly, public opinion appears to differ slightly on this issue, with a June 2018 poll finding that 67% of French people believed their government should sign the TPNW. See Le mouvement de la Paix, “[Press Release: 76% of French are for France’s Commitment in the Nuclear Weapons’ Elimination Process, IFOP Survey](#)” 5 July 2018.

⁷⁸ In the approved 2019-2025 Military Programming Law, Macron’s government assigned €37 billion to maintaining and modernising France’s land and sea-based nuclear deterrent – up from the €23 billion assigned for 2014- 2019. See “Macron to Lay Out France’s Plans for its Nuclear Weapons,” *The Local*, 7 February 2020.

⁷⁹ Corentin Brustlein, “France’s Nuclear Arsenal: What Sort of Renewal?” *Politique Étrangère*, 3 (2017): 113-234, pp. x-xi.

⁸⁰ As the 2017 Strategic Review noted, “maintaining our deterrent over the long term is essential, as multiple powers are developing their nuclear forces, and as some of them use these for power demonstration, intimidation, or even blackmailing purposes. Defence and National Security Strategic Review, 2017, p. 70.

⁸¹ As Bruno Tertrais explained a decade ago, France may not want to be isolated from a major global political movement in this direction that included Russia and China, particularly given there would be strong pressures from within the EU for France to participate. See Bruno Tertrais, “France: French Perspectives on Nuclear Weapons and Nuclear Disarmament,” in Ed. Barry Blechman, “France and the United Kingdom,” *Stimson Centre*, 2009, pp. 18-19.

to medium-term. Nonetheless, it might consider *reducing* its arsenal if both the US and Russia drastically reduced their own, and the US subsequently promoted multilateral disarmament negotiations.⁸²

In the short- to medium-term (2020 – 2030), Australia is similarly likely to continue down its current path of **maintaining its reliance on US extended nuclear deterrence (albeit with increased effort to simultaneously buttress its own non-nuclear deterrent capability)**.⁸³ Extricating itself from the US nuclear umbrella is improbable because Australia is militarily dependent on the US “*in ways that are now very difficult to change*.”⁸⁴ Indeed, doing so would seriously alienate Australia from its superpower ally and risk its continued access to vital US intelligence and defence technology.⁸⁵ Moreover, Australia’s increasing apprehension regarding its threat environment, outlined in recent strategic documents, appears to justify its continued reliance on US nuclear weapons, and may even foreshadow a greater reliance on it.⁸⁶ Nevertheless, influential Australian defence thinkers have begun questioning whether Australia ought to consider pursuing a more dependable nuclear deterrent – its own, for example⁸⁷ – given increasing uncertainty about the credibility of US extended nuclear deterrence and China’s growing military capabilities and strategic assertiveness. For the time being, however, these voices remain extremely marginal, and securing bipartisan agreement (and public support) on such a sensitive issue would likely require that several conditions are met. For example, Australia would need to experience a wholesale deterioration in its strategic environment, including confronting an existential threat,⁸⁸ and US extended nuclear deterrence would need to collapse – which could be precipitated if Japan and South Korea abandoned their reliance on US nuclear weapons and decided to develop their own.⁸⁹

Conclusion and avenues for cooperation

Overall, **there are perhaps more points of confluence between Australian and French nuclear policies than there are divergences**. Both democracies support a practical, step-by-step approach towards disarmament and have made positive contributions to the NPD regime, promoting key NPD mechanisms and launching numerous diplomatic initiatives. Simultaneously, their interpretation of their respective strategic environment leads them to view nuclear deterrence (or, in the case of Australia, extended nuclear deterrence) as a critical component of their security and defence postures. Thus, in seeking to balance their NPD advocacy with efforts to indefinitely sustain the legitimacy and credibility of nuclear weapons, their NPD strategy appears conservative, “*lacking rigor*,”⁹⁰ and at times outright contradictory. Ultimately, however, neither country is likely to

⁸² *Ibid.*, pp. 15-16.

⁸³ As the 2020 Defence Strategic update revealed, Australia must “take greater responsibility for [its] own security” by growing its “self-reliant ability to deliver deterrent effects,” including by acquiring long-range missiles and other advanced weapon systems of its own. See p. 27.

⁸⁴ See Ogilvie-White, “Australia and Extended Nuclear assurance,” p. 23; Hugh White, *How to Defend Australia*, Carlton: La Trobe University Press, 2019.

⁸⁵ Dr Brendan Taylor, “Still the Frightened Country: Australian Anxieties in a Contested Asia,” *Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific*, Jan 2019: pp 34-36.

⁸⁶ For example, given the deepening tensions in the Western Pacific, China’s growing military sophistication and the proliferation of ballistic missiles among several countries listed in the 2016 Defence White Paper, it is clear that greater Australian reliance on nuclear deterrence capability is being foreshadowed (see also paragraph 5.20). Crispin Rovere, “Defence White Paper 2016: Eight Strategic Observations,” *Lowy Institute – the Interpreter*, 29 February 2016.

⁸⁷ See for example, Andrew Greene, “Australia May Need to Consider Nuclear Weapons to Counter China’s Dominance, Defence Analyst Says” *ABC News*, 1 July 2019; Rod Lyon, “Should Australia Build Its Own Nuclear Arsenal?” *ASPI – the Strategist*, 24 October 2019; Paul Dibb, “Nuclear Weapons Time for Australia,” *The National Interest*, 4 October 2018.

⁸⁸ Rod Lyon, “Should Australia Build Its Own Nuclear Arsenal?” *ASPI – the Strategist*, 24 October 2019.

⁸⁹ Rod Lyon, “Australia, Extended Nuclear Deterrence, and What Comes After,” *ASPI – the Strategist*, 2 June 2017.

