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# European Nuclear Arms and Arms Control in an Age of Uncertainty

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## Abstract

The European Union (EU) now sits in the middle of an unprecedented, dangerous, and difficult insecurity vortex fuelled by the Russo-Ukrainian War, an unpredictable and unreliable relationship with the United States that regularly shifts towards various degrees of rivalry, and the expiration of the New START nuclear arms control agreement that, up until February 2026, had limited the number of warheads and delivery systems the US and Russia could possess. With a growing nuclear threat to the east and the US nuclear deterrence umbrella potentially lifted, a reasonable reaction might be for EU member states to collectively seek their own form of nuclear deterrence. This could be through the French or French/United Kingdom (UK) arsenals and/or through additional EU members developing their own national nuclear weapons programmes. However, both approaches are unrealistic due to lack of resources, political issues within the EU, and would be largely militarily ineffective. Moreover, any expansion of nuclear weapons would undermine the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and generally undermine nuclear disarmament ideals – the result which might be global nu-

clear weapons proliferation. Thus, the overall result would be a net decrease, not an increase, in EU security. A more effective approach and one that is much more feasible is for the European Union institutions to pursue global nuclear weapons arms control, focused on EU members and United Nations Security Council permanent 5 members (P5); and to focus investments in conventional arms. This report analyses the many drawbacks and limitations of an EU nuclear deterrence and then offers a set of recommendations in how the EU should pursue nuclear weapons arms control.

## 1. Introduction: A Bad New World

The European Union (EU) faces unprecedented threats and uncertainty with Europe's largest war since 1945 raging in Ukraine, Russia posing a substantial and credible threat along EU's<sup>1</sup> borders, and the United States (US) under President Trump being an unreliable strategic partner at best, and a potential military threat at worst. Thus, the EU finds itself in the unenviable and difficult situation of being surrounded by two major military powers and two nuclear superpowers. It is in this environment that the EU must make difficult decisions,

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<sup>1</sup> The term European Union (EU) is used when referring to EU member states, in place of 'Europe' which has a broader meaning and includes EU security rivals such as Russia and Belarus. The

term 'Europe' is used when referring to the continent more generally.

increase defence spending, and respond to uncertain, emerging, and growing threats. Although a surge in nuclear and conventional weapons may, on the surface, appear to be the best response to growing and uncertain threats, resource constraints compel difficult choices and trade-offs. The best approach may be to focus on conventional arms while preventing a nuclear arms race through global strategic nuclear arms control through an EU-initiated agreement that does not decrease the relative nuclear security position of any state party; an agreement that retains the near-term nuclear security status quo at lower costs.

The February 2026 expiration of the nuclear weapons-limiting New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) between the US and Russia compounds the complexity and scale of threats confronting the EU, with the EU facing nuclear weapons rivals and adversaries who are modernising and may begin to grow their arsenals. Up until recently, nuclear threats against most of Europe (west of Russia) were balanced by extended deterrence from the US's nuclear weapons umbrella.<sup>2</sup> But recent events and statements fundamentally question that guarantee and

protection – and even more threatening scenarios should not be entirely ruled out. Moscow and Washington are modernising their nuclear weapons arsenals and may expand them, lacking a formal strategic nuclear arms control agreement.<sup>3</sup>

One response to this new and troubling security environment is for the EU – in collaboration with the United Kingdom (UK) – to obtain its own nuclear deterrent that goes beyond the existing, independent French and UK nuclear arsenals. Broadly, there are two approaches to an EU nuclear deterrent: broadening the French, or a combined French-UK, nuclear weapons capabilities to more formally cover all EU members while leaving command, control, production, possession, and all other major aspects of the weapons under French/French-UK control; or EU institutions coordinating or otherwise supporting some EU member states in producing and deploying their own nuclear weapons.

As will be discussed in detail below, neither of these options will have the desired effect of increasing security for the EU, and/or they are simply unrealistic due to a combination of costs and political realities. The best approach – and the one that can bring

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<sup>2</sup> This report regularly refers to the EU and partners to differentiate from the term 'Europe' as a general term, which would include rivals such as Russia and Belarus. The EU's partners in this report include the UK, Norway, and to a lesser extent states such as Moldova and Ukraine.

<sup>3</sup> Lana Cohen, 'Nuclear Agreement Expiration Could Trigger Rapid Arms Race', Union of Concerned Scientists, 12 January 2026, <https://www.ucs.org/about/news/nuclear-agreement-expiration->

[could-trigger-rapid-arms-race](#); Anya Loukianova Fink, *Defense Primer: Strategic Nuclear Forces*, IF 10519 (Congressional Research Service (CRS), 2026); *Nuclear Weapons Ban Monitor 2026* (Norwegian People's Aid (NPA), 2026).

the EU security at lower cost – is arms control. *Adversarial* arms control fundamentally reduces the costs of security competition without decreasing security – while increasing stability. For the EU, a nuclear arms control regime that goes beyond US-Russia will increase Europe's security and decrease the likelihood of a catastrophic nuclear conflict.

The EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HR/VP), European External Action Service (EEAS), the European Commission (hereafter referred to as the *Commission*) and the European Council can, and should, take the initiative to pursue global nuclear arms control agreements that incorporate China, France, Russia, the UK and the US – or to be more succinct, the United Nations Security Council permanent five members – or P5.<sup>4</sup> A P5 strategic arms control agreement<sup>5</sup> would significantly contribute to global nuclear arms control and disarmament norms and goals and reduce the risk of a global nuclear arms conflict.<sup>6</sup> The good news is that even President Trump

seeks to reestablish strategic stability and arms control.<sup>7</sup>

One challenge, among many, however, is the European Council, HR/VP, EEAS and the Commission are not necessarily well equipped at this time to facilitate or negotiate a comprehensive strategic nuclear arms control agreement covering the P5 because EU institutions lack substantive experience in adversarial arms control agreements – that is, agreements that are made primarily between interstate rivals and involve specific quantitative limitations. Rather, the EU institutions' experience in arms control is more in the areas of counter-proliferation and universal/humanitarian arms control. Additionally, the EU only has minimal 'collective agency'<sup>8</sup> in the area of international security and arms control – which could complicate formulating, negotiating, and becoming a state party (as applicable) to any strategic arms control agreement.

Second, even should the European Council, HR/VP, and the EEAS seek to convene the P5, or the P3 with France and the UK being part

<sup>4</sup> How these different components of the European Union would collaborate on arms control is to be determined, but in general the European Council, HR/VP, and EEAS might be in charge of general engagement and diplomacy with non-EU states while the EEAS and the Commission might be charged with detailed studies, proposals, and internal EU coordination. See, for example, James McBride, 'How Does the European Union Work?', Council on Foreign Relations, 11 March 2022, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounders/how-does-european-union-work>; 'Types of Institutions, Bodies and Agencies', European Union, accessed 4 September 2026, [https://european-union.europa.eu/institutions-law-budget/institutions-and-bodies/types-institutions-and-bodies\\_en](https://european-union.europa.eu/institutions-law-budget/institutions-and-bodies/types-institutions-and-bodies_en).

<sup>5</sup> This paper uses the terms 'strategic arms control' and 'nuclear weapons arms control' interchangeably for stylistic and substantive reasons as applicable.

<sup>6</sup> Eckart Conze et al., *Nuclear Threats, Nuclear Fear and the Cold War in the 1980s*, Publications of the German Historical Institute (Cambridge University Press, 2017); John D. Maurer, 'The Purposes of Arms Control', *Texas National Security Review* 2, no. 1 (2018): 8–27; Thomas C. Schelling and Morton H. Halperin, *Strategy and Arms Control* (Twentieth Century Fund, 1961), WorldCat.

<sup>7</sup> Donald J. Trump, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (The White House, 2025).

<sup>8</sup> Alexander Høgsberg Tetzlaff and Cornelia Baci, *European Perspectives on the Global Return of Nuclear Weapons* (Djøf Publishing in cooperation with the Centre for Military Studies, 2023).

of the EU initiative, there is no guarantee that the other three nuclear weapons states would agree to participate in any EU-facilitated initiative. What the EU might offer, however, might be a comprehensive set of plans and proposals – after they have been developed – that would offer all states a retention of the nuclear security status quo at lower costs. Moreover, the EU could tie a convocation of what might be a P5 and EU (P5+1) summit to other foreign policy incentives such as trade deals, security partnerships, and other arms control agreements.

An EU-facilitated strategic arms control agreement(s) would have many benefits beyond increasing its own security and reducing the likelihood of global thermonuclear war. First, the EU would actively contribute to nuclear arms control regime building.<sup>9</sup> This would broadly promote nuclear non-proliferation, disarmament, transparency, and nuclear weapon non-use globally. Second, the EU could increase its stature by playing an important role in facilitating any major strategic arms control agreement.<sup>10</sup> Lastly, by avoiding costly and ultimately ineffective nuclear arms racing by seeking in some way to increase the EU's own nuclear

umbrella, the EU will have more resources to invest in conventional military capabilities – capabilities that are both more versatile and more relevant to present and future security threats and challenges.

## 2. Contribution and Key Messages

This analysis offers a comprehensive assessment of the EU's current security situation in light of continued rivalry with Russia, an unpredictable and uncertain relationship with the US, and the expiration of the New START nuclear arms control agreement. The analysis considers the EU's options, their limitations, and ultimately recommends that the European Council, HR/VP, and EEAS should focus on and facilitate a nuclear arms control agreement between China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Such an agreement would increase the EU's security at a substantially lower cost and with more certainty than other approaches, promote global nuclear arms control and disarmament, and permit greater

<sup>9</sup> Gloria Fernández Arribas, 'Rethinking International Institutionalisation through Treaty Organs', *International Organizations Law Review* 17, no. 2 (2020): 457–83, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15723747-2019012>; John Duffield, 'What Are International Institutions?', *International Studies Review* 9, no. 1 (2007): 1–22; Robert Jervis, 'Security Regimes', *International Organization* 36, no. 2 (1982): 357–78, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818300018981>; Ulrich Kühn, 'Institutional Resilience, Deterrence and the Transition to Zero Nuclear Weapons', *Security and Human Rights* 26, nos 2–4 (2015): 262–80, <https://doi.org/10.1163/18750230-02602002>; Sarah E.

Kreps, 'The Institutional Design of Arms Control Agreements', *Foreign Policy Analysis* 14, no. 1 (2018): 127–47, <https://doi.org/10.1093/fpa/orw045>; Andrew W. Reddie, *Governing Insecurity: Institutional Design, Compliance, and Arms Control* (ProQuest, 2019).

<sup>10</sup> Daniel Fiott, 'The Three Images of EU Strategic Autonomy: Perspectives on Wedging, Binding and Hedging', *Journal of European Integration* 47, no. 6 (2025): 825–42, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07036337.2025.2537369>.

investments in conventional arms and military capabilities. This strategic arms control approach goes against the current thinking of many experts and policy makers and against the prevailing mood across the EU.

### 3. Arms Control

#### Overview

To fully understand the present strategic nuclear arms control situation and the EU's position in the network of arms control and disarmament agreements, this section offers a brief overview of arms control agreement categories and approaches. Arms control agreements vary in the types of weapons they cover, who is subject to the controls, and why the controls are established. All manner of weapons and military capabilities are or were subject of arms control agreements. Among these are nuclear weapons; nuclear weapons-related capabilities and activities such as ballistic missile defences and nuclear weapon testing; chemical weapons; biological weapons; ballistic and cruise missiles capable of carrying nuclear warheads (whether or not they actually do); main battle tanks, combat aircraft, naval vessels; landmines; cluster munitions; and small arms. Table 1 offers a summary of agreement types with examples.

Some agreements establish a comprehensive ban on the weapon capability – such as the 1997 Anti-Personnel Landmine Ban

Treaty, 1992 Chemical Weapons Convention, or the 1972 Biological Weapons Convention; others seek to limit which states may possess the weapon, such as the 1968 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT); some seek to make access to a weapon system more difficult, but do not impose an actual prohibition, such as the 1987 Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR); and some seek to set non-zero limitations on, or prohibit specific states from having, certain military capabilities. Early examples are the peace treaties signed following World War One which prohibited the former Central Powers from possessing certain military capabilities such as submarines and combat aircraft; and the 1922 Washington Naval Treaty which limited how many capital ships France, Italy, Japan, the UK, and the US could have.

An important consideration of any arms control agreement is its area of applicability (AoA). This is determined by a combination of the weapon capability, state parties involved, and purpose of the agreement. Some agreements may have a very narrow application – such as an island, narrow waterway (strait), or along a border. Often, these fall in the category of demilitarised zones and can be monitored by third parties such as the United Nations (UN).

Although all arms control agreements control, regulate, limit, or prohibit military capabilities in some ways, agreements' goals

can differ significantly. Non-proliferation treaties (including export control agreements) seek to limit the spread of certain types of weapons but otherwise do not prohibit them globally. Universal/humanitarian arms control agreements seek to limit conflicts' suffering and, often, harm to civilians. One of the earliest international arms control agreements – the still in-force 1899 Hague Declaration – prohibited the use of hollow-point bullets because of the severe injuries they inflict. The Anti-Personnel Landmine Ban Treaty was established because of the harm that landmines posed to civilians for decades after conflicts ended. As discussed below, EU institutions have been engaged in various non-proliferation and universal/humanitarian arms control agreements and initiatives.

Lastly, and most relevant, are adversarial arms control agreements. These agreements are limited to states which are at war with one another, or otherwise have a substantial security rivalry (or had, or expect to have). The goal is to stabilise the rivalry – often by

preventing or ending arms racing, increasing transparency, and preventing one or all sides from being able to launch a successful surprise attack. This is accomplished by setting clear, formal limits primarily on the quantity of weapons although sometimes also on their quality; and establishing a rigorous system of monitoring and verification. Conventional arms control (CAC) agreements carry few or no normative elements. Nuclear arms control agreements, however, both aim to increase strategic stability by ensuring that a nuclear second-strike countervalue (population-targeting) retaliatory strike is possible – often referred to as Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD); and the normative aspect wherein all states are committed to the goal of nuclear disarmament. Strategic arms control agreements are almost always global; their AoA is the entire world because nuclear weapons often have ranges in excess of 5,000 km, making regional or local limitations irrelevant; and monitoring and verification is much easier when all weapon systems are subject to treaty limits, rather than just some.

**Table 1:** Arms Control Categories

| Category                 | Purpose                                                                                               | Examples                                                                                                                                                               |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Universal/humanitarian   | To reduce the human suffering of war to soldiers and/or civilians. Ideally should include all states. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Biological Weapons Convention</li> <li>– Chemical Weapons Convention</li> <li>– Anti-personnel Landmine Ban Treaty</li> </ul> |
| Adversarial conventional | To reduce the likelihood of a successful surprise attack (whether by one party, both, or              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Washington Naval Treaty</li> </ul>                                                                                            |

| Category              | Purpose                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Examples                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                       | several); to fix a ratio of conventional forces to end or prevent arms racing; retain the existing security relationship (military balance) at lower costs; to generally stabilise rivalries.                                                                                                                                                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– World War One peace treaties between the Allies and Central Powers</li> <li>– Conventional Armed Forces in Europe Treaty</li> <li>– Sub-Regional Arms Control Agreement for the former Yugoslav states</li> </ul> |
| Demilitarisation      | To prohibit the presence of certain or any military capabilities beyond a very limited quantity to increase the warning time of any attacks, thus decreasing the likelihood of a successful surprise attack; to decrease tensions especially in areas of contested sovereignty; to decrease sources of interstate dispute and potential conflict. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Svalbard/Spitsbergen Treaty</li> <li>– Åland Island Convention</li> <li>– Establishment of the Demilitarised Zone (DMZ) on the Korean peninsula</li> <li>– Minsk Agreements for Ukraine</li> </ul>                |
| Strategic nuclear     | To limit or reduce the number of nuclear warheads and/or delivery systems while ensuring MAD; decreasing the incentives for a nuclear first strike; contribute to global nuclear weapons disarmament; reduce the likelihood of global annihilation; reduce the likelihood of mass civilian casualty nuclear attacks.                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Partial Test Ban Treaty</li> <li>– Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty</li> <li>– Intermediate and Shorter-range Nuclear Forces Treaty</li> <li>– Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty</li> <li>– New START</li> </ul>       |
| Counter-proliferation | To prevent the spread of a certain military capability (primarily nuclear weapons) while accepting that certain states are permitted to have the capability.                                                                                                                                                                                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                       |
| Export control        | To limit the spread of a certain military capability through export controls, but otherwise no prohibition on any state possessing the capability.                                                                                                                                                                                                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Missile Technology Control Regime</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                      |

Source: Author's own compilation

To date, EU institutions have had little experience in negotiating or monitoring adversarial arms control agreements. Unlike the other types of agreements, adversarial arms control agreements often involve complicated considerations and negotiations about weapon system capabilities, existing and

potential inventories, and ultimately reaching an agreement on the ratio for each applicable military capability between each and all sides (also known as Treaty-Limited Equipment (TLE)).<sup>11</sup> During negotiations, parties often substantially disagree about what weapon systems should be included or excluded, and what the ratio should be. Non-

<sup>11</sup> A. J. Nelson, *The Arms Control Paradox: Managing Uncertainty in an Insecure World* (Stanford University Press, 2026), <https://books.google.nl/books?id=Ur3i0QEACAAJ>.

zero TLE quantities are much more complicated to monitor and verify compared to complete prohibitions. However, any future nuclear weapons arms control agreements will require the European Council and other EU institutions to be well versed in these issues and eventually develop the capabilities to implement and support any agreement.

