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A TREATY UNSPOKEN: THE FRENCH PARLIAMENT AND THE MISSING DEBATE ON THE TPNW

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SUMMARY

While the adoption of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) represent an international effort to achieve a world free of nuclear weapons, France – a nuclear-weapons state – fiercely opposes its implementation. This study investigates the debate on the TPNW in the French Parliament. Based on interviews with parliamentarians and experts from the field, this research identifies several factors explaining why the French Parliament fails to open the debate on the Ban Treaty. These include: (1) a sort of consensus among parliamentarians on the necessity of maintaining France's nuclear deterrence, (2) a French nuclear doctrine that discourages open discussion, (3) limited knowledge of and interest in nuclear issues, (4) a strategic context unfavourable to nuclear disarmament, and (5) other international commitments that take precedence over disarmament. These findings suggest that the TPNW remains a non-topic in French Parliament, indicating that a shift in France's official position is unlikely in the near future.

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INTRODUCTION

In 2015, the failure to reach an agreement at the conference to review the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) marked a turning point. The non-nuclear-weapon states realised that the progress on disarmament was blocked and that an alternative framework was therefore needed to defend their interests and positions within the international nuclear hierarchy (Egel & Ward 2022; Highsmith & Stewart 2018; Kmentt 2021). As Martin Luther King said, "freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor, it must be demanded by the oppressed" (Ritchie & Egeland 2018). Therefore, the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) was negotiated without the participation of any nuclear-weapon state and as part of the humanitarian initiative. Born from the Austrian Pledge, the Humanitarian Pledge took the form of a UN General Assembly resolution in 2016, with the primary objective of preventing civilian harm and threats to human security. This initiative led to the adoption of the treaty by the United Nations on July 7, 2017, and its entrance into force on October 22, 2021, 90 days after the 50th country ratified it. The objective of the Ban Treaty is to formalise the prohibition of nuclear weapons on the premise that their dangers outweigh their potential stabilizing effects. This is an ambitious provision given that, with the exception of South Africa after the fall of the apartheid regime, no state that had developed nuclear weapons has decided to abandon them voluntarily (Tertrais 2022). To achieve this, the TPNW's main strategy is to "turn attributes of status, prestige and dominance into symbols of inferiority" (Egel & Ward 2022: 768). The physical destruction of nuclear weapons alone would be useless as the world cannot unlearn or uninvent how to make nuclear weapons. This is why the TPNW demands changing norms, attitudes, ideas, principles and discourse so that a state would never feel entitled to possess a nuclear arsenal (Tannenwald 2021; Tannenwald 2005).

It has often been acknowledged that this Ban Treaty has the power to challenge the nuclear world order. Many researchers have argued that if the TPNW did not have this power, nuclear-weapons states would not have put so much effort into fiercely delegitimizing it (Egel & Ward 2022; Thakur 2018; Camilleri 2019). Among the nuclear weapons states, France is one of the most relentless when it comes to delegitimizing the TPNW. France's position on the Ban Treaty is very clear: it will not be part of the TPNW and intends to convince its allies not to accede it either. The French official position, however, defends nuclear deterrence and guarantees compliance with the non-proliferation and disarmament commitments of the NPT. When it comes to the subject of nuclear deterrence, French diplomacy is known to be one of the toughest, with the diplomats' personalities characterised as not conciliatory. Thomas Gassilloud (*Ensemble*) explained it as the ethic of responsibility taking precedence over the ethic of conviction for a humanitarian initiative (Assemblée Nationale 2023a).

This very closed position is criticised by TPNW member states and organizations such as ICAN (the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons), which leads to a form of isolation for France and a weakening of multilateralism. As a consequence of the French position, the position of certain non-nuclear-weapons states from the South is reinforced. As they feel ignored, with their concerns dismissed and overlooked by nuclear-weapons states like France, they assert their stance in favour of nuclear disarmament even more firmly. It is about making sure that their voice is finally acknowledged and taken into account after decades without being included in nuclear matters. France's position also strengthens the positions of Russia and China, which consider that if democracies like France do

not respect their own instruments by refusing to engage in this multilateral initiative, authoritarian countries have no interest in feeling constrained by it either. Especially when French elected representatives fail to raise the issue of nuclear disarmament in Parliament despite initiatives such as those of ICAN, authoritarian countries feel even less pressured to recognise the wishes of the TPNW.

What France defends so fiercely is its nuclear deterrence, as it offers valuable security guarantees. The French nuclear doctrine is unique. Tertrais (2022) identifies its three core principles: permanence, sufficiency and flexibility. French nuclear deterrence is exercised continuously, even in peacetime. Its nuclear capabilities are limited to what is strictly necessary for deterring potential opponents. French nuclear deterrence is flexible and adapts to the strategic context. It is linked to the concept of "all-azimuths", which means that France cannot predict who its future adversaries will be, so deterrence can be used against all states. France also adheres to the concept of "ultimate warning", which aims to subordinate any recourse to nuclear weapons to a political objective: restoring deterrence and ending the conflict. An "ultimate warning" is not a full-scale nuclear retaliation but only the sending out of a signal that French nuclear interests are at stake in order to deter further aggression.

Thus, the French position has the effect of closing the debate on nuclear disarmament and the TPNW, resulting in their absence from parliamentary discussions. Through a study of the French parliamentary discourse and interviews with four parliamentarians, this research came to the conclusion that the TPNW was a non-subject for the Parliament. Beyond the basic assumption that a nuclear-armed state will obviously refuse to sign the TPNW, several other reasons can be identified to explain why the French Parliament fails to at least open the debate on the subject of nuclear disarmament. A consensus on the need for nuclear deterrence may overrule the debate in Parliament. The French nuclear doctrine itself could hinder an open discussion on the need for and effectiveness of nuclear deterrence. The lack of knowledge and interest in nuclear issues among the population and therefore among parliamentarians may also explain their absence from parliamentary debates. The international context is considered as not auspicious for the abolition of nuclear deterrence given its stabilizing effects. And ultimately, France's commitments in other international frameworks are deemed incompatible with the TPNW. These findings indicate that a shift in France's official position is unlikely in the near future.

