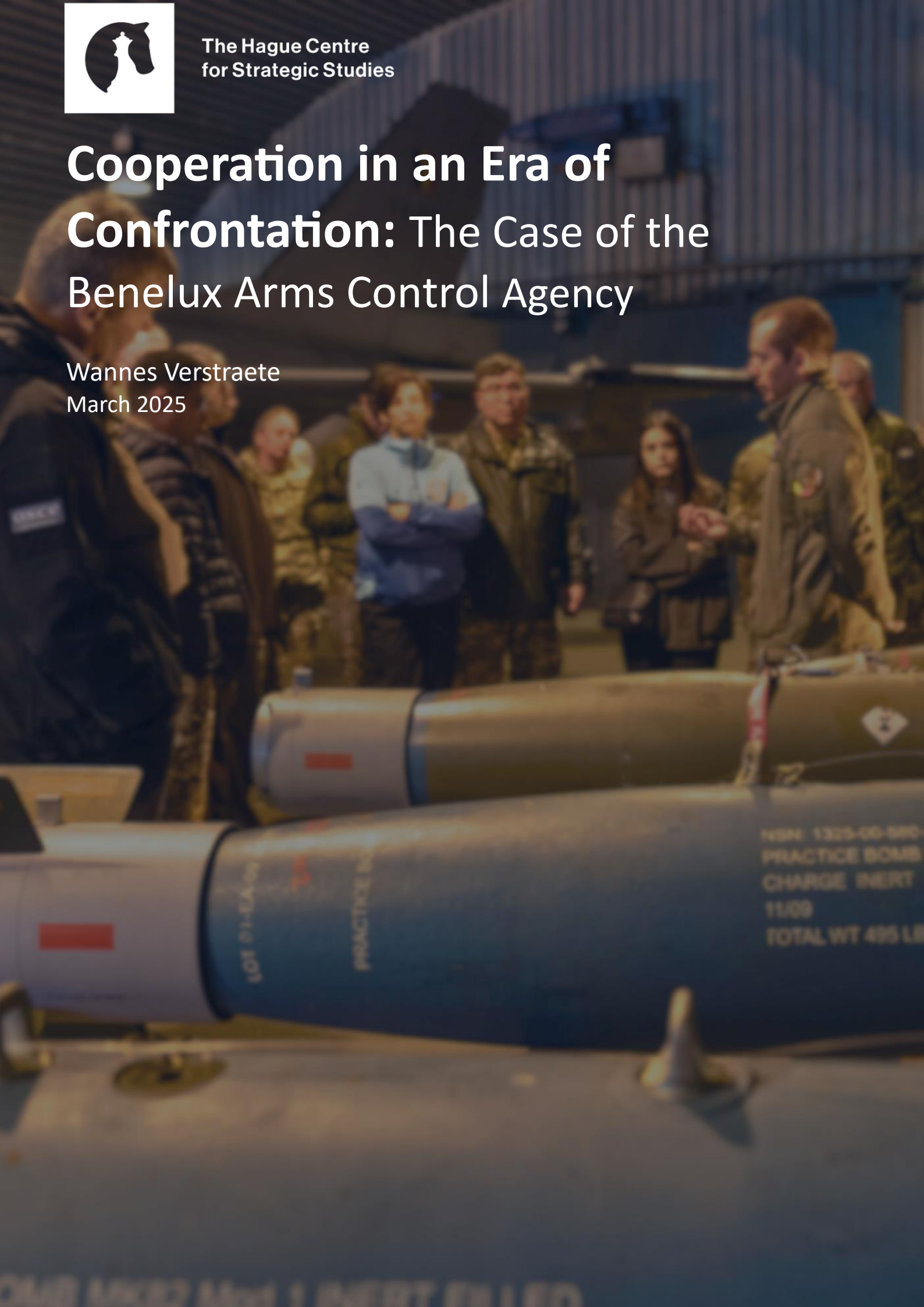


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# Cooperation in an Era of Confrontation: The Case of the Benelux Arms Control Agency