## 4. New START and Nuclear Weapons Arms Control

Throughout the latter half of the Cold War and up until recently, the US and Soviet Union/Russia maintained several nuclear weapons-related arms control agreements that were intended to ensure MAD, limit and then reduce the number of nuclear weapons and their delivery systems, and increase transparency and predictability.<sup>12</sup> However, over the past 25 years, the agreements have expired or been nullified by withdrawals – with the only substantive nuclear arms treaty still in effect being the Limited Test Ban Treaty (LTBT) – an agreement signed by over 100 countries (including the P5).<sup>13</sup> It thus straddles humanitarian/universal,

non-proliferation, and adversarial arms control agreements.

The New START expired on 5 February 2026. This treaty limited Russia and the US to approximately 1,550 nuclear weapons spread across their triad of delivery systems: inter-continental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), long-range strategic bombers, and submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBM).<sup>14</sup> As with most previous nuclear weapons-related treaties, New START included a rigorous regime of on-site inspections and monitoring. However, due to COVID and then the war in and US support for Ukraine, Russia suspended inspections first and then information sharing. As of now, neither side has committed to or publicly undertaken measures to increase their nuclear weapons arsenals as counted by warheads and delivery systems – but without a treaty in force, nothing prevents them from doing so – even covertly. Thus, the lack of agreement substantially increases the incentives to arms race, decreases strategic stability, and limits the predictability brought about by transparency and continuous, working-level meetings and dialogue (often accomplished through formal treaty implementation bodies).<sup>15</sup>

<sup>12</sup> *Arms Control and Nonproliferation: A Catalog of Treaties and Agreements*, no. RL33865 (Congressional Research Service (CRS), 2024).

<sup>13</sup> 'Limited Test Ban Treaty (LTBT)', U.S. Department of State, accessed 2 April 2026, <https://2009-2017.state.gov/t/avc/trty/199116.htm>.

<sup>14</sup> 'New START Treaty', United States Department of State, 1 June 2023, <https://www.state.gov/new-start-treaty/>. While strategic

bombers can carry more than one nuclear weapon, each bomber is only counted as one nuclear weapon for treaty purposes.

<sup>15</sup> William Lippert, 'Delegation to Treaty Bodies and International Organizations for Conventional Arms Control Agreements in Europe: A Sum Score Evaluation', *Global Governance: A Review of Multilateralism and International Organizations* (Leiden, The Netherlands) 30, no. 1 (2024): 93–122, <https://doi.org/10.1163/19426720-03001005>.

New START's expiration increases the threat of nuclear attack, including attacks against the EU. This is due to the lack of transparency, which means both sides may feel an increased pressure to 'use or lose'; and increased nuclear weapons inventories increase states' capabilities to strike non-strategic nuclear-related targets.<sup>16</sup> To put it more simply, if Russia has more nuclear weapons, they could have more weapons above what they need to strike the US and thus more nuclear weapons available that could be used against the EU.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, New START furnished US intelligence and inspectors with information about Russia's nuclear arsenal and posture; information that was likely shared with European states at varying levels, reducing the likelihood of surprise attacks.<sup>18</sup> However, lacking US intelligence sharing (which is part of a broader, positive alliance and cooperative relationship with the US – which is no longer guaranteed) – the EU members or European Council and EU institutions might not have access to this information and intelligence even if a new agreement is made *unless* the

EU has an active role in formulating, negotiating, signing, and implementing any future agreement.

## 5. An Unexpected World

Five years ago, no one could have anticipated today's geopolitical situation. Europe was at relative peace and the US was a reliable ally and partner. No one could have predicted the full-scale war in Ukraine that began in 2022, or the US threat to invade and seize Greenland in 2026. The EU and its partners find themselves in an unexpected and undesired security situation and must adjust its policies and strategies accordingly.

The first challenge comes from the renewed great power rivalries that have settled across the world, arguably starting from the early 2000s. These rivalries were primarily between China, Russia and the US<sup>19</sup> with the EU and its European partner states attempting to navigate their own path among these great powers.<sup>20</sup> This trilateral rivalry (albeit with China now strongly leaning in support

<sup>16</sup> The expected target priorities for nuclear weapons are nuclear weapons delivery systems and bases, nuclear weapon storage sites, and strategic command and control centres. If more weapons are available after those targets are struck, these might target conventional weapons and forces and/or population centres.

<sup>17</sup> Assessing warhead targeting is difficult at best, however, in part because it is uncertain how many warheads any side will allocate to any target, and the extent to which Russia will have excess warheads to generously target the EU depends partly on the extent to which the US expands the number of nuclear weapons-related sites and facilities. Otherwise stated, a substantial expansion of the US nuclear force that greatly exceeds the Russian warhead quantity expansion could actually mean *less* Russian warheads available for EU targets.

<sup>18</sup> Angela Kane and Héloïse Fayet, 'What the End of New START Means for Europe: Two Views', *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 17 February 2026, <https://thebulletin.org/2026/02/what-the-end-of-new-start-means-for-europe-two-views/>.

<sup>19</sup> Jeffrey Mankoff, 'Russia in the Era of Great Power Competition', *The Washington Quarterly* 44, no. 3 (2021): 107–25, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0163660X.2021.1970905>; *Renewed Great Power Competition: Implications for Defense—Issues for Congress* (Congressional Research Service (CRS), 2022).

<sup>20</sup> S. M. Rogov, 'An Inequilateral Triangle: Russia–United States–China in a New Geopolitical Environment', *Herald of the Russian Academy of Sciences* 92, no. S7 (2022): S564–73, <https://doi.org/10.1134/S1019331622130068>.

of Russia) decreased the momentum for nuclear disarmament, and is now a major obstacle to strategic arms control because China's nuclear arsenal is growing without any limitations;<sup>21</sup> and the Trump administration<sup>22</sup> – as well as many experts<sup>23</sup> – insist that China must be included in any future strategic arms control agreement. President Trump's opinion on this matter is, at least for the next several years, paramount given the need for the US to be a state party to any agreement. Yet complicating the EU's geopolitical situation, especially since the start of the US/Israel-Iran conflict (Operation Epic Fury), is President Trump's relationship with the EU which has become increasingly hostile, potentially shifting the geopolitical order from a semi-trilateral rivalry into a quadrilateral rivalry. Indeed, the 2025 *US National Security Strategy* focuses much more on EU members' perceived faults and failures rather than Russia, which barely receives any mention.<sup>24</sup>

One of the most substantive and substantial obstacles – and arguably reasonable – to a new Russia-US strategic arms control agreement is China's growing nuclear weapons

inventory and increasing quantity and quality of delivery systems.<sup>25</sup> Beijing currently possesses 600 warheads and is expected to have 1,500 by 2035 – the same quantity as New START limits. Moreover, unlike the UK and France, China possesses a complete nuclear triad; and is planning on acquiring and deploying a flying wing strategic stealth bomber within five years similar to the US B-2 or B-21 stealth bombers.<sup>26</sup> Chinese nuclear weapons impact the strategic balance both because China leans towards supporting Russia and aggregating their nuclear capabilities is reasonable in certain situations or scenarios and the US and China have a deep security rivalry in the Pacific. It is for these reasons that President Trump is insisting that any future strategic arms control agreements must include China.<sup>27</sup>

*The threat of a nuclear attack against the EU and UK necessitates urgent policy formulation and execution.*

<sup>21</sup> Hans M. Kristensen et al., 'Chinese Nuclear Weapons, 2025', *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 81, no. 2 (2025): 135–60, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00963402.2025.2467011>.

<sup>22</sup> Marco Rubio, 'The Next Era of Nuclear Arms Control - U.S. Embassy & Consulates in China', U.S. Mission China, 9 February 2026, <https://china.usembassy-china.org.cn/the-next-era-of-nuclear-arms-control/>.

<sup>23</sup> See, for example, Rose Gottemoeller, 'Scientists Can Save Nuclear Arms Control', *Science* 391, no. 6792 (2026): 1301, <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aeh3556>.

<sup>24</sup> Trump, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*.

<sup>25</sup> Kristensen et al., 'Chinese Nuclear Weapons, 2025'.

<sup>26</sup> Kristensen et al., 'Chinese Nuclear Weapons, 2025'.

<sup>27</sup> Thomas G. Dinanno, 'Statement to the Conference on Disarmament', United States Department of State, Geneva, Switzerland, 6 February 2026, <https://www.state.gov/releases/under-secretary-for-arms-control-and-international-security-affairs/2026/02/statement-to-the-conference-on-disarmament/>; Rubio, 'The Next Era of Nuclear Arms Control - U.S. Embassy & Consulates in China'.

## 6. France and UK Arsenals

Among the P5, France and the UK are junior nuclear weapons powers. France possesses approximately 290 warheads spread between tactical fighters and SLBMs, while the UK possesses 225 warheads solely deliverable by SLBM. Thus, collectively, France and the UK have fewer warheads than China and, of course, the US and Russia; and their employability differs significantly from that of the other three nuclear weapons states. The UK's arsenal cannot necessarily be counted at its full quantity of 225 warheads, as ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs, four of which the UK possesses) are often in various stages of training, refitting, and operational deployments.<sup>28</sup> Thus, to reach 225 ready-to-launch warheads would require all four of the UK's SSBNs to be loaded, crewed, and on alert – an unlikely configuration except with a lucky combination of strategic warning and timing.<sup>29</sup>

France possesses a semi-dyad of nuclear weapons delivery systems: land and sea-based combat aircraft and SLBMs. France's four SSBNs have the same limitations as the

UK's SSBN fleet, but its combat aircraft offer an alternative – one that can maintain a higher state of readiness due to the nature of combat aircraft versus naval vessels. However, France's air-launched nuclear missiles and their combat aircraft have their own, significant, limitations. Unlike China, Russia, and the US which possess long-range strategic nuclear bombers capable of flying long distances and thus being able to conduct attacks from a very wide arc around their targets (making interception much more difficult), the French aircraft are tactical fighters which are in comparison to ICBMs much more limited in range. Another significant disadvantage of air-launched cruise missiles – which are France's delivery system – is that recent conflicts in Europe and the Middle East suggest that prepared and well-stocked air defences can successfully defend against cruise missiles. While the other three major nuclear weapons powers also possess cruise missiles, the likelihood of intercepting these is reduced because of their bombers' longer ranges.

In the past, the French and UK arsenals were comparatively too small to be considered relevant in US-Russian strategic arms negotiations.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, both wanted to retain a

<sup>28</sup> Hans M. Kristensen et al., 'United Kingdom Nuclear Weapons, 2024', *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 80, no. 6 (2024): 394–407, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00963402.2024.2420550>; Claire Mills, *Nuclear Weapons Profile: United Kingdom*, Research Briefing (UK House of Commons Library, 2025).

<sup>29</sup> Naval vessels undergoing major maintenance or refit cannot quickly become operational. However, SSBNs that are only undergoing routine work could be crewed and capable of

launching their SLBMs – even from port – in relatively short order. This SSBN limitation applies to all SSBN operators, but the UK's reliance only on SSBNs, and possessing a relatively small fleet, reduces their likely actual number of launchable warheads proportionately substantially.

<sup>30</sup> Alexei Arbatov et al., *Prospects of Engaging the United Kingdom and France in Nuclear Arms Control* (Carnegie Moscow Center, 2014).

certain independence from the US by having their own nuclear deterrence.<sup>31</sup> President Putin has indicated – taking a page from President Trump in some ways – that any future nuclear arms control agreements must include France and the UK.<sup>32</sup> Arguably, this is not an unreasonable demand.

While the US insistence on including China is understandable given the security rivalry in the Pacific, the reality is that the US is (mostly) significantly far from China. Moreover, China does not pose a substantial nuclear threat to US interests in Europe. In contrast, from Russia's perspective, however imperfect the French and UK nuclear arsenals might be, they are very close – especially were they to operate from NATO/EU allied territory where they could be just a few kilometres from Russia. And, just as importantly, France and the UK are allied with the US through NATO. Thus, from Russia's perspective, the US can deploy its nuclear weapons very close to Russia from its NATO allies' territories. Russia has no such advantage against the US (other than Alaska, which at some points is just a few kilometres apart); and does not have any allies that border the US that could threaten the US the way that NATO members the UK and France can. Moreover, the mere possession of nuclear weapons by France and the UK (both as

US allies and as part of the anti-Russia, Ukraine-supporting European coalition) poses a threat to Russia that requires Russia to maintain sufficient defences and allocate some number of nuclear warheads against the UK-French arsenals and capabilities, decreasing the number of warheads available for other missions (such as striking US targets).

Thus, President Putin's demands for including France and the UK in a future strategic arms control agreement are not unreasonable (especially if the US insists on including China). Such an inclusion, however, has important implications for the EU members and EU institutions.

## 7. An Ally of the Past?

The issue of an EU nuclear deterrence and the importance of EU institutional involvement in nuclear arms control might be substantially less pertinent were the US still a reliable ally and its nuclear umbrella fully credible. Unfortunately for EU institutions and EU member state governments and their people this is not the case. During the first Trump administration, there were frequent disputes across the Atlantic, but these have taken on a whole new tenor and level

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<sup>31</sup> Tobias Bunde et al., *Mind the Deterrence Gap: Assessing Europe's Nuclear Options. Report of the European Nuclear Study Group* (Munich Security Conference; Hertie School; University of St. Gallen, 2026), <https://doi.org/10.47342/SNSE5421>.

