

Promoting the European network of independent non-proliferation and disarmament think tanks

nonproliferation.eu

## Interview with Adam Thomson



Sir Adam Thomson KCMG is the Director of the European Leadership Network (ELN). Before joining the ELN, Adam had a 38-year diplomatic career in the British Diplomatic Service, preceded by short spells at the World Bank and at Harvard. His final diplomatic posting was as UK Permanent Representative to NATO between 2014 and 2016. Prior to that, from 2010 Adam served as British High Commissioner to Pakistan and between 2002 and 2006 he was British Ambassador and Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations in New York. Earlier postings included Moscow, NATO, Washington DC and New Delhi. Adam has also worked in London on Israel/Lebanon, in the Cabinet Office as the Soviet analyst for the UK's Joint Intelligence Committee (1989 - 91), as the Head of the FCO's Security Policy Department and as FCO Director for South Asia and Afghanistan.

Initially focused on multilateral nuclear disarmament, the European Leadership Network (ELN) now deals with a wide spectrum of security threats with the goal of enhancing mutual security in wider Europe. What are the most urgent steps that need to be taken towards this goal? What future initiatives is ELN undertaking to help achieve this goal?

Security in Europe is worsening. Winter is coming. Governments and their citizens need to take more seriously the most existential risks, such as nuclear confrontation and unintended West-Russia escalation. The ELN has adapted its approach accordingly – sustaining the nuclear disarmament goal but addressing the context in which progress can happen. So we focus on nuclear risks and reducing West-Russia tensions, including from new technologies. We are addressing the dangers from hazardous military incidents, the erosion of conventional arms control and CSBMs, the need for pol-mil dialogue, and the problems of competing security narratives. We are working on the risks to nuclear arms control, such as INF and the growing gap over the nuclear ban treaty. We also do what we can to reverse the deteriorating transatlantic security relationship. In practice, we make increasing use of our very senior members and our links with governments and international organizations, supporting them with rigorous analysis and practical propositions. For example, through our powerful virtual network of Iran experts we are supporting European governments in trying to salvage the JCPOA.

Looking beyond Europe, we are witnessing an increasingly dangerous gap between nuclear and non-nuclear armed states. The 2020 NPT RevCon is approaching, and the risks of consensus not being reached are high. What steps can the EU take to reinvigorate the NPT process? Do you think it can serve as bridge-builder between nuclear and non-nuclear weapons states? What can the EU do to strengthen global non-proliferation and arms control?

It wouldn't be the first time a RevCon failed to reach consensus. But the distinct possibility of

failure in 2020, coupled with the likely collapse of the JCPOA and demise of the INF treaty, may precipitate a deep crisis. The long-standing NPT consensus is at risk of fragmenting. The EU is well placed to offer constructive ways to bridge the international divide. Its member states represent almost all points of view – nuclear weapon states, umbrella states and ban treaty supporters. It has strong mechanisms all the way up to head of government level for finding and building compromise. And it aspires to be a more influential international actor. But it needs to find the political will and courage to discuss this issue internally. For 2020 the answers may lie in forging common responses to global nuclear crises such as on the JCPOA or the DPRK, and working to promote improved risk reduction measures as well as nuclear transparency and disarmament verification. With some creative EU diplomacy, the Ban Treaty debate does not have to become confrontational.

The US has recently announced its decision to withdraw from the INF Treaty, often defined as a landmark and the pillar of international security and stability since its inception. In your view what initiatives could be undertaken to avert a potential crisis resulting from this withdrawal?

The INF treaty may be anachronistic, but it is totemic and it has been stabilising. It would be a big miscalculation by the US if in response to Russia's violation it simply withdraws unilaterally. The costs both to the US taxpayer and to international nuclear stability would be high. The only way to turn this crisis into an opportunity would be for the US and Russia jointly to use the INF's demise as a springboard to fresh agreements on nuclear and wider strategic stability. Perhaps that is what John Bolton intends and President Trump hopes. But there's so far little evidence that this US Administration really plans to do more than assert America First. If that is indeed the case, it falls to others - including the EU - to plan now for how to walk the world away from the wreckage of what was once Pax Americana towards something safer and less costly - better and more modern arms control and confidence building measures to meet 21st century security challenges.

## AI and International Security: more than LAWS

Leaders in AI - artificial intelligence - will rule the world. This thought was the essence of a speech given by Russian President, Vladimir Putin, to students in 2017. Many actors, including Russia, the USA, China and the EU, are heavily investing in AI and almost all aspects of modern society, from public transport to medicine and even journalism, will be affected by this technology.

What is lacking, however, is a security-centred debate on the implications of artificial intelligence in the military and warfare domains. In fact, there is an ongoing debate within the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) in Geneva on a potential ban of Lethal Autonomous Weapon Systems (LAWS). However, while this debate is timely and important, LAWS are not the only military application of AI, and the focus on legal and ethical arguments in Geneva is too narrow.