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# Key takeaways

- The global and regional arms control architecture is in dire straits. Russia's irresponsible rhetoric and actions harmed or destroyed multiple arms control agreements. The People's Republic of China's refuses to engage in a substantive arms control dialogue with the United States while at the same time being opaque about its nuclear expansion. The return of Donald J. Trump as President of the United States also leads to increased uncertainty about future US arms control initiatives.
- In this rapidly changing geopolitical context, middle and minor powers have fewer options available regarding arms control. Types of arms control cooperation can be divided into unilateral, bilateral, minilateral, and multilateral forms of cooperation on the one hand, and diplomatic and military or operational cooperation on the other. Subsequently, the author argues that minilateral cooperation can offer possibilities at a time when other forms of cooperation are becoming more difficult.
- As a successful example of trilateral cooperation in conventional arms control, the establishment, the current role, and future opportunities for the Benelux Arms Control Agency (BACA) between Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg are discussed.
- Consequently, the author suggests that Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg should bolster BACA by (1) providing increased support for efforts to maintain the (diplomatic and technical) knowledge and expertise; (2) future-proofing the cooperation by exploring the possibilities of emerging and disruptive technologies & expanding the human and material resources; and (3) broadening the thematic scope of the cooperation to weapons of mass destruction.

# Introduction

After the successes of bilateral and multilateral arms control and non-proliferation during the second half and after the Cold War, the worsening geopolitical situation over the last years has resulted in the erosion of the arms control and non-proliferation architecture. While formal arms control treaties may become even more difficult in the coming years, experts and states are exploring informal arms control opportunities and trying to retain the experience and expertise regarding, for instance, the negotiation, implementation, and verification of arms control agreements.

Subsequently, the establishment, the current role, and future opportunities for the Benelux Arms Control Agency (BACA) as a successful example of trilateral conventional arms control cooperation will be the central focus of the article. Such minilateral cooperation in an era of confrontation is necessary because a Europe without conventional arms control guardrails results in a greater risk of escalation. Moreover, Kim Westerich-Fellner argues that “with no modern comprehensive communication framework between signatories, there is a black hole of information regarding any military activity at all”.<sup>1</sup>

Consequently, while major powers are unwilling to adhere to legacy arms control agreements or create new ones, middle and minor powers should hold on to their past experiences and prepare for more favourable times. The three nations that form BACA should thus strengthen the agency by (1) providing increased support for efforts to maintain the (diplomatic and technical) knowledge and expertise; (2) future-proofing the cooperation by exploring the possibilities of emerging and disruptive technologies & expanding the human and material resources; and (3) broadening the thematic scope of the cooperation to weapons of mass destruction.

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<sup>1</sup> Kim Westerich-Fellner, ‘Up in arms: European security options for a post-cooperative era’, *ECFR Commentary*, 20 September 2024, <https://ecfr.eu/article/up-in-arms-european-security-options-for-a-post-cooperative-era/>.

# Regional Arms Control in Dire Straits

The prospects of global and regional arms control seem dire given Russia's violation, suspension, de-ratification, and withdrawal from multiple arms control agreements; the People's Republic of China's unwillingness to have substantive bilateral talks on arms control with the United States; and the return to power of Donald J. Trump as President of the United States.

Over the past years, the Russian Federation's rhetoric and actions have undermined arms control agreements and the non-proliferation regime. For example, regarding conventional arms control in the framework of the Organisation on Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Russia suspended its participation in 2007 – to wage war against Georgia – and made the decision to completely withdraw in May 2023 from the 1990 Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE Treaty) that for years limited the size of the conventional forces of the state parties.<sup>2</sup> Russia also withdrew from the 1992 Open Skies Treaty (OST) in December 2021 which increased transparency via unarmed reconnaissance flights above the state parties.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, Russia also negated sharing the annual national data on its military forces as stipulated in the Vienna Document (VD), a confidence and security-building mechanism that regulates the notification and observation of military exercises.<sup>4</sup>

