



“In fact, the issue is always between two points”

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**FRANCE'S PROPOSAL TO USE ITS NUCLEAR DETERRENCE FOR EUROPEAN PROTECTION**

**"Who can believe that Russia will be satisfied with Ukraine?" (Emmanuel Macron, President of France)**

French President Emmanuel Macron, at a time when the United States and Russia are increasing their talks on peace in Ukraine and European countries fear being left out of the negotiations, emphasized autonomy in defense and security by stating, "The future of Europe should be determined in Europe, not in Washington or Moscow."

Macron also pointed out in his March address to the nation that Russia, which plans to further expand its military by 2030 with more than €40 billion in spending, 3,000 tanks, and 300 fighter jets, continues cyberattacks and attempts to manipulate public opinion in Europe by spreading false information on social media.

France is working with its European partners to prepare a "solid, lasting, and verifiable peace plan," and regardless of whether peace is achieved in Ukraine, there is an increasing consensus that Europe's defense and deterrence capacity must be strengthened. Serious steps are being taken towards establishing "joint financing" for the procurement of defense equipment such as tanks and fighter jets in Europe.

France (at least Macron) believes that it holds a "special status" in European security, possesses "the most effective army" in Europe, and has sufficient nuclear deterrence capacity to ensure Europe's security. At the same time, political and economic efforts are being made in France to double the defense budget within ten years.

On the other hand, Germany's future Chancellor Friedrich Merz has emphasized that Europe must reduce its dependence on the United States for security and develop its own defense capabilities. He has expressed his support for Macron's proposal to protect Europe through France's nuclear deterrence. From Moscow, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov responded by declaring that "Macron's nuclear-related plans are a threat to Russia," recalling Napoleon's failed Russian campaign. Once again, historical events have found their way into international relations discussions.

The Expert Perspective on Nuclear Deterrence Amid these debates, nuclear expert Benoît Grémare stated in The Conversation:

**"According to Macron, France could deploy nuclear weapons in Eastern European countries to replace the United States. The nuclear security umbrella provided by France could grant Europe strategic autonomy by deploying fighter jets equipped with nuclear weapons. This would serve as a symbol of political solidarity in Europe and complicate Moscow's calculations. The visible presence of these aircraft in Eastern Europe could deter Russia from attacking these countries using conventional methods, as such an attack could trigger a nuclear response from France on behalf of Europe."**

Swedish newspaper Aftonbladet believes this debate has started too soon:

**"The U.S. has not left NATO. U.S. troops have not withdrawn from Europe. Whether this will happen remains uncertain. ... Our soft power will continue to be our most valuable asset in the future—let's protect it. Of course, soft power has its limits. This is why strengthening our continent's military capabilities is a crucial development. As long as the U.S. remains a NATO member and honors its commitments, rearmament should be limited to conventional forces. If the U.S. exits NATO or remains uncertain about Article 5, then the situation will change. But—we are not at that point yet."**

Russian President Vladimir Putin commented:

"There are people who want to return to Napoleon's time, forgetting how his Moscow campaign ended."

Macron responded:

"I think Putin is misinterpreting history, and this surprises me. Napoleon pursued conquests, but today, the only imperialist power I see in Europe is Russia."

Lavrov added:

"Macron may act recklessly to protect his damaged reputation in France."

**Evaluation**

French President Emmanuel Macron's proposal to lead Europe's nuclear deterrence marks a significant shift in the continent's security policies. France, as Europe's most powerful military force, is positioning its nuclear capabilities as a strategic deterrence factor. Germany's support for this initiative reinforces Europe's inclination towards greater independence in defense matters. However, this proposal also raises questions about NATO's existing structure and the security guarantees provided by the U.S. in Europe.

Russia perceives this plan as a direct threat, increasing tensions in the region. Moscow's strong reaction to Macron's statements indicates that such a strategic shift will have repercussions not only within Europe but also on a global scale. While strengthening Europe's defense mechanisms, France's nuclear deterrence initiative also risks further straining relations with Russia.

Europe's primary dilemma is whether it can build a self-sufficient security structure while maintaining its ties with the U.S. and NATO. Although a U.S. withdrawal from NATO is not currently on the table, the debates triggered by Trump's previous policies highlight the risks of Europe relying solely on Washington for security. Strengthening Europe's joint security policy and increasing defense investments appear to be inevitable. However, ensuring that this process does not conflict with NATO or escalate tensions with Russia requires a delicate balance.