⁹⁰ Aiden Warren, “Rethinking Australia’s Middle-Power Nuclear Paradox,” *Arms Control Today*, May 2019.

imminently alter the value it accords nuclear deterrence given the dark outlook they have towards their current and longer-term security environment.⁹¹

France and Australia are likeminded countries with highly compatible strategic interests – including in the Indo-Pacific and nuclear arms control – and **there are therefore opportunities for increased modes of collaboration between them to help each other advance their security interests, as well as strengthen regional security and stability.**⁹² For example, building off then-Prime Minister Turnbull and President Macron’s 2018 vision statement to buttress the Indian Ocean architecture and cooperate closely to bolster regional maritime security,⁹³ Australia and France are well-placed to jointly advance regional maritime confidence-and-security building measures (CSBMs) to help defuse tension and prevent miscalculations,⁹⁴ possibly in tandem with other regional actors such as Japan.⁹⁵ Beijing may be more amenable to such cooperation measures given its proclivity for regional bodies in which the US is not a member (and its tendency to resist US-led components of the regional order, more broadly).

Separately, **a fruitful avenue of bilateral strategic dialogue for France and Australia is their respective perceptions of the future of alliances,** possibly including the reliability of the US as a partner and a security guarantor. As US allies, both are impacted by shifts in US strategic focus and thus would benefit from helping each other build a deeper understanding of the changing nature of alliances – for instance whether their focus was becoming more one of regional interests or of global like-mindedness,⁹⁶ which is particularly pertinent against the backdrop of the first France-India-Australia trilateral dialogue in September 2020. Consultations on this theme would occur within the framework of the Joint Statement of Enhanced Strategic Partnership,⁹⁷ for example as part of the existing Track 1.5 “Australia-France Strategic Dialogue” or at a higher level between senior officials.

Avenues for greater NPD collaboration also exist, namely in areas which both countries are mutually committed to or deeply invested in. For example, France and Australia could launch a cooperative project on nuclear disarmament verification – akin to that which France recently initiated with Germany⁹⁸ – that seeks to further research on and understanding of how best to verify nuclear disarmament. Additionally, to increase CTBT ratifications in South Asia (where CTBT ratification is lowest in the world⁹⁹), France and Australia could conduct active outreach to the region

⁹¹ See the Defence and National Security Strategic Review 2017, which characterises France’s strategic environment as undergoing “a rapid and lasting deterioration” (pages 16-33) and the Australian 2016 Defence White Paper.

⁹² Their approaches for pursuing such interests also converge. For example, Australia is viewed in Paris as a country that sees regional stability through the same prism and effective multilateralism as the way to ensure it. See Frédéric Gare, “A French Perspective on Australia’s Role in the Indian Ocean,” *The Interpreter*, Lowy Institute, 7 April 2020; and, C. Raja Mohan, Rory Medcalf, Bruno Tertrais, “New Indo-Pacific Axis,” *The IndianExpress*, 8 May 2018.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ CSBMs are suggested here over the development of Asian arms control mechanisms since major obstacles make the latter an unlikely prospect in the short-term. See Bhumitra Chakma, “Nuclear Arms Control 1 Challenges in South Asia,” *India Review* 9, no. 3 (July 2010): pp. 364-384.

⁹⁵ For example, effort could be directed towards exploring the appetite for and feasibility of a maritime and aerial communication mechanism in the South China Sea – similar to that created between Japan and China in 2018 to avert accidental clashes at sea and in the air in the East China Sea.

⁹⁶ This was, in fact, one conclusion reached at the 2013 round of Australia-France Strategic Dialogue. See Lowy Institute, “[Australia-France Strategic Dialogue: Co-Chairs Report](#),” 24 July 2013.

⁹⁷ The Joint Statement on enhanced strategic partnership commits France and Australia to intensifying bilateral strategic dialogue through engagements between senior officials, expert groups and research bodies in Australia and France, particularly with regard to strategic and defence issues.

Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, “Joint Statement of Enhanced Strategic Partnership between Australia and France,” 3 March 2017.

⁹⁸ As part of the IPNDV initiative, France and Germany organised an exercise in September 2019 to test the verification procedures for one stage of a fictitious disarmament scenario. President Macron also recently highlighted that this work is one of France’s four priorities in the area of disarmament. See Macron, “Defence and Strategy” 2020.

⁹⁹ Currently less than 40% of South Asian countries have ratified the CTBT.

that highlights in detail the CTBTO's benefits, including the value of CTBT verification data for disaster warning and science. Such an initiative would carry symbolic weight given the reputation of both countries as CTBT heavyweights. Moreover, France and Australia could increase their cooperation in the nuclear security domain and extend this to the Indo-Pacific, for example by jointly developing a public education campaign to raise regional awareness of nuclear security challenges and opportunities,¹⁰⁰ or by launching a regional capacity-building mechanism similar to the highly successful Australian Regional Security of Radioactive Sources (RSRS) project.¹⁰¹ In sum, **the time is ripe for France and Australia to undertake bolder collaborative efforts**, leveraging their deepening strategic partnership and the strong Indo-Pacific focus of the current French leadership, **to help practically advance the nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation agenda.**

¹⁰⁰ Fissile Materials Working Group, "Nuclear-Security Lessons from Australia," 2013.

¹⁰¹ The RSRS promoted regional inter-agency cooperation and follow-up exercises. It began in 2004 and created an ongoing peer review process around radioactive-sources security in Southeast Asia.

French vs. Australian nuclear policies:
convergences, divergences and avenues for cooperation

The opinions expressed here are the sole responsibility of the author