

Research Axes

[I- Europe and nuclear deterrence](#)

[II- Strategic knowledge: between academia and expertise](#)

[III- New areas of conflict and future of deterrence](#)

I- Europe and nuclear deterrence

In a context where the major Euro-Atlantic and global balances are shifting, the first theme of the CIENS aims to explore the relationship between Europe, Europeans and nuclear deterrence, and is based on three questions: (1) the diversity and convergence of European nuclear trajectories; (2) European arms control and disarmament policies, insofar as they affect the European security architecture; (3) the conditions under which European strategic autonomy is possible.

European nuclear trajectory(s)?

Through the notion of 'nuclear trajectory', this first sub-area aims to explore, on the one hand, the plurality of European historical experiences of the nuclear age and of deterrence, at different levels (that of citizens and public opinion; that of the stato-national and interstate levels; that of the European level, of the various nuclear tests; that of the European Union, of the European Union and of the United States) and, on the other hand, the diversity of European experiences of the nuclear age and of deterrence; secondly, the hypothesis of the emergence of a specific relationship between Europeans and nuclear weapons, by identifying certain recurrences, certain circulations, potentially constituting a common 'European' approach to the nuclear issue, over and above the deep divisions that have divided Europeans (between nuclear and non-nuclear countries ; between political decision-makers, diplomats and the military on the one hand, and civil society and public opinion on the other; or between 'Gaullists' and 'Atlanticists'). By integrating the contributions of cultural history and strategic studies, the aim is, on the one hand, to question the existence of a common strategic and nuclear culture that is specifically 'European' and, on the other hand, to explore the nuclear imaginations of European societies faced with the balance of terror. Examining the hypothesis of a European specificity in the relationship to

Centre interdisciplinaire sur les enjeux stratégiques (CIENS)

nuclear energy corollarily raises the question of what differentiates Europeans from other major geopolitical groupings (Asia, the 'Global South', or even the two superpowers of the Cold War era, the USSR/Russia and the United States). The aim here is by no means to arrive at a univocal and static definition of what constitutes nuclear Europeanness, nor to construct simplistic and artificial dichotomies between the European and the non-European, but to examine how 'Europe', as a project for building unity, or at least coherence between the powers of the Old Continent, has been interpreted and used to define oneself and the other, for example in the development of relations between Europeans and Americans or Europeans and Soviets.

European arms control (and disarmament) policies and the (re)structuring of power relations

Since 1945, and far from the linearity sometimes assumed by expert accounts, nuclear arms control, anti-proliferation and disarmament policies have been the subject of multiple investments and reinvestments at both national and international levels. While arms control measures in Europe played a crucial role in reducing tensions during the Cold War, they now seem to be undermined by contemporary changes (erosion of American power, rise of China, Russian imperialism, advent of new technologies, etc.). What are the empirical implications of these reconfigurations of international security mechanisms? How do they manifest themselves in practice? What links do these practices have with international power structures? This second sub-area aims to explore the social processes of composition and recomposition of arms control policies and institutions, through the prism of relations and transactions between political, legal, military and scientific fields. It also aims to investigate how these processes interact with the transformation of strategic balances and the production of regional and international 'security architectures'. The study of the crystallisation as well as the disintegration of these mechanisms provides an insight into the relationships between national and international political struggles, and raises the question of the marginality of the role of European states in the institutionalisation of the 'European security architecture'. The aim of this sub-field is therefore, firstly, to shed light on the foundations of this apparent paradox, between the centrality of Europe as an issue and the marginality of Europeans as actors in their own security; secondly, to draw on a socio-history of arms control institutions in Europe to provide a better account of contemporary strategic transformations and their effects on European policies.

