

**Joint Press Briefing by the Foreign and Defense Ministries
on the 2005 NPT Review Conference
Paris, April 18, 2005**

Presentation of speakers:

- Jean-Baptiste Mattei, director, Foreign Ministry spokesperson
- Jean-François Bureau, Defense Ministry spokesperson
- Philippe Carré, Director of Strategic Affairs, Security and Disarmament
- Eric Lebedel, Director of International and Strategic Affairs at the SGDN

JBM: We wanted to hold this press briefing for two reasons:

First, because the NPT review conference is approaching; it will be held in New York from May 2 to May 27.

And second, because the SGDN, the Defense Ministry and the Foreign Ministry, have just jointly published this brochure, which reviews the most important things to know about France's effort to combat the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, control sensitive exports and arms exports, and foster disarmament. Some 15,000 copies will be distributed to those who are interested in these subjects, whether in France or abroad, via our diplomatic network.

A few words to place these discussions on the NPT and proliferation in context.

The UN Security Council considers that the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery is a threat to international peace and security. Combating it both nationally and externally is one of France's priorities.

This brochure sums up the main components of our effort, but I would also like to describe them a little, to provide a framework for our discussions.

The NPT entered into force in 1970. France acceded to it in 1992. You know that the NPT provides a global framework for the three aspects of the nuclear problem, which we can subsequently discuss at greater length: non-proliferation, the development of civilian nuclear energy, and disarmament.

The NPT is today nearly universal. Only three countries haven't signed it: Israel, India and Pakistan.

Review conferences are held every five years; the previous ones in 1995 and 2000 were heavily marked by the post Cold-War context. Our main task was to take note of the end of the arms race and to establish foundations that would serve for the years to come. As you know, it was decided in 1995 to extend the Treaty indefinitely.

The context for this upcoming review conference is different—nuclear proliferation crises are what is dominating the current situation and the debate. I would single out three notable aspects of these crises, which have proliferated in recent times:

- revelations on clandestine nuclear programs operated by parties to the NPT: ongoing revelations on the North Korean program, revelations in the summer of 2002 on the Iranian program and on the Libyan program in late 2003;
- the announcement of a country's withdrawal from the NPT (i.e., North Korea in January 2003), unprecedented in the treaty's history;
- revelations on the existence of clandestine networks for acquiring sensitive nuclear materials and technologies.

These crises are far from being resolved. I'm thinking in particular of Iran and North Korea. Their effect is to undermine the relations of trust established by the NPT.

All of that justifies the initiatives we would like to take to strengthen the non-proliferation regime, whether in the framework of the review conference, the G8 or the EU. Just a word on our ideas, which we could expand on later. We are currently in a study phase and are trying to give greater impetus to the debate on strengthening non-proliferation regimes. We are pursuing four main directions:

- first, to place more responsibility on the shoulders of exporting countries, whoever they may be, by strengthening controls on sensitive nuclear technologies (enrichment and reprocessing);
- second, to enhance the IAEA's verification capabilities by making the Additional Protocol universal;
- third, to ensure an organized response on the part of the international community in the event of a violation, including the suspension of nuclear cooperation with the country in question;
- fourth, to strengthen the multilateral treatment of these issues, notably by involving the UN Security Council to a greater degree.

We're also working with Germany on the issue of withdrawal from the NPT—the question of Article X of the NPT.

The second aspect of the NPT concerns the peaceful uses of nuclear energy. Here I'd like to emphasize that our objective isn't to prevent developing countries from having access to nuclear energy. France, which itself chose the nuclear option, is convinced that the production of electricity from nuclear power is one of the only solutions for sustainable development. As you know, a meeting was held just recently in Paris, on March 21 and 22, on nuclear energy in the 21st century.

In reality, for a very large majority of states parties, who are members of the international community in good standing, failing to respect the NPT, clandestinity or the lack of a peaceful end-use for certain programs are non-issues. It is precisely in their interest, to preserve their rights, that we think we shouldn't be weak with those who are not abiding by the common rules.

Finally, I will speak a bit more briefly on disarmament, the third component. Naturally, disarmament issues will be debated in the Review Conference.

You are familiar with Article VI of the NPT, which stipulates that states parties must contribute to nuclear disarmament and to general and complete, disarmament. France respects its obligations in this regard. In the brochure, you will find a summary of all the measures taken by France in the areas of nuclear, chemical and conventional disarmament, showing that France has a record that could be described as exemplary. Perhaps Jean-François Bureau would like to talk about some of these subjects, including the dismantling of the test center in Mururoa, the dismantling of our fissile material production facilities for nuclear weapons, and the reduction in nuclear delivery systems.

