

EU Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Consortium

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

E-newsletter of the European Network of Independent Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Think Tanks

GERMANY AND NUCLEAR WEAPONS IN THE 21ST CENTURY - ATOMIC ZEITENWENDE?- AN INTERVIEW WITH ULRICH KÜHN



Dr. Ulrich Kühn is Head of the research area "Arms Control and Emerging Technologies" at the Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg (IFSH). He works at the intersection between security studies and conflict research. His research focuses on arms control and non-proliferation mechanisms, the nuclear and conventional deterrence, Euro-Atlantic and European security, and international security institutions. In concrete terms, Ulrich Kühn researches nuclear policies, security mechanisms between NATO and Russia, conventional arms control in Europe, foreign and security policy of Germany, the United States and Russia, and confidence- and security-building measures (CSBMs) of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE).

The war in Ukraine has stimulated a fresh debate in Europe about nuclear deterrence as a key component of the continent's security system. How is such debate developing in Germany?

The German debate on nuclear deterrence in Europe is shaped by either panic and lack of expertise or outright neglect. On the one hand, there is an increasing chorus of pundits and policy-makers from across the mainstream political establishment that fear US abandonment, should Trump be reelected. This group is very present in the German media and their somewhat panicky policy suggestions often do not stand the test of reality. Some suggest a somewhat Europeanised deterrent, based on French and British forces. Others, like Germany's finance minister, muse about Germany financing the French force de frappe in order to get greater assurances from Paris. Again, others hint at German proliferation. The Chancellor, to the contrary, sees no reason to discuss these issues and refers to Germany's long-standing legal commitments not to acquire the bomb.

The book "Germany and Nuclear Weapons in the 21st Century - Atomic Zeitenwende?" edited by you, includes a discussion on the idea of a Eurodeterrent. How realistic is this prospect? Can the different positions in Europe on the role of nuclear weapons be reconciled? Under what conditions could the French nuclear forces serve as a credible instrument of an extended deterrence?

The discussion about a 'Eurodeterrent' – that is a somewhat Europeanised deterrent with military responsibilities for the EU – is completely unrealistic, simply for the reason that Paris and London do not intend to somehow 'share' their nuclear forces. Further complicating the setting, there are very different perspectives on nuclear deterrence across Europe with Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries very much in favor and Austria or Ireland rather opposed.

Whether these different positions can be reconciled in the future depends mostly on the severity of the Russian threat to Europe further down the road. One of the main misunderstandings of the debate in Germany is that pundits envision an extended deterrence role for France akin to the current US commitments. But French nuclear strategy does not think in terms of classical extended deterrence and the force de frappe is structured in a way that serves mainly French interests. Macron has repeatedly pointed to the European dimension of the French deterrent. It will be interesting to see how France might substantiate these claims after the next US presidential elections in November. In the end, deterrence can only hold if it is conceived as credible by the adversary and – also critical – as credible by its own backers. In both regards, I doubt whether Russia or CEE countries would view an increased role of the force de frappe for Europe as credible enough.

Do you think that Germany can play a bridge-builder role in the Eurodeterrent debate?

In that debate almost all roads lead to Paris. Given the currently fraught relationship between Germany and France, I doubt that Berlin could successfully play a bridge-building role in the near future. Poland has a new government that is now (again) much more of a political partner for Berlin and Paris. Perhaps Poland might be better positioned to take up this juicy issue with Macron. Then again, Warsaw's prime interest in the nuclear domain is clearly geared towards NATO nuclear sharing. Paris, however, does not even participate in the Alliance's joint nuclear planning. As always in Europe there is a multitude of opinions and quite different interests. For any complex deterrence debate, this is not a very conducive environment.

SIGNS OF PROGRESS TOWARDS LAWS REGULATION

Calls to regulate lethal autonomous weapons systems (LAWS) are getting louder. The joint appeal by the UN Secretary-General and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in October 2023 to conclude a legally binding instrument by 2026 has been widely supported. In November 2023 the states parties to the Convention on Certain Convention Weapons (CCW) approved a new, more focused, three-year mandate for the group of governmental experts (GGE) on lethal autonomous weapon systems. However, at the first meeting under the new mandate in March 2024 different interpretations of the mandate emerged.

The new mandate entrusts the GGE with the task to 'further consider and formulate a set of elements of an instrument' as well as 'other options related to the normative and operational framework on [LAWS]'. There were different views as to the issues the Group should focus on and the final objective it should pursue. However, the discussions were substantive thanks to a constructive approach of the delegations and an effective chairing. This gave the sense that the GGE was finally getting down to business.

The Chair of the GGE organised the meeting around three topics: 1) characteristics and definitions, 2) application of international humanitarian law (IHL); and 3) risk mitigation and confidence building. Differences remain over what LAWS (or AWS as some prefer) actually are, how IHL applies, context of use, and what 'autonomous' means. In particular, commonly shared definitions are key to building a normative framework, let alone a legally binding instrument.