A CONSENSUS ON NUCLEAR DETERRENCE HAMPERS ANY DEBATE ON THE TPNW

One factor that may explain the lack of debate on the TPNW in the French Parliament is the existence of a consensus on nuclear weapons. Historically, particularly in the 1960s, there was no consensus on nuclear deterrence in France. Some parliamentarians were fiercely opposed to it for various reasons, including protests against De Gaulle's policy in Algeria. The communists did not want to deter Moscow, and the centrists believed that nuclear deterrence could only be European. The government under De Gaulle even had to resort to Article 49 paragraph 3 of the Constitution to forcefully adopt the Military Programming Law without a vote of the Parliament in order to maintain nuclear weapons

for the long term (Grémare 2020). The 1980s were then marked by an intense debate on nuclear deterrence (Pincé 2020). It was not until 1988 that a form of consensus on this issue was built with the re-election of François Mitterrand, the emblematic figure of the construction of the consensus on nuclear weapons (Pincé 2020). Today, it can be considered that there is a broad support for the possession of nuclear weapons among the population and in Parliament. However, Yannick Pincé (2020) argues that upon closer examination, it is a support for useless nuclear weapons because as soon as there is a risk of engaging in strategic tensions with another nuclear power, people withdraw their support for nuclear weapons.

What this report reveals through the study of the parliamentary discourse and interviews, is that there is no real political consensus on the details of nuclear deterrence in France. Some political parties, such as the Green and the Communist Party, have maintained their traditional anti-nuclear stance. Some left-wing parties, such as *La France Insoumise*, oppose nuclear weapons but do not support a unilateral disarmament. Instead, they advocate for respecting international commitments made under the NPT and for the French observer status in the TPNW. Then a wide range of parties, from the left-wing party *Les Socialistes*, through the centrist parties and the right-wing *Les Républicains*, to the far-right, can be considered in favour of nuclear deterrence. Despite these differences, the study reveals that no political party – with the possible exception of the Communist Party and, in particular, the deputy Jean-Paul Lecoq, who was interviewed – is able to advocate in favour of France unilaterally and immediately abandoning its nuclear deterrence through the TPNW. It can be said that the vast majority of Parliament recognises the necessity of nuclear deterrence but disagrees on the terms and conditions of its use. These observations apply to the whole Parliament, even if the compositions of the two chambers differ significantly: the National Assembly is more fragmented with a strong presence of the far-right (*Rassemblement National*), left-wing and centrist parties, while the Senate remains dominated by right-wing parties (*Les Républicains*), with a stable left-wing opposition and a virtually absent far-right with only 3 seats. This is why Jean-Marie Collin, the director of ICAN France, does not speak of a consensus on nuclear weapons, but rather of "sheep-like behaviour". According to him, a few people decide on the French position on nuclear deterrence with others following due to a lack of education on the subject.

Although the vast majority of Parliament agrees on the necessity of nuclear weapons, the motivations are diverse. Some parliamentarians are convinced of the merits of nuclear deterrence, particularly in the current strategic context. Thomas Gassilloud (*Ensemble*) explained that the French strategy of defence relies on nuclear deterrence and that it is thanks to France's nuclear status that it can negotiate on an equal footing with Russia on the war in Ukraine. This idea is also linked to the fear of transforming nuclear weapons into a strategic advantage for authoritarian countries if democracies proceed with denuclearization alone. Critics of the TPNW point out that pressure from civil society, together with actors such as ICAN, could be more effective in regard to democracies than in regard to authoritarian states (Kmentt 2021). For the French government, renouncing nuclear weapons would weaken democracies around the world and empower authoritarian countries (Assemblée Nationale 2023a). Gassilloud stated that "if nuclear weapons are outlawed, they will be the weapon of outlaws". According to him, as long as international relations are governed by power relations and not by the rule of law and an international governance, nuclear deterrence will be necessary for securing the world.

Another motivation for France retaining its nuclear weapons is that French nuclear deterrence is often seen as the emblem of French strategic autonomy. However, Guy Benarroche (the Green Party) criticises this idea of autonomy and independence, as nuclear deterrence relies on materials which are not produced in France and must be imported.

Other parliamentarians are attached to French nuclear deterrence because of two historical events considered as instances of humiliation: the debacle of 1940 and the Suez expedition in 1956 (Tertrais 2020). These two events reaffirmed France's desire for autonomy and international status. To this day, these two events are still cited in Parliament to defend nuclear deterrence and patriotism by rallying around the flag.

Some parliamentarians stick with nuclear weapons because of their industrialist tradition. Nuclear weapons are a symbol of the power of French industry and its rebirth after World War II. They have even become the emblem of the country's recovery. They are considered as a chance for the French economy and its capacities for innovation (Assemblée Nationale 2023a). Emmanuelle Maitre, a researcher at the *Fondation pour la Recherche Stratégique*, identifies this industrialist tradition in the discourse of Jean-Luc Mélenchon, the head of *La France Insoumise*. Despite its opposition to nuclear weapons, this far-left party has never managed to turn the nukes into a political issue, partly because getting rid of nuclear weapons would harm French industry.

Moreover, some groups and individuals supposedly in favour of the TPNW express doubts about or conditions for nuclear disarmament. For instance, Mélenchon does not firmly support the TPNW. According to Jean-Paul Lecoq (*the Communist Party*), Mélenchon considers that a France without nuclear weapons is no longer France because it loses its status relative to other powers. This argument was already present in the original debate on whether or not to acquire nuclear weapons. France, as one of the victors of the Second World War, was willing to develop its nuclear arsenal to claim a special status equivalent to that of the Anglo-Saxon powers. This finding contradicts Tertrais' (2020) assertion that nuclear weapons are no longer associated with prestige in France. More generally, Mélenchon's parliamentary group *La France Insoumise*, represented by the opinions of Pierre-Yves Cadalen in this study, recognises that nuclear disarmament is the objective, but that France should not be the first to disarm. They argue that a unilateral disarmament by France would endanger French security and cause France to lose its bargaining power. Benarroche also recognises that it is unrealistic to demand that France proceed with nuclear disarmament, which is why he has adopted the approach of ICAN France and also advocates for an observer status for France within the TPNW, even if the final objective is the ratification of the treaty.

