

Anniversary of the Lancaster House Treaties  
November 1, 2025

## **Retired General Bernard Norlain \***



After the end of the Second World War, our two countries, the United Kingdom and France, had no choice but to launch our own nuclear weapons programs in order to get our own atomic weapons.

We needed to compensate for the post war weakening of our positions on the international stage.

Also resulting from the loss of the colonial empires. The humiliation of the 1940 defeat for France. The failure of the Suez Campaign in 1956, where the test of nuclear blackmail from the USSR, however hypothetical, put us under pressure. Intensified by the hegemony of the United States, we were pushed to seek ways to regain strategic autonomy and preserve our threatened status as great powers.

The nuclear bomb seemed to be the best way to consolidate these positions as permanent members of the UN Security Council and to remain among the major architects of security and international order.

Although we followed different paths; one country cooperating with the United States in building its nuclear force. And the other, gradually seeking to achieve technological and strategic autonomy; we finally ended up realising our shared destiny.

This awareness was materialised in November 2010 with the signing of the Lancaster House bilateral treaties, which include a section on defense cooperation, including the security of national nuclear deterrents, and a section on the sharing of radiographic and hydrodynamic facilities.

This approach will continue throughout the following years and will culminate in the declaration of July 10, 2025.

Today, we are gathered on the anniversary of these treaties to denounce the dangers of an illusory pursuit of power through the possession of nuclear weapons.

As much as the international context, and particularly the European context, justifies and requires a strong and independent Franco-British alliance in matters of security and defence.

The nuclear base of this alliance, can lead us not only into an exhausting nuclear arms race, with the risk to end in the abyss.

The conflicts of the 21st century, and particularly Russia's war against Ukraine, are the tragic confirmation that, not only a nuclear war is still possible, contrary to what the nuclear doctrines of our two countries would have us believe. But also, that nuclear weapons are the ultimate weapon of predators.

Eighty years after the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, which reduced these two cities to radioactive ash and demonstrated the barbarity of nuclear weapons. The world is descending into the darkness of geopolitical chaos in which only the law of the strongest and every man for himself are the rule.

A rule based, for those who possess nuclear weapons, on the nuclear threat.

Furthermore, the threat of destruction to humanity posed by nuclear weapons seeks to justify itself through the implementation of a doctrine of nuclear deterrence intended to provide an ultimate guarantee of security for nuclear countries and the protection of their populations.

However, this guarantee is an illusion, a deadly illusion. First, in principle, because it is based on a gamble, that of the rationality of a potential adversary who forgets the inherent otherness of human nature and blinds itself to the current geostrategic reality: chaotic, brutal, multipolar, and where nuclear-armed countries do not respect their commitment to nuclear disarmament and, on the contrary, through their nuclear-based defense policy, actually encourage nuclear proliferation. In practice, it is also an illusion because it can be circumvented both technologically and operationally and does not prevent wars while inhibiting the will of democratic countries to defend themselves against nuclear blackmail.

Finally, nuclear deterrence is based on a denial of democracy. By promising an absolute guarantee of security, it distracts citizens from their civic duty to be closely involved in the defense and security of their country. It is also taking place in an environment of secrecy and in the absence of a genuine democratic debate, making their peoples hostages to a vision of power that can only lead to apocalypse.

Under these conditions, as France and the United Kingdom celebrate the fifteenth anniversary of their nuclear alliance, we, as representatives of churches and organizations dedicated to nuclear disarmament, must firmly call on the governments of our two countries:

- To commit to promoting an ambition for their countries that is no longer based on death but on life. In particular, by no longer making nuclear weapons the "keystone" of their defense and security policies.
- To respect their commitment under the Non-Proliferation Treaty to move toward nuclear disarmament.
- To rejoin the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. To stop blocking UN disarmament initiatives
- To immediately halt programs to modernize their arsenals

Only in this way can our countries contribute to creating a safer world. Security is not built on the threat of genocide. It is built through cooperation, international law, and trust.

\* Five-star retired General Bernard Norlain, born in 1939, an engineer from the Air Force Academy, was from 1986 to 1989 head of the military cabinet of Prime Minister Jacques Chirac and then Michel Rocard. From 1994 to 1996, he was director of the 'Institute of Advanced Studies in National Defense' (IHEDN). It was during this period that he was appointed Air Force General. From July 2008 to June 2011, he was Director of the *Revue Défense nationale*. On October 15, 2009, he co-signed with Michel Rocard, Alain Juppé, both former Prime Ministers, and Alain Richard, former Minister of Defense, an op-ed in the daily newspaper *Le Monde* to advocate for nuclear disarmament. He is the successor to former Defense Minister Paul Quilès as head of the 'Initiatives for Nuclear Disarmament' (IDN) association and a member of the international movement 'Global Zero' for the elimination of nuclear weapons. He is a Commander of the Legion of Honor and has received the Mahatma Gandhi Gold Medal from UNESCO.