"European strategic autonomy

The aim of the third sub-area is to examine the possibility of "European strategic autonomy" or "European power". While the idea of a European foreign and defence policy developed in the 1990s, following the Maastricht Treaty and then after the Lisbon Treaty with the creation of the European External Action Service, Russia's invasion of Ukraine placed the strengthening of European military capabilities at the centre of political attention and strategic studies. The aim is to study the development of European military capabilities, attempts to pool and coordinate

Centre interdisciplinaire sur les enjeux stratégiques (CIENS)

national armies, and the limits encountered in bringing together military doctrines and techniques in Europe. In particular, we will explore the links between European defense and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and the possibility of developing an autonomous European pillar within the latter, in a context where American investment in the Alliance is regularly called into question. We will also examine the gradual emergence of economic, industrial, energy and technological issues in European strategic discourse, and the consequences that the militarisation of these issues could have. Finally, this sub-area invites us to examine how the various European countries perceive strategic issues, and how each of them defines its relationship to the defence of its territory, or of a shared territory - whether this be 'European' territory or that of the Atlantic Alliance.

II- Strategic knowledge: between academia and expertise

The CIENS' second area of research focuses on strategic knowledge, its uses and modes of production, and hence the relationship between academia and political and administrative circles in their approach to nuclear and strategic affairs. The aim of this area is to develop a reflective approach to the very specific status of the CIENS, at the junction of the world of research and that of political and strategic decision-making, and more broadly: (1) to the relations maintained between academics and practitioners on nuclear defence and strategic issues; (2) to the normative issues of deterrence; (3) to strategic knowledge beyond the West.

Research, expertise and practice in strategic issues

The specific nature of the CIENS, as a meeting point for teacher-researchers and experts, invites particular interest in the differences in approaches and contributions, but also in the relations maintained between academics and practitioners on the subject of military nuclear studies. The emergence of knowledge on strategy and military knowledge is nothing new in the twentieth century. However, after the Second World War, the enlistment of experts in the conduct of the Cold War and the structuring of the disciplines of political science and international relations, supported in particular by organisations such as UNESCO and American philanthropic foundations, provided a new context for the enlistment of knowledge in the conduct of international affairs. By raising the question of the relationship between academics and experts on strategic knowledge, this sub-field invites us to consider the place of military nuclear power as an object of study in the constitution of disciplinary fields and in their most significant developments. From a complementary perspective on the construction of strategic knowledge and in line with the work devoted to the 'social sciences of the Cold War', the aim will also be to highlight how East-West tensions have encouraged the development of certain paradigms in the social sciences. Finally, it will examine the applicative dimension of knowledge on military nuclear power, looking in particular at the dissemination of social science studies and models to

Centre interdisciplinaire sur les enjeux stratégiques (CIENS)

administrative and political fields, and analysing the ways in which scholarly and/or expert references become State references.

Normative issues of deterrence

Building on the work carried out within the 'Ethics and Nuclear Weapons' seminar, organised by CIENS in the early years of its existence, this second sub-area aims to continue exploring the moral dilemmas posed by nuclear deterrence by highlighting the central role played by certain twentieth-century philosophers (Karl Jaspers, Jean-Paul Sartre, Raymond Aron, Thérèse Delpech and Pierre Hassner, among others) have played a central role in thinking about nuclear weapons, their (non-)use and, more generally, the reconfiguration of concepts of war and peace that has gone hand in hand with the so-called 'nuclear age'. The nuclear weapon, which contains violence in both senses of the term - both as the embodiment of excess and as the only instrument capable of limiting that excess - appears to be an 'agent of universalisation', as humanity becomes aware of its unity in the face of an existential threat that concerns it as a whole. The era of nuclear deterrence can therefore be seen as a transitional phase (or via the notion of a necessary evil), allowing the immediate absence of cataclysmic conflict between the great powers (the 'pax atomica', or peace in its negative sense), But this should in no way prevent us from actively seeking, hic et nunc, the conditions for moving beyond it towards a real or positive peace, based on cooperation between states and complete disarmament - part of a cosmopolitical horizon inherited from the Enlightenment, presupposing a transformation of man and of the political organisation of humanity. Within this sub-area, reflections on the normative issues associated with deterrence could be pursued by examining the relationship between nuclear deterrence and democracy.