Nonetheless, some individuals publicly oppose nuclear deterrence. Within the Communist Party, there is the idea that France has abandoned its values to the benefit of nuclear deterrence. According to them, there was a time when France would have defended the Enlightenment, international law, equality and fraternity, which were considered as vital interests. However, for Lecoq, these values have now been abandoned in favour of "business diplomacy". This implies that hidden interests linked to economic and business profits, motivate the government's nuclear deterrence policy and that, in order to protect these interests, any debate on nuclear disarmament in Parliament is prevented. Benarroche goes further and asserts that possessing nuclear weapons is incompatible with defending human rights. For him, threatening to use nuclear weapons – or resorting to them in the

case of the United States – is indefensible, even if it is in the name of a just cause: "One death does not prevent another death; when it is a man, it is a man". Conversely, the other interviewed parliamentarians see no contradiction between France's values and maintaining nuclear weapons. Gassilloud argues that nuclear deterrence is what limits the level of violence from the top. Because the world fears nuclear war, the world is more peaceful, and France contributes to this phenomenon through its nuclear arsenal. This is linked to the idea that without nuclear weapons, conventional confrontations would be much more frequent. According to him, "our humanist side of defending human rights is compatible with deterrence because we completely refute the idea of a return to generalised violence where a million men fight against another million men", which nuclear deterrence is supposed to prevent. Pierre-Yves Cadalen (*La France Insoumise*), while in favour of the Ban Treaty, reflected that it is perhaps because France possesses nuclear weapons that it can act as a power defending human rights. Indeed, this nuclear status is still associated with confidence for France and enables it to be more assertive diplomatically in pursuing its goals and defending human rights, knowing that it possesses the ultimate deterrent backup.

Thus, admittedly, the consensus remains idealised as not all parliamentarians favour nuclear deterrence, and not all parliamentary groups acknowledge the need for this deterrence for the same reason. However, very few parliamentarians argue for nuclear disarmament and even fewer for a unilateral and immediate one. Therefore, in Parliament, disagreements and discussions do not centre on whether France needs nuclear deterrence or needs to adhere to the TPNW, but mainly on what France should do with this nuclear deterrence, what it should defend and how it should use it.

THE FRENCH DOCTRINE OF NUCLEAR DETERRENCE RESTRICTS THE DEBATE ON THE TPNW

The French doctrine on use of nuclear weapons itself constrains the debate. Fundamentally, opening the debate on the TPNW means that the government must be prepared to counter the arguments in favour of the treaty. However, as Heloise Fayet, a researcher at the *Institut français des relations internationales*, explains, as soon as the government cannot effectively counter these arguments, the French doctrine on nuclear deterrence will be weakened. Failing to find counter arguments amounts to acknowledging that the TPNW has identified deficient aspects of the current nuclear world order that should be revised. This is a risk France is not prepared to take.

To go further, for the French nuclear deterrence to work and deter adversaries, it requires strategic ambiguity. In this sense, French vital interests, which are protected by nuclear deterrence, cannot be described precisely without giving an indication to potential adversaries of when and where they can push the limits without fear of nuclear retaliation (Tertrais 2020). This ambiguity about French vital interests worries some of the parliamentarians involved in the humanitarian initiative behind the TPNW. Lecoq wonders whether the French vital interests are threatened if Russia interferes in the French presidential elections. Does this act require a nuclear retaliation given the supposed importance of democracy for France? Would a nuclear retaliation be proportionate? How can we be sure of the origin of the interference in order to retaliate against the right culprit?

What target should be aimed at when cyber operations are immaterial? For parliamentarians committed to the Humanitarian Initiative, such reprisals would be disproportionate and intolerable given the damage caused by a nuclear bomb. In fact, the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross confirmed that, given the damage induced by even a limited use of nuclear weapons, "there is neither an international plan nor the capacity to respond adequately" (ICRC 2018). Yet, these questions about vital interests cannot be debated in Parliament without threatening the credibility of the French nuclear doctrine.

Despite the fact that the French nuclear doctrine has never been elevated to the status of constitutional law, there is a tangle of laws and *opinio juris* practices, combined with textual ambivalence, which complicates any open debate on the TPNW in Parliament (Grémare 2020). Despite the absence of a constitutionalisation of the nuclear doctrine, the role of Parliament in matters of defence, and therefore nuclear deterrence, is severely limited by Article 15 of the Constitution, which stipulates that "[t]he President of the Republic is the head of the armed forces. He presides over higher councils and committees of National Defence". This article is interpreted as an exclusive presidential prerogative for nuclear deterrence, leaving no room for Parliament to influence these issues. The logic De Gaulle intended for the Fifth Republic is that the President of the Republic is the only one who can ignite the nuclear fire. But De Gaulle considered that the President should be elected by direct universal suffrage in order to get democratic legitimacy for dealing with nuclear issues. Moreover, the nuclear doctrine itself, prohibiting any formal definition of French vital interests, is considered by some parliamentarians to confer full powers on the President. If the vital interests are not defined, the President is free to declare at any time that French vital interests have been attacked and that a nuclear retaliation is required. For Lecoq, this concentration of power in the hands of a single person is ethically and democratically questionable and constitutes an additional reason to defend the TPNW. For him, a democracy should not be able to start a war without asking for the opinion of the Parliament. However, some parliamentarians, such as Cadalen, although opposed to nuclear weapons, rightly recognise that in the event of a threat of nuclear attack, the President must make the decision to retaliate alone. Here lies the logic of presidential power over nuclear issues: parliamentary time is much longer than the executive time. In the event of a nuclear emergency, a decision must be made very quickly on how to react, which justifies the power of the President to do so. Thus, French nuclear deterrence is considered a symbol of presidential power. For the President, renouncing nuclear weapons would amount to abandoning his sceptre, to use the expression of Pincé. Therefore, among the interviewed parliamentarians in favour of the TPNW, doubts remain as to the possibility that a political figure from a pro-disarmament party would be elected and actually proceed with nuclear disarmament.

Even though nuclear issues seem to fall primarily under the prerogative of the President, this does not mean that Parliament cannot play a role in this regard. Fundamentally, one of the roles of Parliament is to control the action of the government. It is responsible for monitoring the proper implementation of the Military Programming Law and therefore also of the nuclear doctrine, despite the constraints described above. According to the President of the Commission of Defence of the Senate, however, this role is hampered by a lack of access to information and a lack of clear answers from the government to questions from the Senate, because it respects the secrecy imposed by the nuclear doctrine (Sénat 2023). Another key role of Parliament is to vote every five years on the Military Programming Laws, which define the strategic orientations, budget and capacities of the military forces. On this point, some parliamentarians such as Lecoq, Cadalen and Benarroche point to the cost

of maintaining a French nuclear deterrence, estimated at 10 billion euros per year, which is seen as a burden preventing investments in public services. For some parliamentarians, such as Gassilloud or Benarroche, the vote on the budget is considered an important power that allows them to act directly on nuclear issues. However, other parliamentarians consider this power superficial when it comes to nuclear deterrence. Lecoq goes further and argues that the lack of transparency regarding the budget dedicated to nuclear weapons suits the government, which is accountable neither to Parliament nor to the people. In fact, the government refuses to reveal the portion of the military budget devoted to nuclear deterrence because disclosing such information would give potential opponents indications about the strength and credibility of France's nuclear deterrence. The logic of deterrence is indeed strongly marked by the concept of strategic ambiguity. Deterrence is not linked to actual military capability, but to the potential military capability to persuade an adversary to avoid certain activities in its own interest (Schelling 1960). This is why Schelling (1960) called deterrence "the threat that leaves something to chance". Nonetheless, more recent works question whether greater transparency about France's technical and operational capabilities would not be desirable in order to ensure that potential opponents would be scared to attack the country (Tertrais 2022).