<sup>32</sup> Shannon Bugos, 'Russia Suspends New START', Arms Control Association, March 2023, <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2023-03/news/russia-suspends-new-start>.

of intensity with the second Trump administration.<sup>33</sup> Examples of US divisions with the EU and its partner states are now almost daily, with new issues continuously surfacing. The clearest and most alarming situation was the 2026 Greenland Crisis wherein President Trump threatened to invade and seize the island by force. Unlike some of President Trump's statements which are off-hand, improvised, and can be viewed as exaggerated rhetoric, the threat to invade Greenland was parroted by senior Trump-aligned public figures and became official US policy repeated by government officials, Republican members of Congress, and President Trump himself.<sup>34</sup> There is no public information available about the extent to which President Trump genuinely was prepared to invade and seize Greenland, or if it was a distraction from domestic disorder or just a flight of fancy. But it was taken seriously by Denmark and other European

states to the extent that military forces were deployed to the island<sup>35</sup> and Denmark prepared to resist any incursions by force.<sup>36</sup>

Today, President Trump's complaint with European NATO allies is their lack of military support for US forces in the current US/Israel-Iran conflict.<sup>37</sup> President Trump's ire is intense enough that he has once again threatened to withdraw from NATO, and otherwise even if the US remains a member (given that withdrawal requires US congressional approval),<sup>38</sup> there is no mechanism to require the US (or any other NATO member) to provide substantial military support in defence of any other NATO member – to include using nuclear weapons to defend another NATO member or retaliate against any state that uses a nuclear weapon against any NATO member.<sup>39</sup> An additional point of leverage President Trump is using against European NATO members is his threat to withdraw support for Ukraine.<sup>40</sup> Even if the

<sup>33</sup> Annie Bao, 'Europe-U.S. Ties at Their "lowest" in NATO History, Ex-EU Chief Says, as Trump Goes "America First"', CNBC, 26 January 2026, <https://www.cnbc.com/2026/01/26/europe-us-relations-at-their-lowest-moment-european-commission-president-barroso.html>; Nathalie Tocci and Jan Techau, 'Can Europe Trust the United States Again?', Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 7 January 2026, <https://carnegieendowment.org/posts/2026/01/can-europe-ever-trust-the-united-states-again>.

<sup>34</sup> Kit Maher and Kylie Atwood, 'White House Discussing "Options" to Acquire Greenland, Says Military Use Isn't off the Table', CNN, 7 January 2026, <https://www.cnn.com/2026/01/06/politics/us-options-greenland-military>.

<sup>35</sup> Paul Kirby, 'European Military Personnel Arrive in Greenland as Trump Says US Needs Island', BBC News, 15 January 2026, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cd0ydjvxpejo>. Notably, however, Danish or other European governments did not make other moves typical of war preparation such as withdrawing embassy staff from the US. See, for example, US withdrawing embassy staff ahead of anticipated armed conflicts: 'Diplomats@Work: Evacuating Ukraine', American Foreign Service

Association, October 2023, <https://afsa.org/diplomatswork-evacuating-ukraine>; 'US Evacuates "Non-Emergency" Personnel from Middle East', Voice of America, 30 October 2009, <https://www.voanews.com/a/a-13-a-2003-03-17-24-us/303804.html>.

<sup>36</sup> Jaroslav Lukiv, 'Denmark Planned to Blow up Greenland Runways If US Invaded, Reports Say', BBC News, 19 March 2026, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c33ln4mp1p2o>.

<sup>37</sup> Victor Jack, 'Europe Hardens Opposition to Trump's Iran War Demands', POLITICO, 31 March 2026, <https://www.politico.eu/article/europe-hardens-opposition-trump-iran-war-demands/>.

<sup>38</sup> Sokol Sokol, *Separation of Powers and NATO Withdrawal*, no. R48868 (Congressional Research Service, 2026).

<sup>39</sup> 'Collective Defence and Article 5', NATO, 12 November 2025, <https://www.nato.int/en/what-we-do/introduction-to-nato/collective-defence-and-article-5>.

<sup>40</sup> Laura Dubois et al., 'Trump Threatened to Stop Weapons for Ukraine Unless Europe Joined Hormuz Coalition', Financial Times, 1 April 2026, <https://www.ft.com/content/d304071a-ca97-4b3b-be93-ff880a6645c3?syn-25a6b1a6=1>.

US's direct support for Ukraine has decreased since 2025, the US continues to sell weapons to Europe and Ukraine to support the conflict, and provides critical intelligence. Moreover, while the US's support might be quantitatively less than Ukraine's European partners', it is providing critical air defences with capabilities that Ukraine's European partners are unable to provide.<sup>41</sup> A full and complete transatlantic break, however, could see the US withdraw all support for Ukraine, cease sales of critical systems such as air defences, and lift all sanctions against Russia.<sup>42</sup> Such an action could compel Ukraine to sue for terms that are detrimental to EU interests.

Tense transatlantic relations within the NATO alliance are not new.<sup>43</sup> Yet today's division may be orders of magnitude greater. The sea change in EU-US relations cannot be exaggerated – and the European Council and other EU institutions are aware of this.<sup>44</sup>

## 8. Are the EU and its Partners Surrounded?

At the root of EU's security challenges is the threat from Russia. Without this threat, US security guarantees and extended deterrence would be much less critical. For the first 15 to 20 years following the Cold War, Europe was able to let its conventional military capabilities decline and entropy – especially those related to a major land war in Europe.<sup>45</sup> During this period of great power *entente*, strategic arms control was relatively easy and states saw little use for nuclear weapons during the global war on terrorism (GWOT).

Today, however – and since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine – the EU fears a Russian invasion. The threat from Russia is clear and present, and does not need to be thoroughly elaborated in this report. To summarise, there are several categories of Russian threats to the EU, including: sabotage, deep strikes, an invasion, nuclear blackmail, and use of nuclear weapons

<sup>41</sup> As Michael Kofman states, the US may only be providing 20 per cent of the military aid but that 20 per cent is essential. Ryan Evans and Michael Kofman, hosts, *Update from the Battlefield: Drones, Distance, and Diminishing Returns*, War on the Rocks, aired 9 April 2026, 28 minutes.

<sup>42</sup> Mark Cancian and Maria Snegovaya, *The Unfinished Plan for Peace in Ukraine* (Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), 2025); Alex Raufoglu, 'US Lifts Sanctions On Three Russian Vessels; Treasury Says No Broader Policy Shift', Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 1 April 2026, <https://www.rferl.org/a/us-sanctions-russia-vessels-treasury-policy-shift/33722318.html>.

<sup>43</sup> Susan Colbourn, *Euromissiles*, The Nuclear Weapons That Nearly Destroyed NATO (Cornell University Press, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781501766039>; Liviu Horovitz and Claudia

Major, 'Should Europeans Develop an Independent Nuclear Deterrent?', *Brookings*, 17 June 2025, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/should-europeans-develop-an-independent-nuclear-deterrent/>.

<sup>44</sup> 'EU Slams Critical US Security Strategy, Notes "Changed Relationship"', Al Jazeera, 8 December 2025, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/12/8/eu-slams-critical-us-security-strategy-notes-changed-relationship>.

<sup>45</sup> Max Bergmann et al., *Transforming European Defense*, CSIS Briefs (Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), 2022); Scott Boston et al., *Assessing the Conventional Force Imbalance in Europe: Implications for Countering Russian Local Superiority* (RAND, 2018).

against military targets and population centres.<sup>46</sup> Sabotage operations – which Russia is already engaging in – can target military or military-related facilities with the goals, for example, of disrupting military equipment production or movement; or to otherwise sow discord and disunity within EU members.<sup>47</sup> Russia might conduct deep strike missions while refraining from a land invasion – for example, to pressure the EU or otherwise send a message, or for narrow military goals such as disrupting support for Ukraine (striking, for example, military aid intended for Ukraine).<sup>48</sup>

A full-scale invasion is one of the more worrisome contingencies, and despite Russia's losses in Ukraine, such an attack cannot be discounted – especially if the Russo-Ukrainian War ends and Russia rebuilds its military within a few years. A Russian attack could be launched to seize and annex territory, pressure the EU, or more broadly defeat the EU to eliminate its capacity to rival

Russia.<sup>49</sup> The EU could be subject to nuclear blackmail – and arguably already has been – with Moscow threatening use of nuclear weapons in order to shape EU policy and reduce EU resistance to Russian security goals.<sup>50</sup> Unlike the other threats discussed here, however, nuclear blackmail is not in and of itself a kinetic action; and its effectiveness is much less than certain.<sup>51</sup> Nonetheless, it is a foreign policy tool that Moscow has and can continue to employ that might not be as credible were the EU to have an effective nuclear deterrent. Lastly, Russia might employ nuclear weapons against the EU for any number of reasons to include retaliation and punishment for perceived offences; preparations for an invasion; as part of a broader conflict with the US; or in response to a perceived imminent nuclear threat from the EU (for example, a launch-on-warning scenario).

With the 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Russia became the EU's most significant and

<sup>46</sup> Nuclear weapons have many methods of application beyond strikes against military targets and population centres. These include striking bomber formations, air defence, and anti-ship missions. However, the variety of nuclear weapons missions and their varying impact on EU security is beyond this report's scope.

<sup>47</sup> Piotr Arak, 'Russia's Shadow War: How the Kremlin Uses Sabotage to Wear down Europe', *Atlantic Council: New Atlanticist*, 20 November 2025, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/russias-shadow-war-how-the-kremlin-uses-sabotage-to-wear-down-europe/>; Charlie Edwards and Nate Seidenstein, *The Scale of Russian Sabotage Operations Against Europe's Critical Infrastructure* (International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2025).

<sup>48</sup> Karen DeYoung, 'Russia Warns U.S. to Stop Arming of Ukraine', *Washington Post*, 15 April 2022, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2022/04/14/russia-warns-us-stop-arming-ukraine/>.

<sup>49</sup> Thomas Graham, 'Right-Sizing the Russian Threat', Council on Foreign Relations, 17 February 2026, <https://www.cfr.org/articles/right-sizing-the-russian-threat>; Richard D. Hooker, Jr., *Putin's next Move? Five Russian Attack*

*Scenarios Europe Must Prepare For* (Atlantic Council, 2026); Csongor Körömi and Hanne Cokelaere, 'The Closer to Russia the Greater the Fear, Opinion Poll Finds', *POLITICO*, 20 October 2025, <https://www.politico.eu/article/russia-opinion-poll-closer-border-fear-yougov-eu-countries/>; Eric Rosenbach et al., *Russian Threats to NATO's Eastern Flank: Scenarios, Strategy, and Policy for European Security* (Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, 2026).

<sup>50</sup> Peter Dickinson, 'Putin Will Keep Escalating His Nuclear Blackmail until It Stops Working', *Atlantic Council*, 26 September 2024, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/putin-will-keep-escalating-his-nuclear-blackmail-until-it-stops-working/>; Andrea Gilli and Francesco Nicoli, *How Can Europe's Nuclear Deterrence Trilemma Be Resolved?*, Working Paper (Bruegel, 2025); Céline Marangé, 'Russia's Nuclear Blackmail: Mere Strategic Intimidation?', *Irsem*, accessed 2 April 2026, <https://www.irsem.fr/en/publications/russias-nuclear-blackmail-mere-strategic-intimidation>.

<sup>51</sup> Kühn, 'Institutional Resilience, Deterrence and the Transition to Zero Nuclear Weapons'.

substantial threat – one that poses a far greater threat than international terrorism, which consumed much of Europe's security strategies and operations for two decades. It is a threat that cannot be ignored but requires difficult choices and substantial resources to address.

## 9. A Bad Basket of Options

Other than strategic arms control, the EU and its partners have only poor options to address present international security threats. In the following sections, we first lay out what those options are and then why these are some combination of unrealistic, unaffordable, and ineffective.

First – and to some extent where the EU is at now – France could more formally and more substantially provide a nuclear umbrella for the EU.<sup>52</sup> This would engender France significantly increasing its nuclear capabilities, possibly with funding by other EU members and EU institutions. In this approach, France would acquire and deploy a complete nuclear triad and/or establish nuclear sharing agreements with other EU members (effectively complementing or replacing the US nuclear weapons sharing agreements with several European NATO members). Yet

full, operational control and strategic decisions would be largely dictated by Paris, with the EU and other EU members having a consultative role. Moreover, nuclear sharing of the French arsenal or French and UK arsenals would not resolve deterrence or resource challenges. First, the weapon systems are more likely to be tactical and operational-range (as is the case with the US nuclear weapons sharing programme) – not strategic, resulting in a comparatively reduced deterrence. Second, a weapons sharing programme across the EU would still be constrained by nuclear weapon production costs. Yet on the other hand, any level of nuclear sharing might distribute nuclear weapons policy formulation and even limited deterrence across the EU, thereby decreasing the disadvantages of nuclear weapons policies being solely dependent on Paris and London (as applicable). Moreover, as an interim plan, nuclear weapons sharing could spread nuclear weapons policy development and somewhat increase deterrence across the EU and European NATO members (depending, of course, on precisely with whom the weapons are shared).

Another approach is to essentially accept the status quo, however imperfect it is; but one that has functioned with seeming success for many decades. The first part of this is to hope that President Trump will, sooner

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<sup>52</sup> Philipp Sauter, 'European Nuclear Weapons', *Verfassungsblog*, 20 February 2026, <https://doi.org/10.59704/e59f32931316cdbc>.

rather than later, end his attacks against and disputes with the EU and fully restore the credibility of, especially in Moscow's eyes, the US nuclear umbrella. Unfortunately for Brussels and every other EU member, there is no reason to believe that President Trump's attitudes about the EU and European NATO members are likely to shift back towards unequivocal strategic partnership and alliance – and remain that way. As President Trump is term-limited, the EU can merely suffer for the next several years and hope that the next administration returns the transatlantic alliance back to its pre-2025 status.

The second aspect of living with the status quo is relying on the existing French-UK nuclear deterrent, with somewhat expanded promises of cooperation and protection for EU members.<sup>53</sup> This essentially leaves all aspects of nuclear weapons policy up to London and Paris.

Unfortunately for the EU member states and EU institutions, all of these options have substantial faults that result in them either being unachievable or failing to make the

EU and its partners more secure against Russian (and US) nuclear threats. For any ambition to obtain a substantial increase in the number of nuclear weapons and the number and variety of delivery systems (i.e. a full nuclear weapons triad), affordability is a major obstacle. Even discounting the issue of defence procurement inefficiencies across the EU and its partners due to the many, competing states and companies<sup>54</sup> that result in military products that are often much more expensive for the same capability or less capable for the same cost than their US or Russian counterparts, obtaining a robust, large (1,500 warhead-plus) nuclear weapons capability that would deter rivals and includes associated costs such as command and control systems and centres, intelligence collection and targeting assets, ICBM sites, long-range strategic bombers, and early warning systems is unaffordable without an unrealistic level of expenditure.<sup>55</sup>

On top of this, a large-scale deployment of nuclear weapons across the EU (and UK) would invite a first strike by Russia (or the

<sup>53</sup> Ulrich Kühn, 'Is Europe Moving to an Independent Nuclear Deterrent?', Arms Control Association, May 2025, <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2025-05/features/europe-moving-independent-nuclear-deterrent>; 'Northwood Declaration: 10 July 2025 (UK-France Joint Nuclear Statement)', GOV.UK, 10 July 2025, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/northwood-declaration-10-july-2025-uk-france-joint-nuclear-statement>; Gabriela Reitz, 'Europe's Uncertainty as New START Ends', Council on Foreign Relations, 6 February 2026, <https://www.cfr.org/articles/europe-faces-uncertainty-as-new-start-ends>.

<sup>54</sup> Lucian Cernat et al., *Openness and Fragmentation in EU Defence Procurement*, Policy Brief No. 20 (European Centre for International Political Economy (ECIPE), 2025); Sebastian Clapp et al., *Building a Common Market for European Defence*, PE 775.924 (European Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS), 2025).

<sup>55</sup> Gilli and Nicoli, *How Can Europe's Nuclear Deterrence Trilemma Be Resolved?*; Kühn, 'Is Europe Moving to an Independent Nuclear Deterrent?'

US).<sup>56</sup> That is, a fully-capable EU nuclear capability would result in first-strike instability due to the EU's geographic situation. Most of Europe is not far from either the Atlantic Ocean or Russian territory, as shown in Figure 1. As a result, the US or Russia could strike EU/UK nuclear targets with little warning. This contrasts with Russian and US nuclear weapons and their delivery sys-

tems – especially ICBMs – which are surrounded by thousands of kilometres of each country's land mass. Thus, any attempts to strike them offer sufficient warning (at least, assuming that all warning systems are functional) to launch under attack; or otherwise take some measures to retain a retaliatory capability (such as having alert bombers take off).