On a more global level, you know that nuclear disarmament is continuing with the implementation of disarmament agreements between the United States and Russia, which I believe should lead to a threefold reduction in the number of those countries' nuclear warheads as well as progress in making the CTBT—which unfortunately still hasn't entered into force—more universal. And finally, it is continuing, through the planned cut-off negotiations, the treaty banning the production of fissile materials for weapons.

JFB: We thought it would be helpful, under the auspices of the Secretary General for National Defense (SGDN), to review all of our efforts on non-proliferation, arms control and disarmament.

[...] Arms control is an essential dimension of conflict prevention, with the limitation of weapons helping to reduce the risks of confrontation and thus contributing to security. Our concept of security integrates arms control as well as disarmament—a major factor in strengthening security—both in our own interests and those of international security and stability.

Arms control is also part of a permanent posture of security and the fight against terrorism. These are issues that are becoming increasingly important and involve a large number of players and areas of expertise.

I won't go into detail about all of the structures in which Defense staff are involved when it comes to arms control and disarmament; let me just mention our permanent representative to the Disarmament Conference, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty Organization (CTBT) and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW).

To return to the recent evolution of our nuclear posture, through decisions taken over the past 15—and especially the past 10—years we have actively contributed to a posture of deterrence set at the lowest possible level, strictly what is necessary. Let me remind you that during this period, France halved its nuclear delivery vehicles, dismantled its surface-to-surface nuclear missiles, its so-called “Plateau d’Albion” missiles, decreased the number of ballistic missile nuclear submarines (SSBNs) from six to four, decreased its alert posture (at least one submarine is permanently at sea), and closed the Pacific test centers of Mururoa and Fangataufa, which are subject to ongoing surveillance by the IAEA. We also began dismantling fissile material production facilities, notably Pierrelatte and Marcoule. The total amount of credits allocated to nuclear deterrence during this period was reduced by 60 percent.

This conveys the extent of France's effort to adapt its forces and its posture of deterrence to its doctrine, that is, to what's required to protect its vital interests and no more.

To conclude, I would add that the Defense Ministry is working along two lines. The first is the Proliferation Security Initiative, through a certain number of exercises that have been developed since that initiative was launched in 2003. France took part in the Basilic 03 maritime exercise in the Mediterranean and an air interdiction exercise in 2004. Another will be held in 2006.

Finally, we are carrying out a number of technical missions, whether they be the secretariat or the establishment of mechanisms providing support to the CTBT. That way, when the treaty enters into force, we will be able to implement the technical means needed to monitor it. We are also supplying a certain number of surveillance stations. That makes it possible for the collection center in Vienna to gather all the data, thereby facilitating follow-up and guaranteeing the treaty's implementation.

PC: The reality is that over the past 10 years, we have done what we believed was possible and we are prepared to provide an accounting, to explain ourselves. At the same time, other nations that had asked us to move ahead faster with disarmament have violated the provisions of the treaty. That's a fact, and we haven't the slightest problem talking about it.

In any case, for us nuclear disarmament can't be conceived in a sort of vacuum, in which it's disconnected from the aim of general and complete disarmament and international security. That seems very ambitious, but concretely speaking, in today's world more deaths are caused by the illegal trafficking of small arms—and France is concerned about that—than by the use of nuclear weapons. So let's not neglect the very real dangers of destabilization; the risks to populations posed by apparently simple weapons which nobody is calling into question but which are in reality very dangerous.

Q – On the subject of Iran: If negotiations with the three European countries don't succeed, meaning that Iran is following in the footsteps of North Korea and withdrawing from the treaty and the Additional Protocol, would it still be possible to talk about universality?

PC: We don't comment on hypothetical issues.

We are working to get the Iranians to give us objective guarantees showing that their nuclear program is strictly peaceful. A year and a half ago, in October 2003, an agreement was signed providing for various things relating to Iran's relations with the IAEA, Iran's international commitments and the suspension of contested activities linked to the fuel cycle, in other words enrichment and reprocessing. After difficult discussions, that agreement was confirmed last November; we are now working toward a global agreement regulating this issue. Meanwhile, the Iranians are continuing to suspend such activities. I therefore don't see why we would go off on hypotheses that are completely outside of this negotiation framework. We are operating on the basis of the discussions that have taken place recently. Experts will soon be meeting to examine these points; I see no reason to anticipate other scenarios.

Q – Does the conference agenda provide for re-examining the conditions for withdrawing from the NPT, for example, after the North Korean experience?

PC: There's no item on the agenda concerning conditions for withdrawal, but we are among the many nations who consider that North Korea's conditions for announcing its withdrawal don't in fact constitute a withdrawal from the treaty. Consequently, we don't acknowledge that country's withdrawal. The NPT is not a treaty you can pull out of just like that, without consequences. France, along with several of its partners, will present its thinking on the subject, to demonstrate that—contrary to what some may imagine—it's not enough to say you're quitting the treaty to dispense with the obligations assumed under the NPT, without any consequences.