The different camps on display in previous meetings are still in evidence. An ultra-cautious camp doubts whether new regulation is even needed. Some believe that more discussions are needed before any meaningful negotiations can start. A growing group, which includes EU and NATO states, supports a two-tier approach: banning systems that cannot comply with IHL and regulating those that can. Then, the Group of 15 - an informal forum- composed of countries from Latin America, Africa and Asia - continues to push for a comprehensive legally binding instrument.

The outcome of the discussions under this new mandate will not be known until the Group submits its report to the Seventh Review Conference of the CCW in 2026. The three-year mandate provides a valuable opportunity to define normative elements to prohibit the use of weapons systems that do not comply with IHL, even if no agreement were reached on a legal instrument.

In a [statement](#), the Geneva Centre for Security Policy (GCSP) argued that the Group needed to pay more attention to the risks posed by the increasingly autonomous battlefield. Decision making, targeting decisions, and even target engagement is already highly algorithmically assisted, with varying levels of human oversight and involvement. Research into automation bias shows that the more autonomous a system is, the more humans tend to defer to machine suggestions. Therefore, humans need to have the contextual understanding and cognitive and physical capacity to critically engage with the system's suggestions or actions and ensure an adequate human involvement.

The mounting pressure to regulate LAWS has certainly contributed to focusing minds within the GGE. We should welcome the promising signs emerging from discussions at the GGE. Reaching consensus at the end of the three-year mandate still looks challenging, but getting off to a constructive start gives some cause for optimism.

Simon Cleobury, Head, Arms Control and Disarmament, Geneva Centre for Security Policy (GCSP)

Latest Publications

Australia's defense export control regime and critical technologies.
Lauren Sanders. Journal of Strategic Trade Control, Vol. 2, February 2024.

Francis and the Bomb: On the Immorality of Nuclear Deterrence.
Christian Nikolaus Braun. Journal of Military Ethics. February 2024

The Chemical Weapons Convention After Its Fifth Review Conference: Key Issues For The European Union
Alexander Ghionis and Alexander Kelle. EU Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Paper no. 87, February 2024

Russia's nuclear-capable missiles: a question of escalation control.
William Alberque. IISS Online Analysis. March 2024

Network Calls

SIPRI's Armament and Disarmament Cluster is hiring a Researcher, with specific focus on biological weapons or biological and chemical weapons, to join the Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) Programme.

More info: [Here](#)

The International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) intends to hire a full-time Senior Fellow for Nuclear Arms Control, Non-Proliferation and Disarmament, based at IISS-Asia in Singapore. The selected candidate will report to the Executive Director of IISS-Asia and will lead the Institute's research on Nuclear Arms Control, Non-Proliferation and Disarmament.

More info: [Here](#)

EU NEWS

EU STATEMENT ON PREVENTION OF AN ARMS RACE IN OUTER SPACE

THE EU REPRESENTATIVE TO THE CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT IN GENEVA ADDRESSED THE EU'S POSITION ON THE PREVENTION OF AN ARMS RACE IN OUTER SPACE IN HIS SPEECH ON 28 MARCH.

THE EU REPRESENTATIVE EMPHASISED THAT OUTER SPACE IS CONSIDERED A GLOBAL COMMONS AND THAT ENSURING SPACE SECURITY AND PREVENTING AN ARMS RACE IN OUTER SPACE ARE ESSENTIAL CONDITIONS FOR THE PEACEFUL EXPLORATION AND SAFE, STABLE, SUSTAINABLE AND SECURE USE OF OUTER SPACE. IT ALSO STRESSED THE IMPORTANCE OF STRENGTHENING INTERNATIONAL PEACE AND SECURITY FOR THE BENEFIT OF ALL MANKIND.

OUTER SPACE HAS FACED INCREASING CHALLENGES IN TERMS OF SECURITY IN RECENT YEARS, WITH THREATS ENDANGERING THE LONG-TERM SUSTAINABILITY OF THE SPACE ENVIRONMENT. SPACE-BASED SATELLITES AND ASSETS, TOGETHER WITH THEIR GROUND SEGMENTS AND DATA LINKS, ARE VITAL FOR THE FUNCTIONING OF OUR SOCIETIES AND FOR ADDRESSING IMPORTANT GLOBAL ISSUES.

THE EU WELCOMED THE FRUITFUL EXCHANGES BETWEEN MEMBER STATES AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS DURING THE INFORMAL CONSULTATIVE MEETINGS OF THE GROUP OF GOVERNMENTAL EXPERTS ON PRACTICAL MEASURES TO PREVENT AN ARMS RACE IN OUTER SPACE. IT INSISTED ON THE APPLICATION OF INTERNATIONAL LAW, INCLUDING THE 1967 OUTER SPACE TREATY, AND STRESSED THE IMPORTANCE OF RESPONSIBLE NORMS AND PRINCIPLES IN SPACE. IT ALSO UNDERLINED THE NEED TO ENHANCE CONFIDENCE AND PROMOTE THE IMPLEMENTATION OF CONFIDENCE-BUILDING MEASURES TO STRENGTHEN SPACE SECURITY.