**Figure 1:** Probable priority Russian nuclear weapons-related targets in the EU/NATO.

Indeed, even the current French and UK nuclear postures are destabilising *vis-à-vis* Russia in the absence of a US nuclear security umbrella. If Russia perceives that France or the UK is about to launch, Russia may feel compelled to strike first to eliminate their first and second-strike capabilities. French-UK knowledge of this situation – a situation that would similarly exist in most other EU-based nuclear weapons capabilities – also imposes a use-or-lose pressure on the UK

and France, and other EU members in the future, as applicable. Thus, there is and will remain a significant first-strike instability. This notably does not exist (at least, in theory) between the US and Russia (and largely did not exist between the US and USSR) because both sides could absorb a first strike

<sup>56</sup> Olamide Samuel, 'Europe Going Nuclear Would Be a Catastrophic Mistake', Al Jazeera, 11 March 2025,

<https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2025/3/11/europe-going-nuclear-would-be-a-catastrophic-mistake>.

and have sufficient warheads for a counterforce and countervalue retaliation – ensuring MAD.<sup>57</sup>

Waiting out President Trump is not an ideal option because there is no guarantee that the next US president will not share the same views about the EU.<sup>58</sup> A future president might not be as unpredictable or boisterous as President Trump, but they may retain in practice some of the same policies that keep the EU in its current security conundrum.

Retaining the nuclear weapons status quo with the current, or slightly increased, French and UK arsenals is insufficient for several reasons. First, these arsenals – as previously discussed – do not offer an effective deterrence against Russia's much larger and effective nuclear weapons force;<sup>59</sup> and even invite a first strike. For example, Russia could launch a first strike (if there is no

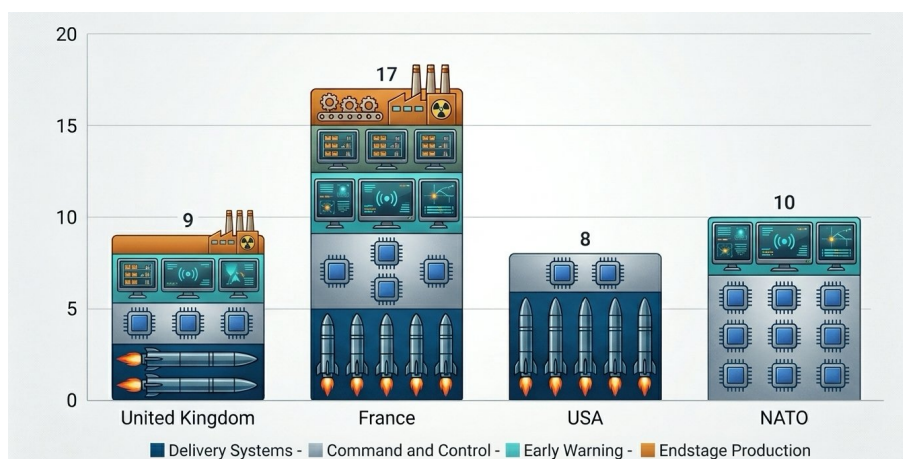
longer a credible US nuclear umbrella, including its formal withdrawal) against the French and UK nuclear forces such as airbases, aircraft carriers, submarine bases, and, if possible, target and sink any SLBMs at sea with attack submarines. As Figure 2 shows, there are likely fewer than 30 nuclear targets in Europe, excluding primarily US sites which would not be relevant if the US were to withdraw its forces from Europe. If existing NATO nuclear capability-related facilities were included, this would only bring the total number of targets to approximately 35-40. In any Russia versus EU/UK scenario, even with a moderate increase of nuclear weapons-related sites, warheads, and delivery systems, the number of combined EU/UK targets might still be below 100, comfortably leaving Russia with over 1,000 warheads with which to threaten the EU/UK following a first strike.

<sup>57</sup> See the following for a detailed assessment of how US and Russian forces and populations would fare in various nuclear exchange scenarios: Paul K. Davis, ed., *New Challenges for Defense Planning: Rethinking How Much Is Enough* (RAND, 1994), ch. 11.

<sup>58</sup> Domenico Montanaro et al., 'What's the Future of the MAGA Movement, beyond President Trump?', NPR: All Things Considered, 1 August 2025, [https://www.npr.org/2025/08/01/nx-s1-](https://www.npr.org/2025/08/01/nx-s1-5482846/whats-the-future-of-the-maga-movement-beyond-president-trump)

[5482846/whats-the-future-of-the-maga-movement-beyond-president-trump](https://www.npr.org/2025/08/01/nx-s1-5482846/whats-the-future-of-the-maga-movement-beyond-president-trump).

<sup>59</sup> Pranay Vaddi and Vipin Narang, 'Building a Euro Deterrent: Easier Said Than Done', Substack newsletter, *Strategic Simplicity*, 15 March 2025, <https://strategicsimplicity.substack.com/p/building-a-euro-deterrent-easier>.



**Figure 2:** Relevant nuclear first strike targets within the EU and UK for Russian nuclear warheads – source: author's own elaboration

The remaining number of Anglo-French warheads might be so small – with no guarantee of successful delivery – that Russia could deter any retaliatory strike by threatening a countervalue attack (or even counterforce, although some EU members and France/UK might fear this less) with Russia's large number of remaining warheads.

Moreover, relying on France and the UK alone – or even in a scenario in which other European states such as Poland or Germany have obtained and fielded nuclear weapons – simply opens up the non-nuclear weapon possessing EU members to the same political vulnerabilities as the EU finds itself in now with the US and its nuclear umbrella: nuclear umbrella blackmail, unreliability, and uncertainties with changing leadership among other problems. For example, nuclear security guarantees from France are

tainted by the prospect of an isolationist, nationalist far-right party (or even a pro-Russian party) leading the country and reversing extended deterrence to the rest of the EU.<sup>60</sup> A similar situation could arise with newly-established nuclear weapons states within the EU – that what might be initially planned as a national nuclear weapons programme for the protection of all the EU could become, with a change of government, a national programme for solely national selfish interests.

Another concern, albeit one that is less probable but not negligible, is the threat of a Russian response during a nuclear weapons build-up. Russia could engage in any number of covert and overt acts to prevent the EU from becoming a fully-capable and comparable nuclear rival. This could range from sabotage operations of uranium enrichment facilities and plutonium production plants,

<sup>60</sup> Kühn, 'Is Europe Moving to an Independent Nuclear Deterrent?'; Ulrich Kühn, 'The Unintended Consequences of German Deterrence', *Global Policy* Special Issue: Non-Nuclear Deterrence in

Europe (2026): 1758-5899.70134, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1758-5899.70134>.

to overt strikes with long-range weapons of such facilities, to even a full-scale invasion to compel nuclear weapons disarmament. There are several precedents for such policies, particularly in the Middle East, where Iran and Iraq have been subject to repeated attacks and (in the latter case) invasions to destroy perceived nuclear weapons programmes. A major cause of Operation Epic Fury, for example, is President Trump's fear that Iran could retrieve their buried enriched uranium and further enrich it to build a nuclear weapon.<sup>61</sup>

Although it is not openly stated, some if not many scholars, experts and policy-makers who support building up an expanded EU member state nuclear weapons capability and striving for nuclear deterrence make such considerations in a vacuum of Russian non-response. As discussed above, Russia might respond kinetically but a more likely and non-kinetic response would be a comparative build-up of Russian nuclear capabilities. Because Russia has an extensive nuclear weapons infrastructure, including production and delivery systems, Russia can match or exceed any EU capability at a

much lower cost. Thus, even if the EU and its partners were to manufacture and deploy, for example, 1,500 warheads, Russia might outdo this at a much lower cost with, for example, 5,000 warheads. The result would leave the EU less rather than more secure. Thus, an arms race would leave the EU and its partners poorer and less secure – hardly an outcome that the EU should seek.

More generally, an EU nuclear weapons build-up could be generally destabilising, particularly in Russian and EU relations but also in the EU's relations with other countries.<sup>62</sup> A drive to increase EU members' nuclear weapons capabilities, especially if these capabilities were in presently non-nuclear states, might also inspire other states around the world to do the same, destabilising other relationships, possibly leading to conflict, and at worst compelling states unfriendly to the EU and its members to obtain nuclear weapons – not in direct competition to the EU but because their regional rival undertakes a nuclear weapons programme.

While the establishment of the EU was to reduce disagreements and rivalries among its

<sup>61</sup> Philip Loft, 'US-Iran Ceasefire and Nuclear Talks in 2026', UK Parliament: House of Commons Library, 24 April 2026, <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-10637/>; Stephanie Pappas, 'Trump Wants Iran's "nuclear Dust." Here's How the U.S. Could Remove the Uranium', *Scientific American*, 23 April 2026, <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/trump-wants-irans-nuclear-dust-heres-how-the-u-s-could-remove-the-uranium/>.

<sup>62</sup> Rizwan Asghar, 'Nuclear Weapons and Interstate Conflict Behavior: The Moderating Influence of Civil–Military Relations', *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 42, no. 2 (2025): 190–219, <https://doi.org/10.1177/07388942241238649>; Kelsey Davenport, 'In

2026, a Growing Risk of Nuclear Proliferation', *Just Security*, 5 February 2026, <https://www.justsecurity.org/129480/risk-nuclear-proliferation-2026/>; George Fekete, *Escalation of Nuclear Conflict Risk amid Global Tensions*, n.d., accessed 8 April 2026, <https://www.hilarispublisher.com/open-access/escalation-of-nuclear-conflict-risk-amid-global-tensions-111539.html>; Marion Paradas, 'Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons: Threat to International Peace, Security and Stability', Permanent Mission of France to the United Nations in New York, 5 May 2015, <https://onu.delegfrance.org/Proliferation-of-Nuclear-Weapons-threat-to-international-peace-security-and>; Vaddi and Narang, 'Building a Euro Deterrent'.

members,<sup>63</sup> very clearly EU member states retain a high level of sovereignty and intense disagreements arise regularly. At worst, the establishment of new nuclear weapons states within the EU could open the door to intra-EU security rivalries and even the EU's dismantlement due to the enmities and disagreements that upsetting the nuclear weapons status quo within the EU might provoke.

Individual states possessing nuclear weapons could deepen rivalries between EU members and complicate disputes. For example, quarrels over migration policies and monetary policies between EU members<sup>64</sup> would likely have had very different undertones, if not outright public rhetoric, had some or all of the states which had been at the centre of the disputes had nuclear weapons. They might have experienced the 'presence-of-weapons' effect wherein the mere presence of a weapon increases aggressiveness.<sup>65</sup> This effect might be amplified given the history of war and conflict that has characterised European relations for many centuries. EU members lacking nuclear weapons especially might feel strong-armed

by nuclear weapons-armed EU states in situations of stressed diplomacy and difficult decision-making. The challenge might also go the other direction: nuclear weapons EU-states might object to being compelled to support non-nuclear states that, in their view, engage in risky foreign policies<sup>66</sup> – such as antagonising Russia. More specifically, an intra-EU crisis could develop if a non-nuclear EU state bordering Russia engaged in aggressive and provocative actions against Russia against the will of EU nuclear weapons states who provide all EU members with a nuclear umbrella.

Alternatively, an aggrieved (likely non-nuclear) EU state might seek nuclear protection from a non-EU state, such as the US or Russia. The several years of disputes between Budapest and Brussels, for example, might have taken a very different tone and direction had Budapest possessed nuclear weapons, or if a nuclear-armed Germany or Poland (for example) threw their weight behind Brussels. The open support the US's Trump administration showed in support of then-President Orbán's re-election, coupled with the US's open hostility towards the EU, indicates the US's willingness to interfere in

<sup>63</sup> Vicki L. Birchfield et al., 'European Integration as a Peace Project', *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 19, no. 1 (2017): 3–12, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1369148116685274>.

<sup>64</sup> Marianna Lovato et al., *The Internal Contestation of EU Foreign and Security Policy. A Literature Review of the Implications of Intra-EU Contestation on Crises and Conflicts*, Joint Research Paper No. 1 (JOINT, 2021); Frank Schimmelfennig, 'European Integration (Theory) in Times of Crisis. A Comparison of the Euro and Schengen Crises', *Journal of European Public Policy* 25, no. 7 (2018): 969–89, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2017.1421252>.

<sup>65</sup> Leonard Berkowitz and Anthony LePage, 'Weapons as Aggression-Eliciting Stimuli', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 7 (October 1967): 202–7, <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0025008>.

<sup>66</sup> Rizwan Asghar, 'Nuclear Weapons and Interstate Conflict Behavior: The Moderating Influence of Civil–Military Relations', *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 42, no. 2 (2025): 190–219, <https://doi.org/10.1177/07388942241238649>.

internal EU affairs between Brussels and its member states.

Although it is beyond the scope of this report, German production and/or possession of nuclear weapons would be, and would likely be viewed by Moscow as, a material breach and violation of the 1990 peace treaty. Although the treaty does not provide for enforcement mechanisms in response to violations, such a breach on such an important aspect of a united Germany could force a strong reaction from Russia and, no less importantly, lend Russia a substantial *casus belli* for their responses.

## 10. Nuclear Deterrence Myth?

A nuclear weapons capability broadly shared by EU members, at least according to statements and experts,<sup>67</sup> is intended for deterrence rather than actual use. That is, available information (although thoughts and theory may evolve over time) does not indicate that the EU members intend to use

nuclear weapons to conduct normal military operations, whether defensively or offensively.<sup>68</sup> Thus whether nuclear weapons *actually* work as a deterrent is vital to any decision to adopt an expensive, risky, and complicated programme.

Nuclear deterrence and MAD underlie all discussions and policies about nuclear weapons.<sup>69</sup> Arguably, due to many factors, nuclear deterrence may have worked during the Cold War to prevent both a conventional and nuclear war between the superpowers. Yet on the other hand, nuclear weapons did not deter the superpowers from conflict with one another – only *direct* conflict. The two most prominent instances in which the superpowers killed each other's forces and contested each other militarily were in Vietnam and Afghanistan.

Since the Cold War's end, the efficacy of nuclear deterrence is at best uncertain.<sup>70</sup> Nuclear weapons have not prevented nuclear states from going to war or otherwise having direct military clashes with one another – as

<sup>67</sup> GOV.UK, 'Northwood Declaration'.

<sup>68</sup> Two examples of plans to use tactical nuclear weapons in Cold War-era operational-level combat are Manlio Brosio, 'Provisional Political Guidelines for the Initial Tactical Use of Nuclear Weapons by NATO', NATO North Atlantic Council, 20 November 1969; Vojtech Mastny et al., *Taking Lyon on the Ninth Day? The 1964 Warsaw Pact Plan for a Nuclear War in Europe and Related Documents* (PHP Publications Series, 2000), 36.

<sup>69</sup> Robert Jervis, 'Arms Control, Stability, and Causes of War', *Daedalus* 120, no. 1 (1991): 167–81; Andrei Kokoshin, *Ensuring Strategic Stability in the Past and Present: Theoretical and Applied Questions* (Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School, 2011); Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and*

*Influence* (Yale University Press, 1966); Thomas C. Schelling, 'A Framework for the Evaluation of Arms-Control Proposals', *Daedalus* 104, no. 3 (1975): 187–200, JSTOR; Schelling and Halperin, *Strategy and Arms Control*.

<sup>70</sup> 'Experts Discuss Nuclear Deterrence in Europe: More Weapons, More Security?', Leiden University, 29 January 2025, <https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/en/news/2025/01/experts-discuss-nuclear-deterrence-in-europe-more-weapons-more-security>; David Krieger, 'Ten Serious Flaws in Nuclear Deterrence Theory', *Nuclear Age Peace Foundation*, 7 February 2011, <https://www.wagingpeace.org/ten-serious-flaws-in-nuclear-deterrence-theory/>.

in the case of India and Pakistan.<sup>71</sup> Most contradictory is that Russia, a nuclear superpower, was subject to a large-scale invasion and occupation of its territory when Ukrainian forces entered Kursk, Russia, in August 2024. That the invasion was a part of a larger war is certainly relevant and important, but the fact remains that Ukraine was not deterred by Russia's nuclear arsenal from violating and occupying some of Russia's territory. Moreover, Ukraine has not been 'deterred' from resisting the Russian full-scale invasion through the imposition of high losses on Russian military personnel and equipment, deep strikes in Russian territory against military and economic targets, striking Russian commercial and naval vessels, assassinating Russian officials, and even destroying or damaging Russia's strategic nuclear weapons assets and capabilities.<sup>72</sup> Essentially, it seems that Russia's nuclear weapons arsenal has done little to affect Ukraine's calculations other than to, perhaps, prevent them from attempting leadership decapitation strikes.