Taking a public stand in favour of nuclear disarmament and the TPNW, and therefore against the French nuclear doctrine, can also hinder a career. The French establishment may prevent certain parliamentarians from taking a position on the TPNW so as not to close doors for their future careers. Nuclear disarmament is a difficult position to defend in a nuclear-armed country. Not only can your career be jeopardised, but also your reputation. Cadalen regrets that the media characterises him as a coward afraid of Putin when he is interviewed on the geopolitical situation and emphasises the dangers of nuclear weapons in a context of international tensions. Collin has also been the victim of media mockery, as the media called him a utopian.

The nuclear doctrine also limits the debate on a possible observer status for France within the TPNW. While some parliamentarians, such as Cadalen, Lecoq and Benarroche, advocate for such a status, Sébastien Lecornu, the Minister of the Armed Forces, closed the debate on this question during the National Assembly's debates on the 2023 Military Programming Laws (Assemblée Nationale 2023b). He argued that accessing the TPNW with observer status would send out a message too strong and could be interpreted by potential challengers as France questioning its nuclear status and therefore the potential use of its deterrence in the event of an attack. On the contrary, Cadalen believes that if France does not join the TPNW as a permanent signatory but under observer status, it is really because it wants its deterrence to remain effective. He also adds that France could play a mediating role between the nuclear powers and the TPNW by joining the Ban Treaty with observer status. This idea of putting French diplomacy at the service of the Global South and nuclear disarmament is also shared by Lecoq, who confesses to having heard Pakistani representatives say that if France helped to re-establish a dialogue with India, Pakistan would consider abandoning its nuclear arsenal. Some parliamentarians would like to turn France's particular status due to nuclear weapons into a particular status due to France's self-perceived role on the global stage with ambitions to act as a pragmatic and value-driven actor. However, the question arises as to whether France's influential power on the international stage stems from its status as a major power, which in turn comes from its nuclear status. It is difficult to assess France's potential leverage power once it abandons its nuclear arsenal.

Additionally, opening the debate on the TPNW also implies addressing the consequences of French nuclear tests, since Article 6 of the treaty includes provisions on victim assistance and environmental remediations. France has already spoken out against this initiative in the past, notably by refusing to participate in the independent studies on the victims of nuclear testing initiated by Kazakhstan. Fayet (IFRI) explains that, from a French perspective, since nuclear weapons are not supposed to be used in the doctrine, it is pointless to discuss their effects. Worse still, discussing the consequences of the use of nuclear weapons in the event of war amounts to considering the failure of nuclear deterrence and therefore weakening the nuclear doctrine itself. Emmanuelle Maitre (FRS) also argues that France has refused to accept the offer to participate in the independent studies on victims of nuclear testing because this would open the door to new demands and concessions related to nuclear deterrence.

As a consequence of the constraints imposed by the French nuclear doctrine, some parliamentary groups and supporters of the TPNW denounce the democratic crisis in French institutions that is hampering the debate on nuclear disarmament. The Communist Party, represented here by Lecoq, denounces the false appearance of democracy that is maintained as a façade to gaslight the French population, while in reality the institutions of the Republic are locked, and the power of parliamentarians limited. The deputy mentioned the reduction in speaking time at the National Assembly. It had been reduced from two minutes and thirty seconds to two minutes, and could further be reduced to one minute and thirty seconds, thus preventing the deputies from the Commission of Foreign Affairs from developing any idea in this respect. Such a short speaking time constitutes a real constraint on being able to develop such an important position on nuclear disarmament. Lecoq declared that “democracy is melting away; it is a democratic setback”. For the Communist deputy, this situation is conducive to war, or at least to the absence of any questioning of nuclear deterrence. In fact, there would be a risk of a democratic crisis, or its worsening, if France did not open the debate on the TPNW (Schepers 2021). Indeed, this would be seen as a failure to take into account the popular will. However, for this to happen, the population must be highly mobilised, which is not currently the case.

THE LACK OF KNOWLEDGE AND INTEREST IN THE TPNW LIMITS THE DEBATE

One of the pathways to the nuclear taboo is societal pressure (Tannenwald 2005). However, the French debate on the TPNW is not driven by democratic demand. Unlike other countries such as the Netherlands, where the population successfully compelled its government to attend the TPNW negotiations and then to access it as an observer, despite its being a host country for American nuclear weapons, the French population is currently not active on nuclear issues. This lack of involvement can be explained by a lack of knowledge, but also of interest in nuclear weapons.

Cadalen suggests that international questions are kept at a distance by everyday concerns, by the lack of media attention to international issues, and also by the passage of time since France has not been at war on its territory – with the exception of the war in Algeria – since World War II. Both Cadalen and Gassilloud mention the abolition of compulsory military

service as a factor that could have played a role in weakening the education of French people in the culture of defence. Many parliamentarians and experts on nuclear deterrence also tend to attribute this current lack of interest in nuclear weapons to new concerns that have emerged and are preoccupying French people such as inflation, pandemics, terrorist attacks or climate change. Lecoq stated, "The fear of disappearing tomorrow: before, only the atomic bomb carried this message; today there is the climate that is getting involved". For him and other parliamentarians such as Cadalen, it is illusory to consider that the emergency lies in climate change and no longer in nuclear weapons: they argue that it should concern both because the threat of a nuclear winter is always present.

Nonetheless, this current ignorance and lack of interest are not a constant trend. In the 1980s, nuclear weapons were a subject of societal discussion in France. Due to the related political debates, the media also took up the issue. It was common for TV news programs to broadcast a 15 to 20 minute report on nuclear deterrence. Public figures, such as intellectuals, actors, singers and writers also spoke on this topic (Pincé 2020). In a particularly tensed international context, notably with the Euromissile crisis, French society was mobilised around nuclear issues. The Communist deputy Lecoq recalls demonstrating in the streets with the slogan "Neither Pershing, nor SS-20" to refuse the presence of both American and Soviet missiles in Europe. This mobilisation may have contributed to the resolution of the crisis, which resulted in the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, the first ever signed agreement to eliminate an entire category of nuclear weapons. According to Pincé (2020), the debate on nuclear weapons faded at the end of the Cold War, when the nuclear risk diminished in importance. At the same time, nuclear deterrence became a prerogative of the President, which also limited the debate in the public sphere.