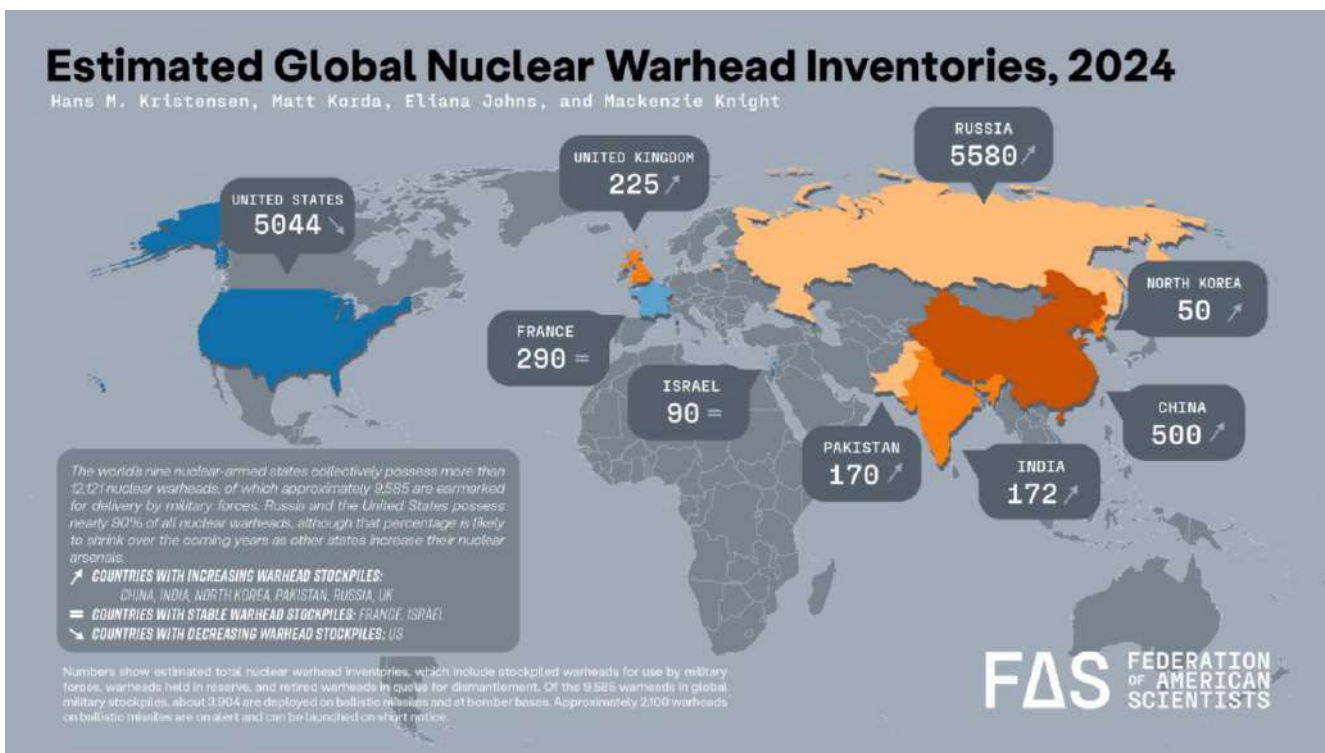
In conclusion, France's initiative to enhance its nuclear deterrence role represents a potential turning point for Europe's military and political future. However, the success of this strategy depends on securing broad consensus among European nations and maintaining a coordinated security policy with NATO. Europe's security can only be sustainably ensured through not just military strength but also well-managed diplomatic and strategic alliances.

**Conclusion**

France's proposal to extend its nuclear deterrence for Europe's security has ignited a global security debate. While concerns about nuclear war remain in the background, the current global balance and historical examples suggest that a direct nuclear conflict remains unlikely. However, under a potential Trump 2.0 administration, increasing geopolitical tensions and sudden strategic shifts make it impossible to ignore this risk entirely.

Historically, nuclear weapons have been seen as a deterrent that prevents direct wars between nuclear states. During the Cold War, the U.S. and the Soviet Union avoided full-scale war, though proxy conflicts and crises—such as the Cuban Missile Crisis—brought the world to the brink of nuclear conflict. In the current context, where the nuclear power balance in Europe is significantly tilted in Russia's favor, a nuclear war remains theoretically unlikely but not impossible.

To mitigate risks, Europe and Russia must strengthen direct diplomatic channels, and the U.S. and Russia should negotiate new agreements on nuclear arms control to enhance global security.



### **France's Nuclear Capabilities**

Since conducting its first nuclear test in 1960, France has been considered a nuclear power. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), France possesses approximately 290 nuclear warheads. The Washington-based Nuclear Threat Initiative (NTI) states that these warheads are carried by:

Four Triomphant-class nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs). 40 Rafale BF3 land-based fighter jets, 10 Rafale MF3 carrier-based fighter jets. Although France eliminated its land-based nuclear ballistic missiles in 1996, it continues to maintain deterrence with:

48 submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs), 50 air-launched cruise missiles (ALCMs)

According to NTI, France follows a policy of "strict sufficiency," keeping its nuclear arsenal at the minimum level required for defense strategies. However, Paris is also working on modernizing its nuclear inventory, including designing third-generation nuclear-capable SLBMs.

### **U.S. and Russian Nuclear Superiority**

According to SIPRI, about 90% of the world's nuclear weapons belong to the U.S. and Russia. As of January 2024:

The U.S. possesses 3,708 nuclear warheads. Russia possesses 4,380 nuclear warheads. Both countries have largely maintained their military stockpiles, with Russia reportedly deploying approximately 36 additional nuclear warheads over the past year. The report also notes a decline in transparency regarding nuclear forces since the Russia-Ukraine war began in February 2022. Furthermore, while reports suggest that Russia has deployed nuclear weapons in Belarus, no definitive evidence has confirmed this claim.

Beyond their operational inventories, the U.S. and Russia also have over 1,200 retired nuclear warheads undergoing gradual dismantlement.

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