One explanation of why Russia may not have used nuclear weapons against Ukraine

is that it is itself deterred by the US potential to respond with its own nuclear weapons in defence of Ukraine, or otherwise – with NATO – fully enter the war with conventional forces (especially airpower) against Russia.<sup>73</sup> The main take-away, however, is nuclear deterrence might not deter much, if anything; and that for the EU and its partners, the opportunity costs of building something resembling a full nuclear deterrence would make its conventional deterrence much less credible.

Nuclear deterrence revolves around the notion that states will not use nuclear weapons due to fears of MAD. The problem with this theory is that deterrence can break down and MAD fail under several reasonable, and reasonably probable scenarios.<sup>74</sup> One of these is one or a series of accidents or malfunctions in which one side assesses that the other is launching a nuclear attack (close calls);<sup>75</sup> or such an incident makes the state in which the incident took place fear that the adversary will interpret the incident as an attack, and the nuclear state in which the incident took place will feel compelled to

<sup>71</sup> Carter Malkasian and Zachary Constantino, 'Nuclear Powers, Conventional Wars', *Foreign Affairs*, 17 July 2025, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/nuclear-powers-conventional-wars>.

<sup>72</sup> Sabine Siebold, 'Ukrainian Attack Damaged 10% of Russia's Strategic Bombers, Germany Says', *Reuters*, 7 June 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/world/ukrainian-attack-damaged-10-russias-strategic-bombers-germany-says-2025-06-07/>; Xiaodon Liang, 'Ukraine Strikes Russian Early-Warning Radars', *Arms Control Association*, August 2024, <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2024-07/news/ukraine-strikes-russian-early-warning-radars>.

<sup>73</sup> See the following for a discussion about why Russia has not used nuclear weapons in the Russo-Ukrainian War: Ulrich Kühn, 'The Fall Crisis of 2022: Why Did Russia Not Use Nuclear Arms?', *Defense & Security Analysis* 41, no. 2 (2025): 280–300, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14751798.2024.2442794>.

<sup>74</sup> Jeffrey W. Knopf, 'The Inherent Unpredictability of Nuclear Deterrence', *The Nonproliferation Review* 31, nos 4–6 (2024): 165–88, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10736700.2025.2569131>.

<sup>75</sup> Eric Schlosser and Scott Brick, *Command and Control: Nuclear Weapons, the Damascus Accident, and the Illusion of Safety* (The Penguin Press, 2013).

launch their weapons (so as to obtain the advantages of a first strike) even with the knowledge that their accident is the root cause of the crisis. Thus, a nuclear weapons deterrence policy whose goal is to prevent the use of nuclear weapons is inherently flawed if deterrence cannot in all reasonable and foreseeable circumstances (let alone in unreasonable circumstances such as an irrational use of weapons by a ‘madman’, for example) prevent a nuclear conflict.

To an extent, the fallacy of nuclear deterrence is exposed by chemical and, to a lesser extent, biological weapons. Effective battlefield chemical weapons have existed since at least World War One; while effective battlefield biological weapons have existed from approximately the 1950s.<sup>76</sup> Yet these weapons of mass destruction have not prevented either the outbreak of wars or the conquest and dismantlement of major powers – Nazi Germany being the one example. Thus, again, to the extent to which chemical weapons particularly have some equivalence to nuclear weapons, weapons of mass destruction (WMD) as a broad category of nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons

(NBC) suggest the futility of nuclear weapons in deterring attacks, invasions, or even conquest.

## 11. The EU and Nuclear Arms Control

As previously discussed, EU institutions have not been a part of adversarial nuclear arms control negotiations or agreements (nor the UK or France). Rather, the EU institutions have been focused on global nuclear arms control and disarmament primarily through counter-proliferation rhetoric and policy<sup>77</sup> rather than as a formal state party, as most agreements have been made between sovereign nation-states rather than the complicated conglomeration that characterises the EU.

The EU’s non-proliferation focus is aligned with the universal ideals of global nuclear disarmament,<sup>78</sup> which is articulated not just in the NPT but in other treaties and official statements by many states, including the US and Soviet Union/Russia. On the NPT, for example, the EU states that it ‘is fully committed to strengthening the NPT, promoting its

<sup>76</sup> Vladimír Pitschmann, ‘Overall View of Chemical and Biochemical Weapons’, *Toxins* 6, no. 6 (2014): 1761–84, <https://doi.org/10.3390/toxins6061761>.

<sup>77</sup> European Union, ‘EU Statement for the General Debate’, United Nations Disarmament Commission, 1 April 2024; Manuel Herrera, *The European Union’s Nuclear Non-Proliferation Policy: Performance and Contestation*, 1st edn (Routledge, 2025), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003529224>; Benjamin Kienzle, ‘An Overstrained Actor? The European Union and the Challenges of Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Arms Control’, in *EU Foreign Policy in*

*a Fragmenting International Order*, ed. Oriol Costa et al. (Springer Nature Switzerland, 2025), [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-64060-5\\_9](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-64060-5_9); Clara Portela, *The EU’s Arms Control Challenge: Bridging Nuclear Divides*, with Europäische Union, Chaillot Paper, 166 (April 2021) (European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS), 2021), <https://doi.org/10.2815/601066>.

<sup>78</sup> Herrera, *The European Union’s Nuclear Non-Proliferation Policy*.

universalisation and enhancing its implementation.<sup>79</sup>

Although most EU members are not state parties to the TPNW (Cyprus is a signatory but not a state party due to non-ratification<sup>80</sup>), most or all are state parties to the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), the NPT, and the LTBT. Thus,<sup>81</sup> it is clear that EU institutions and individual EU members are dedicated to and continue to work towards nuclear non-proliferation. However, the EU's formal role as a state party is non-existent – an approach that could and should be changed.

Fundamentally, the EU's members and institutions have a selfish interest in nuclear arms control because some of its members are likely targeted by Russian nuclear warheads; nuclear detonations within the EU will affect all EU members either through death or injury from the detonation(s) (i.e. an explosion in a port city will kill or injure any citizens present in the blast area), fallout will likely affect other member states; and economic consequences among other

impacts will likely be EU-wide; nuclear arms control impacts some of its members because of their current US nuclear weapon hosting policies; and more generally the EU has a broad interest in humanity and a commitment to a nuclear weapons-free world.<sup>82</sup>

There are innumerable examples of how the EU, primarily through the European Council, *could* be a state party to an adversarial nuclear arms control agreement. For example, then-French President Sarkozy negotiated a cease-fire agreement between Russia and Georgia in 2008, wherein the EU (as President Sarkozy was negotiating and signing the agreement in his role as President of the European Council) was a signatory and became an implementer.<sup>83</sup> This agreement was clearly between adversaries, and involved loose conventional arms control measures.<sup>84</sup> Beyond international security and arms control, the EU is a full state party to many other agreements in the areas of trade, the environment, and other issues.<sup>85</sup>

For an adversarial strategic arms control agreement, the European Council could be a

<sup>79</sup> 'The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT)', European Union External Action, 24 April 2025, [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/treaty-non-proliferation-nuclear-weapons-npt\\_en](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/treaty-non-proliferation-nuclear-weapons-npt_en).

<sup>80</sup> Vassos Vassiliou, 'Cyprus Stays out of Nuclear Weapons Ban as Minister Rules out Signing', Philenews, 23 March 2026, <https://in-cyprus.philenews.com/local/cyprus-nuclear-weapons-ban-treaty-tpnw-foreign-minister/>.

<sup>81</sup> 'Status of Signatures and Ratifications', CTBTO, accessed 20 April 2026, <https://www.ctbto.org/our-mission/states-signatories>.

<sup>82</sup> Karim Haggag, 'After New START Expires, Europe Needs to Step up on Arms Control', SIPRI Commentary, 4 February 2026, <https://www.sipri.org/commentary/essay/2026/after-new-start-expires-europe-needs-step-arms-control>; Md. Arifur Rahman, 'Europe Can't Disarm the World, but Can It Make Disarmament

Possible?', *European Studies Review*, 12 February 2026, <https://europeanstudiesreview.com/2026/02/12/europe-cant-disarm-the-world-but-can-it-make-disarmament-possible/>.

<sup>83</sup> 'The European Union Monitoring Mission In Georgia (Fact Sheet)', European Commission, EUMM, n.d., <https://www.eumm.eu>.

<sup>84</sup> Nicholas Sarkozy, 'Six Point Peace Plan', 12 August 2008, <https://smr.gov.ge/uploads/prev/9bbbc7.pdf>.

<sup>85</sup> 'International Agreements and the Role of the Council', Consilium, 23 February 2026, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/council-eu/international-agreements>. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/collection/eu-law/inter-agree.html?locale=en> offers a searchable database of EU agreements with non-EU countries and international organizations.

major convener and facilitator of the P5.<sup>86</sup> As a non-P5 entity dedicated to nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament, the Council could credibly serve as an intermediary and facilitator of adversarial nuclear arms control negotiations. As Kane and Fayet note, arms control negotiations can be long, technical, and difficult.<sup>87</sup> The European Council, with the EU institutions' support, possesses a large staff of legal and diplomatic experts, can reach back for additional expertise from academia, think tanks, and national experts and agencies, and is well positioned to support a P5 nuclear arms control negotiation project.

There are two prerequisites to any substantive nuclear arms control initiative led by the Council. First, the P5 parties must be willing to meet. Second, the Council must be viewed as a reasonable and perhaps necessary participant, moderately impartial intermediary, and state party.

The desire of at least *some* of the parties to negotiate a nuclear arms control agreement is relatively clear. The US and Russia have repeatedly stated their wish for an agreement – indicated, in part, by continuous negotiations and agreements made in the past decades regardless of the state of diplomatic relations. The main obstacle at this moment,

at least as stated, is their desire to include additional state parties. The UK and France have not been as clear about their interest in adversarial nuclear arms control agreements. However, given the stakes and threat of an unchecked nuclear arms race with the other P5 states as well as general ideals of nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament, they might be more willing to negotiate whether as individual states or with the Council representing them informally or formally. China may be the most significant obstacle to a full P5 agreement, but the 'good news' is that EU-China relations are complicated but not poor.<sup>88</sup> Although China has refused any nuclear arms control negotiation proposals to date,<sup>89</sup> a concerted effort from the European Council, other P5 countries, and non-nuclear states (reminding Beijing of global nuclear disarmament goals) might convince China to at least *enter* negotiations. What might convince Beijing most, however, is the impact that the absence of a nuclear arms control agreement would have: unlimited and costly arms racing that would not necessarily result in China's parity (where they are currently headed) but which could keep China in the inferior position *vis-à-vis* Russia and the US that it has historically been.

<sup>86</sup> Reitz, 'Europe's Uncertainty as New START Ends'.

<sup>87</sup> Kane and Fayet, 'What the End of New START Means for Europe'.

<sup>88</sup> Andreea Brinza et al., *EU-China Relations: De-Risking or de-Coupling - the Future of the EU Strategy towards China* (Policy Department for External Relations Directorate-General for External Policies of the Union, 2024).

<sup>89</sup> David Santoro, 'Getting Past No: Developing a Nuclear Arms Control Relationship with China', *Journal for Peace and Nuclear Disarmament* 6, no. 1 (2023): 68–86, <https://doi.org/10.1080/25751654.2023.2221830>.

Convening Moscow at a nuclear negotiation table might be more difficult than China because of the ongoing war in Ukraine and related sanctions and EU support for Kyiv. However, President Putin seems open to engaging with adversaries under the right conditions, whether directly in person or at least through senior representatives.<sup>90</sup> Moreover, it is not unreasonable to assess that Moscow views nuclear arms control in a category of its own outside of other disputes and conflicts (as Washington has in the past). For example, nuclear arms control agreements were made during the Vietnam War and upheld during the Soviet-Afghanistan conflict. The 2002 Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty (SORT) and 2010 New START Treaty were made during periods of growing distrust due to continued NATO enlargement and clear divergences in US and Russian interests.

Current discussions about an (increased) 'EU' nuclear weapons capability – however defined – can actually contribute to the EU institutions' ability to convene a nuclear arms control negotiation initiative. While the combined French-UK arsenals (which might be considered, for pre-negotiation or

negotiation purposes, an 'EU' arsenal) currently trail behind the other P5 nuclear arsenals, the possibility that an EU arsenal could grow and threaten other states could serve as an impetus for P5 negotiations with the EU. A rough example of this was the US's plan to grow its intermediate and shorter-range nuclear forces (INF) capability in Europe in response to Soviet missiles of similar range during the 1980s. While the Soviet Union possessed more of the missiles in question at that time, the US plan would have brought the two to parity and – because of geography – threaten Russia more than the US. The end result was the INF Treaty banning all such weapons – conventional and nuclear – globally (between the two states).<sup>91</sup> Thus, if President Putin feared that the EU might credibly develop a nuclear arsenal that could threaten Russia – especially given first-strike instability (as an EU/UK nuclear force might face launch-or-lose pressures, as discussed above) – he might be more inclined to negotiate.

Another reason the P5 might be open to an EU convocation is legitimate fears of global nuclear proliferation motivated in part by

<sup>90</sup> Samuel Charap and Sergey Radchenko, 'The Talks That Could Have Ended the War in Ukraine', *Foreign Affairs*, 16 April 2024, [https://www.foreignaffairs.com/ukraine/talks-could-have-ended-war-ukraine?utm\\_campaign=dfn-ebb&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_source=sailthru](https://www.foreignaffairs.com/ukraine/talks-could-have-ended-war-ukraine?utm_campaign=dfn-ebb&utm_medium=email&utm_source=sailthru); 'Trump-Putin Meeting on Ukraine: Early Analysis from Chatham House Experts', Chatham House, 26 August 2025, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2025/08/trump-putin-meeting-ukraine-early-analysis-chatham-house-experts>.

<sup>91</sup> Justin V. Anderson and Amy J. Nelson, 'The INF Treaty: A Spectacular, Inflexible, Time-Bound Success', *Strategic Studies Quarterly* 13, no. 2 (2019): 90–122; Colbourn, *Euromissiles*; Daryl Kimball, 'The Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty at a Glance', Arms Control Association, August 2019, <https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/INFtreaty>.

the failure of the P5 to control their own nuclear arsenals.<sup>92</sup> Nuclear weapons proliferation risks are a substantial threat in the Middle East and Asia. In the Middle East, a nuclear conflict would not only be devastating for the global economy, but could escalate unintentionally and draw in the US or Russia in particular.<sup>93</sup> In Asia, the most immediate concern might be South Korea obtaining a nuclear weapon to counter North Korea. However, as disputes and tensions persist in East Asia, China could see its security threatened were rivals such as Japan, the Philippines, and Taiwan to obtain nuclear weapons.<sup>94</sup> In brief, one state obtaining a nuclear weapon in either East/Southeast Asia or the Middle East could result in a domino effect of other states following suit.

There are several complications of the Council leading or facilitating any negotiations. Were the Council to negotiate on behalf of the UK and France – giving it leverage – this would require Paris and London to agree to such an arrangement. The Council itself cannot claim to be a neutral convener. However, these are not insurmountable. Diplomacy and persuasion can overcome these obstacles.

Nonetheless, even if there was a consensus among EU member states for the EU to engage in a nuclear weapons arms control initiative *and* France and the UK were willing to coordinate their positions with the EU as a negotiating partner, China, Russia, and the US might refuse the EU initiative on any number of grounds. First, they might be unprepared to engage in any nuclear weapons negotiations despite – at least on Russia and the US's part – statements to the contrary. Second, they may not view the EU as a credible negotiating partner, in part due to its lack of nuclear weapons. Nonetheless, the potential of refusal should not discourage attempts to convene.