On nuclear arms control, Russia violated over the past decade the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty that banned ground-launched ballistic and cruise missiles with ranges from 500 to 5500 kilometres. This subsequently led to the US withdrawing from the INF in 2019, a move that was supported by all NATO Allies.<sup>5</sup> Russia also suspended on 21 February 2023 its participation in the 2010 New START Treaty, the last remaining bilateral arms control agreement between the United States and Russia.<sup>6</sup> Lastly, Russia also negatively impacted the nuclear non-proliferation regime by de-ratifying in November 2023 the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT)<sup>7</sup> and voting as the only state party against the final document of the 2022 NPT Review Conference.<sup>8</sup> All of this has led observers, such as Nicholas Lokker, to claim that "In Russia's perceived war with the West, arms control is collateral damage".<sup>9</sup> Moreover, in November 2024, Russia battle-tested an

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<sup>2</sup> Gabriela Iveliz Rosa Hernández, 'Russia Formally Withdraws From CFE Treaty', *Arms Control Association*, June 2023, <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2023-06/news/russia-formally-withdraws-cfe-reaty>.

<sup>3</sup> Hollis Rammer, 'Russia Officially Leaves Open Skies Treaty', *Arms Control Association*, July/August 2021, <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2021-07/news/russia-officially-leaves-open-skies-treaty>.

<sup>4</sup> Gabriela Rosa Hernández, 'Russia Refuses Annual Vienna Document Data Exchange', *Arms Control Association*, March 2023, <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2023-03/news/russia-refuses-annual-vienna-document-data-exchange>.

<sup>5</sup> NATO, 'Statement on Russia's failure to comply with the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty: Issued by the North Atlantic Council, Brussels, 1 February 2019', [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news\\_162996.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_162996.htm).

<sup>6</sup> Heather Williams, 'Russia Suspends New START and Increases Nuclear Risks', *Center for Strategic & International Studies Critical Questions*, 23 February 2023, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/russia-suspends-new-start-and-increases-nuclear-risks>.

<sup>7</sup> Camille Grand, 'Another blow to arms control: Russia's 'de-ratification' of the nuclear test ban treaty', *ECFR Policy Alert*, 2 November 2023, <https://ecfr.eu/article/another-blow-to-arms-control-russias-de-ratification-of-the-nuclear-test-ban-treaty/>.

<sup>8</sup> United Nations Meeting Coverage and Press Releases, 'Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference Ends without Adopting Substantive Outcome Document Due to Opposition by One Member State: Delegates Broadly Condemn Russian's Federation's 'Dangerous Nuclear Rhetoric'', 26 August 2022, <https://press.un.org/en/2022/dc3850.doc.htm>.

<sup>9</sup> Nicholas Lokker, 'In Russia's perceived war with the West, arms control is collateral damage', *European Leadership Network Commentary*, 13 January 2025, <https://europeanleadershipnetwork.org/commentary/in-russias-perceived-war-with-the-west-arms-control-is-collateral-damage/>.

intermediate-range ballistic missile (IRBM) called ‘Oreshnik’ against the Ukrainian city of Dnipro.<sup>10</sup> Consequently, Russia’s actions have not only diplomatic but also operational and strategic consequences.

Apart from the discussion in November 2024 between the People's Republic of China and the United States, China has thus far been unwilling to set up a substantive bilateral dialogue on arms control with the United States.<sup>11</sup> The People's Republic of China does engage the other nuclear weapon states in the P5 – the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC): The People's Republic of China, France, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom, and the United States – with its so-called ‘No-first-use of Nuclear Weapons Initiative’.<sup>12</sup> In contrast, China is simultaneously expanding and modernising its nuclear weapons arsenal.<sup>13</sup>

Lastly, the decision taken by former President George W. Bush in December 2001 to withdraw from the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty arguably already undermined US trustworthiness.<sup>14</sup> And if the first Trump Administration’s record on arms control is indicative of his present approach to arms control – exemplified by, for instance, the US withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) or Iran Nuclear Deal on 8 May 2018,<sup>15</sup> the failed US-North Korean summits in Singapore (2018) and Hanoi (2019),<sup>16</sup> the withdrawal from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty on 2 August 2019,<sup>17</sup> and the withdrawal from the Open Skies Treaty on 22 November 2020<sup>18</sup> – the US seems also not a requesting party regarding arms control. Subsequently, it is increasingly likely that New START, after Russia’s suspension in 2023, will expire in 2026 given the national positions of both parties.<sup>19</sup> Nonetheless, at the beginning of his second term, President Donald J. Trump stated during the Davos World Economic Forum that he would explore the possibility of conducting “denuclearisation” talks with the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China, but did not provide an actual concrete plan.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Sidharth Kaushal and Matthew Savill, ‘The Oreshnik Ballistic Missile: From Russia with Love?’, *RUSI Commentary*, 10 December 2024, <https://rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/oreshnik-ballistic-missile-russia-love>.