Q – Are you going to the May 2 conference with a common European position on the NPT agenda?

PC: You're talking about a common NPT position. The 25 EU states are largely in agreement. Certainly when it comes to the conditions for implementing nuclear disarmament in relation to general and complete nuclear disarmament, member states may not all have the same position, the same sensibility. But the divide is not necessarily between the nuclearweapon states and the others. There's a whole gradation of sensitivities. Ireland is part of the coalition for a new agenda with states some distance from the Union and NATO; by the same token, other non-nuclear EU member states fully agree with the positions France has presented to you. We're handling these nuances very well. I think what will dominate at the New York conference in May is the recognition by everyone that it is absolutely imperative to reaffirm the principles of the NPT.

Q – Egyptian Mohamed El Baradei is a candidate for his own succession to head the IAEA. Are you satisfied with his action? Do you plan to support his candidacy for a new term?

JBM: Mr. El Baradei is the only candidate. We hope a consensus emerges.

Q – Do you consider Iran's production of fissile material a breach of the NPT because so far as I know certain states, like Japan and German, produce fissile material?

PC: The NPT does not say that such technological activity is good or bad. It says that activities to obtain a nuclear weapon are unlawful. Article 4 doesn't place any obstacle, doesn't bring into question the lawfulness of the peaceful uses of nuclear energy. The issue is whether one or another activity is only for civilian use and corresponds to a strictly civilian need, consistent with peaceful uses, or whether it may have other purposes, other uses.

What we want in the present discussions are objective guarantees from the Iranians that their activities are solely for peaceful uses--I'm not talking about power plants for electricity—that the purpose is strictly civilian.

Well, we do not see in Iran's nuclear energy program any justification for mastering control of the full fuel cycle.

Q – Does that mean that in Iran there are no plants that can use enriched fuel, enriched uranium for civilian uses--is that what you're saying?

PC: No, the power plants that are going to be built in Iran will get Russian fuel adapted to this use. Enriched fuel will inevitably be produced and transferred by Russia to run these plants, and spent fuel will then be taken back to Russia. The problem is the existence, parallel to these arrangements, of capacities for manufacturing enriched uranium from ores and, after irradiation, reprocessing it and extracting plutonium from it. That's what is currently under discussion.

Q – So in the Russian scenario, if Russia takes back spent fuel, military use is out of the question. That's the trick?

PC: We don't think that to run the current Iranian civilian power station program there is a need for a separate complete fuel production cycle.

Q – There are states that don't deny having nuclear weapons and don't confirm it, like Israel. How can France instate monitoring for those states that have not signed the treaty?

PC: We'd like the treaty to be global and we invite all countries to accede to it. This position is clear and without ambiguity. In the discussions at the UN, we have consistently supported the goal of making the Middle East a zone free of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery. These are the positions taken by France. I say a "zone free of weapons of mass destruction", i.e. not simply nuclear but also chemical and biological weapons. There are states in the region other than the one you mentioned that have not subscribed to the conventions banning them. We mustn't leave out the means of delivery because missiles that deliver these weapons of mass destruction are also part of the problem of proliferation.

(...)

Q – About the four points you referred to on strengthening the NPT. Do you have the support of countries like the US? And on the question of suspending cooperation in nuclear technologies, would there perhaps be sanctions by the international community?

PC: The action plan developed by the G8 at Sea Island incorporates everything that seemed possible. It includes a distinction between really sensitive activities linked to the fuel cycle and others that are less dangerous. Work is continuing in the G8; it's very complicated obviously because no one wishes inadvertently to complicate lawful transfers for energy production so it's rather painstaking. But the contract which appears in the Sea Island documents satisfies us, and we wish to implement it, concretely, with our partners.

PC: (...) The fact is that there are now far fewer nuclear weapons and far fewer delivery systems than there were ten years ago, including in Moscow, the United States, France and the UK. The trend is not upward, toward an arms build-up; the reality is you've a sharp decline.

So we did what we said a moment ago, we are ourselves open to the start of negotiations on a treaty banning the production of fissile material for explosive purposes. The Cut-Off would be a treaty which prevented the additional manufacture of material for explosives. This is not something that is insignificant, and not everyone is ready to go along with it. We are ready to subscribe to it, in line with maintaining the minimum level strictly required.