## 12. EU Nuclear Arms Control Agreement Negotiations, Formulation, and Implementation

Getting to 'Yes' will be a long and difficult road in the best of circumstances because of the number of parties and the complicated issues involved. The EU institutions internally possess some expertise which lays the

<sup>92</sup> Piet de Klerk, 'The EU Must Step up for Nuclear Non-Proliferation', *Clingendael Spectator*, 11 March 2025, <https://spectator.clingendael.org/en/publication/eu-must-step-nuclear-non-proliferation>.

<sup>93</sup> Asmeret Asghedom et al., *The Nuclear Future of the Middle East* (Center for Global Security Research, 2024); Si Liu, 'Beyond the

Battlefield: Economic and Geopolitical Reverberations of the 2024 Israel-Iran Escalation in the Middle East, South Asia, and East Africa', *Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies* 19, no. 2 (2025): 130–53, <https://doi.org/10.1080/25765949.2025.2553258>.

<sup>94</sup> Jeremy Rausch, *Emerging Nonproliferation Challenges in the Indo-Pacific* (National Bureau of Asian Research, 2023).

foundation for adversarial nuclear arms control negotiations. There is a designated EU special envoy for non-proliferation and disarmament<sup>95</sup> who – although he has not negotiated adversarial arms control on behalf of the EU before – should have familiarity with many of the nuclear arms issues in question.

The EU has its own agency involved with nuclear non-proliferation inspections: Euratom. Euratom is charged with inspecting nuclear reactors and facilities for nuclear fission materials rather than weapons, and works closely with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Its focus is on-site inspections of nuclear facilities within the EU to ensure their compliance with the NPT.<sup>96</sup> Although the knowledge, skills, and abilities for nuclear weapons inspections are different from those for nuclear material and facility inspections (requiring, for example, more knowledge of military hardware), Euratom could partly serve as a backbone of on-site inspection fundamentals.

Were an agreement to be made and if European institutions had a role in monitoring and verification, it might need to create a dedicated arms control agency. Such an agency existed for the Western European Union – the Armaments Control Agency – which was charged with inspecting member countries for a range of arms control limitations and prohibitions, particularly West Germany.<sup>97</sup>

Each arms control agreement is different, but a nuclear-weapons limiting agreement could (and should) involve regular reporting from the state parties about holdings and inventories, include on-site inspections, protect imagery intelligence collection, and establish a coordinative body.<sup>98</sup> On-site inspections are the best way to ensure compliance with arms control agreements, with verification teams having unique training and knowledge. Moreover, verification teams often host inspectors from other countries, facilitating their inspections. While an agreement might not delegate

<sup>95</sup> 'Disarmament, Non-Proliferation and Arms Export Control', European Union External Action, 31 January 2025, [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/disarmament-non-proliferation-and-arms-export-control-0\\_en](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/disarmament-non-proliferation-and-arms-export-control-0_en).

<sup>96</sup> 'Euratom Safeguards', European Commission, accessed 30 March 2026, [https://energy.ec.europa.eu/topics/nuclear-energy/euratom-safeguards\\_en](https://energy.ec.europa.eu/topics/nuclear-energy/euratom-safeguards_en); 'Euratom Safeguards', Premier Ministre: Comité Technique Euratom (France), 27 May 2025, <https://www.cte.gouv.fr/english/Pages/IAEA-and-Euratom-controls/euratom-security-inspections.aspx>.

<sup>97</sup> Hughes Hallett, 'Western European Union (Armaments Control Agency), (Hansard, 17 December 1959)', Hansard UK Parliament Archives, 17 December 1959, <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1959/dec/17/western-european-union-armaments-control>; T. W. Parker, 'NATO Memorandum on the Western European Union Armaments Control Agency, Visits, Inspections and Spot Checks', NATO, 30 July 1957,

<https://archives.nato.int/western-european-union-armaments-control-agency-visits-inspections-and-spot-checks-as-per-protocols-annexed-to-brussels-treaty>; 'Protocol No. IV on the Agency of Western European Union for the Control of Armaments, October 23, 1954', Text, United States Government Printing Office, 1957, 23 October 1954, [https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/we006.asp](https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/we006.asp).

<sup>98</sup> A. Walter Dorn and Douglas S. Scott, '15: Compliance Mechanisms for Disarmament Treaties', in *Verification Yearbook 2000* (Vertic, 2000); Lewis A. Dunn, 'Arms Control Verification: Living with Uncertainty', *International Security* 14, no. 4 (1990): 165–75, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2538757>; Serge Sur and United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, eds, *Verification of Disarmament or Limitation of Armaments: Instruments, Negotiations, Proposals* (United Nations, 1992); Amy F. Woolf, *Monitoring and Verification in Arms Control* (Congressional Research Service (CRS), 2010).

much authority to an agreement implementer,<sup>99</sup> a coordinative body might be formed to address technical questions, serve as an administrative organiser and coordinator, and be a forum for resolving disputes.

### 13. Possible Nuclear Arms Control Agreement Contents

Establishing a specific, detailed, and legally binding nuclear arms control agreement between five or more parties will be difficult – far more difficult than the bilateral agreements signed by the US and Soviet Union which generally settled on nuclear parity, variously defined by delivery systems, warheads, number of warheads per delivery system (such as multiple independently targetable re-entry vehicles (MIRVs)), payload capacity, and range. If the P5 currently had parity in nuclear capabilities, any agreement that retained that parity could be relatively easily made.<sup>100</sup> However, this is not the case, and long-term inventory projections are uncertain.

Yet the challenge of unequal holdings and more than two negotiating parties is not

new. Over 100 years ago, this issue was successfully addressed in the Washington Naval Treaty at a battleship ratio (battleships then being viewed as the most powerful, mobile weapon system of the time) of 5:5:3:1.75:1.75 for the US, UK, Japan, Italy, and France, respectively.<sup>101</sup> A bit similar to today, the geopolitical relationships were complicated and at best uncertain. While all five state parties had been allies during World War One, their diverging security and national interests were clear. And, as they controlled naval vessels, the negotiators had to consider the global mobility of battleships while taking into account that some state parties' interests lay primarily in one, rather than both, hemispheres.

The 1996 Balkans Sub-Regional Arms Control Agreement, which is linked to the 1995 Dayton Peace Accords, set different TLE levels in five conventional weapon system categories between the three state parties – Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and then-Yugoslavia. A few relevant points about this agreement other than that the TLE varied somewhat by state (with additional limits within Bosnia and Herzegovina) are that: first, intermediaries such as the US and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) were key to making the

<sup>99</sup> Lippert, 'Delegation to Treaty Bodies and International Organizations for Conventional Arms Control Agreements in Europe: A Sum Score Evaluation'.

<sup>100</sup> For a discussion about how adversarial arms control agreements usually do not alter the military balance status quo as defined by TLE, see: William E. Lippert and Jordan Becker,

'Conventional Arms Control and Military Balance in Europe', *Contemporary Security Policy* 46, no. 3 (2025): 641–72, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13523260.2025.2474873>.

<sup>101</sup> 'The Washington Treaty', 6 February 1922, [https://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/disp\\_textbook.cfm?smtID=3&psid=3995](https://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/disp_textbook.cfm?smtID=3&psid=3995).

agreement; and second, the agreement was made between state parties with uncertain rivalries and partnerships both during the 1990s Balkan Wars and in the then-foreseeable future.

The 1999 Adaptation of the Conventional Armed Forces Agreement in Europe (A/CFE) was made between 30 state parties at a time of significant uncertainty about existing and future alliance membership in NATO, partnerships, and rivalries. The complicated agreement retained TLE in the same five weapon system categories as the 1990 Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty. The treaty adopted the relatively simple approach of mostly retaining the existing ratio of TLEs.<sup>102</sup>

Arms control agreements have four central components: the monitoring and verification regime (specifically discussed in the previous section); specification of which TLE are covered; the quantities (prohibited or not) of permitted TLE; and the AoA. The following paragraphs discuss the latter three in more detail and offer recommendations on what a substantive agreement might include.

Previous nuclear weapons arms control agreements only included what might be

called ‘traditional’ strategic nuclear weapons, for example: long-range bombers specifically configured to carry nuclear weapons, long-range air-launched nuclear cruise missiles, intercontinental ballistic missiles and their launch facilities/vehicles, ballistic missile submarines configured for nuclear missile launches, and submarine-launched ballistic missiles. Interestingly, while the US ICBMs are launched from fixed silos, the USSR/Russia use silos *and* mobile missile launchers; the latter of which may be more survivable in a major nuclear conflict (and require a greater commitment of US warheads for targeting purposes) due to their mobility – although this may be much less the case today compared to during the Cold War as satellite imagery today is much more available and covers a much greater area.<sup>103</sup> However, for simplicity and, ultimately, to come to any agreement at all, ICBMs are counted the same regardless of their mobility or lack therein.

As previously mentioned, INF missiles were the subject of a single prohibition treaty; nuclear explosive tests were banned; and anti-ballistic missile systems were limited (missiles and radar systems). One of the most notable absences was tactical nuclear weapons, which include nuclear weapons delivered by tactical combat aircraft (in the

<sup>102</sup> Lippert and Becker, ‘Conventional Arms Control and Military Balance in Europe’.

<sup>103</sup> Ryan Christenson, *Supplemental Second-Strike: Road-Mobile ICBMs in the Two-Peer Environment* (Center for Global Security

Research, Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, 2024); David Ochmanek and Michael Sulmeyer, *Challenges in U.S. National Security Policy: A Festschrift Honoring Edward L. (Ted) Warner* (RAND Corporation, 2014).

case of bombs in particular, the bomb dropped by a strategic bomber is subject to limits while the same bomb dropped by a tactical fighter is not). Other tactical nuclear warheads include those fired by artillery systems, sea mines and torpedoes, and air-to-air weapons. Among these today, only nuclear weapons carried by tactical combat aircraft are readily available and operationally deployed.

Compared to conventional weapons, nuclear weapons do not undergo continuous and frequent evolutions. New delivery systems are infrequently introduced in part due to low volume and high cost. Although the US is developing a new stealth bomber – the B-21 Raider – which will be nuclear weapons capable – it is still operating the B-52 Stratofortress which first entered service in 1955. Russia lacks a stealth bomber and plans to manufacture one are tentative at best. Rather, it continues to use its existing fleet, including Tu-95 Bear bombers which also entered service in the 1950s. None of the nuclear arms control agreements took quality of a weapon system into account. The B-52 is counted equally along with the B-2 stealth bomber (of which Russia has no equivalent) despite the substantial performance differences of non-stealth versus stealth.

A detailed discussion of the US and Russian nuclear weapon and delivery system modernisation plans is beyond this study's scope. However, it is worth noting that Russia has claimed to be developing, and possibly deploying, at least two nuclear weapons that have strategic nuclear weapon characteristics (determined by warhead yield and weapon system range) and which differ substantially from previous TLE. The first is a nuclear-powered and nuclear-armed cruise missile with, theoretically, unlimited range.<sup>104</sup> The second is a nuclear-powered, nuclear-armed autonomous underwater vehicle – also of near unlimited range.<sup>105</sup> Both of these can be considered destabilising because they might travel at relatively high velocities with unpredictable routes, thus limiting warning times. They are thus destabilising because an adversary would fear that they could be launched undetected (unlike the usual nuclear weapons triad) and thus the adversary would be compelled to strike them before they could be employed in any crisis situation. Space-based nuclear weapons that can target surface or other

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<sup>104</sup> Patrycja Bazylczyk and Hannah Freeman, 'Russia's Nuclear-Powered Burevestnik Missile: Implications for Missile Defense', 4 November 2025, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/russias-nuclear-powered-burevestnik-missile-implications-missile-defense>.

<sup>105</sup> Zuzanna Gwadera, 'Russia's Burevestnik and Poseidon Tests', IISS, 20 November 2025, <https://www.iiss.org/online-analysis/missile-dialogue-initiative/2025/11/russias-burevestnik-and-poseidon-tests/>.

space assets are another system of concern.<sup>106</sup>

The preceding paragraphs have offered a brief summary of which nuclear systems were and were not included in strategic and nuclear weapons-related arms control agreements. With any arms control agreement, there is no default or requirement of what is and is not included. Some weapon systems are easier to monitor and verify than others,<sup>107</sup> but there is no theoretical approach to what can and cannot be included.

A starting point for the P5 and the EU, however, should be to begin with the traditional nuclear weapon TLE – SLBMs, ICBMs, and long-range bombers. To both increase the EU's relevance and address Russia's concerns, France could offer its tactical combat aircraft-based nuclear weapons (which France considers strategic) as a point of negotiation and bargaining. Although hypersonic glide missiles have performance characteristics that differ significantly from ballistic missiles, it is unclear if their performance and effects at a strategic level require that they be limited differently than other types of nuclear weapons.

Novel strategic nuclear weapons would need to be a part of any discussion, and

(were a treaty to be made), subject to discussion within any treaty implementation body. No arms control agreement can anticipate every technological development, and few attempt to do so. However, incorporating some flexibility within the agreement and authority within the implementation body could be instrumental in dealing with emerging nuclear weapon technologies.<sup>108</sup>

Various versions of tactical nuclear warheads have existed since almost the invention of nuclear weapons. Some had no effective range at all – such as nuclear demolition munitions (what amounted to a remote detonated landmine). Verification challenges among other issues have made limiting them especially difficult outside of states and global regions that maintain a strict non-nuclear weapon policy. Yet these weapons pose a substantial escalatory risk, could result in high civilian casualties if used in an urban environment even against military targets, and generally pose a threat across Europe to Russian and EU citizens and population centres – especially those closest to the border or any front line (in the event of an active conflict). Therefore, from both a threat perspective and a non-proliferation and disarmament perspective, limiting tactical nuclear weapons – perhaps

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<sup>106</sup> Peter Garretson and Richard M. Harrison, *Space Nuclear Weapons Analysis* (American Foreign Policy Council, 2026).

<sup>107</sup> An example of a difficult-to-monitor 'system' was the limits in the Versailles Treaty that Germany accepted after World War One which set a requirement for minimum years of service of its military personnel.

<sup>108</sup> William Lippert, 'A European Military Balance Organization and Dynamic Conventional Arms Control', *Bulletin of 'Carol I' National Defense University* 12, no. 3 (2023): 41–59, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.53477/2284-9378-23-31>.

defined by a combination of characteristics to include yield and delivery system – would be advantageous.

Other areas of TLE could include space-based nuclear weapons, intercontinental ballistic missile defences (while accepting that differentiating these from intermediate-range ballistic missile defences could be difficult), and surface ship-based nuclear weapons. In sum, especially when negotiations begin, *all* nuclear weapons and associated military capabilities held by all parties should be part of initial discussions, with the negotiations serving to establish each party's interests, priorities, and demands.

The next major area of any agreement would be TLE ratios. There is no 'golden rule' for any TLE ratios, although as previously stated they tend to reflect the status quo. At the same time, in the interests of arms racing prevention and improved diplomacy (as well as, in the case of nuclear weapons, nuclear disarmament), TLE limitations have contradicted existing ratios substantially. In the area of conventional arms control, a number of factors, to include seeking stability, resource constraints, and a positive global security environment can lead to states accepting a degradation of their military balance standing vis-à-vis adversaries in the area of conventional arms control.<sup>109</sup>

One general rule for arms control negotiations is that states tend to *understate* weapon system and military capabilities to achieve a more favourable ratio. A state might claim that a certain weapon system is outside of a TLE category due to comparably less capabilities to TLE, thus leaving it out of the agreements. A specific example of this would be in the area of aircraft wherein, thanks to in-flight refuelling, external fuel tanks, and other factors (such as unmanned in-flight refuelling aircraft) the difference between a heavy bomber armed with a nuclear gravity bomb and a longer-range tactical fighter that carries the same bomb is one of degrees rather than a stark and clear difference. Another example is a state could claim that their weapon system is so inferior that two of those count towards one of the adversary's – and therefore any ratio calculations should account for this. These issues tend to be overcome through negotiation and bargaining, and at least with the US and Soviet Union/Russia, combat aircraft tended to be comparable to one another so it was not difficult for one side to exclude one of their aircraft types as long as the other side could exclude a comparable aircraft type.