Yet, all the parliamentarians interviewed, whether they defend or criticise nuclear deterrence, call for more education on the topic so that the President can acquire true democratic legitimacy in regard to nuclear issues when elected. This does not mean that nuclear deterrence is less effective in authoritarian countries where the populations are not included in nuclear policies. But in a democratic country, where public opinion could disturb political decisions, education is crucial for its nuclear deterrence to be credible. Because nuclear deterrence is understood by the population, it can be entrusted to the President in full knowledge of the devastating consequences in the event of its use. Gassilloud, a defender of French nuclear deterrence, adopts a position not shared by all his peers on this issue. He is in favour of educating the population on the topic because for him, failing to do so would weaken the French deterrence. He cites the example of a fictitious case of nuclear deterrence: strategic aerial forces are deployed to deter a threat to French vital interests, but massive demonstrations against nuclear deterrence are organised in Paris. In such a case, France's deterrence would then lose its credibility because who could believe that in a democracy, a strong popular mobilisation would not influence the actions of the President? Democratic governments, compared to authoritarian ones, are subject to these strategic constraints because they are tied to public opinion (Schelling 1960). Gassilloud also adds that it is important for the population to understand why France is investing so much in nuclear deterrence. Other parliamentarians defending nuclear weapons disagree with him on this point. They adopt De Gaulle's legacy of not encouraging a public discussion on nuclear weapons and leaving it to the state, not the people, to preserve the "mystique" of nuclear deterrence and ensure its deterrent effect.

If the population is not educated on nuclear deterrence, it is because they do not have the necessary tools to understand it. Lecoq regrets that nuclear weapons are not mentioned in school as part of the education of children and young adults. Also, the deputy Gassilloud, the former President of the Commission of National Defence and Armed Forces, organised a round of discussions on nuclear deterrence at the National Assembly in 2023. This initiative carried the benefit of attempting to spark a debate on this topic, something that had not been done since the 2014 debate in the Commission of Defence. This round of discussion enabled the parliamentarians from the Commission to better understand the issues surrounding nuclear deterrence, which benefited the parliamentary debate on the Military Programming Law in 2023.[1] It must be said, however, that organising such a round of discussion on nuclear deterrence in a Commission at the National Assembly is considered risky because it amounts to taking the risk of showing the world that there are disagreements on nuclear deterrence in the French National Assembly. This round of discussion was a good bet for the deputy and the government because it was not perceived that way in France or on the international scene, as the report of these hearings presents a sort of convergence of points of view and only a limited opposition to nuclear deterrence. Nonetheless, Gassilloud also affirmed that this initiative had a rebound effect by putting in the public debate the topic of nuclear deterrence, which is in line with his desire to better inform the population. However, all the hearings of the round of discussion -except one- were held behind closed doors. Only the written report and the video of the single public hearing are accessible to the French population. This was a change compared to the last round of discussion on nuclear deterrence held at the National Assembly in 2014, which was entirely public. This change in the format of the hearings, from public to behind closed doors, was criticised by Collin, the director of ICAN France, who was one of the speakers. Such an important topic, given the budget devoted to nuclear weapons and their implications for the security of present and future generations, should require open debates with the possibility for the French population to be educated on the topic. Gassilloud, the President of the Commission at that time, responded that the closed format of the debates was intended to allow greater freedom of expression during the hearing (Assemblée Nationale 2023a). In reality, however, it is suspected that this freedom of expression was mainly granted to Antoine de Romanet, the Bishop to the French Armies, whose position differs significantly from that of the Vatican, which is largely anti-nuclear weapons and a signatory to the TPNW.

Then some parliamentarians argue that the difficulty of educating the population on nuclear issues is also reflected in the limited freedom of expression in the media. This argument is supported by Lecoq, who criticises the privatization of most media outlets. As a consequence, nuclear weapons are rarely mentioned in the media, let alone nuclear disarmament. Lecoq believes that it is the role of investigative journalists to question nuclear issues. Indeed, investigative journalists are known in France to challenge parliamentarians on sensitive issues. For example, in February 2025, Élise Lucet confronted French deputies outside the National Assembly, proposing that they submit to drug testing after a surge in public debate surrounding the fight against drug trafficking. But nuclear weapons are a very different issue from drug trafficking. Even if a proactive initiative by investigate journalists could encourage parliamentarians to address nuclear issues in Parliament, questions remain about how to do so. They would face a complex landscape with state secrecy, national security concerns and strong institutional protection of the nuclear industry.

[1] This debate in the National Assembly was recognised by the media and the Minister of Armed Forces as one of the rare debates on nuclear deterrence of such a great length – 2 hours and 30 minutes – and such a high level of quality (Assemblée Nationale 2023b).

Critics of nuclear weapons in Parliament believe that the government is not just not giving the population the opportunity to be informed on the topic, but even more so, that it is exploiting the French people's ignorance and fear of a third world war to justify nuclear deterrence. According to Lecoq, the government is trying to convince the population that if there has been no third world war, in order to prevent one from happening, France must rely on nuclear deterrence and protect Europe. This echoes a topic long-debated by scholars, namely the long-peace theory. Some, such as Gassilloud, argue that thanks to nuclear weapons there has been no generalised conflict since the Second World War. Others, such as Cadalen and Benarroche, argue that nuclear weapons did not prevent violent confrontations during the Cold War, especially in "the third world". Scholars in the literature are also divided. Some argue that nuclear deterrence has been the "great equaliser of nations and the great stabiliser of the international system" (Bartelson in Sylvest 2021: 22). However, others argue that if nuclear weapons have not been used in an armed conflict since Hiroshima and Nagasaki, it is not because of their deterrent power, but rather because there is already a form of taboo prohibiting their first use (Tannnewald 2005; Thakur 2018). Otherwise, how can we explain cases where nuclear weapon states did not use their nuclear power to put an end to a conflict when there was no fear of nuclear retaliation because the opposite side did not possess nuclear weapons (Tannenwald 1999)? Because of this disagreement within the academic community, political decisions are also divided.

