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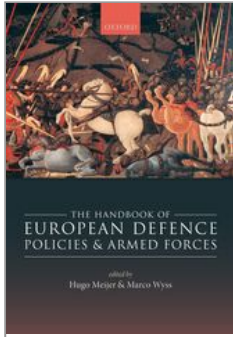
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Non-Proliferation and Counter-Proliferation

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Abstract and Keywords

European approaches to the proliferation of nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons—the so-called weapons of mass destruction (WMD)—have undergone a profound transformation during the last few decades. This chapter will trace the varying European policy responses to WMD proliferation over time and examine how European security doctrines have evolved more recently in this area. It will focus on processes of doctrinal convergence and divergence both in the three major powers in Europe—France, Germany, and the United Kingdom—and in other European states with a significant non-proliferation policy of their own, especially Austria, Ireland, and Sweden. In this context, it will also take into consideration the influence of relevant international organizations such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the European Union.

Keywords: weapons of mass destruction, nuclear weapons, chemical weapons, biological weapons, proliferation, non-proliferation, strategy, Germany, France, United Kingdom

Introduction

THE proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD)—defined for the purpose of this chapter as nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons—is widely perceived to be a major international security issue. This is clearly reflected in major, Europe-wide strategic documents. According to the 2010 Strategic Concept of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), ‘the proliferation of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction, and their means of delivery, threatens incalculable consequences for global stability and prosperity’.¹ Likewise, the member states of the European Union (EU) declared in their 2003 European Security Strategy that ‘proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction is potentially the greatest threat to our security’.² However, proliferation experts also tend to highlight important differences among European states in their fight against the proliferation of WMD, with the 2003 invasion of Iraq—ostensibly a counter-proliferation measure—as one of the prime examples. Especially in the nuclear realm, there are obvious cleavages in Europe, such as the divisions between nuclear weapon states and non-nuclear weapon states or NATO and non-NATO members.

The purpose of this chapter is to examine in greater depth to what extent the individual non- and counter-proliferation policies in European states actually diverge or converge in strategic terms. To this end, it will trace the varying European strategic responses to WMD proliferation over time. It will focus in particular on the six West European states with the most pronounced non-proliferation policies. This includes, on the one hand, France and the United Kingdom, Western Europe’s two nuclear weapon states, as well as Germany, which does not have its own nuclear arsenal but which stores US nuclear weapons on its national territory and benefits from NATO’s nuclear umbrella. On the other hand, it (p.627) includes three small, neutral states that have been traditionally very active in the area of non-proliferation and disarmament—namely, Austria, Ireland, and Sweden. This chapter will outline specifically the major developments in terms of non- and counter-proliferation in these two groups of states. The chapter will conclude that biological and chemical weapons proliferation is largely uncontroversial in strategic terms. All major actors are firmly committed to non-proliferation and disarmament in this area. The nuclear field, however, is more complex: while it is possible to discern strong strategic convergence regarding non-proliferation in a strict sense, there remains significant strategic divergence regarding important interrelated issues, in particular nuclear disarmament and the use of military force for counter-proliferation purposes.

Major Powers and Non-Proliferation

Preventing the spread of WMD—that is, non-proliferation in a strict sense—is a fundamental norm of international relations that is enshrined in a series of international treaties and organizations collectively known as the non-proliferation regimes. Adherence to the regimes is a key indicator of a nation state's commitment to non-proliferation. However, the non-proliferation elements of these regimes are usually only one side of the coin. Equally important are the disarmament elements. In other words, there is an implicit bargain between those states that do not possess WMD to forgo their proliferation and those states that already possess these weapons to disarm. Despite this basic bargain, for some states nuclear weapons, the most destructive WMD, still have military utility in the form of nuclear deterrence. Since the 1990s, there have also been debates about the use of coercive means, in particular the use of force, to stop WMD proliferation. These measures, usually known as counter-proliferation, have been very controversial. The following sections on national WMD strategies and policies will be focused on all these key aspects of non- and counter-proliferation.