More specifically in a P5 negotiation, France's strategic nuclear deterrent partly rests on tactical combat aircraft, which is

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<sup>109</sup> Lippert and Becker, 'Conventional Arms Control and Military Balance in Europe'.

not the case for the other P5 states. Specifically, 50 of France's nuclear weapons are delivered by tactical combat aircraft, with the other 140 delivered by SLBMs. Were France to accept to include these weapons in any negotiations and not insist that comparable combat aircraft be included among the other P5, it is difficult to foresee any substantive objections.

Thus, a rough ratio of current 'strategic' nuclear weapons based on existing TLE definitions (except for France, as discussed above) would be 1550:1550:600:290:120 or 1:1:0.39:0.19:0.08<sup>110</sup> for US:Russia:China:France:UK. However, if the US and Russian arsenals remain the same size (and the French and the UK, as increasing the number of deployed nuclear weapons is far from certain) but China succeeds in growing its deployed warheads to US/Russia levels, the ratio would be 1:1:1:0.19:0.08. Either ratio is a useful measuring stick for any negotiations because it serves as the metric with which to agree on specific TLE quantities. For example, if states accept that all parties will increase their nuclear weapons stockpiles but do so in a predictable and limited way, using the second ratio an agreement could fix warheads at approximately 2000:2000:2000:400:200. Similarly, and more

ideally, an agreement to reduce nuclear weapons (and accepting that the limit on Chinese nuclear weapons might actually mean an increase over current holdings but a decrease from expected and planned – a common approach in arms control) might see approximately 1000:1000:1000:200:100.<sup>111</sup>

Adding additional nuclear weapons systems, such as all of the P5's tactical nuclear weapons would require a new approach to nuclear arms control but not an insurmountable one. A simple resolution would be to count like versus like – that is strategic vs strategic and tactical vs. tactical (or otherwise divide these into categories). To a significant extent, this is already done with strategic weapons by having a top-line limitation, but then sub-limitations based on the three nuclear triad categories. The CFE Treaty similarly established categories of weapon systems (5.5) that were used in other agreements rather than counting a vaguer firepower score or something similar.<sup>112</sup>

The ratios above generally suggest retaining the status quo (with the exception of China, as discussed, which is allotted a higher ratio due to expected nuclear weapons production and deployment). However, out of the

<sup>110</sup> Rounded to two decimal places.

<sup>111</sup> These ratios show the impact of including or excluding the French air-launched nuclear weapons from tactical fighters. Were these excluded, the ratio would be 1550:1550:600:240:120, or 1:1:0.39:0.16:0.08. If the air-launched nuclear weapons are excluded, a new agreement in the example would see the French have 160 instead of 200 – plus the 50 air-launched weapons for a

total of 210, giving it slightly more than if the weapons are initially included.

<sup>112</sup> Although, as with nuclear arms control agreements, the CFE Treaty did not take into consideration the quality of any given weapon system within a category. A modern US M1 Abrams tank counted the same as a Soviet tank from the 1950s.

interests of savings or nuclear disarmament France and the UK could agree to surrendering all nuclear weapons if the other P5 agreed to significantly lower nuclear weapons holdings. A warhead quantity could look something like 500:500:500:0:0 (or in ratio terms, 1:1:1:0:0). Precedents for this are the INF Treaty (discussed above) or the Washington Naval Agreement, which saw the UK give up a significant advantage in battleship quantities and agree to parity with the US.

The AoA is another key area of any arms control agreement, and to-date all nuclear arms control agreements have covered the entire world rather than regionally (such as the CFE Treaty which applied to an area defined as the Atlantic to the Urals (ATTU) which specifically excluded TLE held by the Soviet Union and US outside of the ATTU). For truly long-range strategic weapons and their delivery systems this makes sense. However, for tactical nuclear weapons and their delivery systems, there might be some logic to limiting them regionally, but as the P5 are or may compete globally (as with the 5 state parties to the Washington Naval Agreement), any limitations of tactical nuclear weapons should probably be global. This makes monitoring and verification somewhat easier as well as states seeking to violate the agreement could not effectively

play a shell game of moving TLE in and out of the AoA.

On the other hand, there may be regional geographic limitations in conjunction with global limitations – something Russia even proposed in December 2022.<sup>113</sup> For example, there might be a global limit on heavy bombers but these might be prohibited from being based in, or present, in a certain geographic area (such as Europe and parts of East Asia). A significant obstacle, however, is that in certain configurations Russia and/or China would have restrictions within their territory while the US would not (other than, perhaps, Alaska which borders Russia) – a complaint from Russia about some conventional arms control agreements. An example of a geographic restriction – setting aside verification difficulties – is to prohibit SSBNs from operating within a certain distance from an adversary's coast because launches might not be detected more than a few minutes before impact, rewarding a surprise attack and contributing to first-strike instability.

Lastly, how to monitor and verify the agreement would be a part of any treaty. As discussed above, there are several configurations. More specifically, there are four broad categories. First, states could agree that there would essentially be no

<sup>113</sup> Russian Foreign Ministry, 'Treaty between The United States of America and the Russian Federation on Security Guarantees', 17 December 2021. Moscow's seriousness of this proposal or lack

thereof, made shortly before the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, is beyond this report's scope.

monitoring and verification arrangement beyond existing open source, diplomatic, espionage, and national technical means (similar to the Washington and London Naval Treaties, among others). This, however, would do little to increase transparency and there is little likelihood that the state parties would have any confidence in such an approach (and, lacking confidence, would be unlikely to comply).<sup>114</sup>

A second approach would be to rely on a formal system of state-based and national on-site inspectors with, potentially, setting up a coordinative body. This was the approach for the INF and CFE Treaties which saw dedicated, trained national inspectors and the establishment of coordinative bodies: the Special Verification Commission (SVC) and the Joint Consultative Group (JCG), respectively. Importantly, neither body made any decisions or judgements about compliance; and neither had the autonomy of a true, international organisation. Rather, they were permanent bodies in which officials from each state party met, with only minimal administrative support staff.

Third, there are large, fully autonomous treaty implementers with significant independence. One of the most significant examples of these in the area of conventional

arms control is the OSCE's Special Monitoring Mission (SMM) which was a product of the Minsk Agreements which sought to end the conflict in Eastern Ukraine. Over 1,000 SMM staff, most of whom were independent of any state party (answering to OSCE management and leadership) were placed across Ukraine to oversee implementation of and compliance with the agreement (but they were not charged with enforcing the agreement).

The end of World War One saw the Allies place hundreds of military personnel throughout the defeated Central Power states (some of which were newly formed) to ensure their compliance with the arms control elements of the peace treaties. Unlike the INF and CFE Treaty on-site inspectors, the Inter-Allied Commissions of Control (IACC)<sup>115</sup> staff resided in their designated former Central Power state, with full access on their demand to all military facilities of concern. One of the most empowered treaty implementation bodies was the Allied Control Councils/Commissions (ACCs) created during and shortly after World War Two in each Axis state which were charged with overseeing compliance with various armistices. The ACCs had at their disposal, per agreement in the armistices, the full powers

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<sup>114</sup> Lack of a vigorous monitoring and verification regime, however, does not guarantee agreement failure. Several demilitarisation agreements have no regimes but are still successfully in force 100 years later. See William Lippert, 'Infrequent but Serious: Severe Conventional Arms Control Agreement Violations', *Defense &*

*Security Analysis*, 22 August 2025, 1–25, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14751798.2025.2539630>.

<sup>115</sup> Similar staffs were set up for naval and air issues.

and capabilities of the Allied armies to enforce the armistices – a power and capability easily applied through the occupation armies.<sup>116</sup>

At a minimum, any future nuclear arms control treaty would need a rigorous system for monitoring and verification. Given the current and possibly increasing fragmentation of alliances and partnerships, it might be reasonable to expect that each state party would have the right to inspect the others. Although a system of having resident inspectors similar to the post-World War One IACCs has not been made for nuclear arms control, such a system could increase transparency, predictability, and confidence in treaty compliance. It would also increase the efficiency of organising inspections by reducing travel time and permitting more rapid snap, short-notice inspections.

Another approach would be to establish an international organisation to implement the agreement or assign the work to an existing international organisation. The IAEA serves as a good example of an organisation involved in nuclear non-proliferation and it can conduct inspections of nuclear facilities, including to an extent areas suspected of harbouring undeclared nuclear weapons or nuclear material programmes. The IAEA however has not, to date, been charged with

verifying compliance with weapons-limiting nuclear arms control agreements made between the US and USSR/Russia. As a future nuclear weapons arms control agreement treaty implementer, the IAEA would have several advantages including an existing secretariat with commensurate organisational infrastructure and knowledge and credibility for neutral and objective activities and assessments. Any monitoring and verification regime should be rigorous and intrusive to guard against violations. Given the existing distrust among states today and in international institutions, a combination of approaches including establishment or assignment of some monitoring and inspection activities and policies to an international organisation, national on-site inspection teams, and potentially even host-country resident inspectors would help hedge against perfidy.

While most nuclear arms control agreements are only signed by the state parties concerned, there is at least one exception. Moreover, for CAC agreements it is common for signatories and state parties to go beyond the rivals immediately concerned. The nuclear weapons-related exception is the previously-discussed LTBT which has 126 signatories even though at that time and up until today most state parties have not had

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<sup>116</sup> There was a stark difference between the armistices ending combat between each Axis state and the Allies, versus the peace agreements. The former saw the Allies hold the right to occupy the

Axis states, while the peace agreements restored full sovereignty (in principle) to the Axis states.

nuclear weapons to test. The 100-plus additional signatories, rather, emphasise the global importance of nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament.<sup>117</sup>

CAC agreements have had signatories and state parties beyond the concerned adversaries for usually two reasons. First, for normative reasons; to emphasise states' commitments to peace and non-conflict. And second, to serve as witnesses and guarantors to the agreement with the unspoken suggestion that violators would not just be offending the adversary but also the third, neutral party(ies). For example, the US, Russia, other European states, and the EU signed the 1995 Dayton Peace Accords. As previously discussed, the EU was a facilitator and signatory to the 2008 Six-Point Peace Plan ending the Georgian-Russian conflict. The OSCE was a signatory to the 2015 Minsk II agreement to end the conflict in Eastern Ukraine.

Thus, while a core strategic nuclear arms agreement would at a minimum need the P5 to sign, the EU could sign as a state party (partnering with France or France/UK), as a partner, and as a witness. The agreement could also see third-parties from anywhere in the world sign in support of the agreement – as they did with the LTBT. This could even pave the way for third-party state officials to be involved in inspection activities

as national experts (complementing international organisation staff or, depending on the agreement configuration, conducting such activities in the absence of an empowered international organisation). Most states beyond the P5 would have a vested interest in a nuclear arms agreement, especially if it promotes nuclear disarmament in line with the ideals and goals of the NPT. In brief, most of the world's states would likely welcome a net decrease in deployed nuclear weapons.

This report assumes that the world's other nuclear weapon states: India, Israel, North Korea, and Pakistan – would not be interested in P5 strategic arms control because of the particular rivalries that motivated their nuclear weapons programmes in the first place and the relative size of their arsenals compared to the P5 – especially the US and Russia. Most importantly and relevant, these four states' nuclear weapons programmes and policies are largely independent of the P5 nuclear weapon programmes and policies. At the same time, any possibility to increase nuclear weapons arms control should be embraced. Thus, any or all of the other four states could participate in EU/P5 nuclear arms control negotiations as observers and, as relevant depending on the agreement scope and areas of application, state parties.

<sup>117</sup> 'Limited or Partial Test Ban Treaty (LTBT/PTBT)', *Atomic Heritage Foundation*, 10 June 2016,

<https://ahf.nuclearmuseum.org/ahf/history/limited-or-partial-test-ban-treaty-ltbtptbt/>.

Arms control agreements are characterised by variety in content, length, scope, and approaches. Negotiating parties are confronted with a range of options of what to consider and what to exclude in areas such as TLE, AoA, monitoring and verification regimes, and agreement implementer. Initially, negotiating parties may have starkly different preferences and demands in these areas. But any finalised agreement will require compromise and harmonisation of preferred positions and policies.

## 14. Conclusion

In today's international security environment, the temptation for EU states, in partnership and cooperation with the EU's institutions, to arm up with nuclear weapons is strong because the perception exists that these weapons offer security guarantees and protections. Yet, this report has attempted to explain that any significant EU-wide nuclear weapons programme, whether centred in a national capability or some collaborative arrangement across EU members is unaffordable, impractical, and even were it to exist such a programme would result in substantially destabilising interstate relationships within and outside of the EU. This report does not suggest that an effective and comprehensive nuclear deterrent is not *desirable*. All else being equal, possessing a nuclear deterrent is probably better than not

having one. However, the realities of adversaries' and potential adversaries' nuclear weapons capabilities coupled with the resource constraints that the EU faces means that an effective nuclear weapons deterrent is not realistic, barring a substantial and effectively wartime shift of resources.

Rather, a comprehensive nuclear arms control and disarmament approach is the better option because it will increase the EU's security by reducing the number of nuclear weapons that could be used against the EU and free up resources for conventional arms that are a much more likely effective deterrent against Russia. Such an approach would also promote nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament globally which is also a net gain for the EU and in line with the EU's commitment to the NPT. At the same time, a well-crafted agreement would retain the near-term nuclear status quo at a lower cost for all state parties.

Any EU institutional attempts to facilitate nuclear arms control negotiations among the P5 should enjoy broad support across the EU – among governments and the general public – and especially among those states who are non-NATO EU members. While such an effort might initially be greeted with scepticism, the arguments laid out in this report should help convince sceptics that nuclear armament is contrary to the EU's security interests.

Unfortunately, even with EU and UK unity to convene a nuclear arms control summit, China, Russia, and the US are far from guaranteed to participate. In order to convince these three states to at least come to the table, the EU can do several things: first, convince the three states of both the need for a new nuclear arms control agreement, and their self-interest in pursuing one; second, develop and present comprehensive and realistic sets of options and approaches; and third, use the diplomatic and other tools such as trade deals, military partnerships, and public diplomacy to further encourage and reward participation.

Even if an expanding UK-French/EU nuclear weapons arsenal does not offer the EU credible deterrence, increases in nuclear weapons capabilities will require adversaries' investments in resources to counter the expansion – resources that they might otherwise use for other military capabilities or non-military programmes. Thus, arms racing or the fear of arms racing could strengthen any EU quest to promote global nuclear arms control.

Any near-term attempt for the EU's institutions to obtain its own nuclear weapons deterrent outside of nuclear weapons owned and controlled by its member states is futile. If the EU could have a 'do-over' and be estab-

lished as a strong, central federal government in 1991 and at that time undertake an ambitious nuclear weapons and deterrence policy, some of the challenges of coordination, collaboration, and control might not exist today. Unfortunately for the EU, the Chinese, Russian, and US nuclear weapons arsenals and their related support systems are too quantitatively large, the states are too unified from a command and control perspective, and the nuclear weapons production infrastructure is too well established for the EU to realistically compete against them.

History fortunately offers some foundation for optimism. First, that nuclear weapons arms control treaties can still be made even among the most seemingly intractable rivalries. US-Soviet relations had their ups and downs, but only at the very end of the Cold War could they be broadly assessed as positive and non-confrontational. Yet throughout the Cold War arms control treaties were made in part due to genuine fears of nuclear annihilation.<sup>118</sup> With all the present, ongoing conflicts and rivalries, the P5 and the EU should fear nuclear annihilation no less than during the Cold War.