Is nuclear deterrence effective? This question must be examined in order to determine whether it is worth keeping a nuclear arsenal. Some parliamentarians, especially those from the group of democrats, assert that if Ukraine had not renounced its nuclear arsenal under the Budapest Memorandum, Russia would not have invaded Ukraine's territory (Assemblée Nationale 2023a). Other parliamentarians, such as Cadalen, despite being in favour of the TPNW, are more cautious, and admit that they cannot affirm the ineffectiveness of nuclear deterrence. In his advocacy, Benarroche asks the French government to study this question in good faith by joining the works carried out within the framework of the TPNW with the observer status. Benarroche then continues to develop the argument that nuclear weapons are ineffective because, by definition, they are weapons of non-use. According to him, nuclear weapons are useless because they amount to asserting to a potential challenger that they are weapons of deterrence only, so they will never be used. He compares this to a radar posted on a road to flag drivers for speeding, while the police assert that no sanction will be applied if a driver is reported. In fact, nuclear deterrence is effective only when the threat is credible because the state that makes it is committed to its fulfilment (Schelling 1960). This is why it is crucial to recall, as did the Minister of Armed Forces at the National Assembly during a debate on the Military Programming Law, that French nuclear weapons are not weapons of non-use, but defensive and sufficient weapons (Assemblée Nationale 2023b). It is the one who is deterred who can decide whether the threat is credible or not, which is why any potential opponent must be convinced that France will carry out its threats in the event of an attack on its vital interests.

Because of this ignorance and lack of interest in nuclear weapons, TPNW supporters reject the idea of a referendum on nuclear weapons. Although Emmanuel Macron mentioned his desire to consult the French people on various issues in his New Year's wishes for 2025, TPNW supporters oppose the idea of asking French citizens, "Are you for or against nuclear weapons?" This type of referendum is all the more criticised because it would amount to asking the population for its opinion on a subject on which it is not educated. Soliciting the opinion of the population without educating them will only lead to useless

responses. Cadalen evokes Bourdieu and his critique of polling institutes: since people do not like to feel stupid, they will always answer something, but based on what? Collin, the director of ICAN France, shares this opinion and considers that a referendum on whether the respondents are "for or against nuclear weapons in France" – propelled by other anti-nuclear civil society organisations – would be too simplistic and would not produce concrete results. This argument can be surprising in a democratic country where sovereignty belongs to the people. Democracy presumes that all citizens are equal in a political vote, regardless of their technical knowledge. To refuse to consult the population on the necessity to maintain a nuclear arsenal because they are not educated enough on this topic means that the decisions should be made only by experts and elites.

By extension, if the population is not educated or interested in nuclear issues, parliamentarians have little incentive to work on these questions. The deputies from the National Assembly are directly elected by the population of their department. But no electoral campaign has been conducted by taking a position on nuclear disarmament because it is not a topic that mobilises voters, which is also true for presidential campaigns. Both Cadalen, a deputy of Finistère, where the nuclear submarine base of l'Île Longue is located, and Benarroche, a senator of Bouches-du-Rhône, where the nuclear aerial base of Istres is located, have stated that their respective populations are not active on the issue of nuclear weapons, even though they live next to a component of nuclear deterrence. Cadalen recalls the strange atmosphere in Brest when Putin raised Russia's level of nuclear alert in 2022, as the population knew that in the event of an attack, the base of l'Île Longue would be the first military target. He explains, however, that he was not approached by the population of his department on issues of nuclear deterrence or nuclear disarmament. Benarroche makes the same observation about his department, where people are aware of the risk of living near a nuclear airbase, but he sees no connection between it and support for nuclear disarmament; quite the contrary, this base is viewed positively because it creates economic activity for the region.

Consequently, this is not a topic on which parliamentarians feel engaged by the population. When all the parliamentary groups were invited to provide a written contribution to an information report on the hearings on nuclear deterrence for the Commission of National Defence and Armed Forces at the National Assembly, only four out of eleven parliamentary groups contributed: Renaissance (the President's party – centre-right), *Rassemblement National* (far-right), *La France Insoumise – Nouvelle Union Populaire Écologique et Sociale* (left/far-left), and Démocrates (centre-right). Regarding the attendance in the hearing on ethical issues related to nuclear deterrence, Collin, one of the speakers, estimates that fewer than twenty deputies out of the 60 permanent members of the commission attended it -on that day, 28 deputies were present and 19 were excused. And yet, "indifference does not mean approval" (Pincé 2022). The French population, as well as parliamentarians, must be educated and interested in nuclear issues in order to open up the debate on the TPNW.

THE STRATEGIC CONTEXT ALWAYS POSTPONES THE "RIGHT TIME" FOR DISARMAMENT

It is often said that it is never the "right time" for nuclear disarmament. Today, the war in Ukraine is being used as an argument by the French government and the supporters of nuclear weapons in Parliament to justify the importance of French nuclear deterrence. Nuclear weapons are seen as a means of negotiating on an equal footing with Russia. This idea is also supported by some members of *La France Insoumise*, such as Cadalen, who, although supportive of the TPNW, believes that if there was a nuclear disarmament right now, it would weaken France's bargaining power on the international stage and threaten its strategic autonomy. And yet, this is precisely what the TPNW aims to prevent: nuclear weapons being used "as a currency of power" (Tannnenwald 2020). On the contrary, during the debates on the Military Programming Law in 2023, some parliamentarians from *La France Insoumise* attempted to argue that this strategic context was in fact conducive to denuclearization (Assemblée Nationale 2023b). Citing the Cuban Missile Crisis as an example, they argued that it was in times of crisis and high tensions that the biggest steps for discussions on nuclear disarmament were taken. The world was so close to a nuclear catastrophe during the Cuban Missile Crisis that the two superpowers entered into a dialogue and negotiations.

The French government recognises that nuclear weapons are not an ideal solution, but there is still no credible alternative (Assemblée Nationale 2023b). Cadalen also acknowledges that it could be difficult to replace nuclear deterrence with another kind of deterrence with the same deterring power because of the unbearable damage involved. The last presidential campaign in France took place during a period of international conflict, notably during the Russian aggression against Ukraine. Benarroche admits that it is difficult, in such a context, to run for the Presidency while defending both the obligation to help Ukraine and the need to join the TPNW and give up the nuclear arsenal. Critics of the Ban Treaty, such as Gassilloud, also argue that France can no longer be reassured by American security guarantees. With President Trump back in the White House, his foreign policy is deemed too unpredictable for France to renounce its strategic autonomy. Cadalen argues that historical facts have proven that France cannot rely on the United States; as the US entered World War I in 1917 and World War II in 1942, "they did not rush to the aid of Europe".