France

In 1960, France joined the exclusive club of nuclear weapon states. France and the United Kingdom remain Western Europe's only nuclear weapon states. However, in contrast to the United Kingdom and other nuclear weapon states, it did not develop a policy to prevent the further spread of nuclear weapons early on. As Beatrice Heuser highlights in a major study on French, UK, and German nuclear policies, 'until the 1980s, France showed little concern about the possibility of nuclear proliferation'.³ Most notably, it refused to sign and ratify the 1970 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), the core treaty of the nuclear non-proliferation regime, and postponed its accession to the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC), the key treaty on biological weapons proliferation, until 1984—that is, twelve years after the convention had opened for signature. However, France was not an active **(p.628)** promoter of WMD proliferation.⁴ Already in the 1970s it realized that WMD proliferation was not necessarily in the French national interest. At the same time, US pressure in this area intensified, and France began to take some initial non-proliferation steps—for example, in 1978 by joining the London Suppliers Group, later to be known as the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), an informal group of states that coordinates national efforts to control the exports of nuclear items. Yet, in spite of these steps, France tended to subordinate its proliferation concerns to the economic and commercial interests of its burgeoning nuclear energy industry, which led to numerous conflicts with the United States.⁵

It was only in the late 1980s that the non-proliferation stance of France began to change more dramatically.⁶ In this context, the widely cited key moment is the French accession to the NPT in 1992. Although there is some debate about what explains this step, the step itself is generally recognized as a watershed in European non-proliferation affairs.⁷ It is a reflection of a major rethink process among French policymakers in the wake of a number of major proliferation-relevant events, in particular the discovery of a clandestine Iraqi WMD programme after the 1990–1 Gulf War, the break-up of the Soviet Union, and the nascent North Korean nuclear weapons programme.⁸ All these factors led to the unprecedented prioritization of WMD proliferation in French security strategies: ‘The 1994 Defense White Paper emphasized, for the first time in a government-level policy document, the risks stemming from WMD in general and nuclear weapons in particular’.⁹ This emphasis on WMD proliferation hardly changed in the 2013 White Paper, which also remains—in the absence of an explicit national security strategy—the most important French document on national security.¹⁰

All the non-proliferation efforts of France are firmly embedded within the international non-proliferation regimes.¹¹ Apart from the NPT, France joined all other key non-proliferation treaties and organizations, in particular the Chemical Weapons Convention¹² and the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT),¹³ in the 1990s. It is also an active **(p.629)** member of all the informal export control groups.¹⁴ Counter-proliferation or, more generally, the use of the armed forces in the fight against WMD proliferation, does not figure prominently in the major French strategic documents. Although France is not principally opposed to the use of force, the WMD role of the armed forces is focused on nuclear deterrence, the defence against WMD attacks, and the technical expertise on WMD. Famously, France opposed vigorously the 2003 military invasion of Iraq to prevent the development of Iraqi WMD. Moreover, one of the driving forces behind its 2003 diplomatic initiative with Germany and the United Kingdom in the Iranian nuclear crisis was the desire to avoid another preventive war.¹⁵ In the following twelve years, Iran—and to lesser extent North Korea—became prominent examples of the willingness of France to use its diplomatic and economic power to prevent the proliferation of WMD after the end of the cold war.¹⁶

However, France has also kept its deep-rooted idiosyncratic beliefs regarding nuclear matters.¹⁷ First, it continues to believe strongly in the benefits of nuclear energy and has supported actively the export of domestic French nuclear technology and expertise to other countries.¹⁸ Second, nuclear deterrence remains a crucial pillar of its national defence. Over the years, its nuclear deterrence strategy has been updated to account for new developments—for instance, in 2006, when it began to contemplate the deterrence of regional actors.¹⁹ In general, there is very little debate within France about replacing nuclear deterrence with other forms of deterrence or defence policies. Third, nuclear disarmament is not a realistic option in France. Although it took some disarmament measures, such as downsizing its nuclear arsenal, dismantling its nuclear test sites, and joining the CTBT,²⁰ it does not believe that Article VI of the NPT constitutes an obligation to disarm completely in the short term. In the words of Bruno Tertrais, ‘any decision by France to give up its nuclear weapons entirely would require extraordinary circumstances and profound changes in the strategic and political environment’.²¹