<sup>11</sup> Daryl G. Kimball, ‘The US and China re-engage on arms control. What may come next’, *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 15 November 2023, <https://thebulletin.org/2023/11/the-us-and-china-re-engage-on-arms-control-what-may-come-next/>.

<sup>12</sup> Amy F. Woolf, Nikolai Sokov, and Dai Huaicheng, ‘Evaluating Current Arms-control Proposals: Perspectives from the US, Russia and China’, *The International Institute for Strategic Studies*, October 2024, [https://www.iiss.org/globalassets/media-library---content---migration/files/research-papers/2024/10/mdi-report/iiss\\_mdi\\_evaluating-current-arms-control-proposals\\_22102024.pdf](https://www.iiss.org/globalassets/media-library---content---migration/files/research-papers/2024/10/mdi-report/iiss_mdi_evaluating-current-arms-control-proposals_22102024.pdf).

<sup>13</sup> Hans M. Kristensen, Matt Korda, Eliana Johns, and Mackenzie Knight, ‘Chinese nuclear weapons, 2024’, *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 80, No. 1 (2024), 49-72, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00963402.2023.2295206>.

<sup>14</sup> Arms Control Association, ‘U.S. Withdrawal From the ABM Treaty: President Bush’s Remarks and U.S. Diplomatic Notes’, January 2002, <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2002-01/us-withdrawal-abm-treaty-president-bushs-remarks-and-us-diplomatic-notes>

<sup>15</sup> The White House, ‘President Donald J. Trump is Ending United States Participation in an Unacceptable Iran Deal’, 8 May 2028, <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/president-donald-j-trump-ending-united-states-participation-unacceptable-iran-deal/>.

<sup>16</sup> Leon V. Sigal, ‘Paved with Good Intentions: Trump’s Nuclear Diplomacy with North Korea’, *Journal for Peace and Nuclear Disarmament* 3, No. 1 (2020), 163-182, <https://doi.org/10.1080/25751654.2020.1751549>.

<sup>17</sup> C. Todd Lopez, ‘U.S. Withdraws From Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty’, *U.S. Department of Defense*, 2 August 2019, <https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/article/article/1924779/us-withdraws-from-intermediate-range-nuclear-forces-treaty/>.

<sup>18</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, ‘DOD Statement on Open Skies Treaty Withdrawal’, 21 May 2020, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/release/article/2195239/dod-statement-on-open-skies-treaty-withdrawal/>.

<sup>19</sup> Samuel Charap and Christian Curriden, ‘U.S. Options for Post-New START Arms Control with Russia’, *RAND Expert Insights*, 30 July 2024, <https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PEA739-1.html>.

<sup>20</sup> Daryl Kimball and Xiaondon Liang, ‘ACA Welcomes Trump’s Acknowledgement of the “Tremendous” Cost and Dangers of Nuclear Weapons and Interest in “Denuclearization” with Russia and China’, *Arms Control Association*, 24 January 2025, <https://www.armscontrol.org/pressroom/2025-01/aca-welcomes-trumps-acknowledgement-tremendous-cost-and-dangers-nuclear-weapons>

# Types of Arms Control Cooperation as a Middle or Minor Power

Consequently, while Trump attempts to initiate such talks, the three major nuclear powers appear disinclined to engage in meaningful arms control discussions. This has resulted in a situation where middle and minor powers have fewer options available regarding arms control (see table). Unilateral diplomatic statements that call for arms control among the three major nuclear powers may offer some ‘cheap’ political gains domestically, however, such calls will remain unanswered given the absence of leverage. Unilaterally limiting the use of certain types of weaponry – such as the new Belgian coalition agreement stating the national framework for the deployment of Lethal Autonomous Weapon Systems (LAWS) will be limited to adhere to the principles of international humanitarian law<sup>21</sup> – can serve as a positive signal or establish a precedent. However, it is unlikely to have a significant impact on the major powers.

