The AUKUS Pact & Its Impact on Non-Proliferation:
Interview with Sébastien Philippe

Sébastien Philippe is a research scholar and lecturer at Princeton University’s Program on Science and Global Security. He is also an associate faculty with the Nuclear Knowledges program at Sciences-Po Paris Center for International Studies. His research focus on nuclear weapons and emerging technologies challenges to international peace and security. He was a Stanton nuclear security postdoctoral fellow at the Harvard Kennedy School and has served as a nuclear safety engineer for the French strategic nuclear submarine forces.

The Centre de Recherches Internationales of SciencePo is a leading French research center dedicated to the study of international and regional issues. Its research activities include a Nuclear Knowledge Program. What is the specific focus of this programme?

The Nuclear Knowledge program, founded by Benoît Pelopidas in 2017, is an interdisciplinary research program at the intersection of international history and international relations, public opinion studies, and technical analysis of nuclear technology. It focuses on the scope and justifications of nuclear weapons policy choices. It is unique among French research institutions working on nuclear weapons because it is embedded in an academic environment, must meet the criteria of peer-reviewed scholarly work, and is not funded by stakeholders of the nuclear weapons policy debate to avoid conflict of interests. Thanks to this independence and rigorous interdisciplinarity, the program has made a series of important scholarly contributions on the role of luck in nuclear crisis, the credibility of French nuclear forces, on the legacy of French nuclear testing in the Pacific, public knowledge about and attitudes towards nuclear weapons in Europe, nuclearization of NATO and the case for European nuclear weapons. It provides a creative and supportive environment for scholars who wish to tackle fundamental research questions that cannot be addressed elsewhere.

On September 15, Australia, the UK and the USA announced the AUKUS trilateral security pact, which includes the transfer of naval nuclear-propulsion technology and, possibly, weapon-grade uranium to Australia from the US and UK. Is the pact in contrast with the commitments laid out by the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)? What implications can it have for the non-proliferation regime? Could it set a dangerous precedent?

The AUKUS nuclear submarine only exists in press releases, nothing has yet been signed, and no vessel is likely to be launched before the next ten to twenty years – it is for now a paper submarine. Nevertheless, the important non-proliferation implications of AUKUS are already materializing. The reason is twofold: the AUKUS deal is both a serious challenge to the non-proliferation safeguards regime and the reversal of decades of US efforts to minimize highly enriched uranium (HEU) stockpiles in non-nuclear weapon states. The deal may involve the US or UK transferring 4 tons of weapon-grade uranium (the material requirements for ~200 weapons) to fuel a fleet of eight Australian nuclear attack submarines. Australia is likely to invoke article 14 of its Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement, to remove this HEU from the standard International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) monitoring. It will be the first time in the history of the NPT that such large amounts of weapon-grade fissile material will end up outside of international safeguards in a non-nuclear weapon state. The director of the IAEA, Rafael Grossi, euphemistically called this situation “very tricky.” No matter what arrangement is negotiated, the precedent will be set, and other states could invoke it to develop their own nuclear propulsion capability or legitimate HEU production with the risk that it can be used to build nuclear weapons.

The pact cancelled and replaced a contract between France and Australia for the sale of conventionally-powered attack submarines. Besides its economic implications, how can this replacement affect transatlantic, EU-UK and EU-AUS relations, and what should stand the EU take?

The submarine deal is first and foremost a blow to France military exports strategy. The sense of betrayal is genuine in French political and diplomatic circles. In the US, the urgent need to contain China is taking precedence over everything else – which explains why the nonproliferation implications of the deal were not given much thought prior to the announcement. Perhaps more interestingly, the episode lays bare the profound disconnect between France’s ambitions and means in the Indo-Pacific region. There is little doubt that France needs its European partners and the support of the United States if it wants to defend its interests in the region, no matter what they are. Therefore, I do not think that AUKUS alone will have any significant consequences on transatlantic relations. It simply confirms existing trends. With the withdrawal from Afghanistan, the US has now fully pivoted towards China. Unlike during the old cold war, Europe is no longer front and center. How to navigate this new reality is the question the European Union needs to answer.