United Kingdom

In the context of its first National Security Strategy, which lists WMD threats among the major risks facing the country, the United Kingdom became the only case examined in this chapter that has adopted explicit non-proliferation strategies. In line with the 2010 Security Strategy, the first strategy, the National Counter Proliferation Strategy 2012–2015, adopted a risk-based approach that listed the specific WMD risks and how the United Kingdom **(p. 630)** could mitigate them.²² The three principal risks included a terrorist attack, a state-sponsored attack, and a military crisis involving WMD.²³ In 2016, in the wake of the 2015 Strategic Defence and Security Review, the UK government updated the first strategy and adopted the National Counter Proliferation Strategy to 2020. In broad strategic terms, there are no major differences between the first and second strategy. In essence, the UK non-proliferation policy, as outlined in these documents, is focused on the international non-proliferation regimes. Citing the 2015 Strategic Defence and Security Review, the 2016 counter-proliferation strategy declares that ‘rules and norms to counter the proliferation of illicit arms and weapons of mass destruction play a vital role in our security. The United Kingdom has consistently been at the forefront of international efforts to tackle proliferation. We devote substantial efforts to this and will continue to do so’.²⁴ The strategy emphasizes in particular UK membership of and participation in key organizations and treaties.²⁵

In this context, the United Kingdom has adopted a number of diplomatic, technical, and financial measures.²⁶ In the diplomatic realm, it influenced, for example, United Nations Security Council Resolution 1540 on WMD proliferation, in particular to non-state actors, by proposing the draft resolution on which it was built.²⁷ It is also a firm supporter of the Nuclear Security summits, a US initiative that aims to tackle the problem of nuclear terrorism. The technical and financial measures, for their part, are reflected in the United Kingdom's support for the verification work of the CTBT and CWC,²⁸ most notably on the destruction of the chemical weapons arsenal in Syria in 2015. Internationally, the United Kingdom is perhaps best known for its key role—together with France and Germany—in the nuclear negotiations with Iran.²⁹

As this overview demonstrates, the United Kingdom's fight against the proliferation of WMD is based mainly on civilian measures. In fact, UK non-proliferation policy, albeit a cross-governmental policy field, is led by the Foreign Ministry and overseen by the National Security Council (chaired by the Prime Minister).³⁰ Yet, the 2003 invasion of Iraq also shows that the United Kingdom is willing and able to participate in military **(p.631)** counter-proliferation measures. However, the Iraq case turned out to be very controversial domestically. One study even goes so far as to claim that the United Kingdom's post-Iraq non-proliferation policies have been driven by the desire to avoid another preventive war.³¹ In sum, it can be argued that modern-day UK non-proliferation policies reflect by and large French efforts in this area.

Historically, however, the United Kingdom has been the more consistent non-proliferation actor. It was already worried about nuclear proliferation in the 1960s: 'For successive post-war British governments, the proliferation of nuclear weapons was viewed with increasing alarm'.³² In 1970, the UK government became—together with its American and Soviet counterparts—one of the three depositary governments of the NPT. It is also one of the original signatory states of the BWC. However, in the 1970s and early 1980s, it was not always willing to implement strict US-inspired non-proliferation policies. Although to a lesser degree than France, it subordinated its proliferation concerns to economic considerations, as can be seen in a controversial commercial deal with India during this period.³³ Yet, as in the case of France and Germany, this began to change in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when the United Kingdom turned into the non-proliferation actor just described.³⁴

The one area where the United Kingdom has remained a singular case—in comparison not only with France but also with other nuclear weapon states—is its attitude towards nuclear disarmament. Especially since the end of the cold war, successive UK governments have taken a number of practical steps towards nuclear disarmament as stipulated by Article VI of the NPT:³⁵ it has been very supportive of the CTBT, it has maintained a moratorium on the production of fissile material that could be used as an explosive in a nuclear weapon, and it has reduced its nuclear arsenal to a point where most analysts agree that it maintains only a minimum deterrent.³⁶ It is also a supporter of a WMD-free zone in the Middle East. In the words of Lawrence Freedman: ‘Of all the established nuclear powers, Britain has appeared for some time to be the best placed to abandon its nuclear status’.³⁷ However, in the second decade of the twenty-first century it has become clear that the United Kingdom is poised to renew its ageing nuclear deterrent and not go down the route of unilateral nuclear disarmament.³⁸ In other words, nuclear deterrence will play a key role in the United Kingdom’s strategic defence for the foreseeable future.