The broader military implications AI may have on stability and transparency are tremendous. The more weapon systems rely on "intelligent" software rather than hardware, the harder it is to assess their military value vis-à-vis the systems of strategic competitors. The reliance on new and more sophisticated algorithms leads to an acceleration of decision-making processes, with shorter consideration and reflection times in crises situations. Inevitably, this will lead into an ever-increasing reliance on technology to cope with the new environment. Even logistics will profit immensely from AI, leading to faster troop dislocation and a decreasing relevance of, for example, regional ceilings for specific treaty limitations on the deployment of troops and equipment.

Many experts are currently focussed on the preservation of the existing arms control architecture, meaning that resources to address new issues are limited. However, given the profound implications of AI on stability and transparency, a broader but complementary debate to that occurring in the CCW on AI and LAWS has to start now.

**Niklas Schörnig**

Leibniz-Institut Hessische Stiftung Friedens- und Konfliktforschung (HSFK) -  
Peace Research Institute Frankfurt (PRIF) /  
EU Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Consortium



Funded by  
the European Union

## Latest Network Publications

*Perils of Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems Proliferation: Preventing Non-State Acquisition*, Philip Chertoff, The Geneva Centre for Security Policy (GCSP), 2018

*Negative Security Assurances: The Test of Commitment to Multilateral Nuclear Disarmament?*, Paul Ingram, British American Security Information Council (BASIC), 2018

*Opposing trends: The renewed salience of nuclear weapons and nuclear abolitionism*, Tytti Erästö and Dr. Tarja Cronberg, SIPRI, 2018

*Countering CBRN Challenges amid Disarmament and Non-Proliferation Concerns in the Middle East/Gulf*, Bernd W. Kubbig, Leibniz-Institut Hessische Stiftung Friedens-und Konfliktforschung (HSFK)/The Peace Research Institute (PRIF), 2018

## Network Call:

### 8th Nuclear History Boot Camp

Applications are now open for the 8th NHBC, an intensive 10-day immersion course in the history of nuclear matters. The course will be held in Allumiere (Rome), Italy, 24 May - 02 June 2019

Eligibility:

- Students enrolled in a Ph.D. program in international relations, history, political science and related fields, and who are working towards or considering a thesis on nuclear matters
- Applicants who have completed their M.A. degree and are considering a Ph.D. in nuclear matters

Participants will receive full tuition, a round-trip airfare to Rome, as well as accommodations and meals.

Applications deadlines:  
- January 10th, 2019

For further information please contact [nuclearbootcamp@uniroma3.it](mailto:nuclearbootcamp@uniroma3.it) or visit <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/nuclear-history-boot-camp>

## EU INSTITUTIONAL NEWS

### Statement on the Treaty on Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) in Europe

On 22 October 2018, the Spokesperson for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, Maja Kocijancic, delivered a [statement](#) on behalf of the EU High Representative Federica Mogherini in response to the Trump administration's [announcement](#) that it is planning to withdraw from the Treaty on Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF). The Spokesperson invited the United States to consider the consequences of its withdrawal and to reflect on the action's significance from the point of view of US security, the security of its allies and of the whole world. The Spokesperson also mentioned alleged Russian violations of the Treaty, calling on the Russian Federation to respond to the "serious concerns regarding its compliance with the INF Treaty in a substantial and transparent way".

Signed in December 1987 by the United States and the Soviet Union (now Russian Federation), the INF Treaty is a bilateral agreement that falls under the wider non-proliferation and arms control regimes. Considered by many as a landmark agreement, the INF Treaty prohibits the two States to possess, test and deploy nuclear and conventional ground-launched ballistic and cruise missiles with ranges of 500 to 5,500 kilometers. Under its auspices, the agreement led to the removal and the verifiable destruction of almost three thousand missiles with nuclear and conventional warheads by the treaty's implementation deadline of 1 June 1991.

The statement on behalf of High Representative Mogherini emphasized that the INF Treaty has "contributed to the end of the cold-war" and "constitutes a pillar of European security architecture". In defining the Treaty as crucial for Europe's security, the statement underlined how its dismantlement would heighten global "instability".

[Statement by the Spokesperson on the Treaty on Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces in Europe](#)

## NETWORK NEWS

### The new website of the EU Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Network is online

The new website of the European Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Network (EUNPD) is online. Reachable at [www.nonproliferation.eu](http://www.nonproliferation.eu), it includes a detailed explanation of the work and mission of the EUNPD Consortium and EUNPD Network, a section on the project's activities and a section on its thematic areas of interest. Together with the EUNPD's monthly newsletter, the website will serve as our primary way to stay connected and share important information. The website also includes a "job openings" section, with European vacancies in the field of non-proliferation, disarmament and arms control.

We hope you enjoy it!



This publication was produced with the financial support of the European Union. Its contents are the sole responsibility of the EU NPD Network and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union