However, the current strategic context with the war in Ukraine is also being used by some parliamentarians to highlight the dangers posed by nuclear weapons. Referred to as "weapons of mass destruction" by supporters of the TPNW, nuclear weapons carry a risk of nuclear escalation in the war in Ukraine. Their plea is to abandon nuclear weapons before a catastrophe occurs. The more time passes, the more the world tends to forget the consequences of Hiroshima and Nagasaki (Schroeder 2018; Tertrais 2022). The Nobel Peace Prize awarded to Nihon Hidankyo in 2024 illustrated this objective: to demonstrate "through witness testimony that nuclear weapons must never be used again" (The Nobel Prize n.d.). The motivations for giving this award to Nihon Hidankyo differ from those that motivated the granting of the Nobel Peace Prize to ICAN in 2017. While ICAN is an organization fighting nuclear weapons, Nihon Hidankyo is an association fighting against the effects and consequences of the use of nuclear weapons. Moreover, the war in Ukraine is also used to warn of the possibility of nuclear accidents. Lecoq warned of the dangers of using artificial intelligence in nuclear matters. He cited the example of accidental strikes in

Ukraine caused by drones misinterpreting signals, which cause civilian casualties. For him, the war in Ukraine, far from justifying nuclear deterrence, rather illustrates the potential dangers of weakening human control in favour of new technologies.

OTHER INTERNATIONAL COMMITMENTS PREVAIL OVER THE TPNW

Finally, the debate on the TPNW is limited by other international commitments that are considered by France as prevailing over the Ban Treaty. According to the French government and some parliamentarians like Gassilloud, since France is a member of NATO, which is a nuclear alliance – even if France is not a member of the Nuclear Planning Group – it is incoherent to join the TPNW. Philippe Errera, the director of political affairs and security at the Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs, would see this as a form of schizophrenia (Assemblée Nationale 2023a). NATO pushed the narrative that any softening of a member state's position on the TPNW would be considered a breach of solidarity and cohesion within the alliance (Ritchie & Kmentt 2021). However, Ambassador Kmentt of Austria (2021), who initiated the Austrian Pledge, confirms that there is no legal incompatibility between joining the TPNW and NATO membership. In the debates in the National Assembly, NATO membership is widely considered to be what allowed France to play a mediating role in the conflict in Ukraine and ensure its security. The fact that NATO can count on the independent forces of the United Kingdom and France is an advantage because it complicates the calculations of a potential challenger, which must deal with three centres of decision-making, not just one (Tertrais 2022).

President Macron, in his speech at the École de Guerre in 2020, also emphasised the role played by French nuclear deterrence in the defence of Europe as well as his ambition to engage in a strategic dialogue with European allies on its role in collective defence, considering that France's vital interests have a European dimension (Macron 2020). This idea of extending French nuclear deterrence to European allies is not new; Florian Galleri, a historian, recalls that De Gaulle had also given the armed forces instructions to defend France's European allies in the event of attacks when the Soviets were in Berlin. Later, the European dimension of French deterrence was reaffirmed in the White Book of 1974. Because of these self-defined duties, France is not open to the TPNW and intends to convince its European allies not to sign the Ban Treaty either. However, the extension of nuclear deterrence to European allies raises concerns and criticisms in most parliamentary groups. During the 2024 European Parliament electoral campaign, some political parties used the extension of nuclear deterrence to European allies to scare the French population and win votes. *The Rassemblement National* (far-right) accused President Macron of selling France's nuclear deterrence to the EU and thus depriving the French nation of its sovereignty and a means to defend itself (Herreros 2024). *La France Insoumise* (left/far-left) played on public fears by arguing that the problems of European allies could drag the French people into a nuclear war that would not be theirs (La France Insoumise 2024).

Some parliamentarians, such as Gassilloud, even question whether France's current nuclear capabilities are sufficient for it to pretend to extend the deterrence to its European allies. This idea is also supported by some scholars such as Galleri, who argues that France's vital

interests must be explicitly extended to its European allies and that changes must be made to reassure its European partners. To this end, Galleri (2024) suggests that France join the NATO Nuclear Planning Group, that Paris includes European partners in joint exercises, deploys Rafales with nuclear capabilities on the territories of European partners, possibly reintroduces nuclear warheads similar to the Hades system on Europe's eastern flank, and increases its nuclear warheads. These remarks raise several concerns. If this happened, not only would France fail to meet its non-proliferation obligations under the NPT, but the reintroduction of short-range tactical nuclear weapons would change France's doctrine from a strategic to a tactical one intended for use on the battlefield, thus jeopardizing the core principles of *stricte suffisance* and last resort. In deterrence strategy, it is crucial to keep secrets from an enemy, but it may be even more important to reassure him and not to send out the wrong signals. The reintegration of Hades systems could be perceived as too assertive by Russia, and it could increase its suspicion of a surprise-attack being planned and lead to Russian self-defence moves. This is why Schelling (1960: 231) stated, "there are not only secrets we prefer not to keep, but military capabilities we might prefer not to have".

Nonetheless, Gassilloud acknowledges that if France's European allies were to sign the treaty or participate in the meetings with observer status, this would isolate France in its stance against nuclear disarmament. Indeed, the treaty aims to establish a taboo on nuclear weapons to stigmatise not only their use, but also their possession (Muller 2021; Sanders-Zakre & Fihn 2021; Payne 2021; Tannenwald 2021; Lovold 2021; Kurosawa 2018). The taboo must be on the weapons themselves, and not on the people who use them. "If a North Korean or Iranian bomb is so awful that anything is justified to stop it, how is an American or Russian bomb any different? If we are afraid of nuclear weapons in Trump's hands, aren't we really afraid of nuclear weapons all together? Regardless of which country or leader uses these weapons, the results will be the same" (Acheson 2018: 147). The taboo means that it cannot be challenged "without the contester being condemned and severely sanctioned by the whole community" (Muller 2021: 159). Consequently, as Gassilloud has pointed out, it will become increasingly difficult for states not party to the TPNW to justify their position if the treaty's normative power increases as more states accede to it (Sanders-Zakre & Fihn 2021; Tannenwald 2005; Abe 2018). And it is not the law itself – here the TPNW – that is stronger, but rather the norm (Tannenwald 2021; Abe 2018). Tannenwald (2021) cites the example of North Korea, which is no longer a party to the NPT, yet has been widely condemned for its nuclear tests because the norm prevails over legal constraints.