IN SUMMARY, THE EU ADVOCATED A COMBINED APPROACH OF LEGALLY BINDING AND NON-BINDING INSTRUMENTS TO ENHANCE SPACE SECURITY AND PREVENT AN ARMS RACE IN OUTER SPACE, EMPHASISING THE IMPORTANCE OF MULTILATERAL COOPERATION AND THE ENGAGEMENT OF ALL STAKEHOLDERS IN THIS CRITICAL AREA FOR GLOBAL WELL-BEING.

READ THE FULL STATEMENT: [HERE](#)

NETWORK NEWS

2024 VIENNA CONFERENCE ON AUTONOMOUS WEAPON SYSTEMS

THE AUSTRIAN FEDERAL MINISTRY FOR EUROPEAN AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS IS PLEASED TO HOST THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE "HUMANITY AT THE CROSSROADS: AUTONOMOUS WEAPONS SYSTEMS AND THE CHALLENGE OF REGULATION" ON 29-30 APRIL 2024 IN THE HOFBURG PALACE IN VIENNA.

MORE INFO: [HERE](#)

2024 SIPRI SUMMER SCHOOL ON ARMAMENT AND DISARMAMENT

THE STOCKHOLM INTERNATIONAL PEACE RESEARCH INSTITUTE (SIPRI) AND THE ALVA MYRDAL CENTRE FOR NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT (AMC) AT UPPSALA UNIVERSITY INVITE APPLICATIONS FOR THE 2024 ARMAMENT AND DISARMAMENT SUMMER SCHOOL TO BE HELD ON 26-30 AUGUST IN STOCKHOLM.

THE SUMMER SCHOOL IS FOR STUDENTS, RESEARCHERS, POLICYMAKERS, OR OTHER JUNIOR PROFESSIONALS WITH A RELEVANT PROFILE IN THE FIELDS OF DISARMAMENT, NON-PROLIFERATION AND ARMS CONTROL. THE COST OF THE COURSE AS WELL AS ALL ESSENTIAL COSTS REQUIRED FOR PARTICIPATION (INCLUDING TRAVEL, VISA, INSURANCE, LOCAL TRANSPORT, FOOD, AND ACCOMMODATION) WILL BE FULLY COVERED FOR ALL PARTICIPANTS

MORE INFO: [HERE](#)

INVENTORY OF THE RELEVANT LEGISLATION OF THE EU AND ITS MEMBER STATES ON DUAL-USE ITEMS

THE EUROPEAN STUDIES UNIT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF LIEGE LAUNCHES ITS INVENTORY OF THE RELEVANT LEGISLATION OF THE EU AND ITS MEMBER STATES ON DUAL-USE ITEMS.

IN ADDITION TO THE EU DUAL-USE REGULATION AND THE UPDATED EU DUAL-USE CONTROL LIST, THE INVENTORY CONTAINS THE RELEVANT DUAL-USE LEGISLATION OF THE 27 EU MEMBER STATES. FOR EACH MEMBER STATE COMPETENT AUTHORITY, THE INVENTORY PROVIDES ITS OFFICIAL DUAL-USE WEBPAGE AND THE RELEVANT NATIONAL LEGISLATION, WHICH IS ACCESSIBLE EITHER VIA THE ORIGINAL EXTERNAL LINK (ALLOWING USERS, IF NECESSARY, TO TRANSLATE THE WEBPAGE CONTENT MORE EASILY, FOR EXAMPLE VIA THEIR BROWSER'S AUTOMATIC TRANSLATION WITH DUE REGARD TO ITS CAVEATS) OR VIA THE DOWNLOADED PDF (ENSURING ITS PERMANENT STORAGE).

MORE INFO [HERE](#)

IAI COURSE ON NON-PROLIFERATION, ARMS CONTROL AND DISARMAMENT

THE COURSE - TAUGHT IN ITALIAN, WITH THE POSSIBILITY OF SOME MODULES IN ENGLISH - PROVIDES A HISTORICAL, LEGAL AND POLITICAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE REGULATORY FRAMEWORK, STRATEGIES AND TECHNIQUES FOR ARMS CONTROL, DISARMAMENT AND NON-PROLIFERATION; IT ALSO OFFERS THE OPPORTUNITY TO HONE SKILLS OF ANALYSIS, PRESENTATION, AND ARGUMENTATION IN NEGOTIATION AND DEBATE CONTEXTS ON INTERNATIONAL SECURITY ISSUES. THE COURSE WILL TAKE PLACE IN A HYBRID MODE WHICH WILL ALLOW PARTICIPANTS TO FOLLOW LECTURES, INTERACT WITH LECTURERS AND CARRY OUT LABORATORY ACTIVITIES.

MORE INFO: [HERE](#)



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