The AUKUS pact was an episode in the wider setting of US-UK efforts to develop their own nuclear propulsion capabilities. The AUKUS nuclear submarine only exists in press releases, nothing has yet been signed, and no vessel is likely to be launched before the next ten to twenty years – it is for now a paper submarine. Nevertheless, the important non-proliferation implications of AUKUS are already materializing. The reason is twofold: the AUKUS deal is both a serious challenge to the non-proliferation safeguards regime and the reversal of decades of US efforts to minimize highly enriched uranium (HEU) stockpiles in non-nuclear weapon states. The deal may involve the US or UK transferring 4 tons of weapon-grade uranium (the material requirements for ~200 weapons) to fuel a fleet of eight Australian nuclear attack submarines. Australia is likely to invoke article 14 of its Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement, to remove this HEU from the standard International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) monitoring. It will be the first time in the history of the NPT that such large amounts of weapon-grade fissile material will end up outside of international safeguards in a non-nuclear weapon state. The director of the IAEA, Rafael Grossi, euphemistically called this situation “very tricky.” No matter what arrangement is negotiated, the precedent will be set, and other states could invoke it to develop their own nuclear propulsion capability or legitimate HEU production with the risk that it can be used to build nuclear weapons.

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CONSORTIUM NEWS

The EU Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Papers Series

As part of its mandate, defined in Council Decision (CFSP) 2018/299 of 26 February 2018, the EU Non-Proliferation Consortium is publishing a new series of Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Policy Papers. One of the latest papers is co-authored by Mark Bromley and Kolja Brockmann, respectively Director and Researcher of the SIPRI’s Dual-use and Arms Trade Control Programme.

Implementing the 2021 recast of the EU dual-use regulation: challenges and opportunities

Summary

In 2011, the European Union (EU) launched a review of its regulation establishing controls on exports of dual-use items. This began a process involving the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council of the EU that led to a recast of the regulation which entered into force on 9 September 2021. This paper examines the main underlying concerns that drove the review and recast process: exporters’ regulatory burden, uneven national implementation, exports of cybersurveillance items and advances in emerging technologies. It also analyses the key changes introduced by the recast, particularly a mechanism for coordinating enforcement, additional controls on exports of cybersurveillance items, new commitments on public transparency and an expanded mechanism to control unlisted items, including emerging technologies. The paper concludes by outlining the steps needed to ensure both effective implementation of the recast and greater coherence in the EU’s wider efforts in the field of export controls and non-proliferation.

Read the full paper [here](https://www.onn.eu/newsletter/2021/09/22/implementing-the-2021-recast-of-the-eu-dual-use-regulation-challenges-and-opportunities)

Previous papers can be found [here](https://www.onn.eu/newsletter/2021/09/15/putting-the-russian-hypersonic-threat-in-perspective)

NETWORK NEWS

HOW TO WORK AT AN INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATION: THE YWNGI’s THIRD OUTREACH EVENT

On 6 September 2021, as part of the Young Women and Next Generation Initiative (YWNGI), the Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) and the Vienna Center for Disarmament and Non-Proliferation (VCDNP), with the support of the EU Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Consortium, organized the third public outreach event focused on tips and insights for young professionals who aspire to work at international organizations.

The webinar, intended for students and young specialists - particularly young women, - featured representatives from three major international organizations in Vienna Pedro Alvarez Cobacho, Acting Head of the Recruitment Unit from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Maria Chepurina, External Relations Officer and CTBTO Youth Group Task Force Coordinator from the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO) and Paul Henriksson, Associate Talent Acquisition Officer from the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) represented by

The event was opened by Elena Sokova, Executive Director of the VCDNP, and was attended by over 300 participants from different regions of the world.

More information can be found below:

The YWNGI Third Outreach Event
Web Report
The Young Women and Next Generation Initiative (YWNGI)

The full recording of the Outreach event can be found here: [https://youtu.be/Dt08IwXARnM](https://youtu.be/Dt08IwXARnM)