(p.632) *Germany*

In the early phases of the cold war, West Germany was not a promoter of non-proliferation. On the contrary, it was seen by other actors as a proliferation concern, in particular in the nuclear field. According to Susanna Schrafstetter and Stephen Twigge, West Germany 'was the primary, if unspoken, driver of non-proliferation policy during this period'.³⁹ Although it forwent the development of WMD on its national territory in 1954, the development of German nuclear weapon capabilities remained a concern. In 1957, Germany even had a short-lived agreement with France (and later Italy) to develop nuclear weapons outside German territory.⁴⁰ It was only in 1969, when it signed the NPT after intense domestic debates, that it ceased to be a major proliferation concern.⁴¹ In 1972, West Germany also became one of the original signatory states of the BWC. However, this does not mean that West Germany became an active force in the fight against WMD proliferation. Although it complied widely with international non-proliferation standards, it was more interested in promoting its growing nuclear industry than in non-proliferation. This was its main focus in the context of the NPT.⁴² In fact, similar to French views at the time, stringent non-proliferation rules and norms were seen as detrimental to its nuclear industry. So, in the 1970s and 1980s West Germany was generally seen as a 'laggard' in non-proliferation affairs. In this regard, the NPT was a good early indicator: Germany interpreted the NPT's key provisions in a rather lax way, in particular Article IV, which guarantees 'the inalienable right' to nuclear energy.⁴³ More specifically, dual-use nuclear technology, which can be used for both civilian and military purposes, such as uranium enrichment, was seen as relevant for peaceful purposes and thus was permissible under the NPT. Consequently, West German companies were allowed to export these kind of technologies to countries with questionable intentions, most notably Brazil.⁴⁴ Even as late as the early 1990s, Germany gave permission for a research reactor to be built in Bavaria that uses weapons-grade highly enriched uranium as fuel—a rather problematic decision from a proliferation perspective.⁴⁵

It was only in the late 1980s and early 1990s that a number of major proliferation scandals involving German firms triggered a rethink in Germany.⁴⁶ Major scandals included the illicit shipment of nuclear fuel to Pakistan and support for a poison gas factory in Libya. The latter case in particular caused outrage across the world. William Safire of the **(p.633)** *New York Times* referred to it infamously as ‘Auschwitz-in-the-sand’.⁴⁷ Over the years, investigative journalism, parliamentary investigations, and a damaged international reputation built up the pressure for major reforms to combat effectively the proliferation of WMD. Eventually, Germany experienced a major strategic shift towards a greater focus on non-proliferation. In the words of Harald Müller: ‘Germany today has come to view WMD non-proliferation as a cornerstone of its security policy and expends considerable effort in its conceptualization and operation’.⁴⁸ This is also reflected in the 2006 White Paper on German Security Policy and the Future of the *Bundeswehr*, one of Germany’s most relevant security policy documents. It recognizes WMD proliferation as the ‘potentially greatest threat to global security’.⁴⁹ As in the case of France and the United Kingdom, the international non-proliferation regimes play a key role in this regard. In the post-cold war world, Germany has been at the forefront of all major non-proliferation agreements, in particular the CWC and the CTBT. It has also turned into a firm supporter of strict export controls for dual-use items. More recently, it has been a key actor—together with France and the United Kingdom—in the peaceful resolution of the Iranian nuclear crisis. Some even argue that this new-found role as a non-proliferation actor has become part of the German foreign-policy identity as being a civilian power and good international citizen.⁵⁰ Counter-proliferation, on the other hand, plays no major role in German strategic thinking. Although Germany is not entirely opposed to military measures in this area, it remains certainly sceptical.⁵¹ The non-proliferation role of the German armed forces is mainly in technical areas related to verification mechanisms or disarmament measures.⁵²

In addition to the field of non-proliferation in a strict sense, Germany has also gained a more prominent role in matters of WMD disarmament. The Foreign Ministry, the lead institution in the area of non-proliferation and disarmament, has a designated Federal Government Commissioner for Disarmament and Arms Control, who coordinates German disarmament efforts. Since the end of the cold war it has funded or supported with its technical expertise a number of practical disarmament measures, in particular in the former Soviet Union,⁵³ but also more recently in Syria to destroy the country's chemical weapons arsenal.⁵⁴ It has also addressed more controversial disarmament issues. For **(p.634)** instance, when Guido Westerwelle was Minister for Foreign Affairs (2009–13), the German government called for the removal of US substrategic weapons from Europe.⁵⁵ Germany also collaborates with other like-minded countries in the Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Initiative, which was founded in 2010 to find a new consensus on nuclear disarmament in the framework of the NPT.⁵⁶ However, more radical measures, such as a nuclear-weapon-free zone in Europe, have never gained ground in Germany.⁵⁷ In general, German disarmament efforts have been moderate and do not aim at full nuclear disarmament, at least in the short term. Rather, complete nuclear disarmament is seen as detrimental to Germany's desire to remain protected under NATO's nuclear umbrella. Consequently, Germany's position on nuclear weapons has been characterized by an ambivalent relationship between nuclear disarmament and nuclear deterrence.⁵⁸