I don't think the main problem today is the over-armament of the great powers. Contrary to the predictions 20 years ago, the number of delivery vehicles and weapons is declining. We have a program with Russia for converting excess plutonium--whereby plutonium is transformed into Mox, which is a fuel for nuclear power plants-- in cooperation with the US in order to burn plutonium of Russian origin. Globally, if you take all the figures--means of delivery and explosive capacity--we are

well below the figures of ten years ago--and we are ready to consolidate this through a treaty banning the production of fissile material. So we've nothing to be ashamed of in our action. Probably, it will never be enough for some, but we have to live in a world where general security considerations must be taken into consideration, and once again, article VI refers not just to nuclear disarmament but to disarmament problems as a whole.

(...)

Q – In your proposals you want to make the exporting countries more accountable, you also mentioned strengthening the monitoring powers of the IAEA; you also refer to possible international reaction if there were a violation or a failure to comply with commitments, that would also permit the problem to be addressed in a multinational framework, namely the United Nations and the Security Council. Can you give us more details on those aspects so that we have a clearer idea of what France would like and whether you think it possible it would be a problem or if these proposals could be voted with a show of hands?

PC: The ideas now circulating are for a sort of embargo, in principle on a whole raft of technologies. This has been discussed by high-ranking international officials. We think we ought to preserve access to the capacity to produce nuclear electricity, which is not dangerous. So we must be careful not to take too robust measures. But, on the other hand, it's possible to work to increase vigilance by considering, for example, that the additional protocol becomes a very important tool in the case of transfers of the most sensitive nuclear technologies. Cooperation might be suspended in the event of violations. A whole series of measures are under discussion, which we think go in the right direction. Obviously, some still continue at least in principle to support the idea of a total embargo on transfers of the fuel cycle to states that don't have it. But that isn't in the Sea Island plan. What we're proposing, on the other hand, is in the G8 document.

Q – It seems some elements are less controversial than others? What are the stumbling blocks?

PC: I believe there's a greater awareness of the stakes than in the past. What is really dangerous are explosive materials. Everything that is linked to the production of explosive materials and everything that might give access to explosive materials must be looked at carefully. And this is the problem we're having in the talks with the Iranians, for example. Inevitably, a great deal of attention is focusing on explosive materials and so on the provisions that allow for enriching material. In fact, the problem is that when you take uranium, you put it in centrifuges, you run it a number of times, and that gives you explosive material. How do you deal with this kind of problem? It's not easy, technically. Obviously, there's the idea of a general embargo, but there are many extremely peaceful countries which have fuel cycles without danger to anyone, and it's difficult to tell them that this will be impossible in future. So we're trying to define conditions of supply to guarantee that material isn't being diverted. It's quite a delicate task which isn't over but which cannot be resolved through an all-or-nothing policy.

(...)

Q – I'd like to know how many countries have already signed the additional protocol? I know that France signed the agreement a few months ago. The UN secretary-general has made eight proposals regarding the meeting in New York. What's your sense, your assessment of these eight proposals? Are you supporting them or not? What are the points that pose a problem?

PC: One hundred forty-four states have signed a generalized safeguards agreement, 90 have signed an additional protocol to the agreement; 65 have implemented it. Iran has signed but not ratified it, but is applying it anyway. The proposals from the head of the IAEA try to respond precisely to the question of technology transfers, especially of nuclear fuel, and we'll not necessarily respond to every point as he does, but the way of dealing with the questions strikes us overall as perfectly sound. But I can't go into too much detail. We'll be offering specific comments in other settings.

(...) The treaty is excellent, and we set great store by it. It is accepted now, much more so than probably 30 years ago--the number of states parties is very high. Even the crises we've seen recently or have experienced have been opportunities to show that there was a strong international commitment to maintain the non-proliferation regime and the NPT itself. Indeed, we're counting on New York to consolidate this agreement, to consider the NPT central. Mr. El Baradi's proposals, I believe, say that we should go further in disarmament. And he may think so. But once again, it's a fact that over the past ten years there's been a steady reduction in the nuclear arsenals of nuclear weapon states.

There is a global consensus on the international side that in the event of violation and breach of the treaty, there is a threat to international peace and security, as the Security Council has recognized. We consider the debates at the IAEA in recent years on the issue of non-proliferation satisfactory. We think the adoption of Security Council resolution 1540, which requires states to have a system of export controls, is accepted and is being implemented by a growing number of states which realize that they must not only be concerned about their own attitude but also the conduct of people on their territory. The resolution was adopted after the Khan affair. I believe, all in all, that we're not describing solely a crisis scenario. We're describing a scenario in which the existence of a crisis leads to greater international resolve to respond to that particular problem. We don't consider the Treaty is becoming less relevant, quite the contrary. Nor do we think that non-proliferation commitments, which are necessary to guarantee peace, should somehow depend on progress, calculated inch by inch, in disarmament. There's an objective which is, I believe, recognized by all and which has value as such. Thank you./.