Bilateral diplomatic engagement of a middle or minor power towards a major power could keep arms control under attention. Similarly, military or operational cooperation – for instance, the Norwegian-US small arms working group that was established in late 1999 “to assist at-risk countries in the destruction of excess SA/LW [small arms and light weapons]”<sup>22</sup> – can have beneficial effects but, nonetheless, do not bring the major powers together at the table.

Multilateral diplomatic cooperation is, as previously mentioned, under pressure. This is especially the case if major powers are involved. An example is the NPT review conference of 2022, which, due to Russian opposition, did not result in a final document. Subsequently, smaller initiatives such as the Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Initiative (NPDI) – a group of 10 NPT states parties (including the Netherlands) – focus on taking “forward the consensus outcomes of the 2010 NPT Review Conference”.<sup>23</sup> An example of multilateral military cooperation is military-to-military contacts and, more concretely, military dialogues, such as the High-Level Military Doctrine Seminar or the Expert Level Workshops of the Structured Dialogue in the framework of the OSCE. Nonetheless, in the 2021 High-Level Military Doctrine Seminar, Russia decided to not send a high-level military delegation.<sup>24</sup>

Minilateral cooperation can offer possibilities at a time when other forms of cooperation are becoming more difficult. Collective diplomatic statements carry more weight than individual appeals. Moreover, military or operational cooperation in minilateral formats creates opportunities for like-minded middle and minor powers to retain and strengthen knowledge and expertise.

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<sup>21</sup> *Federaal Regeerakkoord: 2025-2029*, 31 January 2025, p. 183.

<sup>22</sup> Bureau of Political-Military Affairs, ‘Background Paper: U.S. Policy and Programs on Destroying Excess Small Arms’, 2 June 2001, <https://2001-2009.state.gov/t/pm/rls/fs/3767.htm>.

<sup>23</sup> *Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Initiative: 11th High-level Meeting Joint High-level Statement, The Tenth NPT Review Conference*, New York, 1 August 2022.

<sup>24</sup> Stephanie Liechtenstein, ‘In Historical First, Russian High-Level Delegates Absent from OSCE Military Doctrine Seminar’, *Security and Human Rights Monitor*, 18 February 2021, <https://www.shrmonitor.org/in-historical-first-russian-high-level-delegates-absent-from-osce-military-doctrine-seminar/>.

A first example of such cooperation involving a major power is the Quad Nuclear Verification Partnership between Norway, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the United States.<sup>25</sup> Another example of regional minilateral cooperation is the Benelux Arms Control Agency (BACA).

	Diplomatic	Military/ operational
<b>Unilateral</b>	Issuing national statements	Unilateral arms limitations
<b>Bilateral</b>	Engaging a major power via diplomacy	Military cooperation 'in the field' with a major power
<b>Minilateral</b>	Issuing collective statements with like-minded nations	Military cooperation with like-minded nations
<b>Multilateral</b>	Negotiations or other forms of diplomacy in the framework of regional or international arms control regimes	Military-to-military contacts in regional or international organisations

**Table:** types of arms control cooperation as a middle or minor power.

<sup>25</sup> Quad, 'Quad Nuclear Verification Partnership: Collaborating to provide solutions to nuclear arms control and disarmament challenges', <https://quad-nvp.info>.



# BACA as Successful Example of Trilateral Arms Control Cooperation

The above-mentioned overview of the state of arms control in the world results in a difficult context for European Allies to navigate. Subsequently, cooperation with like-minded states on arms control can be an avenue to bolster one's voice and capacity in this policy field – often dominated by great powers. While multilateral regional cooperation – such as in the OSCE – has become harder since 2014 and, especially, the 2022 Russian war against Ukraine, unilateral cooperation has gained increased traction.

Since 2014, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg have worked extensively together in a trilateral Benelux format concerning conventional arms control.<sup>26</sup> The arms control agencies of the three states merged into the Benelux Arms Control Agency (BACA) which constitutes in essence a shared early warning system regarding conventional armaments via inspections. The 'Luxembourg Defence Guidelines 2035', approved by the government in 2023, describes that part of the mandate of BACA comprises "the implementation of conventional arms controls abroad in order to provide a clear and transparent picture of the number of sites housing weapons and military equipment".<sup>27</sup> Subsequently, reciprocity and transparency are crucial principles for confidence- and security-building measures (CSBMs) with non-Allied states.