Another historical source of optimism is that periods of global war have often been followed by relative global peace, usually introduced by a global (or at least European)

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<sup>118</sup> Nelson, *The Arms Control Paradox: Managing Uncertainty in an Insecure World*.

peace initiative. The Napoleonic Wars ended with the Concert of Europe, which saw over 100 years of relative peace between the great powers in Europe.<sup>119</sup> World War One saw the League of Nations established – an honest but flawed attempt at putting an end to interstate wars. The more cataclysmic Second World War saw the establishment of the UN – again, an imperfect body but one that still exists and functions today. That the great powers (P5) have not fought a major, world war since 1945 against one another may say something about the UN's success; or at least its ideals. Of course, some may say this is due to the existence of nuclear weapons, but a thorough assessment of the history of conflict and relations between the P5 casts doubt on such a simplistic explanation.<sup>120</sup>

With Europe's largest war since 1945 raging in Ukraine – a conflict which has the US and the EU supporting Ukraine against Russia in all ways short of direct participation; recurring, large-scale conflict in the Middle East; and potential war in the Pacific related to Taiwan and maritime sovereignty, the world is close to a global state of war. A global peace concert might be necessary – but humanity would be better served by one that takes place before rather than after a world war. An EU-facilitated nuclear arms

control summit might be the first step in returning the world to a state of peace and stability.

Such a summit would need to bear in mind some key realities of any large-scale, international negotiation, whether it was those that took place as far back as 1644-1648 in Westphalia that brought an end to the Thirty Years' and Eighty Years' Wars, or the San Francisco Conference of 1945 that resulted in the United Nations Charter. All states need to offer compromises to get compromises. They must give up something they value in return for other parties giving up something *they* value.

## 15. Recommendations

Based on the preceding text, we suggest the following categorised recommendations:

### Internal European Union Institutions' Activities

- In cooperation with and in part under the guidance of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HR/VP), the EEAS should undertake studies which carefully assess first-strike stability of an EU arsenal in various configurations versus present

<sup>119</sup> David King, *Vienna, 1814: How the Conquerors of Napoleon Made Love, War, and Peace at the Congress of Vienna*, 1st ed, 1 online resource (viii, 434 pages) : illustrations (Harmony Books, 2008), WorldCat, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=719120>.

<sup>120</sup> Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 1981), Cambridge Core, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511664267>; John Mueller, 'The Obsolescence of Major War', *Bulletin of Peace Proposals* 21, no. 3 (1990): 321–28, JSTOR.

and potential future Russian nuclear weapons capabilities. These studies may be supported by the EU Institute for Security Studies (EUISS) and civil society groups specialised in international security.

- The HR/VP, in cooperation with the Foreign Affairs Council, should undertake to develop a multi-pronged nuclear arms control and disarmament plan which accounts for the differing approaches, especially incorporating and not incorporating France and/or the UK in a unified EU approach.
- The European Union institutions should harmonise their arms control and disarmament policies, empowered and mandated by the European Council and led by the HR/VP and, eventually, a dedicated arms control agency, through coordination and collaboration with EU offices such as the EEAS and the European Commission.
- Lay the groundwork for a fully trained and empowered EU nuclear weapons monitoring and verification capability and personnel, perhaps through the establishment of an arms control agency or by expanding Euratom.

### **European Council-France-UK Diplomacy**

- The European Council could form a formal consultative group of its members

with France and the UK chairing, to discuss nuclear weapons policies.

- The Council, EEAS, HR/VP, and relevant Commission institutions (some of which may need to be newly formed) should collaborate with France and the UK to find a common vision for strategic arms control.
- The European Council, with the support of the HR/VP, Commission, and EEAS, should consider establishing the EU as a unitary nuclear power for the purposes of negotiations and agreements, incorporating the UK and French arsenals. It could be referred to as the EU-UK group of states.
- As an interim arrangement to better establish nuclear weapons capabilities across the EU in the interests of limited deterrence and for bargaining power to encourage nuclear arms control negotiations, the EU, led by the HR/VP and supported by the Commission and the EEAS, could collaborate with France and the UK to establish a nuclear weapons sharing programme with other EU/non-US NATO members.

### **Broad EU Policies**

- A working group of EU officials led by the HR/VP's office and the Foreign Affairs Council, supported by the European Commission and EEAS and member state experts, should be convened to discuss

options and preferences for all potential parties' TLE, AoA, monitoring and verification procedures, and an implementation body.

- The EU via the European Council should commit to no further expansion of nuclear weapon states within the EU or nuclear host states as part of an agreement; or at least as an interim measure of good faith while the European Council and HR/VP engage China, Russia, and the US (and the UK, if applicable) in initial nuclear arms control discussions.
- The European Council should declare that no European Union institution will undertake any plans, proposals, or considerations to develop a nuclear weapons capability. Rather, the European Council should focus on European member states' development and improvement of conventional military capabilities, including through cooperation via the European Defence Agency (EDA).

## EU Global Diplomacy

- The HR/VP, with the support of the EEAS, should develop a concrete proposal or set of proposals, or even a fully drafted treaty, for the main global nuclear power states (P5).
- The President of the European Council, with the European Council's mandate,

should facilitate and convene negotiations between the US, Russia, China, the UK, and France (P5). The HR/VP, EEAS, and the Commission may support the negotiations with proposals and logistics support.

- The HR/VP should consider including the other nuclear states – India, Israel, North Korea, and Pakistan – as observers, to promote nuclear weapons arms control and disarmament. Invitations to observe and participate, however, should only be made with the agreement of all negotiating parties.
- The HR/VP could attempt to pressure recalcitrant states through diplomatic or economic means to join any negotiations, such as through trade deals or public pressure. The European Council, through its President, might also offer Russia conventional arms control negotiations/agreement that would be coupled with nuclear arms control.

## Other

- The HR/VP, EEAS, EUISS, national governments, and NGOs may organise a major conference of experts to present and discuss various nuclear arms control treaty approaches and issues.
- Civil society groups in the P5 countries and more globally should undertake public campaigns to advocate a nuclear

arms agreement facilitated by the EU  
that includes the P5.

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## Appendix A: Potential Russian Nuclear Warhead Targets in Europe

| Potential Target                                       | Country or Organisation | Location                                                                            | Description and Relevance                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|--------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Brest Dry Docks                                        | France                  | Brest (48°23'07.1"N 4°27'17.3"W)                                                    | Used for submarine maintenance, always one submarine present on rotating schedule. Long-term submarine repairs and refueling take place at the Brest naval base across the bay, which has three large drydocks. |
| Saint Dizier-Robinson                                  | France                  | Saint Dizier (48°37'50.8"N 4°53'41.5"E)                                             | Nuclear air base. Houses both BF3 squadrons. High-security nuclear weapons storage facility.                                                                                                                    |
| Luxeuil airbase (PROPOSED)                             | France                  | Luxeuil (47°47'28.9"N 6°21'24.1"E)                                                  | Nuclear air base, meant to encompass France's new hypersonic nuclear cruise missile by 2035.                                                                                                                    |
| Jupiter                                                | France                  | underneath the Élysée Palace (48°52'12.4"N 2°18'59.4"E)                             | Primary command post of the president, used to transmit nuclear order.                                                                                                                                          |
| Mobile command post                                    | France (?)              | Travels with the president of France                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Opérationnel des Forces Aériennes Stratégiques (COFAS) | France                  | Underground at Taverny Air Base (BA-921) north of Paris. (49°02'09.9"N 2°13'09.7"E) | Nuclear command centre for the air component of the French deterrent.                                                                                                                                           |
| Radio station Rosnay                                   | France                  | Rosnay (46°42'48.1"N 1°14'38.1"E)                                                   | Communication with deployed ballistic missile submarines at sea is facilitated by a network of very-low frequency radio transmitting stations                                                                   |
| Radio station La Régine                                | France                  | La Régine (43°23'18.5"N 2°05'48.3"E)                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Radio station Kerlouan                                 | France                  | Kerlouan (48°38'16.0"N 4°21'04.8"W)                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Radio station Saint-Assise                             | France                  | Saint-Assise (48°32'43.5"N 2°34'38.4"E)                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Île Longue naval base                                  | France                  | Île Longue, near Brest (48°18'02.7"N 4°30'56.3"W)                                   | The SSBN force is based at the Île Longue naval base near Brest in Brittany, which includes two drydocks, nuclear warhead storage, and missile handling and storage facilities.                                 |

| Potential Target                          | Country or Organisation | Location                                                                            | Description and Relevance                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|-------------------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Île Longue storage facility               | France                  | 4km south of the base, at the Guenvévez pyrotechnic site (48°15'42.8"N 4°31'02.9"W) |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| Cherbourg Shipyard                        | France                  | Cherbourg (49°39'10.5"N 1°38'11.2"W)                                                | SSBNs are built and dismantled here.                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Istres airbase                            | France                  | Istres (43°31'24.4"N 4°57'19.8"E)                                                   | Previous home base of one BF3 squadron. High-security nuclear weapons storage facility.                                                                                                                                                                      |
| Avord Air Base                            | France                  | Avord (47°02'38.9"N 2°38'16.1"E)                                                    | Stores, maintains and prepares ASMPA missiles for the nuclear mission. High-security nuclear weapons storage facility.                                                                                                                                       |
| Toulon port                               | France                  | Toulon, Var                                                                         | Home port of the Charles de Gaulle aircraft carrier                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| Landivisiau Naval Aviation Base           | France                  | Landivisiau, Brittany                                                               | Aircraft for the carrier are based here                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| DAM centre                                | France                  | Bruyères-le-Châtel, about 30 kilometers south of Paris                              | Warhead design and simulation.                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| Nuclear Energy Commission's Valduc Centre | France                  | About 30 kilometers northwest of Dijon                                              | Responsible for nuclear warhead production, maintenance, storage, and dismantlement.                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Nuclear Energy Commission's CESTA         | France                  | Near Le Barp, about 30 kilometers southwest of Bordeaux                             | Responsible for designing equipment for nuclear weapons and reentry vehicles, as well as coordinating the development of nuclear warheads. The Laser Mégajoule (LMJ), France's equivalent to the US National Ignition Facility, is located at the same site. |
| Naval Armaments Depot Coulport            | UK                      | Coulport                                                                            | Reserve warheads are stored here. Non-operational warheads are stored here. (approximately three kilometers west of the base).                                                                                                                               |
| AWE Burghfield                            | UK                      | Burghfield, Berkshire                                                               | Reserve warheads are stored here. Old ones are recycled or dismantled here. Plans for an enriched uranium storage.                                                                                                                                           |
| HM Naval Base Clyde                       | UK                      | Faslane, southwestern Scotland                                                      | Home base of its four submarines.                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| Devonport Royal Dockyard                  | UK                      | Plymouth                                                                            | The submarines undergo deep maintenance here                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| AWE facility at Aldermaston               | UK                      | Aldermaston, Berkshire                                                              | Warhead upgrades are done here. Plans for a new plutonium manufacturing facility.                                                                                                                                                                            |

| Potential Target                               | Country or Organisation | Location               | Description and Relevance                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Royal Air Force (RAF) Brize Norton             | UK                      | Carterton, Oxfordshire | Logistical hub for nuclear transports between the UK and USA.                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| US Airforce Base Lakenheath (PROPOSED REVIVAL) | USA                     | Lakenheath, Suffolk    | Once stored nuclear warheads designated to be delivered by US Aircraft. Those sites are set to be revived, at least as a contingency base. British Aircraft here (F35) are nuclear capable.                                                                                                 |
| RAF Flyingdales                                | UK                      | North Yorkshire        | Provides a continuous ballistic missile early warning service to the UK and US Governments. Operates in sync with other radar stations in Greenland (Thule) and Colorado (USA). Detection and identification of an Inter-continental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) targeted on the US or the UK. |
| Aviano Air Base                                | USA                     | Italy                  | Deploys US Nonstrategic nuclear weapons, has own aircraft assigned in strike role.                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| Ghedi Air Base                                 | USA                     | Italy                  | Deploys US Nonstrategic nuclear weapons, has own aircraft assigned in strike role.                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| Büchel Air Base                                | USA                     | Germany                | Deploys US Nonstrategic nuclear weapons, has own aircraft assigned in strike role.                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| Incirlik Air Base                              | USA                     | Turkey                 | Deploys US Nonstrategic nuclear weapons.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Kleine Brogel Air Base                         | USA                     | Belgium                | Deploys US Nonstrategic nuclear weapons, has own aircraft assigned in strike role.                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| Volkel Air Base                                | USA                     | Netherlands            | Deploys US Nonstrategic nuclear weapons, has own aircraft assigned in strike role.                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| Ramstein Air Base                              | USA                     | Germany                | Set to receive nuclear capabilities/facilities. (Training Base).                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| NATO Headquarters                              | NATO                    | Brussels, Belgium      | Includes Operations Centre for Air Policing, and Ballistic Missile Defence, Operational Control of NATO's Airborne Early Warning and Control Force.                                                                                                                                         |
| Combined Air Operations Centre                 | NATO                    | Uedem, Germany         | Subordinate units to the Headquarters.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| Combined Air Operations Centre                 | NATO                    | Torrejón, Spain        | Subordinate units to the Headquarters.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |

| Potential Target                                        | Country or Organisation | Location               | Description and Relevance                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|---------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Combined Air Operations Centre                          | NATO                    | Bodø, Norway           | Subordinate units to the Headquarters.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| Deployable Air Command and Control Centre               | NATO                    | Poggio Renatico, Italy | NATO's deployable air surveillance and control capability, responsible for the control of air missions including surface-to-air missiles, air traffic management and control, area air surveillance.                                                                                                                        |
| Patch Barracks                                          | USA                     | Stuttgart, Germany     | Headquarters of the US European Command (EUCOM).                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE)       | NATO                    | Mons, Belgium          | Supreme Allied Commander Europe – or SACEUR – assumes the overall command of operations at the strategic level and exercises his responsibilities from the headquarters. Head of the Nuclear Planning Group.                                                                                                                |
| Operational-level command                               | NATO                    | Brunssum               | Plan, conduct and sustain NATO operations of different size and scope.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| Operational-level command                               | NATO                    | Naples                 | Plan, conduct and sustain NATO operations of different size and scope.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| NATO Airborne Early Warning and Control Force (NAEW&CF) | NATO                    | Waddington, UK         | The fleet of six Boeing E-3D aircraft based in Waddington, Lincolnshire, United Kingdom is manned by Royal Air Force personnel only.                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| NATO Airborne Early Warning and Control Force (NAEW&CF) | NATO                    | Geilenkirchen, Germany | Multinational HQ (Geilenkirchen) and two operational components, the multinational E-3A and the E-3D. NATO Air Base (NAB) Geilenkirchen, Germany, is home to 14 Boeing E-3A 'Sentry' AWACS aircraft. NATO operates this fleet, which provides the Alliance with an immediately available airborne command and control (C2). |
| NATO Airborne Early Warning and Control Force (NAEW&CF) | NATO                    | Lincolnshire, UK       | The fleet of six Boeing E-3D aircraft based in Waddington, Lincolnshire, United Kingdom is manned by Royal Air Force personnel only.                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| RAF High Wycombe                                        | UK                      | Buckinghamshire        | Hosts and supports HQ Air Command.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| Northwood Headquarters                                  | UK                      | Hertfordshire          | The only facility allowed to communicate with the <i>Vanguard</i> commander on patrol.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |

| Potential Target                                                   | Country or Organisation | Location | Description and Relevance                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|----------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Ministry of Defence (MOD)<br>Main Building in Whitehall,<br>London | UK                      | London   | Only the prime minister or a designated survivor can authorize the missiles to be fired. <sup>[148]</sup> These orders would likely be issued from the <a href="#">Pindar</a> command bunker.                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Centre opérationnel des<br>forces nucléaires (COFN)                | France                  | Paris    | The order would first go to the chairman of the joint chiefs of staff who, since 1996, carries the explicit responsibility of ‘ensuring the execution of the order of engagement given by the president’. This transmission will take place via the Centre opérationnel des forces nucléaires (COFN, located in Paris in the îlot Saint Germain and created in 1993). |



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