Lesser Powers and Non-Proliferation

As the previous case studies have shown, WMD proliferation has become a major strategic concern in all major powers in Western Europe. They also now share a common focus on the international non-proliferation regimes to address this concern, while military approaches are de-emphasized. However, important differences remain, especially regarding nuclear deterrence and disarmament. The following sections will examine how the attitudes and policies of three lesser but still important powers in Western Europe have developed regarding these issues.

Austria

The proliferation of WMD is one of the top risks listed in the 2013 Austrian security strategy.⁵⁹ In its efforts to reduce proliferation risks, Austria traditionally emphasizes its full participation in all major non-proliferation regimes and its status as host nation of several non-proliferation institutions.⁶⁰ Regarding the latter, Vienna has been the traditional seat of both the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the Preparatory Commission for the CTBT Organization. Since 2011, Vienna has also hosted an office of the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs. Likewise, Austria has become the Immediate Central Contact ('Executive Secretariat') for the 2002 Hague Code of Conduct, an informal **(p.635)** regulation mechanism to prevent the proliferation of ballistic missiles.⁶¹ Although this does not entail any special formal powers for Austria, it ensures that Austria is more directly involved in non-proliferation matters than other small states of the same size. Regarding the participation in non-proliferation regimes, it should be highlighted that Austria is either one of the original signatories or a founding member of all the most relevant organizations and treaties, including the IAEA, the NPT, the BWC, the CWC, and the CTBT.⁶² It is also a full member of all relevant informal export-control institutions, in particular the Australia Group and the NSG.

Given these close relations with the international non-proliferation regimes, Austria is widely seen to be a staunch defender of the established institutional order and has ensured that it complies internally with all the relevant international norms and regulations.⁶³ Since the early 2000s, it has demonstrated that it does not shy away from putting up a fight to protect this order. This was particularly evident in the case of the discussions about a special NSG waiver and a special IAEA safeguards agreement for India between 2005 and 2008. Many non-proliferation experts argued that these measures would undermine core non-proliferation principles, as they would reward India, which developed nuclear weapons outside the established nuclear regimes, with benefits that are usually restricted to the five officially recognized nuclear weapon states. Although Austria refrained eventually from blocking both the NSG waiver and IAEA safeguard agreement, it resisted these measures fiercely for several years.⁶⁴

Owing to Austria's strong focus on the international non-proliferation regimes, its non-proliferation policies are mainly led by the Foreign Ministry and the Federal Chancellery.⁶⁵ The armed forces have only a very minor role, in particular regarding capacity-building to implement specific verification or disarmament measures in the area of biological, chemical, and nuclear weapons.⁶⁶ As a historically neutral country with a deep-seated aversion to nuclear weapons,⁶⁷ most of Austria's active international efforts in this area have been targeted at concrete disarmament measures, in particular nuclear disarmament. It is, for example, an early promoter of a nuclear weapon-free zone in (Central) Europe.⁶⁸ In 1999, the national parliament adopted the Federal Constitutional Act for a Nonnuclear Austria, which basically prohibits any kind of nuclear-weapon-related activity in Austria and makes it—in principle—eligible for joining a nuclear-weapon-free zone.⁶⁹ In the second decade of **(p.636)** the twenty-first century, Austria has risen to prominence as one of the key promoters of the so-called humanitarian impact initiative, which is essentially a way to promote nuclear disarmament by highlighting the devastating effects of the use of nuclear weapons on humanity.⁷⁰ Most notably, it organized the third main conference of this initiative, which led to the so-called Vienna pledge—supported by 127 states as of April 2016. The pledge calls on 'all states parties to the NPT to renew their commitment to the urgent and full implementation of existing obligations under Article VI, and to this end, to identify and pursue effective measures to fill the legal gap for the prohibition and elimination of nuclear weapons'.⁷¹