The joint command and unit are stationed in Peutie (Belgium), and BACA is led by a tri-national steering group.<sup>28</sup> The unit participated in monitoring missions in Ukraine that entailed inspections done within the framework of the BACA mandate and quota missions before the Russian invasion of Ukraine in early February of 2022. Moreover, the unit also assisted inspections from non-NATO states on the territory of the Benelux.<sup>29</sup> A press release from the Belgian Ministry of Defence stated on 10 December 2021 that "The agency is still considered the prime example of international cooperation: nowhere else do three countries work so closely together on arms control".<sup>30</sup>

Under the OST, the Benelux is considered a single-state party.<sup>31</sup> For the CFE Treaty and the VD, the three states are individual state parties.<sup>32</sup> That said, when all NATO Allies suspended their

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<sup>26</sup> Trouw, 'Nieuw Benelux-agentschap voor wapeninspecties', 25 April 2014, <https://www.trouw.nl/nieuws/nieuw-benelux-agentschap-voor-wapeninspecties~b49c9390/?referrer=https://www.google.com/>.

<sup>27</sup> Directorate of Defence, 'The Luxembourg Defence Guidelines 2035', 2023, p. 57, <https://gouvernement.lu/dam-assets/documents/actualites/2023/05-mai/11-guidelines-defence/luxembourg-defence-guidelines-2035-en.pdf>.

<sup>28</sup> Tweede Kamer, 'Bijlage 2: Overzicht van samenwerkingsthema's', [https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&opi=89978449&url=https://www.tweedekamer.nl/downloads/document%3Fid%3D2016D47172&ved=2ahUKewiFjaHGjlmLAXGX0EAHQzeAocQFnoECBcQAQ&usg=AOvVaw28HYFHGJgQlznElRju\\_j8D](https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&opi=89978449&url=https://www.tweedekamer.nl/downloads/document%3Fid%3D2016D47172&ved=2ahUKewiFjaHGjlmLAXGX0EAHQzeAocQFnoECBcQAQ&usg=AOvVaw28HYFHGJgQlznElRju_j8D).

<sup>29</sup> Benelux Interparlementaire Assemblée, 'Benelux Arms Control Agency (BACA)', November 2019, <https://www.beneluxparl.eu/nl/2019/11/26/benelux-arms-control-agency-baca/>.

<sup>30</sup> Eric Op de Beeck, 'Verderzetting samenwerking Benelux Arms Control Agency', *Ministerie van Defensie*, 10 December 2021, <https://beldefnews.mil.be/verderzetting-samenwerking-benelux-arms-control-agency/>.

<sup>31</sup> OSCE, 'TREATY ON OPEN SKIES', Article XIV, §1, <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/1/5/14127.pdf>.

<sup>32</sup> Resp. OSCE, 'TREATY ON CONVENTIONAL ARMED FORCES IN EUROPE', <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/4/9/14087.pdf>; OSCE, 'VIENNA DOCUMENT 2011 ON CONFIDENCE- AND SECURITY-BUILDING MEASURES', <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/a/4/86597.pdf>.

implementation of the CFE Treaty on 7 November 2023,<sup>33</sup> the Dutch Ambassador made a statement on behalf of the three Benelux states – because the Permanent Representation of the Netherlands to the OSCE is the depositary of the CFE Treaty for the Benelux states – explaining why they suspended their obligations under the CFE Treaty. The Ambassador pointed towards the Russian withdrawal from the treaty and war against Ukraine as the main causes. While practically all forms of arms control eroded over the past years, the Benelux states declared that they “remain firmly committed to conventional arms control as a key element of Euro-Atlantic security based on key principles and commitments, including reciprocity, transparency, and host nation consent”. Additionally, they stated that “Through the Benelux Arms Control Agency, we will continue to implement measures to reduce military risk, with States in the Euro-Atlantic area that share these principles and commitments”.<sup>34</sup>