Ultimately, France considers the TPNW to be incompatible with the NPT for both legal and strategic reasons. The two treaties have different approaches: while the NPT recognises five nuclear-weapon states and allows them to temporarily retain their nuclear weapons, the TPNW aims for a total and immediate ban on nuclear weapons. This common objective found in both treaties but with different timelines, could create a legal dispute and weaken the authority and universality of the NPT. According to Benoît Grémare, in the event of a legal overlap, the TPNW would prevail. The prevalence of the TPNW would jeopardise France's position as a nuclear-weapon state, which explains its fierce opposition to this treaty. The strength of the TPNW, and what rightly annoys nuclear-weapons states like France, lies in its clarity: it reflects a near-consensus on nuclear disarmament. This means that it prevents nuclear-weapon states from continuing to present ambivalent positions on nuclear disarmament, and committing verbally but not through actions, just as President Obama did in his Prague speech (Egeland 2021; Craig 2021). Another criticism of the TPNW in the French Parliament is that it will create divisions among state parties to the NPT.

However, the NPT itself was already a highly divisive treaty, classifying five states as nuclear powers with special advantages and statuses, while the others were called non-nuclear states and only had prohibitions imposed on them. Ambassador Kmentt (2021) also argues that what has created divisions is, rightly, the non-implementation of Article 6 of the NPT.

Nonetheless, the government and its supporters, such as Gassilloud, often point out that even if France cannot afford to join the TPNW in this strategic context, it must maintain its ambition for denuclearization through the NPT. Article 6 of the NPT commits all the signatories to pursue nuclear disarmament negotiations "in good faith", something that parliamentarians in favour of nuclear deterrence emphasise. Thanks to its policy of *stricte suffisance*, the French nuclear arsenal is limited to fewer than 300 nuclear warheads, and France is the only country to have voluntarily renounced its land-based nuclear missiles, which makes France the only nuclear power to rely solely on air and sea-based deterrence. A part of the parliamentary discourse defends the idea that France has done better than the other nuclear powers, "it is the good student", and it should not be asked to make more sacrifices until others do the same. These "sacrifices" are deeply felt by some parliamentarians, such as Gassilloud, who believes that the removal of land-based missiles from the Plateau d'Albion is costing France dearly because France has deprived itself of a means of defence.

Supporters of the TPNW also largely share the belief that the NPT is unfair (Sauer et al. 2021). This argument is supported by the parliamentarians interviewed from the left-wing, the communist and the green parties. The NPT recognises only five states as nuclear powers: the United States, Russia, France, the UK and China. However, Israel, North Korea, Pakistan and India are now also confirmed nuclear powers. The NPT prohibits all the other states from developing and acquiring nuclear weapons. Questions have been raised as to why these countries have been allowed to protect themselves with nuclear weapons, which would endanger global security if they were used, while others have not been allowed to do so. Lecoq stated that "the notion of fraternity on a global scale is hampered by nuclear weapons". The TPNW, initiated by the Global South, aims to rebalance the equilibrium of power by resisting oppression and banning nuclear weapons. Benarroche was the only French parliamentarian to speak at the third meeting of the TPNW at the UN on March 3rd, 2025. What struck him most then was the Global South countries' portrayal of nuclear weapons as a tool for rich countries to oppress the South. For the Green senator, this is yet another reason for France to join the TPNW as an observer: it would move away from the European-centred perspective and listen to the Global South in order to confront these ideas. Indeed, the TPNW is deeply rooted in the "new" way of thinking about nuclear disarmament, namely through the prism of humanitarian costs and the emancipation of peoples, in contrast to the "old" approach focused solely on security concerns (Onderco & Vignoli 2024). The TPNW is a means for non-nuclear weapons states, primarily from the Global South, to enfranchise themselves so as not to be at the mercy of nuclear-weapons states. The TPNW has often been characterised as a form of resistance by subordinate actors rebelling against the hegemonic nuclear order and the normative value associated with the possession of nuclear weapons (Egel & Ward 2022; Onderco & Vignoli 2024; Kmentt 2021; Ritchie & Egeland 2018; Acheson 2018). It is this attempt at "subversive revisionism" (Egel & Ward 2022) through the stigmatization and erosion of the discourses and ideas constituting the nuclear hierarchy, that the French government is trying to stifle by limiting the debate on the TPNW in Parliament.

CONCLUSION

In France, the TPNW is best characterised by its absence from parliamentary debates. Few parliamentarians actively work on defence and nuclear weapons issues, and even fewer take a public position in favour of the Ban Treaty. The French government and proponents of nuclear deterrence assume that opening the debate on the TPNW amounts to considering nuclear disarmament and, consequently, undermining the credibility of nuclear deterrence. Every step toward opening the debate on the TPNW weakens the conviction of potential aggressors about France's capacity and willingness to carry out its threats.

Among parliamentarians interested in working on nuclear issues, their knowledge of the treaty itself is very limited. Their positions focus on nuclear deterrence and nuclear disarmament in general, but not directly on the TPNW. And when the treaty is mentioned, particularly in the interviews conducted for this research, the debate is not technical. Some issues that concern researchers are not addressed by the parliamentarians, such as the practical implementation of the TPNW, the verification measures, or the withdrawal clause which allows a party to the TPNW to withdraw from it -but only when it is not involved in an armed conflict.

Nonetheless, all the parliamentarians interviewed are aware of this lack of debate on the TPNW. This awareness is reflected in the parliamentarians' advocacy for the TPNW, as well as in that of civil society organisations such as ICAN, which no longer advocate for France's accession to the treaty, but for an observer status for it as a first step. The objective is first of all to open France to dialogue and encourage it to think objectively about nuclear deterrence through questions such as: is nuclear deterrence effective or what does the Global South think about nuclear weapons?

The interviews with the parliamentarians and the study of parliamentary discourse have identified several reasons why the TPNW and nuclear disarmament are absent from parliamentary debates. There is a kind of consensus among parliamentarians that even if nuclear deterrence is not ideal, it remains necessary for France's defence, status, bargaining power, industry and strategic autonomy. Therefore, the debates in Parliament do not focus on whether France should keep its nuclear deterrence or accede to the TPNW, but rather on how to use this nuclear deterrence. The French nuclear doctrine, with its obligations of strategic ambiguity and secrecy, does not allow for an open debate on nuclear issues without weakening the core of the deterrence strategy. The lack of knowledge and interest of the French population, and, by extension, of the parliamentarians, prevents an informed debate on nuclear issues. The strategic context is also considered unfavourable to nuclear disarmament given the heightened international tensions. Ultimately, France feels committed to other international obligations that take precedence over the TPNW, such as those within NATO, a common European defence enhanced by French nuclear deterrence, and the requirements of the NPT. This silence on the TPNW in French Parliament indicates that France is unlikely to reconsider its opposition to the TPNW in the foreseeable future.

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INTERVIEWS

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