Strategic knowledge beyond the West

By attempting to decentralise the analysis of strategic models in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, this final sub-area aims to study strategic knowledge beyond the West. Since the end of the Cold War, both the geographical origins of the countries where the nuclear risk is considered to be greatest (North Korea, Iran and, more generally, the Asia-Pacific region) and the countries that are parties to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (CTBT) have forced us to shift our focus and look at new areas for analysing strategic knowledge. In this sense, this sub-field is part of a particularly fertile literature on proliferation and non-proliferation, based on non-Western fields of investigation. This work has shed light on the colonial stakes of military nuclear power (in India and Kazakhstan), but also on the dynamics of abandoning or renouncing nuclear weapons in radically changing political contexts (South Africa and Ukraine), and on the interweaving of recognition on the international stage and military nuclear power (China and Brazil). As well as shifting the focus geographically, this last sub-area also invites us to consider the subject of military nuclear power in new non-Western fields of investigation, whether by

Centre interdisciplinaire sur les enjeux stratégiques (CIENS)

focusing on the question of the supply of natural and technical resources or, ultimately, on nuclear testing. Taking a resolutely interdisciplinary approach, it also questions the categories of thought used in the analysis of military nuclear power, and more specifically, the dynamics of circulation, appropriation and distortion of theories, methods and concepts used in the analysis of strategic issues (for example, the notion of the 'rogue state', that of 'responsible' or 'irresponsible' nuclear power, or the dichotomy between 'the West and the Rest').

III- New areas of conflict and the future of deterrence

The third area of research at CIENS calls for new areas of conflict and new actors to be taken into account in strategic issues, insofar as the emergence of these areas and actors may increase or complicate the risks of a rise to extremes.

Cyber and outer space

This sub-area aims to shed light on the specific mechanisms and issues at stake in the political, military and economic competitions taking place in cyberspace and outer space, where new forms of conflict are emerging. This sub-discipline looks in particular at 'cyber' strategic issues. The first two decades of the 21st century, marked by the increasing digitisation of societies and economies, have seen 'cyberspace' assert itself as a new arena for strategic confrontation and competition between states. By multiplying the number of 'grey zones' that blur the boundaries and definitions of war, cyberspace raises specific challenges. How can we define the security threats posed by cyberspace? How do we respond to attacks or incidents that fall short of the threshold for the use of armed force? How can we identify and prevent the risks of escalation and armed conflict that could arise from a cyber incident? How are standards developed to govern the conduct of states in cyberspace? This sub-area also examines strategic issues through the prism of outer space. Russia's anti-satellite launch in November 2021 and North Korea's successful launch of a spy satellite in November 2023 are indicative of the increased militarisation of space. How is political, military and economic competition structured around space issues? What are the approaches and mechanisms for managing the risks of escalation specific to these areas? What role do European states play in this strategic context? What role do private companies play?

Technologies, artificial intelligence and new risks of escalation

CIENS is also studying the impact of the development of artificial intelligence on strategic issues, particularly in terms of its ability to transform our relationship with information and public decision-making. Artificial intelligence is already changing journalistic practices, the information economy and the strategies of political players at home and abroad. They are also set to transform the way governments fight for influence through information technology, as well as

Centre interdisciplinaire sur les enjeux stratégiques (CIENS)

the contours of possible military manoeuvres in the media space, particularly those aimed at 'social networks' during conflicts or external operations. What is the impact of artificial intelligence on our national and international political systems? What are the effects of artificial intelligence on information for election campaigns or inter-state conflicts? Have we entered a new era of "information warfare"? What are its forms and implications? More broadly, this area also aims to study the link between the development of a new technology and the emergence of new risks of conflict.

The future of war and deterrence

Finally, CIENS is developing research into the restructuring of power relations, emerging forms of conflict and their interaction with nuclear deterrence. The research carried out under this sub-area includes an analysis of the challenges posed by the growing involvement of private companies in the management of high-intensity conflicts. The example of Elon Musk's company Starlink and its role, widely publicised in the media, in setting up fast and secure Internet access for the Ukrainian army following the Russian invasion, demonstrates the need to refine our understanding of the new ways in which the private sector is involved in international crises and belligerence. We will also look at how energy and environmental issues play a part in contemporary power rivalries. How are these issues taken into account in military affairs? Finally, the emergence of new technologies raises questions about the sustainability of regional or global strategic stability. In this respect, what are the specific features and risks represented by the balances that are being created? How are the widespread use of drones, changes in international law, the strategic reinvestment of outer space and the integration of artificial intelligence into weapons systems and decision-making likely to affect inter-state conflict, strategic dialogue and the future of nuclear deterrence?