Ireland

Ireland is generally committed to the goal of non-proliferation of WMD. However, there is no major national strategic document that outlines its importance in the context of Irish national security policies. The 2015 Strategic Document of the Irish armed forces mentions WMD proliferation only fleetingly.⁷² Pundits also highlight that Ireland has no direct stakes in the issue of non-proliferation: 'It has no nuclear industry; it is not a member of a military alliance, still less a nuclear one; it is not in a region directly affected by the danger of nuclear proliferation'.⁷³ Yet, since the 1950s, Ireland has gained a distinct profile in matters of non-proliferation that is not commensurate with its power status in international affairs. Similar to Austria, this profile stems from its foreign-policy identity based on neutrality. During the cold war, its opposition to nuclear weapons and nuclear energy gave Ireland a role it could play as a neutral country.⁷⁴ It rejected the logic of nuclear deterrence between the two superpower blocks and opposed the development of nuclear energy on safety grounds—both in Ireland and across the Irish Sea in the United Kingdom.⁷⁵ These two elements of Irish foreign and security policy are still present today.

However, Ireland is best known for its active promotion of the NPT. Although the NPT is mainly the result of superpower agreement, Ireland played an important mediating role, most notably through the so-called Irish Resolutions, on which the NPT text is based.⁷⁶ **(p.637)** Since the entry into force of the NPT, the core activity of Irish non-proliferation efforts is focused on the continuous NPT review processes.⁷⁷ In order to underline its commitment to the NPT, Ireland joined the IAEA when the NPT entered into force in 1970 and the IAEA became responsible for the NPT's nuclear safeguard provisions. Although Ireland has not played an equally important role in the case of other non-proliferation regimes, it is also one of the original signatories of the other key non-proliferation treaties, in particular the BWC, the CWC, and the CTBT. Likewise, it is a member of all informal export-control regimes.

Irish efforts in the non-proliferation regimes are focused not on non-proliferation in a strict sense, but on the related issue of nuclear disarmament. In this regard, it resembles the Austrian policies already outlined. However, in contrast to Austria, Irish policymakers emphasize more the pragmatism—or what Richard Sinnott calls 'incrementalism'—of their approach.⁷⁸ Although it is possible to discern a certain degree of politicization of the disarmament issue in Irish politics,⁷⁹ Ireland still tends to take a more conciliatory stance in controversial matters. In the case of the special NSG waiver for India mentioned in the Austrian case, Ireland certainly opposed the waiver for the same reasons as Austria, but was less dogmatic towards the end of the negotiations.⁸⁰ In contrast to Austria, it does not strive actively to become part of a WMD-free zone either, although the idea was discussed in the 1980s.⁸¹ However, it is a firm supporter of the humanitarian impact initiative. Moreover, it is an active promoter of the nuclear disarmament agenda in the NPT, especially as part of the New Agenda Coalition, a group of six like-minded states that was established in 1998 to promote this agenda.⁸²

Sweden

At the beginning of the cold war, Sweden chose a nuclear path that was very different from the one chosen by Austria and Ireland, its fellow neutral states in Europe. Whereas the latter two were characterized by their anti-nuclear attitudes and emphasis of nuclear disarmament early on, Sweden was originally a major proliferation concern itself. It had an active nuclear weapon programme in the 1950s and 1960s. Although it never assembled and tested an actual warhead, its programme was considered to be technically very advanced.⁸³ However, after a prolonged domestic debate, Sweden abandoned the programme for good and signed the NPT as a non-nuclear weapon state in 1968.⁸⁴ **(p.638)** Since 1980, Sweden has been also phasing out its numerous nuclear power plants.⁸⁵ In short, by the 1980s Sweden's nuclear stance increasingly resembled Austria's and Ireland's anti-nuclear attitudes. This has been reflected particularly in Swedish WMD non-proliferation policies.