A concrete example of the commitment to uphold transparency was a visit that the Benelux states organised at the end of September 2024 for an OSCE delegation to observe the military practices of the three states, this time the Belgian motorised brigade and Dutch F-35 fighter jets.<sup>35</sup> The aim of this event was to meet the Benelux obligation under Chapter IV ‘Contacts’ of the 2011 VD which stipulates that the participating states should organise a visit every 5 years to an airbase and military facility.<sup>36</sup> The Vice Chief of Defence from the Netherlands stressed the importance of the visit and stated: “Today, military contacts under the Vienna Document are among the few remaining pillars of the system”. Furthermore, during the current era of confrontation on the European continent, the Vice Chief of Defence said “Together, let us work to protect the principles reflected in the Vienna Document, and make sure that countries who share our values continue to foster a culture of military transparency”.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> NATO, ‘North Atlantic Council statement on the Allied response to Russia’s withdrawal from the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe’, 7 November 2023, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_219811.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_219811.htm); William Alberque, ‘NATO allies fully suspend implementation of the CFE Treaty’, *The International Institute for Strategic Studies Online Analysis*, 8 November 2023, <https://www.iiss.org/online-analysis/online-analysis/2023/10/nato-allies-fully-suspend-implementation-of-the-cfe-treaty/>.

<sup>34</sup> Permanent Representation of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), ‘OSCE 89th Joint FSC - PC meeting Vienna, 8 November 2023: BENELUX Statement delivered by Ambassador Christophe Kamp’, FSC-PC.DEL/61/23, 9 November 2023, <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/5/1/559218.pdf>.

<sup>35</sup> Y. Willems, ‘Benelux Arms Control Agency (BACA): transparantie voor vrede’, *Ministerie van Defensie*, 30 September 2024, <https://beldefnews.mil.be/benelux-arms-control-agency-baca-transparantie-voor-vrede/>.

<sup>36</sup> ‘VIENNA DOCUMENT 2011 ON CONFIDENCE- AND SECURITY-BUILDING MEASURES’, <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/a/4/86597.pdf>.

<sup>37</sup> Ministry of Defence, ‘Speech by Vice Chief of Defence Vice Admiral Boudewijn Boots during the OCSE delegation’s arrival on September 22, 2024’, 25 September 2024, <https://english.defensie.nl/downloads/speeches/2024/09/25/speech-by-vice-chief-of-defence-vice-admiral-boudewijn-boots-during-the-ocse-delegations-arrival-on-september-22-2024>.

# Recommendations

## 1. Providing increased support for efforts to maintain the (diplomatic and technical) knowledge and expertise:

While the prospects for conventional arms control in Europe seem dire in the near future and the strengthening of collective deterrence and defence is again the priority, the efforts by BACA to keep the principles and commitments of reciprocity, transparency, and host nation consent alive remain all the more relevant. Subsequently, the risk of “the loss of critical knowledge and expertise” should be mitigated because this “will not only affect the negotiation and implementation of future treaties; it may also weaken states’ abilities to conduct relevant monitoring missions outside of the current treaty regimes”.<sup>38</sup> This is especially the case with treaties such as the OST where technical know-how is essential for the success of an unarmed reconnaissance flight mission.

## 2. Future-proofing the cooperation by exploring the possibilities of emerging and disruptive technologies & expanding the human and material resources:

Continued support for the agency by all three states is crucial as retaining the knowledge and expertise is also useful to enhance the information and intelligence position of the three involved nations. Subsequently, action is needed to futureproof their cooperation during an era of confrontation. For example, the possibilities that emerging and disruptive technologies (such as Artificial Intelligence) provide for future methods of verification should be explored, tested, and developed. Moreover, opportunities to expand the thematic scope and related human and material resources should be considered given the additional defence spending and plans to increase the amount of military personnel in the Benelux.

## 3. Broadening the thematic scope of the cooperation to weapons of mass destruction:

Consequently, enhancing military and diplomatic cooperation on arms control issues regarding weapons of mass destruction (WMD) – namely chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear weapons – should be considered. Such steps would further increase the common voice of the Benelux on all arms control matters during the current era of global and regional confrontation.

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<sup>38</sup> Westerich-Fellner, ‘Up in arms’.