Owing to a mix of factors related to security considerations, political culture, and domestic politics, Sweden became particularly active in non-proliferation in the 1970s—and has remained so well into the twenty-first century.⁸⁶ In the words of a recent study in this area, ‘Sweden has historically been a nonproliferation and disarmament powerhouse, which has earned the country the status as a White Knight state, a term applied to a select few countries well known for long-established support and advocacy of nonproliferation and disarmament’.⁸⁷ Apart from the NPT, Sweden has been an active promoter of all major non-proliferation treaties and institutions, including the IAEA, the BWC, the CWC, and the CTBT.⁸⁸ As most other West European states, it is also a member of all the informal export-control regimes. Thanks to the build-up of substantial expertise and technical knowledge on WMD proliferation matters, in particular in the Foreign Ministry, Sweden’s lead institution in this area, Sweden has gained a reputation as an honest broker in international non-proliferation affairs. In this context, it is also important to highlight the personal commitment to the non-proliferation and disarmament cause by numerous Swedish diplomats and policymakers, from Olof Palme to Hans Blix.⁸⁹

As in the case of Austria and Ireland, Sweden has focused much of its activities in the framework of the international non-proliferation regimes on disarmament activities, in particular the implementation of Article VI of the NPT. Its expertise has proven to be crucial: ‘The technical knowledge obtained through its NW [nuclear weapon] research provided Sweden with leverage for developing high-profile disarmament activities with the UN’.⁹⁰ Contrary to the situation in Austria and Ireland, however, active Swedish nuclear disarmament efforts have diminished since the 1990s and 2000s. This has been attributed both to ideological shifts in successive Swedish governments and to a decreasing salience of nuclear disarmament in public discourses after the end of the cold war.⁹¹ Concrete manifestations of this shift include Sweden’s lack of opposition to the NSG waiver and special IAEA safeguard agreement for India and Sweden’s abandonment, in 2013, of the previously mentioned New Agenda Coalition, which it helped to establish in 1998.⁹² It is **(p.639)** also noteworthy that Sweden’s support for the humanitarian impact initiative has been unusually passive. Most notably, at the time of writing in 2016 it has not signed up to the initiative’s ‘Vienna pledge’, though this may change with a possible reorientation of the Swedish government.⁹³ At the very least, in the second decade of the twenty-first century, Swedish disarmament efforts are currently in a state of flux. Some argue, on a more positive note, that ‘disarmament idealism has given way to pragmatism’.⁹⁴ Yet others perceive a notable decline in the influence of Sweden in disarmament matters.⁹⁵

Conclusion

In many respects, European nation states have seen a remarkable process of strategic convergence in the field of non-proliferation.⁹⁶ Although from a twenty-first century perspective it appears to be normal that they agree on the need to prevent the proliferation of WMD, historically this is not a given. During the cold war, European states had very different attitudes towards non-proliferation. Among the established nuclear weapon states, the United Kingdom was an early defender of the non-proliferation principle, whereas France worried much less about proliferation. During the first half of the cold war period Germany and Sweden were even major nuclear proliferation concerns themselves. On the contrary, Ireland and Austria were key promoters of international non-proliferation measures, though always in combination with an equal or even greater emphasis on the need for global nuclear disarmament. It was only in the 1980s that non-proliferation and, more specifically, the international non-proliferation regimes slowly became a strategic priority in all Western European states. At the same time, counter-proliferation, or, more generally, the use of the armed forces in the fight against WMD, has never become a priority for any of the West European states.

These convergence processes are clearly reflected in common European strategic documents, in particular the 2003 EU Strategy against Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction, and the establishment of a number of common European non-proliferation institutions over time. In practice, European states have also stepped up their common efforts to prevent the proliferation of WMD since the 1980s. This includes measures as diverse as common dual-use items export controls, EU financial support for a wide variety of international non-proliferation institutions, and the coordination of national policies in multilateral forums. The nuclear negotiations with Iran are another important example of how European states have been able to maintain a leading role in a major proliferation **(p.640)** crisis during more than a decade.⁹⁷ Without major strategic agreement on the need to prevent proliferation, this would have not been possible.

However, strategic convergence on non-proliferation does not equal European harmony in this area. Important disagreements remain at both the operational and the strategic level. Operationally, there is no guarantee that broad strategic convergence on ends, ways, and means can be translated into common policies. European states may still disagree on the specific implementation of ways and means in certain circumstances. Especially, coercive measures such as sanctions or the use of the armed forces can easily turn into major points of contention. Strategically, it is important to emphasize that non-proliferation is widely perceived to be only one side of the coin, with disarmament being the other. In the biological and chemical realm this is rarely an issue, but in the nuclear field it can be very controversial. Crucially, in Europe strategic convergence on nuclear disarmament has not occurred to the same extent as in the case of non-proliferation. But, given the increasing dissatisfaction among many states with the pace of nuclear disarmament at the global level,⁹⁸ this unequal strategic convergence may well create major strategic tensions among European states in coming years.

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